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Community Learning and University Policy: An Inner-City University Goes Back to School

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Abstract

For at least a decade now, the University of Winnipeg (U of W), an urban institution on Treaty One land in the heart of the Métis Nation, has challenged existing academic models and practices, and has incorporated strategies that address the social divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in order to more effectively serve the learning needs of its surrounding community. This article demonstrates how an inner-city university has used internal policies and programs to help support the self-determination of Indigenous peoples. Six community learning initiatives were recently evaluated for impact. This article will provide an overview of the positive outcomes of these learning initiatives on a community of underrepresented learners.

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Over the past 15 years, universities and colleges across Canada and the United States have responded to the need to modernize pedagogical approaches to their curricula by introducing community learning initiatives, which have taken the form of service learning courses for students (Moore, 2014; Prentice & Robinson, 2010), and an increased emphasis on community-engaged scholarship for faculty (Arendt & Westover, 2014; Nichols, Phipps, Gaetz, & Fisher, 2014;). The impetus for this movement in Canada was the establishment of the Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning (CACSL) in late 2004, which supported the expansion of these initiatives in Canadian post-secondary institutions (CACSL, 2015).

The University of Winnipeg (U of W) was at the forefront of these innovations over a decade ago. At the time, a 10-year provincial tuition freeze had little impact on the recruitment of low-income students, as only 10% of them came from high poverty neighbourhoods around the university. U of W's newly-recruited President was determined to address this reality, as he recognized that, in order to maintain its relevance as a modern inner-city university, it was essential to remove systemic barriers (academic, financial, social, and cultural) to post-secondary education for low-income students, and particularly to encourage Indigenous student participation by incorporating a comprehensive community learning initiative. Moreover, consistent with Indigenous cultures, community learning had to be a highly social process that involved families in supporting their children's learning. Thus, engaging with the idea of "community as a neighbour" (Moore, 2014), U of W reimagined its approach, profoundly changing its relationship to the community, by moving beyond service learning to actively partner with the surrounding community in order to make it easier for Indigenous people to access the resources and facilities on the campus. U of W had embarked on its own learning journey.

Since then, other Canadian universities have followed suit, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC, 2015) and so many other reports have pointed to the need for substantially broadening access to education for Indigenous students. In particular, these reports suggest that there is a need for a concerted effort to counter the dropout rate among Indigenous students at the Grade 9 level. In fact, according to the Centre for the Study of Living Standards, the educational parity that served to eliminate the employment rate and income gaps between Aboriginal peoples and the non-Aboriginal population by 2001 would have yielded an additional $160 billion in Canadian GDP between 2001 and 2017 (Sharpe, Arsenault, & Lapointe, 2007). Why deny this human potential? The role played by modern universities must evolve to include community-based goals. Indeed, a search of 65 university websites[1] across Canada also showed evidence of universities actively embracing the idea that learning should extend beyond the customary structures of in-class lectures. Many universities have established service learning and community outreach offices or centres that focus on building community partnerships for the purpose of providing services to Indigenous children and youth.

This article is a case study based on a series of evaluations of programs implemented as a result of U of W's internal policy transformation, which was established to provide innovative culturally-based

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[1] A research assistant conducted a brief survey of community learning initiatives at approximately two-thirds of Canadian universities.

learning opportunities to a local population that has been traditionally underrepresented in the university community, including a significant inner-city population of Indigenous people. The promising results of six program initiatives developed for a community of underrepresented learners will demonstrate the long-standing positive interactions between a university and the community it serves.

Background: Community Characteristics

Of particular relevance to U of W was the fact that its surrounding community was increasingly becoming more diverse as a result of the rapidly growing population of urban Aboriginal peoples, primarily First Nations and Metis, and new Canadians—the fastest growing populations in both the university's immediate neighbourhoods and Canada as a whole. Aboriginal people represent more than 11% of Winnipeg's population and account for 20.2% of inner-city residents. Similarly, new Canadians comprise almost a quarter of inner-city residents (City of Winnipeg, 2015a, 2015b). Despite the local cultural richness and diversity, these surrounding neighbourhoods are high-poverty areas that struggle with inadequate housing, unemployment, a relatively high level of crime and gang activity, as well as other social inequities. Moreover, Winnipeg is located in a province (Manitoba) that is frequently referred to as the child poverty capital of Canada, as 62% of First Nation children live below the poverty line compared to the non-Indigenous child poverty rate of 15% (Macdonald & Wilson, 2013) In this city, almost 70% of Indigenous children under 6 years of age are a part of families with incomes below the low-income cut-off (LICO) poverty line (Winnipeg Harvest, 2015). Not only do Indigenous youth face enormous economic disadvantages associated with poverty, but they also experience higher school dropout and pushout rates than children and youth in more affluent neighbourhoods. Recent statistical analyses in Manitoba indicated that high school completion rates in the poorest urban families (i.e., lowest income quintile) could be as low as 55.3% compared to 98.5% in the highest income quintile (Brownell et al., 2012). In Winnipeg, these are frequently Indigenous families who face numerous barriers in the educational system such as an absence of cultural content and high levels of distrust originating from the legacy of residential schools. Likewise, in Winnipeg, an even larger gap persists in university education completion rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people—12.3% versus 30.4% respectively (Hallett, 2006; Statistics Canada 2010, 2013a, 2013b)—thus resulting in the potential loss of economic and social contributions of a growing segment of the community. Families of Indigenous youth in high poverty areas can barely afford to fulfill basic needs like food and shelter, let alone post-secondary education for their children, despite the fact that, according to a 2010 Environics Aboriginal Peoples Survey, education is a top priority for urban Aboriginal families (Environics Institute, 2010). These challenges are profoundly significant because the number of Aboriginal youth under the age of 18 as a percentage of all Aboriginal people in Winnipeg is more than double that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts (35.4% and 17.2%, respectively) (Statistics Canada, 2013a, 2013b).

These persistent poverty-related barriers raise many questions, such as: how, as a matter of ethical responsibility, can the U of W be situated in a neighbourhood with significant social disparities and not consider the wider inclusion of the community, particularly the university's role in challenging the graduation gap? How could the university partner with its neighbours to improve high school graduation rates and to help increase engagement with the university and other forms of post-secondary education? For Indigenous youth, who have been traditionally underrepresented in post-secondary education, which methods of outreach would promote an understanding that the university belongs to them, and that they have the right to benefit from opportunities that higher education provides? In the process of

integrating community learning initiatives, how can U of W respect the community's autonomy in developing programs to support the increased participation of inner-city Indigenous youth in education (Axworthy, 2009)? Encouraging the participation of Indigenous youth in many culturally-based learning and educational opportunities would be one of many stepping stones to achieving cultural preservation and building resilient and involved communities in the inner city and other high poverty areas of Winnipeg. It would also substantially improve their chances of completing a high school and post-secondary education.

Internal Policy Framework: Transforming Policy into Programming

The community's reality was a catalyst for the university's innovative approach to addressing the question of what it means to implement relevant and respectful community learning initiatives. In order to renew the campus in these ways, several internal policies and programs were needed to generate mechanisms of change including:

Internal Policy #1: Community-Driven Learning Programs Led by Strong Indigenous Leadership

The hiring of Indigenous leaders and role models (for instance, an associate vice-president of Indigenous, Government and Community Affairs) with authentic relationships to the community and their ability to build on existing collaborative relationships with schools, community agencies, and families was essential to the university's mandate of generating positive changes in the community by way of after school, summer, and cultural programs. To achieve this particular aim, following a community consultation process, culturally-based programming emerged from a series of discussions that took place at a 2004 Aboriginal Education Working Group led by First Nations and Métis faculty, staff, and students. The working group's mandate was to examine barriers within the university itself. These discussions produced an Indigenous Education Strategy that extended beyond service learning to a community investment model that adopted a holistic approach to addressing the learning needs of Aboriginal members of the surrounding community. One example of the U of W's divergent approach is the free, culturally-based family programming, such as Pow Wow clubs and not-for-credit Indigenous language programs, which are not typically offered at most other universities.

As part of the university's community learning mandate, the introduction of an Innovative Learning Centre in 2006 presented an array of learning opportunities for community members, including an on-campus science program for Grade 5 and 6 students from inner-city schools, as well as a summer day camp. The mandate of the latter was to address summer learning loss experienced by students from high poverty neighbourhoods who would not otherwise have an opportunity to attend a summer day camp, and to help these students see themselves as high school and post-secondary graduates. In a further attempt to break down barriers to education, a Model School (a high school within a high school) provided students underrepresented in high school and post-secondary graduation rates an opportunity to attend U of W's Collegiate High School at no financial cost to their families, while also providing bursaries toward their post-secondary studies. Students who are invited to join the program substantially increase their chances of completing high school and pursuing post-secondary studies (Axworthy, 2009, 2013).

Similarly, in 2005, the Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre—a community centre located on the U of W campus—opened its doors, and is now open 6 days per week year-round. Led by First Nations management and staff, and guided by a Community Advisory Committee, the Centre offers free and open access to computers, after-school tutoring, educational and cultural programs, as well as community meeting spaces. The centre is a safe and friendly environment that encourages residents in the community to expand their knowledge and skills in cultural activities, such as beading, making crafts, the art of traditional Pow Wow dancing (grass, jingle dress, hoop, round dance, etc.), drumming, and Aboriginal language proficiency. The Global Welcome Centre was also established in 2008 to help support new Canadians with their learning needs, such as computer and language skills, tutoring, counselling, as well as providing any other required assistance in transitioning to a university environment (Axworthy, 2009, 2013). Annually, this Centre serves 350 to 400 registered clients representing 80 countries; it has recruited 75 to 100 volunteers; and its Bridge-to-Post-Secondary outreach program serves approximately 600 people in the community each year.

The President and Indigenous leadership within the university recognized that, in order to meet the needs of the community, their approach to community learning must be a highly social process that nurtures family relationships. Moreover, learning can be more effective if it is informal and experiential. The role of Elders is crucial for passing down cultural teachings to children and youth, and for promoting lifelong learning about oneself, as well as one's responsibility to family and community. In Indigenous communities, social relationships provide the foundation for learning about self-identity through cultural ceremonies and other traditions, but particularly ancestral language. It is alarming then that, according to the 2011 Aboriginal Population Profile, only 6.1% of the Aboriginal population in Winnipeg had knowledge of an Aboriginal language (Statistics Canada, 2013b). This may be significant with regard to children's school outcomes, as another study based on the Aboriginal People's Survey (APS), found that children aged 6 to 14 years who were supported to learn an Aboriginal language had improved school achievement (Guevremont & Kohen, 2012).

Internal Policy #2: Changing the Governance Model

To ensure the sustainability of these programs, in 2011, the University integrated community learning into its governance structure by having its Board of Regents approve a community learning policy that has a mandate to support youth from Indigenous and new Canadian families in order to increase high school and post-secondary graduation rates. To this end, U of W made community learning a matter of university policy by changing its governance structure to include an Indigenous advisory circle to guide its progress, and it established strong relationships with Indigenous Elders (Axworthy, 2013).

Internal Policy #3: Private Fundraising

In addition, following a commitment by the Province of Manitoba's Department of Education, a primarily private fundraising strategy referred to as the Opportunity Fund established bursaries and a tuition credit account towards post-secondary education for each student enrolled in the program. The overarching goal of these measures is to reduce the graduation gap (Axworthy, 2013). All three centers are funded privately; however, they also rely on resources from U of W in order to implement meaningful learning opportunities.

Evaluation Methods and Study Participants

In this article, the internal policy framework was based on interviews with key administrators and stakeholders, as well as secondary data sources (e.g., available internal university reports and funding documentation; the former President's speaking notes, etc.). In regard to programming, although U of W implemented a wide range of initiatives over the past decade, the impacts of six of these community learning programs (Appendix A) were recently evaluated, under the direction of one this article's authors (DeRiviere, 2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c;\ DeRiviere & Rhodes, 2014). These evaluations assessed a science program for elementary school children, summer day camps open to children ages 7 to 15, a high school for socioeconomically disadvantaged students, free culturally-based learning opportunities for families, a healthy teen relationships program, and a summer math camp.

In the early stages, an advisory committee that included Indigenous community leaders helped to set the direction and questions that the evaluation would need to address, how the evaluations would be used, as well as methods to be used. Each individual program's administrators and staff helped to answer questions about the program's story, its objectives, cultural values, and success indicators. As shown in Appendix A, most programs had been in place for at least two years, and all evaluations were conducted in 2014 and 2015. The University's Human Research Ethics Board (UHREB) approved the research.

As shown in Table 1, 940 individuals self-selected into a wide range of exercises throughout the evaluation process, including surveys, questionnaires that required short answers, forced-choice Likert scale statements, in-person or telephone interviews, and many other instruments. Participant groups included children ages 12 and under who participated in programs, such as Science Kids on Campus, Sacred Seven school presentations, family learning programs (e.g., Pow Wow Club), and as campers at Adventure Kids Summer Camp. Adolescents and older youths participated as junior and senior leaders at the Adventure Kids Summer Camp, Sacred Seven, and Math Camp programs, as well as the Model School high school program. The majority of participants were Indigenous children and youth; however, programs such as Science Kids and Adventure Kids also recruited children from new Canadian families, and specific data on ethnicity was either incomplete on the registration forms or impractical to capture. Interviews were also conducted with participants' parents and guardians, as well as adult program participants and volunteers in the family learning programs. Other evaluation participants included program staff and managers, instructors and volunteers in the Science Kids and Math Camp programs, as well as community school teachers, outreach workers, counsellors, and principals. Children and youth under age 18 required a parent or a legal guardian's consent to participate.

Quantitative instruments were mostly used for younger participants, as the objective was to assess their level of interest in, and enjoyment of, the program, as well as how much they felt they had learned from the experience. The advantage of quantitative data over qualitative data is that one can use comparatively larger samples, and such instruments are frequently standardized and simplistic so as not to be too daunting for young participants. For older youth and adults, the evaluations emphasized qualitative interviews, as the strength of this approach is its ability to capture the participants' experiences of the programs and clarify the causal pathways of outcomes.

Table 1. Evaluation Participation

Program stakeholder	Type of instrument	Innovative Learning Centre		
		Model School	Adventure Kids Camp	Science Kids on Campus
		N (%)	*N* (%)	*N* (%)
Children and youth program participants, under age 25	Questionnaires and Likert scale instruments	26 (76.9)	n/a	n/a
Children and youth program participants, under age 25	Survey instruments and other evaluative exercises: circle the word, friendship bracelet, and fill in the blanks	n/a	308 (76.3)	46
Youth, over age 18 (former students)	Qualitative interviews	4 (100.0)	n/a	n/a
Other adult program participants	Likert scale instrument	n/a	n/a	n/a
Program staff and faculty, volunteers, instructors, youth leaders, administrators	Qualitative interviews	6	43 (63.4)	9
Parents and guardians of participants and youth leaders	Qualitative interviews	18	73	2
Community schools: teachers, community outreach workers, counsellors, and principals	Qualitative interviews	n/a	17	3
Community schools: teachers and principals	Survey instrument	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total participation in the evaluations		**54**	**441**	**60**
Total program registrations and participation		42[a]	1,032 campers 45 youth leaders[b]	70 students[c]

Note. Percentage (%) of Indigenous participants in parentheses. The percentage of Indigenous students, school stakeholders, staff, and other family participants is unknown in some categories because we did not capture this data. However, it is estimated to be a high proportion.

[a] Student registrations for 2014 and 2015. The Model School high school has graduated 41 students since 2008.

[b] Summer of 2014 registrations and youth leader employment.

[c] 70 students participated in two sessions in 2013 and 2014; 110 students in 3 sessions in 2012 and 2013.

Table 1. Evaluation Participation (continued)

| Program stakeholder | Type of instrument | Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre | | |
| | | Sacred Seven | Family Learning | Math Camp |
		$N(\%)$	$N(\%)$	$N(\%)$
Children and youth program participants, under age 25	Questionnaires and Likert scale instruments	36 (100.0)	n/a	10 (100.0)
Children and youth program participants, under age 25	Survey instruments and other evaluative exercises: circle the word, friendship bracelet, and fill in the blanks	222	27 (100.0)	n/a
Youth, over age 18 (former students)	Qualitative interviews	n/a	n/a	n/a
Other adult program participants	Likert scale instrument	n/a	27 (92.6)	n/a
Program staff and faculty, volunteers, instructors, youth leaders, administrators	Qualitative interviews	9 (100.0)	10 (100.0)	1
Parents and guardians of participants and youth leaders	Qualitative interviews	10 (100.0)	8 (87.5)	8 (100.0)
Community schools: teachers, community outreach workers, counsellors, and principals	Qualitative interviews	6	n/a	n/a
Community schools: teachers and principals	Survey instrument	11	n/a	n/a
Total participation in the evaluations		**294**	**72**	**19**
Total program registrations and participation		222 students; 71 program participants[d]	54 adults and 69 children[e]	11 students

Note. Percentage (%) of Indigenous participants in parentheses. The percentage of Indigenous students, school stakeholders, staff, and other family participants is unknown in some categories because we did not capture this data. However, it is estimated to be a high proportion.

[d] From September 2013 to June 2015, 222 students participated in five school presentations, and 71 students participated in the Sacred Seven program.

[e] Spring session 2014: Pow Wow Club: 15 adults, 36 children from 9 families; Let's Speak Ojibway: 39 adults and 33 children from 19 families.

Questions in the qualitative interviews with youth leaders and other program staff addressed general themes such as program delivery issues, benefits derived from their employment with the program, the ways in which the program impacted their educational and vocational aspirations, and their future plans for both paid and volunteer work. Parent and guardian interviews were concerned with the degree to which their children enjoyed attending the program, their perceptions of and satisfaction with the program staff, the benefits derived from their children's participation, the no-cost feature, and any suggestions for improvement. In their interviews, the teachers and administrators were asked for feedback on recruitment issues, the cultural value and social benefits of the program, and the importance of the program to youth in the community.

An Indigenous approach to evaluation, which is driven by a strengths-based and empowerment framework, offered a compelling depth for understanding the impact of these programs. By rejecting the negative legacy and colonial agendas of past research and evaluation practices that failed to serve Indigenous people, this relatively new approach to community-based evaluation recognizes it as an opportunity for community learning in the interests of Indigenous people's self-determination (LaFrance & Nichols, 2011). Since it was necessary for the research process to benefit those who are most directly impacted, we asked the participants to tell their story about their experiences in the programs and what they thought worked well or needed improvement and why.

The evaluator triangulated the data to the greatest possible extent. In triangulation methods, the data are collected and analyzed together to ensure that the findings are corroborated. The objective of this cross-referencing technique is to have the data tell the full story and to identify patterns that increase confidence in the findings, thus improving validity and permitting conclusions. Although the data gathering instruments and questionnaires in the six evaluations were uniquely designed for each program, the questions were relatively similar and suitable to the thematic analysis included in this article. For example, while questions posed to youth may have been framed or worded slightly differently in the instruments of each evaluation, they often tapped into similar themes of confidence building, resilience, making positive choices, educational and vocational aspirations, and establishing healthy relationships through cultural teachings. Therefore, we aggregated data whenever common lessons learned or themes of best practices could be collated across programs.

Findings: Lessons Learned about Evaluated Programs

In this section, we demonstrate how U of W used its internal policies to establish a dialogue and an authentic relationship with the surrounding community. We summarize what we learned from the evaluations about best practices in programming, including the need for holistic educational opportunities and to foster an environment of community capacity-building aimed at lifelong learning.

Although these programs affect thousands of students, they are only models that need to be brought to scale in order to meet the enormity of the task. What these U of W community learning opportunities provide through evidence-based evaluations are a large number of outcomes, best practices, and lessons learned that can provide a path towards an effective education strategy not only for the city and province, but also internationally. In narrowing down these best practices, five key themes emerged from the data in support of the university's Indigenous Education Initiative dating back to 2004. The themes that seemed to cultivate program successes included:

a. Supporting families by providing culturally-relevant and free learning opportunities to a community of underrepresented learners in all levels of education and, at every possible opportunity, within a wraparound model of free transportation, materials and supplies, and meals or snacks;

b. Community partnerships that are strengthened by hiring Indigenous leaders and role models with authentic relationships to community;

c. Building social capital among youth through peer mentoring and role modelling opportunities;

d. Encouraging connections of Indigenous youth to education, employment, leadership opportunities, and civic responsibility;

e. Fostering a sense of belonging to the university community in children, youth, and their families by effectively using its resources and infrastructure to extend its reach into the community. This is enormously important in building trust and support networks among Indigenous people in the inner city (see Figure 1).

The programs discussed in this article only scratch the surface in terms of the huge task undertaken by U of W to provide community learning opportunities. But this research has demonstrated the immense ability of an urban university to effectively use its resources and infrastructure in order to extend its reach into the community and, through a variety of partnerships, to have an impact on the learning experiences of many people beyond the conventional structures of university programming. The evaluations conveyed important narratives about the perseverance of inner-city youth in the face of numerous challenges, improved Indigenous academic success, and high parental involvement and turnout in community programs. Youth and their families remarked that they felt a sense of belonging to the University community, and that it is not simply an exclusive, closed institution that happens to be situated within their neighbourhood. In fact, recent institutional statistics indicate substantial growth in the representation of Indigenous students at approximately 10% and visible minorities at approximately 20% (University of Winnipeg, 2015). Overall, the reactions of evaluation participants were overwhelmingly positive with regard to their experiences at U of W, which was described as a reputable institution that seemed genuinely interested in getting to know the community.
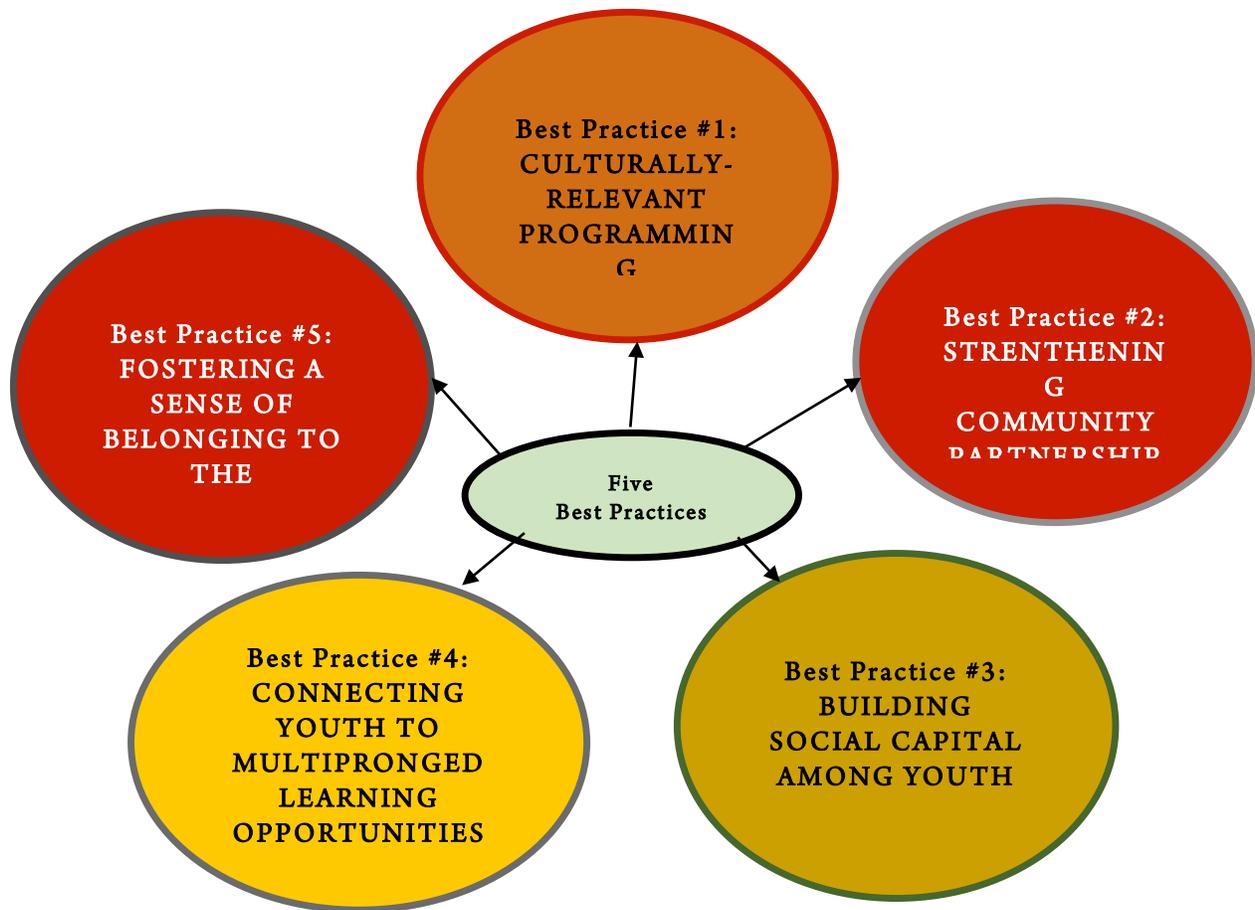
Figure 1. Best practices for community learning initiatives based on evaluations of programs offered as part of the University of Winnipeg's Indigenous Education Initiative.

Best Practice #1: Culturally-Relevant Programming

All programs included culturally-relevant educational and learning opportunities with the goal of having families and children learn about the richness of their ancestry, celebrate First Nations, Métis, and Inuit accomplishments and contributions, and increase cultural pride. Programs were also consistent with Indigenous approaches, such as hands-on or experiential learning opportunities that are relevant to participant's real lives. Family engagement was encouraged at every possible opportunity. The family learning programs were viewed as a family celebration of learning about culture and as an intergenerational transfer of knowledge. Interviewed parents or guardians expressed a strong commitment to raising children who were proud of being Aboriginal, to keeping them away from the cycle of negativity commonly associated with poverty, and to continue to celebrate their Aboriginal heritage by passing along cultural traditions and legacies to their children. As noted by Nguyen (2011),

Aboriginal education needs to be reframed in an Aboriginal context that will provide Aboriginal children with a sense of self-worth. That is, a sense of who they are and where they come from, which will impact community self-government and self-determination. (p. 231)

Best Practice #2: Strengthening Community Partnerships

The university's Indigenous leadership cultivated strong partnerships, both internal and external to the university community, with public school stakeholders (principals, community outreach workers, school counsellors, and teachers), community residents, non-profit agencies, program volunteers, and university faculty and instructors. These partnerships have assisted in the development of innovative and culturally-relevant programs, and they have been sustained over the years. For example, each year, it is through a collaborative referral system with community groups and agencies, and public school partners in the inner city that students are recommended to the Model School high school. These partners recommend students who show academic promise, but are not realizing their full potential and are at risk of falling behind for a variety of reasons. The community partners also help to facilitate communication between the Model School faculty and a student's parents or guardians.

Best Practice #3: Social Capital

These programs have an added advantage that results from the wide age range of the students they recruit (ages 9 to 24): The younger children and adolescents get a chance to observe the older students and learn what level of commitment is required if they want to succeed academically and personally.

For instance, perhaps the most significant feature of the summer camp is that it exposed hundreds of Indigenous children to the positive peer influences of the camp's leaders—nearly two-thirds Aboriginal—an exemplary model of youth who are engaged with leadership in the Indigenous community and who take their education and future aspirations very seriously. The positive role modelling, peer mentoring, and shared sense of identity helped Indigenous children and youth to connect with each other and to be proud of their identity and also to see themselves as high school and post-secondary graduates. Similarly, by focusing on physical activities such as the art of hoop dancing and basketball, the Sacred Seven Healthy Teen Relationships program supported youth in their journeys of personal growth through cultural teachings and understandings, which unquestionably helped to build resilience in these youth. In fact, parents and guardians of children and youth leaders in all programs noted improvements in their children's sense of responsibility, dependability, and leadership qualities since they began attending these programs.

Best Practice #4: Multipronged Learning Opportunities

All programs employed multipronged educational and learning opportunities for youth. Programs encouraged youth to connect to their education, provided summer employment and training, as well as offering opportunities for leadership and engaging youth in ongoing volunteer work in their communities. Program developers also recognized the importance of using cultural teachings to help youth to establish better relationships with themselves, their families, and their communities. Program resources helped build participants' self-confidence and resilience as they worked towards discovering their cultural identity and achieving positive life results, including educational outcomes. Participants in the Model School, Sacred Seven Healthy Relationships, Adventure Kids, Math Camp, and family

learning programs reported more self-awareness, healthier interpersonal relationships, improved positivity, making better choices, and better decision-making abilities. In interviews and questionnaires, many youth spoke about their strong sense of responsibility to their community and expressed that they wished to be a part of the solution in strengthening their communities. As discussed by Grover (2007), a life of service to community can create a self-sustaining model that strengthens its people in countless economic and political ways. Some participants indicated that they were the first in their family and peer network to pursue a post-secondary education and, in many situations, they were the first to earn a high school diploma.

Furthermore, a significant long-run accomplishment is that the Model School has produced 41 graduates (a graduation rate of more than 95% in a neighbourhood where a 50% graduation rate is the norm), of which 78% (*n* = 32) have gone on to pursue post-secondary studies to date. An economic cost analysis determined that the Model School program pays for itself. Compared to what it cost to educate students, throughout the course of their working lives, Model School graduates of post-secondary programs will contribute more than twice as much to the tax base from their incremental earnings than a high school graduate[2]. This is the tip of the iceberg in terms of their contributions to society. The Model School is a preventive investment as its costs are vastly outweighed by its far-reaching social and fiscal benefits for society.

Best Practice #5: A Sense of Belonging to the University Community

Access to the campus was key to all programming. Nichols et al. (2014) have stated, "universities are difficult for 'outsiders' to navigate" (p. 80). Nothing could be truer for groups that have had limited exposure to a university campus. By offering access to the university campus, the programs address barriers that often prevent inner-city children, many of whom are Indigenous and new Canadians, from accessing post-secondary education. All programs showed evidence of improvements in the participants' sense of belonging to the university community. For instance, the university made space available for the weekly Pow Wow Club and Indigenous language programs. Coming to the campus was a first occasion for many children, youth, and their families.

Discussion and Policy Lessons

Evaluated programs had overall approval ratings of more than 90% by children and youth, parents and guardians, and school stakeholders; the reasons for this large-scale approval were primarily related to the programs' holistic approaches to addressing the learning needs of Indigenous peoples. Activities were regarded as creative, culturally-relevant and, where applicable, addressed summer learning loss in an enjoyable way. Programs were consistent with Indigenous approaches, such as hands-on or experiential

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[2] Net present value calculations: because a dollar amount in the present is worth more than the same amount in the future, a net present value calculation uses a discount rate (8%, as recommended by Canada's Treasury Board Secretariat) to estimate all future incremental earnings in current 2015 Canadian dollars and then to compare this value to the 4-year average per student expenditures ($42,000 in 2015 Canadian dollars) at the Model School. Inflation rate: 2% based on Conference Board of Canada estimates. Average tax rate: 25% based on estimated average full-time full-year earnings of $65,000 per year (Canadian dollars). Average public and private wages (full-time, full-year) by Aboriginal status and education are based on the 2011 National Household Survey conducted by Statistics Canada. Estimated earnings were retrieved from a table prepared in McInturff & Tulloch (2014).

learning opportunities that are relevant to participants' real lives. Family learning programs helped to build stronger family units and the community's capacity to see itself as learners. Adventure Kids, the largest free summer day camp in the inner city, helped to alleviate the social isolation that some children from high poverty families experience during the summer break and who would not otherwise have the opportunity to attend a summer camp.

Some participants, including program staff, grew up in the university's surrounding neighbourhoods. They revealed that there were previously no programs that offered cultural teachings, traditional dance, and Aboriginal language preservation programs. In particular, the uniqueness of the Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre was enormously important in building trust and support networks among residents in this part of the city. Participant suggestions of areas for further development typically called for additional funding to expand the duration of programs (i.e., length of time offered or extending daily hours) or adding new programs, such as workshops in traditional ways of parenting. Another lesson that was heavily emphasized was the need for all programs to continue their efforts to expand community partnerships.

U of W's model is provided at a relatively low cost compared to the societal benefits that extend beyond the substantive personal and community benefits. This begs the question: Should there be public investment funds added to the already strained budgets of the university system? Even in times of fiscal austerity, we simply cannot afford not to. If community learning initiatives result in higher graduation rates, fewer unemployed youth, and healthier, more engaged citizens, does this added human potential not enhance the public welfare instead of incurring the extra costs of economic repercussions of a more than 50% high school dropout rate (Axworthy, 2009)? The cost analysis offered earlier of former Model School student outcomes provides a clear answer that this model is a community investment strategy, which more than pays for itself in the long run. It simply makes sense in terms of prevention and helping young people to see themselves as agents of change in their own lives.

The lessons learned from the evaluations present a viable approach to remediating the pervasive social problems in these neighbourhoods. If there are fewer children left on the streets to be recruited by gangs, or if the rates of addiction are reduced and the expense of security and incarceration are positively affected and family life improved, is that not of substantial public value (Axworthy, 2009)? Referring to the social benefits of the Sacred Seven Healthy Relationships program, one basketball coach remarked how most of the programming occurs during the "vulnerable" hours for young people, such as after school and early evening. These are the hours when youth are most at risk of becoming involved in negative behaviours. Thus, the University's recreation facilities and Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre function not only as a safe place, but also as a preventive measure. Coaching, mentoring, and role modeling Mino Bimaadiziwin, or a good life—which involves sports, team building, and keeping busy with learning activities—is one method of building belonging and offsetting some of the boredom and potential for youth to engage in high risk activities. These ideas are supported in meta-analyses of after-school programs for vulnerable youth in the U.S., which suggests that non-academic activities may also have a positive impact on the developmental outcomes of young people (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Kremer, Maynard, Polanin, Vaughn, & Sarteschi, 2015). Likewise, in their case studies of Indigenous high school students, Preston and Claypool (2013) posed the question, "What motivates students to learn" (p.259)? Their study identified key themes, such as a supportive environment,

relevant curricular content, role models, and many others; but after-school activities, including sports, were viewed as an important motivational aspect of students' education.

These are the kind of questions that the university contemplates as it continues to pursue its community learning strategy to help to slow the cycle of intergenerational poverty in these neighbourhoods. In fact, as many initiatives described herein are transferable to other situations, this university's vision can help set new priorities for public policy, practice, and university funding models that commit to both the continuity and expansion of these programs. To date, the community learning initiatives described in this article have been largely funded through private sources and not public funds or the university's operating budget (Axworthy, 2009). In fact, most programs' operational budgets are deeply underfunded, which calls into question the sustainability of private fundraising models since many of these sources of funding are at risk of dwindling over time.

Moreover, the evaluated programs only scratch the surface in terms of the exhaustive list of U of W initiatives for which private funding was raised, including affordable student residences mixed in with community townhouses, day care spaces, a young entrepreneurs program, and a culturally diverse social enterprise food service. In an effort to address the fact that children in the care of a child welfare agency—87% Indigenous in Manitoba—are underrepresented in high school and post-secondary graduation rates (Brownell et al., 2015), U of W also introduced a tuition waiver program along with wraparound services (housing, textbooks, meal plans) to support the participation of youth in care in post-secondary studies. Since the waivers were announced, several universities and local colleges now offer a tuition waiver program to youth in care. In light of the TRC's focus on education, these programs are best practice models that substantially broaden access for Indigenous children and counter the dropout rate at the Grade 9 level disproportionately affecting Indigenous students. Furthermore, in recognition of its responsibilities of Indigenous inclusion under Treaty One, U of W's Senate recently approved a motion that will ensure each graduating student is exposed to Indigenous course content, including pedagogy (e.g., experiential learning).

In addition, a formalized Community Charter was developed to govern a new RecPlex recreation and wellness facility, and it mandates free access for community-based groups to run their programs (Axworthy, 2013). As argued by Moore (2014), these brick and mortar projects "strengthen relationships of people to the places where they live and among those people who live there" (p. 20). The evidence gathered in our evaluations supports this idea. However, a major shortcoming of this community learning model is the lack of a sustained and coordinated government funding commitment, which could potentially undermine future efforts in the university's civic mission.

Conclusion

In summary, this research informed our understanding of key guiding principles that post-secondary institutions can implement to positively impact Indigenous educational outcomes, including:

- Visionary leadership as a catalyst for changing the institutional culture in the face of obstacles and resistance.

- Equally as important is the recruitment of strong Indigenous leadership entrusted to nurture authentic community partnerships and respectful relationships with ongoing, deliberative consultation.

- A clear university governance model and formal policy framework for community engagement that makes it an institutional priority.

- Good fundraising capacity to support low-income students with a program of tuition credits, waivers, and bursaries, as well as ancillary services (housing, meal plans, etc.).

- A willingness to listen to and respect the wisdom of the community you are intending to serve. The community knows what it wants and needs.

The evaluations showed the transformative potential of community-engaged approaches as having an impact on the learning experiences of many people beyond the conventional structures of university programming. The five themes presented in this article identify some best practices to accomplishing these tasks. For instance, the most significant feature of the peer mentoring approach was that it helped Indigenous youth and children to connect with each other and to be proud of their identity and also to see themselves as high school and post-secondary graduates. What is needed now, in light of the recent TRC events across the country, is to form a seamless cooperative approach among governments, private sector, and educational institutions toward a community investment model that tackles at scale the literacy and educational outcomes of Indigenous children and their families, and particularly the high school and post-secondary graduation gaps. Some core principles include:

- Culturally relevant programming that encourages family and multigenerational engagement at every possible opportunity.

- Promoting a clear model of civically engaged youth, positive role modeling and mentoring among children and youth through a strong commitment to the leadership development aspects in any programming. This requires a commitment to empowering youth in program decision-making processes.

- Multipronged educational strategies and learning opportunities to help generate resilience and capacity in youth who may otherwise be poorly prepared to meet the challenges of post-secondary education and the labour market. These include pedagogical changes to include experiential learning, engaging traditional knowledge and cultural teachings, co-curricular activities such as skill-building workshops and employment experiences.

The costs of these preventive investments are vastly outweighed by their far-reaching social and fiscal benefits for society.

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Appendix A

Innovative Learning Centre Program Descriptions

Model School (2008). The Model School is a high school program accommodating approximately 45 to 50 students in Grades 9 to 12. It operates in partnership with the University of Winnipeg's Collegiate High School (a private, tuition-based school), and addresses the needs of students from backgrounds that have traditionally been underrepresented in high school and post-secondary graduation rates; for example, low-income Indigenous students and some new Canadians who may have shown academic promise in their public school but were not realizing their full potential and were at risk of falling behind and dropping out of high school for a variety of reasons. The school has been developed as part of the university's community learning mandate to eliminate barriers to education, and in order to realize this goal, the University of Winnipeg provides underrepresented students an opportunity to attend the university's Collegiate High School at no financial cost to their families, as well as providing Opportunity Fund bursaries for their post-secondary studies. The school takes a holistic approach to its programming and utilizes individualized academic plans that identify and address the unique challenges faced by each student while providing an intensive support structure to help students overcome them in achieving academic success.

Adventure Kids Summer Camp (2007). This summer camp is the largest free day camp in the inner city and serves more than 1,000 children from more than 40 public schools located in low-income neighbourhoods. The camp offers between 4 to 6 separate one-week programs that aim to address summer learning loss by engaging children in science and environmental activities, as well as helping to alleviate the social isolation that some children from high poverty families experience during the summer break. Transportation is provided to get the participants to the camp site, as well as to build and reinforce a positive relationship with the schools and families, and a nutrition program provides healthy snacks and lunches to every participant. The camp employs and provides volunteer opportunities to more than 40 youth leaders between the ages of 14 and 25. The majority of these workers are Aboriginal or they are visible minorities from the high poverty areas of Winnipeg, and many have a strong interest in careers that deal with social justice issues. Through the use of group-centered approaches, the employment experience teaches leaders about teamwork, positive peer influences, and life skills for daily living such as work ethic, leadership, responsibility, commitment, and dedication.

Science Kids on Campus (2006). Three times a year, approximately 50 students in Grades 5 and 6 from inner-city schools attend a two-hour long weekly science program for a period of 8 to 10 weeks at the university campus. While on campus, science professors, teachers, and senior level students assist the children in conducting a variety of hands-on science experiments and activities tied to their school curriculum, such as DNA sampling, squid dissection, studying how the brain works, and examining owl pellets. The program also focuses on increasing students' sense of belonging to the university campus—for instance, that university is for them as well, and they have a right to benefit from it. The students take tours of different departments and facilities on campus, which helps to familiarize them with a post-secondary environment as it strengthens their science education and experience.

Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre Program Descriptions

A professor and Elder named the centre, and it means "partners" in the Anishinaabe language. Although Wii Chiiwaakanak Centre has over 1,000 drop-in visits to its computer lab each month and hundreds more to its other community programming, three of their programs were evaluated:

Sacred Seven Healthy Teen Relationships (2013). The Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre at the University of Winnipeg has offered the Sacred Seven Healthy Teen Relationships Program for students primarily from schools in Winnipeg's high poverty areas (the inner-city, North End, and West End neighbourhoods). Divided into two program components, basketball (Pride Group) and hoop dancing (Girls Group), the Sacred Seven Healthy Relationships Program offers resources to Indigenous children and youth between the ages of 9 and 19 that allow them to access traditional Aboriginal teachings (Seven Sacred Teachings and Medicine Wheel tool), helps them to feel connected to their ancestry, and to establish better relationships with themselves, their families, and their communities. The youth are also empowered to develop their own code of honour principles for healthy teen relationships, and they integrate these principles into their hoop dancing and basketball drills. The teens serve as role models and leaders by conducting presentations of what they have learned in the program at community public schools in the above noted neighbourhoods.

Family Learning Programs

Let's Speak Ojibway to Our Kids (2012). This weekly multigenerational language program provides families and individuals of all ages a chance to learn about ceremony, the Anishinaabe (Ojibway) language, and traditional beliefs in a social and family environment.

Pow Wow Club (2012). This weekly program provides community members of all ages with an opportunity to learn the art of traditional dancing (jingle dress, fancy shawl, grass and round dance, etc.), along with song and drum teachings. The program is open to families and individuals of all ages, knowledge levels, and abilities.

Summer Indigenous Math Leadership Camp (Math Camp) (2012). The Centre has offered a two-week Math Camp for 11 students from urban schools in the high-poverty areas of Winnipeg. The camp runs from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. each day and, over the two-week period, students are given math lessons, lunches and snacks, and transportation to and from their residence at no cost to their families. The summer math camp provides students between the ages of 13 and 15 with an opportunity to sharpen their math skills (or get caught up) and learn more about the connection between mathematics and Aboriginal cultures, while also participating in on-campus outings and off-campus field trips, such as a sweat lodge, smudging ceremonies, and sweet grass picking. The math camp continued over the next three summers (2013 to 2015) with the majority of participants returning each year. In 2015, Math Camp was expanded in numbers, as well as to include a model of youth leadership through a mentoring approach, as past participants were hired to tutor younger children in Grades 3 and 4.