

# Foreword

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The history of education for both Native<sup>1</sup> and non-Native people in North America has been defined by changing relationships and perceptions between governmental, educational, and social institutions and by the individuals and communities being served.

The approach to training and educating Native peoples has been assimilationist model in pattern and practice. The use of a Native knowledge base and the participation of Native faculty has been neither consonant nor compatible with efforts to "westernize" Native learners through education from infancy to the baccalaureate level. At the graduate level the presence of Native students has been and is tenuous and marginal at best.

Existing graduate programs in education in Canada and the rest of North America do not address Native pre-Contact history, foundations, pedagogy, or epistemology of Native education and educators. Existing colleges and universities in North America, with the exception of tribal colleges, do not enfranchise the Native knowledge base or Native faculty as they research and disseminate knowledge. Educational excellence is systematically eroded when the dissemination of knowledge omits this Native knowledge base and inquiry mode.

First Nations peoples have had broad access to postsecondary education only since the 1960s. Although numbers of Indigenous Canadians entering postsecondary educational institutions have increased yearly since then, the completion rate is still below 15% of the national average (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1989). Tables labeled "Schooling and Training Characteristics of the Adult (15-64) Population Reporting Aboriginal Identity for Canada, Provinces and Territories" (Statistics Canada, 1991) show that only 8,685 hold university degrees. No province holds a monopoly on success (see Table 1); however, provinces that do have either Indigenous teacher education programs and/or Native studies departments at their universities report completion rates higher than provinces that do not. Whatever the reason for the variance between provinces, the statistics on successful completion rates for Indigenous students in postsecondary institutions is abysmally low.

During the 1970s and 1980s a number of Canadian universities initiated teacher training programs specifically geared toward Indigenous Canadians. These programs collectively have qualified a fair number of Indigenous Canadians as certificated elementary schoolteachers across

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<sup>1</sup>The term *Native* is used interchangeably with *Aboriginal*, *Indian*, *Canadian Indian*, *Inuit*, *Native American*, *Status*, *non-Status*, *Metis* and *Indigenous*. *First Nations* is the preferred collective term used to refer to communities from which Native people come, particularly in Canada.

**Table 1.** Breakdown by Province of Reported Aboriginal Holders of University Degrees in Canada, 1991 (Statistics Canada, 1991)

Province	Degree Holders	Province	Degree Holders
Newfoundland	125	PEI	0
New Brunswick	155	Quebec	1,050
Nova Scotia	195	Ontario	2,040
Manitoba	1,490	Saskatchewan	1,101
Alberta	970	British Columbia	1,465
Yukon	0	NWT	170

Canada. Although this development in itself has had a positive impact on the lives of all Canadians, the level of impact remains at the lower end of the educational hierarchy. The representation of Indigenous Canadians at the upper levels of educational institutions is still low at best.

Students who do progress successfully through First Nations teacher education programs or through Native studies programs must then discontinue their area of specialization simply because no graduate university programs are designed specifically to address the stated needs of Indigenous students. Few Indigenous Canadians now hold doctoral degrees in education (approximately 15 Status Indians in all of Canada). Because upper-level positions in educational institutions usually require graduate or postgraduate degrees as conditions for employment, certificated elementary school teachers of Canadian Indigenous descent are neither trained nor eligible for these positions.

This lack of participation by the Indigenous community at higher levels of the educational system leaves a void in Canada's pursuit of a multicultural society. A program that actively encourages and promotes qualified Indigenous Canadians to pursue doctoral degrees should result in a number becoming qualified to fill the upper positions in educational institutions in Canada. However, this cannot happen unless the stated needs of present Indigenous students are heard and acted on. For this reason a proposal for the establishment of a Master's and Doctoral Degree program specialization in First Nations Education has been presented to the University of Alberta, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research.

In order to elicit community input for the proposed program, a three-day conference was held in Edmonton, Alberta in March 1995. Eminent Elders, Indigenous scholars, and Indigenous students from selected programs throughout Canada and the United States were invited to present their opinions and their suggestions for program content and process. What follows is an account of presentations made at this conference, which was titled "Autochthonous Scholars: Toward an Indigenous Research Model."

*Reference*

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (1989, November). *Evaluation of post-secondary education assistance program*. Ottawa: Author.