Athabasca University ◢◤ Master of Arts - Integrated Studies

SUCCESS FOR EVERYONE?!?

WHY IS ACHIEVING ACADEMIC SUCCESS DIFFICULT FOR FIRST
NATIONS' STUDENTS?

By

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ABSTRACT

This paper will attempt to explain why achieving academic success is difficult for First Nations' students. History, culture, educational practices and expectations, will be discussed using a variety of approaches and theories. Socioeconomic disparity, along with loss of traditional knowledge, practices, and language, will be shown as barriers to be overcome. The First Nation Education Act will be introduced, albeit in a cloud of criticism. Several ideas will be discussed when looking toward the future for these students, and some Indigenous ways will be presented when looking back to their past. The strengths and benefits of utilizing an integrated approach will be evident throughout the discussion.

Why is Achieving Academic Success Difficult for First Nations' Students?

Introduction of the Question

Success for everyone?!?[1] Note the ambiguity of my punctuation; I am not sure if this is a question to be asked or a mandate to be given. Either way, it evokes strong emotions in those it affects and prompts me to ask the following.

Why is achieving academic success difficult for First Nations'[2] students? A seemingly simple question, at first glance, but one that appears to be too complex to be answered. This paper will offer some insights into what makes this discussion so difficult and why a suitable solution has yet to be recognized. I invite the reader to refer to the Notes section at the end of this document to expand their understanding of terms and theories being discussed.

Historically, First Nations' people have been subjected to a variety of educational experiences; some of which continue to haunt them today. Culturally, First Nations' people have a proud tradition of aural knowledge; this, and many other traditions are being lost. Realistically, First Nations' people are dealing with many issues, several of which affect students' ability to succeed. Not only are they limited academically, but also in many other areas of their being. Ideally, not only would the education system be revised to promote academic success for these students, but all the other factors that have become barriers, would also be addressed on a nationwide level.

Success. A quick online search will offer a mixture of definitions for the word *success*. How would a First Nations' student define it? A few suggestions will be

offered throughout this paper as different vantage points are utilized in viewing the

question at hand.

The Topic Choice

Palys & Atchison (2008) note that "the biggest trick at the beginning [of research]

is to care about what you are researching" (p.136). Education and Culture have been the

focus of my Master of Arts- Integrated Studies' journey and I feel it is fitting to be able to

integrate my specializations in this, the final project of the program. I feel this paper not

only captures the intent of my learning plan but has strengthened my knowledge base and

will offer the reader insight into a very disturbing problem that continues to exist.

Although the research question is vast, I feel I am personalizing it somewhat as

life circumstances, and opportunities presented, have allowed me to explore the chosen

topic first hand and actually become familiar with some of the issues being discussed. To

the best of my ability, I have used caution to not let personal involvement bias this

discussion. However, I truly feel a grassroots approach is needed when looking at the

issues involved with First Nations' students' success. A bottom up approach may have

more desired results than the current method of funneling down policies and funding.

The limitations of this paper and my scope of knowledge, do not allow for a full

presentation of First Nations' culture, Canadian history, or the framework of the

Education system. A general overview of these influences has been done as I attempted

to use information literacy[3] and critical thinking[4] while researching this topic.

The Process

Taking a transdisciplinary approach[5] to this research question utilized a review of pertinent literature from a variety of sources. Although I would have preferred to take a more hands-on approach to this project, both my inexperience as a researcher and ethical considerations[6] made that impossible.   A glimmer of ethnography and rhetoric may have found their way into the discussion but no identifying details will be utilized.

The method of analysis is by discussion and summary, and the material is presented in essay style. I chose to become familiar with the research material and let that guide the writing process, rather than taking a more structured, sequential approach. Numerous theories and concepts were reviewed and applied through the progression of this project: cognitive justice[7], cultural competence[8], Indigenous education[9], Indigenous epistemology[10], Indigenous pedagogy[11], and social dominance theory[12] to name a few. Although all the material utilized may not be readily apparent in the final essay, the concepts and approaches were always in the background, guiding and directing the research and the written work.

The Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to show that the lack of academic success of First Nations' students can be attributed to several factors, few of which will be solved with the long awaited First Nations Education Act. I do not believe that this Act will spell success for these students as is being hoped for and promised. There are many other areas that need to be addressed concurrently before academic success will become a reality across First Nations.

The Discussion

Before trying to answer the research question we need to look at success from another view point. Academic success, as being discussed and measured, is usually based on achievement test results and the number of students obtaining a diploma or those going into post-secondary education. However, if you asked a First Nations' child what success means to them, a few different definitions may come to light.

Perhaps success doesn't mean growing up to be a doctor or a lawyer, a teacher or a chief…maybe it's as simple (and as complex) as living in a safe environment, getting to the school bus on time, having clean, suitable clothing to wear, and nutritious food available.

Maybe success means being part of a sports team, a drama club or a choir. Is it having coaches who care? Reliable transportation to the games? Suitable equipment and uniforms? Someone to cheer them on? Is it being able to attend school in your own community despite having special needs?

Maybe academic success should be measured in terms of getting safely through another day, attending school, having a nutritious meal and staying healthy enough to be motivated to improve and continue to learn. Until academic success, or lack thereof, is looked at holistically, it will be difficult to achieve…and define.

Research, and personal experience, has left me wondering why and how the current situation has developed and, more importantly, been allowed to continue. A review of Canadian history, colonization, assimilation and the education system show the how. Poor attempts at decolonization, and failed revisions of the education system, point

to the why. Recently, in another attempt to create an opportunity for improved success,

discussions were held amongst the stakeholders, and the First Nation Education Act was

developed. Unveiled in a recent session of Parliament, it did not receive the response that

was anticipated. An educator, on Reserve, commented that the Act looks like the

Government's way of making First Nations look responsible for previous government

shortfalls, and offers no real solutions. Rather, the Act just hands off the responsibility.

So, if the Act isn't the answer, what will be?

  A review of literature, as well as personal experience, shows that even the basic

needs of some First Nations' students are not being met. How can someone achieve any

kind of success when they are cold, hungry, tired, alone or afraid? Mellor and Corrigan

(2004) note that the health status of a child is an important determinant of a child's

readiness for school and capacity while at school; basic nutrition is a necessary for

cognitive development. Children who are hungry and lack shelter will primarily focus on

those needs with little capacity to function at a higher level (Maslow[13]).

  The reality of the situation shows a need much greater than a new educational

structure. A structure is only as good as the foundation it is set upon; I feel the First

Nations' foundation has crumbled in many respects.

  As mentioned previously, the confines of this paper do not allow for a thorough

presentation of cultural, historical, political or educational facts. I urge you, as the

reader, to take it upon yourself to become familiar with these aspects as they affect First

Nation people. As a Canadian; an 'oil-rich'- Albertan, I was appalled at the following

statistics and wonder (albeit abstractly) if their vast geographical distribution is

preventing First Nations from truly receiving the respect and freedoms they request and deserve. If all First Nation peoples lived in one location, identified as a separate country rather than a 'subset' of Canada, would culture, tradition, language, goals and dreams be recognized, studied and respected? As a multidimensional assembly, spread across the continent, the undertone of assimilation runs deep. The Government sends aid to foreign countries in time of need; I urge them to look at the need on our own doorstep FIRST~ First Nations. Noted, a large amount of funding is transferred to First Nations for housing, governance and education. Why then do the statistics show such socioeconomic despair? Another difficult question to be answered.

The Tarnished Crown

Before delving into some stark realities, I feel it is appropriate to present a section from the recent Crown speech as I believe it will show the contrast between what is being said and what is being done. Gov. Gen. David Johnson said "…we do not abandon our fellows to scrape by in times of distress or natural disaster…we come swiftly to the aid of those in need…" He goes on to say "…as we look to the 150th anniversary of our Confederation, we are reminded that ours is a rich heritage: a legacy of freedom; the birthright of all humanity and the courage to uphold it, the rule of the law, and the institutions to protect it, respect for human dignity and diversity…" He promises that "…our Government will take further steps to see that those traditionally under-represented in the workforce, including people with disabilities, youth and Aboriginal[14] Canadians, find the job training they need…" Job training? I think that food, shelter and security would be of greater importance! Gov. Gen. Johnson also pointed out that "Our

Government recognized the tremendous potential of Canada's First Nations, Metis and Inuit populations to strengthen the growing Canadian economy. [I propose he has this totally backwards and the growing economy should strengthen the potential for First Nations]. It [the Government] will continue working with First Nations to develop stronger, more effective, and more accountable on –reserve education systems…"(CTV news).

Although the Crown speech appears to hold promise, I feel it is missing the mark and not looking deep enough at root causes. Again the 'top-down' approach prevails as the lofty view from Parliament Hill is undoubtedly a bit different than the stark reality being faced on the Land. A more in-depth discussion is needed to explain and explore the data. I will present the data in point form; there is no need to gloss it over or dress it up; it is a sad reality.

The Facts

The First Nations Children's Action Research and Education System created a document showing a Cycle of Structural Disadvantage (2012) that offers a quick but thorough overview of the issues. This report points to poverty, substance misuse, substandard housing and inequities in Government and voluntary sector services as some of the structural factors affecting poor outcomes of First Nation children and youth. The facts speak for themselves:

- One in four First Nations children and youth live in poverty as compared to one in nine other Canadian children (UNICEF, 2009).
- Poverty is associated with increased substance use (Reading & Wein, 2009, p.3).

- Food security is an issue for almost 50% of reserve residents (Chief's Assembly on Education, 2012, p .2).

- Youth substance over-use and violence as well as behavior problems in children has been linked to over-crowded living conditions (Reading & Wein, 2009, p.4).

- Among First Nations, 28% lived in a home requiring major repairs. On reserve, housing disparities were greater with approximately 44% of First Nations residing in homes in need of major repairs (National Collaborative Centre of Aboriginal Health, 2011, p.2).

- Poor housing conditions such as mold, lack of safe drinking water, and over-crowding have been associated with increased risk of morbidity from infectious disease, chronic illness, injuries, poor nutrition, and mental disorders (National Collaborative Centre of Aboriginal Health, 2011, p.1).

- Jurisdictional disputes involving the cases of caring for First Nation children are common, with nearly 400 occurring in 12 First Nations Child and Family service agencies sampled in one year alone (Canadian Pediatric Society, 2012).

- Health and safety of students is a concerns for 72% of First Nations schools, and 32% of schools have an issue with access to clean drinking water (Chief's Assembly on Education, 2012, p .1).

- Socioeconomic barriers [to equity in health services] include lower levels of education and income (National Collaborative Centre of Aboriginal Health, 2011, p.2).

- Almost half (48.1%) of all children, aged 14 and under, in foster care (in 2011) were Aboriginal children (Statistics Canada, 2013).

- First Nations' children more frequently come in to contact with child welfare as a result of neglect and poverty, rather than referral for physical or sexual abuse (Trocme, MacLaurin, Fallon, Knoke, Pitman, & McCormack, 2006).

These statistics do not spell success, academically or otherwise. Blackstock (2007) suggests that the current socioeconomic status of Aboriginal peoples in Canada can be explained through the impacts of residential schools[s] (p.5). Trocme et al (2004) note that alcohol abuse is a concern for almost two thirds of Aboriginal parents, compared to 22% for Caucasian parents (p.588). Henton (2013) reports that Aboriginal poverty is perpetuated by the lack of funding that aboriginal agencies receive; on average about 22% less that their provincial counterparts (p.3). As heart wrenching as these statistics are, I find the next statements even more abhorring. "It is believed that the current status of aboriginal peoples and reduced funding for aboriginal agencies has resulted in the overrepresentation of aboriginal children in care. There are as many as three times more children in the care of child welfare authorities than was the number of aboriginal children placed in residential schools at the height of those school operations in the 1940's" (Compton, Galaway, & Cournoyer, p. 424). Sweetgrass (2012) puts forth that as of June 2012, there were 8686 children reported in care in Alberta, with 68% of those being Aboriginal (p.1). Another eye opening fact comes from Henton (2013), who writes that "only 9% of Alberta children are Aboriginal, yet they account for a staggering 78% of children who have died in foster care since 1999" (p.3). As penned by Murrell

(2013), "There appears to be a consensus among researchers that the history of residential school trauma, the lack of funding for aboriginal agencies, the socioeconomic status of aboriginal peoples, and the lack of current supports, contribute to the existing overrepresentation of aboriginal youth in care"(p.8). I would suggest that these same factors also speak loudly to the lack of academic success for these children and for that reason chose to include them in this discussion.

To give a true picture of the scope of these issues, a few other statistics are worth considering. Statistics Canada (2011), offers these facts:

- 4.3% [1,400,685] of the total Canadian population had an aboriginal identity (60.8% of these identified as First Nations).

- Nearly one half (49.3%) of First Nations people lived on reserves or Indian settlements.

- The Aboriginal population increased by 20.1% between 2006 and 2011, compared with 5.2% for the non –aboriginal population [22.9% increase for First Nations].

- Aboriginal children age 14 and under made up 28% of the total Aboriginal population, 7% of all the children in Canada.

Making Sense of it All?

Taking all the previous statistics into consideration, it is obvious to me, that many factors are in play when discussing academic success of First Nations' students. Not only are these students increasing in numbers, but too many of them are ending up in the care of Social Services. Education IS important for success, but the facts speak volumes about other areas of need. Many questions need to be asked, not just the one about academic success. Blackstock (2007) wrote that "too often, arriving at an answer stopped the journey for truth, and our ancestors understood that truth was fragile-given shape by the moment and the interpretation of those who came upon it" (p.4). We need to heed that piece of traditional knowledge!

Historically, the education received by First Nations' students has been geared toward assimilation, with the effects of residential schools still present today. "Despite the painful experiences Aboriginal people carry with them from formal education systems, they still see education as the hope for the future and are determined to see education fulfill its promise" (Indian & Northern Affairs Canada, 1996, 3:343).

Culturally, as a proud people recognize their loss of language and traditions, and strive to develop programs to address this loss, societal demands are dictating a certain level of educational success to gain employment income and subsequent security for them and their children. Many authors are referring to education as *the new buffalo* when looking at the struggles of Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada; it is crucial to modern-day survival of Aboriginal peoples. The term is referring to the food, clothing

and shelter provided by the buffalo that sustained and improved the First Nation life

[in past time] (Stonechild, 2006).

Realistically, academic success is not being achieved by many First Nations'

students, for numerous reasons, many of which are not usually discussed alongside the

test results. Leaving the socioeconomic factors out of the discussion for a moment, if that

is possible, I want to briefly focus on the education system itself. Despite all the

research, reports and recommendations[15] made over the years, serious issues continue to

exist. So serious in fact, that the Assembly of First Nations has prepared a Human Rights

complaint.[16]

Using a provincial curriculum, slightly modified to include some traditional

knowledge, and having success measured by standardized tests does not point to having a

good outcome. The [cultural] bias in testing often leads to a higher rate of diagnosis of

special education needs (Alberta Education, 2002). Unfortunately, because of the limited

service available for these students, they often have to leave their community to receive

their education. Again, the cycle of misunderstood culture and education continues.

There have been many attempts to level the playing field between the education

aboriginal students are receiving compared to the rest of the nation; numerous resources

list the work done and the progress made. However, nothing seems to have changed;

demands are higher, services and programs are not. Mendelson (2008) argues that "The

present non-system of Education for First Nations' students living on reserve is failing,

and the overall results for Canada show no improvement over the past decade. It is

difficult to think of another issue that is so clearly a social and economic disaster in the

making" (p.19). A bit closer to home, for me, Goddard & Foster (2002) identified

barriers to success when they looked at Educational Issues in Northern Alberta. Their

findings were consistent with what has already been discussed here .[17]

The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (2007) also identify barriers to success

for Aboriginal students, noting a need to integrate Indigenous knowledge into

classrooms, provide more support through mentorship programs, learn about the ongoing

effects of colonialism and racism, and build relationships with students, communities and

parents.

Other common themes identified as concerns throughout much of the literature

was the inability to recruit and retain experienced teachers, noting that many reserve

teachers are new teachers and often cannot accept the culture shock they receive. Also

discussed were the substandard accommodations for teachers and lower pay than their

provincial counterparts. Due to a high rate of staff turnover, relationships with students

and the community often never develop and the barrier between newcomer and local is

never removed.

Obviously, there are many factors that affect the success of First Nations'

students. I think a holistic approach is needed to resolve the situation. Improving

education without addressing the numerous socioeconomic issues would be as ineffective

as improving the socioeconomic conditions without addressing the numerous issues identified with the education system. This sounds like a circle with no end, and I'm afraid we, as a Nation, are still riding that merry-go-round, despite thinking we are moving forward.

The First Nation Education Act (2013), a long awaited legislation that promises to "learn from the past and act for the future" (p.2) was developed in consultation with Aboriginal leaders, educators and government. The hope was that educational design and control would be returned to the Aboriginal peoples. The Act includes First Nations developing programs and curricula, and developing a system of support to see this system progress. Although the Act does allow bands to operate schools directly and to also purchase services from regional, provincial or private school boards, it would still be the federal government that would set and enforce the standards for schools on reserves. This continued control was apparently not discussed or anticipated by the First Nations. The Blue Print for Legislation (July, 2013) has become the focus of an active controversy between the Canadian government and Indigenous leaders since it was introduced into Parliament in October, 2013. Unfortunately, to date, it has been rejected by over 200 Indigenous leaders for a variety of reasons. Even Bob Nault, a former Indian affairs minister, voiced his disappointment stating, " This isn't much of anything except basically sending a message that it's the parents' and First Nations' fault that we don't have First Nations kids at the same level as non-native kids across Canada" (CBC, 2013). It has been called 'paternalistic' and 'at risk of repeating the mistakes of the past.' The Assembly of First Nations Chiefs expressed that they have lost hope in the new Act

and report that "First Nations oppose unilateral federal policy and legislation after a history of failed and harmful attempts have been devastating for their communities…"

"First Nations have complained that real consultation was not part of the process, and that being listened to is not the same as being heard" (CBC). Interestingly, the Blueprint is broken down into sections- entitled 'What We Heard' and 'What We Proposed.' Obviously there is still a big disconnect: First Nations and other interested people have two months to give input before the final legislation. Two months to rectify years of misunderstanding; I agree with those who say this Act is one of hope lost.

Lost hope certainly doesn`t spell success but it doesn't necessarily spell failure either. The development of this legislation and its subsequent lack of acceptance may have done more harm than good in improving the atmosphere around education. However, there are so many other factors that impact the ability of a First Nations` student to learn that I don't feel the Act would have made a huge difference in success rate. As alluded earlier, it might just be a process for shifting blame for failure rather than paving a road for success.

Final Thoughts

Why is achieving academic success difficult for First Nations' students? A modest question with a very multifaceted answer; if there is an answer. This paper has utilized many resources, differing approaches and theories, to explain some of the reasons academic success is proving to be such a difficult task for these students. History,

culture, educational practices, and expectations have all contributed to the issues being faced. Socioeconomic disparity, along with loss of traditional knowledge, practices, and language, are problems that overshadow and undermine every aspect of these students' lives. These barriers not only limit the support and opportunities available but also limit the students' expectations of themselves. The promise of improvement, hanging on the

proposed First Nation Education Act, has been all but squelched as the Act does not represent the concerns put forward by First Nations during initial consultations. Memories of past mistreatment, talk of paternalism and forced assimilations have once again entered the conversation. This negativity will surely not add to the success of these students as the air of mistrust thickens and the gap between cultures widens. I hope, for the sake of the students, as well as the sake of the Nation, that not all of their energy will be expended on fighting this Act. There are so many barriers that need to be addressed before success can be achieved that this Act should only be seen as one small piece of a very challenging puzzle. Living in poverty, often in geographic isolation, without adequate supports must be a daunting existence. Attending a school that is poorly equipped, with inexperienced teachers who may not understand the culture, language and traditions, adds more difficulty. An entire generation of people, subjected to the atrocities of residential schools, do not trust the system. Funding issues and governance struggles continue to hamper progress. Is it any wonder these students are having difficulty succeeding? This paper may not have fully answered the initial question, but I feel strongly that the information presented has shown that the question needs to be asked until a suitable answer is attained. I am confident that success is attainable for these

students. I feel the answers lie in taking a holistic view at the grassroots level,

recognizing and respecting the distinctive features of Indigenous knowledge and

education.   Taking an integrated approach to complex issues allows problems to be

viewed from several different angles rather than using only the methods, theories and

concepts of one specific discipline. The development and sharing of knowledge outside

traditional boundaries may offer creative, innovative solutions to the ongoing issues

plaguing First Nations. Perhaps this approach would provide a new way of knowing for

all parties involved; I hope the work continues. I am pleased to have had the opportunity

to explore the issue of education and culture and proud of the knowledge that I have

gained and shared throughout the journey.

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Notes

[1] **Success for Everyone** is a belief held by a Treaty 8 school in Northern Alberta. This belief is proudly posted in every classroom in the school. This phrase, and similar wording, is dispersed throughout Government documents. The Alberta's Commission on Learning Report & Recommendations states that there will be success for every child: Adapting programs, and providing support so that all children, including Aboriginal children, children with special needs, children new to Canada, and children who have special gifts and talents, get every opportunity to succeed at school (p.5).

[2] **First Nations** is a term, preferred by many Aboriginal peoples and the Assembly of First Nations, refers to the various governments of the first peoples of Canada. First Nations is a term preferred to the terms Indians, Tribes, and Bands that are frequently used by the federal, provincial, and territorial governments in Canada. There are over 600 First Nations across Canada with 46 in Alberta. Alberta (2002).

[3] **Critical thinking** is a quality of thinking that is characterized by self-regulated deliberations on a challenging situation or task that involve exploring and generating alternatives, and making evaluative judgments. These judgments are based on criteria, which provide justifications for the conclusion, and are applied to meaning, relational, empirical, or value claims (Van Gyn & Ford, 2006, p.11).

[4] **Information literacy** is the ability to determine the extent of information needed, access the needed information effectively and efficiently, evaluate information and its sources critically, incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base, use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose and understand the economic,

legal and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use

information ethically and legally (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2000, 2-

3).

[5] I have chosen to describe my approach to the research question as transdisciplinary in

nature as it includes a variety of disciplines (e.g. anthropology, education, history,

Indigenous studies, political science, psychology and sociology). Although this project

includes information and theories developed in several disciplines, it must do more than

share and transfer knowledge; it must create a new way of viewing the subject. The

transdisciplinary approach has consistent collaboration and integration throughout the

process and goes beyond the traditional boundaries of each separate discipline to provide

a rich knowledge base for integration aimed at problem solving and decision making

(Repko, Newell, & Szostak 2012).

[6] Aboriginal people have distinctive perspectives and understandings, derived from their

cultures and histories and embodied in their languages. Research that has Aboriginal

experience as it subject matter must reflect this. Knowledge that is transmitted orally

must also be acknowledged as a valuable research resource along with documentation

and other sources (AERC, 2007).

[7] **Cognitive justice** – this model recognizes the plurality of knowledge and expresses the

right of different forms of knowledge to co-exist. One way to provide more recognition

of Indigenous learners is by recognizing Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge as

valued and legitimate within the classroom. This type of recognition is referred to as

Cognitive Justice (Birkbeck, 2013). Brydon (2010) uses the term to refer to "the goals of reciprocal knowledge production based on dialogue across differences and attempts to compensate for power differentials in the interests of promoting social justice" (p. 101).

[8]**Cultural competence-** being effective in cross cultural relationships; it requires self-awareness that allows us to recognize that who we are influences the way we see, understand and work with others. It means adapting our knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and skills to become more effective and trustworthy when working with people of another culture. It is not a skill to master but a lifelong learning process (Indigenous Cultural Competency Training).

[9]**Indigenous education-** a process that begins before birth and continues long after formal education is over; learning at one stage has implications for subsequent stages. Elders are able to transmit knowledge and wisdom to younger generations. The individual is viewed as a whole person with intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical dimensions; holistic education (AERC).

[10]**Indigenous epistemology-** grounded in the self, the spirit and the unknown. Understanding the Universe is grounded in the spirit; speaks of pondering great mysteries that lie no further than the self (AERC).

[11]**Indigenous pedagogy-**distinctive features are learning by observation and doing, learning through authentic experiences and individualized instruction, and learning through enjoyment. It accepts the students need to internalize the learning and Aboriginal teachers allow for a lag period of watching before doing. [Non aboriginal

teachers may see this as not having an answer, being disrespectful or not wanting to speak up, and is often the reason for discipline]. Indigenous knowledge is empirical (based on experience) and normative (based on social values). It embraces both the circumstances people find themselves in and their beliefs about those circumstances; this is not done in Eurocentric knowledge system. It constantly adapts to the dynamic interplay of changing empirical knowledge as well as changing social values (AERC).

[12]**Social dominance theory** – developed by psychology professors Sidanius & Pratto who reason that human social groups have three hierarchies based (1) age, (2) gender and (3) arbitrary set; which are group based and culturally defined (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). This theory argues that intergroup oppression, discrimination, and prejudice are the means by which human societies organize themselves as group –based hierarchies, in which members of the dominant group secure a disproportionate share of the good things in life**.** Erica Neegan (2005) looks at the physical, spiritual, and mental destruction and disruptive components of colonial education on Aboriginal peoples concluding that the dominant group [Government of Canada] is using the education system as a means to continue exploitative conditions (p.14).

[13]**Maslow's** (1943, 1954) hierarchy of needs initially included five motivational needs: Physiological, Safety, Love - Belonging, Esteem and Self-actualization. This theory is often shown as levels on a pyramid, and purports that basic needs must be satisfied before progressing on to meet higher needs. In 1970, Maslow expanded the model to include

cognitive and esthetic needs (1970a) and later added transcendence needs (1970b) (McLeod, 2007).

[14] **Aboriginal peoples**: The descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. Section 35 of the Constitution Act of 1892, defines Aboriginal peoples to include First Nations (Indians), Inuit and Metis groups (Alberta, 2002).

[15] **Dr. Marie Battiste** has penned numerous scholarly papers around Indigenous knowledge and education. As part of the Educational Renewal Initiative, she wrote Indigenous Knowledge: Foundations for First Nations (2005). Another report, prepared for the Canadian Council on Learning looks at Foundation Principles for First Nations Learning and Education. **Verna Kirkness**, an associate professor at UBC has worked in the field of Aboriginal education for over four decades and has published much about the topic. Both of these authors deserve more attention that can be afforded them in this paper.

[16] Education, Jurisdiction and Governance- The Assembly of First Nations, in collaboration with other organizations, have prepared a Human Rights complaint pursuant to Section 5 of the Canadian Human Rights Act. The issue put forward is that First Nation children and youth living on reserve and attending on-reserve schools across Canada are denied access to the same standard and quality of primary and secondary programs and services that are available to those living off reserve. The discrimination is systemic and affects approximately 70,000 First Nations' children and young people (AFN Annual Report 2012-2013).

[17] For a closer look at educational issues in northern Alberta, please refer to *Adapting to Diversity: Where Cultures Collide-Educational Issues in Northern Alberta* (Goddard & Foster, 2002).