“If you don't care, I don't care:”

Aboriginal Students at post-secondary educational institutions in Manitoba

by Kimberly Embleton, University of Manitoba

Abstract

This study examined the experiences of Aboriginal students at post-secondary institutions in Manitoba in terms of what supports kept them registered in college and university and what institutional factors contributed to their success. This research included the gathering of data from three Aboriginal students who were registered in post-secondary educational programs in Manitoba. The findings suggest that though specialized institutional approaches and supports currently available were needed and being utilized by the respondents, more important was their ability to form authentic personal, respectful and reciprocal relationships with instructors and other students, while also being provided with opportunities to connect with cultural activities, pedagogies and place both inside the classroom and outside of it. The findings of the study are discussed as they relate to three broad themes that developed from the interviews: (a) relationships, reciprocity and respect; (b) supports, guidance and flexibility; and (c) personal efficacy.

Keywords: Aboriginal students, post-secondary, supports, success, relationships, instructors
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Currently, the Aboriginal population of Canada is growing at a rate six times faster than the Canadian population as a whole (Castellano, 2002; Preston, 2008). With a birth rate one and a half times higher than the national average, the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics estimates that one in five labour market participants will be Aboriginal by 2016 (Manitoba Bureau of Statistics, 1997; Mendelson, 2004). Yet, the proportion of Aboriginal youths and adults who have completed post-secondary studies is significantly lower than the provincial and national averages: 15% of the total Canadian population has completed university, compared to only 4% of the Aboriginal population; in Manitoba, these numbers are 13% and 4% respectively (Brown, Knol, & Fraehlich, 2008). Interest in the area of retention of Aboriginal students at the post-secondary level is therefore rising, as colleges and universities increasingly see the need to welcome more Aboriginal applicants and produce more Aboriginal graduates.

In a study of Aboriginal learners in secondary-level Manitoba Adult Learning Centres, Silver, Klyne, and Simard (2003) concluded that the main factors contributing to the success of these learners were:

- holistic and learner-centred approaches to instruction;
- strong social, emotional, and practical supports;
- a personalized and non-hierarchical atmosphere;
- dedicated teaching staff; and
- non-judgemental treatment of learners by staff.

The purpose of this study was to expand the scope of this research to post-secondary levels of education in order to better understand what factors are contributing to the success of Aboriginal post-secondary students in Manitoba. The following research questions drove the study:
• What approaches to learning and teaching contribute to the success of Aboriginal post-secondary students?

• What institutional supports are being accessed by Aboriginal post-secondary students?

• What factors do Aboriginal post-secondary students find helpful in relation to their success?

The following study examined the current literature related to Aboriginal post-secondary student success and retention and identified the experiences and needs of current Aboriginal post-secondary students in Manitoba. In addition, the report makes recommendations for how to improve the success of these students and for areas of further research.

**Background**

Before discussing the literature related to the experiences of Aboriginal post-secondary students, specific terms used throughout this paper must be defined. According to the *Canadian Constitution Act of 1982*, “aboriginal peoples of Canada” includes Indian, Métis and Inuit people of Canada (*Rights of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada, 1982*). The term *Aboriginal* used in this paper will therefore reflect this legal definition, and it will be used as an inclusive term to encompass all those who self-identify as being Indian, Métis or Inuit, regardless of Status or Treaty. The term *post-secondary institution* will include any educational body that provides education higher than grade 12 and which grants credentials in the form of academic degrees or professional certifications (*Preston, 2008*). This definition includes universities, community colleges, vocational and technical institutions, institutes of technology and applied arts, and career colleges.

According to Preston (2008), the “progress of Canadian society, to a large degree, is measured by the extent to which Canada's population obtains post-secondary qualifications” (p. 7). And while numbers indicate that post-secondary enrolment and completion rates are increasing, overall Aboriginal involvement is still lagging (*Preston, 2008*). Yet, Stonechild (2006, cited in *Preston, 2008*) identifies post-secondary education as the “new buffalo;” it has the potential to increase standard of living,
employment and income rates, quality of health, and longevity of life. Similarly, Sloane-Seale, Wallace, and Levin (2001) see additional education as able to directly improve life outcomes. However, they also believe that disadvantage that has continued throughout a person's life cannot be overcome by education or any one social element alone.

The literature available explores the demographic, social, educational and economic trends which explain why Aboriginal people are still lagging in post-secondary attainment (Preston, 2008). It examines current specialized programming for Aboriginal post-secondary students that aims to increase enrolment and retention rates, and makes comparisons of other programming for Indigenous peoples in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada [CMEC], 2002; Sloane-Seale, Wallace, & Levin, 2001). However, the literature indicates that there exists a lack of written material in several areas of importance to Aboriginal post-secondary involvement. These include research in school-to-work transitions for Aboriginal people over 25 years of age, involvement of Aboriginal second-chance learners in specialized programs, and longitudinal studies on the link between Aboriginal people's motivations and barriers in post-secondary institutions (Sloane-Seale, Wallace, & Levin, 2001). As well, it appears that much of the information available to researchers comes from Statistics Canada and is quantitative in nature. What most studies agree upon is that there are lower levels of program completion for Aboriginal post-secondary students, indicating that this population faces considerable barriers in terms of accessing and completing post-secondary education (CMEC, 2002).

Aboriginal people comprise the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population. In 2006, numbers of Aboriginal people surpassed the 1,000,000 count mark, and between 1996 and 2006, the population grew by 22%, while the non-Aboriginal population grew by 3% (Preston, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2007). Of this group, First Nations account for 62% of the Aboriginal population of Canada, the Métis for 30%, and the Inuit for 5% (Preston, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2007). In Manitoba,
Aboriginal people account for 15% of the provincial population, and they are undereducated in relation to their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Preston (2008) indicates that the number of Aboriginal people in the province aged 25-44 with a post-secondary certificate is around 30%. For non-Aboriginal people in the same age group, the number is 53% (Preston, 2008). What these numbers may indicate is that non-Aboriginal people are supplied with more opportunities to attend post-secondary education and are better equipped for post-secondary success; studies appear to show that there is less conflict with language, learning styles, teaching styles, communication modes, and cultural patterns at post-secondary institutions for non-Aboriginal students than for Aboriginal students (Preston, 2008).

According to the literature, Aboriginal people face numerous challenges entering and completing post-secondary programs. The main themes echoed across current research include dispositional, situational, institutional, and systemic barriers (Sloane-Seale, Wallace, & Levin, 2001). Examples of these include: geography; inadequate academic preparation; lack of funding, for both individuals and specialized supports and programs; historical distrust; poverty; discrimination; cultural conflict; and family responsibilities and demands (CMEC, 2002; Preston, 2008).

The themes in the practice of education that emerged from the literature to address the barriers faced by Aboriginal post-secondary students focus on increased funding for programming and individual students, Aboriginal specific institutions and programs of study, community delivery and partnerships, and additional student supports aimed specifically at Aboriginal needs (CMEC, 2002). Supports that are currently available and examined include those that address the personal, emotional, academic, financial, and social needs of Aboriginal students. However, one study in particular noted that help-seeking strategies were important elements in the achievements of the participants of the University of Manitoba's ACCESS programs; these individuals were able to form their own network or community within the institution, something not all Aboriginals students are equipped to do (Brown, Knol, & Fraehlich, 2008; Sloane-Seale, Wallace, & Levin, 2001).
Overall, the literature indicates that it is necessary to continue to examine what factors contribute to the success of Aboriginal post-secondary students and what supports are needed by these individuals in light of the still lower rates of participation and completion in comparison to the non-Aboriginal population of Canada. It also appears to be essential to begin to examine the voices of Aboriginal post-secondary students themselves in order to determine what they say about their experiences. This project was therefore designed to study these elements in the Manitoba context from a social constructivism perspective to inform educators, administrators, and students of the needs and experiences of Aboriginal learners at the post-secondary level.

**Methods**

The methodology of choice for this study was qualitative in nature to account for the subjective experiences of the participants. The study was conducted over the course of three months in an urban setting in the province of Manitoba. In order to address the research questions, three subjects were selected using a purposeful sampling in order to ensure a variety of experiences were included. Permission was requested from the Director of an Adult Learning Centre in Winnipeg to engage in this research, and as a third party the Director sent a letter of invitation to graduates of the centre's programs who were currently registered in post-secondary programming in Manitoba. Those graduates who were interested were asked in the letter of invitation to contact the researcher via telephone or email. A total of five individuals, all female, made contact and the first three were chosen as participants. Pseudonyms have been used in this study to protect the identities of these individuals, and to ensure confidentiality.

The subjects were then interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol to obtain data related to their experience as Aboriginal post-secondary students at recognized educational institutions in Manitoba. They were asked to describe personal experiences with accessing and/or utilizing supports and programs targeted to support their academic success, and examples of experience were requested to
corroborate their responses in order to address the limitations of self-response (Crippen & Wallin, 2008). Interviews took approximately 60 minutes to conduct, and were audio-taped and transcribed by the researcher. All transcripts were electronically mailed to the subjects for member checks in order to ensure trustworthiness, at which time the participants were provided the opportunity to add, delete, or change the information on the transcripts until they were comfortable with the content (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The interview data was then analyzed using reductive analysis, where themes were identified, coded, and categorized into meaningful and comprehensible units (Jorgenson, 1989). These themes were then used to guide the findings and refine the conceptual framework of the study.

Findings

This section provides the findings regarding the approaches to learning and teaching that contribute to the success of Aboriginal post-secondary students, the institutional supports that are being accessed by them, and the factors they find helpful in relation to their success. They have been classified into four different categories: Relationships, Reciprocity, and Respect; Supports, Guidance, and Flexibility; Barriers and Challenges; and Personal Efficacy.

Relationships, Reciprocity and Respect

Most frequently mentioned as a factor for success across all three interviews was the importance of developing authentic personal relationships with classmates and instructors. The three Aboriginal post-secondary students interviewed indicated that they were more inclined to participate actively in classroom settings when they felt that they were given the chance to share their ideas, feelings, struggles and successes with other students and their instructors. Sharon (a pseudonym) stated this occurred through the use of Sharing Circles as a mode of instruction; Judy (a pseudonym) stated this occurred through encounters with instructors in the hallway when she was asked how she was doing and if she needed to talk; and Noel (a pseudonym) stated this occurred through social interactions with other Aboriginal students in the student lounge between and after classes.
A finding that was also expressed across the interviews in relation to authentic personal relationships was difficulty with feeling like a “number” in the program of study, or not being seen as an individual in the classroom. Sharon asserted that she felt that she was rushed along frequently in her interactions with her instructor; Noel indicated that she had a hard time locating her instructor when she needed additional help outside of class, resulting in her feeling devalued; and Judy repeatedly emphasized her desire for instructors to approach her individually to check for comprehension and understanding, which was not occurring. They each then contrasted these incidents with examples of positive interactions with other instructors, in which they felt “encouraged,” (Sharon) “complimented,” (Judy) and “inspired,” (Noel).

The need for reciprocity in relationships was also identified in all three interviews, though more so in Sharon's and Judy's. Indicated were desires for open conversations regarding learning plans in order to work towards common goals; effective communication of expectations of both the instructor and the subject as student; and the sharing of support resources amongst students both inside and outside of the institution. Judy referred to times in which she had continued to use skills that she had learned or encountered with her instructors in her place of employment after graduation. Sharon indicated that the supports she found amongst her classmates in the classroom continued to after school hours, where a circle of support formed between students at their homes. In each of these cases, the women felt that they were not only receiving supports, guidance, or assistance from their instructors and classmates, but also that they were contributing to the success of others.

Also under this category was expressed the importance of respect in relationships and interactions within the institution, by both Sharon and Judy. They stated that respect was shown when instructors worked to ensure students were “not…afraid to [feel] stupid” when they asked questions and through consultations with students in regards to deadlines for assignments and presentation guidelines. Judy specifically made note of a negative example, in which an instructor had made last-
minute changes to an assignment which negatively impacted several students in her class. In doing this, she states “...all that work – don’t ever do that to someone in your course....I did it [the assignment], but our hearts were not in it.” In a positive example Sharon states, “It was such a wonderful feeling that somebody cares, like somebody cares that you want to succeed....And that's what kept me going all year.”

Under the same category, the data from Sharon and Noel indicated the importance of finding cultural connections both inside and outside of the classroom for Aboriginal post-secondary students. Sharing circles, prayers, the use of Elders, sweatlodge ceremonies, and graduation Pow Wows were all mentioned as important in supporting these students. In relation to the use of Aboriginal epistemology and pedagogy, Sharon emphasized her appreciation for the use of group discussions and sharing circles; Judy recognized her need for the use of visual aids in instruction; Noel echoed this tendency towards visual learning, adding that the use of personal experiences by instructors when explaining ideas and topics also assisted her to relate to the material being taught. Additionally, sense of place and having a safe environment in which to retreat was stressed by Noel in relation to cultural connections. In her case, the Aboriginal student lounge at the post-secondary institution where she attended was frequently mentioned as a place where she accessed social, academic, and emotional supports, mainly through contact with other Aboriginal students.

**Supports, Guidance, and Flexibility**

Under this second category emerged data relating to ongoing supports and encouragement (Sharon), the need for financial guidance and supports (Judy), and the importance of flexibility from instructors and in programming (Judy and Noel). Though not mentioned as often as data relating to relationships, reciprocity, and respect, the data from this category did appear throughout the three interviews.

In Sharon's interview, the word “encourage” and derivatives thereof appeared frequently. She
stated this not only in relation to her need for ongoing supports as a student, but in relation to her daughter who is also attending a post-secondary institution in Manitoba. Judy also spoke frequently of being encouraged, though more so in terms of financial needs. She notes that without financial supports from funders outside of the post-secondary institution, she would have been unable to participate in the program. She makes specific note of financial assistance in the form of tuition, transportation costs, and living allowances. In addition, she notes that the materials supplied by the institution at no additional costs were also essential to her success as a student.

Finally, both Judy and Noel's data included information on the importance of flexibility in programming and by individual instructors. An example of this comes from Judy's interview: “I was able to stay a few minutes after school and for them to take the time, it was huge....giving me that window, that opportunity to get a little extra help....that was huge.” Mention was also made of instructors arranging for work spaces during class time, the ability to meet with academic advisors with little notice, and the flexibility of hours of access to the Aboriginal student lounge versus the shorter hours of the institution's library.

**Barriers and Challenges**

In order of the number of specific mentions in the interviews, the barriers and challenges for Aboriginal post-secondary students that appear in the data include: the size of the institution and feelings of isolation (16); discriminatory behaviours of instructors and peers (8); a sense of guilt over family responsibilities (8); time constraints (5); and financial struggles (4). It should also be noted that only financial struggles appeared across all three interviews, however all the other subcategories appeared in at least two of the three interviews.

The size of the institution was mentioned as a barrier and a challenge by both Sharon and Noel. Sharon specifically made note of her experience in coming from a rural setting to an urban post-secondary institution:
When I first started university, I came from the reserve. And for me it was so, like, such a rush, like...there is a big world, so to speak. And you feel lost. That is exactly how I felt. I felt....you come from this little room and you open the door to a big auditorium. You know?...I felt lost...

Noel's comments were made more specifically in regards to class size: “The smaller the class the better, for me. Because in a big class, it's...kinda, you were a number....I really like smaller classes.” Judy made no comments regarding the size of the institution or the class. She did, however, discuss feelings of isolation and being alone in the struggle to succeed as an Aboriginal student in post-secondary studies, as did Sharon. They stated that they felt “alone” and “lost” (Sharon), and that the experience was often “nerve-wracking” and made it “harder to focus,” (Judy).

Sharon and Noel both made note of discriminatory behaviours of others at the post-secondary institutions at which they attended. The data from the interviews with these women specifically mention favouritism of certain students or groups of students by instructors, the forming of cliques among students in classes, and racist comments being made by non-Aboriginal students in class discussions. Noel also states that in one circumstance a professor “talked highly” of Aboriginal people, that she “really admired that,” and that “he stood out because he was different.” Judy made no comments regarding discriminatory behaviours.

Sharon, Judy, and Noel stated that they felt family responsibilities were challenges for them as Aboriginal post-secondary students. All three women stated they had children, which often caused them to be discouraged and anxious. Sharon mentioned both her own struggles of raising a family and going to school and those of her daughter, also a student; “she's getting really discouraged now. But I think it actually has a lot to do with her having to leave her baby. She cries, she cries...” Judy was the only subject to mention having responsibilities of looking after her husband, and Noel mentions the difficulties of finding a quiet place to study with a child at home.

Barriers dealing with time constraints appeared in the data of Judy and Noel. Having to take
care of children, having to complete assignments and tasks “on their own time;” (Judy) and having to work outside of school to support themselves and their families all affected not only their ability to succeed academically, but also to participate in social activities and access institutional supports. Time constraints on the part of the institution were also noted by Noel, which negatively affected her ability to access resources: “I'm not there during the day....[and] the library is only open until five on Saturdays.” For Judy, time constraints focused on accessing the library or finding a textbook at the bookstore. For Noel it centred around meeting with academic advisors and accessing study space: “When I was at [school], I didn't have any time to do any of the social aspects, because I was working part time and going to school full time, so I didn't really have any time.” Sharon made no mention of time restraints in her interview.

Finally, it was indicated by Judy, Sharon, and Noel that financial struggles were caused by the following: raising a family, accessing and understanding student loans, accessing tuition and cost of living funding, and buying textbooks and materials. As a result of financial struggles, the subjects made poor choices regarding student loans, were forced to disregard certain programs because they could not access funds, and could not fully participate in extra-curricular programming provided by the institution. This theme appeared most frequently in the data from Judy's interview, though there was consensus across all three interviews.

**Sense of Personal Efficacy**

The final category of findings is small but was mentioned by all three subjects. Being able to state that they could complete a program or overcome a barrier was cited repeatedly:

- “I mean, when you complete, it's not just the satisfaction of completing. It's like, wow, I can really do this, I can really do this.” (Sharon)
- “I mean, you wanna be...okay, I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna make this work.” (Judy)
- “We have a lot of stress going in as students, and [we] want to do good....I have to do this. I
want to do good.” (Noel)

The comments were made in relation to being encouraged by instructors or when interacting with instructors on a social, less-formal level both inside and outside the classroom.

Overall, the data mentioned in relation to the factors affecting Aboriginal students at post-secondary educational institutions in Manitoba in order of most frequent to least frequent are: authentic personal relationships (55), reciprocity in relationships (16), size of institution and feelings of isolation (16), respect in relationships (12), desire for the use of Aboriginal epistemology and pedagogy (11), a sense of personal efficacy (11), cultural connections and sense of place (9), discriminatory behaviours of instructors and peers (8), family responsibilities (8), need for ongoing support (7), flexibility in programming and individual instructors (6), time constraints (5), need for financial guidance and supports (5), and financial struggles (4).

Discussion

Researchers conclude that post-secondary education has the potential to transform the lives of Aboriginal people in Canada (Preston 2008). They also state that though participation by Aboriginal students in post-secondary education is increasing, it is still at a level well below the Canadian average (CMEC, 2002; Sloane-Seale, Wallace, & Levin, 2001). Therefore, it is suggested that there needs to exist certain approaches to learning and teaching, as well as institutional supports such as financial assistance, specialized programming, and increased cultural content to assist Aboriginal students in being successful (CMEC, 2002; Preston, 2008; Silver, Klyne, and Simard, 2003; Sloane-Seale, Wallace, & Levin, 2001). The findings of the three interviews conducted in this study confirm the literature reviewed. However, they also expand the factors that relate to the success of these students to include authentic, reciprocal, and respectful relationships, and the ultimate goal of personal efficacy for Aboriginal students. As such, there is a need to focus as much on the individual affects as there is on institutional supports.
The findings of this study emphasize that being able to form authentic, meaningful relationships that allow for reciprocity and respect is more important to Aboriginal post-secondary students than the availability of institutional supports. The desire for voice, identity, and belonging is stated by all three students repeatedly throughout the interviews. This may indicate that there exists a lack of support and encouragement in the families from which they come; they therefore search out these relationships and connections within the institution as a means of building a pseudo-family and finding commonalities in those around them. An alternative perspective may be that it is the small, intimate but meaningful connections like those they have at home that create a safety network within the institution, and therefore they search for these in their post-secondary lives. As well, these needs may be influenced by the importance of community in Aboriginal cultures for both survival and prosperity; the individual, the family, the community and the nation cannot be separated, must be aligned in the learning process (National Aboriginal Design Committee [NADC], 2002). It is also interesting to note that all three subjects did not want to feel like a number as students; they wanted to be recognized as individuals. This may be influenced by the historic governmental system imposed upon Aboriginal people in Canada by the Indian Act, and the practice of numbering First Nations people in order to declare status and entrench special rights. The subjects in this study may be resisting the sterile environment of the mainstream post-secondary educational system in order to try to find a sense of place and identity as a student.

In addition, the need for the inclusion of and connection to cultural ceremonies, teachings, and beliefs by the subjects in their programs of study may be in reaction to what Sloane-Seale, Wallace, and Levin (2001), and Brown, Knol, and Fraehlick (2008) identify as historic distrust of mainstream educational institutions based on Residential School experiences and the destruction of culture that occurred as a result. Through this system imposed on Aboriginal people from the nineteenth century until recently, and the intergenerational effects related to this, many elements of Aboriginal culture
were forcibly lost or forgotten. The findings of this study indicate that in order to be successful in this time of education and learning, Aboriginal students want to be provided with opportunities to regain these teachings in order to strengthen their identities as Aboriginal people and their connections to their cultures. By including culture in the classroom at the post-secondary level, Aboriginal students are finding strength to continue in their programs of study and ways to connect with both instructors and the material being taught. This finding agrees with the National Aboriginal Design Committee's (NADC) (2002) expansion of the work of Malcolm Knowles in the area of andragogy, differentiating the needs of Aboriginal adult learners. In the study, they advocate for all learning to be done within the context of Aboriginal teachings and cultures, and for the use of the Medicine Wheel as a model for educational programming (NADC, 2002).

Though mentioned less frequently, ongoing supports, guidance, and flexibility in programming were also identified as important factors in the success of Aboriginal students at post-secondary institutions in Manitoba by Noel, Sharon, and Judy. As with relationships, reciprocity, and respect, the need for encouragement by instructors and the need for financial support may also be reflective of the lack of these types of assets at home in comparison to non-Aboriginal students. This finding agrees with the literature, which states that poverty and lack of funding are a reality for many Aboriginal people accessing post-secondary studies (Sloane-Seale, Wallace, and Levin, 2001; CMEC, 2002). Brown, Knol, and Fraehlich (2008) concur, asserting that due to the legacy of colonization, many Aboriginal families and communities experience pronounced socio-economic disparities. Therefore, all three subjects expressed that their success was influenced by ongoing institutional supports like academic advising, tutoring, and financial aid and awards, as well as factors such as flexibility in programming. However, because this data appeared less frequently in the interviews, it seems to have played less of a role in the success of these three individuals.

The findings of this study in the area of barriers and challenges for Aboriginal post-secondary
students are also supported by the literature. The NADC (2002) states that poor self-esteem, experiences of racism, violence, and abuse, lower average incomes, and higher rates of unemployment are all barriers for Aboriginal people when accessing education as adults. This agrees with the data provided by Noel, Judy, and Sharon as expressed in their interviews; financial struggles and discriminatory behaviours are both realities and barriers for Aboriginal post-secondary students in Manitoba. Additionally, and in agreement with the literature, is the reality that the subjects in this study are also experiencing feelings of isolation and loneliness in large, mainstream post-secondary institutions. Brown, Knol, and Fraehlich (2008) similarly emphasize the effect that barriers like the mistrust and opposition of mainstream educational systems, lack of appropriate and accessible childcare, and conflict with traditional Aboriginal value systems can have on Aboriginal adult students. Interestingly, when all three subjects spoke of the barriers and challenges they faced, they almost always followed the statement with a reference to a relationship they had formed to buffer the impact of the negative encounter or experience. This further emphasized the importance of building and maintaining authentic, personal relationships within the institution in order to achieve success.

Finally, all three subjects spoke of their goal of achieving a sense of personal efficacy, the “I can really do this,” “I can make this,” and “I have to do this....I want to do good,” findings in the data. Most often, the mandate of any support or program put in place for Aboriginal students at post-secondary institutions in Manitoba is to promote retention and graduation rates. However, for these three subjects their goals are to gain a sense of ability to succeed and to make it through with their identity strengthened and an increased self-esteem. Brown, Knol, and Fraehlich (2008) state that adult learning opportunities need to have substantial personal effects on participants. The data in this study also supports this belief; that the inner changes in a student's sense of confidence and ability is as much a factor in their success as is any institutional support or program.

This study had several limitations which may restrict its applicability to the general Aboriginal
student body. First, the students interviewed were recruited from only one adult learning centre in Manitoba, and the study was limited to only three individuals. Second, all students interviewed were female; a male perspective on the experiences of Aboriginal post-secondary students in Manitoba is lacking from this study. Finally, two of the three participants did not complete the programs in which they were enrolled when they were recruited into the study. Their perception of the factors that contributed to post-secondary success might therefore be different from students who did successfully complete their program.

**Conclusion**

Preston (2008) states that in order for Aboriginal people to overcome the multitude of barriers which weaken their prospects of educational success, post-secondary programs must be innovative, supportive, and empowering for Aboriginal people. It appears from the results of this study that Aboriginal post-secondary students in Manitoba have experiences that support these types of approaches to education. Implications for further study which arise from this research include an examination of existing programming in order to discover if efforts are being made to encourage the development of relationships within the student body and with instructors. As well, further research into the role of on-campus Aboriginal student lounges and the effects they have on Aboriginal students may provide further insight into the experiences of this group of the post-secondary population in Manitoba.

In conclusion, the analysis of the factors and supports that affect the success of Aboriginal students at post-secondary educational institutions in Manitoba provides evidence to suggest that more effort should be put into encouraging the development of authentic, personal relationships between students, their peers, and their instructors, as well as to creating environments that are conducive to reciprocity and respect. Additionally, post-secondary institutions need to continue to develop connections with Aboriginal cultural beliefs and practices both inside and outside the classroom, and to
create spaces within the institution that develop a sense of belonging and safety. The findings in this study also demonstrate that the current initiatives of post-secondary institutions in Manitoba to increasing Aboriginal participation are effective and helpful to Aboriginal students. As discussed, the ongoing supports, guidance, and flexibility in programming were utilized and appreciated by all three subjects. Yet, without the authentic, reciprocal and respectful relationships, it seems that these institutional supports are not enough. Because of the limitations mentioned in the discussion, it would be important to validate these findings with a larger/further study.
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