

## **Session and Paper Summaries**

### **American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting**

**Denver, Colorado**

**April 30 – May 4, 2010**

Ray Barnhardt, Chair

Session title: Cross-institutional Collaborations in Indigenous Education

Abstract: The session will examine various models of cross-institutional collaboration that have been implemented in support of undergraduate and graduate research programs serving indigenous students and communities across the U.S. and beyond. Examples will be drawn from experiences of institutions serving American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Canadian First Nations, as well as indigenous peoples in the Circumpolar North and South Pacific regions. The formation of an International Indigenous Graduate Education Alliance under the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium will also be discussed.

1. Objectives of the session:

To promote increased participation of indigenous peoples in educational research efforts

To encourage indigenous serving institutions to be proactive in the support of joint research programs with indigenous peoples

To explore models of cross-institutional partnerships in support of indigenous research programs

2. Overview of the presentation: The session will examine the features of existing cross-institutional collaborations aimed at increasing the participation of indigenous students and communities in joint research endeavors.

3. Scholarly or scientific significance: Indigenous epistemologies provide important insights into human behavior that are of benefit in all aspects of educational research. The session will address the scholarly contributions being made by indigenous researchers participating in cross-institutional partnerships.

4. Structure of the session: The session will consist of a series and presentations and discussions by faculty and students associated with existing cross-institutional initiatives promoting indigenous participation in research.

## Presentation Summaries

### **1. Cross-Institutional Collaboration in Indigenous Education: The Alaska Experience**

Ray Barnhardt, The University of Alaska Fairbanks

Actions taken by indigenous peoples over the past twenty years have begun to explicate indigenous knowledge systems and ways of knowing in ways that demonstrate their inherent validity and adaptability as complex knowledge systems with a logic and coherence of their own. As this shift evolves, it is not only indigenous people who are the beneficiaries, because the issues that are being addressed are of equal significance in non-indigenous contexts. Many of the problems that are manifested under conditions of marginalization have gravitated from the periphery to the center of industrial societies, so the new insights that are emerging from indigenous societies are of equal benefit to the broader community.

The aspirations of indigenous peoples extend beyond serving in a passive or advisory role in response to someone else's policy or research agenda - they include shaping the terms of that agenda and serving as active participants in its implementation. One of the most persistent constraints in fulfilling those aspirations is for indigenous peoples to be recognized as having the qualifications and expertise to be valued partners in the research and policy-making process. The strategy to overcome those constraints in Alaska has focused on the preparation of indigenous scholars who have a high level of research and policy expertise and an in-depth understanding of the dynamics at the interface between indigenous knowledge systems and western institutions.

With numerous research initiatives currently in various stages of development and implementation in collaboration with other indigenous-serving institutions, there is an unprecedented window of opportunity to open new channels of communication between scientists, policy makers and indigenous communities, particularly as they relate to those research activities that are of the most consequence to indigenous peoples (e.g., effects of climate change, environmental degradation, contaminants and subsistence resources, health and nutrition, bio/cultural diversity, Arctic observation networks, natural resource management, economic development, resilience and adaptation, community viability, cultural sustainability, language and education).

To the extent that there are competing bodies of knowledge (indigenous and western) that have bearing on a comprehensive understanding of particular research initiatives associated with indigenous-related themes, we seek to offer opportunities for indigenous scholars to be embedded with on-going cross-national research initiatives to contribute to and learn from the research process. In addition to conducting research on the inner dynamics of indigenous knowledge systems, the indigenous scholars are also examining the interplay between indigenous and western knowledge systems, particularly as it relates to scientific processes of knowledge construction and utilization.

## **2. Cross-Institutional Collaboration in Indigenous Education: The Hawaii Experience**

Keiki Kawai'ae'a, University of Hawaii Hilo

The presentation will examine various models of cross-institutional collaboration that have been implemented in support of undergraduate and graduate research programs serving indigenous students and communities across Hawaii and beyond.

## **3. Cross-Institutional Collaboration in Indigenous Education: The Arizona Experience**

Perry Gilmore, The University of Arizona

This presentation will examine a range of cross-institutional collaborative efforts designed to generate, promote and disseminate academic programs, projects, and research that foster indigenous knowledge and support indigenous scholars and scholarship. With special focus on language and culture revitalization and community engagement, the indigenous education activities explored and described in this paper interrupt and transform the all too prominent "us studying them" hierarchical arrangements seen historically in much of the existing literature and research.

Widespread global grass roots research and development of indigenous communities in both anthropology and education have generated valuable new knowledge and introduced a dedicated population of emerging indigenous scholars into the academy. Activities are described that document recognition of, and deliberate resistance to, established "grand narratives" and mainstream academic texts that frequently misrepresent, misinterpret and stereotype indigenous populations. Models are explored that show how Indigenous graduate students have adopted successful and creative ways to use counter narratives and other forms of expression that (1) more accurately present indigenous knowledge, epistemologies and worldviews; and (2) reflect presentations of self (both in style and content) more consistent with individual and community identities. The strategies described affirm subaltern knowledge, create "free spaces" for authentic voices, provide access to academic power in higher education, and expand a scholarly discourse across international indigenous populations. Indigenous counter narratives reassert cultural ties; challenge existing power arrangements; and potentially transform the academic environments where they are implemented.

Scattered across the continents there are innovative and successful academic spaces dedicated to fostering indigenous education and mentoring indigenous scholars. These sites have small but growing populations of indigenous graduate students committed to conducting research in indigenous language and culture revitalization and indigenous education program development. Many of these programs have followed the work of the others and have, as a result of their similar goals and overlapping research agendas, collaborated on various projects.

This presentation will highlight some of the collaborations engaged in by graduate students at the University of Arizona and explore their effects. Specific examples of

international collaborations will be described which include, for example, participation of graduate cohorts from Arizona, Hawaii, Alaska and New Zealand in a series of international courses delivered via live video. Several of the participants have also conducted visiting stints at each others' institutions, presented their research together at conferences, and joined the same professional associations and special interest groups, thus creating a critical mass, new presence, voice and visibility in these various venues. One central example was the creation of a special Committee on Indigenous Education in the Council on Anthropology and Education (CAE). This committee has served as a platform for shared research and scholarly exchanges and marked a symbolic space in the Anthropology community. The infusion of this new community of indigenous scholars into the academy generates a challenging era of critical exploration and redefinition of how research in indigenous education gets done and how it is engaged in community, university, and disciplinary needs and goals. Ethical, methodological and epistemological questions and implications will be considered.

#### **4. An Intergenerational Initiative for Indigenous Undergraduate Students' Transitioning to Graduate School in Canada**

Jo-ann Archibald, University of British Columbia

Michelle Pidgeon, Simon Fraser University

While educational participation and completion (K-20) of Aboriginal peoples has been slowly increasing in Canada, a significant national disparity exists in university attainment, particularly at the graduate level (Statistics Canada, 2003a, 2003b). Statistics Canada data of Aboriginal post-secondary participation notes that no more than 3%, reflects the Aboriginal graduate student population in Canada. Despite these low national graduate student numbers, the number of Indigenous students attending magisterial and doctoral programs at universities in British Columbia is growing. The Aboriginal Transitions: Undergraduate to Graduate (AT:U2G) research project sought to examine Aboriginal undergraduate students' transition into graduate education. This project included learning from initiatives such as the Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) a province-wide peer support and mentoring initiative and learning from the perspectives and transition experiences of Aboriginal undergraduate and graduate students. .

##### Research Questions

1. What factors facilitate and hinder Aboriginal undergraduates' access and admission to graduate programs?
2. How can the facilitating factors be strengthened and the hindering factors mitigated?
3. What are the critical components (e.g. governance structures, human and financial resources, communications structures, institutional proximity, values, culture and Indigenous knowledge, etc.) that would comprise a successful transition framework for Aboriginal learners?

In British Columbia, six universities and SAGE worked cooperatively on the AT:U2G initiative. This paper focuses on the cross-institutional collaborations that occurred during this study, as well as presenting the findings of the study.

### Theory & Methodology

A wholistic (circle) Indigenous Knowledge framework informed all aspects of the research project. The emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physical realms of learning were considered along with relationships among the individual student, her/his family, and community. Structural, social and cultural factors associated with individual/group aspirations, intentions, and actions completed the wholistic analysis. Kirkness and Barnhardt's (1991) 4Rs of respect, relevance, responsibility, and reciprocity provided an additional framework that complimented the wholistic Indigenous circle.

A mixed-methods approach included: an extensive literature review, on-line student surveys, focus groups, individual interviews, an environmental scan of graduate programs and transitional initiatives, and a review of post-secondary student data.

### Findings

The following major helpful and hindering themes emerged from the data: mentoring and supportive relationships make a difference; taking individual responsibility to plan and prepare for graduate school makes a difference; people make institutions user and Aboriginal friendly and relevant; depersonalized and colonial institutional barriers still exist; navigating different learning expectations in graduate studies is challenging; navigating racism is a critical challenge; working with and providing communications about university student services are important; and sharing Aboriginal knowledge and Aboriginal methodology for graduate education is necessary.

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