Closing the health and education gaps that exist between First Nations and the rest of the Canadian population is commonly held out as a ‘top priority’ by governments, institutions, leaders and community members. What is not at all clear, however, is just how we should go about doing that. In this presentation, I will argue that continuing to focus our attention on the gaps themselves is profoundly counterproductive. By dwelling on the fact that youth suicide is X times higher among First Nations youth, or that their level of education is Y times lower, we begin to imagine that there is some ‘magic bullet’ solution out there – in Ottawa, or in some university, or at AFN – and if only we could ‘roll it out, and scale it up’ these gaps would disappear. We all recognize that one-size-fits-all solutions that are essentially imposed on communities are bound to fail. And while there is much talk of rejecting the current pathologizing, deficit view of First Nations, in favour of a strength-based, resilience approach, acts of ‘drive-by’ research and intervention ‘on’ communities continue. The research I will present began by asking not “why is suicide higher among First Nations?” but rather “why are some communities suicide free?” Similarly, the work I’ll present on post-secondary education is not about finding ways to change First Nations students to enhance their retention and graduation rates, but about how to change universities to make them more welcoming and supportive of Indigenous knowledges and cultural ways of knowing.

Video conference viewing of this presentation is available at the following two locations on Wednesday, November 26, 2014 - 12:00 Noon to 1:00 PM:

1) Room 501 Tier Building, Fort Garry Campus
2) Room 2, Northern Social Work Program, 3 Station Road, Thompson, MB.

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