An Evaluation of Parental Perspectives on Children's Education in Skownan First Nation

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Introduction

The current labour and economic context suggests that Canada is moving away from an industrial-based economy toward a knowledge-based economy, one that requires creativity, innovative skills, and technical expertise. For the majority of individuals, possession of these particular abilities is more likely to result in their participation as fully engaged members of a democratic society, accompanied by some measure of economic and social success. The pathway to develop these abilities continues to be access to post-secondary education including programs at technical, college, and university institutions. Post-secondary education remains a significant predictor of not living in poverty as the average incomes of university-educated workers remain substantially higher than those who have attained high school or less (Hankivsky, 2008; Usher, 2009). In Canada, the two key predictors of attending post-secondary education remain parents who have completed post-secondary education and family income level (Foley, Galipoli, & Green, 2012; McMullen, 2011).

The impact of these indicators results in a notable disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. There is a substantial body of research that documents the complex and interrelated challenges and constraints that Indigenous families experience. These include poverty, food insecurity, overcrowded housing, under or unemployment, family dissolution, over-representation within the child welfare system, and health care issues (Trocmé, Knocke, & Blackstock, 2004; Brown, Higgitt, Wingert, Miller, & Morrissette, 2004; Willows, Veugelersa, Rainea, & Kuhle, 2009). Given this context, the significant outcome of study for this paper is that compared to non-Indigenous youth, Indigenous youth are four times less likely to attend post-secondary education (Mendelson, 2006; Merrill, Bruce, & Marlin, 2010). Additionally, in Manitoba, Indigenous youth have the highest rates of early school leaving and lower educational achievement than non-Indigenous Manitobans (Mendelson, 2006). Given that access to post-secondary education is predicated on the successful completion of high school, the educational trajectories of Indigenous students are impeded by the cumulative impact of not completing high school, thereby limiting access to post-secondary education options. Employment rates for Indigenous families who live on reserve range from 20-55% compared to those who reside in urban centres, with at least half of this discrepancy directly attributed to

educational attainment (Sharpe, Arsenault, & Lapointe, 2007).

There is a substantive body of research that demonstrates the intergenerational transmission of educational attainment (Juarez, 2011; Huang, 2012). However, much of this research is based on mainstream populations, and there is limited knowledge of how Indigenous parents perceive their role in children's educational outcomes. The purpose of this paper was therefore to explore parents' personal educational and career histories as one means of understanding why educational outcomes vary so conspicuously between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth. The information collected in this study has important implications for how educators and service providers may develop effective interventions that can target these disparities.

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model provides a useful means of organizing numerous indicators as it acknowledges the multiple and reciprocating influences on the educational development of children and youth within a broad range of domains. It is not intended to serve a predictive function but rather serves as a structured framework that facilitates the examination of a multitude of variables specific to a particular group.

The macro or societal level explores the cultural and historical context of the relationship between Indigenous families, the federal government, and the education system. It includes dynamics of poverty, race, family structure, and community and how the interaction between micro-level resources and macro-level constraints can limit Indigenous children's opportunities for academic and therefore potential economic success. The deleterious impact of the residential school system on Indigenous families and the subsequent effect of these experiences on children and youth's academic outcomes is only beginning to be understood by mainstream society. The education system as the primary vehicle of oppression has resulted in higher rates of child welfare involvement, poverty, and adolescent

motherhood, all of which are significant risk factors for not completing high school (Brownell, Roos, MacWilliam, Leclair, Ekuma, & Fransoo, 2010). Indigenous families continue to experience long-standing emotional trauma as a result of forcible removal from parents and families, subsequent physical, sexual, and emotional abuse while in the care of residential school staff, and loss of traditional lands, culture and language (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2011).

The exo level explores how legislation and institutional policies facilitate or impede children's academic outcomes. The availability of sufficient funding is directly related to both infrastructure development and curriculum delivery within educational systems. Although reserve-based schools are expected to be comparable to their provincial counterparts in terms of standards that "allow students to transfer without penalty to an equivalent grade in another school within the school system of the province in which the school is located" (Mendelson, 2008, p.7), federal funding for on-reserve educational programs is significantly less than average provincial funding formulas. These discrepancies result in First Nations students being on average two grades behinds their provincial counterparts (ibid). Most

recently, the National Panel on First Nations Education invalidated the concept of parity and recommended higher levels of funding for First Nations communities than are provided in non-reserve communities as "learning barriers are greater in First Nation communities" (p.20). At a more basic level, the physical quality of many on-reserve schools is deteriorating, and funding for maintenance and renovations remains inadequate for the need. In addition, the availability of Grades 7-12 education on many reserves is limited, and thus students are required to travel outside their community to continue their education past the elementary level.

The mezzo system describes interactions between micro systems that lead to new levels of developmental influence. With respect to Indigenous educational outcomes, this relates to understanding parents' educational experiences and the impact of these experiences on children's educational development. Previous research has consistently identified that parental educational level is an important predictor of children's educational outcomes and Indigenous parents who have higher levels of education are more likely to have children who succeed at school (Pin & Rudnicki, 2011; Richards & Scott, 2009). Parental involvement within school systems also positively impacts children's educational outcomes in terms of increased motivation in school and higher achievement (Grolnick, Gehl, & Manzo,

1997). However, research continues to highlight how there is limited parental participation and involvement in schools (Richards & Scott, 2009). One explanation is that Indigenous parental participation continues to be viewed as a problem from the perspective of many educators and administrators, while public schools tend to remain unwelcoming (Friedel, 2010). Conversely, given that a major agent of the oppression of Indigenous families was the education system, it is entirely reasonable to understand Indigenous families' perceived ambivalence about the educational system, apprehension about judgments by outsiders, and reluctance to become involved. At the same time, learning about ways to increase Indigenous parental involvement in meaningful ways are major objectives of provincial educational systems (Malatest, 2002).

Micro level experiences inform us of the macro level realities of Indigenous people. Interactions within this level, which includes one's immediate physical and social environment may also contribute to the academic disparities. Examples of microsystems are families, homes, and schools. Children's exposure to post- secondary education, parent-child interactions regarding academic achievement and career exploration attitudes and behaviours, and parent-school relationships are potentially important transmission mechanisms of children's educational attainment.

Purpose of this Study

There is little research about the perceptions and awareness of parents regarding their personal educational and career histories, and the impact of their experiences on children's academic goals and career exploration. Understanding parental perceptions of these relationships is important for many purposes including identifying ways that educators and service providers can assist parents/caregivers in facilitating more positive outcomes for their children. The purpose of the present study was to explore parental perceptions of the relationship between their own experiences and how the impact of these interactions influence their children's academic engagement, career exploration, and post-secondary goals. The study was funded by the Manitoba Research Alliance as part of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Grant for "Transforming Inner-city and Aboriginal Communities".

To explore how Indigenous parental educational and career histories influenced their perceptions of children's exposure to career exploration, participants were recruited from the Apinochek Pasaquok (Children Rising) project operated by Career Trek, Inc. in Skownan, Manitoba.

Career Trek is an early intervention, social inclusion initiative targeted toward students who, due to social, economic, or family structure disadvantages, may not successfully transition to post-secondary education after graduation. In essence, the mandate of Career Trek is poverty reduction through career exploration. Each year, over 300 children in grades 5 and 6 who appear to require additional academic and/or social supports are identified by school staff as candidates for the Career Trek program. The program fully acknowledges that all children have the potential to be successful; however those who may be perceived as being academically at-risk of not moving on to post- secondary education require additional supports in order to be successful. The program operates for 20 Saturdays beginning in October and ending in April with graduation. It seeks to increase students' and families' knowledge about potential careers that are accessible through post-secondary educational institutions through an integrated approach to experiential career exposure, the provision of information about post-secondary educational institutions, and encouraging parental involvement in children's career decision-making choices.

The program curriculum is designed to expose students to the wide variety of careers that are accessible via post-secondary education, as

well as the broad range of careers within each discipline/subject. The program is experiential, and participants engage in the "hands-on" tasks of particular careers. For example, activities associated with the Political Science department include developing policies and legislation (policy analyst), engaging in a political debate (politician), and writing about current events (journalist). In addition to the experiential component, the program staff ensures that information is provided regarding particular disciplines and the required school subjects.

The Apinochek Pasaquok project is an extension of the core Career Trek program for First Nations youth and their families. Program participants travel into Winnipeg twice a semester for two days of intensive programming at the three post-secondary institutions. This project began in 2004 in Skownan which is a reserve community located 400 kilometres northwest of Winnipeg with a population of fewer than 700 people. Funding for the Apinochek Pasaquok Program is largely provided by the Province of Manitoba. Improving the educational outcomes of reserve-based youth requires a long term perspective that acknowledges the ecological influences as described above. A critical component

of partnering with reserve communities is the establishment of trust that is only achieved by engaging in a relationship that is based on the recognition of individual, family, and community strengths. Prior to implementation, project staff worked with the elders, parents, and school staff to ensure that the project would be respectful of community traditions and that it would not be perceived as a short term project that simply parachuted into the community, only to leave within a short period.

Individual interviews were held with 12 parents of children who were at various stages of the program. Some interviews were held in the community at the Skownan School, others were conducted when parents/caregivers accompanied their children to the city for programming. Interviews with the parents ranged between 60-90 minutes, and were audio recorded using a digital voice recorder. Parents were asked to respond to a series of open-ended questions about their educational and career backgrounds, their beliefs and attitudes regarding their roles in children's education and career development, and their experiences related to the Career Trek program. Prior to the interview, written consent was obtained from each person.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed and constant comparative analysis (Glaser, 1965) was employed for the first round of coding, which consisted of reading transcripts, coding and analyzing responses to identify emerging patterns and to code and categorize the data. The researchers organized all responses to each question and then examined them for similarities and differences and to identify the dominant themes. Following this, themes were organized *a priori* according to the ecological domains of macro, mezzo, and micro levels.

Findings

Macro Level: Legacy of Racism

A dominant theme that emerged was that the majority of parents' personal school experiences were laden with racism. The impact of racism at school affected parents at a personal, academic, and employment/career level. Parents were targeted by both teachers and other students, in ways that prevented them from engaging in education. Racism was both overt in the form of being punished for inconsequential behaviours, or covert, in the form of being completely ignored. Although parents attempted to complete their high school, the issue of being away from their community and being targeted because they were Indigenous students resulted in them not completing school.

> The schooling and everything that we had, it wasn't very good, especially if you were a Native, in the 50s and 60s. I said it was pretty tough to be a Native in a white man's school. I said, and certainly you didn't feel like you're in with the group. It's like you're on the outside all the time. That slowed your learning down.

> I left because of racism. In Winnipeg. I did grade 11. I went, then I quit, then I went, then I quit.

> The next school year I started in Dauphin. That didn't last too cause you had to move away and it was a big shock and dealing with racism, finances and being away from home. I was home sick. I stayed quiet and bit my lip, and when I'd come home, I didn't want to go back on Sunday, but I was dragged back

> Especially the teacher I had in grade 9 – he just didn't give me the time of day like he gave the other kids. Anything I did, if I looked at my watch, I'd have to stay in for an hour after school.

> There were a few of us that dropped out, out of the same grade. I think there were 4 or 5 of us that just left. I know there were 3 for sure, besides me, that couldn't put up with that teacher. It was something that we, well, we all saw. Being discriminated against because of our skin colour.

Although participants did not necessarily articulate direct linkages, the impact of parental experiences of racism was linked to perspectives on school for their children. For some parents, the absence of parental encouragement to continue in school was motivated by a belief that school,

particularly outside the community, was potentially not a safe place.

> Coming from a small community we don't have grade 12 here and sending her out- that's one of the barriers. I know it can also be a barrier just keeping the kids in their own community. It works both ways, and that's why as a parent I'm telling her all the birds and the bees, and the different life styles, and cities, there's more influences, gangs and drugs. Even just being an innocent bystander it's so dangerous out there. I always try to be aware of these things so, how dangerous it is out there.

> You've got to go out. Even to some places, it's hard and yes, there's racism. I don't think it's changed from my days, you know. Everything's risky. You can see the outside world. You want to change things. You want to take that risk and be out there.

Residential School System

All of the parents in this study described some connection to the residential school system. For some parents, their own parents had been students within that system. Others were sent to boarding schools outside their community. Although information regarding the residential school system is beginning to emerge, there remains a shroud of silence for many individuals. Parents talked about how they had only recently learned of their own parents' experiences, and how difficult this was for them to discuss. As one parent disclosed "It was a big shocker to hear - it was being taken from your parents and put where you didn't want to be." Another parent discussed her mother's experiences with the residential school. Later in the interview, she linked this history to her own absence of information regarding staying in school, or the importance of school, and how her mother "never" talked to her about education. In many ways, these experiences have silenced future conversations about educational experiences.

She went from 4 till she was 15. Well she was only 4, and they just live 2 kilometers away, and she knew her parents lived there and they only went home at Christmas and in June. But every Sunday she would see them in church, and she wasn't allowed to go and see them.

Another parent talked about her father's perception of her as a mother in relation to his experience.

> He doesn't really talk about it. Well he just asked me at one time, he said, would you ever let that happen to your kids, like what I went through over there? And I said, no. And he said, that's good. You're a good mother. Because some of the stuff I guess wasn't that great.

Another parent talked about how her mother was "lucky" in that she was not sent away due to her age.

> She was one of the lucky ones. Her being the oldest in the family, her siblings, she took care of her younger brothers, and I think she was older, too old already. She came from a big family. I don't know if my grandfather hid her, but I remember him telling me that the younger ones went.

The linkages between parents' knowledge of their families' residential school experiences and the intergenerational impact of these experiences on their own and their children's educational challenges emerged as a causal explanation for some participants.

> Even in my elementary school, up to grade 9, my mom was never involved and my attendance was never an issue. She did not have anyone pushing her and she never pushed me. You know, it just had to do with residential school. That's where my mom went.

For other participants, the experiences of their parents were presented as compartmentalized events in their family history, events that bore little to no relationship with each other. Com-

partmentalization refers to enacting boundaries around different experiences in order to avoid the discomfort and distress associated with incongruence of those experiences. Several participants acknowledged that their parents neither expected nor supported them to attend school. Although these parents did not consciously make the link between their experiences and those of their parents, this serves as an important reminder that although there is a substantive knowledge base that is emerging from Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, academics, and community leaders that link these events, individual families may not be at this stage of understanding or acceptance.

> My mom just wasn't really interested. And what I guess really stuck to me the most is all the events I did attend, they never really once came out to them. I just didn't have that support from them to come and spend that 5, 10 minutes, to be there and they weren't.

> So I didn't really have anybody to tell me you know how important school was.

> My parents didn't push it. There's was no talk in our house, what are you going to be? Go to school. You need a job. There was no, nobody bothered us to do anything. There was no support.

> I was in grade 11 and, I used to feel Aboriginal people don't graduate. I didn't really have role models at the time and I felt, I felt I couldn't do it. And then that was it.

Despite parents' experiences growing up where the low educational levels of their own parents led to an absence of support for them to attend school, the recognition of the importance of education for the next generation, their own children clearly emerged as a critical theme for parents.

> I say is that the kind of life you want? I make school very important. They're young and I teach them that school is a privilege.

The work that they were doing, you know, it was very hard. Usually I find I wasn't really having enough education in school, , so that was kind of my set back. I was attending, taking these courses, and they always had some kind of hard words and then it would take me time to find out, you know, like checking in a dictionary and finding out what it really meant, you know. So that's, I guess if I had my grade 9 or 10, that would have helped me a lot. I just want her to have a better education than what I had. I only had a little bit of it here and there.

I think we're the first First Nation community that has Career Trek, and I always felt that we were very fortunate to have the program in our community. You know, I see the kids that started from day one, they're still struggling, but you know, they're staying in school. They're in high school.

I wish there was more parent support. That's what we lack, I would say that. But as I said, parents don't know what's out there for their kids. Is education important for them? Whereas for me it's important.

Mezzo level - Jobs, not careers

Parents also noted that when they were younger, there were sufficient opportunities to locate work that did not require formal education. The majority of parents had worked, or were working in a variety of positions in the community, none of which required the completion of high school or post-secondary education. The importance of work had been instilled within them from their families of origin. However, there was the general recognition that although they may have been able to find work in the absence of formal schooling, these options were no longer available to their children.

> Well they expected that everybody would be all right, all their kids would work because we were brought up like that. You have to work for what you have. You don't depend on nobody else.

I worked in the bush, logging. In the logging industry on Vancouver Island.

Oh they didn't care. When I was growing up as a kid, when I was 16, you had to get out there and start working for a living. There was no such thing as money handed out like today.

Not at that time, there were a lot of jobs. Not like today where you got a lot of computers and everything. More technical now than in my time. In my time you didn't need an education actually to get a good job.

Micro level: Parent- Child interactions

Parent child interactions have a significant impact on children's educational outcomes. For some, their lack of knowledge and absence of parental push in terms of their own education left them with a profound sense of regret.

I see a lot of careers. I go, wow, I could have been that. I tell my boys, I could have gone much further. I could have been a teacher. I could have been a nurse, you know, but nobody pushed me. I had nothing. It wasn't even talked about to me. Nobody talked. That's why I'm behind them all the time, and on their back about everything.

I would like to be the one, first, probably and only one from my family, to actually finish high school.

From an environmental perspective, it is important to emphasize the position that many parents who were deprived of educational opportunities themselves are not indifferent to their children's educational and career opportunities, but do not have the positive experiences or frameworks from which to model themselves. In contrast to their experiences of an absence of "parental push", parents recognized that these conversations were important, and described various ways they were undertaking to inform their children about the importance of education and the link to future careers.

Well that's, when we talk in the evening in the living room, I said, that's what I talk to him about. I said, you'd better get an education, as much as you can possibly get. Don't drop out and keep going, as high as you can possibly go. You know, you've got opportunities, I said, nowadays, more than what I had in my day, you know, with all that.

Yeah, like movies, scary movies, it's not real. It's movie make-up, because they know how. I say, that's his job. And that's his job, the credits. Those are people's jobs.

Well, I was raised in the community and I feel that, you know, we have to, as adults, community members, we have to try and push our kids to try and finish school.

Although the majority of parents articulated their regret that they had not been pushed by their own families, some remained reluctant to prescribe education for their children. Comments such as "Oh they will go to what (grade) they want to be" and "I'm not going to tell her she has to go to school, she has to figure that out for herself" identify a central paradox between the cultural acceptance of independence contrasted with the knowledge that parents typically need to be actively involved in supporting their children's education in order to increase their opportunities for success.

I can't force them where they want to go. They have their own mind. They're adults. They can do what they want. As long as they get a job, get something they like, take care of themselves, everything, I can't force them.

No, I don't know. I didn't, I just let them go, take their own, let them go the way they wanted to go. I didn't try to force them to go in any direction. They can choose and pick their own.

Career Trek

As previously noted, there is a substantive body of research has documented the causes and con-

sequences of poor educational outcomes for Indigenous youth, and subsequently, programs directed toward improving these outcomes have been developed. These programs are typically based on hypotheses about causal factors that are perceived to influence academic outcomes. What has become clear however is that breaking the intergenerational cycle of educational challenges requires a comprehensive set of interventions at the macro, mezzo, and micro levels. From the parents' perspective, there were a number of benefits of Career Trek. For some parents, it served as a bridge to support children as they transitioned to schools outside of their community and the opportunity to interact with other, non-Aboriginal students, notwithstanding their own negative experiences. For other participants, Career Trek provided a sense of future orientation by identifying that there are important educational and career opportunities outside of their community.

> When Career Trek came into our community and our school, I was happy for the kids, for our kids, that they were going to benefit from it. Preparing them, whenever they go to another school, because it is hard you know. Whenever I try to talk to my kids, the older ones, they said they wished they would have had Career Trek at the time, to prepare them and when they left for a different school and not knowing what they want to take …

> I'm hoping that because of Career Trek that she'll stay in school. That she won't give up, you know, that she will know there's lots of choices out there for her to choose from, career choices. And how to also get along with other students. Right now we've just joined with other schools and we're sharing the same campus.

> (Career Trek) helped them see what is out there for them, that they have to stay in school, finish their education. That there are lots of (careers) out there. Whereas in my days, I didn't even

know what was out there. I was scared to go to town. We were scared.

> When we get to other end, it's like there's a big door and we open it and the kids see Wow! Airplane technology. And if it wasn't for Career Trek, they wouldn't see that.

At a mezzo level, Career Trek's emphasis on parental involvement acted as a connection point between participants and their children, and served as a catalyst to parent-child conversations about the importance of education. Parents are the bridge to their children's education and part of their contemporary role is to act as a cultural intermediary that navigates between their experiences and their children's future experiences, experiences that are often inherently contradictory (Stelmach, 2008). In this respect, Career Trek was able to support parents in this role in a way that facilitated connections between the participants and their children in the area of career exploration, by actively involving parents in the program.

> Even myself, I was learning. Wow. What do we have here? I was learning along. I was very glad to go on the next trip, because there were careers I saw, dental, doctor, technician, whatever. It's all out there but you need to go to school to get there. It'll take you there.

> I try to support her by being there, just actually being involved with her in Career Trek, explaining to her how many careers there are and making sure she's listening.

> Now that she's in Career Trek, she does talk about the future, and she asks me, if I do leave, are you still going to be there to help? She says "you have to teach me how to spend money, how to save money" and that's what I'm doing. Just ask me along the way. If you really want to know something, just ask and I'll tell you. That's when I know how to help you, or answer your questions.

The presence of Career Trek in the community sent the message that idea that their children and community were important. Several parents appreciated that Career Trek identified a full range of educational opportunities for their children, including university, and did not focus on 'streaming" into the trades.

> I'm glad that we (Career Trek) went to the Universities. Because usually for Aboriginal people it seems like, it's more like carpentry....I know carpentry is alright, but Aboriginal people are often directed into the trades as opposed to more of the professions.

Other participants appreciated how Career Trek is respectful of the community, both in their relationships and by utilizing Aboriginal trainers whenever possible.

> Career Trek succeeded I think, by learning who we are first, how we are, how we do things, knowing, learning and knowing who we are, and just not, I guess, demanding. Understanding who we are.

> They get people who are our own nationality, like what race they are. Our own nationality, they show them that they can do it because there's some that are, they're showing them the careers, to give them self-esteem, give them a boost, and they said you could do it. There's stuff out there for you.

> No, I'm just grateful, like I said earlier, that you know, that Career Trek is here in Skownan. Even for the reserve here too, like if other kids, other adults are getting their education and thinking of going back to school and getting their grade 12, it would be open to them too. Because Career Trek is not only about the parents and students that are in Career Trek, it's about the community as a whole, you know.

Discussion

Educational inequality is typically viewed as an individual issue, and there has been a significant amount of research undertaken that has identified negative educational outcomes for Indigenous youth. An ecological analysis provides a more contextual analysis of that factors that influence outcomes for this particular group. Parent's personal educational and career histories are understood as a major environmental factor affecting their children's educational outcomes. Exploring parental perceptions of educational and career development within reserve based populations provides an opportunity to elicit important information on how parents understand these issues, and how they can facilitate more positive outcomes using the vehicle of career exploration. However, given the challenges in Indigenous communities, particularly with respect to education, changes in individual- or family-level factors are not sufficient to achieve educational equity without the reduction of macro- and institutional level factors that increase inequalities. Given the complexity of influences on outcomes, interventions that are targeted to decrease the disparities for Indigenous children and youth must adopt a comprehensive approach that addresses the issues across all domains.

Although not specifically identified by the participants, any discussion regarding Indigenous education must include an analysis of macro level or structural-level factors, and their impact on the problem under study. Clearly, if funding and educational reform are not addressed, the striking differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth will remain. An examination of academic indicators reveals that academic preparedness for reserve-educated students is typically not equivalent to that of students in more mainstream schools (St. Germain & Dyck, 2011). The degrees of "comparability" and "transferability" identified as mandatory by the federal government have clearly yet to be achieved. This creates a perpetual negative cycle in which children move on to higher levels of education in mainstream schools, are identified as not having similar understandings of curriculum, do not receive the required remedial and resource assistance necessary to bring them to grade level, internalize these systemic discrepancies as personal inadequacies, and subsequently stop trying. What reflects a structural problem becomes internalized as an individual deficit. The National Panel on Education strongly recommended the need to "facilitate and support the creation of a First

Nation education system through the development of regional First Nation Education organizations to provide support and services for First Nation schools and First Nation students" (Haldane, Lafond, & Krause, 2012, p. 36). This will require thoughtful and constructive dialogue between the Indigenous communities and the federal government and will have significant implications for Indigenous education.

Second, the enduring impact of racism and the legacy of the residential school system remain. A critical and pervasive impact of the residential schools system has been the disruption of traditional parenting practices within communities (LaFrance & Collins, 2003). The legacy of loss and an absence of culturally congruent resources can impede parents' abilities to foster connections with educational systems, for themselves and for their children. For the current generation of parents, the experiences of racism and other challenges they encountered when they made this journey restricted their own academic outcomes, and none completed high school. The intergenerational transmission of the negative influences of residential schools continues, and for some, their children's experiences appear to be replicating their own. The need to leave the community for either high school or post-secondary education remains an isolating and unhappy experience that frequently results in the return home. Although parents described the importance of providing support for their children, this appears insufficient to mitigate the negative impact of exclusionary institutions that perpetuate feelings of marginalization and alienation. What are also missing are their own experiences of how to remain in school and be successful. If this disconnect between parents and school systems is not more fully understood and bridged, it will continue to impede efforts to keep students in school with the view toward moving on to post-secondary education.

Beginning explanations for these challenges were rooted in raising awareness of how tra-

ditional Aboriginal practices with respect to learning were opposite to those of "normative" educational systems. This perspective conflicted with Western models of education that expect children to conform to dyadic ways of learning, rather than learning by experience or innovation. The mechanism for education, a belief in the value of oral history as a means of "passing down" knowledge from elders to children is incongruent with Western systems' emphases on the acquisition of individualized reading and writing skills. Contemporary explanations have contributed the need for cultural safety within educational systems, a construct that that invites both students and teachers to reflect on their own identities as well as to recognize and understand the dynamics of power in relationships (Ramsden, 1990, 1992). This is supported by MacIver (2012) who found that being taught in a culturally affirming environment motivated school engagement for Aboriginal learners.

There is also a need to understand how we can create culturally safe interventions that facilitate Indigenous parental involvement in their children's education. This suggests that efforts need to be made to engage parents *first* by establishing meaningful relationships, in ways that extend significantly beyond conversations about classroom behaviour management. Building capacity of parents to become involved in education in culturally safe ways is critical to empowering future generations. Given this, community-based education that provides additional support and academic preparation at the early years level, could significantly extend children's academic careers. At the same time, mainstream educational systems can encourage greater Indigenous engagement through the development of an anti-racist curriculum that explores the history of the residential school system and other relevant content, by not blaming students or families for encountering academic difficulties, and by demonstrating an ethic of care and responsibility for Indigenous students and their families.

Third, the knowledge that parental involvement and parental "push" promotes better educational outcomes for children is beginning to re-emerge within families. Despite the history of traumatic experiences, despite being raised in a shroud of silence regarding the history of residential schools, and despite their personal achievements in terms of locating work in the absence of formal education, this generation of parents has recognized that their children need more – more education, more support, and more opportunities. Although macro level changes are necessary, it is also important to find ways to facilitate intergenerational parent-child conversations that incorporate parents' educational histories and link their children's current experiences to future outcomes and opportunities as one means of strengthening parental involvement.

This is perhaps the most challenging issue for educators and service providers and it is this last point that highlights the success of Career Trek. One of the key attributes of the program has been its emphasis on the importance of early intervention in connecting children with school, in order for them to remain in school, and envision their future beyond school. As stated by one parent, "If they didn't think that (early intervention) was good, they wouldn't come here to take kids at a young age to take them out there. If Career Trek didn't think that, they wouldn't have that much funding from the government to do that." Furthermore, the presence of Career Trek within the community has served as a catalyst for parent-child conversations around education and careers, conversations that may not have occurred in the absence of the program.

In summary, although there is much to remain concerned about, there is also reason to be optimistic. Career Trek Inc. has achieved what many other programs have not. They have partnered with an Indigenous community in such a way as to instill hope for the current generation of children, youth, and their families. Career exploration through education has provided a strong impetus for community involvement amongst the parents of Career Trek participants. This study has provided some beginning insight into an area that has not been addressed within literature, and suggests that greater understanding of family relationships and history can assist service providers in facilitating young people's post-secondary educational plans.

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