Navigating Two Worlds: Paths to Indigenous Career Success

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About Indspire

Indspire is an Indigenous national registered charity that invests in the education of Indigenous people for the long-term benefit of these individuals, their families and communities, and Canada. With the support of its funding partners, Indspire disburses financial awards, delivers programs, and shares resources with the goal of improving educational outcomes for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis students. Through Indspire's education offerings, we provide resources to students, educators, communities, and other stakeholders who are committed to improving success for Indigenous youth. In 2020-2021, Indspire awarded over $20 million through 6,245 bursaries and scholarships to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth, making it the largest funder of Indigenous post-secondary education outside the federal government.

About Research Knowledge Nest

The Indspire *Research Knowledge Nest* is the first Indigenous research program of its kind in Canada. With data analysis skills rapidly becoming critical to economic success, the *Research Nest* is poised to seize this exciting opportunity to foster Indigenous engagement and leadership in quantitative research and data science roles. The program will be guided by an Advisory Committee of researchers, leaders, and key stakeholders who will provide direction and input on the development of this important initiative.

Founding Supporters

Introduction

Purpose

Each year, Indspire supports thousands of Indigenous students with reaching their educational goals. A strong relationship exists between educational attainment and career success. Therefore, understanding education as an integral part of career transition allows for the creation of appropriate supports. With these supports, more students can be well prepared to successfully transition into their careers of choice. Through inspiring Indigenous education and achievement, Indspire can positively influence these students' socioeconomic outcomes. To support them in this journey, Indspire is interested in understanding Indigenous student experiences in achieving career aspirations and to identify what supports they require for success in the school-to-work transition. This helps identify areas to strengthen for Indspire's Rivers to Success (R2S) Indigenous Mentorship program, as well as for other organizations looking to provide relevant support for Indigenous career success.

Indspire invests in educational achievement to support the long-term benefit of Indigenous people, their communities, and Canada. The negative impacts of colonization have a direct relation to the overrepresentation of Indigenous people experiencing poverty and unemployment (MacKinnon, 2015). With the growing number of Indigenous students entering post-secondary education and the workforce, it is a crucial time to ensure there is support for achieving their full potential (MacKinnon, 2015). Indigenous students will provide an increasingly significant source of labour that helps enrich Canada and work towards a path to reconciliation. This is important for closing existing socioeconomic gaps and contributing to a more equitable society where both Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews are valued in education and the workplace.

Method

This literature review examines research related to the experiences of the school-to-work transition for Indigenous students.[1] To identify the challenges faced during the school-to-work transition, the experiences of Indigenous students within Western education and employment systems are explored. This provides a foundation for understanding and offers reflections for appropriately supporting Indigenous students in the school-to-work transition, with a focus of building on individual strengths. With the specific emphasis on Indigenous student experiences during the school-to-work transition, it is important to acknowledge that there are additional factors beyond the scope of this review that are also important for success. This includes

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[1] Online resources are drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, Indigenous-led community organizations, Indigenous scholars, and the invaluable experiences shared by community members.

addressing the substantial systemic barriers to attending post-secondary education and sustaining employment for Indigenous people in Canada.

Through this process, themes and sub-themes are identified and discussed in this review. These include:

1. Challenges Faced: Challenges experienced by Indigenous students while achieving career aspirations. Sub-themes cover cultural isolation, power imbalance, legacy of trauma, and navigating two worlds.
2. Indigenous Strengths: Finding a path to educational and career success through Indigenous strengths. Sub-themes involve cultural integrity, connection and relationships, and a wholistic approach.
3. Supporting Success: Approaches to supporting Indigenous students in the school-to-work transition. Sub-themes are culturally responsive, strength-based, encouraging mentorship, and career development.

Literature Review

Challenges Faced

The challenges Indigenous students experience in achieving their educational and career goals are central to understanding how to appropriately support them in the school-to-work transition. Adequate support must actively acknowledge and consider the history of colonization and its relationship to the current existing socioeconomic conditions of Indigenous people. Sub-themes for challenges faced by Indigenous learners include cultural isolation, power imbalance, legacy of trauma, and navigating two worlds. These sub-themes are explored with a focus on educational experiences and how these challenges are carried forth into the workplace. This is significant because these barriers impact the ability for Indigenous people to find suitable work and affects their retention in employment.

Cultural Isolation

It is important to recognize how educational institutions have been historically used as a primary means to colonize and assimilate Indigenous people in Canada. This continued legacy and the combination of racism, structural barriers, and cultural isolation have frequently made educational institutions unfavorable and unwelcoming spaces for Indigenous students pursuing their career aspirations (Brigham & Taylor, 2006). This continues in education through the centring of Western knowledges in curriculum and the promotion of dominant values that extend into many workplaces they enter. Students in Hare and Pidgeon's (2011) study found difficulty relating to mainstream curriculum that mainly disregards Indigenous perspectives, worldviews, and histories. Shankar and Khalema's (2020) research also discusses racism as an ongoing experience and found Indigenous students reported they felt socially and culturally isolated, and that Indigenous people were misrepresented or excluded from the curriculum. When these perspectives are ignored within an educational system that acts as a prerequisite for obtaining employment, it becomes a greater challenge to create the needed change in workplaces to support Indigenous success. It is important for employers to understand the work that needs to be done to prepare workplaces to appropriately receive Indigenous employees.

Training models which are labour market-focused often present negative issues for Indigenous graduates. These models tend to disregard the harmful impacts of colonization and the sustained colonial violence towards Indigenous peoples within institutions that perpetuate discrimination and disregard Indigenous perspectives in curriculum. This limits Indigenous success because it neglects the importance of healing, cultural identity, and acknowledging and responding to the negative impacts of structural racism. The effects of cultural isolation, colonization, and racism create a deep emotional burden that is increased for Indigenous populations compared to non-Indigenous populations pursuing career goals (MacKinnon, 2015). This has a profound impact on students working toward their career goals, as well as when they

look for and find work in culturally isolating workplaces. Continued experiences of racism and discrimination due to inherent or learned bias towards Indigenous people in the workplace reinforces barriers for Indigenous people looking to secure and maintain employment. Continuing to disregard these experiences and applying mainstream approaches to education and training will provide limited change in labour outcomes to communities with unique worldviews and complex needs (MacKinnon, 2015). The ability to reclaim culture is an important aspect for wellbeing and enhancing socioeconomic outcomes for Indigenous people who have been taught they are less than in Western society (MacKinnon, 2015).

Power Imbalance

Experiences of exclusion and oppression have a direct impact on Indigenous people's self-confidence, mental health, and wellbeing. This can act as a considerable barrier to achieving success in both education and employment (NCCAH, 2017). Indigenous students experienced multiple forms of racism while working towards their career aspirations. Wallace's (2019) study examines the experiences of First Nations students who shared that racism was the predominant challenge they experienced transitioning from high school to post-secondary education, and then into the workforce. Each student told a story of experiencing discrimination during multiple stages of their lives, and forms of racism ranged from direct slurs to ill-treatment (Wallace, 2019). Hare and Pidgeon's (2011) study of Indigenous youths' reflections also share that they faced experiences of racism at school on a regular basis from students and teachers. This involved verbal and psychological abuse, as well as attitudes of low expectations for Indigenous students. Bruce and Marlin (2012) discuss studies related to employer perceptions that have found historical stereotypes and assumptions have influenced their views of Indigenous employees. This is a persistent barrier to attaining employment and is displayed through biased recruitment processes, unequal income/working conditions, and being unfairly stereotyped (NCCAH, 2017).

These harmful attitudes contribute to a lack of understanding and policies that limit opportunities for Indigenous people pursuing education and employment (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). Many employers have not established Indigenous-inclusive policies and hiring practices to address issues that are important for promoting cultural awareness and equitable access (Bruce & Marlin, 2012). This also becomes an issue of addressing inherent or learned bias and educating employees about the continued colonial violence towards Indigenous peoples. Racial discrimination also came up in Brigham and Taylor's (2006) study as an issue in the workplace; employers often revealed having low or no expectations of Indigenous youth. Often, Indigenous employees are thought of as being less educated, experienced, and worthy of the position. The study by Lai et al. (2018) finds that healthcare workplaces which contain encounters of racism and lack of respect for culture, led to burnout experienced by Indigenous employees. This means that creating a culturally safe environment is an important factor for increasing retention of Indigenous employees who continue to face these challenges (Lai et al., 2018). To

create needed change, employers must address the reality that schools and workplaces have not been safe places for Indigenous people who experience racism and violence.

Prevalent experiences of discrimination toward Indigenous youth varied to include both individual (beliefs, attitudes, assumptions) and structural forms (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). In Wallace's (2019) research, discrimination is also experienced through the treatment of their families, children, and community members. In the literature, racism is discussed as a social injustice that is deeply embedded in assumptions based on social value and is frequently used to justify disparities (Wallace, 2019). This shapes public discourse and institutional policies that contribute to social exclusion and racism towards Indigenous people. Structural racism is expressed as a racialized social system arising from power of the dominant group, and is reinforced through laws, policies, and access to resources that disadvantage racialized groups. In Canada this includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. Two examples of this are the laws of the Indian Act and the establishment of the Indian Residential School system by the Canadian government (Wallace, 2019). The effects of these experiences continue to have a negative impact on Indigenous people seeking employment and a life free from discrimination. This results in significant education and employment disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Legacy of Trauma

The history of colonial violence and its legacy have left Indigenous people to continually experience generations of trauma and an imbalance of power. Students in Wallace's (2019) study share their stories of intergenerational trauma, having family members who were negatively impacted by the Residential School system, and how this trauma has been passed on. Feelings of self-doubt were commonly discussed, along with stories of those who told them they could not achieve their goals. Teachers and other authority figures who did not support them created a negative impact on their decision-making regarding post-secondary education, work placements, and living arrangements (Wallace, 2019). Lower enrollment and completion rates in post-secondary education have also been associated with intergenerational trauma and the negative impacts of Residential Schools (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, 2015). This legacy of physical, emotional, cultural, and sexual abuse experienced in Residential Schools has led many Indigenous people to feel anger and a lack of power toward educational institutions (Shankar & Khalema, 2020). This may also contribute to reduced confidence during interviews or networking opportunities that could lead to securing employment.

The legacy of colonization and trauma presents itself in multiple ways that impact students' social and economic conditions. Participants in Wallace's (2019) research identify that location and family dynamics presented challenges for First Nations students achieving their career aspirations. They wanted to live in a healthy environment to raise their children and have space to live away from overcrowded housing. They also wanted to stay within their communities but left due to the negative behaviour of people around them, and to find more opportunities for

work and home life (Wallace, 2019). Shankar and Khalema (2020) discuss financial barriers as a related challenge, which particularly affect those from lower socioeconomic statuses. The sharp rise in tuition fees and family responsibilities contributes to increasing financial constraints. Additionally, students who live further away from post-secondary institutions face an increased cost to attend (Shankar & Khalema, 2020). Leaving support systems means that Indigenous students may have to work more than non-Indigenous students. This can limit their ability to achieve higher grades and obtain support for navigation through their career transition process. These types of barriers related to the legacy of trauma are significant because they impact a student's ability to reach their educational and career goals for a more successful future.

Navigating Two Worlds

Indigenous students expressed the need to learn to navigate in two worlds, referring to the contrast between Indigenous and Western worldviews and spaces (CHiXapkaid et al., 2011). Indigenous youth experienced intersectional barriers based on their race, ability, location, and economic status that made navigating the school-to-work transition more challenging (Brigham & Taylor, 2006). Central elements for success included giving back to their communities and building on their connections to family, community, and land (CHiXapkaid et al., 2011). Bruce and Marlin (2012) also examine research where Indigenous youth reported that they would like to find work that allows them to stay in their home communities, provide them the ability to give back, and strengthen their culture. Careers the youth associated this with were in public service areas such as education, health, and policing. More traditional roles included herbal medicine, hunting, trapping, and Indigenous art (Bruce & Marlin, 2012).

Students in Wallace's (2019) study also discussed their career goals in terms of wanting to plan for their future and their children, learning to "walk in both worlds confidently". They spoke about being young parents and having various ideas for careers but not knowing where to begin. Concerns were shared around how they would be financially independent and afford to achieve their career aspirations. They expressed feelings of uncertainty about life ahead, the need to upgrade their skills, and the need to have access to appropriate supports in their transition to the workforce. They also wanted to make a positive contribution to their communities and believed that change would come through leading by example and guiding the children (Wallace, 2019). It would be valuable to increase partnerships for career development and employment training within Indigenous communities to help reduce barriers. Given the complex and unique experiences of Indigenous people, alternative approaches are needed to appropriately address these challenges while working towards empowerment.

Indigenous Strengths

Indigenous students found a path to educational and career success through reclaiming Indigenous sources of strengths that live within their cultural knowledge and practices. Studies of student experiences reveal how they used these strengths to successfully achieve their educational and career goals. Providing appropriate support in the school-to-work transition period involves learning how to restore, nurture, and build on existing cultural strengths. This is an integral factor in appropriately supporting Indigenous students reach their career goals – keeping in mind that Indigenous communities must identify the solutions that best fit their particular context and needs. Sub-themes for Indigenous strengths include cultural integrity, connection and relationships, and a wholistic approach. These sub-themes are explored as examples that focus on using Indigenous sources of strength to overcome challenges faced in Western society while working to achieve career goals.

Cultural Integrity

The foundation of cultural integrity and affirmation of Indigenous identity includes Indigenous knowledge systems that emerge from languages, practices, values, and beliefs, which involve the local and specific knowledge passed on to the community (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). This works to combat cultural isolation and loss experienced through colonization, and helps Indigenous youth reclaim a sense of purpose, empowerment, and pride in cultural knowledge and practices. Youth in Hare and Pidgeon's (2011) study share that having encouraging mentors, family, and connecting with cultural traditions and practices have a positive impact. Indigenous knowledge also assisted them with finding a "good path," which honors the fundamental Anishinaabe value of leading a healthy life, known as "bimaadiziwi" (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). This means that employment through an Indigenous lens includes looking at individual strengths, gifts, and the individual's roles and responsibilities to family and community. Building on strengths of Indigenous identity, culture, and community is a positive first step for success. This is important for offering guidance on career paths and encouraging traditional knowledge to be passed on with future generations in mind.

Research by Deyhle (1995) shows that connections with family and community are significant for Navajo youths' success in school. The study indicates that youth who embraced their culture and retained strong relationships with their home community were able to find success within Western education. The centre of their choice to stay in school was their cultural integrity, defined as the refusal to undertake assimilation while using culture, traditions, and community as grounds for strength (Deyhle, 1995). To disrupt colonial myths related to the Indigenous warrior, Alfred (2005) brings forward a culturally rooted and modern illustration of the "new warrior". This definition includes one who is deeply dedicated to the revival and restoration of Indigenous culture through reconnecting with sources of strength such as traditional lands, languages, spirituality, culture, and community (Alfred, 2005). Restoring healthy communities means that Indigenous people need to be supported in reclaiming cultural identity, place, and

wellbeing. This offers a meaningful area for supporting the school-to-work transition through building on cultural strengths and finding a sense of purpose.

Connection & Relationships

Encouraging the importance of connections and relationships can provide greater assistance for Indigenous students to achieve their career goals and find meaningful work. Hare and Pidgeon (2011) provide reflections on the Indigenous "new warrior" metaphor suggested by Alfred to explain how youth handled challenges in their education. Youth commonly described issues of racism and how it has shaped their life experiences and choices. They spoke about the ways they used their Indigenous sources of strength to help them through these challenges, using their relationships with family, friends, and community to make decisions involving the type of education that worked best for them, including alternative schooling (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). Ensuring that these connections are developed and maintained is an effective approach to support Indigenous students in the school-to-work transition while promoting their well-being.

Building healthy connections and relationships are central to achieving Indigenous career success. Lenny's (2019) study focuses on the experiences of Indigenous women who have found success in their career decision-making. The narratives of four women revealed that they found success through confidence and learning to trust their intuition. To support "trusting intuition", six sub-categories were identified which included having healthy relationships, maintaining a balanced lifestyle, participating in education, practicing lived engagement, having access to financial resources, and encountering mentors. Finding success involved supportive partners and peers, encouragement from teachers and mentors, community cultural involvement, and learning about new careers and opportunities (Lenny, 2019). These relationships promote inspiration to develop career goals, and provide the encouragement and support needed to reach those goals using a more wholistic lens.

Wholistic Approach

Approaches that incorporate wholistic views are more appropriate for Indigenous people. CHiXapkaid et al. (2011) examine what educational success looks like for Indigenous students and the factors that contribute to achieving success. This involves using a wholistic approach that recognizes unique gifts and addresses the mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects of wellness. It also means including a culturally responsive curriculum, caring Indigenous role models, a variety of post-secondary institution supports (e.g., financial), and support from family and community (CHiXapkaid et al., 2011). Maintaining a balanced lifestyle was also a theme that was prevalent throughout Lenny's (2019) study, which involved addressing physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional needs. Absolon (2010) presents an Indigenous Wholistic theory that uses the medicine wheel as a tool for understanding the interconnections of all our relations and that corresponding influence on the whole self. Using a wholistic perspective becomes an important approach for providing a culturally appropriate response to support Indigenous students in the school-to-work transition.

This theory is significant because it encompasses Indigenous concepts such as mino-bimaadiziwin in Anishnaabemowin and mino-pimatisiwin in Cree, both of which mean the active process of seeking to "live the good life". This approach offers awareness of self and works to achieve the harmony and balance needed to follow a good path (Absolon, 2010). The Rainbow Schools document on transition supports for Indigenous youth organizes common transition issues into four visuals representing the medicine wheel (Dokis-Ranney, 2010). It focuses on supporting the spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental needs to address these challenges. For example, students who feel culturally isolated could benefit through connecting with Elders to guide the development of their identity (spiritual), a space where Indigenous students can connect (physical), ensuring there is support with a kind and caring adult (emotional), and including Indigenous perspectives in curriculum (mental) (Dokis-Ranney, 2010). A wholistic approach looks at support from all these angles and can be used in multiple ways for various challenges students experience while achieving educational and career goals.

Supporting Success

All approaches to supporting Indigenous success in the school-to-work transition need to consider challenges that Indigenous students face along with the value of Indigenous strengths. Incorporating an understanding of these challenges and strengths offers insight and reflections for appropriately supporting Indigenous career success. Supporting more students to achieve success means investing in programming that is wholistic and provides early support throughout the educational journey to encourage career development. Sub-themes for supporting success involve approaches that are culturally responsive, strength-based, encourage mentorship, and career development. The sub-themes culturally responsive and strength-based are explored to describe important approaches needed to appropriately support Indigenous students. With these approaches in mind, the sub-themes encouraging mentorship and career development are brought forward as programs and supports that contribute to success in the school-to-work transition.

Culturally Responsive

To improve Indigenous youths' success in completing their education and attaining meaningful work, it is recommended to include a more culturally responsive curriculum. It is important to look at root causes and address the institutional issues that contribute to maintaining the status quo and producing the same results. Hare and Pidgeon (2011) suggest it is important for educators to learn about Indigenous education and ways to create space for Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. This integrated approach can be useful for the benefit of all learners and educators (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). Brigham and Taylor (2006) also call for more culturally relevant learning through curriculum, Indigenous languages, and cross-cultural training. These recommendations support the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action numbers 57 and 62. These call for the training and

professional development of public servants via a curriculum that is more inclusive and culturally responsive. It states to provide education to students and public servants on the history of Indigenous people, including Residential Schools, treaties and rights, and Indigenous law (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, 2015). This allows workplaces to become more culturally responsive and aware of the needs of Indigenous people seeking work, which can in turn promote inclusion and reduce feelings of cultural isolation.

It is important that these environments change to incorporate increased understanding and support. To address experiences of discrimination in education and the workplace, Wallace (2019) suggests skills-based training for anti-racism, intercultural competency, conflict resolution, and human rights. This helps people see how different groups experience racism and how it functions at the institutional level through policies and procedures that privilege and disadvantage certain groups. This can encourage conversations and mobilize change to happen through the creation of new policies and more inclusive environments for Indigenous people. Lenny (2019) also suggests anti-discrimination training as an approach to increase educational opportunities for Indigenous youth; it can reduce the experience of racism from educational institutions, teachers, and students. Training that teaches how to recognize microaggressions and ways to combat them can help reduce the harmful experiences Indigenous students often face. Learning about the ongoing impact of colonialism and Residential Schools creates an increased understanding of the need for more inclusive policies and practices (Lenny, 2019). Bruce and Marlin (2012) discuss creating employment programs and opportunities that are culturally relevant for Indigenous communities as a useful approach. Taking early steps to understand the needs of Indigenous people at the beginning of educational and employment processes allows for improved assistance from educators and employers to successfully support their school-to-work transition.

Strength-Based

Building on the strengths of students and using a critical perspective creates a culturally relevant approach that utilizes a wholistic view for the school-to-work transition. CHiXapkaid et al. (2011) found that using a strength-based approach which builds on students' gifts rather than a deficit-based approach which expects them to change was more beneficial for Indigenous students in achieving success in their education. Recognizing the factors that support the strengths of Indigenous youth helps empower them to learn and succeed in their own ways. This combats the deficit approach which depicts what success looks like from a Western perspective (CHiXapkaid et al., 2011). This approach should be balanced with the reality of students' lived experiences and an acknowledgement of the challenges that have been previously discussed. Shankar and Khalema (2020) suggest using postcolonial and critical race theory (CRT) perspectives for decolonizing pedagogy and addressing how Indigenous students feel culturally and socially isolated from mainstream curriculum and society. From a CRT perspective, racism has come to be so deeply embedded in societies' thoughts and systems that it is often unseen (MacKinnon, 2015). Failing to actively acknowledge this allows society to

ignore the impacts of colonization and limits the fundamental change needed to improve socioeconomic conditions for Indigenous people (MacKinnon, 2015).

Achieving true reconciliation needs to be combined with an anti-racism lens that allows people to look beyond individual factors. This lens drives society to consider how systemic barriers such as policies, practices, procedures, and biases negatively impact Indigenous people. Working through a culturally competent framework, such as critical race theory (CRT), Lee (2018) suggests educators can positively impact graduation rates and employment success for marginalized populations. CRT is an approach that challenges traditional Western social constructs and considers the intersection of race and identity, and how this affects the experiences of marginalized groups. This promotes critical self-reflection while fostering a greater understanding and awareness of racialized experiences in education and society. From this framework there is a focus on providing extra support for these groups through academic guidance, resources, planning for post-graduation, and work placements (Lee, 2018). Additionally, Bruce and Marlin (2012) suggest it would be helpful to increase financial support for students in post-secondary studies and expand training opportunities for employment. Employers who use this framework will have a greater understanding of Indigenous communities and how experiences of oppression shape their daily lives. This inspires critical thought regarding how to appropriately support Indigenous employees and is important for creating policies that address current labour inequities.

Encouraging Mentorship

A common approach discussed to support the school-to-work transition for Indigenous students includes mentorship. To further support Indigenous youth with their career decisions, Lenny (2019) suggests providing mentorship opportunities to show visible Indigenous leadership and encouragement for students to explore future possibilities. The importance of these relationships to participants was more about having connection and encouragement rather than about giving advice. To create a larger impact, mentorship efforts should begin in high school and post-secondary to inspire growth and provide opportunities for Indigenous students to reach their career aspirations (Lenny, 2019). Bruce and Marlin (2012) also mention creating and maintaining strong programs for mentorship and role models, as the lack of these supports has been a source of frustration for Indigenous youth in the workplace. Encouraging more Indigenous mentors and role models to take active roles in mentorship is valuable for leading Indigenous students on paths to career success.

Programs designed for Indigenous youth need to be Indigenous-led to provide appropriate cultural support and understanding of community needs. Wallace (2019) suggests that a life skills program which incorporates Indigenous worldviews could be beneficial for Indigenous youth. This can be used as an opportunity for sharing and healing from experiences of intergenerational trauma and other forms of oppression. Traditional parenting courses could be another example that can provide a healthy opportunity to express love and affection (Wallace,

2019). Information on how to access mental health support and resources within communities and institutions is also mentioned by Lenny (2019) as an important factor for supporting success in school and finding employment. This supports the use of a wholistic approach that provides appropriate programs and support for Indigenous students in the school-to-work transition.

Career Development

Providing more transition programs and support through career counsellors and advisors was an important aspect Wallace (2019) discussed for contributing to success. This helps students understand different pathways to achieving their goals that may not be common knowledge. Lenny (2019) recommends that teachers and career counsellors can connect students to career opportunities through volunteer work, student placements, job shadowing, and networking with people in a variety of fields. Bruce and Marlin (2012) suggest that career counsellors would help students explore information on careers, pathways, and support plans to reach their career goals and receive relevant educational training. It is recommended to begin career development programs and opportunities for Indigenous students in grade seven and into post-secondary (Bruce & Marlin, 2012). Wallace (2019) also suggests beginning career exploration during middle school, where a career or guidance counsellor can work with an Indigenous liaison worker to provide support with this process in its early stages. This can help guide students through the development of a career plan and provide them with meaningful support to reach their goals while transitioning to the next steps on their journey.

Supporting career development is important for Indigenous career success and needs to be put into practice using multiple approaches. The Rainbow Schools resource document on supporting Indigenous students in their career transitions recommends including more inclusive career awareness days and opportunities for youth to meet Indigenous role models (Dokis-Ranney, 2010). This could include networking events that allow Indigenous students to connect with post-secondary institutions, mentors, and future employment opportunities. Goal setting and informing students about programs and support available, including financial assistance, are also beneficial practices. The Ontario Native Education Counselling Association offers best practices to support Indigenous students with these transitions, which involves establishing supports to obtain employment such as creating cover letters, resumes, and opportunities for interview skill practice (Hill-MacDonald, 2011). Other beneficial supports include volunteer resources, mentorship opportunities, placement info sessions, and financial planning workshops (Hill-MacDonald, 2011). Wallace (2019) also recommends that financial planning workshops would be useful for assisting Indigenous students with budgeting and savings plans, helping them to reach and accomplish their goals.

Summary of Themes

PATHS TO INDIGENOUS CAREER SUCCESS

SUPPORTS

Culturally Responsive
- Educate history of Indigenous people
- Anti-racism, intercultural competency

Strength-Based
- Approach to build on unique gifts
- Culturally competent approach

Encourage Mentorship
- Mentorship & role-model opportunities
- Indigenous-led programming

Career Development
- Career counsellors and advisors
- Transition support for employment

INDIGENOUS STRENGTHS

Cultural Integrity
- Embrace connection with culture
- Strength in culture and community

Connection & Relationships
- Family, friends, and community help
- Supportive and encouraging mentors

Wholistic Approach
- Recognize gifts and maintain balance
- Mental, spiritual, emotional, physical

CHALLENGES

Cultural Isolation
- Legacy of colonization
- Difficulty relating to dominant society

Power Imbalance
- Racism – individual and structural
- Power – access is limited

Legacy of Trauma
- Intergenerational trauma
- Impact of Residential Schools

Navigating Two Worlds
- Walking in both worlds confidently
- Giving back to communities

Conclusion

Summary

Indspire is committed to supporting Indigenous students for the long-term benefit of Indigenous people and communities. With this in mind, Indspire's Rivers to Success (R2S) Indigenous Mentorship program aims to provide greater support for students transitioning from school into their careers. In this review, an understanding of Indigenous student experiences achieving career aspirations and the supports they require for success in the school-to-work transition have been explored throughout the literature. Challenges that they experience include cultural isolation, power imbalance, legacy of trauma, and navigating two worlds. Success through Indigenous strengths included cultural integrity, connection and relationships, and using a wholistic approach. The approaches to support this success were culturally responsive and strength-based; they also encouraged mentorship and career development. These student perspectives can provide insight into students' experiences transitioning from school into the workforce, recognizing how educational institutions operate through a colonial lens. Educational venues are where students begin to learn about their career aspirations and are important areas for providing support in achieving these goals. With appropriate supports in place, Indigenous learners can find success in their chosen career paths and improve their socioeconomic conditions.

Further Research

Although employment and wage gaps have been identified between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, a limited field of research has been conducted on the experiences of racism toward Indigenous people in the workplace (Bruce & Marlin, 2012). It could be useful to conduct further research on the experiences of discrimination and how this power dynamic impacts the educational and career choices of Indigenous students. Understanding and addressing experiences of oppression is a key step towards providing more culturally responsive supports and reducing cultural isolation for Indigenous students. There is also limited literature on how Indigenous youth choose their career aspirations and whether the careers they transition into are related to their chosen fields of study. Further questions to consider include understanding what the career aspirations for Indigenous youth are as well as the ways they wish to positively give back to their communities. Do Indigenous students feel the need to participate in careers that contribute to moving their communities forward with future generations in mind? If so, how does this reciprocity factor into their decision-making process? What support do they need throughout that process – and are there additional services or resources that could help them with achieving their career goals? Working in partnership with others, we can make efforts to provide more culturally relevant support, increase understanding of Indigenous knowledges, and create more inclusive spaces for Indigenous students transitioning into their careers.

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