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Roland Karen  
*University of Windsor*

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**CREATING INCLUSIVE SPACE FOR ABORIGINAL SCHOLARS  
AND SCHOLARSHIP IN THE ACADEMY:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYMENT EQUITY POLICY**

[Karen A. Roland](#), *University of Windsor*

Many Canadian universities report an under-representation of Aboriginal scholars in their professoriate. Employment equity policy seeks to redress the under-representation of marginalized groups in the Canadian workforce, including Aboriginal peoples. This article presents the findings of a case study which sought to examine, from the perspective of Aboriginal scholars, the under-representation of Aboriginal scholars in the Ontario professoriate, specifically, why Aboriginal scholars stay, or leave the academy. The study findings illustrate the need for employment equity policy to equitably promote the recruitment of Aboriginal scholars, and further, to support their retention through the valuation of Aboriginal scholarship. The study highlights the need for Canadian universities to embrace their role as societal ‘agents of change,’ and as part of their social justice mission, to promote diversification in the professoriate by creating inclusive space for Aboriginal scholars and scholarship in the academy.

Canadian educational institutions are comprised of politically driven processes that have considerable power and influence over the communication of respect and value for cultural diversity in Canadian society. As such, to acknowledge the multiple identities within Canada’s pluralistic society, there is a compelling need for a ‘call for social justice’ in the Canadian educational system. However, policy-making within this context may become fragmented, and for some groups, such as the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, *voices* may be lost, or left unheard. To ensure social justice and equity, public policy development must engage the voice of all of its

citizenry. Given this, policymakers in institutions of higher education share a national imperative to ensure equitable access, for all members of Canadian society, to the life chances and opportunities that education may provide in reaching their potential.

The 1971 Canadian *Multiculturalism Policy* viewed as an effort to promote social justice in Canadian society within a bilingual framework, for the benefit of all the citizenry, is consonant with a multicultural approach to education policy characterized as a focus on the celebration of diversity and the various contributions made by many cultural groups. However, as Lock Kunz (2001) shares, while Canada may be considered a national model for managing diversity through the establishment of multiculturalism as an official policy, it may also be criticized for marginalizing those individuals and groups outside of the mainstream. McIntosh (1992), reflecting on the active and embedded forms of societal oppression states that in some cases the nature of the oppression may be so insidious, that even the dominant group is ignorant of the invisible systems which confer dominance.

Given that systemic and embedded forms of societal oppression exist, it may be argued that multiculturalism does not move Canadian society beyond a stance of tolerance, and of critical importance, is that this policy does not move Canadian society towards positive social action through the promotion of meaningful respect and valuing for differences among the many groups comprising the Canadian *mosaic*. Lawrence and Dua (2005) identify an example of this in their discussion of the inability of the Canadian *Multiculturalism* policy to redress the extinction of Aboriginal languages. They assert that this policy reflects a colonial perspective by first providing for the ‘official’ languages of Canada, and only then providing whatever limited funding remains for Aboriginal language initiatives. They suggest that ongoing colonization is a foundational practice in Canadian society. This therefore points to a crucial need for the

Canadian populace to not only acknowledge, but also to operationalize a shared conceptualization of what social justice means in Canadian society, and how this conceptualization translates into social justice policy to address the marginalization of certain groups in the Canadian educational system (Roland, 2009, p. 37). This is of particular significance to universities as institutions of higher education. Kuokkanen (2007) asserts that there must be recognition that the academy is an institution which silences and marginalizes indigenous students through selective and exclusionary practices, and furthermore, she states that "...it is not enough to critique oppressive, discriminatory structures and practices; one must also envision alternatives" (p. 3).

This paper presents the findings of a doctoral case study that examined, from the perspective of Aboriginal scholars, the efficacy of employment equity policy in the academy to identify and remove barriers to recruitment and retention of Aboriginal scholars in the Ontario professoriate. In the discussion of this case study it is essential to acknowledge with sincere gratitude the generosity of the Aboriginal research participants for sharing their wisdom, knowledge, insights and perspectives throughout the research journey. The discussion in the paper will begin with an overview of the purpose and aims of employment equity policy, and its relevance in the Canadian university. This will be followed with a discussion of the case study methodology and data analysis, the study findings relevant to policy transformation, and a discussion of why Aboriginal scholars stay, or conversely, why they leave the professoriate, specifically, the implications this has for employment equity policy and practices in the academy.

## **Employment Equity Policy in the Academy**

As a social policy at the federal level, the purpose and aims of employment equity are directed at increasing the representation of marginalized groups of people across the Canadian workforce. The Canada Royal Commission on Equality in Employment (1984) report, *Equality in Employment* states that, employment equity is an attempt to open equitability the competition for employment and career opportunities, and that:

It is not that individuals in the designated groups are inherently unable to achieve equality on their own, it is that the obstacles in their way are so formidable and self-perpetuating that they cannot be overcome without intervention. It is both intolerable and insensitive if we simply wait and hope that the barriers will disappear with time. Equality in employment will not happen unless we make it happen. (p. 254)

Therefore, it may be argued that Canadian universities, as institutions of significant social influence, must include as an integral aspect of their social justice mission, the need to diversify the professoriate as a means to promote inclusion and equity in the educational community. Coupled with the benefit of workforce diversification, this focus on equity may also provide an effective strategy to expand and broaden the body of scholarly knowledge in marginalized areas of research.

In monitoring employment equity on Canadian campuses, many universities report an under-representation of Aboriginal scholars (Holmes, 2006; Metcalfe, Mazawi, Rubenson, Fisher, MacIvor, & Meredith, 2007; University of Windsor Employment Equity Committee, 2002, 2006). The Government of Canada, Human Resources Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) (2004) *Employment Equity Data Report* based on 2001 Census data report, “*Workforce population showing representation by employment equity occupational groups and unit groups (2001 NOC) for Women, Aboriginal Peoples and Visible Minorities*” indicated a

national labour force availability of 0.7 percent for Aboriginal Peoples in the national occupation code (NOC) #4121, university professors; specifically, of the 52,160 persons available in the workforce nationally in this employment category, only 340 self-identified in the 2001 census as an Aboriginal person. And, of particular interest to this study, in Ontario, of the 19,355 persons available in this employment category, only 95 individuals self-identified as an Aboriginal person (Government of Canada). These figures are compelling and of particular significance for Aboriginal scholars, not only in terms of career aspirations, but also as Preston (2008) asserts, because of the fact that postsecondary educational opportunities may in fact work toward the preservation of Aboriginal peoples and their cultures in Canada. As Kuokkanen (2007) states:

Many indigenous people contend that notwithstanding its rhetoric of welcome and hospitality, the academy is not a good host. Their experiences attest to the ways in which the academy is an inhospitable and sometimes even a hostile host with only a weak commitment to indigenous people. Access and bridging programs have opened the doors to many indigenous students, but these are inadequate solutions to the central problem, which is that indigenous people are inevitably treated as outsiders. (p. 3)

Therefore, to address these issues, employment equity policy in universities, through processes which systematically analyze and identify barriers to recruitment and retention, may in fact offer strategies to increase the representation of Aboriginal scholars and to promote the valuation of Aboriginal scholarship in the academy. This research inquiry examining the under-representation of Aboriginal scholars in the Ontario professoriate, sought to inform employment equity policy from the situational perspective of the participants through the investigation of why Aboriginal scholars stay or leave the Ontario professoriate (Roland, 2009).

### **A Case Study Examining the Under-Representation of Aboriginal Scholars**

This case study sought to understand, from the perspective of Aboriginal scholars currently and formerly employed in the Ontario professoriate, why Aboriginal scholars stay, or conversely, why they leave the professoriate. The study, embodying a counter-story telling postcolonial approach to examine systemic oppression and marginalization in education, was grounded in critical theory in an effort to actively collaborate with Aboriginal scholars. As NishKwe, one of the study participants noted, “It is the ‘First Story, the First Narrative, the First Peoples Account’ that is missing from many types of schools....this knowledge is vital to combating stereotypes and other lies” (Roland, 2009, p. 149). Kincheloe (2005) suggests that critical theory acknowledges the political spaces operating in the context of schooling, and the systematic processes of hegemony which oppress and marginalize those considered outside of mainstream. Kincheloe also claims that education, from a critical theory perspective, recognizes the complex social, cultural, cognitive and socio-economic landscape of human experience, and the polity of these contexts in terms of equity and social justice. He states that, “dominant cultural agents produce hegemonic ways of seeing” (p. 58), and that “education is not neutral” (p. 11). Kincheloe stresses that critical theory is concerned with those members of society who experience marginalization, and that the acknowledgement of these ‘margins’ recognizes the political nature of education.

Given that education has been identified as a system that transmits social and cultural values, this case study sought to examine processes of hegemonic legitimation, and the consequences that result in terms of the marginalization of the members of some groups within educational settings. A qualitative research methodology was used to investigate a social phenomenon, from the interpretative and subjective stance of the participants, self-identified

Aboriginal scholars currently and formerly employed as members of the Ontario professoriate (Roland, 2009).

### *Sampling Procedure*

Welch (1997) asserts that the professional academic role for members of the professoriate encompasses a diverse range of professional activities including teaching, research and service. For the purpose of this study, membership in the Ontario professoriate was broadly defined in terms of the following academic roles, all which involved some teaching responsibility: faculty member (including sessional instructor), administrator/counsellor, and/or graduate student (Roland, p. 19).

A purposive sampling method was used, and the research was confined to the Ontario region. Eighty-nine individuals in all were contacted and invited to consider participation in the study; of the individuals contacted, 52 were based at Ontario universities, and 37 were members of organizations working with and providing advocacy for Aboriginal peoples in Ontario/Canada. Ultimately, the *snowball* sampling process resulted in 16 individuals who identified as Aboriginal scholars, agreeing to participate in this study.

The study participants were comprised of 11 participants in Group A, and five participants in Group B. The participants in Group A, represented nine universities across Ontario and included Aboriginal scholars currently employed in the Ontario professoriate in the following roles: Associate Professor, Research Officer, Department Head, Department Director, Sessional Instructor, and Graduate Student (Roland, 2009). Additionally, nine of these participants identified as faculty, one as a faculty/administrative counsellor (with teaching responsibility), and one as a graduate student (with teaching responsibility). The participants in

Group B, Aboriginal scholars who were formerly employed as members of the Ontario professoriate, and had held former roles in the academy as Sessional Instructors, Administrative Counsellors (with teaching responsibility), and Graduate Students (with teaching responsibility). The participants in Group B identified their current professional roles as involving the education sector, the entertainment/education field, law, municipal services, and advocacy organizations for women and children (Roland, 2009).

Collectively, the study participants represented a wide-range of academic disciplines including: Aboriginal Education, Arts/Media, Education, Engineering, Environmental Studies, Indigenous Studies, Native Studies, and Law (Roland, 2009, pp. 71-72). Additionally, their reported experience as members of the professoriate ranged from one to 17 years for those currently employed as members of the Ontario Professoriate (Group A), and from two to over 30 years experience for those who were formerly employed as members of the Ontario Professoriate (Group B).

### *Data Collection Procedures*

Data were collected through online weblog focus group interviews, telephone interviews and a researcher journal. However, given Bogdan and Biklen's (1998) assertion that the use of focus group interviews supports a situational case study method, most of the data collected were obtained through focus group interviews.

*Online weblog focus group interviews.* In this study the use of focus group interviews was germane to the exploration of the participants' collective experiences. The study employed an emergent methodology in the form of an online weblog focus group interview format.

Particularly significant for the social justice premise of this inquiry, was the support for an online weblog methodology found in Gregg's (2006) assertion that:

Blogs have made scholarly work accessible and accountable to a readership outside the academy, an achievement that seems important in the history of cultural students' concerns...the very kinds of conversations [blogs] encourage can be regarded as offering renewed vigor to cultural studies; anti-elitist and reflexive epistemological project. (pp. 147-148)

Furthermore, Gregg also suggests that blogging, as a form of "conversational scholarship [may be defined as operating in] ...the 'mid-range' between disciplinary insularism and public intellectual practice" (p. 153). She indicates that as 'political sites,' weblogs create a public forum for dialogue where knowledge is shared less guardedly, and in a more open form of discussion and participant response.

During the research study, four separate online focus group interviews, in the form of weblogs, were conducted over a two month period. During each interview period the participants had 24 hour access to the weblog interview site, and were encouraged to post their comments as often as possible. Participants were asked to use a pseudonym for their online identity (based on a cultural, familial, or historical context) in an effort to protect each individual's identity. Telephone interviews with participants were also conducted throughout the study. And lastly, in addition to both the online weblog focus group and telephone interviews, researcher field notes constituted another form of data collection.

*Researcher field notes.* In an effort to protect the integrity of the study, field notes were kept by the researcher to journal observations and reflections throughout the data collection phase. This was particularly important in an effort to ensure that the researcher, as an 'outsider' to the Aboriginal community, employed a reflexive lens which actively interrogated her

Eurocentric bias, and acknowledged any ethical considerations and challenges as they arose during the course of the inquiry (Roland, 2009).

### *Data Analysis*

This qualitative case study was concerned with understanding the meaning and perspectives of the Aboriginal participants (Roland, 2009). Olesen (1994) in reflecting on feminist ideology and postcolonial research practices, cites the importance of the participant *voice* in context, and she asserts that merely taking experience into account can in no way reflect how the experience came to be, and suggests that a community involved in researching its own situation can best define the issues and possible solutions. Therefore, the case study method utilized a grounded theory approach to provide a contextualized understanding in the qualitative analysis of the research findings.

Stake (2005) asserts that the case study, as a form of scholarly methodology, optimizes the understanding of research questions through processes of triangulation and interpretation carried out continuously during the study. This is relevant to this study in that issues were examined through an Aboriginal epistemic lens in an effort to provide a *voice* for members of the research community, as well as to develop a grounded theory of principles with which to inform employment equity policies and practices in the academy. Glaser and Strauss (1967) state that grounded theory involves the constant comparative analysis of data as a “strategic method for generating theory” (p. 21); the researcher’s main goal is to develop new theories through purposeful, and “systematic generation from the data of social research” (p. 28).

The analysis of data was carried out in two stages: concurrent (field) analysis, conducted throughout the study to enable the development of a grounded theory; and, formal analysis,

conducted based on an in-depth analysis once data collection was completed (Roland, 2009, p. 83). The field analysis, based on the research questions and emergent themes, revealed four major areas of focus in the study: the contextualization of the educational experience for Aboriginal students; the implications of the experience in education on the future employment pool for the professoriate; an examination of why Aboriginal scholars stay, and why they leave the Ontario professoriate – focusing on recruitment and retention issues; and the implications for employment equity policy to foster social justice and equity for Aboriginal scholars in the academy (Roland, 2009).

In the formal analysis stage, data concepts or conceptual categories were created after a review of all the data collected, and included the following six conceptual categories with which to analyze the data: relationship; knowledge; value of education; policy, politics and rhetoric; social justice; and commitment (Roland, 2009). These data concepts or conceptual categories were defined on a broad definitional continuum or dimension (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), from one polarity as supportive of the status quo (systemic oppression), to the other pole, as defining supportive and inclusionary policies/practices within the education system (Roland, 2009).

The conceptual category ‘Relationship,’ referred to the collaboration needed between Aboriginal peoples and mainstream society to provide reparative action concerning identified barriers to recruitment and retention. It was recommended by the participants that this would involve the examination of why the Canadian system of education is perceived to be failing its students, and of great significance, the promotion of initiatives which acknowledge, support and value different knowledge systems, and celebrate diversity (Roland, 2009). NishKwe, one of the study participants eloquently articulated her view of the purpose of education in her statement:

The purpose of education is to provide all children with the tools to reach their fullest potential. Realistically educational systems have failed (and have been set up this way) to exclude various groups based upon race, gender, orientation and social class. This is the history that education is trying to deal with, and overcome. (Roland, 2009, p. 123)

And Raven, another participant described her experience of oppression as an Aboriginal student and scholar in the Canadian educational system as follows:

My experience has always been that of less being to the great white colonizers! [The] Ontario education system is sadly lacking in understanding of Indigenous worldview, for the simple reason, that if basic respect does not exist among scholars, then how can any group come to a cordial meeting of the minds. (Roland, 2009, p. 111)

Closely related to the concept of ‘Relationship’ was the conceptual category of ‘Knowledge,’ which spoke to the need expressed by the participants for Aboriginal peoples to know their own cultures, as well as the essential requirement for mainstream society to gain knowledge of and respect for the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Raven, a study participant articulated this need for knowledge and respect in her statement:

[T]he federal government may say that assimilation is no longer on the table, [but] it will continue to exist in more subtle forms, particularly in Canada’s education systems. No one, it appears is really taking the time to study our cultures, speak to those of us with deep knowledge....What are we going to do now? What actions can we take? We need to educate ourselves and draw on those with the knowledge. (Roland, 2009, p. 109)

The participants indicated that this knowledge base was a foundational factor necessary to facilitate the decolonization of all members of Canadian society, and that the starting point of this process would begin by addressing the significant lack of knowledge and respect for the cultures, languages, histories, and contributions of Aboriginal peoples in Canada (Roland, 2009).

The conceptual category ‘Policy, Politics and Rhetoric’ referred to what participants identified as the need to provide policy initiatives and strategic alliances that support genuine

partnerships, and most importantly, that these collaborative partnership must clearly demonstrate Aboriginal leadership in terms of defining policy goals and the implementation of educational policy to challenge the status quo, and thereby to create meaningful change. Participants suggested that to achieve positive social change for members of Aboriginal communities, rather than just “moving the deck chairs” (supporting the status quo), as voiced by Gahutneo one of the study participants, what is required is authentic partnership and relationship building between Aboriginal communities and mainstream society. Participants identified ‘Politics and Rhetoric’ as the *lip service* or typical political resistance encountered when confronting Eurocentric hegemony and barriers to scholarship in the academy (Roland, 2009). Agreement for this viewpoint is echoed in Green’s (2007) assertion that, “Aboriginal anti-colonial political struggles confront the dominant myths and political, social and economic practices that dignify, deny or perpetuate colonialism” (p. 22).

As a conceptual category, ‘Value of Education’ was polarized from an assimilationist stance on one end of the continuum (essentializing Aboriginal ways of knowing), to a humanistic approach on the other (acknowledging the challenges of multiple epistemologies in the educational system). Participants’ perceptions of the ‘Value of Education,’ and whether this concept might have implications for Aboriginal students choosing to pursue postsecondary education, included an exploration of possibilities for overcoming the perceived divide between Aboriginal epistemologies and the Eurocentric ideologies in the current educational system. In discussing the value of education, one of the participants, Borealgirl, stated:

We’re all expected to reach certain levels of formal education. If we don’t, then our options may be limited. One option is the practical, land-based experience common to Aboriginal people still connected to the land...Both [my parents] would argue that the more we achieved in formal education, the less practical we got...I’ve tried to bring together my theoretical knowledge with practical

experience by learning from both academics and Aboriginal people connected to the land. I value both.

Furthermore, the study findings indicated a crucial need to acknowledge diversity within the

Aboriginal population in terms of the goals and purpose of education (Roland, 2009). NishKwe,

a study participant stated:

I can only speak from what I know in my community...Respect, Love, Humility, Honesty, Bravery, Wisdom and Truth are the key tenets (7 Goodlife Teachings) in an Anishinaabe education...it is also important to be culturally and linguistically fluent, as well as being able to excel in mainstream society...this goes beyond being bi-cultural. (Roland, 2009, p. 112)

And SAM, another participant, responded by cautioning that we must not universalize the experience of Aboriginal students:

Since each Native family will respond to what they value in a different way, I believe the question is not what is valued in Aboriginal education, but rather: What does each individual Aboriginal person value or hope to gain as a result of educational experience? (Roland, 2009, p. 112)

In response, study participant Gahutneo asked, “The real question is can multiple epistemologies exist within one nation state and by extension one education system” (Roland, 2009, p. 112). To which Wolf14, another participant responded that, “We cannot go back to a lifestyle of our ancestors. Our culture, whether we like it or not, involves all of the people now living in Ontario, Canada, and with the information age, the world” (Roland, p. 113). And NishKwe suggested that, “It is important to critically analyze the impact that a dominant canon and discourse has had on the production of what counts as knowledge” (Roland, p. 113). This dominance by political systems to support ongoing oppressive practices in the Canadian school system was noted as a concern for participants, as asserted by study participant Borealgirl:

I think ‘mainstream education’ is trying to grapple with how to acknowledge different knowledge systems, but finding it difficult to give up on the institutions the system has developed...we pay lip service to the ‘traditional ecological

knowledge,' Aboriginal culture and spirituality, but still cling to western science and separation of church and state. (Roland, p. 113)

The conceptual category 'Social Justice' was conceptualized as the acknowledgement and recognition of epistemic arrogance in the translation of equity to Aboriginal worldviews. Metisprof, one of the study participants enriched this study with her challenges concerning the relevance of the social justice and equity premise of this research in terms Aboriginal worldviews. She stated that, "the worldview of my nation does not articulate the concept of equity"...and that the concept of equity employed in this study as "everyone gets what they need is rooted in Eurocanadian ideals of a just society....relatedness is much more easily understood" (Roland, 2009, p. 105).

The conceptual category 'Commitment,' referred to the ethical commitment of the primary researcher – this commitment being dependent on the reflexivity of the primary researcher to reflect on her commitment to the co-participants in the study, and to move beyond a 'Westernized' dichotomy of researcher and those researched (Roland, 2009). Interestingly, challenges concerning the definitions of 'social justice' and 'equity' based on Aboriginal epistemologies were made primarily by the participants in Group A, current members of the Ontario professoriate. Next a discussion of the research findings, in terms of implications of these findings for employment equity policy and practices in the academy, is presented.

### **Are Universities Welcoming Institutions? Recruitment and Retention Issues**

This research study, investigating why Aboriginal scholars stay or leave the Ontario professoriate focused on the examination of key elements of employment equity policy in the academy, specifically, recruitment and retention practices. These practices were reviewed in light

of the participants' responses in which they not only identified barriers to recruitment and retention, but also offered suggested strategies or guidelines to support the success of Aboriginal scholars and scholarship within the academy.

Recruitment practices include three specific areas: 1) the employment pool of potential candidates (e.g., How broad is the applicant pool? Does the applicant pool include members of under-represented groups?); 2) outreach initiatives (e.g., Who is being invited to apply? Does the university extend a genuine invitation to a diverse range of applicants with the goal to increase the representativeness of the professoriate?); and, 3) the selection process (e.g., Are there employment equity hiring goals? Do interview committees have diverse representativeness and cultural competence?). Participants' comments concerning employment equity recruitment practices centred on the necessity for 'knowledge' with which to move the academy beyond Westernized epistemic arrogance and to embrace an authentic legitimization of value for Aboriginal ways of knowing within the academy.

Study participant Jeannette, a former member of the Ontario professoriate, opined, "... [it is] pointless to bring more abor[iginal] scholars into the 'hostile' academic environment without making the necessary changes to improve the environment" (Roland, 2009, p. 129). Her sentiments were reflected in the viewpoints expressed by many of the participants, those currently employed within the Ontario professoriate, as well as those who have left. For example, adjidjak who is a current member of the professoriate explained:

Many professors in Ontario simply do not see Aboriginal people as relevant to their disciplines....If you stand up in class and note that people made their place by killing, mutilating or stealing culture you are seen as some sort of radical attempting to demonize great thinkers....This attitude also flushes Aboriginal students from continuing their studies....there are also issues of tokenism in terms of supervision, evaluating thesis work, and committee work. All of which

discourages individuals from coming or remaining in Ontario for long. (Roland, 2009, p. 129)

These comments appear to suggest an existing system within Canadian academe that continues to ‘silence’ Aboriginal scholars and those engaged in the work to eradicate systemic discrimination and oppression. Employment equity retention issues deal with those practices the institution uses to create a welcoming and inclusive workplace environment; these practices include, 1) opportunities for training and development; 2) opportunities for upward mobility (tenure, research funding); and 3) fair, equitable, and culturally sensitive working conditions (fair and equitable compensation, availability of workplace mentors, equitable and culturally sensitive leave policies). Annie Oakley, a study participant articulated her experience in the academy as one of *silencing*, “...they used their power to silence me” (Roland, 2009, p. 130). Additionally, two former members of the Ontario professoriate identified credentialism as a significant barrier in limiting professional opportunities for Aboriginal scholars with regard to recruitment as well as retention in terms of professional opportunities for upward mobility within the academy. Anishinaabe-Kew, a study participant stated, “...in the end they used credentialism to cut me out” (Roland, p. 130).

In discussing retention issues, participants also reported tokenism or ‘ghettoization’ of Native Studies within the academy as creating systemic barriers that remove opportunities for professional growth and upward mobility. Some examples participants identified as barriers to the retention of Aboriginal scholars in the professoriate included: the lack of public recognition and acknowledgement of the research awards achieved by Aboriginal scholars; barriers to progression through the ranks, the lack of career opportunities such as teaching graduate courses;

and, a lack of cultural sensitivity with regard to ethical clearance for cross-cultural research which results in the delay of the release of research funding (Roland, 2009, p. 130).

Study participants also identified numerous reasons why universities are *not* welcoming institutions, particularly in terms of Aboriginal scholarship. These included a significant lack of acknowledgement, support, and valuing of different knowledge systems. The most profound barrier for inclusion participants identified was the absence of respect and acknowledgement for the value and unique epistemologies of Aboriginal scholars (and scholarship) within the academy (Roland, 2009, p. 130). The crux of the situation was eloquently expressed by Gahutneo:

[T]here is no Aboriginal intellectual critical mass in many universities in Ontario. We are isolated and marginalized because our epistemic realities conflict with the academics....it has to, I mean the word university literally means 'one song' and I sing a different song. (Roland, p. 131)

Participants indicated the need to develop a knowledge bridge with mainstream society, to close the abyss created by the significant lack of knowledge about Aboriginal peoples (Roland, 2009, p. 133). All of the study participants expressed a need to create space in the academy which honours the cultures, languages, histories, and contributions of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Study participant Raven articulated this as a process of healing in her reflection concerning the transformation of employment equity policy:

I really do want to start the National Association of Indigenous Scholars (South on the medicine wheel)....This is where the healing begins within tribal communities, jealousies laid aside and the real work of healing begins. Focus is on collective opinion and eventually a pan-Native spiritual view of what it is to be Native in Canada. (Roland, 2009, p. 134)

Furthermore, study participant Jeannette, in response to the viewpoint that decolonization is a national issue involving all of the Canadian citizenry, stated that, "[This is a] refreshing viewpoint – I often hear, Why should I be held responsible for what my great-grandparents did?

If you are still reaping the benefits [privilege] – you can't accept the one-side of that ticket!"

(Roland, p. 134). She further asserted that an authentic partnership with 'mainstream' society would require that the Aboriginal Community goes into this relationship:

[W]ith our eyes wide-open we can come together in a commitment [for change].... realistically, the problems our communities face – we need help – we didn't create this mess, and we don't have the capacity to change it alone....the dominant society will not just step aside - [change] will not happen easily.  
(Roland, p. 134)

This viewpoint is echoed in Kuokkanen (2007) assertion that, "the university is rooted in a particular historical and geographic context; it is from this context that it derives its legacy and intellectual traditions" (p. 13). The participants in this research study were emphatic concerning the need for policy reform to support social justice in the academy for Aboriginal scholars and scholarship (Roland, 2009).

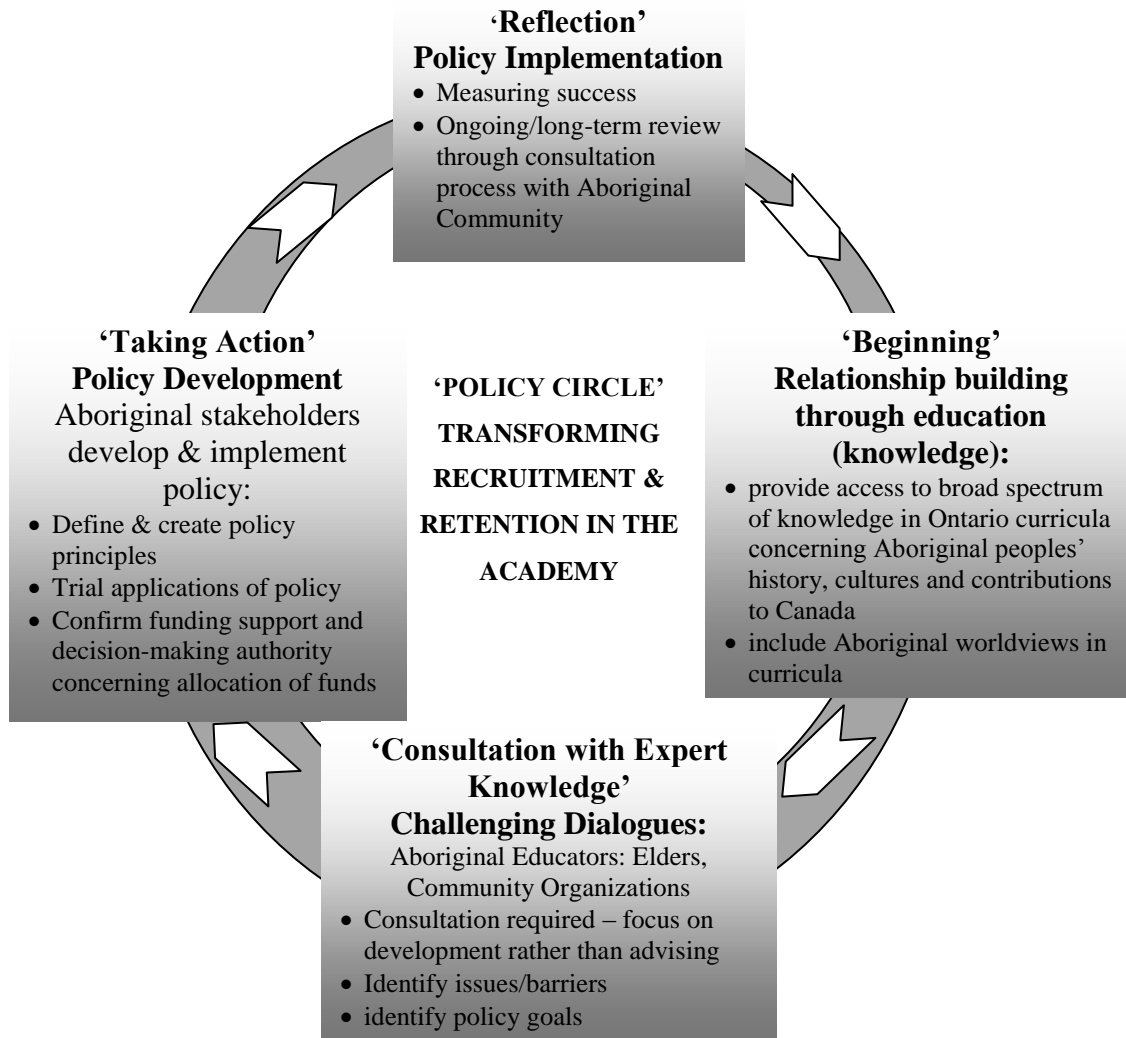
### **Policy Transformation – Implications for Employment Equity Policy in the Academy**

The study findings emphasize that in examining the under-representation of Aboriginal scholars in the academy, it is necessary to acknowledge the entrenchment of hegemonic processes which effectively decontextualize the experience of Aboriginal students and Aboriginal scholarship (Roland, 2009). In recognition of the fact that university policies and practices have been developed and implemented from a 'Westernized' epistemic stance, a transformative policy process, based on the grounded theory flowing from the research data and reflecting the integrative and evolutionary stages of the circle archetype, was proposed (Roland, 2009, p. 171).

### *Policy Circle*

To initiate critical social change, a policy transformation process, consonant with a circle organizational framework, was proposed as shown in the Figure (Roland, 2009).

*Figure. Proposed Policy Transformation Circle (Roland, 2009, p. 173)*



The circle is a significant archetype of the worldview and spirituality of many Aboriginal Peoples (Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, 2007), and this policy process, as the grounded theory flowing from the research data, was presented as integrative stages of

growth and maturation in an evolving developmental process. The work of policy theorists, Ball (1993), Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) and Corson (1990), also support such a transformative and evolutionary policy process. Corson (1990) states that, “Recognition that all aspects of the universe (including knowledge about those aspects) can only be properly understood if we accept that they are in a constant state of evolutionary change” (p. 264). Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) also assert that policy interpretation is subject to the diverse interests, histories and experiences of the readers. Therefore, policy-making, as offered by these theorists as an integrative and evolutionary process, was critically important to understanding, and consonant with, the transformative nature of the policy circle proposed based on the data collected in this research (Roland, 2009). Study participant Raven’s words indicate the urgency for social change as reflective of the circle or medicine wheel archetype:

I have been a Medicine Wheel Teacher for thirty years and here is what I think. Without a circular-based, respectful discourse AMONG TRIBAL COMMUNITIES, never mind external sources, we are doomed to spinning the wheel in endless circles of fruitlessness. We can change the academy, we can do it, but it requires a collective goal. Change begins at home, our Medicine Bundle as NishKwe notes, is to stay the course as a cohesive group of like-minded, dedicated Indigenous people seeking to elevate the souls of the tribes through inclusive education. All My Relations. (Roland, 2009, p. 136)

*The four evolutionary stages of the policy circle.* The transformative policy process proposed incorporated four evolutionary and integrative stages of development and implementation. The ‘Beginning’ stage was identified as the starting point for social action, the place where relationship building, based on knowledge, begins the process of moving policy-making beyond measures that support the status quo, to a process whereby relationships, characterized as authentic and genuine collaborative partnerships between members of the Aboriginal community and mainstream society, are built (Roland, 2009). Therefore, the policy

circle proposed suggests that relationships between Aboriginal communities and mainstream society, built on respect and knowledge, provides a socially just foundation for the next stage of the policy circle, 'Consultation with Expert Knowledge.' This stage involves authentic consultation with members of the Aboriginal community in the examination of critical questions surrounding the identification of policy issues and goals. This has particular relevance for the next stage of the policy circle which involves 'Taking Action' by "implementing social policy designed by Aboriginal stakeholders" (Roland, 2009, p. 186). This developmental stage requires that Aboriginal stakeholders have the authority to not only design and create policy principles, but also to test the application of the policy, and of crucial importance, to receive funding support with clear decision-making authority regarding the allocation of these funds.

And, as an integral aspect of the evolutionary process, policy transformation must integrate a stage for 'Reflection' as part of an ongoing review to determine policy efficacy. The research findings underscore the fact that changes to support equitable employment equity policy in the academy require principles as guidelines to ensure respect and honour for Aboriginal epistemologies (Roland, 2009). Therefore, the following employment equity policy principles, respect honour, truth and wisdom, represent the measures universities may use to reflect on the success of, and to guide policy change. These policy principles or guides were directly informed by the words and insights of study participants, and supported by the literature. The research findings suggest that these principles may have significance with regard to understanding why Aboriginal scholars stay, or conversely, why they leave the Ontario professoriate.

### **Why Aboriginal Scholars Stay or Why they Leave the Ontario Professoriate**

In the examination of the under-representation of Aboriginal scholars in the Ontario professoriate, the research inquiry sought to inform employment equity policy and practices through the investigation, from the situational perspective of the participants, as to why Aboriginal scholars stay or leave the Ontario professoriate (Roland, 2009, p. 158). The literature indicates that many Aboriginal people continue to experience an oppressive class structure in Canadian society that is the direct result of ongoing and systemic colonization supported in the educational system by the hegemony of Eurocentric ideologies. In reflecting on his personal experience as a current member of the Ontario professoriate, one study participant, Gahutneo, disclosed why he has stayed in the Ontario professoriate:

I think about leaving Ontario periodically and fret about leaving my territory, what will I lose if I leave? Will I be disconnected from my ancestors? Am I effectively leaving the communities that have invested in me, encouraged me, prayed for me, and yes kicked my ass when I needed it just when I have the credential that gives me voice in the academy? (Roland, 2009, p. 127)

Raven, a study participant who had left the Ontario professoriate shared her reasons for leaving:

I left due to lack of support, lack of interest in Indigenous culture, both pre and post-European contact...It is difficult to get people at the University-level to engage if they have never been taught or shown any interest in 'things Indigenous.' (Roland, 2009, p. 128)

In this next section, the discussion will highlight the policy principles, respect, honour, truth and wisdom based on the recommendations provided the participants as guides for equitable recruitment and retention practices in the academy.

The first principle, respect, was identified by the participants as related to the need for a greater awareness and recognition on the part of the academy regarding the barriers experienced by Aboriginal scholars and scholarship which have been created by historical and continual

systems of oppression in the Canadian educational system (Roland, 2009). In this regard, NishKwe, one of the study participants provided a number of reasons why Aboriginal scholars stay or leave the Ontario professoriate in her statement:

Why do 'we' stay? Respect for our culture, languages and worldview; Respect for our forms of scholarship and research; Respect for our contributions to the communities (non-university and university); Honouring the gifts that we bring (since we are still few in numbers); Honouring the struggles that we have overcome to get here (and there have been many - systemic and otherwise); Honouring the unique voice that we bring to the academy (authentic and original); Acknowledging our place with the appropriate salaries; Acknowledging our status with the granting of tenure; Acknowledging our need to grow by offering incentives and opportunities....Why do 'we' leave? When I have been taken for granted, tokenized, taken advantage of and disrespected in terms of workload, recognition and status....This is not acceptable, yet, it happens so often. (Roland, 2009, p. 126)

Further, the findings indicate that the production and validity of knowledge, based on respect for different ways of knowing is often strongly contested by the dominance of Eurocentricism in the Canadian educational system (Roland, 2009, p. 178). This heightens the need for the academy to develop equitable policy strategies to support and safeguard Indigenous knowledge, to work to invite “indigenous philosophies and epistemes in from the fringes, so that they can be heard” (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. 2). Additionally, to enhance inclusiveness and the breadth of scholarship within the academy, consideration of the value of mentoring and peer support initiatives must also be acknowledged as potential strategies for the development of minority leadership, providing opportunities for the expression and contribution to intellectual inquiry within the academy.

Lahey (2003) indicated in a University Affairs article that faculty members and academic leaders point to the importance of guidance and support for new faculty as critical recruitment and retention issues for universities; new faculty often require clarification regarding the

expectations of their role to ensure successful academic careers. New faculty members want to successfully navigate the promotion and tenure process by focusing on developing their expertise in research and teaching. It is important to consider this context, particularly as participants in the study identified the following barriers to recruitment and retention of Aboriginal scholars in the academy: a serious lack of knowledge and respect for the contributions of Aboriginal scholars; a high degree of isolation in the academy; tokenism; credentialism; and epistemic barriers to scholarship (Roland, 2009). Therefore, the tenet of respect requires special measures on the part of the academy to redress this identified lack of knowledge and respect for Aboriginal peoples and scholarship by incorporating the following employment equity policy guidelines based on the research data:

- ensuring that Aboriginal knowledge, cultures, languages and histories are embraced as core elements of the identity of the institution;
- ensuring that the institution, including senior level administrators, publicly acknowledge that Aboriginal peoples are the protectors of their knowledge;
- promoting institutional development of interdisciplinary programs that focus on Aboriginal scholarship and knowledge; and
- inviting the Aboriginal community to become directly involved in curriculum development and delivery (Roland, 2009, p. 190).

The second guiding principle, honour, seeks to address barriers to recruitment and retention identified by the participants by recognizing these barriers “as pervasive conditions which restrict access and afflict the growth, development, and dissemination of Aboriginal epistemology and scholarship” in the academy (Roland, 2009, p. 190). Battiste, Bell and Findlay (2002) claim that despite efforts to achieve social justice, “Aboriginal peoples’ achievements, knowledge, histories, and perspectives remain too often ignored, rejected, suppressed, marginalized, or underutilized in universities across Canada and beyond” (p. 82). Furthermore,

they state that while universities “express an Aboriginal agenda in mission statements, priorities, and projects [they in fact] reaffirm Eurocentric and colonial encounters in the name of excellence, integration, and modernity” (Battiste, Bell & Findlay, p. 82). The guidelines under the tenet of honour point to the need for active consultation and collaboration, and the creation of strategic alliances to promote research with Aboriginal communities, requiring that the academy actively support and sponsor Aboriginal scholarship identified by the participants. This support and sponsorship may involve the following flowing from research data:

- the academy recognizing its responsibility to create inclusive space in the academy to contest epistemic barriers to research and scholarship;
- actively seeking opportunities for genuine collaboration with members of the Aboriginal community – ensuring these members have decision-making authority;
- supporting Aboriginal scholarship through funding and course release; and
- creating strategic alliances among institutions of higher learning, such as the Pan-Indigenous organization proposed by the study participants to provide support and to foster cross-cultural scholarship (Roland, 2009, p. 191).

The third principle recommended to guide employment equity policy and practice reflected the tenet of truth by ensuring the involvement of Aboriginal stakeholders in defining policy issues and practices. These guidelines are crucially important in terms of reviewing policy for bias, adverse impact, legality and consistency of application, and include the need to ensure that Aboriginal scholars (or representatives from the Aboriginal community including Elders, Aboriginal educators) are represented on hiring committees, particularly hiring committees which require expertise in evaluating Aboriginal scholarship. Additionally, as the participants noted, the academy must actively foster knowledge and celebration of Aboriginal scholarship,

cultures, histories and contributions by sharing information about Aboriginal peoples, programs and research with all members of the campus community (Roland, 2009, pp. 191-192).

The final principle, wisdom was recommended as a series of guidelines that call for continual policy review and ongoing change, emphasizing the requirement for genuine consultation with Aboriginal stakeholders. This is a point of reflection, where as Calliou (1995) asserts, knowledge converges with wisdom. This is not the ‘end’ of a transformative policy process, but rather as the circle suggests, yet another beginning (Roland, 2009, p. 172). The tenet of wisdom is of particular importance in policy review, especially given the potential for ‘backlash’ and resistance to employment equity programs in the academy. Espinoza (2007) asserts that concepts of equality and equity are often used interchangeably, and yet there is a significant difference in their outcomes – equality requiring and equalization of outcomes, whereas equity may result in “unequal results” (p. 346); unequal results are often dependent on the need to invoke special measures to remediate oppression and past discriminatory conditions. Resistance or backlash to equity may take the form of direct and/or indirect discrimination such as:

...institutional ghettoization of programs and departments which focus on ‘different ways of knowing’ and, the lack of resources (distributional injustice) such as limited funding or support for academic programs to promote new knowledge in the form of Aboriginal scholarship. (Roland, 2009, p. 43)

Resistance to equity has particular relevance in the investigation as to why Aboriginal scholars stay or leave the professoriate. Therefore, the guidelines under the tenet of wisdom suggests the need for strategic policy planning and development, through equity outreach initiatives, to build relationships with members of the Aboriginal community based on trust and respect. This would necessarily involve the continual and respectful tracking of equity hiring

goals, and ensuring representatives from the Aboriginal community are invited and involved in the life of the campus community – particularly to work together with community members to combat racism and discrimination. And finally, fostering and supporting organizations such as the proposed Pan-Indigenous organization, may also work towards the promotion of Aboriginal scholarship to ultimately build what participants in the study referred to as a much needed “critical mass of Aboriginal scholars and administrators” (Roland, 2009, p. 193).

The inclusion of these guiding principles in the transformative policy circle underscores the importance of the over-arching theme of the policy circle, “the dissemination of knowledge about Aboriginal peoples to all members of the academy as a core aspect of relationship building” (Roland, 2009, p. 193). Jenson & Papillon (2001) state that in public decision-making, the challenge is to reach a balance, a political space in which the competing perspectives can be supported, and in which there is value for respectful discourse.

## **Conclusion**

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) state that scholarship from a critical theory framework must embed the *voice* of participants as well as the opportunity to claim and name one’s reality, to present counterstories with which to challenge Eurocentric hegemony in the academy. As they suggest, telling these stories influences both teller and listener, and challenges meritocracy – that by communicating the experience of oppression, this may in fact be the first step toward social justice. The doctoral research discussed in this paper was grounded in critical theory, the aim of the inquiry being to collaborate with members of the Aboriginal community to institute change in employment equity policy and practices in the academy.

This study was undertaken with the understanding that to deal with those “social forces that impinge on educational equity, it is necessary to identify the oppressive policies and practices, and document their effects” (Anyon, 2006, p. 22). Furthermore, in examining policy transformation in education and knowledge production, Battiste (2002) offers an assertion that it is essential to consider how this transformation may be facilitated through the adoption of Aboriginal knowledge, and through the creation of respectful and inclusive space to promote and support Aboriginal scholars and scholarship in educational institutions. Kuokkanen (2007) opines in her critique of the academy that “indigenous epistemes need to be recognized as a gift,” (p. 3), and this sentiment is clearly articulated in the assertion made by one of the study participants, Anishinaabe-Kew:

Why can't we just say what we have to say as First Nations people? Often the institution is asking us to think quite the opposite from our ways of knowing, not speaking from our heart. We have brilliance in the Aboriginal worldviews, we are just thinking differently. (Roland, 2009, p. 168)

I would suggest that the study participants' report of experiencing an oppressive environment that effectively marginalizes Aboriginal scholars and scholarship in the academy, may be viewed as a call for social justice and equity. Bell (1997) provides a description of social justice educators as ‘agents of change,’ and I would contend that the academy, as an institutional ‘agent of change’ has a responsibility to actively foster social change as an indelible function of its institutional responsibility (Roland, 2009, p. 26). This ‘social responsibility’ requires that universities support social policies, such as employment equity in their efforts to create inclusive space for Aboriginal scholars through the diversification of the professoriate, and to foster and promote Aboriginal scholarship in an effort to “add to existing knowledge, to excite intellectual development, and to move beyond the possibilities that currently exist though knowledge

production that is supportive of innovation and different ways of knowing and learning” (Roland, pp. 198-199). As the proposed policy transformational circle suggests, and as these study participants identified, the beginning of this process of healing and decolonization will require building relationships with Aboriginal peoples based on knowledge of and respect for their cultures, histories, languages, and contributions to Canada. This need for decolonization and gaining knowledge to create relationships based on respect was eloquently stated by SAM, a research participant:

[I]t is through students learning historical truths and examples of knowledges that we can create the next generation of Canadians who are less ignorant and less biased of Aboriginal peoples as contemporary beings. (Roland, 2009, p. 119)

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