

TAKING HOLD OF THE TOOLS: POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR CANADA'S WALPOLE ISLAND FIRST NATION, 1965-1994

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Abstract / Résumé

Post-secondary education is a key to comprehending present conditions among Canadian First Nations and to fashioning their hopes for the future. Yet historians have neglected the subject. "Taking Hold of the Tools" examines the experiences of one Ontario Native community over a thirty-year period: why its students selected particular institutions and academic programs, what they encountered at colleges and universities, subsequent careers, and their recommendations for improving Native post-secondary education. The author's findings and analysis have important implications for national and provincial policy makers, for institutions of higher learning, and for First Nations educational leaders.

L'enseignement poste-secondaire est la clef à la compréhension des conditions présentes aux Premières Nations canadiennes et au façonnement de leurs espérances pour l'avenir. Pourtant les historiens ont négligé ce sujet. "S'Emparer des Instruments" examine les expériences d'une communauté Natale d'Ontario en une période de trente ans: pourquoi ses étudiants ont choisi des institutions et des programmes académiques particulières, ce qu'ils ont éprouvé à des collèges et universités, des carrières postérieures et leurs recommandations pour améliorer l'enseignement poste-secondaire Natale. Les conclusions et l'analyse de l'auteur ont des implications importantes pour les administrateurs de niveau national et provincial prenant des décisions de principe, les institutions d'enseignement supérieur et les dirigeants d'éducation des Premières Nations.

Introduction

During the 1994-95 academic year, the Aboriginal Cultural/Learning Centre at Lambton College in Samia, Ontario, served the needs of 120 First Nation students from nearby Reserves. They made up 4.8 percent of the student body. Natives dropping by between classes found a homey atmosphere: comfortable chairs, carpeting, coat racks, a coffee pot, microwave, small refrigerator, and walls colorfully decorated with paintings, posters, and Native paraphernalia. Men and women working on class assignments or planning Aboriginal Centre activities (from minipowwows to peer tutoring) could use the study table, computers and printers, plus information posted on the bulletin boards. Support staffer Holly Altman assisted students with their needs, helped maintain Centre operations, and provided clerical support for Counsellor Virgil Nahdee, whose office was part of the Centre. His goal was to assist Aboriginal students from rural Reserves who experienced difficulties when they entered the high-speed, urban, academic world. Native enrollments nearly tripled the last six years, in part because the Centre's programs helped them to feel comfortable at Lambton College. Nahdee and Altman came from Walpole Island First Nation, located twenty-five miles south of the college at the St. Clair River delta. Thirty students attending Lambton that year were also Walpole community members.¹

The experiences of Walpole Island post-secondary students at Lambton College and at other institutions of higher learning over the past thirty years is the subject of this essay. Evidence reveals that the number of attendees and graduates has multiplied dramatically as have the efforts of universities and colleges like Lambton to provide a supportive learning environment for Aboriginal students. Equally noteworthy is the increased control which Walpole Island First Nation has assumed over the funding of its college and university students, and the degree to which the Reserve has benefited from the post-secondary education of its members.

Walpole Island and other First Nations understand the historic relationship between education of the young and community well being. Today, more than ever before, the focus is on study beyond Grade 12. If "you talk to any Indian leader in this country," testified George Watts, president of the Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council,

you will not get an argument about the value post-secondary education has brought to our communities...the real changes are happening because our people are going to university and taking their skills and using them, with the knowledge of our old people, to start to make meaningful changes in our community.²

Post-secondary education is a key to comprehending present conditions among Canadian First Nations and to fashioning their hopes for the future. Education empowers people, and according to some Aboriginal leaders the denial of it in the past helped account for "the unacceptable social and economic conditions, pervasive in our communities today"³ First Nations students who attended college and university classes, on the other hand, experienced personal growth, enhanced incomes, and the opportunity to better serve their people. Those who earned university degrees in the late 1980s, for example, were 30 percent more likely to find jobs and received twice the median income of Aboriginal secondary school graduates. The Chiefs of Ontario believed post-secondary education was important for an additional reason: "First Nations self-government and the acknowledgment of rights are meaningless, if we do not have the educated and skilled people in our communities, to act on the principles of self-determination." The Assembly of First Nations concurred: post-secondary "education plays a crucial role in the creation of First Nations professionals and community leaders who will contribute to the development of the First Nations."⁴

Aboriginal people accepted this rationale, and their demand for higher education increased dramatically. During the 1985-86 academic year, 5,800 First Nations men and women enrolled in university programs--up from 60 students in 1960-61. Attendance at post-secondary institutions of all types in 1985-86 was 11,170. Nine years later this jumped to 26,800. Aboriginal students attending Ontario's Lakehead University rose from 4 to 400 between 1973 and 1993, for instance, and from 12 in 1983 to 400 ten years later at Nicola Valley Institute of Technology in British Columbia.⁵

Besides the attention of Aboriginal leaders, the snowballing demand for post-secondary education stemmed from at least five other factors: the growing First Nations population (from 224,164 in 1966 to 511,791 in 1991); increased success at the secondary level (in 1960-61, only 3.4 percent of on-Reserve students remained until Grade 12 after consecutive years of schooling; in 1991-92, the percentage was 53.6); more relevant programs at post-secondary institutions; and better access to these colleges and universities. Political events since the 1960s also stimulated the demand for post-secondary training. The notorious 1969 White Paper, wrote historian J.R. Miller, "initiated two decades of political and constitutional struggle by native peoples." Their leaders understood, without question, the contribution of higher education to First Nations self-government and economic self-sufficiency.⁶

Increased enrollment demands strained the financial support system for Aboriginal students and provoked controversy about access and pro-

grams. The Department of Indian Affairs established a post-secondary student assistance program in the late 1960s "to close the educational gap between Indians and Inuit, and the non-Native population in Canada."⁷ For twenty years federal funding kept pace with skyrocketing student demand. Appropriations more than doubled between 1986-87 and 1992-93 when they reached \$201.3 million. Still this was insufficient to support all First Nations continuing students, recent high school graduates, and mature students who sought a college and university education. "The current rate of government funding will barely maintain the status quo," complained the Chiefs of Ontario in 1991, "and the gap in levels of education and participation rates between First Nations and the Canadian population will continue to widen." The Chiefs argued, too, that post-secondary support was an Aboriginal right guaranteed by earlier land cession treaties. Indian Affairs disagreed. The on-going debate about access to higher education highlighted its importance to Native communities across Canada. Their quest for self-determination also prompted First Nations to take administrative responsibility for over 90 percent of the federal post-secondary student support program budget by 1995.⁸

Besides access to colleges and universities, Aboriginal leaders wanted their students, upon arrival, to find culturally appropriate programs. Testimony that this was not the case came in part from success rates. In the mid-1980s, only 25 percent of First Nation students who started university programs earned a degree, compared to 55 percent of non-Native students. College and university life caused culture shock among First Nation men and women from rural and often isolated Reserves. Coping with the academic workload, money problems, family worries, a new social life, and plain loneliness caused many Aboriginal students to withdraw and return home. Counselling programs and Aboriginal support groups for these isolated students are recent developments. First Nations leaders also hope that colleges and universities will adjust their curriculums to the special needs of Aboriginal students who "do not want to be assimilated" and who "have their own historical realities."⁹

Despite the importance of higher education to First Nation communities, most studies have focused on (1) Indian control of Reservation schools, (2) Indian parent involvement in off-Reservation public schools, to which older children are sent, and (3) attempts to solve the very serious dropout problem. Scholars have neglected the changing historical patterns of Indian post-secondary education. The Canadian government compiles only national data, and these figures do not explain why more students have been enrolling and what types of institutions they attend. Nor do we know much about historical changes in their educational experiences, funding, diplo-

mas and degrees granted, or subsequent employment history. To answer these and other significant questions, policy makers--in Ottawa and elsewhere in Canada--must have grass roots studies about the post-secondary experiences of individual Native communities.

Walpole Island First Nation

Walpole Island First Nation is an exemplary community for such a study because the education of its members mirrored the history of national trends. Located on the rich St. Clair River delta twenty miles south of Samia, Ontario, the Reserve consists of five islands covering 58,000 acres as well as unceded lands and waters in Lake St. Clair and the St. Clair River. Walpole is home to over 3,000 Ojibwa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi Indians. The community straddles strategic north-south and east-west transportation routes, and thus has played important roles--political, economic, and cultural--since the prehistoric era. More recently the Reserve has been a national leader in the fight for Indian self-determination. In the mid-1960s Walpole was the first Canadian Reserve to remove its Indian agent and begin to restore self-government. A flurry of Band-initiated activities followed: construction of a bridge to the Ontario mainland, establishment of a Band-owned farm, improved housing and social services, and the encouragement of tourism. Among the first projects instituted by the Chief and Council was a new central school. Yet this was only a start at tackling the serious educational problems on the island, where only 2.9 percent of Band members were educated beyond Grade 9. Since then Walpole has expanded the day school and in 1990 took charge of its programs for children from pre-kindergarten through Grade 8. Boys and girls then leave the island to attend nearby Wallaceburg District Secondary School, where overall success rates have improved significantly during the last two decades.¹⁰ Dramatic changes in post-secondary education have also pleased Walpole's Board of Education. During the 1973-74 academic year, for example, 8 islanders were full-time students at post-secondary institutions. Twenty years later the number had jumped to 90, with 25 more enrolled as part-time students.¹¹

Methodology

To understand these local developments since the mid-1960s, Native voices must be heard: the thoughts and feelings of Walpole Island college and university students who were active participants in the educational process. The author, following accepted protocol, presented his credentials and research proposal to the Walpole Island Chief and Council and the newly-elected Board of Education. Permission was generously granted in

1993. Next, the author identified 169 persons who had been admitted to college and university programs during the previous thirty years. He selected a sample of 67 (39.6 percent of the total) to interview. Their post-secondary experiences represented three time periods: 1965-74, 1975-84, and 1984-94. The author developed questions for these informants in consultation with Walpole Island education leaders. He conducted the interviews during 1994 after first obtaining signed consent forms which explained the project and promised anonymity to interviewees. Their candid and detailed responses--the heart of this study--are an important expression of historic Walpole Island educational experiences. This data and the author's analysis have important implications for national and provincial policy makers, for institutions of higher learning, for the Walpole Island Board of Education, and for other First Nations.

Ambitions

Over the years, several factors have influenced Walpole students' choices of post-secondary institutions and academic programs. Of the 67 interviewees, 47 (70.1 percent) graduated from Wallaceburg District Secondary School. The 20 others attended high schools elsewhere in southwest Ontario and the United States or entered college as mature students. Most college and university students were thus under the strong influence of their home community and its neighboring secondary school when they made choices about higher education.

Fifty-five informants identified specific individuals or groups--families, teachers and counsellors, and peers--who shaped their decisions to attend college or university. Fifty-three percent of the respondents named their families. Parents, siblings, relatives, and for older students their spouses and children, encouraged the interviewees to pursue higher education, even if families did not fully understand what was involved. Wallaceburg District Secondary School teachers and Native counsellors helped convince 15 respondents to attend post-secondary institutions. Non-Native academic counsellors strongly affected only 11 interviewees out of 67. Nearly as important as teachers and counsellors in influencing the informants were Native and non-Native peers who also contemplated higher education. In a couple cases students rejected peer advice to shun more education. Three of the 67 interviewees claimed they were entirely self-motivated. Thus, the prime motivators of Walpole Island post-secondary students since 1965 were family and school associates (friends, teachers, and counsellors).

The influence of family and their home community was manifested as well in the choice of educational institutions. Most were in southwest

Ontario, a few hours by car from Walpole Island: the University of Windsor, St. Clair College (Windsor, Chatham), Lambton College (Sarnia), Fanshawe College (London), and the University of Western Ontario (London). Other schools attended by at least two students from the Walpole sample included Eastern Michigan University (Ypsilanti, Michigan), University of Waterloo (Waterloo, Ontario), and Ontario Police College (Aylmer).

Institutional affiliations of the Walpole student 30-year sample correlated closely with another group for which general data is available: the 115 islanders who took post-secondary courses during the 1993-94 academic year. The latter group also attended a diverse group of 17 universities (11 in Canada and 6 in the United States) and 24 colleges (17 in Canada and 7 in the United States). Yet those institutions with 5 or more Walpole students were, with the exception of Trent University, close to home in southwestern Ontario and the Detroit metropolitan area: the University of Windsor, St. Clair College, Lambton College, the University of Western Ontario, and Macomb Community College. Another similarity was the percentages attending universities rather than colleges. For the 1993-94 cohort it was 33.9 and for the Walpole sample used in this study it was 35.8.¹²

Experiences

Although closeness to Walpole characterized these students throughout secondary and post-secondary studies, they showed a variety of academic interests. Between the mid-1960s and mid-1980s, one third to one half the males from the Walpole sample took classes on trade skills. Since then their aspirations have broadened to include Native studies, human services, policing, and business. Business administration, office management, secretarial training, and education were favorite fields for Walpole women throughout the time period. This pattern was similar to the academic interests of the 115 Walpole Island students who took classes during the 1993-94 school year. Sixty-eight (59.1 percent) enrolled in the following programs:

Human services, counselling, health	18
Business	17
Education	12
General arts and sciences	8
Law, law enforcement	5
Native studies	4
Theology	4

The Walpole sample attended institutions fairly close to their Reserve. Colleges and universities tried to make new students feel welcome during the past thirty years, according to 86.6 percent of those interviewed, yet a "post-secondary trauma" occurred when First Nation students left the "warm and cozy" reserve community and ventured onto college and university campuses where Natives made up less than 5 percent of the student body.¹³ Often they felt isolated, lonely, and full of self-doubt. Once classes began, the challenges of higher education hit them hard. They needed help budgeting their time, taking notes, preparing for tests, managing stress, and with other life and academic skills. Because so many from Walpole were older students, they had even more to cope with: family pressures; money, housing, and transportation problems; plus community demands on their time. Cultural alienation on campus, the frequent lack of a support group, and no place to call their own--to be themselves--all made post-secondary survival especially challenging for Aboriginal students.

Aware of these difficulties, the Province of Ontario created in 1991 an incentive program for colleges and universities: the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy. The Ministry of Education and Training would provide funds

to increase the number of Aboriginal counselors employed by postsecondary institutions...to enhance the range and quality of specialized support services available to Aboriginal students... [and] to encourage the development and start up of: Aboriginal curricula which supports the cultural, social and economic needs of Aboriginal people; innovative and flexible delivery of Aboriginal programs; and, joint college/university Aboriginal program initiatives.¹⁴

Support from this program helped establish the Aboriginal Cultural/Learning Centre at Lambton College. Its Aboriginal Council on Education was composed of representatives from the college and its Native constituencies: the Chippewas of Sarnia, Walpole Island First Nation, Chippewas of Kettle and Stoney Point, Muncey Delaware Nation, Moravian Delaware First Nation, Chippewas of the Thames, and Onyota'a:ka. The Aboriginal Council provided liaison with these Native communities and set policies for the Centre, whose accomplishments were reviewed each year at the provincial level. A member of the Aboriginal Council also sat on Lambton College's Board of Governors.¹⁵ Walpole Island students benefited from similar programs at the University of Western Ontario, St. Clair College, the University of Windsor, and at other institutions.

During the 1990s, Native post-secondary counsellors like Virgil Nahdee at Lambton College were the keys to successful social and academic

integration. We have provided a "cushion" for Native students that did not previously exist, observed one counsellor. Advisers have offered many social services as well; they helped orient students to campus life, assisted them in dealing with troublesome personal issues, established a gathering place, and encouraged Native student organizations. These in turn sponsored pot lucks, parties, guest speakers, and other informal functions. Perhaps most important, the counsellors were fellow Aboriginals whom students could trust and with whom students could bond. Once established, this personal bridge expanded into a support network and thus increased dramatically the students' chances for "survival." Native counsellors also exerted great influence academically. They gave hope and direction. They convinced first-year students that they were not alone. Advisers referred students to study skills workshops and generally helped them deal with their "skeletons" of past failure. Aboriginal student centers offered computers, peer tutors, study rooms, resource materials, and fellow Natives engaged in the same educational endeavors.¹⁶

Counsellors' activities extended beyond Native students. Liz Chamberlain at the University of Windsor has recruited post-secondary students from Reserves as far north as Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury. Here she also held workshops for Grade 9s and 10s. Many of these youngsters lived in poverty, had little contact with secondary school counsellors, and had not even considered university education--until Chamberlain arrived. Russell Nahdee, the Native Counsellor at St. Clair College, has advocated at both campuses for Aboriginal students and programs. Moreover he has promoted cultural awareness among faculty and staff. During the spring of 1994, for example, he arranged for interested college employees to tour his Walpole Island home.¹⁷

Walpole interviewees' experiences reflected these institutional changes. Of the 43 who took post-secondary classes between 1965 and 1984, only 5 (11.6 percent) were aware of Native support programs. One informant commented that back then you "just bit the bullet and dealt with it yourself." During the last decade, on the other hand, 11 (47.8 percent) of the 23 college and university students knew of special services available to them.

Although their numbers remained small on campuses, Aboriginal students sought out one another. "Hell would be a place where there are no Native peoples," commented one. Not surprisingly, three-quarters of the Walpole Islanders reported that they had contact with other Native students--many on a regular basis, and the percentage varied little throughout the 30 year period under study.

An effective strategy used by most Walpole informants to cope with post-secondary challenges was staying close to their Reserve. One-third commuted regularly between their homes and campuses. Women travelled more than men, probably because of household responsibilities. Those who lived on campus or rented rooms nearby also visited Walpole regularly. From 1965-94, 22-50 percent journeyed back to the island at least once a week. They often spent summers at home as well.

Once they adjusted to college and university life, Walpole respondents had high praise for their academic training. Secondary schools had prepared 80 percent of the islanders well for higher education, in their judgment. Only nine interviewees complained about the impersonality of large college and university classrooms or about faculty who were unfriendly or harbored stereotypes about Native people. Students more often expressed praise for respectful teachers and excitement about the knowledge they conveyed. When asked about the quality of their post-secondary education, all but one islander was pleased, and the lone dissenter grumbled because he was not challenged enough. Among the positive comments were: "good quality," "good skills and treated well," "usable and practical," "excellent! I'm proud of that place and to have graduated."

Enrollment and attendance patterns as well as program completion rates of Walpole interviewees indicated that they were proud, determined, ambitious (I'm not finished yet") first generation students "testing the waters" of higher education. Of the 60 who responded to a question about their years of higher education, 29 (48.3 percent) had taken only 1 or 2 years. Islanders with 3-4 years numbered 19 (31.7 percent), and 12 (20 percent) accumulated 5 or more years. A slightly higher percentage of women (51.3) were in the 1-2 year category than the men (43.5). Forty-eight from the Walpole sample commented on their attendance. Roughly half (57.9 percent of the men and 51.7 percent of the women) took classes each term; the rest followed a less regular schedule because of the need to work, family demands, and personal problems. Their in-and-out attendance pattern coupled with the large number of islanders with 1-2 years of higher education suggested a community which was just beginning to take hold of the tools offered by colleges and universities.

Academic persistence yielded important rewards. Of the 67 Walpole interviewees, 70 percent finished at least one academic program and earned college certificates/diplomas or bachelors/masters degrees. Twenty-one percent did not complete their coursework, and 9 percent were still in school. One received an M.A. degree. Women showed a slightly higher completion rate than men: 74.4 percent versus 64.3. Among those finishing programs between 1965 and 1994, two-thirds obtained certificates

and diplomas and one-third earned degrees. The experiences of the Walpole sample once again suggest that they were not radically different from all island college and university students who were funded during the 1993-94 school year. Certificate and diploma programs attracted 58.8 percent, while 41.2 percent enrolled in degree programs.

Financial dependence went hand-in-hand with academic persistence and success during the college and university years. Coming from an economically-depressed community, first generation Walpole students understandably needed assistance with higher education expenses. Only four persons from the sample paid for significant portions of their own education. For most of the others, Indian Affairs subsidized their tuition and books and provided a monthly living allowance. Travel assistance was also available. These costs increased even after Walpole Island First Nation took over administrative responsibility in the late 1980s for the federal post-secondary student support program. During the 1992-93 Fiscal Year, for example, Walpole assisted 133 students, 122 of whom were full time and 11 part time. As a group they received \$956,325, an average of \$7,190.41 per student.¹⁸

Based on these post-secondary experiences, Walpole interviewees had some advice for the local administrators of the higher education student support program. Limited federal dollars and the growing Native demand for post-secondary assistance necessitated accountability. All serious undergraduate and graduate students should have a chance to take college and university classes, but their grades must be monitored and each term they ought to make progress toward graduation. No longer fundable were "professional students" who used assistance money as a type of welfare--"partying" and switching from major to major and institution to institution. Clearly some of these individuals had abused the student support program, and Walpole informants felt strongly that they should no longer be tolerated. Blame did not rest entirely on them, according to Roslynn McCoy, a former Supervisor/Counsellor of Walpole's Post-Secondary Counselling Services Program. In May 1992 she observed that no one took responsibility for

the enormous abuses....This specific situation was created and nurtured by the Department of Indian Affairs all the years that they administered the post secondary program. The problem was a lack of expectations, standards and accountability for results.... An additional factor centered on the availability of seemingly limitless funds. This created an attitude that the money will always be there., much was taken for granted and diminished responsibility of DIA to Native people and individual responsibility to one's self and community. These are tough lessons but lessons learned.¹⁹

After taking over administration of the post-secondary student support program, Walpole Island emphasized counselling and accountability. Higher education Native counsellors prior to 1989 were rarely available to Walpole students either at the colleges and universities or at home. Marshall George, a Native employee of the Department of Indian Affairs who was headquartered in London, allocated funds to Aboriginal students in southwest Ontario for eighteen years, but he was not from the island or readily available for academic and personal consultations.²⁰ Since the early 1990s, Walpole has had a full-time post-secondary counsellor who advises college- and university-bound secondary students, administers the financial support program, provides academic and social advice to persons attending post-secondary classes, monitors their progress, and assists them with summer employment and finding jobs after graduation.²¹

On the Job

Upon completing their academic programs, with assistance from Indian Affairs and, after 1989, island post-secondary counsellors, Walpole interviewees held a variety of jobs--from government employees, administrators, office workers, and policemen to the building trades and data processing--while maintaining strong community connections. Of the 66 who responded to employment questions, only 4 (6 percent) had worked consistently off the Reserve. Another 30 (45.5 percent) found positions over the years both on and off the island. The rest had jobs on the Reserve, were still in school, had never found work, or were retired. The largest employer of college and university graduates was Walpole Island First Nation. Sixty-three percent of the male and 84.6 percent of the female informants had worked or were still employed by local government service programs. These included administrators, office workers, educators, health care and environmental specialists, policemen, computer programmers, and employment counsellors. The concentration of workers on the island was due in part to their sense of obligation. Of the forty who answered this question, 25 (62.5 percent) felt duty-bound to use their new post-secondary skills for the community's benefit. More men (76.9 percent) expressed this commitment than women (55.6 percent). Also, the strength of responsibility to work at home lessened somewhat over time: from 70 percent for the 1965-74 cohort and 70.6 (1975-84) to 46.2 percent for those who attended classes between 1985 and 1994.

Walpole Islands' response to its post-secondary graduates was heartening. Eighty percent of the 46 who responded believed that the community appreciated their higher education skills. These strongly positive perceptions held by men and women continued throughout the 30-year time frame

of this study. The five interviewees with negative views focused on the Chief and Council, which, it was claimed, did not fully use the skills of recent graduates and sometimes hired less qualified persons because of their family connections.

Recommendations

Sixty-seven islanders concluded their interviews with recommendations for improving Native post-secondary experiences. Respondents spoke of three general needs: better preparation for college- and university-bound students, improved campus support for Natives, and greater understanding among islanders about higher education's importance. The distilled wisdom of these informants, tempered by personal experience, warrants serious attention by policy makers. A more detailed composite of these suggestions follows.

Besides the support of loving and caring family members, Walpole youngsters must be better prepared for the challenges of college and university life by their home community and local schools. The Walpole Board of Education and its employees, such as the post-secondary counsellor, should identify students who are motivated and academically ready for higher education. For them the Board should sponsor summer preparatory workshops. Attendees would learn that college and university success depended on their commitment, self-discipline, and willingness to do their very best. "There is no authority over you. You must be your own authority." There is "no magic formula to succeed, no easy way around." You just have to "buckle down and do it." Students must be alerted very early that the work will be hard. College- and university-bound men and women also needed tips on handling life's inevitable personal problems. For Walpole Islanders these included discouragement and loneliness, the stress of demanding professors, and the pain of racism. Finding solutions to these difficulties would involve building a support group of teachers and fellow students--Native as well as non-Native--and talking to counsellors. Personal goal setting might also be an important part of each summer's workshop, for success depended on the individual. You must believe in yourself and stay focused on what you want to do. "Don't let others drag you down." "Stick with your dream and don't lose your vision." Talks by successful college and university students could motivate workshop attendees and get them thinking about professional options. Field trips to nearby educational institutions would also be enlightening. Finally, the workshops should stimulate Walpole men and women to help one another while away from home--to be teachers themselves.

Interviewees had additional suggestions for their Board of Education. It should arrange work experiences for secondary school students on and off the Reserve to prepare them for "what the outside world is like." On the job they would learn time and money management, to become more responsible, and begin to grasp the importance of education. Because there can never be enough community recognition for post-secondary students, one informant suggested a Walpole Student Hall of Fame to honor academic achievements--"all the way back." Finally, the Board of Education as well as the Chief and Council must encourage skill upgrading among its own employees and then hire/promote islanders with enhanced abilities. If this were not done, it would discourage ambitious post-secondary students.

Interviewees further felt that Walpole Island Day School, administered by the Board of Education, and District Secondary School should do more to encourage and prepare Natives for higher education. This ought to start with Grade 6 students rather than waiting until secondary school. Teachers must work harder to help Aboriginal youngsters discover and develop their skills. English composition and computer literacy were particularly important for the college and university bound as well as forming good homework habits. These goals could be more easily reached if Wallaceburg high school employed some Native teachers. Also critical were caring Aboriginal counsellors who aggressively sought out good students and encouraged them to prepare for university as well as college experiences. Advisers should help students visualize the many opportunities that await them after graduation from post-secondary institutions, including coming back to the island to serve their people.

Walpole interviewees who attended classes prior to the mid-1980s suggested several ways to improve college and university support of Aboriginal students. Institutions like Lambton College have already implemented many of these ideas, as noted above: orientations geared toward Natives' special needs, on-campus social and academic counselling, First Nation student organizations, and drop-in centers.

Finally, island respondents repeatedly emphasized "getting the word out" to young people about the importance of education for individuals and for the Native community. True, the transition to college or university was rough; but you "have to get past that," and once you do, you "feel good about yourself." If you are not sure what you want, take a general arts and sciences curriculum. Go part time, if you have to. Go nights, if necessary. Pay for Glasses yourself, if need be--but go. The more education you have, the better job you will get and the higher salary. You can never learn too much, and once on the job you can never stop learning.

Conclusion

Regarding the "dismantling" of the Department of Indian Affairs in Manitoba, Minister Ronald A Irwin remarked in November, 1994: "You can't have self-government without self-sufficiency and you can't have self-sufficiency without the skills. The Chiefs and Elders know this, that is why education is so important."²² Walpole Island First Nation exemplified this important linkage between education and community well being. Walpole shaped the academic ambitions of young men and women, and was in turn strengthened by returning college and university students. They brought home the tools needed to manage their community and fight for its rights on the provincial, national, and international levels.

Sixty-seven interviewees explained the process: from selection of their institutions and campus adjustment problems to putting their tools to work following graduation. Most respondents graduated from nearby Wallaceburg District Secondary School, sought higher education because of parental encouragement, and enrolled at campuses rather close to the Reserve. Two thirds chose college programs and one third university. Interviewees had high praise for their academic training. Between 1965 and 1994, these student characteristics changed very little. Academic interests, on the other hand, have broadened over time for both men and women. The shock of attending urban institutions, even those not too far from home, has not lessened. Some help came in the late 1980s when several colleges and universities, spurred on by the Province of Ontario, established Aboriginal support programs. Native academic and social counsellors now coordinate a variety of services for Walpole students at Lambton College and at other campuses. Enrollment, attendance, and program completion patterns suggest that ambitious post-secondary students from the island struggled mightily to stay in school, often had to drop out for a time, but as a group (70 percent of the Walpole sample) finished at least one academic program. While "testing the waters" of higher education, these first generation students depended on financial aid from Indian Affairs, either administered by Marshall George's office or, after 1989, by Walpole's post-secondary counsellor. Respondents directed their two major complaints to Indian Affairs for "capping" post-secondary student support allocations in the 1990s and for not closely monitoring student progress prior to 1989. Finally, the employment history of the Walpole sample documented that the island was the major beneficiary of post-secondary education. Most graduates have returned home because they felt a responsibility to their family and friends and because they believed their new tools were appreciated.

Since tools often get rusty, wear out, and must be replaced by new technology, student interviewees had several important suggestions about higher education for the next generation of Walpole Islanders. Some recommendations dealt with colleges, universities and Wallaceburg District

Secondary School, but most focused on how the community could best help itself. Most promising were the summer workshops and on-the-job experiences, which would better prepare Native students for academic and social challenges away from home. Finally, post-secondary students must never have reason to doubt their community's support for education.

The implications of these recommendations are varied and full of significance. Provincial and national policy makers must not weaken their post-secondary student support for Native communities like Walpole Island. If possible, funding ought to be expanded to keep pace with the rising demands of these historically disadvantaged Canadians. Ontario should continue to encourage its secondary schools, colleges, and universities to address the special academic and social needs of Native students. Fighting for education dollars is a major responsibility of the Assembly of First Nations, the national advocacy group for Aboriginal peoples, but it must also help proclaim the success stories of communities like Walpole Island. Individual achievements of its post-secondary students and how they, as a group, have impacted their home Reserve are worthy of further study and emulation. First Nations need role models, just like individuals.

External support alone will not meet Walpole's challenges. History suggests that the answers to Canadian Native problems have not come from Ottawa or Toronto. In the highly-competitive, international environment of the 1990s, First Nation economic self-sufficiency and self-government will more likely be achieved when local leaders rouse their people to take hold of the educational tools needed to forge their own destiny.

Notes

1. Don Loraas, Director of Learning Services, Personal Interview (hereafter cited as PI), November 17, 1994, Lambton College; Virgil Nahdee, PI, October 13, 1994, Lambton College. The author thanks the Walpole Island First Nation Council for granting permission to undertake this study and the Canadian government for a Faculty Research Grant which supported his research. Appreciation is also extended to four graduate students who assisted with this project (Phyllis Gernhardt, Stephanie Jass, Christine Kersten, Carol Re-pass), to the Walpole Island Heritage Centre, and to the Reverend James Miller. The sixty-seven interviewees, who must remain anonymous, cooperated with yet another research project because of a dedication to their community's welfare. The author hopes that his narrative and analysis is worthy of their trust.
2. Testimony before the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 1989, quoted in Robin Armstrong, *et al.*, *University Education and Economic Well-being: Indian Achievements and Prospects* (Ottawa: Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1990), 1-2.

3. Post-Secondary Education Lobby Information Package, Chiefs of Ontario, September, 1991, photocopies in author's files.
4. Armstrong, University Education, 23; Post-Secondary Education Lobby Information Package; National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations, *Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future. National Review of First Nations Education. Volume I* (Ottawa: National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations, 1988), 98.
5. Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. *Basic Departmental Data*, 1992 (Ottawa, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1992), 39, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Public Hearings: *Overview of the Second Round* (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group---Publishing, 1993), 54. *Creating Opportunity: Progress on Commitments to Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs, 1995), 2.
6. Department of Indian Affairs, Basic Departmental Data, 1992, 5, 36-37; Post-Secondary Education Lobby Information Package; J. R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 230. See Chapters 12-14 in Miller for a description of Native political struggles since the 1960s.
7. Christoph Clodius, "Minister Announces Extra Funding for Post-Secondary Education," *Transition*, 7 (September, 1994): 8, 12.
8. [Http://www.inac.gc.ca/pubs/information/info41/html](http://www.inac.gc.ca/pubs/information/info41/html) (November 18, 1996); Jibkenyan [Walpole Island First Nation newsletter], January 11, 1991; History of Post-Secondary Student Support Program, in Post-Secondary Education Lobby Information Package; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, "Communique No. 1-91104: Minister Sidon Reaffirms Federal Commitment to the Indian and Inuit Post-Secondary Education Support Program, Vancouver, November 13, 1991," photocopy in Post-Secondary Education Lobby Information Package. Ottawa's allocation for post-secondary support in 1994-95 was \$247.3 million, Clodius, "Minister Announces Extra Funding for Post-Secondary Education"; *Creating Opportunity*, 2.
9. Armstrong *et al.*, *University Education*, vii; R.W. Common and Lorraine G. Frost, Native Counselling Needs Assessment (Union of Ontario Indians, 1991), 55, 58; Jennifer Hollands, "First Nations Education Counselling Unit is there to Help," *Transition*, 5 (December, 1992), 5; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Public Hearings: Overview of the Second Round*, 54.
10. Edmund J. Danziger, Jr., "Children and the Future: Indian Education at Wallaceburg District Secondary School," *Canadian Journal of*

- Native Education*, 19 (No. 1, 1992): 22. For a discussion of this community's battle for self-determination, see Nin.Da.Waab.Jig, *Walpole Island: The Soul of Indian Territory* (Walpole Island, Ontario: Nin.Da.Waab.Jig, 1987), Chapter 9 and Epilogue.
11. Margaret A. and L. Alice Brigham, Walpole Island Local Education Study, [1986], copy on file at Walpole Island Heritage Centre, 35; Walpole Island First Nation, Post Secondary Counselling Services Program, 1993-1994 Students Entering the Fall-Winter School Year, photocopy in author's files.
 12. Walpole Island First Nation, Post Secondary Counselling Services Program, 1993-1994 Students Entering the Fall- Winter School Year.
 13. Data for this paragraph came from interviews with the Walpole sample and Native counsellors at the University of Windsor, St. Clair College, Lambton College, the University of Western Ontario, and Fanshawe College.
 14. Ministry of Education and Training, Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy, Guidelines for Proposals (July 1994), 1, photocopy in author's files.
 15. Lambton College, Ministry of Education and Training Funding Proposal, Native Education and Training Strategy (November, 1993), 1-13, copy in author's files.
 16. Data for this paragraph came from interviews with the Walpole sample and Native counsellors at the University of Windsor, St. Clair College, Lambton College, the University of Western Ontario, and Fanshawe College.
 17. Liz Chamberlain, PI, November 5, 1994, Windsor, Ontario; Russell Nahdee, PI, October 6, 1994, Windsor, Ontario. First Nation Services at the University of Western Ontario are described by Pat Morden, "Bridging the Gap: Vivian Peters, Manager of First Nation Services, Helps Native Students Cope," *Western Alumni Gazette*, 71 (Summer, 1995): 14-15.
 18. Walpole Island First Nation, Post Secondary Program Statistics (2 Year Sampling), photocopy in author's files.
 19. Roslynn McCoy, Post Secondary Education Up-date. A Policy Development Prelude, May 5, 1992, photocopy in author's files.
 20. Telephone Interview, Marshall George, January 13, 1995.
 21. Bernita Brigham, PI, February 9, 1995, Walpole Island First Nation.
 22. Raymond Lawrence, "Dismantling in Manitoba, An Interview with the Minister," *Transition*, 7 (November, 1994): 3, 8.