

## **Postsecondary Education Programs for Aboriginal Peoples: Achievements and Issues**

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*This article presents some of the unique postsecondary programs that have been established to meet the distinct needs of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The case studies presented in the article point to the variety of programs and models for educational delivery. In critically examining the case studies, special reference is made to how these are designed in relation to add-on, partnership, and First Nations control approaches. As indicated in this research, postsecondary education programs for Aboriginal peoples are rapidly evolving: the developments are impressive, yet many challenges remain. Fundamental questions exist at the center of the debate for First Nations educators and programmers. How does one implement the goals of postsecondary education? What are the criteria for evaluating postsecondary education? How can postsecondary education address both the need for more people with degrees and the need for higher education that is culturally grounded and provides students with the tools to transmit their culture? In assessing the situation of postsecondary education for Aboriginal peoples in the final section, the authors address these questions in the following areas: access and rates of completion, Indian control of Indian education, and relevance.*

### *Introduction*

We send our children to school and a lot of them fail—they don't finish school. It is important to give young people the understanding and the strength of tradition and culture. If you talk to young people who are strong in their culture and ask them about their academics, you will find they have graduated and some are going to college and university. (Samuel Sam, Coast Salish Elder)

The history of postsecondary education for Aboriginal peoples in Canada is recent. Not so long ago pursuing education beyond grade 8 meant losing one's Indian status. Only since the 1970s has specific attention been paid to the needs of Aboriginal peoples in higher education. Since 1972 the residential school system has been dismantled, and the number of schools under Aboriginal administration has grown, as have the number of Aboriginal teachers being hired by these schools. Language classes have been introduced, and cultural elements have been added to the curricula. The number of Aboriginal students attending postsecondary institutions has increased.

The 1981 Census reveals that 2% of the Aboriginal population as compared with 8.1% of the non-Aboriginal population held university degrees. The 1991 Census indicates that the percentage has risen to 2.6% compared with 11.6% for the

non-Aboriginal population. In 1996 the Census showed that 4.2% of the Aboriginal population completed university compared with 15.5% of the non-Aboriginal population. In the non-university postsecondary area, percentages and increases over the 15 years are even higher for the Aboriginal population. In 1981 8.9% of the Aboriginal population, compared with 13% of the non-Aboriginal population, completed non-university postsecondary education and earned a certificate. In 1991 the figures had risen to 13.8% and 15.8% respectively. In 1996 21% of the Aboriginal population had completed college, compared with 25.5% of the non-Aboriginal population.

Beyond the issue of statistics lies the question: What does postsecondary education for Aboriginal peoples involve? Because of the newness and evolving nature of the programs, it is difficult to find up-to-date and critical information to answer this question. We have undertaken a number of case studies of various models of programming currently offered to meet the needs of Aboriginal peoples. The case studies are based on site visits and interviews conducted with those in the field. Before presenting these case studies, we need to look at some of the criteria for assessing the various models of delivery and design.

### *Criteria for Classification*

Any discussion about postsecondary education for Aboriginal peoples in Canada must be prefaced by reference to "the red paper" that articulated the need for Indian Control of Indian Education (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). This policy statement is considered a key document in Aboriginal education. Therein, a philosophical vision for indigenous education is articulated. It states, "We want education to provide the setting in which our children can develop the fundamental attitudes and values which have an honoured place in Indian tradition and culture" (p. 2). This policy statement continues to stand as the litmus test for most educational programming for Aboriginal peoples in Canada. In this article we have identified three principal approaches to Aboriginal education: the add-on, the partnership, and the First Nations control approach. These classifications are in no way meant to be exclusive or definitive, but rather developed as descriptive tools for analysis. Indeed these three approaches are sometimes used concurrently within the scope of a single program. Below is a brief discussion of the three approaches.

### *Add-on Approach*

The add-on approach can be described as Aboriginal enrichment of mainstream curricula and pedagogy. This approach has also been called the beads-and-feathers approach. It describes the practice of "dressing up" preexisting methods and curricula to make them appear more culturally appropriate for Aboriginal people. Including lessons or examples of Aboriginal culture, adjusting the pedagogical approach to include traditional First Nations processes such as passing an eagle feather, or inviting an Aboriginal guest speaker to a mainstream class are some of the methods used in this approach. In university textbooks, for example, a pull-out box is used to illustrate how a concept relates to a First Nations, Metis, or Inuit situation.

The Aboriginal add-on approach—currently used to varying degrees—predominates in the Canadian public school system and in many university and college courses. One feature of this approach is that it is the least threatening to the status quo and requires the least amount of effort and resources to implement. It does not demand fundamental change. In essence it is a pragmatic approach that may offer a mild sense of inclusion to Aboriginal students in “majority culture” educational settings. The add-on approach is often viewed as a means of promoting multiculturalism and of including First Nations people in mainstream institutional settings. It has been offered to educators as an easy way of accommodating the new recognition of Aboriginal cultures without requiring a major shift in the system. Does it work?

Certainly if the achievement of decolonization and cultural integrity are criteria for evaluating postsecondary education, the add-on approach does little. Nonetheless it can be argued that this approach is better than nothing, especially given the reality that changing curricula in public institutions that resist change is not an easy task. The exposure to the indigenous world view provided by the add-on approach can enhance the educational climate for First Nation students, increasing the likelihood of active engagement and participation in the classroom. This effect may increase the possibility of higher success rates overall. The difference made by the add-on approach will also depend on the support services offered to Aboriginal students in the institutional setting. Most universities and colleges in Canada have courses that use the add-on approach.

#### *Partnership Approach*

The partnership approach constitutes the second main approach to Aboriginal education. Advocates of this approach study and participate in bicultural enterprises between mainstream educational institutions and First Nations communities. This approach is often driven by a philosophical belief in the principles of grassroots community development: helping people to help themselves by asking what they need, listening, and offering the tools to meet these needs. *Partnership, equality, mutual-aid, and cooperation* are part of the concepts promoted in this approach. At times it is a vanguard situation that dissolves after the needs of the community have been met, leaving the First Nation partner in complete control of its programs. It may represent a postcolonial world where equal and mutually respectful partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities are possible.

Participation in a partnership enterprise requires a willingness to construct collaboratively, or generate as in a “generative curriculum,” content that addresses the particular needs of a community. An Aboriginal community may find this type of program attractive because of the opportunities for human and social development at a local level. This depends on the political will of the community to work in partnership with an outside non-Aboriginal organization. Moreover, individuals and communities that are in the process of establishing a separate, nonintegrated identity and vision may not be ready to work in such partnerships. An increasing number of partnership programs are being established in Canada; each is unique. Included in the case studies that follow is a partnership program that has been operating for the past 10 years with a high level of success.

Partnership programs have much potential and may be advantageous for communities that seek to develop a curriculum modeled to their culture and aspirations while benefiting from the experience and accreditation of a formal institution. The nature of the partnership will, of course, vary depending on the relationship established. Community partners need to enter the partnership knowingly with the intention of jointly establishing the direction of the program. However, the partnership approach may not be appropriate for all communities and students. One issue that arises in a partnership program is the proverbial "placing of all the community resource eggs in one basket." Some communities see a need to target the training of their members strategically in different areas, the underlying aim being to employ their members eventually in the various functions required for managing the communities.

#### *First Nations Control Approach.*

The third approach, First Nations control, contains an element of collective individuation. It is where Native communities choose to separate themselves from the mainstream, to reclaim their educational services along with other forms of self-governing practices. Its motto is "Indian Control of Indian Education" with a conscious objection to the mainstreaming of First Nations students. Withdrawal of support from the dominant system in favor of monocultural First Nations educational programming is integral, where the content and delivery of curricula lie with the First Nations community. The desired outcome of First Nations control is cultural reintegration in and through education and "collective self-actualization" for First Nations people.

First Nations approaches generally require dramatic changes in existing systems and in the political will of Canadians to recognize community autonomy and First Nations sovereignty. The reluctance of Canadian society to honor historical treaties and autonomy is revealed in mainstream resistance to land claims, treaty settlements, and Aboriginal attempts to exercise historical control over land use. Where widespread systemic changes are not immediately detectable, some educators employ interim approaches until the political will catches up.

A large number of postsecondary Aboriginal-controlled institutions have been established in Canada. The existing programs can be summarized as follows.

1. Similar to a fully fledged college and often accredited with one or more mainstream public postsecondary institutions, the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC) is an example of the first model.
2. Smaller and more locally focused affiliated institutions such as the Yellowhead Tribal Council, in partnership with colleges or universities, offer preparatory or college/university programs in their own communities.
3. Community learning centers, which often have a site in the community, deliver a number of accredited or non-accredited programs. These are owned either by an outside institution or by the community. Examples include the Saanich Adult Education Centre on Vancouver Island and the Nunavut Sivuniksavut College in Ottawa.

4. Nonprofit institutes that offer training in communities relevant to Aboriginal self-government and often non-accredited include the First Nations Technical Institute in Tyendinaga, Ontario.

Although First Nations control is a fundamental goal for many programs, it is not always feasible in reality. Often only part control occurs. For example, certain upgrading or training programs for teachers may be under First Nations control, whereas other programs may contain only elements of autonomy. As indicated in the case studies, one important consideration for First Nations control has been funding. The Royal Commission also indicates that where Aboriginally directed programs exist they survive on unstable project funding. This discourages program and curriculum development, thus undermining program continuity. As well, achieving First Nations control calls for attitudinal and political change in Canadian society. Many roadblocks impede the support and restructuring necessary for First Nations educational autonomy to be realized. Looking at the different approaches in action reveals an evolutionary process through various phases. Any given program may exist in a certain phase or comprise a combination of various models and approaches.

### *Case Studies*

#### *Case Study #1: The Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program*

The Nunavut Sivuniksavut program (the NS program) is an example of a small program that responds to the specific needs of Inuit youth. It is part of the many targeted programs needed to make postsecondary education more of a reality for Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The program was launched in 1985 as an initiative of the Tungavik Federation of Nunavut (TFN), the negotiating body of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. Its purpose was to train Inuit who would be beneficiaries of the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement for positions in the future government and land claim organizations. Gradually the program evolved, embracing a broader focus and becoming a more general transition year for Inuit youth.

Today its mandate is to offer Inuit youth "an opportunity to learn about Inuit history, land claims and other issues essential to their future careers in Nunavut, while experiencing the world outside of the North and learning to live successfully on their own," say program directors Murray Angus and Morley Hanson. The NS program provides a missing link in the standard educational system.

According to a survey undertaken in 1993, 91% of Inuit youth were prepared to leave home to pursue postsecondary education, but 72% indicated the need for a transition year program. The NS program receives 40-60 applications each year; currently there are only 20 positions in the program. Angus and Hanson recognize the many challenges for Inuit youth arriving from the north. So the NS program emphasizes both academic and independent living skill training. Following the eight-month program the youth are better prepared to live in the south away from their community and to pursue postsecondary education. A significant part of the program is teaching about the mechanics of life:

We are a constant presence for the students, that is one of the values of the program. The students know someone is paying attention to them, that they won't fall between the

cracks. It is always a challenge, having a lifestyle that supports their learning and that is really preparing them for a postsecondary program. (Angus: interview)

As Angus further explains, acclimatization to the south—which involves managing one's time, expenses, building a healthy lifestyle, and making healthy choices—accounts for 40% of a student's learning at NS.

One of my biggest concerns was leaving my family. Growing up in a small community, you know everyone around you. You grow up with everyone in the community; you see everything that's happening. You just feel at ease knowing that you're safe with all these people. I was afraid of not knowing anyone in a place like Ottawa. The thought "what if" kept coming up in my mind. I did not feel safe but I always tried to think when I made the choice to come down here to somehow be able to help my people. (Rita Anilniliak, former student, personal communication, 1999)

Central to the academic component of the program is teaching about Inuit history, issues, and land claims. Students come out of the program knowing about the land where they will be working and living and the history of the institutions that serve their people. As Angus explains, "People find their own story riveting. It's the first time that students learn that their own story is a legitimate focus for formal education. They love it." A former student from Pond Inlet says,

The program taught me the history of Nunavut, which I really had no idea of before I took the program. It made me appreciate it even more, thinking that our forefathers worked so hard for bringing us to where we are today, and it just made me appreciate it more, and being proud of being an Inuk. It also really opened me up to other options, how our Inuit people struggled to where we are today. It makes me want to further my training.

In 12 years of instruction at NS, Morley Hanson has observed a shift in the expectations of the students. In the beginning he noticed that students hoped it would help them find a job. More recently students are expressing interest in the program for its educational value:

The message has been getting out through schools and organizations about the need for education, either college or university ... So they come here thinking that this would be a step beyond high school before university.

As a result of the greater student interest in pursuing higher education and the need to attend an accredited institution in order to receive funding, the NS program has been affiliated to the Aboriginal Section of the Algonquin College in Ottawa. Now all courses offered by NS are accredited. Although certain course requirements need to be met, the NS program remains flexible, with the capacity to adapt its program to the specific needs of Inuit youth. This involves, for example, spending more time on developing English skills. For most Inuit youth, English constitutes a second language, and their writing skills need to be brushed up for them to succeed later at university. Rita Anilniliak discovered that writing was a skill she enjoyed while going to NS:

What I most liked was the writing. I had never studied my own culture, my own people. So many issues I was interested in, but not enough time to write about my opinions, or my feelings. Using writing as a tool to show how the work was affecting me was so much of a challenge. Every word, of each sentence, every sentence of each paragraph, every paragraph of each page was giving me hope that this is how I want to help my people.

NS has focused on combining cultural content with academic curriculum.

### *Critical Appraisal*

In general this program has been successful and rates highly among former students.

I recommend this to anyone up there in the North. Every Inuk should or deserves to know the history of their own people instead of learning about other people from other places. After having a chance to learn who were the people to bring us Nunavut, I truly believe that everyone deserves to know why we have it today. (Rita Anilniliak, 1999)

Attendance rates are high. An interesting system of penalties and rewards has been established to encourage attendance wherein the rules are enforced by the group. If people are late or absent, they are fined. Every Friday there is a "people's court" where the fines are announced. If the defendants wish to plead innocent, they stand before the court to make their case. Then the group votes. If the reason is deemed acceptable, the defendant wins. If the defendant loses, he or she will have to pay a fine. The money is used for a trip at the end of the year. In the past these have included visiting the Sami in Scandinavia, the Nuu-Chah-Nulth on Vancouver Island, and the Maori in Australia. Having recently learned their own history, students are eager to share experiences with students of other Indigenous cultures.

A difficulty for the program has been lack of funding stability, and Nunavut Sivuniksavut is still seeking longer-term funding. In previous years instructors were not sure they could run the program for the entire eight months. However, the NS program has been recently incorporated, and the current appointed Board is strongly committed to securing multiyear funding that will allow for long-term planning.

Are students prepared for college or university after this program? Hanson explains that only a handful have graduated from university. A main challenge for the students is the transition from the supportive environment provided by NS to the university. The students need to be independent and ready for the academic demands. Another issue is the reduced funding they receive as university students. As NS is affiliated with Algonquin College, students automatically receive \$675 a month from Student Financial Assistance. Nunavut Sivuniksavut augments this monthly student allowance to \$1,000 with funding received by Inuit organizations. Scaling down spending habits to attend university is often difficult.

Another obstacle to university study is the abstract nature of academia in contrast to most training and readiness programs. "These are first generation people taking postsecondary steps. There are virtually no models in their community to identify with, people who have gone through that process before," explains Hanson. As well, many students can get jobs in their communities with the education received from the NS program alone. The vast majority of NS program graduates are employed.

Today virtually any Inuk with an education beyond high school can find a job or a training position in the north. That students are not necessarily continuing on past the NS program is indicative of the educational challenges that exist for Aboriginal peoples. Transition programs may be an essential part of the solution,

but alone they are not sufficient. The existing inadequacies of the public school system for Indigenous people cannot be remedied by transition programs. Developing strategies for postsecondary education includes addressing the failures and weaknesses in the primary- and secondary-level programs. This is clear from the nature of the academic program and the students' comments at NS.

*Case Study #2: First Nations Partnership Program at the University of Victoria*

The First Nations Partnership Program provides an example of the partnership approach. The Program evolved out of the efforts of a few dedicated members of the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria in collaboration with various Aboriginal communities. In 1989 Alan Pence was approached by the Tribal Council of Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan. The Meadow Lake First Nation had identified the shortage of quality child care as a deficit for its nine communities: they were seeking a postsecondary institution willing to develop jointly a culturally appropriate program to train adults as early childhood care and education workers in the community. This contact marked the beginning of a partnership that would last five years and a university program that would expand to work with other First Nations communities with similar needs.

For the purposes of this case study, the focus is primarily on the partnership experience between the University of Victoria School of Child and Youth Care and the Meadow Lake Tribal Council. This community-based training project for adult early childhood education care practitioners began with a three-year funding commitment by the federal government. Meetings were held between participants of the University of Victoria and the Meadow Lake community to establish a foundation on which the work could begin.

An initial literature search conducted by the university revealed little published information in the area of bicultural partnerships: this left a tabula rasa on which the process of culturally appropriate curriculum development could begin. Meadow Lake community members comprise the Cree and the Dene nation. One of the main sources of program success was a focus on culturally appropriate practice. The partners met with several outside advisors and, through a series of brainstorming sessions, articulated seven principles of what came to be known as a "generative curriculum," which would guide their journey through uncharted waters.

The seven principles are revisited at every stage of the curriculum, as they inspire both the process and the product of the learning. These principles are: the community-initiated/community-based concern for community well-being; the program's incorporation of community-relevant and broad social concerns of child and youth care services in the training of early childhood care workers; training provided in the form of a career ladder, ranging from a one-week training session to a four-year baccalaureate program, which students can step on or step off as appropriate for them; a bicultural approach respecting both bicultural and multicultural learning. Using this model, Cree and Dene students learn Meadow Lake First Nations caregiving traditions, values, and practices as well as those of the mainstream culture.

The generative approach integrates text-based material with information from students, Elders, and other community members that results in courses tailored to

the First Nations of Meadow Lake. As well, the program focused on the principle of empowerment, recognizing strengths rather than deficits. The child was seen as part of "an ecological focus," including the development of an interactive systems framework wherein the child is central to the well-being of families and communities. Finally, a generative curriculum was developed through a model that successively builds on culturally appropriate information generated in the preceding deliveries of the courses.

Using these principles as program guidelines, certain activities were nurtured in an ongoing manner. These included Elder involvement (the Meadow Lake Tribal Council identified Elders as the keepers of traditional knowledge regarding education of the young), language maintenance (although English is the language of instruction), and cultural practices embedded in the curriculum.

Teaching a generative curriculum departs from common classroom experience found in postsecondary education. The approach depends on students and other community members bringing forward individual as well as traditional perspectives that can then be juxtaposed with other views, stimulating dialogue and reflection. Activities such as role plays, small-group work, interaction, and reflection are used to build an atmosphere of trust, enhanced self-esteem, and learning. The survival and development of the partnership have meant stepping outside expected and typical institutional relationships to identify a common ground of caring, respect, and interest in innovation on which the collaborative project could be built (Pence & McCallum, 1994).

### *Critical Appraisal*

Pence (1992) summarized his thoughts about the experimental journey through partnership in these words:

In short, what we have discovered thus far on our shared voyage is the outline of an alternative landscape—a land form influenced by a different set of principles than those we typically experience. It is a landscape that, in my opinion, offers great promise at a time when we need promising alternatives.

The team from the university reiterated the importance of establishing a relationship of equality between both partners. A partnership can easily otherwise slip into an add-on approach. Jessica Ball (personal communication, 1999), now co-coordinator of the First Nations Partnership Program, points to the importance of going into a partnership open-minded, without a set agenda: "It is better to go into a partnership with an empty pad of paper, rather than a suitcase full of pre-established, ready-to-go curricula."

Some of the challenges to the program's success include balancing the personal and cultural commitments of life in a First Nations community with the expectations of academic life, especially for women. Although there may be some flexibility in terms of assignments and completion dates, other externally imposed conditions may create a bind for students. One example has proven to be the lack of accessible child care while such programs are in the initial stage of development. In some areas First Nations cultural practices and mainstream practices are incongruent, and the student must prioritize his or her commitments. Generally the greater the family and community support for the student, the greater are the

chances of educational success. The program in Meadow Lake was successfully delivered with a 60% completion rate.

One of the main qualities of successful partnerships and programming comes from maintaining a sense of comfort with *not knowing* where things are going, a trust in the process. As program developers discovered, the absence of maps increased reliance on the collective creativity, on the vision and the ability to support one another (Pence & McCallum, 1994).

Following the initial success with Meadow Lake, the FNPP has started work with another seven communities, co-creating unique programs to meet the needs of each community.

### *Case Study #3: First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia*

The First Nations House of Learning (FNHL) at the University of BC has adopted an approach to postsecondary education that is best described as comprehensive. This approach relies in different ways and degrees on all three approaches described above. The seeds from which the FNHL germinated lie in a 1984 report on the state of Aboriginal Education at UBC. In this report co-chairs Verna Kirkness and Thomas Berger identified issues of access and curriculum relevance as key areas that required attention (MacIvor, 1998). These recommendations would be the basis for establishing that "The mandate of the First Nations House of Learning is to make the University's vast resources more accessible to First Nations Peoples and to improve the University's ability to meet the needs of First Nations."

The FNHL was established in 1987. With a capacity to welcome 400 people the FNHL offers student services such as admissions advocacy, academic and personal counseling, a child care center, library, computer lab, student services, cultural events, and an Elders-in-residence program. The FNHL works with the various faculties to develop programs and courses with, for, or about First Nations peoples.

The FNHL also works with existing programs such as the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP), Ts'Kel Graduate Studies in Education, and First Nations Legal Studies. The FNHL partners with some of the academic units such as the Office of the Coordinator and Health Sciences to establish the Institute for Aboriginal Health. Providing a visual presence for First Nations people on campus, the Longhouse serves as a center for events and activities. Some First Nations students have held their wedding ceremonies there. The building was completed in 1993 and stands as a home away from home for First Nations students attending the University of BC. Built on the Musqueam people's traditional territory, this structure is the first contemporary West Coast Longhouse constructed as an integral part of a university campus. Its building incorporates such features as Sty-wet-tan—the Great Hall containing house posts carved by BC artists.

The FNHL logo represents a human face flanked by two ravens. The Raven, a symbol of creativity and learning, is known as a transformer in many First Nations cultures. As represented in the logo created by Tsimshian artist Glen Wood, Raven is transforming the university to reflect First Nations cultures and philosophies, linking the university to First Nations communities.

The FNHL is involved in a wide range of activities on campus. It first works to serve Aboriginal students in areas of recruitment, access, and support services. The Longhouse disseminates information on UBC programs to First Nations. Realizing that personal connections are most important in promotion, the staff have been involved in organizing career days and visiting schools. Students often serve as presenters, sharing their experiences and encouragement to potential new students.

Access is a key issue given the underrepresentation of First Nations on campus. Some of the degree programs such as the NITEP and the First Nations Legal Studies implement broader-based admission criteria such as work experience and community leadership. Some program areas such as the School of Social Work, Counseling Psychology, and First Nations Legal Studies set aside a certain number of admissions seats. In previous years funding was obtained for creating an access program to the professional sciences because of the low First Nations enrollment in forestry, applied science, agricultural science, and science.

In 1997 the UBC Senate approved a new university-wide Aboriginal Admissions Policy based on the university minimum of 67% average for entrance to first-year programs, and which considered other criteria presented in reference letters. At the same time the Senate passed a motion to adopt the goal of "1,000 First Nations students by the year 2000."

Another area of work for the FNHL is curricular transformation to enhance relevance for First Nations. This work with university faculties, departments, and schools is to incorporate First Nations content across disciplines. The FNHL has worked with the Faculty of Arts to develop a proposal for a major in First Nations studies, credit Musqueam language courses, and a new course about the roles of Aboriginal women in Canada. Such program development takes place in consultation with Aboriginal communities through community consultations and through representation on the advisory committee

### *Critical Appraisal*

According to Jo-ann Archibald (1986), FNHL Director, the achievements of the FNHL have been significant. Compared with programs in other Canadian universities, the FNHL is leading the way in providing student services and developing academic initiatives that are university-wide. Other campuses such as the University of Toronto have put similar models in place. Archibald sees the FNHL's approach as comprehensive, involved in curriculum development, the provision of student services, research, and community linkages, serving as a model for universities and colleges worldwide. She points out, "It takes a lot of cooperative work, time, effort, and energy to make institutional change." UBC has 12 faculties and a number of schools. To work with each of them requires considerable effort.

A theme of the FNHL is *working together*, and this helps the FNHL address a recommendation of an external review committee that Indigenous knowledge needs to play a more prominent role across the university campus in terms of research and teaching, but faculties are responding at differing rates. Although the goal of *1,000 First Nations Students by the year 2000* was articulated, Archibald remarked, "We need to continually address the barriers to access and continually be proactive. Some of the reasons for not achieving the target number, currently

estimated to be 500, are barriers of finance and access while some are societal and cultural." Although the UBC FNHL considers its community linkages to be strong, it recognizes the importance of strengthening and sustaining these relationships. Finally, there is a recognition that quality education is determined by its relevance to the philosophy and values of First Nations and is guided through the voices of the Ancestors. The FNHL is beginning the new millennium with this recognition as foundational for its work in future years.

#### *Case Study #4: Saanich Adult Education Centre*

The Saanich Adult Education Centre sits on the territory of the Saanich people on Vancouver Island in BC. It is a good example of a locally controlled postsecondary institution that has established small-scale adult education to respond to the communities' specific needs. The Centre and the tribal school, with grades K-9, is overseen by the Saanich Indian School Board, with representative members from each of the four Saanich communities.

Recently the Centre has started a program called STEP to deal with the lack of bridging between programs. The program is unique: it is individualized and molded to provide the skills and prerequisites needed for a specific education or career choice. It also allows students to move rapidly at their own pace. The entry level of the STEP program is equivalent to grades 8, 9, and 10, and steps 3 and 4 to grades 9, 10, and 11. This program is aimed at increasing rates of literacy and basic skills. Evidently the program is meeting a need: of 100 attending the Centre 50 register in the STEP program. The Centre offers a safe environment that allows for language training, fostering of community linkages, and high levels of staff support to students.

#### *Student Profile*

Vern Jack, Jr., 27 years old, attends the First Nations Family Support Worker Program (FNFSW). Before entering the program he took some ABE courses at the Adult Centre to improve his English and to prepare himself for returning to school after nine years. He quit school in grade 11 "because it really had nothing to offer me. I chose to go and receive my training in the longhouse, and that is where I have spent most of my time in the last years." Vern returned to school because he realized that to get any job, even in his own community, required some sort of degree or certificate. He chose the FNFSW program because he believed it would complement the training he received in the longhouse.

Vern finds that the program accommodates the First Nations approach. It is important to him that consideration is given to the Elders, prayers, and songs. "Opening with prayers and singing makes a big difference because it is something I am familiar with, it strengthens our classroom and we learn to work together; it helps in an academic aspect." Also important in the delivery of the program is the emphasis on learning from the group and the use of the circle. While attending school Vern sees continuing to go to the longhouse as important; it keeps him grounded in his academics as well. After completing the FNFSW he would like to go into social work or administration. He is certain that he wants to enter a First Nations-oriented program.

### *Critical Appraisal*

The Centre deals with planning and management of programs. At present the Centre oversees the delivery of the First Nations Support Worker program in partnership with Camosun College. Each year an average of 25 students register in the program. Although these students are First Nations, most do not come from the four Saanich communities. Fran Hunt-Jinnouchi, Director of the STEP program, questions whether the program really meets community needs. An ongoing concern for any community program is also the number of people a community wishes to be trained in a single field. Hunt-Jinnouchi sees offering entrepreneurial skills to community members as an avenue to be encouraged. She has been delivering night courses to community members in order to encourage them to foster small development businesses.

A major limitation for the Centre's development is funding. It receives no core funding from the government: it is entirely project-funded and proposal-driven. Hunt-Jinnouchi believes that these types of First Nations educational centres are crucial in preparing students for higher learning and could be expanded to deal with community issues such as child care, transportation, and support services.

### *Issues and Challenges for Aboriginal Postsecondary Education*

The case studies provide samples of the types of initiatives that have been established in Canada. In assessing the situation of postsecondary education for Aboriginal peoples in Canada as a whole, four issues and challenges have been identified as central. These relate to access, rates of completion, Indian control of Indian education, and relevance.

Despite increases in the number of Aboriginal students attending postsecondary programs, the issue of access continues to be significant. According to the literature, some of the issues that constitute obstacles for Aboriginal students are: the nature of the K-12 schooling system; low expectations of Aboriginal students; inadequate financial support; racism and experiences with the educational system that have resulted in low self-esteem, low skills development, and emotional barriers; stress related to relocating, for example, finding housing, moving away from family, feeling unsupported; curriculum that does not reflect Aboriginal culture; programs that ignore Aboriginal perspectives, values, and issues and do not prepare students for the environments where they will be working; lack of support services; and students feeling no ownership or control with regard to the education process. The first point reminds us that the needs of postsecondary education for Aboriginal peoples are in part defined by the failures of the K-12 school system. That many Aboriginal students drop out before grade 12 or go through the system without acquiring skills to pursue postsecondary education are realities that postsecondary institutions need to address. This will mean, for example, that upgrading programs are required. Catching up may involve acquiring both academic training and study skills for success in the formal education system. Many students have been out of school from one to four years. Most need to look into a minimum of a year to enhance their skills before starting on a degree. Not all are ready to make the commitment in terms of time and focus to succeed academically. These conditions relate to the situation in the public primary and secondary school system. The Sal'i'shan Institute conducted a committee report on postsecond-

dary education for Native learners in which it addressed the issue of underrepresentation of First Nations and Metis people in teaching. The research indicates definite obstacles that prevent these groups from reaching postsecondary education. It is clear that racism impedes any approach to First Nations education.

Indeed First Nations people are still coping with, and healing from, the effects of racism endured since the time of European contact. Despite positive changes many Aboriginal peoples still feel alienated from their own culture and live as second-class citizens in a mainstream Euro-Canadian world. Closely related to access is the issue of program completion. Although attending a university or college is an important step, completing a program is another. Of those Aboriginal students who begin university studies about a quarter earn a degree compared with about half of non-Aboriginal students (Armstrong, Kennedy, & Oberle, 1990). Many students drop out of programs entirely; some return after a semester or two; and some change programs. The reasons are various. They may include lack of or inadequate funding, mismanagement of time, falling in love, death or birth of a close person. It is clear that skills to survive in a program are not only academic: they include knowing how to work independently as well as how to work in a team.

As discussed in the case studies, attendance is another factor that impedes success and the capacity to complete a program. Many of the reasons for low attendance relate to the problems of abuse (e.g., alcoholism) that characterize many First Nations communities today. Students have also identified lack of community support for pursuing higher education. In a student's words,

When we go home, we're almost ostracized. We implore our local population to give us their emotional support, because all the education in the world isn't going to help us get through unless we have our spiritual, traditional and emotional roots intact. (AFN, 1993, p. 30)

The perceived lack of support is related to the remnants of the residential schools and years of education being synonymous with assimilation. This past does not disappear overnight. Although access remains a critical issue, the principles of Indian control of Indian education continue to be at the forefront of any assessment of postsecondary education for Aboriginal peoples.

#### *Indian Control of Indian Education*

As illustrated in the case studies, Indian control is essential to respond to the specific needs of Aboriginal peoples in regard both to program delivery and content. Despite improvements in the area of Aboriginal control, the devolution of control of Aboriginal education from education authorities to the communities remains a slow process. The difficulties are in part due to the federal government's interpretation or perception of Indian control, which seems to be confined to administrative control over programs rather than focusing on restructuring or redefining Indian education.

Limited resources and general insistence by the government that institutions conform to provincial regulations are additional factors that have led to restrictions in terms of curriculum development, flexibility, and capacity to address the special educational needs of First Nations people and communities. The significance of

Indian control of Indian education is only now beginning to be understood. Structural and societal changes are required if the situation is to improve significantly for Aboriginal peoples. Some of the pending issues are outlined in *Tradition and Education: Towards A Vision of Our Future* (1988), a declaration of First Nations' jurisdiction over education by the Educational Secretariat of the Assembly of First Nations. Educational needs and issues addressed therein include: financial assistance and training for First Nations teachers; more university-based teacher education programs as well as satellite and extension programs in First Nations communities; and an information-sharing network for dealing with and developing postsecondary education issues. More recent resolutions by the Assembly of First Nations are similar (see AFN Resolution No. 23/98). In fact many of the issues identified are the same as those articulated 25 years ago in *Indian Control of Indian Education* (NIB, 1972). It is suggested that the government of Canada has failed to implement the 1972 policy statement. Those who work in the area of adult and postsecondary education for Aboriginal peoples today identify the following obstacles:

- absence of Aboriginal control over the design of the program;
- fragmented, project-by-project funding for programs;
- fragmented funding sources for student training allowances;
- inadequate community facilities to support programs;
- arbitrary separation of literacy, adult basic education, and academic upgrading from job training services (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 503).

Although the Canadian government has impeded Indian control of Indian education, First Nations working in education also question their leaders on their role in providing direction to Indian control. In the face of land claims and treaty negotiations, education has often been placed on the back burner; insufficient attention has been given to ensure that the education of Aboriginal peoples meets the future needs of the community. According to First Nations educators, settlement for self-government should go hand-in-hand with programming and planning in education.

There is always a tug of war between education, social, and economic development—even within our own leadership. There is not enough long-term planning and management, only piece-meal solutions. Without community people being trained, how are we going to manage our self-government?

This leads to the issue of how to achieve the goals outlined in the NIB (1972) *Indian Control* policy statement.

### Conclusion

Postsecondary education for Aboriginal peoples in Canada has made great gains in the last 30 years. These have included movement away from the assimilation policies that governed school programming for Aboriginal peoples until the 1970s to establishing programs that are First Nations-controlled. Not only have residential schools been dismantled, but their spirit and intent has been condemned. This article examines three current approaches to Aboriginal education in Canada and presents a number of case studies for consideration. Many challenges still face

Aboriginal education in Canada, many of which rely on the political will of Canadians and governing bodies to remedy the historical imbalances caused by colonization. This will include creating funding structures that promote long-term educational programming and empower Aboriginal sovereignty in Canada.

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