

Indian Students' Academic Self-Concept and Their Perceptions of Teacher and Parent Aspirations for Them in a Band-Controlled School and a Provincial School

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The main purpose of this study was to determine if a difference, in terms of academic self-concept, could be found between Native students who attended a band-controlled school and those who attended a public school. Of secondary interest was whether the two groups of students would differ in terms of the academic aspirations which they perceived their parents and favourite teacher held for them. The students in this study were from a Western reserve and included 20 students in grades 8 through 12 who attended a band-controlled school and 22 students who attended a public school in a nearby town. The results indicated that (1) significant differences in self-concept scores were not found; and (2) students attending the Native-controlled school perceived that their parents and favourite teacher held significantly higher levels of educational aspirations for them than did students who attended the public school.

The widespread withdrawal of Indian students from educational institutions before they have completed all of the requirements for a high school diploma has raised concerns as to the quality of Indian education both among educators and Native Elders. For example, while there has been a modest improvement in the high school completion rate among Indian students, their completion rate is still less than one quarter the National rate in Canada (Knox & Nicholson, 1980; Lee, 1986; Morris, Pawlovich & McCall, 1991).

Concerns for the quality of Indian education led to the development of educational goals by the National Indian Brotherhood. These educational goals provided guidelines to assist individual communities in the development of their own specific standards of quality education. The goals as stated by the National Indian Brotherhood were as follows:

Our aim is to make education relevant to the philosophy and needs of the Indian people. We want education to give our children a strong sense of identity, with confidence in their personal worth and ability. We believe in education:

- as preparation for total living,
- as a means of free choice of where to live and work,
- as a means of enabling us to participate fully in our own social, economic, political and educational advancement. (National Indian Brotherhood, 1973, p. 3)

In an effort to improve the relevance of education available to Indian students, educators responded by modifying existing curricula; however, the dropout rate continues to be high (Lee, 1986; Morris et al., 1991). The National

Indian Brotherhood cited four major reasons that they believed to be responsible for the high failure rate of Indian students: (a) lack of properly trained teachers; (b) lack of adequate program facilities; (c) lack of parental involvement; and (d) lack of Indian control of Indian education (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development [DIA], 1982).

Since the publication of *Indian Control of Indian Education* by the National Indian Brotherhood in 1973, considerable attention has centred around two major hypotheses as necessary conditions for establishing high quality schools for Indian students. The first is that Indian teachers would have a positive effect on the motivation and self-concepts of Indian students. It is hypothesized that Indian teachers would be more sensitive to the culture of Indians and would provide appropriate role models. The second hypothesis concerns the positive effects that an Indian curricula would have on the academic adjustment of Indian students. Reyhner (1981) stated that the need for Indian teachers and Indian curricula is crucial to the adjustment of the Indian child in school. He suggested that the presence of familiar role models would serve to lessen the apprehension of the Indian child, thus providing a more comfortable environment.

The need for Indian curricula was presented in a discussion paper prepared by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIA, 1982). In this paper it was stated that "A fundamental problem with Indian education is the irrelevance of curriculum and curriculum materials for the Indian learner" (p. 20). The document went on to state that "Although the picture is improving, at this point in time the programs offered in provincial schools are not in general designed to meet the unique learning needs and styles of Indian children" (p. 20). Central to these ideologies is the belief that modifying the learning environment of Indian students, in terms of being instructed by Indian teachers who use a curriculum relevant to the needs of Indian students, would have a positive impact on their self-concept and academic achievement.

The Purpose of the Study

The review of the literature suggests that a learning environment which provides a curriculum that is more sensitive to the Indian culture and that a teaching staff made up of Indian teachers will have a positive effect on the self-concept of Indian students. In addition, Das, Manos and Kanungo (1975) and Whyte (1986) have pointed out that parents also play an important role in the development of a positive academic self-concept in their children. Because it is imperative to Indian education that suggested reforms be supported by research, this study was designed to examine and compare the academic self-concept of Indian students who live on the same reserve but who attend either a public school or a band-controlled school. For the purposes of this study, academic self-concept is defined as the behaviour in which individuals evaluate (publicly or privately) their ability to achieve in academic tasks as compared with others engaged in the same tasks (Brookover, Erickson, & Joiner, 1967).

A second purpose of this study was to compare the two groups of students with regard to the levels of educational aspirations that they perceived their parents and their favourite teacher held for them.

Methodology

Population Characteristics

Community. This study was carried out in the Mount Currie community, located 200 kilometres northeast of the city of Vancouver in the Pemberton Valley of British Columbia. The community consists of approximately 1,200 residents of the Lil'wat Nation.

Schools. The students who took part in this study attended one of two schools. The Xit'olacw Community School is a band-controlled school located in the Mount Currie community. This school has a total enrollment of approximately 200 nursery through grade 13 students and has a teaching staff of 17 teachers. Ten of the teachers are Native teachers who are band members who live in the Mount Currie Community, while the remaining seven teachers are non-Native and live outside the community.

Under the direction of a program coordinator, the provincial curriculum was modified to maintain a balance between traditional Native and contemporary non-Native culture (Wyatt, 1985). The curriculum has been adjusted to include courses that emphasize Native culture and a positive self-concept. Traditional knowledge of drum making, herb plants and medicines, fishing, land, and family systems are integrated in courses such as home economics, the Lil'wat language course, social studies and political science.

Those Native parents who do not approve of Native culture in the curriculum, and who believe that academic standard are higher in the public provincial schools, send their children to the schools located in Pemberton (Wyatt, 1985). Pemberton is located 10 kilometres southeast of Mount Currie.

The secondary school in Pemberton has approximately 262 grade 8 through 12 students and has a staff of 25 non-native teachers. The school follows the British Columbia provincial curriculum as prescribed by the Ministry of Education and offers three levels of educational programs. In the regular program the provincial curriculum is followed with no modifications to content. A modified program is provided which is the same in structure to the regular program; however, the content of the courses has been simplified. Finally, an alternative program is offered which consists of non-graded courses such as Native wood carving and a tourism program.

Subjects. The samples utilized in this study were 42 grade 8 through 12 Native students from the Xit'olacw Community School and the public secondary school. The students in both samples were Lil'wat Indians from the Mount Currie Reserve and all subjects had been volunteered by their parents to take part in the study. Out of a possible 70 students, the parents of 20 students attending Xit'olacw Community School agreed to have their child take part in this study. From a total of 49 students attending the public secondary school, the parents of 22 students agreed to have their children take part in this study. Both groups included both females and males.

Instrumentation

In order to test the hypotheses of interest, three instruments were utilized in this study.

Michigan State General Self-Concept of Ability Scale (SCA). This instrument was designed to measure an individual's general self-concept as it relates to academic ability (Patterson, 1967). The SCA consists of eight multiple-choice questions which are scored on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most favourable response and 1 being the least favourable. A summation of values produces a potential of 40 points. The original normative sample used to determine the validity and reliability of the SCA was 1,050 grade 7 students. In that study, stability reliability coefficients over a 12-month interval were .75 and .77 for males and females respectively (Patterson, 1967). Internal consistency reliability measures yielded coefficients of .82 to .84 for male and female grade 7 students respectively. Test-retest coefficients of stability over a one-year longitudinal study involving students in grades 8 through 12 ranged from .688 to .724 (Brookover et al., 1967).

This scale has been used extensively by researchers to study academic self-concepts of both Native and non-Native grade 7-12 students (e.g., Abdel-Mawgood & Hatch, 1973; Brookover, 1987; Byrne, 1984; Rampaul, Singh, & Didyk, 1984). A copy of the SCA can be found in Brookover et al. (1967).

Perceived Parental Evaluation of Ability (PPEV) and Perceived Teacher Evaluation of Ability (PTEV). These two instruments were designed by Brookover to elicit students' perceptions of the academic expectations held for them by parents and teachers (Brookover et al., 1967). Both instruments consist of five multiple-choice questions which are scored on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the most favourable response and 1 being the least favourable. A summation of values produces a potential of 25 points for each instrument. Hoyt's analysis of variance reliability coefficients for the PTEV ranged from .912 to .927. Reliability coefficients for the PPEV ranged from .755 to .880. These levels have been judged as being adequate for group comparisons (Brookover et al., 1967). While these two instruments have not been extensively used, they were selected for this study because of their high reported reliability. Copies of the two instruments can be seen in Brookover et al. (1967).

Procedure

Permission to conduct the study at Xit'olacw Community School was obtained from the Xit'olacw Board of Education and for the public secondary school permission was obtained from the Board of School Trustees for the Howe Sound School District No. 48.

In order to recruit students, representatives from each school personally contacted parents. At the Xit'olacw Community School, personal contacts were made by the Acting Administrative Coordinator and at the public secondary school contact was made by a Native Liaison Officer.

Both samples of students were assessed on the same day. The students at public secondary school were tested in the morning and those at Xit'olacw Community School were tested in the afternoon. In order to answer questions on

Table 1. *Academic Self-Concept Results*

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Xit'olacw	20	28.1	4.63	1.49	40	>.05
Public School	22	26.0	4.51			

the Perceived Teacher Evaluation of Ability scale, students were instructed to select their favourite teacher and answer the questions keeping that teacher in mind. Both testing sessions were 45 minutes in length.

Results and Discussion

For each group of students, the data collected from the three instruments were first analyzed descriptively by computing the means and standard deviations. Next, since the hypotheses predicted differences in favour of the band-controlled school, one-tailed independent sample t-tests were used to compare the difference between the mean scores for the two groups of students, with alpha set at .05 (Jaeger, 1990).

Academic Self-Concept. The results of the Michigan State Self-Concept of Ability Scale indicated that while the students who attended the band-controlled school (Xit'olacw Community School) obtained a mean score that was higher than the mean score obtained by students who attended the public secondary school, this difference was not statistically significant (see Table 1).

There are two possible reasons for this outcome. First, it might be the case that attendance at a public school versus a band-controlled school does not result in higher levels of academic self-concept for Indian students. This would mean that the academic self-concepts of Indian students are unrelated to whether the students attend a band-controlled school or a public school. A second possible reason for the lack of a statistical difference is related to the small sample sizes included in this study. Small sample sizes can result in a lack of power to detect differences when differences are in fact present (Jaeger, 1990).

Student Perceived Parental Educational Aspirations. The results of the Perceived Parental Evaluation of Ability, which indicated how students perceived their parents' educational aspirations for them, indicated that students attending the band controlled school perceived their parents as holding significantly higher educational aspirations for them than did the students who attended the public school (see Table 2).

One possible reason for this finding, which was suggested in a paper by Wyatt (1985), might be that parents of children who send their children off the reserve to attend the public school may be unintentionally providing a negative image of Native education to their children. That is, sending their children to a public school may have resulted in their children perceiving them as doubting the educational skills of Native teachers. Students who perceive their parents as doubting Native people in the role of educators may also feel that their own

Table 2. *Student Perceived Parental Aspirations for Their Education*

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Xit'olacw	20	20.2	2.96	3.22	40	<.05
Public School	22	17.4	2.66			

parents have doubts regarding their (the students') ability to succeed in school. However, due to the small sample sizes in this study, further research is needed in this area.

Whatever the reason, the tendency for Native students at the public school to perceive that their parents hold lower expectations for them may ultimately have grave consequences for their future academic success. Erickson (1965), Das et al. (1975), Rumberger (1987), and Finn (1989) have documented that achievement expectations of parents are related to student achievement levels and to whether a student will become a school dropout.

Student Perceived Teacher Educational Aspirations. From Table 3 it can be seen that the results of this aspect of the study indicated that Mount Currie students attending the band-controlled school perceived that their favourite teacher had significantly higher educational aspirations for them than did their peers who attended the public school.

Pepper and Henry (1986) have documented differences between Native and non-Native values with regard to time, behavioural expressions, and group loyalties versus individual loyalties. It may be that these conflicting values between non-Native teachers and Native students may be responsible for the fact that Native students in this study who attended the public school perceived their favourite teacher as having lower educational aspirations for them.

Another possibility may be related to the fact that a number of researchers have documented that many white, middle-class teachers have lower educational expectations for minority students (e.g., Steinberg, Blinde, & Cahn, 1984; Rumberger, 1987; Lee, 1986). Furthermore, Kirkness (1985) stated that Native teachers were crucial in terms of providing high academic expectations of the Native child in school. That is, it may be the case that the Native students attending the public school perceived that their teachers doubted the academic capabilities of Native people.

Table 3. *Student Perceived Teacher Aspirations for Their Education*

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Xit'olacw	20	20.8	3.66	3.58	40	<.05
Public School	22	17.2	2.79			

Conclusions

When interpreting the results of this study several limitations must be kept in mind. The fact that the subjects were all volunteers as opposed to being randomly selected serves to weaken the design of this study. Furthermore, the fact that only two schools in a single province took part in this study limits the generalizability of the results. Small sample size imposes another area of limitation. However, the results of this study do provide pertinent information concerning the value of band-controlled schools in the education of Native students. While statistically significant differences for academic self-concept were not found, it would appear that Native students attending a band-controlled school felt that their parents and teachers had higher educational expectations for them than did Native students who attended a public school. Given that research has demonstrated the important effect of high teacher and parental educational expectations on attrition and academic achievement levels (e.g., Das et al., 1975; Finn, 1989; Kirkness, 1985; Marcuzzi, 1986; Rampaul et al., 1984; Rumberger, 1987; Whyte, 1986), the results of this study provide educators with much to consider when planning for the education of Native students. The importance of being provided with a strong support system was highlighted by one student's unsolicited comment written on the back of the test packet: "Truly! If I had my deserved attention and the right encouragement, no one could stop me."

Recent advances in educational research have led to the conclusion that not all children learn in the same way (e.g., Kaulback, 1984; Marcuzzi, 1986; Pepper & Henry, 1986; Whyte, 1986). Therefore, in order to effectively program for Native students, it is important that educators pay close attention to these differences. Marcuzzi (1986) stated that Native children are at a disadvantage in white people's schools because they are not accustomed to the learning styles utilized there, and therefore have to make adjustments before they can begin learning. Educational programs for Native students should be designed to capitalize on their strengths, rather than to punish them for their weaknesses. Campbell (1983) and Whyte (1986) recommended that one method of doing this was to develop and utilize materials that reflect the cultural heritage of the Native people, while Reyhner (1981) recommended the use of Native teachers as a second method.

If schools are to do justice to Indian and Metis students they cannot continue to represent a culture that ignores and oppresses and denigrates the indigenous culture. Courses and materials which reflect the positive impact of Indian and Metis people have and can be further developed and used. The traditions, heritage, and folklore by one's group can be material for the school today. The spiritual heritage of the community can become part of the school experience. A curriculum infused with content of an Indian and Metis cultural heritage will go a long way in helping generate interest and motivation among Indian and Metis youth. But this alone will not alleviate the alienation and rejection of the school. First, Indian parents must feel the school is their school and not of an alien culture unwilling to listen to their concerns. (Whyte, 1986, p. 15)

What better way to accomplish this than by having the control of the education of their children into the hands of Native people—in other words, having band-controlled schools.

The research presented here has added one small piece of information to the discussion of Native education. What is needed is additional research that attempts to investigate the effects of band-controlled schools over wider geographical areas and over longer periods of time. Areas not included in this study that also need to be researched include the effects of band controlled schools on academic achievement levels and on dropout rates.

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