DEPICTIONS OF SUCCESS: VOICES FROM GR. 12 ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

• President’s SSHRC Research Fund
  • Provided seed money to support small-scale projects
  • Data gathered from this study used for 4 presentations & 3 peer-reviewed papers
  • Subsequent success with this project lead to present SSHRC-IDG: Exploring the Leadership Practices of Principals who Promote the Educational Success of First Nations, Métis and Inuit High School Students

• An urban school division, 12 FNM students from 2 high schools
OVERVIEW

• Purpose of this presentation:
  • to describe educational success and success in general, according to Grade 12 Aboriginal students

• Analyzed students’ views of success using Canadian Council on Learning’s (2007) First nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model
  • Success infused with a balance of academic, physical, emotional & spiritual wellness

• Semi-structured individual interviews, the 12 high school students thematically indicated that success was a personalized phenomenon determined by past experiences and personal ambitions
OVERVIEW

• Previous presentations highlighted the “Motivators of Education Success: Perceptions of Gr. 12 Aboriginal Students”

• Through individual interviews these successful students identified the following motivators:
  • Caring teachers & a hospitable school
  • Personally-relevant learning opportunities
  • After-school activities and programs
  • The positive influence of family role models

• Motivation stemmed from 4 quadrants of learning:
  • Awareness (physical)
  • Knowledge (mental)
  • Continuous improvement (emotional)
  • Perseverance (spiritual)
Achievement goal theory*

- Social cognitive view of motivation
- Explores the influences of class environment on student achievement & academic engagement
- Roles of motivation & self-perception considered
- Mastery goals
- Performance goals

OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Connection between motivational learning & active learning

Active learning: potential rapport building activities for students
- Team building; self-esteem enhancing

Accommodates diversity
- Learning styles, culture, ethnicity
Adult learning theory’s core assumption:

- Relevancy of subject matter important
- Role of active participation in learning
- Holistic nature: Emotional, spiritual, intellectual

Aboriginal Worldview

- Respect for self, family & community
- Belief in sustainable future: balance, connection, harmony
- Mind, body, emotion & spirit - all connected
BASIC GOALS OF RESEARCH

• To give Indigenous students a voice
• To listen to their stories of success
• To understand how they define or depict success
• To share their stories and youthful wisdom with a wider audience
• To become an advocate for change
METHODOLOGY

Stake (2010): qualitative research “interpretive, experiential, situational, and personalistic” (p. 14)

- conversational-like questioning techniques
  - semi-structured interview format

- capture vicarious experiences of participants

- person-focused data collection
Cycles of Data Analysis and Participant Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle 1 Familiarity with Data</th>
<th>Cycle 2 Creation of Topical Codes</th>
<th>Cycle 3 Creation of Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Transcribe interviews</td>
<td>• Analyze first transcript by creating topical codes, which reflect the key ideas, phrases, commonalities, and patterns embedded in the transcript; place verbatim participant comment under appropriate topical code</td>
<td>• Review topical codes and create overarching themes, which address the research question</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Perform member check</td>
<td>• Analyze second transcript by applying/modifying emergent topical codes to represent an aggregated review of the data; place/re-place participant comments under appropriate topical codes</td>
<td>• Reread transcripts ensuring that verbatim comments, topical codes, and overarching themes truthfully represent the data</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Read all transcripts to acquire an overall feel for the data</td>
<td>• Analyze remaining transcripts by applying/modifying emerging topical codes; place/re-place participant comments, as needed</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>School</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sun School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Sun School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sun School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Sun School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seanna</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sun School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Sun School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunrise Woman</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sun School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Moon School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Moon School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tristan</td>
<td>M</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Moon School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zack</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Moon School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUCCESS IN SCHOOL

Western worldview - hierarchical way of interpreting life

Life experienced through ultimate polarities
- Right vs. wrong;
- Human vs. non-human;
- Living vs. non-living;
- Factual vs. intuition;
- Pass vs. fail

Mainstream educational practices
- Competitiveness, individuality, status projection, & outside judgement
ACKNOWLEDGING PREVIOUS RESEARCH

• Two pan-Canadian studies:
  • Bell (2004) studied 10 public and reserves schools and identified common characteristics within these schools that supported educational success of its Aboriginal students
    • Strong leadership
    • High expectations for students
    • Welcoming school environment
    • Quality professional development
    • A range of in- and after-school student programs
  
ACKNOWLEDGING PREVIOUS RESEARCH

• Fulford (2007) studied 10 schools in Central and Eastern Canada
• Results reinforced Bell’s findings, plus 4 additional findings were found to have had a positive influence on Aboriginal student’s educational success:
  • Exceptional language and cultural programs
  • Respect for Aboriginal culture and traditions
  • Assessment linked to instruction and planning
  • Vigorous community partnerships

ACKNOWLEDGING PREVIOUS RESEARCH

• Defining success as a more holistic depiction of the term:
  • As experiencing a more purposeful & fulfilled life
  • Can be connected to knowledge of and/or experience with one’s heritage, language & spiritual beliefs (Bazylak, 2002); (Colquhoun & Dockery, 2012)


ACKNOWLEDGING PREVIOUS RESEARCH

- Over 2,600 urban Aboriginal students were interviewed (Environics Institute, 2010) with the following findings:
  
  - **A strong connection to their Aboriginal heritage was associated with success in life**
    - This finding was more prevalent with status First Nations and Inuit peoples when compared to non-status First Nations & Metis respondents
  
  - **Most participants believed that leading a successful life involved having close connections with family**

The 12 students interviewed predominately talked about 2 types of success:
- Educational success
- The attainment of a fulfilling and/or purposeful life

Additionally, students believed a successful life meant spiritual development and maturation
- This was often accomplished through “experiencing life” with its lessons & challenges

Students provided a number of suggestions for educational leaders in terms of how to foster success in school & beyond
DATA FINDINGS:
DEPICTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

• Sunrise Women
  • “Success to me in school means getting your Grade 12, getting at least a degree in university, or you know, furthering your education in some way.”

• Joe
  • “Success for me means passing and getting a good career.”

• Megan
  • “It is important for me to attend school and get high marks, because it is my last year. I want to go to university…So I thought to myself, ‘Do you want to work at [name of fast food restaurant] for the rest of your life? Or do you want to have your career, like sitting in your office and answering phones, or doing something that you like?’ So now my grades are getting higher.”
David

• “I came from pretty much broken everything, nothing was good. I was heading down a road to nowhere. I had a lot of trouble. Then I came here, and I saw myself change...I started thinking, ‘What kind of person should I be? What kind of person should I turn into?’ So I just turned to music. That is when I started playing guitar, and I excelled at it.”

• “There is hope here [at school]. They give you hope here. They help give you hope in yourself, and they hope you make it. I never had that before.”

• That is how I find support; it’s through smudge. Something deep inside me tells me not to quit. Something is telling me that I have something. That I have so many things that people want, so many things in my life that can take me places.
DATA FINDINGS:
DEPICTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

Jacob
- You know, the more I read, the more I listened, the more I understood. That’s what made me learn. It’s just like listening to Elders. They teach you things and, you know, by listening you learn. But with school it’s reading, and you learn. Or listening to the teacher speak, and you learn. So as my marks have improved as I think, “I can do this”.

Tristin
- “Being here doesn’t mean you’re going to be successful [in life], but basically [it means] graduating and having your marks up.”
- “You have to humble yourselves. You have to follow an ‘Indian Code of Ethics’ in order to do good in life. That’s what helps me in school and, you know, other things in life.”
DATA FINDINGS: DEPICTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

• **Sara**
  Right now they have this thing where you can go and transfer to a different country for half a year. I’m like, ‘Oh, my god! I want to do that.’”

• **Bob**
  This school doesn’t have that many clubs though. I think that would be really good if it had more clubs, because it would give you a chance to be around people who have similar interests.

  We need more sports, way more sports. They need competitive sports, too. I want there to be co-ed sports and same-gender sports.
DATA FINDINGS:
DEPICTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

Frank
I don’t do homework at all. So that kind of messes up how I do in school sometimes...that’s what’s dragging me down in C30 now, is not doing my homework.

Tristin
I don’t do homework.

Seanna
If I go home I’m not going to get my work done, obviously, so they gave me this room [here at school] to do this work.
• CCL’s (2007) First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model:
  • Depicted learning as a quadrilateral concept involving
    • Mental, Physical, Emotional & Spiritual wellbeing/success
    • Individual success & community welfare are a symbiotic concept

• Overview of findings:
  • Student depictions of success focused on
    • Graduation rates, postsecondary credentials & career aspirations
    • Students spoke less to the notion of emotional & spiritual wellbeing

  • Student participation within the arts & after-school activities were motivators for their overall educational success

• Future studies need to explore how a decolonized education system can nourish the learning spirit of students (Battiste, 2013) not only in high school, but in middle and elementary divisions, as well.

• “The learning spirit then, is the entity within each of us that guides our search for purpose and vision. Our gifts unfold in a learning environment that sustain and challenge us as learners.” (Battiste, 2013, p. 18)

DEPICTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

THANK YOU

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