

Neo-Liberalism and the Aboriginal Second-Chance Learner: Stifling development and reinforcing exclusion

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Abstract

The history of colonization of Aboriginal people in Canada has led many Aboriginal people to distrust in the education system as a means to a better future. While an increasing number of Aboriginal people are moving through the education system and attaining good jobs, many others drop out of school at an early age and return as adults through the 'second-chance' system. This paper focuses on this latter group with an emphasis on those living in the urban context. In the age of neo-liberalism where the aim of education is increasingly focused on market needs, these Aboriginal second-chance learners, who characteristically have complicated lives, are expected to move quickly through short-term labour focused training programs toward self-sufficiency. This paper describes the theoretical and ideological context of the current second-chance system and shows how it is incompatible with the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal second-chance learners. Examples of initiatives in Canada and Australia demonstrate that effective approaches requires greater collaboration with community-based organizations that integrate holistic models to address the long-term damage caused by colonization as a critical first step toward greater social inclusion of Indigenous people. This paper also shows how more comprehensive approaches that integrate both supply and demand side solutions can have better outcomes.

Overview of the Policy Challenge

Second-chance learners are those individuals who have failed to complete their education and training through the traditional trajectory (entering post-secondary education directly after completion of secondary education). Second-chance learners can be further characterized as individuals with low socio-economic status, minimal access to resources and supports, often with responsibilities beyond those of the mainstream student. In the current neo-liberal political milieu, individuals pursuing education and training through the second-chance system are presented with limited, short-term options that are directly tied to labour market needs. Within this context I examine the current approach to training policy that has emerged for second-chance learners in general, with an emphasis on its relevance and fit for Aboriginal second-chance learners with more complex needs.

Rationale for analysis of the current training policy paradigm

Developing a better understanding of the current policy environment as it relates to Aboriginal second-chance learners is important for the following reasons. First, while there have been significant improvements in education attainment for Aboriginal people they continue to be over represented among those who fail to complete secondary and post-secondary training through the first-chance trajectory. Second, they are over represented among those most socially and economically marginalized. And third, there is a significant body of literature discussing the limitations of current training policy shaped by the neo-liberal context, and another body of literature outlining the unique challenges of many Aboriginal adult-learners, however there is a lack of analysis of the effectiveness of the neo-liberal framework in relation to the needs of Aboriginal second-chance learners.

There has been a very visible shift in labour market policy from that which is aimed at both demand and supply, to a primary focus on supply side solutions—namely short-term education and training—to meet the needs of the labour market (Crouch, Finegold & Sako, 1999). The increase in income disparity that has coincided with this shift raises questions about the use, and effectiveness of this model to address poverty, inequality and social exclusion. This is particularly a question of concern for the outcomes of Indigenous people across the globe including Canada's Aboriginal people.

In the current political milieu, education is widely viewed as the primary 'ticket out of poverty'. This perspective reinforces a particular worldview that embraces the idea that "the mechanisms that determine an individual's socioeconomic prospects are largely under his or her control" (Bowles, Durlauf & Hoff, 2006:1). But income determination and social inclusion are much more complicated than this. There is much evidence to show that the causes of poverty and social exclusion are structural. Low-wage work is on the rise and poverty is increasingly spatialized, racialized and gendered (Galabuzi, 2001; Millar, 2003; Vosko, 2000; Wilson & Macdonald, 2010; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Yet governments are increasingly moving away from policy tools that have served to minimize poverty and exclusion in the past (McBride, 2001). For those individuals most economically disadvantaged, governments are responding with policies and programs aimed at moving them quickly into the labour market. Neoliberal inspired short-term, supply side strategies aimed at changing individual behaviour to adapt to the market are most often being used in the absence of demand side strategies and comprehensive approaches that recognize the inability of the market to insufficiently respond to structural challenges (Bartik, 2001; Crouch et al, 1999; Livingstone, 1998). Nonetheless, for people who

are poor and have had significant interruptions in education, short-term training is the primary 'inclusion' tool currently used by governments.

Statistics clearly show that in Canada, the 'promise' that a 'rising tide lifts all boats' has been false (Yalnizian, 2007; Osberg, 2008). Many Canadians continued to live in poverty during a time of economic prosperity. Many of these individuals have participated in remedial training because this is what they have been told they must do to escape poverty. Yet they continue to be poor. This is particularly important for the Aboriginal population who, in spite of significant improvements, continue to be over represented among the poorest and least educated, especially in northern Canada and across the prairie provinces (Mendelson, 2006). The reality that many Aboriginal people continue to fall behind raises questions about the effectiveness of the current approach taken by the State.

The Historical Policy Context and Intergenerational Effects

The history of colonial policies in Canada has had a significant impact on the social and economic outcomes for Aboriginal people. Although not a completely homogenous experience, the colonization of Canada's Aboriginal people has been similar to that of indigenous people across the globe (Maaka & Anderson, 2006). In Canada, there is a long history of state and church attempts to force European culture and values on Indigenous peoples and to deny, denigrate, belittle and criminalize indigenous customs and beliefs through a process of colonization (Laenuie, 2000). The implications have been well-documented in the five volumes of research of the 1996 *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. More recently Canada implemented the (2008) The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) following a model similar to the Australian National Inquiry into the Stolen Generations through the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) launched in 1995, to determine the impact of policies aimed at assimilating indigenous children in Australia. These inquiries further demonstrate that colonial policies have had deep and damaging intergenerational effects that we are failing to adequately address, and suggest that we will continue to fail to ensure Aboriginal people are fully included without major structural change. This will begin with a full understanding of the impact of colonization followed by changes such as transfer of control of education to Aboriginal governments and institutions and sufficient funding for a network of programs that address the multiple and inter-generational challenges created by failed assimilationist policies such as residential schools. Small steps have been taken. For example, the Government of Canada has several agreements with First Nations and other Aboriginal institutions giving them control over the distribution of federal training funds. However, they are confined by rules that have been developed through a neoliberal lens.

As the dominant approach to respond to poverty and social exclusion, short-term, remedial skills training is particularly unsuitable for Aboriginal second-chance learners because it fails to acknowledge that many Aboriginal second-chance learners require more than job specific training to reverse the damaging effects of colonization. As noted by Esping-Andersen (2002, 5), a focus on remedial training is unlikely to be effective "unless participants already possess the necessary abilities and motivation". For many Aboriginal second-chance learners, the legacy of colonization and oppression has led to internalized beliefs of inadequacy that inhibit motivation (Hart, 2010; Laenuie, 2000).

Further, the "employment generating power of improvements in skill levels is limited" (Esping-Andersen, vii) in its ability to resolve poverty and social exclusion, and employment policy cannot depend solely on supply side measures such as education and training (Crouch et

al, 1999; Brown, et al, 2001). Wood (2001) further suggests that a fundamental problem with current labour market policy is that attempts at reform are piecemeal as well as one-sided. He notes that reforming institutions at one level are likely to be ineffective if other systems are not reformed in a compatible manner. This is particularly relevant for the Aboriginal second-chance learner for whom challenges are often complex, requiring supports that involve multiple levels and departments of governments. This becomes problematic because the mandates of governments and departments are often not only incompatible, but arguably in conflict. For example, changes to education and training policies to encourage skill development in specific sectors are useless for individuals reliant on social assistance if ‘work-first’¹ policies create barriers for recipients to access these training opportunities.

The current approach to labour market policy is essentially rooted in the belief that education and training —learning— is an individual responsibility. Government intervention is limited and to that which responds to market need. This approach is consistent with a broad political acceptance of neo-liberal values. And even though studies show that many Canadians have been increasingly excluded from the benefits of Canada’s growing prosperity (Yalnizyan, 2007) the narrow approach to training that effectively reinforces the ‘gap’, continues to dominate and has resulted in very minimal training for those who need it the most.

Labour Market Policy, Social Exclusion, Poverty and Inequality

The idea of ‘social exclusion’ as described by Levitas (2005) can be used to shape policy that moves us closer to equality or it can be used as a means to constrict policy, depending on how it is defined. When viewed in its broadest sense, with poverty at the core but in the context of its structural causes and the multiple effects that are associated with income deprivation, it becomes clear that narrowly focused solutions are inadequate. Examining poverty and social exclusion through a comprehensive ‘lens’ allows for consideration of the historical and discriminatory factors that have contributed to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people among the poor. In these broad relative terms, poverty includes “people’s inability to participate in the customary life of society...their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities” (Townsend as cited in Levitas, 2005:9). Therefore social exclusion speaks to the lack of income as central to all exclusion, while also including many other dimensions, such as health, education, access to services, housing, debt, quality of life, dignity and autonomy (Barata, 2000).

In absence of a broader set of social inclusion policies, the current emphasis on labour market attachment will have limited impact (Barata, 2000; Gallie, 2002; Levitas, 2005; Esping-Andersen, 2002). Since poverty is the underlying cause of exclusion, raising benefit levels and providing an extensive array of social supports are also crucial to reducing exclusion, but these measures have largely been ignored and the focus has shifted to training. These supports are increasingly required because the short-term training that governments are willing to support second-chance learners through, all too often leads to further social exclusion, “... manifested in marginalization to the periphery of the labour market, where the only prospects on offer are casual unskilled jobs, unemployment or withdrawal from employment altogether” (Bynner & Parsons, 2001:280).

¹ Work-first policy emerged in the context of welfare reform in the U.S. It has been widely adopted across Canada. The basic idea of work-first is to address poverty by moving the poor from welfare into work as quickly as possible.

Aboriginal Poverty and Inequality

The considerable inequality experienced by Canada's Aboriginal population calls for special attention when examining the design and delivery of government 'inclusion' policies. The level of unemployment and poverty among Aboriginal Canadians is an important indicator of racialized poverty and the inadequacy of current policy approaches. According to the 2006 census, the unemployment rate in Canada was 6.6% in 2005. However the rate was more than double for Aboriginal Canadians at 14.8%. For Aboriginal Canadians, income inequality also remains considerable with both Aboriginal males and females earning significantly less than non-Aboriginal Canadians (Maxim J., White, D. Beavon, D. Whitehead, P., 2001, Census of Canada 2006, Wilson & Macdonald, 2010).

As illustrated in Table 1 and 2, Aboriginal Canadians continue to fare much worse than non-Aboriginal Canadians in general.

Table 1

Income Distribution Aboriginal and Non- Aboriginal Population in Canada 15-years and older				
	Aboriginal Male	Total Male	Aboriginal Female	Total Female
Median earnings	22,386	32,874	16,079	21,543
Median Earnings full year/full time	39,501	46,778	30,938	35,830
Median income	18,714	32,224	15,654	20,460
Earnings as % of income	82.4	79.7	70.3	71.
Unemployment Rate	16.1	6.5	13.5	6.6
Participation Rate	56.5	72.3	51.1	61.6

Source: Statistics Canada 2006 Census

The province of Manitoba is provided as a case example because it is a region among those with the highest Aboriginal populations in Canada. While 4% of Canadians identify as Aboriginal, 18% of Manitoban's identified as Aboriginal in the 2006 census. As shown in table 2, the 2006 census shows that Aboriginal unemployment in Manitoba remains almost triple that of the non-Aboriginal population and earnings remain much lower.

Table 2

Income Distribution in Manitoba Aboriginal Identity and non-Aboriginal 15-years and older				
	Aboriginal Male	Total Male	Aboriginal Female	Total Female
Median earnings	19,707	29,461	15,858	20,289
Median Earnings full year/full time	34,949	40,392	28,502	32,149
Median income	15,454	29,919	15,131	20,169
Earnings as % of income	81.7	79.1	67.	69.7
Unemployment Rate	17.1	5.5	13.6	5.4
Participation Rate	63.7	72.8	55.2	62.

Source: Statistics Canada 2006 census

The situation is far worse for Aboriginal people living on reserve. For example, the average unemployment rate in Manitoba First Nations was 26% in 2006, more than five times that of the total Manitoba labour force rate of 5.5%. Many First Nations members migrate to urban centres seeking employment and many, especially those with low levels of education, are unable to find it.

Educational attainment, employment and income

Educational attainment is an important indicator of individual future employment and earnings potential. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who have attained post secondary education have better incomes than those who have not (Luffman & Sussman, 2007). However, research by Sharpe, Arsenault, Lapointe and Cowan (2009, 23) shows that in 23 educational categories except university certificate or diploma, Aboriginal people have lower employment levels than non-Aboriginal people and higher rates of unemployment for each educational category. While differences in educational attainment have a significant impact on labour market outcomes, it is the longer-term education categories that show the best outcomes and education attainment does not explain the entire gap (Sharpe et al, 2009).

The literature demonstrates that globalization has resulted in an increase in precarious employment for both skilled and unskilled workers (Livingstone, 1998; Brown et al, 2001; Kalleberg, 2009), however individuals with low education levels have a higher risk of long-term, low-wage, precarious employment². While education levels for the Aboriginal population have improved dramatically in recent years, they continue to lag far behind the Non-Aboriginal population. As shown in Table 3, while the number of Aboriginal Canadians completing high school has increased, there continues to be a significant gap when compared with the non-Aboriginal population. In 2006, one in three (34%) Aboriginal persons between 25-64 years, had not completed high school compared with 15% of all adults between 25-64. Fully 60% of all adults between 25 and 64 years had completed some form of postsecondary education in 2006, compared with 44% of Aboriginals. The good news is that the number of Aboriginal people with a degree has increased from 6% in 2001 to 8% in 2006. However increases for Aboriginal people have not kept pace with increases for Non Aboriginals. In 2001, 20% of the non-Aboriginal population had a university degree compared with 23% in 2006.

Table 3
Highest level of Education
Age 25-64

	Total population Less than high school	Total Population High school certificate or equivalent	Total Population With University Degree	Aboriginal Less than high school	Aboriginal High school certificate or equivalent	Aboriginal With University Degree
Canada	15%	24%	23%	34%	21%	8%
Manitoba	20%	25/5	19%	40%	12%	8%

² Chung, 2006, notes that there continues to be a significant gap between university-educated and highschool educated workers, between 2000 and 2005 the average weekly earnings of young male employees with a high school diploma rose by 5% while that of university graduates of the same cohort dropped by 3%. This is attributed to the increase in blue-collar jobs resulting from a boom in the oil industry and earnings growth among less-educated workers in not likely to be sustainable.

While statistics show that there has been progress in Aboriginal educational attainment, the trajectory for many Aboriginal students is unique, calling for unique and flexible measures. While the Aboriginal population is generally much younger than the overall population³, and as pointed out by Mendelson (2006), a reason to focus policies on improving the education attainment of Aboriginal students in the first-chance system, the reality is that in general those enrolled in post-secondary education and/or vocational training tend to be older than others in their cohort because they returned to school as adults (Luffman & Sussman, 2007).

Neoliberal Human Capital theory – limitations for Aboriginal Second-Chance Learners

Poverty and exclusion cannot be resolved exclusively through labour market attachment. However, since labour market focused training is the primary policy tool used to respond to poverty and social exclusion in a neo-liberal milieu, its theoretical underpinnings require explanation. Current labour market policy is shaped by human capital theory—the theory that an individual’s employability determines the value of their human capital and is the source of their economic outcomes (Brown et al, 2001). It assumes that a deficit in skills is the primary source of social exclusion. Others disagree. For example, segmented labour market (SLM) theorists point out that human capital theory fails to recognize that non-economic factors have a central role in determining labour market participation outcomes and that the emphasis on education as a determinant of earnings is overestimated (Thomson, 2003:2). They demonstrate that the labour market is further divided into segments that can be basically defined as the *primary sector*, characterized by secure jobs with good wages, good working conditions and opportunities for advancement and the *secondary sector*, where jobs are insecure, low wage, and offer little opportunity for advancement. These sectors are also highly gendered and racialized (Galabuzi, 2001; Phillips & Phillips, 2000; Vosko, 2000).

Government policy makers continue to design policy aimed at the socially excluded based on the narrow assumptions put forward by human capital theory. However, the limited training accessible to second-chance learners does not prepare them for, nor is intended to, the limited number of high-skill jobs, but rather it moves them toward the secondary track. Such policies are discriminatory and serve to perpetuate poverty and social exclusion. This is not to minimize the importance of education and training of any kind but rather to demonstrate that education and training alone will not end poverty and social exclusion. Demand side policies aimed at changing the behaviour of employers, correcting systemic racism and sexism, as well as increasing the economic security of those unable to work or confined to low-wage jobs are also essential. The emphasis on market focused training as the central solution to unemployment and poverty accepts neoclassical assumptions that the market – if given the freedom – will ensure that good jobs are available for all willing to do what is necessary to meet the requirements of the labour market. According to Gallie (2002), Lafer (2000), Livingstone (1998), and Crouch et al (2001), such assumptions are false.

While inequality of income can in part be attributed to differences in educational attainment, there are many other factors at play. We know for example that hiring decisions are often discriminatory, based on attributes such as gender, and race (Lang, 2007) and have much to do with individual access to social networks – class (Harrison & Weiss, 1998). More specific to the Aboriginal second-chance learner, the historically rooted dynamics described earlier in this paper must be recognized and responded to in policies and programs aimed at inclusion.

³ According to Census 2006, the median age of the Aboriginal population in Canada in 2005 was 26.5 years compared with 39.5 years for the total population

The legacy of colonization: implications for labour market policy

While there are examples of training programs that understand the impact that colonization has had on their students, funding is technically not available for programming focused on cultural reclamation/decolonization. Yet Indigenous second-chance learners identify this as extremely important (Helme, 2005, MacKinnon, 2011). For those individuals who have experienced systemic racism and/or have internalized their oppression, understanding their individual ‘troubles’ in the historical context of colonialism—seeing those problems as being less about personal failings than about damaging social forces—can be transformational.

The schooling experience for many Aboriginal learners has been extremely negative. Eurocentric content, a shortage of Aboriginal teachers, and a lack of ‘proof’ that education leads to a better life, leads many Aboriginal youth to drop out at an early age. The effect has been high levels of illiteracy, absence of hope for a better future, and a perpetuation of poverty. For example, Huffman (2008, 45) points to assimilationist policies as being a central problem that has resulted in ambivalent attitudes toward education among Aboriginal people in the U.S. As an example he points to “paternalistic and condescending educational philosophies and approaches” that have contributed toward ambivalence, distrust, poor academic performance and early withdrawal. This response was reflected in a study of Aboriginal post-secondary learners in Canada that found students to be struggling with “dispositional, situational, and systemic obstacles in their pursuit of post-secondary education” (Sloane-Seale et al, 2001, 23-25). Study participants reported factors including lack of self-esteem; racism and sexism; lack of role models; dislocation; poorly educated parents; lower incomes; difficult family circumstances; lack of academic preparation; childcare and other social support challenges as contributing toward a very daunting experience. Huffman (2009) similarly emphasizes a complex combination of financial, social, psychological and academic barriers for “American Indian” learners. Research on training outcomes for Aboriginal Second-Chance learners in Canada reveals similar obstacles. Individuals pursuing education often carry a heavy emotional load and a breadth of family responsibilities beyond that of non-Aboriginal students. Trainers note that their Aboriginal students generally come to them with very low levels of education (few beyond grade 10) and a host of family challenges and responsibilities that seriously complicate their ability to complete their programs and move out of poverty (MacKinnon, 2011). This is in part due to the under funding of education on-reserve (Mendelson, 2008), lack of adequate supports that places poor kids in poor neighbourhoods at a disadvantage (Silver, 2006) the relative absence of Aboriginal pedagogy in schools (Hodgson-Smith, 2000; Huffman, 2008), and the failure to recognize the importance of integrating indigenous teaching models to ensure that Aboriginal students are exposed to an education that speaks to their experiences. As described by Castellano, Davis and Lahache (2000: x1) there has been “uneven progress towards transforming the contemporary experience of education from one of assimilation to one of self-expression and self-determination.”

Aboriginal led and other organizations working with indigenous populations are increasingly embracing the idea that cultural reclamation is a critical program component to reverse the damaging effects of colonial policies. Some organizations are integrating decolonizing pedagogy into training programs for second-chance learners in spite of limited resources and restrictive policies. While sometimes invisible and difficult to measure, decolonizing pedagogy can have a positive impact and influence on the education paths of those who were disillusioned and dropped out of the ‘first chance’ system. Many Aboriginal adults have regained confidence and hope through their participation in Aboriginal programs that have

integrated traditional teachings. There are many examples of individuals who have ‘dropped out’ of formal education with little hope for the future who attribute their participation in community-based programs as having inspired them to further their education as adults (MacKinnon & Stephens, 2010; Silver, 2006).

Decolonization and training within the neo-liberal paradigm

Understanding the importance of decolonization and reclaiming of culture as a critical form of learning that strengthens self-awareness, self-esteem and builds much needed positive social networks is important for policy makers. Those who understand the long-term value of decolonizing pedagogy are more inclined to adequately invest in a comprehensive network of programs that can lead individuals back through the formal learning trajectory with more successful outcomes. But the narrowly focused neo-liberal framework is incompatible with this approach. Minimal state investment and short-term training to fast track people to employment simply does not allow time for decolonization to be integrated into the training process. Short-term labour market focused training models that ignore the damaging effects of colonization will have limited effectiveness because they disregard the central importance of cultural identity. The supports necessary are simply far too limited. For example, work first policies mean that if any training funds are available for individuals receiving social assistance, they are provided as a last resort and normally for less than one year. In Manitoba, recent policies have extended funding to up to two-years but in a limited number of cases and at the discretion of the caseworker. Comprehensive approaches that are sufficiently resourced are needed. While this will require increased investment in the short term, the literature shows that the impact for individuals, their families and society in general is significant (Helme, 2007, MacKinnon 2011).

Second-chance training: present models and future possibilities

Second-chance training is delivered through various models. Consistent with the neoliberal paradigm, there has been an increase in private for-profit vocational education training schools (VET) since the 1980’s⁴. Non-profit organizations are also increasingly funded to deliver training, sometimes in collaboration with colleges. While non-profits are often more aware of their students needs, and committed to responding to the unique challenges of Aboriginal second-chance learners, they are confined by public policy constraints.

Welfare reform and work-first policies have resulted in the growth in ‘pre-employment training’ programs. These are not really training programs per se, but rather programs to assist individuals with their job search. With the emphasis on short-term training, the research shows that there has been a growing emphasis on placing marginalized individuals in pre-employment and/or short-term initiatives. In spite of the shortage of skilled, certified trades people, efforts to target training for these jobs to excluded groups has been weak. There have been some efforts to encourage Aboriginal people to pursue the trades but they have had limited success. Aboriginal organizations argue that this failure is not surprising because they have not adapted their programs to suit Aboriginal trainees needs (Little, 2005; MacKinnon 2011). One example of a program in Manitoba that has learned from past mistakes is Building Urban Industries through Local Development (BUILD). BUILD provides on the job training for high-risk Aboriginal adults, many with past involvement in the criminal justice system. Most trainees later find employment in related industries while others continue to apprentice in a trade. Trainees describe

⁴ Since the New Democratic Party (NDP) formed government in Manitoba in 1999, there has been a decrease in the number of VETs. in this province

BUILD as different because it is a small, supportive environment of individuals that share similar circumstances (Mackinnon, 2011). While also short-term by definition, the difference between BUILD and mainstream neo-liberal models is that it integrates training with employment. Trainees receive a living wage in exchange for their labour, and are provided with supports to either find work or further their education. It also provides a safe, supportive and encouraging environment for very vulnerable trainees.

The majority of training for Aboriginal people is controlled and delivered through non-Aboriginal institutions. Those programs that are sensitive to the need to integrate decolonizing pedagogy are confined by the policies and expectations of multiple levels of government and government departments that often have conflicting objectives. Policy and program delivery is further complicated by the demands of private sector employers that seek employees trained specifically to meet their needs. As stated by one community-based ‘trainer’ in Winnipeg, many employers simply do not understand the challenges of their trainees.

The literature suggests that the employment that often results from short-term training is in the low-wage secondary sector with few opportunities for advancement (Bartik, 2001; Crouch et al, 1999; Gallie, 2002; Lafer, 2002; Livingstone, 1998). Directors of community-based programs offering short-term training in Winnipeg Canada acknowledge the limitations of their programs in preparing their students for well-paying jobs (MacKinnon, 2011). They attribute this to a policy environment that requires, in a relatively short period of time, that they move people who “are not ready” through basic training into jobs. This, they say is a very unreasonable expectation. But they also argue that trainees who participate benefit in other ways, especially when decolonizing pedagogy is integrated into their programming (MacKinnon, 2011). They describe outcomes similar to those of Koorie learners in Australia (Helme, Polesel & Nicholas, 2005). Employment outcomes for Koorie trainees in VET training remains “well below that for VET graduates in general” (Helme et al, 2005, 55). However, staff involved in Koorie training programs say that “Koorie specific programs make a valuable contribution to developing skills, confidence and a sense of achievement, without necessarily creating a career or job pathway” (Helme et al, 2005, 32).

More research is needed to examine existing programs to better understand the outcomes of short-term training for Aboriginal people and the extent to which longer-term education and training have better outcomes. A better understanding of whether ‘successful’ trainees share common characteristics and/or whether the training programs they participate in share common practices that lead to improved outcomes is also required. And finally, more research is required to determine whether longer-term training and more comprehensive approaches that include demand side strategies paired with training, can better respond to complex challenges. Examples of such approaches that integrate supply and demand side measures are discussed below.

Comprehensive approaches to address poverty and social exclusion

There is significant research to demonstrate that narrowly focused, short-term supply-side interventions have had limited impact in addressing poverty and social exclusion. This is particularly true for Aboriginal second-chance learners. I argue that in addition to expanding supply-side interventions to include decolonizing programming, there requires greater emphasis on demand-side solutions. But the types and combinations of demand and supply interventions also require careful consideration. Bartik (2001, 148) shows that “labour demand increases that get the poor into higher-wage jobs have greater effects on earnings, both in the short run and the long run”. Demographically targeted demand-side interventions will often need to be coupled

with supply-side training interventions since many of those in the ‘target’ population will not have the necessary skills for jobs created.

Blank (1997) provides lessons learned from fifteen years of research on welfare reform initiatives across the U.S. She too emphasizes the need to combine supply- and demand-side strategies to address the complexity of poverty. In terms of training and job search, she notes that adequately funding programs is key to success—when done on the cheap job search and training programs have poor results. If effectively run, employment programs can increase earnings and decrease public assistance expenditures, but not in the short term—effects may not show for several years. Strawn (1998) as cited in Silver and Loewen (2005, 15), found that although ‘quick employment programs’ like job search assistance led to increased employment and earnings, “the impacts quickly diminish...after one or two years”. The vast literature on welfare reform demonstrates very clearly that short-term training and job search approaches do not bring people out of poverty. Blank (1997) notes that if governments are serious about moving people into better paying jobs, then access to further training opportunities must be available to those who are motivated to take them. While job search/placement programs can be cost effective in term of getting people to work, ultimately low skilled workers will need more skills to advance into higher-wage jobs. Longer-term programs, such as apprenticeship programs and vocational training can lead to good jobs and have been shown to be an effective options for second-chance learners. Such programs should be included in a comprehensive continuum of interventions available to Aboriginal second-chance learners.

Creating public sector jobs or subsidizing private sector jobs in firms that pay good wages and provide opportunity for advancement, are essential elements when trying to get the most disadvantaged workers into good jobs. However optimal, such placements are not the norm. A major reason is that in the short term at least, such projects are more costly. But as Blank (1997, 278) notes, the research shows very clearly that anything beyond the most basic job search programs will not be cheap...“there is no quick, easy, and cheap way to run a good job training program.” This is particularly true for Aboriginal second-chance learners.

In Manitoba, large-scale public infrastructure projects, have had some success in creating good jobs and working with community-based organizations to train Aboriginal people and other excluded groups for many of the jobs created.⁵ When done well, participants are provided with training that provides them with skills that make them marketable beyond the life of these projects. For example, in the 1980s Manitoba Hydro and the Province of Manitoba integrated training and employment of Aboriginal people in the development of hydroelectricity dams in northern Manitoba. While far from perfect, the project left a legacy of institutions designed specifically for Aboriginal learners. The University of Manitoba Engineering Access Program for example, continues to provide supports for Aboriginal people wishing to pursue a career in Engineering. More recent Hydro development projects in northern Manitoba have created opportunities for Aboriginal people and have been strengthened because of the strong partnerships and involvement of First Nations.

Neighbourhood effects and interventions

The situation for individuals living in neighbourhoods where poverty is intergenerational and widespread is particularly challenging. In the case of Manitoba, a large number of Aboriginal people are concentrated in poor inner-city neighbourhoods. Some have lived in the

⁵ Manitoba’s Floodway Initiative, the Northern Hydro Training Initiative and the Limestone Training Initiative are examples. These interventions are further explored in a forthcoming article by this author.

the inner city all of their lives, others have come from First Nations seeking greater opportunities and a great many have lived in families who have been poor for generations. Short-term job search and training programs are particularly ineffective for individuals who experience multiple-barriers including deep poverty and weak and or destructive social networks. Blank (1997) found that programs working with disadvantaged women in inner-city neighbourhoods typically found that a very minimum of two years of services, including literacy training, jobs skills assistance and counseling, are required. This is reflected in the experience of Winnipeg's Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD) whose director described their students as having very low literacy levels, complicated family situations and being far from "ready" for employment or structured training. Those that are able to complete sufficient upgrading to qualify for their chosen training program often require more than the 2-year limit that welfare allows (MacKinnon, 2011)

Durlauf (2006,158) argues that in addition to exogenous effects, there are endogenous effects that lead to poverty. For example "teenagers are influenced by the behaviour of their peers through a basic desire to conform to others; the 'age-old' peer pressure factor. In any given community, high and low levels of educational attainment are self-reinforcing as the educational effort of a given teenager reflects his preference to seem like one of the crowd". In neighbourhoods where poverty and hopelessness is pervasive and dropping out is the norm, negative endogenous factors can be overwhelming. This has been the case in Winnipeg's inner city where many young Aboriginal people drop out of school to join their peers in gangs (Comack & Silver, 2009).

One solution is for families to move out of such neighbourhoods, but this is not always possible, nor desirable for many families. Another solution is to scale up and concentrate intervention in high need areas. For example, Durlauf suggests that it would be more effective to provide a significant number of scholarships and concentrated support to students in one specific high-needs school rather than spread intervention out across schools. Creating a cohort of students to support each other in one school will lead to greater success. As noted, Manitoba has had some success in this regard with university and college ACCESS programs that are specifically designed for multi-barriered students. Other examples include the Urban Circle Training Program – a program for Aboriginal second chance learners that integrates decolonizing pedagogy that graduates have described to be as important to their success as the technical training they received (MacKinnon, 2011). Blank similarly argues that the behaviour of individuals in "ghetto communities" will need to change but "people who feel caught –by their own life history, by their lack of economic resources, or by their surrounding friends and neighborhood—my need some sense of hope and possibility coming from outside themselves" (287). This is especially relevant for Aboriginal second-chance learners who have internalized their oppression. For this reason she advocates for neighbourhood development strategies as an important piece of the puzzle... "when people see positive change around them, they are more likely to want to seek positive changes for themselves (287). We have seen elements of this dynamic in Winnipeg's inner city through the many Aboriginal led programs working with Aboriginal second-chance learners. One adult learner who was able to find funding to support her in obtaining a university degree observed "Once one person graduates, boy does that open a door". She went on to describe how the cycle of poverty was broken in her family because her children and grandchildren are now on an education path following in her footsteps. She also describes a journey that took several years and significant state support.

Community-based organizations, many of which are Aboriginal led, have had an important role to play in effecting change in these communities. Governments too have a role but they have been most effective when offering a range of programs aimed at inclusion in addition to adequately supporting individuals through their training and employment trajectories and ensuring access to good paying jobs.

There is a significant amount of research discussing the importance of social networks and labour force attachment. One of the primary ways that people hear about jobs is through their social networks (Ahsan, 2007; Harrison & Weiss, 1998). People who come from families with precarious attachment to the labour market and live in poor neighbourhoods, often lack the social networks required to access good jobs. Bob Giloth of the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) 'Jobs Initiative' (as cited in Silver & Loewen, 2005, 14), describes the "disconnection between the hardest to employ and the mainstream economy" as two separate 'worlds'. "One world is made up of business culture and expectations that hard work is rewarded. The other world is made up of people who have been marginalized by the mainstream over generations and face the labour market with cynicism, loss of hope, and few positive expectations. Bridging these worlds is an enormous challenge".

One means of bridging these 'worlds' is through employment development networks or 'labour market intermediaries' (LMIs) that are designed to connect individuals who have been marginalized from the mainstream economy with employers who are committed to providing good jobs. The intermediary ensures that individuals have the training that they need and are there to provide ongoing support as both workers and employers adjust.

Such models are consistent with the economic literature on moving low-income individuals out of poverty. The lack of social networks available to people in areas where poverty is concentrated exacerbates the problem of intergenerational poverty that exists in such neighbourhoods. LMIs can be an important resource in this regard as they can be the link to a world that many poor people simply do not have access to. Because it is near impossible for an LMI to provide services to meet the diverse needs of job seekers, it is critical that they partner with other community-based organizations that have more tailored expertise. In the case of Aboriginal job-seekers, it is important that LMIs build strong relationships with CBO's that have developed frameworks through a decolonizing lens.

Conclusion

In this paper I have described the theoretical and ideological context of current labour market policy in the current global political economy, and the implications for the Aboriginal second-chance learner in the urban Canadian context. I have also described how more comprehensive approaches that recognizes the effects of colonization, integrate decolonizing pedagogy into training and employment programs, and support learners along a journey of informal and formal learning, have had better results. As questioned by the director of one Winnipeg program "how is that we expect people with such challenges to get all they need in 3 months, 10 months, 2 years. It simply isn't realistic" (Mackinnon, 2011, 263).

The current paradigm emphasizes training that specifically responds to labour market need. For the Aboriginal second-chance learner requiring government support, this is most often limited to training within a two-year period. I have argued that this is insufficient given the complex issues experienced by the Aboriginal second-chance learner.

Improving upon the existing state of inclusion of Aboriginal people we require a significant paradigm shift, beginning with a shift in our definition of the 'problem'. The problem

is not simply a lack of employment related skills. As demonstrated through the experience of Aboriginal second chance learners in Manitoba and as is born out by the experience of Aboriginal people in other jurisdictions, many Aboriginal second-chance learners have been deeply affected by colonial policies that have intentionally stripped them of their identities as indigenous people. For the most part, very little has been done to reverse the damage done by colonization by integrate indigenous knowledge into mainstream education and training institution. Unless governments support a process of decolonization, designed and delivered at the community level, as an integral part of the learning process, the process of healing required as a precursor to more technical learning will not occur.

Recognizing the importance of decolonization allows us to begin to see outcomes in a different way. This doesn't mean we don't address the other side of the ledger – jobs, income and social supports. It does mean however that we accept the need for long-term commitment rather than the quick fixes that align with the neoliberal paradigm.

In addition to a shift in thinking about what constitutes 'education and training' for the Aboriginal second-chance learner, we must revisit the notion of 'job creation'. Creating public sector jobs or private sector jobs in firms that pay decent wages and provide opportunity for advancement, are essential elements when trying to get the most disadvantaged workers into good jobs. Integrating equity training and hiring in large-scale publicly funded infrastructure projects is a good example. Finally, we must recognize that social inclusion is not just about jobs. Providing a continuum of options for individuals to participate in their communities is equally important.

The central point that this paper puts forward is that Aboriginal people continue to be over represented among those socially and economically excluded and current narrowly focused labour market policy approaches are not working for those most marginalized. Full inclusion requires a more comprehensive, long-term approach that integrates a continuum of interventions.

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