

Alberta's Future Leaders: Understanding Aboriginal Development through Sport and the Arts

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Introduction:

The research presented here is a part of a larger Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded project that focuses on three organizations that use sport and the arts as tools for youth development in Aboriginal communities in Canada's Provincial and Territorial North. In the research presented here, the focus is on only Alberta's Future Leaders Program (AFL).

In particular, this research examines the challenges faced by AFL as understood by members of its Provincial Support Committee. Such information is important because without understanding the programs challenges, it will be difficult to strengthen the program.



Methodology & Methods

For this portion of the research project, I focused on understanding the roles that members of AFL's Provincial Support Committee play in AFL as an organization. There individuals volunteer their time to represent different stakeholders in AFL, and all four participants that we interviewed had been involved with the program since its inception in 1996. Dr. Giles and I conducted four semi-structured interviews (three in person, one over the phone), which were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts then underwent thematic analysis (Joffe, 2012).



Results:

Two main themes emerged:

- **Lack of Cultural Knowledge:** The majority of staff implementing AFL are non-Aboriginal university students who have little to no experience working on a reserve or Metis settlement. This was seen by some participants as an opportunity for cultural exchange, but others saw it as resulting in the marginalization of Aboriginal cultural practices.

- **Marginalization of Arts:** There exists an arts component of AFL that is much smaller than the sports component. The arts component is largely organized and planned separately from the sports component. As a result, this can result in conflict at many organizational and practical levels, all of which affect the AFL's overall success.



Conclusion:

The results help to produce a more comprehensive understanding of the issues faced by the AFL than could have been achieved through document analysis alone.

The lack of Aboriginal workers involved in the program prevents Aboriginal youth from learning from an Aboriginal role model, who may be a more salient role model for them.

The relationship between the two components of the program, sport and the arts, speaks to a larger issue of program sponsorship and the impact it has on AFL's structure.

Further research should be focused on how to attract more Aboriginal workers to AFL, as well as on how to improve partnerships between the program's two main program areas.



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