

Role Models, Mentors, and Native Students: Some Implications for Educators

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Introduction

Despite advances in the employment equity arena, the problem of under-represented minorities among faculty in postsecondary education prevails, particularly with respect to Native people. Since claiming control of Native education, it has been a constant struggle for Native educational administrators to provide qualified Native teachers who have maintained a clear commitment to their heritage and culture, not only to students of postsecondary Native studies programs, but also to students of band-controlled schools and Native survival schools. Although the numbers of Native people entering higher education is rising, it will be some time before adequate numbers are available to serve the growing Native population at all levels of education. Reasons for this include high dropout rates among Native students in higher education, and alternative career directions of successful graduates who on graduation may choose to enter teaching positions in mainstream education or nonteaching professions.

What is the reality of the growing pool of non-Native students entering Native studies programs presenting themselves as viable alternatives for positions that are perceived to be more appropriately served by Native people when Native people are not available? How would such individuals fare in faculty positions requiring a great deal of cultural knowledge in areas such as history, issues, language, and legislation? Can they represent positive role models to students whose lives until recently have been largely devoid of proximally close models? Is there a willingness to allow such individuals to be more than minimally represented, where there is a choice, on the teaching staff of Native studies programs that try to maintain a purely Native approach to program delivery?

It is hoped that this study can provide answers to these and other important questions dealing with the relationships of Native students with their teachers and the comparisons of those relationships with those of non-Native students. I do not mean to deny that Native teachers are better suited to serve Native students; rather, I wish to present information to educators on an important issue concerning Native people.

Background

An administrator of a community college Native education department told me that the choice to hire exclusively Native instructors lies mainly in the firm belief that Native people are needed to act as role models for students, particularly

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Native students, as relatively few have been available for some time. However, she had encountered few data to strongly support this belief. In keeping with the policy of her department, she has recruited only Native faculty. However, she said that retaining them could be the biggest problem, particularly when, in a few cases, they did not develop the skills necessary to be successful teachers.

Although the research has produced no clear data pertaining to the success of Native faculty over non-Native faculty in the motivation of Native students, this is not the case with the importance of culture in the classroom. Research shows that different cultures do have different cognitive/learning styles and that students' needs are most effectively met when faculty are able to design learning experiences to match those learning styles (Wright, 1991). The response to learning styles, however, represents only one factor important to the motivation and learning of Native students. Others such as heritage, cultural (social, ecological, cognitive) awareness and diversity, knowledge of and sensitivity to Native issues (educational and otherwise), linguistic and teaching capability, and a high level of faith and self-confidence (Stairs, 1991; McCaskill, 1987) all represent what is ideally sought from faculty involved in Native education. In postsecondary Native studies programs these factors become even more important because of heavy concentration of Native cultural content in the curriculum.

Although increasing numbers of non-Native students are choosing to enter Native studies programs, altering the delivery approach to accommodate a greater variety of learning styles is not seen as an urgent priority. The design and delivery structure of these programs was intended primarily to attract and retain Native students. These are considered priority issues and will probably remain so until sufficient numbers of Native people are available to meet the demand of increasing numbers of jobs being created in the Native community. However, are institutions doing non-Native students enrolled in the programs a grave disservice when their chances of finding employment in the Native community may be hindered because they are non-Native? Furthermore, will non-Native graduates of Native studies programs who endeavor to pursue teaching careers in Native education realize significant success if it is found that Native teachers act more appropriately as role models and mentors for Native students and are better able to motivate and inspire them?

A review of the available research indicates conflicting views of exactly what is an appropriate role model for Native students. Where cultural heritage is viewed as a primary factor in a teacher's representation as a role model or mentor, such a teacher must be Native or of Native descent. On the other hand, where it is deemed that knowledge of Native culture, history, issues, legislation, and/or language are primary factors, then possible role models could be Native or non-Native—particularly when both groups have presumably acquired this from a Native studies program.

Many factors must be considered in determining what characteristics are necessary for a possible role model or mentor to a Native student. Any person can be a role model if he or she has qualities that are important to another individual. However, teachers are responsible for much more than imparting knowledge to human minds. Moreover, in Native education, further variables involving historical problems encountered by Native people in education must be considered in the

recruitment and academic achievement of Native students; among them is the lack of positive role models.

Purpose

This article attempts to answer the question of whether cultural commonality has significant relevance to Native students in terms of perceived credibility of faculty in their representation as role models or mentors. It identifies what characteristics Native students deem important for a role model to possess in order to motivate their learning, achievement, and self-concept and compares them with the non-Native student role model profile.

It is hoped that the findings will present valuable information for Native educational administrators to consider in the recruitment of faculty, as well as for non-Natives who either currently teach Native students in other areas of study or who wish to pursue careers in Native education.

I selected the study topic in response to concerns expressed during conversations with both Native and non-Native educators, such as the lack of qualified Native teachers and the insufficiency of data pertaining to the significant relevance of Native heritage in the education of Native students. In addition, questions were posed regarding what motivates the learning and academic achievement of Native students; what if any significant differences exist between Natives and non-Natives; and what if any differences exist in the motivation of Native students by Native and non-Native faculty.

Views of non-Native students in Native studies programs were used in this study to measure the extent to which they contrasted, compared, and supported those of Native students. However, in view of the primary target market for Native studies programs, the Native perspective was more heavily measured and analyzed in order to present valid information to educators.

Issue

In keeping with the goal of Native education, which is greater Native control of the education of Native people, not only must educators provide qualified teachers for Native students, they must also provide positive role models in order to increase retention and academic success, regardless of cultural heritage. Faculty in all areas of study must make every effort to address the needs of Native students not only in terms of teaching, but in helping them succeed as students and individuals and in paying particular attention to the issues surrounding their commonly documented difficulties in mainstream education.

Assumptions

It is assumed that the group of students studied (being students of a culturally focused program), in particular the Native students, can provide insight into the needs of Native students in all fields of study in terms of the importance that cultural commonality between faculty and students has on student motivation, learning, and self-concept, as well as on the characteristics necessary for an effective role model/mentor. In addition, though they are not able to share views from a Native perspective, it is believed that non-Native students in Native studies programs can measure the importance of cultural background of faculty in cul-

turally oriented programs as well as the extent to which it must be present to enhance the credibility of the program and to motivate their learning.

Literature Review

Although considerable research has been conducted on the subject of mentoring and role modeling in academia, few data were found to be directly applicable to the nature of this study, that is, culture as it pertains to such relationships. Even fewer data were found pertaining to Native mentor and role model relationships in academia or otherwise. Though several studies state that culture is an important factor to minority students in terms of recruitment, persistence, and academic success, little was found to support the statements or to provide specific reasons for why this is so. Much of what was found on the importance of Native culture and Native teachers to Native students were also statements made primarily by administrators, educators, and stakeholders and were largely unsupported either by previous data or by the views of students.

Mentors and Role Models in Academia

In essence, by virtue of their profession, teachers automatically represent mentors upon entering a classroom. *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* defines the term *mentor* as "teacher, tutor, coach" (Carden, 1990). However, we have come to view the term and the relationship as having a more noble connotation and have subsequently applied it to those people in our lives who have possessed qualities and skills that are important to us and have shared them with us through close diadic relationships (Carden, 1990; Hurley, 1988). The term *role model*, on the other hand, is applied to people possessing the same qualities but with whom a close interpersonal relationship is not always present (Redmond, 1990).

A mentor would probably be aware of his or her representation in the mentee's life, whereas a role model may not. Carden (1990) identifies role modeling as being a function of the mentor. However, the two terms can be used interchangeably, as the identification of each relationship involves similar fundamental characteristics (Erkut & Mokros, 1984).

Psychological theories hold that people choose to emulate models who are perceived to be similar to them in terms of personality characteristics, background, race, and sex (Erkut & Mokros, 1984). However, the qualities that make such a relationship positive include support, inspiration, improvement of self-image, and confidence (Erkut & Mokros, 1984; Wright & Wright, 1987).

The mentor/protégé relationship is believed to be one of the most developmentally important relationships a person can have in early adulthood, and the failure to experience such a relationship is a "waste of talent and an impediment to constructive social change" (Carden, 1990, p. 97).

Patterns have been identified in the teacher-student relationship that are linked with academic achievement and motivation (Erkut & Mokros, 1984). Although some researchers warn of the detrimental and possible destructive effects or after-effects of the mentor relationship, particularly as the mentee or protégé meets or surpasses the achievements of the mentor (Hurley, 1988; Bushardt, Fretwell, & Holdnak, 1991; Carden, 1990), the general view of the benefits of such relationships tends to be more positive.

Teachers as Role Models for Minority Students

A great deal of concern has been voiced of late over the academic problems of minority students. Issues such as inadequate academic preparation, lack of financial support, lack of positive role models, cultural conflicts, lack of cohesion in minority retention policies, and discrimination are among those most commonly cited (Wright, 1991; Courtland, 1991, McCormick, 1990).

A study of a unique new concept by Walker (1988) outlines a program to provide positive, consistent, literate role models for black male students. With a student body that is 45% black (as compared with 40% white and 15% Hispanic), minority faculty representation remains significantly low. In this program black students from nearby secondary institutions are hired to act as teacher aides. From the perspective of the teachers and principal, the response to the program has been positive and has thus far served to alleviate somewhat the delinquency problems commonly experienced with this group of students. Unfortunately, however, the small number of students involved in the program and the difficulty in obtaining valid measures have produced no quantitative data to support this opinion.

Bowen (1976), in a study of the difficulties of black students in urban Canadian education, suggests that schools need to assess "what children learn and how they learn rather than blindly compare one ethnic group with another based on fallacious and unmeasurable assumptions" (p. 78). Bowen states that the difficulties of black students may be created by the "confused and conflicting demands of separate cultures—the home culture and the school culture" (p. 79). Recommendations urge that teachers need to be aware of how students' culture has shaped their image of themselves and of the world around them. Behavior patterns should not be labeled delinquent until the teacher has considered that they may be unique to students' culture and has evaluated how they may be utilized in the educational process. The teacher must make every effort to know and understand the history tradition, and social structure of the student's original culture. Understanding and support are of the utmost importance to this relationship, and the teacher must begin where the student is in terms of cognitive/learning style and any physical or psychological impairments. However, is this the best way to deal with this issue? In a passage by Bancroft (1976) relating to a situation where white teachers were undergoing "deprogramming" in terms of their attachment to stereotypes and widely practiced teaching strategies, one white teacher finds him/herself in conflict with dealing with black students: After a black participant had given her views on what part black heroes play or should play in the lives of black children and why the achievements of those cultural "somebodies" should be recognized in mainstream curricula, a white psychologist with an urban board of education said,

Although I understand that it is important to understand other people, and to recognize that their heroes are not mine, and their traditions, values, etc., are not my experience, I can never be a black person. I can never know ... what it means to be black instead of white. I am having great difficulty finding out—if we are to be multicultural—whether I should try harder to be black ... I am now feeling crummy about being white. (p. 91)

To this statement and the way white teachers should approach the issue of cross-cultural understanding and sensitivity, Bancroft (1976) concludes that though a teacher may not share the same culture as a student, and therefore will not likely share in the same heroes, values, and experiences, and so forth, the same often

occurs between teachers and students who do share a cultural commonality; by virtue of every individual's uniqueness, one's heroes, values, and experiences will often differ from person to person. The focus should not be on the differences, but on understanding and appreciating them.

Issues Surrounding Minority Students: Institutional Implication

Ethnic identity and acculturation are two dynamics on which recruitment and retention ultimately hinge (Courtland, 1991). Acculturation implies that students' identities should meld with the attitudes, lifestyles, and values of the dominant culture, whereas ethnic identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging to an ethnic group. Though commonly in the past one set of student services were provided to all students—reflecting an acculturation policy—more institutions are moving toward providing additional student services designed specifically for ethnic minorities.

With respect to minority students, many colleges and universities are now shifting their attention away from recruitment and toward retention (Courtland, 1991). Included in such policies is the involvement of minority students in campus life, pre-college preparatory programs, additional services addressing common achievement and environmental integration problems, and a focus on the campus racial climate. Also, greater emphasis is now being placed on the different cognitive/learning styles of minority cultures (Weisenberg, 1992).

Faculty Responsibilities to Minority Students

Underrepresentation of minorities on faculty presents a significant problem for minority students in their need to identify with a close, culturally similar, sensitive individual. Recruiting and retaining more minority faculty would certainly enhance the cultural diversity of our postsecondary institutions while providing role models for minorities and countering the resurgence of racism on many campuses (McCormick, 1990). However, all faculty are responsible for the success of minority students, not just minority faculty (Redmond, 1990), and all faculty should acknowledge the effects of cultural differences on academic achievement and success and deal with them appropriately.

Factors such as sex, approachability, accessibility, personal interest in and support for the mentee, lifestyle, and status are among those factors found to have the greatest significance in model selection of students (Erkut & Mokros, 1984; Rakstis, 1992). And contrary to one prevailing view, Erkut and Mokros (1984) found that perceived similarity does not seem to play a major role in model selection.

Model selection represents only the first phase of the mentor/mentee relationship. As in typical friendships and intimate relationships, the success of the relationship depends largely on the extent to which the parties share commonalities (Bandura & Walters, 1963). However, in subsequent phases of a mentor-mentee relationship, shared culture would have a lesser impact on continued success than factors such as values, experiences, and personality characteristics. Admittedly, these would often be shared by members of the same culture, but often they are not (Bancroft, 1976). Members of opposing cultures may significantly share in values, beliefs, experiences, and personality characteristics where culture plays no relevant role.

Ratskis (1992) suggests that individual destiny is driven by values and beliefs and that without someone to emulate, whose behavior is admired, the formation of those values can be skewed. In consideration of this, it is important to remember that many students, even at the postsecondary level, have yet to identify a firm set of values. With respect to the identification of role models in the case of such students some other factor such as behavior, status, or lifestyle could then be the motivating identification factor.

Ford (1976) suggests that, regardless of culture, each department should designate a sensitive and understanding instructional staff member who can empathize with students' situations and who will probe cases of slights and alleged or actual discriminatory treatment. A problem with this approach, however, arises when resentment builds between the faculty member assisting the student, the faculty member(s) involved in any such "sensitive" issues, and the consequent negative treatment the student might receive. In such a scenario, the whole intent of the program may negate any positive outcome. The alternative Ford (1976) presents is to encourage the student's independence in solving such problems personally.

Native Students in Higher Education

As many differences as similarities separate the lives of Native people from those of other minorities, particularly in their history and in the strong revitalization of their culture.

One major difference in terms of educational issues is that Native people in both Canada and the United States have for the most part acquired control over the education of their people (Canadian Education Association, 1984). Though global minority issues still exist in mainstream institutions, Native people have had an opportunity to respond to these issues through the creation of band-controlled schools, survival schools, and tribal community colleges where student bodies are entirely Native (CEA, 1984; Wright, 1991). However, regardless of the profile of the student bodies at either Native controlled schools or mainstream schools, the profile of the faculties remains significantly disproportionate despite increasing numbers of Native people graduating from institutions of higher education and from teacher education programs. Reasons cited for this include difficulty in getting hired by schools (discriminatory hiring policies, informal hiring networks, lack of understanding of Native styles of communication and classroom management) and difficulty of schools in retaining Native faculty due to unequal treatment, political matters, family ties, and more attractive positions with Native organizations (Courtland, 1991).

In the United States in 1988 some 90,000 Native people were enrolled in postsecondary education, a surprisingly low figure considering the rapid increase in the Native population and the growth in the college-age cohort over the last few years (Wright 1991). It does, however, mark a significant increase in the numbers of Natives in higher education since 1965, though Natives remain among the least educated ethnic groups in the United States.

Why the low enrollment rates? As with other minorities, fundamental issues such as lack of support (financial and moral) and teacher/counselor discouragement of educational aspirations have been attributed to the severity of the problem (Wright 1991). However, resistance by Native people to higher education has been an issue for several hundred years. That resistance changed direction somewhat

and strengthened in the late 1800s when the federal government assumed complete control over Native education and began removing children from their homes and placing them in residential schools, where strict military influences and the infusion of "Christian" practices replaced the sacred ways and tribal influences. Emphasis was on agricultural, industrial, and domestic arts, presumably with a view to the gradual withdrawal of government money, and less emphasis was placed on higher education (Wright, 1991). Not surprisingly, assimilation pressures like these, the memories of which have been passed down to younger generations are strongly sensed by many Natives at mainstream institutions.

Native Education versus Traditional Education

Stairs (1991), in a study of the learning processes of Inuit students, examines the importance not only of Inuit educational curriculum, but the way it is delivered. Stairs suggests that the entire approach to such education deviates so drastically from traditional educational approaches that teachers in formal settings view it as inefficient and incompatible with the modern world. However, Native teachers have said that non-Native students are unaware of the network of social roles surrounding the skills and information they acquire; they do not know how to internalize what they learn and do not know what they know until it is confirmed by a teacher. Stairs clarifies this by example:

One can observe a junior high school boy learning metalworking as an industrial arts subject with his productions judged only by a professional teacher in a classroom setting—a skill for which he has neither the need, social structure, nor equipment to apply for himself or others at home. In contrast, one can observe a Native child learning to hunt with his older brothers using tools which he is also learning to construct and skills which will contribute food to the home and will help define his social role in his family and in his community. (p. 285)

Such an approach is not unique to the Inuit. The above example describes the approach Native people take to all aspects of learning, whether in or out of a classroom: the holistic approach. Examples of this approach are described by Leavitt (1991) in a review of a course on Native cultural implications in traditional classrooms offered at Concordia University to both Native and non-Native teachers. The course is presented as it would be presented in traditional Native education. Lectures are minimal and are for the most part replaced by small-group and whole-class discussion. Grades are based on individual observations and group achievement; time is conceived of as a sequence rather than a duration; teachings take the form of storytelling; the sharing of history is done orally; and teachers and students often collaborate with one another.

Learning from their Native counterparts, non-Native teachers can discover the contrasts between their own value systems, beliefs, and educational practices and those of the Native culture. Leavitt (1991) holds that non-Native teachers ultimately come to realize that they have to endeavor to learn about the language and culture of all students they teach and acknowledge these in their teaching practices.

Teachers of Inuit and Indian students must consider four aspects of culture in the design and delivery of curriculum (Leavitt, 1991): *Material culture* refers to what is commonly viewed as the "sum of Native content in a school's programs—name-

ly, the objects and skills relevant to a culture's ecology and economy"; *Social culture* refers to personal interactions, communications, kinship organization, and other relationships in the community; *Cognitive culture* involves the characteristics of the individual and collective world view, value systems, spiritual understanding and practical knowledge; *Linguistic culture* consists of the role of a language, how it is used to transfer knowledge from one generation to the next and how it maintains individual and group identity (pp. 266-297). Stairs (1991) suggests that the only way to account for all four aspects of culture in the classroom is for the education to be based in Native culture, rather than simply including components of it as content. Realistically, however, in traditional schools with only a percentage of Native students, reorganizing curriculum in this fashion would probably meet with considerable resistance. Even in band-controlled schools the lack of qualified culturally knowledgeable Native teachers may often prevent this from occurring to any extent.

The approach most often taken is a bicultural one that accounts for both mainstream and Native cultures and their commonalities and differences. The purpose of such an approach is to help students move smoothly back and forth between cultures. However, Leavitt (1991) maintains that findings indicate that the only way to facilitate free movement is to integrate the four cultural aspects with merely an adaptation of traditional educational practices. Thus the efforts of the bicultural approach may only halfway meet the needs of Native students.

This discussion lends itself to the understanding of why dropout rates of Native students tend to be so high and of the dichotomy of two drastically different approaches to education—with only one pervading throughout the levels of mainstream education. Added to the lack of Native educators in both systems and to the historically low success rates of Native students in higher education, this provides a basis for understanding why positive Native cultural role models are so lacking.

Leaders or Educators as Role Models/Mentors for Native Students

MacKay and Myles (1989), in a study on Native student dropouts from Ontario schools, examine several factors contributing to the problem. One factor relating to the teacher-student relationship outlines the differences between off- and on-reserve Native students and notes that, despite differences, a high proportion of both are identified as having problems in the area of relationships with teachers. However, a higher proportion of on-reserve students cite difficulty with their teachers, claiming that the teachers do not understand them; that they neither motivate them to learn, nor encourage them when they have difficulty; that they cannot count on their teachers to help them with problems encountered in school. Incidentally, 45% of the Native students surveyed both off- and on-reserve were said to be at risk of dropping out for these reasons.

Wright (1991) states "the lack of role models in Native communities and in institutions of higher education constitutes a psychological and social barrier to participation and success" (p. 7). From this statement one can reasonably deduce that existing faculty are making little progress toward meeting this need. It also raises questions about whether by virtue of their lack of cultural similarity they are able to take any action.

Wright indicates that in a survey of Native educators 30% cited lack of role models as one of the main three barriers to educational attainment for young Native men and that "educators agree that role modeling is an important ingredient for Indian women as well" (p. 7) in terms of recruitment, sustenance, and academic achievement. Furthermore, for both male and female Native students, cultural conflicts have made adjustments to predominantly white institutions very difficult. Wright suggests that the exact nature of the cultural conflicts or difficulties remains unclear. McCaskill (1987) states:

Indians have not assimilated. Their identity as a separate people with a vision of reality and destiny and of themselves and their world remains a central feature of their lives. Indians are engaged in a significant revitalization of their culture. (p. 156)

However, in mainstream institutions the Native communal way of life is all but forgotten. McCaskill further states that in order to meet the needs of Native students in all levels of education, in addition to possessing relevant qualifications, teachers must possess knowledge of the "Native perspective regarding history, heritage, values and culture, and in their teaching, must encompass Native way education principles and methods, acknowledge and respect Native spirituality, and integrate Native language within the curriculum" (p. 174).

Weisenberg (1992) writes that adaptation to learning styles has become popular among educators despite the fact that "implications of identifiable learning styles is inconclusive" (p. 83). However, little attention has been paid to the unique learning styles of nondominant cultures. In regard to Native North Americans, studies have concluded that cultural heritage appears to be related to a predominantly visual perceptual mode preference for processing information. In view of this, teachers have been recommended strategies consistent with these preferences. But it is argued that such a "narrow-minded/stereotypical approach is misleading and ultimately harmful; a far better approach is one that avoids stereotyping by focusing attention on individual capabilities and talents rather than on racial or ethnic groups" (Weisenberg, 1992, p. 83).

Summary

Research reveals little to suggest that institutions are initiating any serious form of professional development programs for faculty to expand their knowledge and awareness of Native culture, issues, history, and language and to learn to apply specific teaching strategies to meet the identified differences in the learning styles of certain cultures.

The Native approach to education contrasts with that of the mainstream approach, suggesting that cultural conflicts are among the most important reasons for the problems surrounding persistence.

Although identification of role models is an important factor in the success of students, it is evidenced that all minorities are severely lacking in individuals to emulate. Furthermore, with respect to Native students, the suppression of their culture has led to high dropout rates, thus preventing the significant achievement of considerable numbers who may represent role models outside of academia.

Whether non-Native faculty can represent effective role models is not evidenced in the research. However, the research does reveal that non-Native teachers of Native students do have some opportunities to expand their knowledge

of the Native culture. On whether a non-Native can develop a true cultural understanding, findings were inconclusive mainly due to lack of data. Even where non-Native teachers try to develop such understanding, the extent to which they can remains a concern. To avoid the cultural stereotyping that can result, particularly due to the lack of data on cultural learning styles, faculty should acknowledge cultural differences and concern themselves with individual capabilities and differences rather than those perceived to be common to a particular culture.

Regardless of the insufficiency of cultural role models for Native students and for all minorities, little of the literature negates the value of such relationships on both academic and career success, and it seems evident that where faculty possess typical role model characteristics, then minority students and others will ultimately respond to them regardless of their cultural heritage.

Method

Research Sites

Five institutions were identified for the study: two community colleges that delivered a Native studies program with a high concentration of Native students; two universities known to offer Native studies minors; and a tribal community college with an exclusively Native student body. One university was excluded, as its academic year had come to a close, as was the tribal community college located in Michigan's upper peninsula because its spring break fell over the dates the survey was distributed and because it was not known if their specific programs were consistent with those of the other institutions. The remaining three institutions were: Cambrian Community College of Applied Arts and Technology (Cambrian College); Sault College of Applied Arts and Technology (Sault College); and Lake Superior State University (LSSU), respectively located in Ontario's Rainbow District, Algoma District, and Michigan's Chippewa County.

Participants

The goal was to recruit approximately 30 students from each institution to complete the survey, the target sample at each institution to be composed of Native studies students in various subdisciplines. The department representatives at two of the institutions were contacted and subsequently referred me to an appropriate faculty member. The department representative at Cambrian College agreed to receive and distribute the data collection instruments to appropriate faculty.

Data Collection Methods

A 26-question survey was the primary instrument used to gather information. Students were asked to respond to approximately the first half of the survey with a specific person in mind. They were asked to identify such an individual after consideration of all the teachers they had known since enrolling in postsecondary education. They were then asked to select the teacher who had the greatest impact on them as a role model or mentor. Role model/mentor was defined as "a person who has demonstrated the kinds of commitments, skills and qualities which you see as important for you" (Erkut & Mokros, 1984, p. 403).

The remaining questions asked students for their views and were not necessarily intended to be asked with the individual they had previously identified in mind, particularly if the questions did not apply to that person.

Research Questions

I hoped the study would describe the profile of the ideal role model as identified by Native students and draw comparisons with that of the non-Native students. Specifically, the views of Native students on the basic qualities that role models typically possess (technical competence, proven expertise, effect on learning and motivation, ability to inspire achievement, ability to influence values and beliefs, ability to assist in the definition and achievement of professional goals, and the ability to teach to learning styles) were reviewed and compared with the views of non-Native students. Furthermore, questions regarding most to least important characteristics that a typical role model should possess were posed, further comparing them with the views of non-Native students.

The research further sought to determine what impact cultural commonality, cross-cultural understanding, and/or the ability to discuss controversial cultural issues had on the motivation of Native students, comparing them with the views of non-Native students studying in a Native culturally oriented program. Specifically, the research strove to answer whether non-Native faculty could adequately represent effective role models in a Native culturally oriented program, and if so sought to identify in order of importance what characteristics such faculty needed to possess in order to do so.

The importance and variety of role models was viewed as highly relevant from the Native student perspective as compared with non-Native students. Gender was also thought to be relevant in order to evaluate its importance as a variable to the model selection of Native students as compared with non-Native students.

Finally, the research attempted to measure the importance of faculty pursuing a traditional lifestyle and if this enhanced representation as a possible role model or mentor.

Results

Demographic Analysis

Of 90 surveys distributed, 58 were returned resulting in a response rate of 64%. Of the respondents 74% were Native and 26% were non-Native. Sixty-four percent were female and 36% were male. Of the Native respondents 58% were female and 42% were male. The mean age for all respondents was 31.5483 ($sd=8.7074$) with the mean age for Natives being 31.4 ($sd=8.23$) and the mean age for non-Natives being 31.8 ($sd=10.49$).

Of the respondents who indicated the level of education completed before entering Native studies (88%) 41% indicated they had completed high school, 45% had postsecondary education, 10% had less than high school, and 4% had less than elementary education. Of the Native respondents alone 47% had some postsecondary education prior to entering the program, 29% had completed high school, 18.4% had less than high school, and 5.2% had less than elementary education.

The respondents ranged from first-, second-, third-, and fourth-year students with 52% in first year, 27% in second, 13% in third, and 8% in fourth.

Sixty-six percent indicated that faculty of the Native Studies department at their institution were entirely or predominantly female, 24% said faculty were an equal mix of male and female, and 10% said that faculty were entirely or predominantly male. Sixty-five percent indicated that faculty were entirely or predomi-

nantly Native, 27% said faculty were all or predominantly non-Native, and 8% said faculty were an equal mix of Native and non-Native.

Research Questions Analysis

All respondents were able to identify at least one teacher who had demonstrated the kinds of commitments, skills, and qualities they deemed important to them since enrolling in postsecondary education, and 97% indicated that their relationship with that person developed naturally through association.

Mean and standard deviation analysis indicated that both Natives and non-Natives agreed that their teacher/role model was technically competent to teach them and possessed proven expertise in the subject area(s) he or she taught them. Both groups also agreed that their role model had a positive effect on their learning, motivation, and self-concept and inspired them to do their best. To a lesser degree each group agreed that their role model had influence over their values and beliefs. Similarly, both groups agreed that their role model helped them to define their professional goals. Native students, however, felt to a greater extent than non-Natives that their role model supported them personally in achieving their goals. Both groups agreed equally that their teacher/role model was concerned with and taught to their learning style (see Table 1).

In terms of the characteristics typically possessed by role models, Native students ranked education and concern with academic achievement as the most important, followed by extensive knowledge of Native culture, issues, and history, ability to interact cross-culturally, teaching ability, fairness in dealing with students, and giving of time. The least important role model characteristics to Native students were similarity in beliefs and values, gender commonality, and similarity in lifestyle and culture.

Table 1. Basic Role Model Qualities

Qualities	Natives \bar{X}	sd	Non-Natives \bar{X}	sd
Technical competence	1.547	.9310	1.2	.4
Proven expertise	1.395	.7514	1.133	.3399
Positive effect on learning, motivation, self-concept	1.534	.7578	1.4	.6110
Inspired to do best	1.674	.8818	1.533	.6182
Influence on values and beliefs	2.0465	.9138	2.066	1.2892
Helped to define professional goals	1.976	1.022	2.266	1.123
Supportive in achieving goals	1.790	.8228	2.2	1.326
Concerned with/taught to learning style	1.930	.8732	1.933	.8537

Strongly disagree: 5

Strongly agree: 1

Table 2. Role Model Characteristics

	Natives	Non-Natives
Well educated	7.766	7.7
Knowledgeable of Native culture, issues, history	6.966	7.3
Concerned with academic development	7.5	7.1
Interacts well cross-culturally	6.5	6.0
Giving of time	5.466	6.3
Good teacher	6.366	6.6
Fair in dealing with students	6.233	6.5
Sharing of beliefs and values similar to respondent	4.6	4.1
Similar in background (lifestyle/culture)	2.3	2.2
Same gender as respondent	2.7	1.2

10: most important

1: least important

Non-native students' responses were fairly consistent with those of the Native students, ranking education as most important but valuing less knowledge of Native culture, issues, and history over concern with academic development. However, ranked as the fourth most important characteristic was teaching ability rather than ability to interact well cross-culturally (which was ranked seventh). The order of importance for the remaining characteristics were fairness in dealing with students, giving of time, similarity in values and beliefs, similarity in lifestyle and culture, and gender commonality, with the last three characteristics ranked as least important (see Table 2).

Both Natives ($\bar{X}=1.9069$; $sd=.9354$) and non-Natives ($\bar{X}=1.733$; $sd=1.062$) agreed that their role model emphasized and demonstrated the importance of cross-cultural understanding and sensitivity, with non-Natives agreeing to a slightly greater degree but appearing more varied in their responses. Furthermore, though both groups (Natives $\bar{X}=1.906$; $sd=1.007$; non-Natives $\bar{X}=1.666$; $sd=1.0110$) agreed that they could discuss culturally sensitive "controversial" issues with their role model, non-Natives again agreed to a slightly greater extent.

Of all respondents 63% identified Native role models and 37% identified non-Native role models. Sixty-three percent of Native respondents identified Native role models, and 54% of non-Native respondents identified Native role models.

A mean of 2.605 ($sd=1.1364$) for Natives and 2.846 ($sd=1.56$) for non-Natives indicated that both groups were close to being undecided on whether their role model had been selected on the basis of their cultural heritage. And though the standard deviations indicate that responses varied, a t-score of 1.30866 ($df=20$) revealed no significant difference between Natives who selected Native role

models and non-Natives who did likewise in their having done so on the basis of the role model's cultural heritage.

Chi square analysis between the two groups of respondents and their respective selections of either Native or non-Native role models revealed no significant difference among the groups (Natives choosing Native role models, Natives choosing non-Native role models, non-Natives choosing Native role models and non-Natives choosing non-Native role models) that would indicate that they had done so on the basis of cultural heritage ($\chi^2=17.8673$; $df=12$).

Non-Native students were undecided on whether Native studies faculty members were more effective role models if they themselves were Native ($\bar{X}=3.266$; $sd=1.388$); responses were varied. On the other hand, though Natives ($\bar{X}=2.7674$; $sd=1.3949$) seemed to agree more, they were close to being undecided and were also quite varied in their responses to this question. A t-score of 2.2620 ($df=42$) confirmed a significant difference between Native students choosing Native role models and those choosing non-Native role models in their views on this statement.

Non-Native students strongly agreed ($\bar{X}=1.6$; $sd=.6110$) that non-Native faculty can develop an understanding of Native issues, whereas Natives agreed to a much lesser degree although their responses varied ($\bar{X}=2.1162$; $sd=1.038$). Furthermore, non-Natives ($\bar{X}=1.8$; $sd=.7483$) agreed that a faculty member who has developed such an understanding can represent an effective role model; whereas Natives were consistent, though more consensual, with their previous views ($\bar{X}=2.1162$; $sd=.8410$). A t-score of .70025 ($df=42$) revealed no significant difference among Natives choosing Native role models and Natives choosing non-Native role models on their views about whether a non-Native faculty who has developed a cultural understanding can represent an effective role model. Correlational (Natives $r=.0084$; $df=29$; non-Natives $r=.2111$; $df=13$) analysis revealed no positive relation between groups of respondents on whether a faculty member should be Native in order to represent a possible role model and whether non-Native faculty possessing an understanding of Native issues could also represent a possible role model.

The non-Native respondents felt more strongly than Natives on the statement that faculty possessing little or no cultural knowledge could act as an effective role model with a mean of 3.5714 ($sd=1.1157$) though they did not seem to consensually agree. However, the Natives, with a mean of 3.0232 ($sd=1.2480$) were largely undecided. Where the respondents did agree or were undecided ($n=27$), they were then asked to clarify this by ranking in order of importance the characteristics such a person should possess.

The Natives valued most highly a person who is willing to get involved with cultural activities, willing to learn from students, well educated, fair in dealing with students, and accessible, who has faced similar hardships on the basis of race, color, or creed, and who is similar in culture. They valued least someone who is highly respected outside of the institution, the same sex as themselves, and well dressed.

The non-Natives valued most someone who is willing to learn from students, willing to get involved, fair in dealing with students, well educated, highly respected outside the institution, and accessible, whereas they valued least

similarity in culture, dressing well, similarity on the basis of race, color, or creed, and gender commonality (see Table 3).

On whether there is a significant difference between Natives choosing Native role models and Natives choosing non-Native role models in their views on whether a faculty member possessing little or no cultural knowledge can be an effective role model, a *t*-score of .520792 showed no difference.

Correlation analysis showed a positive correlation between both Native ($r=.000885$; $df=29$) and non-Native ($r=.233150$; $df=13$) respondents' views on whether faculty possessing little or no cultural knowledge could be an effective role model, and whether faculty in a Natives studies program should be Native in order to act as an effective role model.

The two groups were fairly consistent in their opinions on the availability of possible faculty mentors/role models in their institutions. Both Natives ($\bar{X}=2.5813$; $sd=1.061$) and non-Natives ($\bar{X}=2.466$; $sd=1.257$) agreed somewhat that the availability was high. The variance, I believe, is due to the differences in faculty profiles at each institution. In terms of the respondents' views on the importance of having had a role model or someone to look up to, Natives ($\bar{X}=1.976$; $sd=1.088$) valued the importance of such a relationship much more than non-Natives ($\bar{X}=2.466$; $sd=1.087$). Further examination revealed a positive correlation ($r=.011762$; $df=30$) between the Native respondents in their views on the importance of a role model relationship to their own success and the availability of possible role models.

Non-Natives ($\bar{X}=1.785$; $sd=.8601$) agreed more than Natives ($\bar{X}=2.25$; $sd=1.1989$) that they had had a variety of role models in their lives.

Table 3. Non-Native Teacher/Role Model Characteristics

	Natives	Non-Natives
Similarity in culture	5.46	4.75
Willingness to learn from students	6.846	8.75
Willingness to get involved in cultural activities	7.769	7.75
Well educated	6.538	7.25
Highly respected outside institution	4.615	6.0
Well dressed	2.0769	4.0
Same gender as respondent	3.615	3.0
Fair in dealing with students	6.461	7.75
Accessible to students	6.153	6.0
Has faced similar hardships on the basis of race, color, or creed	5.846	3.5

10: most important

1: least important

When asked if a teacher in a Native studies department should practice the Native way in order to act as a possible role model, both groups were largely undecided (Natives $\bar{X}=3.2682$; $sd=1.325$; non-Natives $\bar{X}=3.4$; $sd=1.451$). A t-score of 1.5947 ($df=41$) revealed no significant difference in the views of Natives who selected either Native or non-Native role models on this statement. However, a significant difference between the two groups of respondents existed ($t=3.2108$; $df=56$).

Summary

Immediately obvious from the data is that Natives' and non-Natives' views on a typical role model vary little. Only marginal differences appear to exist. The differences that do exist lie in the importance of the cultural heritage of faculty teaching in a Native studies program, and these mainly revolve around whether respondents chose Native role models or non-Native role models. However, it is further documented that non-Native individuals possessing certain characteristics can represent cultural role models, though they may experience certain challenges.

Contradicting previous findings on the importance of similarity, the data show that variables concerning personality, cultural knowledge, and diversity have a much greater influence in role model selection.

In the three institutions it appears that the lack of Native faculty representation is less of a problem than stated in much of the literature. However, the three institutions surveyed are in areas with large Native populations. Furthermore, the representation of women on these faculties appears to exceed that of the North American average.

Conclusion

A review of the findings shows a fairly high proportion of Native students who had postsecondary education before entering the Native studies program, but does not reveal the percentage of students who in fact graduated from a previous postsecondary program. A considerable number of Native students had completed high school, many probably recently, as high school persistence levels have increased somewhat in recent years. A surprising 5.2% of Native students had less than complete elementary education and a closer examination of the survey data reveals that those students had successfully completed the second year of their program.

An interesting result is that 66% of respondents indicated faculty were all or predominantly female, a sharp contrast to the typical faculty profile found in the literature. Furthermore, 24% of respondents indicated a balance of male and female faculty, which also contrasts with the largely male faculty profiles found in the literature.

Consistent with the findings of Mokros and Erkut (1984) was that all students were able to identify at least one role model or mentor, and the vast majority indicated their relationship with that person developed naturally through association rather than through a formal program. This in itself is a positive result as mentors or role models are typically eight to 15 years older than the mentee. As the mean age of student bodies at the postsecondary level nationwide has risen considerably since 1984, the age gap has narrowed significantly. Nonetheless, it appears that students are making role model identifications regardless of age. Both groups

of respondents agreed on the importance of the basic qualities of mentors/role models. However, the lesser degree to which respondents indicated their role model had influence over their values and beliefs could again relate to the mean age of the group, suggesting that values were already well developed prior to returning to school. Similarly, though both groups indicated their role model had helped them to define their professional goals, the extent to which they did so could again relate to age and the stronger sense of direction older students may have upon program selection. The fact that Natives agreed to a greater extent than did non-Natives that their role model had supported them personally in achieving their goals appears to be due to the intricate social network of the Native community and the likelihood that Natives would encounter their teachers more often outside class through friendships, associations, and family relationships. Also, mentee support would probably continue beyond graduation for this reason.

Of significance was that role models were concerned with and taught to students' learning style. However, a closer examination reveals that the numbers of Native student respondents were only slightly higher than the percentage of Native faculty. This, added to the frequency of Native role models, suggests that perhaps cultural commonality results in a matching of teaching and learning styles.

A notable finding, again consistent with that of Erkut and Mokros (1984), reveals that all three characteristics relating to similarity in terms of gender, beliefs, and values, culture, and lifestyle were among the least important to both Native and non-Native students.

Although the majority of students did not rank gender similarity as a motivating factor in selection of a mentor, most respondents who felt it was important ranked it most important; few ranked it at points in between.

It is not surprising to find that both groups of students agreed on the relevance of cross-cultural understanding as a role model characteristic. Not expected was the stronger agreement of non-Natives that they were able to discuss culturally sensitive "controversial" issues with their role model. This suggests that this group values highly their acceptance in the program and the cultural diversity of their teachers, particularly in view of the 54% who selected Native role models. The fact that Natives agreed less strongly reflects back to the literature that Natives are accustomed to strong social support and encouragement in their families and communities outside the classroom.

The percentage of Native role models identified by Natives (63%) indicates that Natives will select Native role models when they can. Furthermore, for non-Native students studying in a culturally oriented program, a 54% Native role model identification suggests that a significant number of these students value highly the guidance and support of Native faculty in terms of their specific career goals.

Respondents were cautious in identifying whether they had selected their role model on the basis of their cultural heritage. Further clarification of this question might have resulted in a more measurable response, particularly when considering the many other variables involved in role model selection. It is now believed that those other variables play a more important role in role model selection, for example, mean analysis of whether faculty are more effective role models if they are Native. Native students did not consensually agree to this. Furthermore, the

indecisiveness of non-Natives indicates that cultural heritage of faculty, even in a culturally oriented program, is far less important than other factors typical of role models.

The non-Native respondents' views that non-Native faculty can develop an understanding of Native issues is for obvious reasons substantiated in light of their representation in the study. Similarly, the fact that Native students agreed to this statement, though to a lesser degree, holds that they have witnessed such development in their non-Native classmates. The lesser degree to which Natives agreed with this statement could indicate some feelings of "ownership" or "protectionism" over their culture, particularly as non-Natives compete for the same jobs.

The responses to whether faculty who have developed such a cultural understanding can represent effective role models reflects consistently on the agreement that such a development can occur, with Natives agreeing to a lesser extent than non-Natives. However, correlational analysis indicates a split in the views of Natives and non-Natives on both statements (faculty can develop a cultural understanding, and faculty who have done so can represent effective role models) suggesting that non-Native faculty may experience difficulty in establishing themselves as role models to Native students.

Apparently, non-Native students value more highly the cultural knowledge of faculty as their primary source of cultural information. Native students may gain cultural knowledge from numerous other sources.

Not surprising is the disagreement of non-Native people on whether faculty possessing little or no cultural knowledge can be effective role models. Further, the Natives' indecisiveness and insignificant difference between those selecting Native role models and those selecting non-Natives role models on this indicates that further variables need to be considered.

Of the Native respondents who agreed or were undecided that faculty possessing little or no cultural knowledge could represent effective role models, similarity became somewhat more important (cultural, hardship on the basis of race, color, or creed). In consideration of the most important characteristics, however (willingness to learn about culture, to get involved in cultural activities), it almost appears that Native students would be willing to take such an individual "under their wing" and teach him or her what they know in exchange for fairness, accessibility, and knowledge gained through education.

These findings seem to reflect the literature by Leavitt (1991), and Malloy and Nilson (1991), which suggests that the Native way revolves around consensual decision making and teacher-student collaboration. Furthermore, students may perceive an increased sense of control over delivery, thus allowing for such collaboration and would in exchange assist the teacher in areas he or she is lacking.

One graduate of a Native studies program identified such a faculty member as a role model. She was in awe of the commitment that the faculty member demonstrated toward learning about the culture, for which she offered kindness, fairness, accessibility, and her knowledge of sociology, an important component in Native studies. In an interview the faculty member evidenced all the characteristics her mentee had identified about her. She remains committed to Native students and the uniqueness of the culture, as well as to how the Native way can be used in mainstream education.

However, the non-Native students who agreed or were undecided on whether a faculty possessing little or no cultural knowledge could represent an effective role model valued credibility more. Again, similarity was valued least.

Opinions on whether availability of possible role models in respondents' institutions was high appeared consistent with their identification of a role model and the availability of Native faculty. Not surprisingly, Natives valued highly the importance of role models and did not consensually agree on whether they had had a variety of role models in their lives. Conversely, non-Natives valued their importance less, yet indicated they had had several in their lives. This suggests that where a need is or has been satisfied, it becomes less important.

However, in the case of Natives, the need for role models is documented. Furthermore, although non-Native faculty may be role models for Native people, cultural identification of role models lends itself to an increase in the perceived confidence and pride in the accomplishments of members of a particular culture, and ultimately in an individual, particularly where such a culture has been suppressed and/or assimilated by the dominant culture. Perhaps, when viewing the increasing accomplishments of Native people in areas other than academia, the lack of Native role models can be rectified by making Natives aware of those accomplishments and by faculty awareness and acknowledgement of them.

Whether a teacher pursues a traditional lifestyle might be unknown to many students. It appears, however, that knowledge rather than practice is valued more highly among both groups, possibly because current faculty do not have a traditional lifestyle to any visible extent. With respect to this view, however, one student said that though culture in a culturally oriented program is important, certain characteristics of the Native way tend to impede progress of a course. She told of a Native language teacher who remained unconcerned with time throughout a course and thus did not adequately cover the material; and the teacher's inattention to traditional evaluation methods made the student uncertain as to her own progress.

Most evident from the data is that similarity between mentors and mentees is of far less importance than other factors. However, findings seem somewhat inconclusive on whether non-Native faculty teaching in Native studies programs will experience much success as role models or mentors. However, should such a faculty member possess qualities typical to role models and be open-minded and willing to become personally involved with students' learning and achievement, the data suggest that students would be willing to respond. Central to the motivation of Native students is their individual perceptions of faculty, which serves to confirm the belief of many researchers that attention needs to be paid to individual capabilities rather than to the perceived capabilities or learning styles typical of an entire culture.

Furthermore, it seems evident that cultural heritage of faculty, in terms of the credibility of a Native studies program, is only moderately important as compared with cultural knowledge. In addition, there seems to be virtually no difference in the perceptions of Native students and non-Native students on typical role model characteristics, leading to the theory that all faculty can represent role models to Native students if they concern themselves with basic cultural differences and Native issues and goals.

One Native student, when asked if a non-Native person could have the same amount of credibility as a Native person teaching, for instance, Ojibwe, as a second language responded:

Where I want to go I can't afford prejudice—I'm over that now; particularly since I've seen how it hinders one's world view. I don't care who teaches me, as long as they get the job done and they concern themselves with me as an individual.

Recommendations

This study evaluated the views of Native studies students who presumably have stronger views on the importance of culture in educational delivery, and who are fortunate enough to have had exposure to a relatively high number of Native faculty. Probably more accurate findings could be realized from a larger sample of exclusively Native students in various fields of study. Furthermore, where Native students drop out from postsecondary studies, their documented reasons for doing so would significantly add to current literature. In addition, considering the high percentage of first-year students in the sample, a follow-up survey in one year's time would measure the number of students who have persisted in Native studies.

For Native studies administrators, the decision to hire non-Native faculty where Natives are not available must be considered carefully. In view of the split between Natives on their views as to whether non-Native faculty can represent positive role models, several other factors must be considered. Though students placed less importance on similarity in terms of culture, values beliefs, and lifestyle than they did on other factors, in the case of culturally oriented programs Native faculty serve to enhance faculty/program credibility. However, the data do not refute that non-Native faculty possessing certain characteristics can represent positive role models in the same program.

An implication of the study relates to the need for faculty of all disciplines to pay more careful attention to the needs of Native students. Learning styles, cross-cultural interaction, cultural diversity, individual support, and accessibility are all factors faculty must consider in their dealings with Native students.

Where cultural awareness and diversity as well as ability to adapt to learning styles are lacking among faculty, administrators must pay careful attention to the concerns of Native students in order to increase persistence levels among this high-risk group by designing policies that pervade the entire institution and not just settle for such remedies as the establishment of cultural centers. Professional development activities for faculty on important cultural issues are long overdue.

In light of the pursuit of a diverse set of teaching strategies more attention could be paid to traditional Native education. Much can be learned from Native educational ideals, learning processes, and delivery modes, which not only account for a Native students' perception of all aspects of life, but also present implications for integration into the traditional mainstream classroom.

Additional recommendations can be added at a later date with the assistance of other educators and administrators who have read this study. However, I can reasonably state that after three years of work both in a postsecondary institution and in the community (in Native training) I have encountered virtually nothing in the way of professional development, workshops, or circulating studies that would suggest that teachers, Native or otherwise, are paying more than minimal attention to student perceptions of them as role models, in particular cultural role models.

Considering the reality and importance of such a representation both from the student perspective and the teacher's, it stands to reason that teachers should be directing more energy toward learning how to reach Native students, motivate them, meet their needs, and improve or help develop their self-concept as one means of enhancing the learning process and retaining students.

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