

NATIVE EDUCATION AND IN-CLASSROOM  
COALITION-BUILDING: FACTORS AND  
MODELS IN DELIVERING AN EQUITOUS  
AUTHENTIC EDUCATION

*Sabrina E. Redwing Saunders*

*Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of  
Toronto*

*& Susan M. Hill*

*Wilfrid Laurier University*

For centuries Canadian First Nations education has been a substandard, abusive means of dealing with the "Indian Problem." In recent decades Native education has been under-funded and employed non-indigenized models. Despite these facts, many are surprised when these efforts fail another cohort of children. This article outlines Canadian Native education including attainment and attrition, curriculum, Native epistemology, and Indigenous practice and theory. Finally, a Curriculum Model designed from a 2004 mixed-method study based on Haudenosaunee student and educator responses is offered as a means to achieve reparative or equitable educational outcomes through the creation of in-classroom coalitions between educators and students.

Key words: Haudenosaunee/Iroquois, authenticity, equitable, Indigenous Knowledge, educational models, coalition

Depuis des siècles, l'éducation des Premières nations canadiennes est un moyen abusif et insuffisant de faire face au « problème des Indiens ». Au cours des dernières décennies, l'éducation des autochtones a été sous-financée et a fait appel à des modèles non autochtones. En dépit de ces faits, bien des personnes sont surprises lorsque les efforts déployés ne donnent encore pas à une cohorte d'enfants ce à quoi

on est en droit de s'attendre d'un système d'enseignement. Cet article fait l'esquisse de l'éducation des autochtones canadiens en abordant les aspects suivants : rendement scolaire et déperdition d'effectifs scolaires, programmes d'études, épistémologie ainsi que théorie et pratiques. Suit un modèle d'enseignement tiré d'une étude effectuée en 2004 à l'aide d'une méthode de recherche mixte et basée sur les réponses d'élèves et d'enseignants haudenosaunees ; ce modèle est proposé comme un moyen d'atteindre des résultats réparateurs ou équitables par la création de coalitions en classe entre les enseignants et les élèves.

Mots clés : haudenosaunee/iroquois, authenticité, équité, savoir autochtone, modèles d'enseignement, coalition

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Across Canada, First Nations<sup>1</sup> communities have been involved in a campaign to take on management of their community's K-12 education systems. Negotiations surrounding this trend began with an Assembly of First Nations (AFN)<sup>2</sup> 1972 policy paper *Indian Control of Indian Education*. Presently only eight of 502 schools remain under the authority of the federal government (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada [INAC], 2004; Scott Directories 2004).<sup>3</sup> However, due to a lack of Native peoples' involvement within major decision-making bodies of education, control is still held in the arms of federal and/or provincial bodies. As Carr-Stewart (2001) wrote, Native peoples' contemporary control does not equate to the concept of original communal control of yesteryear. First Nations education continues to be affected by outside influences such as federal fiscal management and divisions between provincial and federal ministries. In turn these influences propagate ongoing political struggles against oppression and second-class citizenship instead of towards self-determination, autonomy, and sovereignty.

In mainstream educational models, curriculum, the set plan of action, that a program, or lesson encompasses, limits the overall potential engagement of students while segregating whole thoughts and concepts into teachable categories offered in a hierarchical learning environment designed for large-scale instruction. Although rigidity and categorizing of knowledge are often problematic in relation to Native education, the largest problem lies in educators locked by pedagogies of practice that simulate past unsuccessful methods. Goddard and Foster (2002) state that educators often cannot move past the pedagogical status

quo: "They recognize the education system as being similar to the one they experienced and intuitively accept the rightness of that system" (p. 2). As a result educators, by nature, may be working in opposition to relevance and holism within the curriculum.

When educators look at original educational modalities across the history of any peoples, original methods of education do not follow the current educational structure. In this article, we do not ask the question of whether new or traditional methods are better. Instead, we identify concepts and ideas related to how Native peoples can engage themselves, viewing and acting on educational experiences differently while moving away from hierarchical education and towards participation in an educational co-authored journey. The research herein is Haudenosaunee<sup>4</sup> specific, but we believe the findings to be broadly applicable to other Native peoples.

In this article we demonstrate from one study the effects of a lack of authentic and equitable practices upon Native education, the onset of a theoretical perspective to support change in educational pedagogy for Native (and all) students and from one mixed-method study a curricular model as a roadmap for authentic and equitable education based on responses of Haudenosaunee students and educators. In this article we regularly refer to reparative or equitable education which affords students a voice where they may speak and be heard. Equitable education is also utilized as a means for students to build upon: closing gaps between both Native and Canadian opportunity and attainment to succeed in all facets of society. Likewise, we introduce the concept of authentic education. Authenticity allows students a place within the curriculum where they may be Native, yet not societal tokens; where they are true designers of their curriculum, not merely puppets within the larger assessment strategy; and where they are active players, not just recipients of information.<sup>5</sup>

Our reflections address what happens when educators do not consider our Native student body, especially those of elementary age, as potential coalitions. We will argue that to create social justice changes in society, authentic and equitable education must start with in-classroom coalition-building<sup>6</sup> involving our First Nations students and communities. Only through partnering of educators and learners will First

Nations' educators devise a society of critical thinkers who are able to claim their rightful place alongside the Canadian educated society.

#### FIRST NATIONS ATTAINMENT IN EDUCATION

Although the days of direct residential school oppression are, for the most part, behind us, we do find another continuing phenomenon – the lack of educational attainment. Common areas of Native education themed publications include below-average educational attainment and above-average dropout rates (Lin, LaCounte, & Eder, 1988; Reyhner, 1992a, 1992b; Schissel, 2003; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2001; Urion, 1999). However, research conducted outside these themes is limited, especially pertaining to Canadian Natives.

Native people have extremely low post-secondary attainment (as a group) while at the same time comprise the fastest growing population (Statistics Canada, 2001a, 2001b). Coupled, these factors demonstrate a pandemic phenomenon related to Native education and social mobility. The 2001 *Aboriginal Peoples of Canada Census* showed a Canadian population of nearly 30 million with a 3 per cent (976,305) Aboriginal<sup>7</sup> population (Statistics Canada, 2001b). Although the Canadian Native population proportion is nearly 250 per cent larger<sup>8</sup> in ratio to the United States, nearly all research, as little as there may be, pertains to US populations.

According to the 2001 Census, 18 per cent of the Aboriginal population aged 25-44 have not completed a high school diploma while an additional 14 per cent have completed only a high school diploma. These data imply that 32 per cent of the largest body of working-aged Aboriginal peoples in Canada has minimum to below-minimum educational standards to enter the workforce. Additionally, only 7 per cent of the 25-44 year old population has a university degree. Because 19 per cent of the Native population is 15 years or younger, educational attainment of these youth is a significant social factor for all Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2001a, 2001b). Within 10 years this population will be entering the workforce. Their academic capabilities will dictate whether they enter the educated/skilled workforce or as additional members of the under- and unemployed Canadians.

An emphasis on lesser attainment is not to be confused with a labeling of lesser abilities. Authors have made that mistake by discussing

a *need* or prescribed Native learning style (kinesthetic, tactile, and apprenticeship based). In short, this type of overgeneralization makes the Indigenous person disabled by birth right. According to Philips (1982), as a result of the educational process, the Native student is not at a deficit due to *preferring* a learning style; rather Philips identifies them as being at a deficit because of an inability to function according to standards of mainstream educational models. The mere use of terms such as *deficit* is a disservice to Native students. By no means is this article meant to imply that without changes in the system, the Native student is at a deficit. Although we believe in the concept of learning styles and believe that all people can benefit from inclusive instructional techniques that incorporate all styles of learning regardless of race, we are opposed to the concept of any race-based style. Further, we would state that the literature citing *the* Native learning style (Johnny, 2002; Pewewardy, 2002;<sup>9</sup> Plank, 1994; Ross, 1982) is a means of both placing blame for conditions on the student while masking the inequities of the system. Although we recognize that distinct cultural factors for many Native peoples affect students' success in mainstream education, we do not feel it is appropriate that one learning style can encompass the diversity of Indigenous societies in North America.

#### THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Native peoples encompass hundreds of different nations across Canada and the United States, each with its own teachings, stories, language, and beliefs. As a result, no one epistemology is shared by all. However, a number of concepts bridge most, if not all Indigenous peoples. Respect for each other and nature, the understanding of community, and the need for authenticity or authentic voice are common values held among North American and other Indigenous peoples.<sup>10</sup>

One such theoretical stance incorporates each of these canons and is appropriately referred to as Indigenous Theory (G. H. Smith, 2000b, 2005). In Smith's transformative praxis or Indigenous Theory (based on Maori epistemology), he outlines a mode of practice or cycle that includes the use of an authentic community voice used to produce a product that is returned to the community for their benefit. Communal purpose, respect, and authenticity have regularly been absent from

research conducted on Indigenous peoples globally.<sup>11</sup> According to G. H. Smith (2005), the most important concept of Indigenous Theory is that a researcher must be “seriously engaged in grounded critical and political work for transformation and write from a particular cultural, community or tribal particular position” (p. 7), integrating protection against destructive research methodologies.

Indigenous Theory is the cornerstone of this article and the mixed-method study. Although Indigenous Theory has only recently gained a name and definition through the works of G. H. Smith (2000b, 2005) and L. T. Smith (1999), Indigenous Theory describes an epistemological stance of many Indigenous peoples globally that has existed for millennia. Indigenous Theory is based on the following six principles: self-determination, validating and legitimating cultural aspirations and identity, incorporating culturally preferred pedagogy, mediating socio-economic difficulties, incorporating cultural structures that emphasize the *collective* rather than the *individual*,<sup>12</sup> and shared and collective vision.

Documents surrounding Indigenous Theory have been created predominantly on the cultural and educational revitalization work in which G. H. Smith has been involved in his home communities of the Maori peoples of New Zealand; however, when compared with the Redwing Saunders (2004) study of Haudenosaunee perceptions and expectations in education and the Hill (2004) research pertaining to Haudenosaunee (Indigenous) Knowledge, the dialogue of Indigenous Theory and research has common issues to both Indigenous groups.<sup>13</sup> These common themes can be viewed as canons for other Indigenous peoples as well.

Although Indigenous Theory is the theoretical frame of this article and the research project, a more specific worldview of the Haudenosaunee respondents forms the conceptual frame. Haudenosaunee philosophy is centred around the Great Law with teachings given to the Haudenosaunee by the Peacemaker at least 1000 years ago. The Peacemaker, who brought peace to the people, taught them to use their minds – referred to as the Good Mind – to negotiate problems and to create a society based on balance and respect. The Peacemaker is said to have had all those present join hands in a circle; in doing this he said that everything is in the circle – family, traditions, language. In a circle there is no beginning or end, and most importantly, there is no head or

superstructure. The leading of the Haudenosaunee is conducted in a circle, where everyone has an equal voice, with decisions made and carried through based on consensus. Finally, when an acceptance is made that everyone has a voice and everyone in the circle is equal, the role of each member can be accepted as equal. In other words, men and women, elder and child may be responsible for different tasks, but they are equally important in the balance of community (Thomas, 1994). One without the other is the end of the circle, and therefore, the end of the society.

A second major historical article that determines the current Haudenosaunee worldview is the Two Row Wampum (see figure 1). This treaty wampum was made in the 1600s between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch (Hill, 1992). Ultimately the wampum states that the Haudenosaunee and their brothers from across the shore<sup>14</sup> are separate but equal and can live as neighbors in peace and without interference in each other's way of life. The symbolic example referred to when discussing the Two Row Wampum is that of two canoes flowing down the same river, both running in the same direction, but never crossing paths or diverting the other. In Figure 1 the two dark rows (purple beads) which run through the belt are representative of the Native and non-Native peoples surrounded by the beads of white. These same principles were extended to the British by the Haudenosaunee in 1664; the ensuing treaty relationship became known as the Silver Covenant Chain.

The Great Law lays out parameters for everyone to have a voice, regardless of station, gender, or age: the primary tenant of authentic education. The Two Row Wampum and the Covenant Chain provide for balance between the Haudenosaunee and the British Crown.<sup>15</sup> Under this treaty relationship, the Haudenosaunee retained the right to govern their own territories and people. Although Canada has diverted away from this treaty – and most other treaties made with other Indigenous nations – the original framework can be used in repairing the relationship between the Haudenosaunee and Canada. Reparative or equitable education can be a part of that process to polish the treaty relationship and return relations to a state of peace, friendship, and mutual respect.



Figure 1. Two Row Wampum

*Note.* The Two Row Wampum signifies the status of the Haudenosaunee as a sovereign nation. This treaty was made between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch, but has been upheld by the British Crown and the USA in later treaties.

#### INDIGENOUS PEDAGOGIES

Having outlined the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, Native education today, and the inequitous state of society, we identify what coalition-building models are present and what initiatives are being implemented to improve First Nations societies.

##### *Indigenous Knowledge – Original Education*

An understanding of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is imperative to any research involving Native peoples. In 2000, Battiste and Henderson (2000) formalized an ongoing heated debate with the text *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge*. In this publication the authors address the Eurocentric conflicts with IK ideals, how researchers must respect the knowledge that is inherent and sacred to Native peoples, as well as how researchers (Native and non-Native, alike) have a right and responsibility to both protect IK while conducting research and to produce publications that support the needs of Native communities. Although many Native (and some non-Native) researchers have already done so, and will continue to respect the Native awareness outside the public realm, some have chosen to disregard this need. Still others have cloaked themselves in the blanket of IK, even if it is not relevant to their specific argument. Because IK is a general under-



standing that is based on the perspective of the individual community or institution, one definition cannot embody all of what IK entails. Battiste and Henderson (2000) discuss complications with Western notions of defining IK:

The first problem in understanding Indigenous knowledge from a Eurocentric point of view is that Indigenous knowledge does not fit into the Eurocentric concept of "culture." In contrast to the colonial tradition, most Indigenous scholars choose to view every way of life from two different but complementary perspectives: first as a manifestation of human knowledge, heritage, and consciousness, and second as a mode of ecological order. (p. 35)

In a previous paper, Battiste (1998) had offered a statement of concern demonstrating the problem when mainstream educational systems follow standard pedagogical approaches towards First Nations peoples. She writes,

In effect, Eurocentric knowledge, drawn from a limited patriarchal sample remains as distant today to women, Indigenous peoples, and cultural minorities as did the assimilation curricula of the boarding school days. For indigenous peoples, our invisibility continues, while Eurocentric education perpetuates our psychic disequilibrium. (p. 21)

In this quotation, Battiste points out how mainstream education, predicated on European ways of knowing, often minimizes or negates IK and Indigenous people. Also of relevance to this article is her reference to negative impacts of Western education models on other marginalized peoples. This argument supports our position that authentic and restorative/equitous education will improve the learning of all students. Indigenous Knowledge, however, is not defined by the mere fact that a Native holds the knowledge. As Native authors we have in our possession much knowledge of trigonometry, counseling theories, and Greek architecture. Holding this knowledge as Natives does not make it Indigenous Knowledge. In the same light, IK such as ceremonial and traditional<sup>16</sup> teachings cannot be owned by any one person or group (including the elected band council or a university) as one can own only what is theirs – only their actions and their original thoughts can be owned, sold, or copyrighted. The words and thoughts of the ancestors,

the enlightened ones, and the Creator do not fit into this group because they have always been present and have been passed throughout generations.<sup>17</sup> Original Indigenous education is comprised of the systems created by Indigenous societies to perpetuate many of the systems present today despite Canadian government policies that have attempted to disrupt and dissolve traditional education. These policies – residential schools, ceremonial bans, imposition of externally controlled governments – have created a legacy of education as a tool opposed to the perpetuation and continuation of IK.

#### *Immersion Programs*

As a response to external government policies (e.g., Canada, USA, New Zealand), many Indigenous communities over the last thirty years have worked to adapt Western education models to re-invigorate and perpetuate IK through immersion schools. Many communities (and in some cases groups of parents from within communities) have simply given up on mainstream education and refused to subject another generation of children to the systemic problems. As such, they have pooled their resources and created community-based or private schools that teach curricula including language, culture, and components of the mainstream curriculum that they deem to be beneficial to their students. Schools such as the Aha Pūnana Leo schools of Hawai'i, the language nest schools of New Zealand, and the Akwesasne Freedom School have been very successful with high rates of graduation and post-secondary acceptance. Others have struggled with producing (Western) proficient educated students, but have been successful in garnering IK perpetuation.<sup>18</sup> As university faculty and counselors, we note that what is not always mentioned by these systems is the difficulties some students have in transitioning to the mainstream education systems of post-secondary institutions as a result of having stronger Indigenous thinking (similar to ESL) and writing styles as opposed to a critical report/research-based experience.

In their formative years, many immersion schools struggled to find a balance between cultural education and mainstream skills. Although some immersion students may not excel in Western post-secondary education, extensive evidence exists at the community level that immersion

students have become important conduits for the perpetuation of IK (Aha Pūnana Leo, n.d; Gaison, 2004). Original education methods and immersion programs provide important means to perpetuate IK, a priority for many First Nations. Another priority, however, is to create educational systems that will provide general education in many areas, including Western and Indigenous subjects. In the remainder of our article, we discuss this middle road and the *Curriculum Model* approach that is centred around authentic and equitable education as a means to create curriculum in coalition with Native students (and community) of all ages.

## METHODS

### *Data Collection and Procedures*

The mixed-method study that produced the *Curriculum Model* was conducted in 2003-04 and included survey research collected from 101 Haudenosaunee<sup>19</sup> students across Southern Ontario. In addition one Western New York university was included in the survey with respondents enrolled between the years of 1993-1999 and 2003-04. Finally, 29 educator surveys were collected from Southern Ontario-based Haudenosaunee people who worked in various areas of education including teachers, administrators, researchers, counselors, and traditional knowledge holders/elders.<sup>20</sup> All surveys were confidential and analyzed using central tendencies, regression analysis, and data mining.

Interview data were collected in both formal and informal settings with 11 participants. Formal interviews included set questions and time limits, while the preferred method of interviewing of the informal dialogue was conducted with guiding questions as themes but open to the direction in which participants chose to move.<sup>21</sup> These purposeful sample interviews were data-mined for categorical threads and themes. This study incorporated a Haudenosaunee lens<sup>22</sup> grounded in Indigenous Theory. No remuneration was given for participation.

### *Delimitation*

The main delimitation of this study was the inability to involve members of the community who had chosen to remove themselves from education. As educators who believe in authentic education and voice, this

omission was of major concern. The students were either previously or currently enrolled (graduates or drop-outs) at post-secondary institutions. Of the educators, all were affiliated in some way with mainstream education. Because only a small per cent of Native students progress to university/college, the majority of the population's voice was not heard through this sample. Although it was preferred to include all aspects of Native educational attainment, a sample affiliated with post-secondary<sup>23</sup> education was accepted to keep the study manageable.

#### *Emergent Themes*

Although a full chapter is dedicated to the findings in Redwing Saunders's (2004) study, the findings presented here are a collection of relevant content, supporting the coalition-building between educator and student via the form of the *Curriculum Model*. The results of this study revealed a positive result from both the students and educators to the research question: *Is there a Native ontological perspective of education?*<sup>24</sup> and led to the creation of the subsequent *Curriculum Model*. This presence of a Native ontology of education included the *Four Domains of Curriculum* and the *3R's* at the heart of learning. The *Four Domains of Curriculum* were identified in this study through both questionnaires and interviews to be the key areas of holism, lifelong learning, community involvement, and authorship – or more specifically learner/instructor co-authorship. The *3R's* include the areas of respect (of the individual and of difference), relevance (of content to the learner and life), and reciprocal learning (the partnership of learning with and from each other). Additionally, educators referred to the need to incorporate the Mind, Body, and Spirit model<sup>25</sup> to ground intellectual learning cultural awareness and to include a physical, hands-on learning approach.

Each thread, when looked at holistically, paints a picture of a worldview and expected/desired educational experience. Although students offered positive and negative comments about service and communication, more serious concerns were addressed on issues such as racism and non-Native awareness. Two students, both of whom commented about their negative experience, did not graduate from their institutions as a result of their experiences, stating that they either dropped out or chose to attend other schools as a result of systemic indifference. Both

student and educator surveys asked questions pertinent to ontology. Students were asked, "If you could design your own school or learning environment, what would be the most important factor?" Not every response spoke to ontology but the general feeling of the desired system included practical learning with hands-on training, offered in a relevant manner and environment by trained and respectful professionals who had an understanding of Native issues and resources. Respondents described the five main areas as relevance to the learner and real life, inclusion of practical and hands-on learning, respect for individual learners in their environment, community involvement, and up-to-date materials and resources.

Although these areas may be read as best practices for education, the main difference is that these students listed them as important to their success and, most importantly, as a reason why many of them chose to leave their institutions. This second aspect is important because of the high Native attrition rate. Although any student may feel these areas are important, Native students seem to be acting on their distaste of current practices, whereas those of non-Native ancestry appear more accepting of the system as normative. Therefore, building relationships and partnerships between students and educators at every school would help to resolve this issue for all students.

Although numerous comments occurred about the need to have real teaching experiences and not "theory for the sake of theory" (Student Survey 162), an alarming number of comments were offered pertaining to respect, such as "respect for one another" (Student Survey 378) and "treat us as adults" (Student Survey 323). Participants also discussed the opportunity to develop more respect in the classroom or learning environment, such as instructors who lead the class in learning but who do not "highjack the class" (Student Survey 365). More disconcerting, however, were those who addressed the need for respect in place of racism. Students expressed their stories of racism throughout all levels of education, most of which were at the root of their leaving education permanently or for a period of time. Student 300 stated,

[High School] pulled out all of the Indians and took our photos and gave us a paperback photocopy quality "Indian yearbook". The experience of pulling the

Indians out of class – in front of everyone with the teachers saying, “They want the Indians to go into the lobby for your pictures now.” They may have well checked us for lice while they were at it! I dropped out of school. (Student 300 interview)

Perhaps this is an example of an educator’s acceptance of a district norm and Native students’ unwillingness to conform to what appears to them as an absurd situation. Student 300’s comment could also be viewed as an example of differentiation between the perceptions by the races within the system. Either way, this student felt the actions, deemed acceptable and of value by the school, were archaic and humiliating remnants to social norms of a racist society. Battiste (2000) would refer to this experience as cognitive imperialism.

The second research sub-question, *What can curriculum offer when teaching Native populations?* was shown to be a best practice approach to education. The 3R’s (respect, relevance, reciprocal learning) are just as important to the mainstream system as Native education. Techniques suggested by both the students and professionals are already incorporated at some levels throughout the five educational areas (elementary, secondary, post-secondary, community, and traditional education); however, they can always be improved upon. A *Don’t Do List* was also created including students’ comments pertaining to areas that would not occur with an understanding of knowledge of *curriculum*. These *don’ts* were simple concepts that any good educator may assume, but according to student and professional responses these “no-brainers” were experienced in classrooms regularly.<sup>26</sup>

In summary, the research findings did support the research question that there is a shared Native student and educator ontological perspective of education that includes expectations and desires that are not being met. These results and comments were used to create a model or modality of education that is grounded in consciousness of varying roles of educators and students. Further, the findings offered a modality for educating various populations – not just Haudenosaunee or other Natives – based on diversity, values, and responsibility.

## THE CURRICULUM MODEL

The *Curriculum Model* was created to work with students as a curriculum delivery model that Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators would use for short-term personal improvement and long-term social change. This model is not prescriptive or sequential in nature (i.e., steps 1, 2, 3 equal success); rather, it is a pedagogical approach to delivery – a modality of respect and authenticity that is, in itself, coalition-building. It was perceived at the time of study design that coalition-building is often viewed as an “outside event.” In other words, the educator looks to those not involved with the system, or only so superficially, to bring the educator into new and productive partnerships, enhancing the educational and community experience for all. Although this aspect of coalition-building is a tried-and-true method, it was decided to look systemically to create authentic and equitable experiences for those involved to create change – building coalitions between educators and students.

In this curriculum model<sup>27</sup> (see Figure 2), the *Four Domains of Curriculum*, the *Haudenosaunee Triad* (Mind, Body, and Spirit) and the *3R's* (respect, relevance, reciprocative learning) work together to create the output of education. Although these individual circles can be pulled apart to work on aspects of the process of curriculum, their combination creates a holistic experience wherein the student-teacher, coalition-building process occurs.

In the central core, the *Haudenosaunee Triad* is present so that learner and instructor are ever mindful of the need to live and learn holistically and in balance. The experience should incorporate these three aspects of the whole person to be truly holistic and relevant. Both groups of participants identified the middle and outer circles of the *Four Domains of Curriculum* (holism, lifelong learning, community involvement, and co-authorship) and *3R's* (respect, relevance, reciprocative learning) as key to successful education. Whereas the *Domains* maintain the health of the relationship, the *3R's* maintain the health of the learner and are constant values of the coalition process.

The Redwing Saunders (2004) Curriculum Model is a pedagogical approach to incorporating the entirety of the Haudenosaunee concepts of education, culture, and practice.

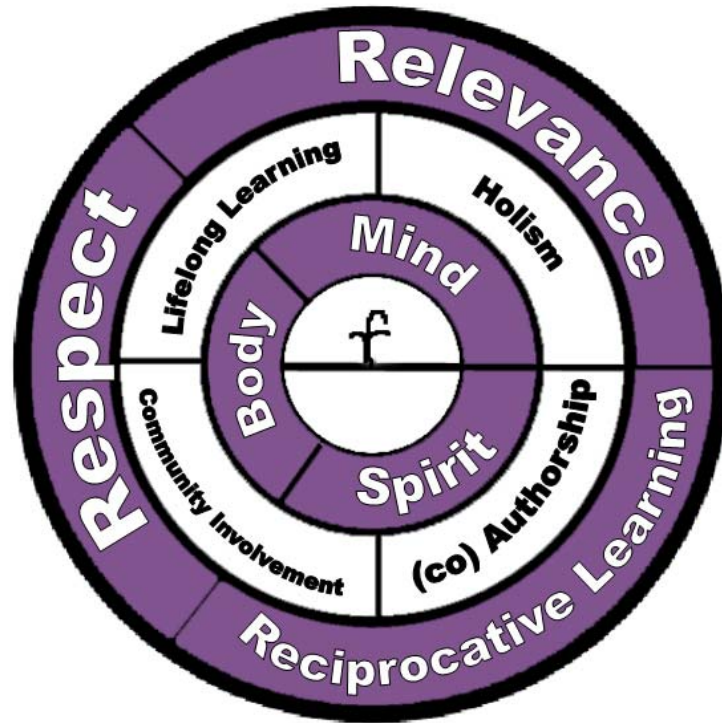


Figure 2. The Curriculum Model

Every experience, every curriculum or lesson, every day, and an entire lifetime can be charted within the *Curriculum Model*. Entering through the eastern line into the learning model brings the learner through every aspect of the educational process. The learner may stay longer or shorter in the areas of need, providing all are addressed. This allows the learner to look as broadly or minutely at the learning and repeat the cycles as needed. This model has natural trends but there is no order or pairing of concepts that *must* occur in any sequence. Based on the Haudenosaunee respondents' educational desires, this model outlines how to maintain a healthy learner (*Triad*), healthy learning environ-



ment (*Four Domains*), and healthy learning experience (*3R's*). Although grounded in the worldview of the Haudenosaunee learner and the teachings of the Peacemaker, these concepts are transferable to other populations of learners.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRICULUM

##### *As Barrier to Equitous and Authentic Education.*

Regardless of the position readers take on Native education, we believe that Western education of Native students has been generally unsuccessful. Historically, Native Canadians were subjected to both positive and negative educational pedagogies,<sup>28</sup> but the one constant from the time of formal education is that of curriculum. Curriculum is most often referred to as “the guide” (Scott, 2001, p. 115) or a concrete and tangible piece of the program plan. Posner (1992) defines curriculum as the over-all design, plan, philosophy, or set of guiding principles about what is taught and why. Watt-Clotier (2000) looks at curriculum as “the program that the staff of an educational institution is implementing in a conscious way” (p. 124). Whether looking at mainstream definitions of curriculum or concepts of Native curriculum that are holistic in nature, the purpose is to deliver a plan or agenda by one party to another. This relationship may be symbiotic, such as in the case of a master and apprentice, or learner-centred as in a classroom setting. Holistic curriculum, one that “refers to everything that the student learns” (Watt-Clotier, 2000, p. 124), or the organic experience of, “[t]he total organism – thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving” (Bandura, 1977, p. 31), is in line with the concept of traditional Native education grounded in authentic and equitable learning.

Curriculum incorporates three main concepts. Holistic learning is the learning environment that allows all aspects of a topic to be incorporated into the experience. Hidden curriculum is often synonymous with citizenship training, deeply engrained in provincial curricula (for the continued propagation of Canadian values and mores within the growing immigrant student body).<sup>29</sup> However, hidden curriculum can be used positively to reinforce (non-assimilating) communal beliefs and values. Finally, experiential learning, envisioned by Rogers (1994), takes place via the incorporation of change and growth of the individual gained

through experience, as it relates to an individual incorporating life experience into his or her own learning journey. Together, these three concepts frame Native curriculum as described in the study.

It is our belief that traditional forms of many Native curricula use a common holistic lifelong learning process that fosters the skills and values necessary for the life journey.<sup>30</sup> Identifying original concepts of Native teaching and learning, and interpreting how they can be used in modern societal times, can produce an increased success rate of Native learners. These can also bring about change in the educational environment as a whole. From both student and educator responses, the systems were indifferent to Native ways of knowing, regardless of district and/or government diversity policies. In the eras of multicultural policy and education, it became accepted that students who see themselves within the curriculum establish an interest in the content. Why then have Native students not seen themselves to date in much of the educational content? A canon shared by both lifelong learning and traditional education is the need to learn through a combination of discussion and self-discovery – yet so few Native students have this opportunity due to limited resources within the schools.<sup>31</sup>

Both curriculum (the overriding content as put forth by the provinces) and pedagogy (techniques of teaching said curriculum) can be changed with the work of activism through coalition-building.<sup>32</sup> Although we do not believe that the ministries of education and teacher preparation programs purposefully set out to propagate low attainment and lessened life opportunities for Natives, this result has, just the same, been their outcome. The coalition process was initiated by redefining the definition of curriculum, as well as recreating a design for how education could be put forth. Mainstream curriculum has limited the overall potential engagement of students, but we do not believe it to be because of segregation into teachable categories, nor because of the hierarchical learning environment designed for “in the box”<sup>33</sup> instruction.

Although curriculum is structured in a rigid compartmentalized plan, good teachers integrate and find fluidity in their practice. Good teachers also create opportunities to integrate multiple subject areas to present more relevant, holistic lessons. Mainstream pedagogy is a barrier to authentic and equitable education because teachers have been taught

and trained that they are the masters of the content and are in place to teach students how and what to think. This stripping of power and shared responsibility is in direct conflict with what has been explained as traditional educational modality across the history of Indigenous peoples. This traditional pedagogy (as defined within the *Curriculum Model*) need not be a thing of the past or limited to immersion programs; Native peoples can engage themselves to view and act on educational experience differently, moving away from the hierarchy of education and towards participation in an educational co-authored journey. Doing so creates a coalition or partnership between educators and students.

*As Roadmap for Moving Towards Social Equality Through Coalition Building*

The concept of Native curriculum is not easily identified, nor will creating a simplistic model or creation of a safe space for the Native student dissolve the problems surrounding their education. Reyhner (1992b) argues that, "this exposure is a promising beginning for a multicultural curriculum, but Indian culture in reservation schools must do more than scratch the surface of the mainstream curriculum" (p. 23). In the same light, the answer to introducing Native curriculum does not have to equate to a 'dumbing down' of the academic standards towards Native admission, completion, success, and staffing. Awareness of social inequities must be brought to the mainstream education policy writers, curriculum designers, and school improvement activists for outward coalitions, partnerships, and advocates to be formed.

However, let us not forget the inner-system coalition partnerships that are awaiting formation: the students. The *Curriculum Model* demonstrates three key areas where coalitions can be built within schools at every age group (pre-K through post-secondary): reciprocal learning, community, and co-authorship. These three areas present fantastic opportunities for building coalitions between the school and the students (if we dare separate the two so blatantly). Initially the model gives educators the task of building a partnership in learning. By definition reciprocal learning would be to reciprocate knowledge or give in return. Thus, a shared learning experience where both parties learn from each other is very important to all age groups because it makes for a learning experience that is a partnership and not one of convenience or mandated

hierarchy. Further, the reciprocation of knowledge is key in establishing rapport that defines the coalition: no trust + no sharing = no relationship!

The second area, community, is most usually referred to as an exterior 'bring-them-in' to assist coalition. Either superficial (invite them so they *believe* educators want their opinion) or financial in nature (business partnerships for goods, service, or in-kind donations of time), parents, leaders, and businesses are rarely seen as full partners in the educational coalition. However, what of the school community, those who reside within the infrastructure? These are the staff and students. Communities come in many shapes and sizes with communities within communities, each desiring involvement in their future: racial groups, interests groups, organizations, and clubs within the school. This does not mean we discount external coalition opportunities, especially with parents and community members who view themselves internal with the system. Regularly missing for this group are opportunities to enter the school, making differences in their own lives and the lives of their communities. How often are members of the community able to access services/resources available in schools? Computers, literature, and self-improvement materials are locked behind closed doors at 4:30 pm. Similarly, when are parents or community members welcomed into school halls without being badgered to assist in fundraising or to help with their 'problem child'? Weenie (1998) offers her concerns of Western schools as problem-ridden, according to Native pedagogy. She states that teachers should work as healing agents, educating students and community to make for whole communities (e.g., Haudenosaunee Triad).

Finally we come to authorship (coalition planning): both students and educators in the study spoke strongly for respect and co-authored learning. Co-authored or student-directed learning can be superficial – feedback cards which are not implemented – or a true partnership where everyone is invested in the learning experience, learning from each other. Most often utilized for the gifted student or in senior levels of high school or university, educators should offer more independent opportunities for students to self-direct their learning, thus enhancing the lifelong learning skills associated with self-directed learning and self-

discovery. The co-authoring team succeeds and fails together, transforming students from numbers in the system into keystones of the in-classroom coalition.

#### CONCLUSION

The Kelowna Accord of 2005 sought to address many of the inequities faced by First Nations in Canada. In regards to education, \$1.8 billion was promised for education, to create Aboriginal school systems, train more Native teachers, and identify and assess special needs (Government of Canada, 2005). The 2006 defeat of the Liberals took Kelowna off the table for the foreseeable future. That result does not mean, however, that the First Nations communities are stuck with the status quo. We have many options to improve our education systems – from both the inside and outside.

The primary recommendation derived from this research focuses internally and urges First Nations communities to persist in fighting for an equal opportunity in education. Although we have focused on research, practice, school improvement, and modality, this article boils down to a need to have equal opportunity to success, which is best accommodated through in-classroom coalition-building. First Nations schools are too far behind for a simple reform package. As long as Native students are attending schools with insufficient resources, that are often not safe,<sup>34</sup> where some teachers are untrained/uncertified,<sup>35</sup> and are producing standardized provincial scores in the bottom percentile (Bomberry, 2001; Duric, 2005), we must fight and fight hard for the future generations' educational opportunities.

Additional research centering on Native education needs to occur. Initiatives such as this issue of the *Canadian Journal of Education* are steps in the right direction, but more research needs to be initiated, published, presented, and used in policy development for the purpose of instituting change (again, coalition-building but from a broader systemic standpoint). We must listen to, respect, and involve our learners of all ages while working to make our educational systems relevant and driven by excellence. We must not turn away from outward coalition work, but teach others our strengths and grow from other's knowledge. At the same time we must form in-classroom coalitions between students and

educators and in-school coalitions between the communities within the school community (teacher groups, student groups, etc.). This process is especially important for First Nations schools because many educators may not be Native and may not hold the same mores as the students and community (Goddard & Foster, 2002).

From a teacher's perspective, it is ironic that educators have such quantities of excellent initiatives put forward in sports – intramurals; varsity clubs; after-school parent, police, and teacher involvement – yet they do not manage to put nearly that much effort into the non-sports related coalitions that could help students succeed. Educators have proven excellence in athletics but have been held back in academics. It is with models and modalities in hand, and with the strength of friends and partners, that First Nations peoples can lobby ministries, bands, the AFN, and INAC to accept recommendations for policy changes so that they may begin to truly lift the Native student to equal and just educational opportunities. At the same time it is with inner system/in-classroom coalition-building that educators lift the spirit of students, assisting them to embrace the love of learning that they will carry to every learning environment. No Canadian would accept any less for their children. As citizens of Turtle Island<sup>36</sup> we *must* demand this same first-class education and fight on the doorsteps of the Band Office and Parliament Hill for our children's future and the future of those not yet born.

The legal and political systems continue to marginalize people of difference while the social, political, economic systems maintain the status quo. Coalition-building done in partnership and in tandem with the *Curriculum Model* is a means of educational improvement that takes no additional funds, materials or infrastructure – only a change in attitude. Grounded in authentic voice and equity for all involved, the *Curriculum Model* is reflective in nature to the point that it is an appropriate modality for all peoples, and not just the Native learner.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> First Nations, Aboriginal, Native, and Native American/Canadian are interchangeable in this article. Native refers to all people of Native decent, both on and off reserve, Status/non-Status, Inuit, and Métis.

<sup>2</sup> At publication, this organization was called the National Indian Brotherhood. The policy paper was presented to the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, Canada.

<sup>3</sup> Of the eight federally controlled schools, five are Six Nations Reserve schools.

<sup>4</sup> Haudenosaunee/Iroquois/Six Nations refer to the “People of the Long Rafters” or “Longhouse.” They are the original five nations of the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk, as well as the sixth nation addition of the Tuscarora (circa 1722). Today their territorial lands are scattered throughout New York, Southern and Eastern Ontario, Quebec, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin. The term Six Nations also applies to one Haudenosaunee community, the home of both authors of this article. It is also known as Six Nations of the Grand River and Ohswe:ken.

<sup>5</sup> Authentic education is especially important for off-reserve or multi-nation schools of mixed ethnicity. A majority of Native children are in schools outside of their communities. This is also important for educators in First Nations schools to consider when addressing the diversity of Native students in their classrooms (e.g., not singling out children from traditional families to be cultural experts or spokespersons).

<sup>6</sup> Coalition for the purpose of this article is defined as the process of creating symbiotic partnerships, similar to that of a biological symbiosis, where both participants benefit from the relationship. As a coalition, both parties need not necessarily have a similar focus, providing each is working towards a mutual end in which both see fruition and benefits meeting their individual (or joint) efforts.

<sup>7</sup> The Aboriginal Peoples Census utilizes data including First Nations people both on and off reserve, Inuit people living on territory and off, as well as Métis people. Significant numbers of Native people regularly opt out of census activities.

<sup>8</sup> The 2000 U.S. National Census shows a national population of 281,421,906, with 2,475,956 (0.9%) identifying as American Indian and Alaskan Native (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Pewewardy (2002) is a comprehensive literature review of research on Native learning styles. He does not support the concept of race-based deficit.

<sup>10</sup> For further discussion, see the work of Greg Cajete, Graham Smith, and Marie Battiste.

<sup>11</sup> Throughout history Indigenous peoples' knowledges have been discounted while they have been stripped of their technologies. Examples of such actions would be the use of knowledge of farming to better settlers' life-style, only to later claim that the Native peoples are not utilizing the land to its fullest potential in the forced relocation argument; or the logging and use of traditional medicines and remedies, followed by forced education, imposition of Western health practices, and punishment to remove uncivilized practices or witchcraft tendencies.

<sup>12</sup> The focusing of a collective is in line with a social justice model as opposed to the neo-liberal stance that would look to individuals as the case of analysis.

<sup>13</sup> Many other Indigenous scholars are engaged in research involving Indigenous Theory with applications of knowledge systems from specific tribal Nations. Some of these scholars include Marie Battiste, Greg Cajete, James Youngblood Henderson, Julie Kaomea, Kiera Ladner, and Leanne Simpson.

<sup>14</sup> Brothers from across the shore has been interpreted to include all from Europe. Treaties of the Haudenosaunee have been made upholding this statement by both the English Crown and the USA.

<sup>15</sup> Canada accepted responsibility to uphold the Covenant Chain under the British North Act, 1867.

<sup>16</sup> Traditional is anything that is original to the people or the old way of doing something. Traditional teaching modalities are the mechanism of transmitting knowledge prior to the onset of formal Western educational techniques. These were often in apprenticeship through games, play, and talk, and were interactive.

<sup>17</sup> See Battiste and Henderson (2000) for a detailed discussion of protecting collectively-owned cultural knowledge.



<sup>18</sup> At Six Nations many of the current and up-and-coming culture bearers are graduates of elementary, secondary, and adult immersion programs.

<sup>19</sup> As a Haudenosaunee woman and educator, Redwing Saunders chose to work with a Haudenosaunee sample to assist in the improvement of education within her community.

<sup>20</sup> In the Haudenosaunee vocabulary the term elder is not used. Because most readers are familiar with this identity we use it here. No disrespect to any participant is intended.

<sup>21</sup> These dialogues were similar in nature to focus groups. Dialogue, as it is referred to in this study, describes a collaboration and sharing of minds.

<sup>22</sup> While working with Haudenosaunee people, Redwing Saunders incorporated a conceptual lens grounded in the two key teachings of the Peacemaker (Thomas, 1994) and the Two Row Wampum (R. Hill, 1992). Additionally, the balancing nature of the Mind, Body, and Spirit was brought to her by many participants and became a reinforced aspect of the Haudenosaunee cultural lens described in the research.

<sup>23</sup> An untested assumption is that people with poor educational experiences would not have participated in this study because they would a) have been inhibited by their experiences, b) not have attended/remained in post secondary education, and c) not have participated in social functions at educational institutions. In addition, this demographic may or may not relate better to traditional forms of education. Although it was anticipated that some of the comments would allude to this, there was no way to determine through the design why some Native peoples did continue in education, while others dropped out, and still others – even with self-described horrific experiences, chose to return.

<sup>24</sup> The original study was comprised of one main research question – Is there a Native ontological perspective of education? Additionally there were five sub-questions: a) Is there a Native ontological perspective of curriculum?; b) What can curriculum offer when teaching Native populations?; c) Are the Four Domains of curriculum key components to success? How can the Four Domains of curriculum (holism, lifelong learning, authorship, and community involvement) be incorporated within formal education?; d) Who are the designers,

providers, and authors of curriculum? What are their roles?; e) Do Native students identify themselves as having a common, preferred learning technique?

<sup>25</sup> The idea of Mind, Body, and Spirit is the three areas of wellness and balance within Haudenosaunee culture. Although they are not equivalent to the Medicine Wheel's intellectual, physical, spiritual, and emotional, this is a close comparison.

<sup>26</sup> Worst Practices in Education: A Don't Do List. Educators should not: ignore teaching opportunities; downgrade the abilities of students through tracking or assumptions; segregate, pull out, or create mandatory special programming for Native students in an attempt to assist; or forget to treat students with respect. (Redwing Saunders, 2004, p. 111).

<sup>27</sup> Curriculum or Native curriculum is the plan, means, method, and learning experience that fosters the educational lesson, while creating a respectful and reciprocal relationship that enhances the ability to self-direct and process learning in the future.

<sup>28</sup> Positive pedagogical approaches would include apprenticeship and respectful discussions between the student and instructor. Negative instruction would include many examples from residential school life such as physical and sexual abuse or instilling fear as a means of transmitting ideals and values.

<sup>29</sup> See Battiste (2000, pp. 192-208) for a detailed discussion of Canadian curricula as a tool of cognitive imperialism/assimilation.

<sup>30</sup> This includes the education and perpetuation of sacred and ceremonial knowledge; however, these topics are reserved primarily to internal Indigenous contexts and are not discussed herein.

<sup>31</sup> Native students who reside in the urban centres predominantly attend schools that are under-funded. Similarly, reserve and Northern schools tend to be lacking in resources such as computers and internet, the most common method for self-directed learning in the modern day.

<sup>32</sup> Although this is an important aspect of changing education for Native students, we have chosen to focus this article on the internal changes that can be brought about through coalition-building. A suggested external activism topic

would be the work of improving teacher education programs, parent/community-school collaborations, and provincial curricula.

<sup>33</sup> As apposed to out-of-the-box thinking.

<sup>34</sup> It is not uncommon for schools where Native students attend to be old, run-down buildings or portables. This can be seen on-reserve as well as in city centres, low-income areas of Canada where more than 70 per cent of identifying Aboriginal people live (Statistics Canada, 2003).

<sup>35</sup> Although this is becoming rarer, INAC, in an attempt to get more Aboriginal teachers working in reserve schools, allowed Native people with no teaching degrees or certification to attend short training programs and work as classroom teachers. These teachers were not registered as certified teachers with the provincial governing bodies, nor were they allowed to work off-reserve. One negative that has occurred in the regained operation by Native government is that a Band can independently create hiring practices. As such, some are still allowing untrained Native people to work in the school simply to have Native educators. As many Northern and remote communities have limited opportunities for teacher education programs close by, the choice is often non-Native or Native uncertified.

<sup>36</sup> Taken from the creation stories of many Indigenous peoples, the North American continent is often referred to as Turtle Island, in honour of the great sea turtle which held the land on his back.

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*Sabrina Redwing Saunders* is a doctoral candidate in the Educational Administration stream in Theory & Policy Studies from OISE-UT. An elementary and university instructor, her research focus has been in First Nations school improvement, policy, and praxis. She has recently published a co-authored chapter with John Tippeconnic III on Native American educational policy in *Multicultural Education Policies in Canada and the United States: Symbol and Substance*.

*Susan M. Hill* is a Haudenosaunee citizen and resident of Ohswe:ken (Six Nations/Grand River Territory). She holds a PhD in Native Studies from Trent University and is an Assistant Professor of Indigenous Studies and Contemporary Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University, Brantford. Her research focuses on Haudenosaunee history and land tenure, Native education history, and Indigenous Knowledge.