Voicing our Realities: Sharing Stories with First Nations Mothers Attending University

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Abstract: Promoting empowerment and growth for First Nations mothers is critical when attempting to improve the post-secondary educational attainment of Indigenous Peoples. Based on the literature, Indigenous Peoples of Canada have lower rates of University-level education across all Indigenous groups (First Nation, Métis, and Inuit). The literature also shows that Indigenous Peoples cite personal and family responsibilities as a barrier to their educational attainment more often than any other barrier. Approximately one in ten First Nations and Inuit teenage girls between the ages of 15 and 19 years were parents in 2011. Fertility rates in the same group are six times higher than that of other Canadian teens. The statistics go on to explain that early motherhood increases the vulnerability of young First Nations women who are already disadvantaged socio-economically by their cultural background and gender. The data for this project was collected through the use of autoethnography and Indigenous storytelling as methods. Together, we explore the literature and the shared stories, while discussing the preliminary project findings through a decolonizing lens. Key points discussed include the balancing of identities, the implications of the imposter syndrome for First Nations Peoples, the process of navigating the post-secondary institution, and the importance of restoring culture while finding autonomy within academia. This research aims to contribute to the literature on Indigenous education while creating the groundwork for future research which may help to inspire future generations of First Nations mothers to attend post-secondary education.

Keywords: First Nations education, Mother, Student, Identity, Inspiration, Trail-blazers

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