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Under the *Canadian Constitution Act, 1982*, the term Aboriginal Peoples refers to First Nations, Inuit and Métis people living in Canada. However, common use of the term is not always inclusive of all three distinct people and much of the available research only focuses on particular segments of the Aboriginal population. NAHO makes every effort to ensure the term is used appropriately.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> people in Canada face an extreme health crisis. Remote locations or proximity to urban centres, socio-economic conditions, occupation, lifestyle choices, and the environment, among many other variables, all contribute to various diseases and conditions experienced by First Nations, Métis and Inuit in Canada.

Lifestyle changes brought on by colonization<sup>2</sup> have caused the most disruption to communities, and have directly led to the health crisis today that Aboriginal people face. The resulting environmental, territorial and resource changes have affected the connection between Aboriginal people and their respective ecologies. The introduction of new (European) diseases and their accompanying treatments based in Eurocentric clinical health science changed the relationship between Aboriginal people and their traditional medicines and healing practices. Indigenous medicines have often been ineffective in combating diseases brought by Europeans, leading Aboriginal people to distrust their original health care practices. In recent years, the blending of traditional and clinical health practices have attempted to reconcile these gaps.

Accessing traditional medicine and health practices can be difficult for many First Nations, Métis and Inuit for many reasons, including cultural change, migration to urban centres and loss of language. Some urban centres provide holistic health services for Aboriginal people. The Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health in Ottawa is a prime example of the integration of clinical and traditional Aboriginal health and wellness. The Centre provides programs and services in mental health and wellness, including counselling services and traditional healing care. The Wabano Clinic provides primary

health care services with family physicians and nurse practitioners along with laboratory services, perinatal care, foot care, chiropractic care, and HIV testing.

One proposed solution to the Aboriginal health crisis is to increase the number of First Nations, Métis and Inuit health professionals. It is expected that these health care professionals will address key areas of the crisis, including:

- First Nations, Métis and Inuit health care professionals serving Aboriginal communities (urban, reserve, rural, and remote) are more likely to have a vested interest in those communities and may serve them for longer than non-Aboriginal health care providers.
- First Nations, Métis and Inuit health care professionals may have more personal experience addressing cultural differences and sensitive cultural issues that often exist around clinical medicine, especially in the context of traditional medicines. When given the proper training, they are more likely to be respected by Aboriginal community- members. Aboriginal health care professionals are also more likely to understand and/or speak the Aboriginal language of patients where applicable.
- First Nations, Métis and Inuit health professionals can provide important health and professional role-modelling for the communities where they work and/or live.
- As frontline workers, Aboriginal health professionals can be advocates on behalf of First Nations, Métis and Inuit regarding health policy and program development at local, regional and national levels (Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada, 2007).

While other factors impact the health of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, a significant increase in Aboriginal health human resources would improve the health status of First Nations, Métis and Inuit in Canada. This proposed increase is one component of a larger push for health care on First Nations, Métis and Inuit terms that will create a bridge between mainstream-trained health professionals and Aboriginal Peoples, ultimately contributing to improved health.

This paper provides a historical overview of First Nations, Métis and Inuit education within a health human resource context. It is intended to inform the reader how the history of education has contributed to the current First Nations, Métis and Inuit

health human resource landscape, and to provide a better foundation for effective solutions and sustainable, healthy communities.

## **ORIGINAL EDUCATION**

Indigenous Peoples of North America have always had education systems as a foundation for the survival and flourishing of their families and communities. European contact and the ensuing diseases and warfare impeded knowledge transmission processes in many ways.

Learning was a lifelong process that reflected the communities' values. "It operated in a non-coercive way, relying in the use of models, illustration stories, and warnings to convey the information that was considered essential" (Miller, 1996, p. 35). Education was "based on experiential, informal learning that was integrated with life and was not based on notions of achievement" (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003, p. 38). Ross (1992) describes this type of learning as "pattern-thought" or a modelling approach to education that "rests on the accumulation of individual memory, observation and pattern-thought skills. It does not seem to permit teaching... instead it requires one to watch, and watch again... " (p. 78). The "curriculum" of Indigenous education told young people things about themselves, "who they were, what other beings around them were, and how the humans and the other beings related to each other" (Miller, 1996, pp. 38).

Communities transformed immeasurably after the arrival of European settlers and the inception of mission-based schools. As death and sickness spread across communities, the traditional mode of education became difficult to sustain. Indigenous methods of curing illness through ceremony and medicine were not always effective for the rapid spread of foreign disease.

As religious instruction infiltrated Indigenous communities, colliding worldviews and philosophies were introduced. The original ways of teaching and knowing became less dominant. However, original education has persisted in many Indigenous communities in various formats despite these disruptions.

Indigenous educational practices vary between and among First Nations, Inuit and Métis, but some generalizations have been made herein to demonstrate the context of Indigenous education, past and present. In general, historic traditional Indigenous education can be viewed within four categories or levels: early childhood education, life skills training, advanced skill education, and mastery training.

In early childhood education, children were introduced to their surroundings, often with explanations of how the world came to be. As children aged, life skills training taught them about survival, sustenance, and family and home development (homemaking, childrearing, home construction, etc.). Early anthropologist Diamond Jenness (1922) explains how the Copper Inuit related life skills training to their children by encouraging them to make dolls and clothing from animal skins, and by watching and emulating their elders on hunting trips (pp. 169–170).

Many Indigenous societies believe that each person is born with a gift—such as such as hunting, skinning animals, making clothing or creating medicines—meant to benefit all the people, not only that individual. Based on the identification of gifts, youth would be integrated into advanced skill education to hone their talents. Finally, some individuals might be extraordinarily gifted, which would designate them for mastery training. This category of education is culturally and regionally specific, but includes professions such as carving, pottery, historic documenting, basketry, and oratory. Today,

traditional Indigenous education follows similar patterns of teaching by doing, mentorship and emulation. It may also include instruction for newer cultural activities and practices (e.g., beadwork), or include contemporary education and skill-building in fields like carpentry or teaching.

Jobs or professions may have changed, but the underlying methods of instruction often persist from generation to generation. Nearly all Aboriginal people in Canada participate in mainstream education systems (at least as children and youth), while some also receive traditional instruction in traditional roles, jobs or skill sets.

Historic Indigenous health education was integrated into all levels of instruction. In the early childhood stage, children were exposed to their immediate environment, learning how to grow and/or harvest foods, identify medicinal plants and recognize seasonal changes. In the life skills stage, children were taught how to harvest and process basic medicinal plants, how to cook foods for proper nutrition, and how to access traditional healing practices. Youth identified as gifted in medicines and/or healing would be introduced to specific practices and procedures depending on their particular talents. Some of them would be further identified for future leadership roles in health and healing, and would be offered mastery level training, which often meant years or even decades of additional instruction.

Jeness (1922) records the educational journey of a west coast healer that started in early childhood when his mother made him bathe in the river and scrubbed him with spruce boughs “. . . even though there was ice on the water; and one morning after I had scrubbed myself—I was still only three—she clothed me with her blessing or power, what we call in our language *swi-em*” (p. 8). This young boy was treated in a special way;

he was never allowed “to receive food from anyone who might be ceremonially unclean” until he was eight years old. At that point he was subjected to regular talks by three of his mother’s “oldest and best informed relatives to teach me the ancient history of our people and the commandment which He-Who-Dwells-Above had imposed upon us when he established us upon this earth” (Jenness, 1922, p. 9). At age ten, the boy had a routine where he would fast in the forest, bathe and scrub himself with spruce boughs, and pray; a routine that persisted throughout the autumn and winter months (Jenness, 1922, p. 10). When he was 14, he had a vision where he encountered a medicine man who instructed him on how to heal: ““Now lay your hands on that sickness and remove it,” the vision ordered. I laid my hands to the patient and cupped his sickness with them. He rose to his feet, cured. “That is how you shall remove every sickness”” (Jenness, 1922, p. 11).

Many communities persisted in their original health practices and education processes despite the negative impact of colonization. As part of the process of colonization, education became a tool of assimilation, with European methods and processes often replacing Indigenous methods and processes. The following sections address specific educational experiences after European contact for First Nations, Inuit and Métis. The final section is a discussion relevant to all three groups with reflection on the impact of their shared history on the First Nations, Métis and Inuit health human resource landscape. In recent history (the last forty years), a renewed focus on Aboriginal education has taken place at the community level, in post-secondary institutions, and in policy-making. Spotlight sections throughout this paper will highlight the efforts of First Nations, Métis and Inuit health professionals in the areas of nursing, community health representation, midwifery, and physicians.

## **FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION**

Great diversity exists among First Nations in Canada in terms of geography, culture, linguistics, economics, and politics. First Nations peoples can be found in every Canadian province and territory—on reserves, in urban centres and in small rural communities.

Each First Nation community maintains a distinct political relationship with the government of Canada, but their shared experience of policy and legislation provides a common foundation.

Canada has a long history of attempting to deal with First Nations in a consistent manner (e.g., the *Indian Act*) despite differences in treaty relationships, cultures and geographical locations. There are several similarities in how education has been imposed on First Nations communities from provinces and the federal government.

Formal education for Aboriginal people came out of three different but interacting streams of colonial imposition. The first were mission-based schools established initially by the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century. The second stream came through federally administered, church-operated residential schools. The third stream was the result of the treaties negotiated during western expansion, wherein First Nations leaders negotiated with the Crown for the right to education and schools on every reserve (Government of Canada, 1992).

There were missionary schools operating across Canada until the late 1800s, when the country formally established itself with the *British North America Act* in 1867. Early missionary approaches focused on basic oral religious education for all ages in an attempt to convert First Nations people from their traditional belief systems to various Christian

denominations. Teaching children/youth to read and write became part of the missionary education process. Eventually, the federal government and the churches combined their efforts and jointly developed schools focusing on trades and domestic skills, known today as industrial or residential schools.

Before the residential schools and mission-run schools of the early nineteenth century, elite institutions were developed for promising young First Nations men to further their education. The Mohawk Institute in Brantford Ontario is an example of one of these precursors to residential schools. It accepted only those young men who showed promise through their respective churches. Shortly after, girls were added to their tutelage, and the school had a long waiting list of potential students. These schools were part of a bigger educational strategy operating through churches, and worked with an internal conversion agenda of training First Nations youth to become Christian leaders in their respective communities and integrate into the transforming mainstream Canadian society.

When Canada was formally established, residential schools were formally entrenched as required learning institutions for First Nations children across Canada.

### **Residential school experiments in New France**

Récollet missionaries in New France founded the earliest recorded residential school experiments in the 1620s. The Récollets encouraged a two-fold approach to conversion. First, they encouraged increased French settlement: “To civilize them it was necessary first that the French should mingle with them and habituate them among us, which could be done only by an increase to the colony” (LeClerq, 1881, pp. 110–111). Their second

approach was to secure funding from people in France to establish a boarding school, “in order to bring up young Indians to Christianity, who might afterwards aid the missionaries in converting their countrymen” (LeClerq, 1881, pp. 110–111). The Récollets withdrew from New France in 1629, closing their school when their superiors in France had been deemed unsuccessful (Miller, 1996, p. 40).

Jesuits replaced the Récollets, and eventually undertook residential schooling with the same goal of building conversion allies within First Nations communities. The Jesuits were considered the “intellectual elite” of European religious orders and were eager and better equipped to try their hand with the “savages” of the New World (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 50). They also advocated for the establishment of hospitals to care for sick First Nations people, hoping to take on the children of deceased patients (Miller, 1996, p. 41).

There were massive epidemics in New France between 1630 and 1640, with First Nations such as the Mohawk and Huron losing up to 75 per cent of their populations (Hill, 2005, p. 144). The ill were predominantly adults in their childbearing years, aged 15–40 years old. The hospital project would therefore have produced many children for the Jesuit education system.

While the Jesuits’ offer to care for orphaned children was perceived as an act of charity, it was not entirely altruistic. The Jesuits also worked with Governor Champlain to force First Nations parents to place their children in the residential school in Quebec. The Jesuits used their relationship as allies with First Nations people to convince them that the placement of children in residential schools would be symbolic of their diplomatic connection. The Jesuits knew that having possession of First Nations children

would ensure the persistence of friendly relations with First Nations people (Miller, 1996, p. 42).

During the 1680s in New France, Jesuits convinced the French colony to train First Nations girls in domestic skills and to encourage these young women to marry French settlers. The French colonial government in New France also provided dowries for these young First Nations women (Dickason, 1992, p. 171). The program, like many other assimilation initiatives in New France, was not very successful in recruiting, but further initiatives continued until the late 20th century.

### **Residential schools: Merging political and religious agendas**

Under the *British North America Act*, the Dominion government was given responsibility for “Indians and lands reserved for Indians.” This created a complicated situation around educating First Nations people, a domain of the provincial governments. One proposed solution to the “Indian education problem” was that the government would provide financial support to churches, many of which were already operating residential and/or day schools servicing mainly First Nations and Métis children. These churches would in turn provide teachers and other staff to the now federally funded schools. Many of the treaties negotiated between the Dominion and First Nations contain provisions for education (e.g., Treaty Nos. 1, 2 & 3), yet the treaties’ records (oral and written) do not mention the assimilation agenda set forth in federal Indian policy. The federal government was clearly telling First Nations one thing about education and doing something else.

Captain Richard C. Pratt used the phrase “save the man, and kill the Indian” to explain the efforts of the Carlisle Indian School (USA) that he founded. These words also described the agenda and foundation of Indian boarding schools in the United States, and, by extension, residential schools in Canada. A strong philosophical connection existed between U.S. and Canadian Indian affairs personnel, especially between Pratt and Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932. Scott, who entered Indian Affairs service in 1879, was responsible for the outlaw of many ceremonial practices and the ongoing supervision of the federal government’s Indian education agenda as set out under the *Indian Act*. A speech that Scott gave in 1920 summarized this agenda:

I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone... Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department, that is the whole object... (McGillivray, 1997, p. 143)

The philosophies of Pratt and Scott stand as symbols of the residential school colonial agenda. Getting rid of the “Indian problem” began with children, through education. For both Church and State, the Christian and fiduciary obligation to Indians could “be discharged through the medium of children,” meaning that adults could not be rescued from “their present state of ignorance, superstition and helplessness, as they were “physically, mentally and morally unfitted to bear such a complete metamorphosis” (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 55).

In the early nineteenth century, Imperial policy makers debated how to address the “Indian Problem.” They eventually decided on a plan to assimilate First Nations through education and the encouragement of European-style farming. Lord Glenelg,

Colonial Secretary from 1835 to 1839, stated that the aim was “to protect and cherish this helpless Race... [and] raise them in the Scale of Humanity” (Dickason, 1992, p. 225). First Nations peoples financed the new Indian policy through the ongoing sale of their lands. As Dickason (1992) states, Indigenous Peoples were in fact “pay[ing] their own way into civilization” (p. 225). As Canada was at that time a conglomeration of independent colonies, the individual governors were charged with the task of outlining how their colony would implement the plans for First Nations’ “path to civilization” via the sale of their lands.

During the nineteenth century, missionaries continued their proselytizing efforts with First Nations. Some missionaries, such as the Moravians, partnered their spiritual efforts with commercial trading interests (Dickason, 1992, p. 227). First Nations’ experience of missionaries in education and other areas were often negative, but some missionaries made a lasting positive impression in the areas of education. For example, Methodist missionary James Evans, while working with the Cree people in Norway House in 1841, created a syllabic writing system incorporating shorthand with Cree symbols. By the end of that century the written language had become staple knowledge among the Cree, and they were known to have one of the highest literacy rates in the world (Dickason, 1992, p. 241).

As they were promised schools by the treaty process, First Nations people began to ask for them. The communities believed that these schools would be a partnership that would offer them the opportunity to train their youth for the changes ahead while maintaining the promises “to preserve Indian life, values and Indian Government authority” (Dickason, 1992, p. 333). The Indian education agenda was implemented

primarily in three types of schools: boarding, industrial and day. Boarding schools were usually on reserves and had students aged eight to fourteen. Industrial schools were located near city centres, and had as their mission to meet the manufacturing or agricultural labour needs of the local settler community. The more skills-oriented schools accepted students through the age of 18 in order to capitalize on the labour force. Few, if any, of the schools offered solely academic curricula. The programs were usually half a day long, and included basic reading and arithmetic (usually whatever was sufficient to carry out the labour requirements). The other half of the day was spent labouring in agriculture, manufacturing, crafts, or housekeeping (i.e., sewing, mending, washing, etc.).

The trades taught were intended to offer “lower level” survival skills, not to produce scholars or master-professionals (Dickason, 1992, p. 334). By 1900, the ratio of First Nations children in day school versus residential/industrial school was two to one. The day schools operated under similar curricula and shared a common agenda with the residential programs, but they were much costlier. In 1923, the remaining industrial schools were officially merged with the residential schools (Miller, 1996, p. 148).

Under the leadership of Duncan Campbell Scott, the residential school system was expanded in the early 1900s. In 1930, three-quarters of the pupils in residential schools were registered in the primary Grades of 1– 3, and only three per cent of pupils made it past Grade 6. In 1931, the peak of the residential school period, there were over eighty residential schools across Canada (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p.50). By the 1950s, one in ten First Nations students made it past Grade 6 – one-third of the equivalent mainstream Canadian population (Dickason, 1992, p. 335). The average First Nations

student was lucky to have completed Grade 5 by the time he or she reached the graduating age of 18 (Dickason, 1992, p. 335).

Residential schools had a disproportional mortality rate. Sarcee Boarding School, for example, had a death rate of 28 per cent, mostly from tuberculosis between the years of 1894 and 1908 (Dickason, 1992, p. 335). Indian Affairs files show that 40 per cent of students who attended school at Kuper Island died before they could return home (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p.58). In general, mortality rates were high but not fully reported. Reports of residential school student deaths that were covered up at the time continue to be made today.

Even though the government's First Nations education agenda was to facilitate the transition of First Nations people to life in mainstream Canada, tensions arose from the newly created First Nations labour force. For example, Frank Oliver, Minister of the Interior and Superintendent General of Indian Affairs from 1905 to 1911, noted that the mainstream population was displeased with the new labour force. He stated, "We are educating these Indians to compete industrially with our own peoples, which seems to me a very undesirable use of public money" (Dickason, 1992, p. 336).

Starting in the 1940s, as part of a political shift towards State–Church autonomy, the federal government began phasing out the church partnerships in First Nations education. With costs rising and a growing public concern about segregation, the federal government began to phase in day-schooling while slowly closing most residential schools by 1970. Dickason (1992) summarizes highlights of Aboriginal education in the 1970s:

Blue Quills, near St. Paul, Alberta, became the first school in Canada to be controlled by an Amerindian band, in 1970. Its success encouraged others

to follow its example; in 1973 the Métis community at Ile a la Crosse in northern Saskatchewan took over the local school. The following year the Ojibwa of Sabaskong Bay in northern Ontario defied the department and began the process of taking over their elementary school; three years later, in 1977, they were also running the secondary school. Today, Indian Affairs encourages bands to take over full or partial administration of reserve schools, although its funding policy is not always consistent with this goal. (p. 337)

Since the late 1980s, residential school survivors have led a movement to educate the Canadian public about the abuses they endured in the government-funded institutions. The federal government, in consultation with many First Nations leaders and residential school survivors, recently created the Indian Residential School Settlement. This program offers financial compensation to former residential school students in exchange for opting out of court proceedings. Other survivors continue to explore a court resolution, seeking judicial redress for the abuses they suffered. The legacy of residential schools persists after several generations of mainstream schooling, and continues to be a scar on Canadian history.

### **Indian control of Indian education**

In 1969, the Pierre Trudeau government released the *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*, otherwise known as the “White Paper” (Canada, 1969). This document suggested that the federal government begin to treat First Nations peoples as citizens (a right which was “bestowed” earlier in the decade)<sup>3</sup>, and end all special services and responsibilities. The White Paper argued for the termination of the *Indian Act* and an amendment to the Constitution. The differential treatment of a specific racial group did not fall within Trudeau’s vision of multiculturalism and equality. The White Paper promoted this as a positive step forward for First Nations people, a change in the

course of history enabling “Indian people to be free—free to develop Indian cultures in an environment of legal, social and economic equality with other Canadians” (Canada, 1969, p. 3).

This was not the first opinion paper released in the 1960s on the future of First Nations people. The *Hawthorn Report* of 1966 supported a radically different perspective than to that of the White Paper. This report agreed that First Nations should have full rights as citizens, as dictated by new laws, but argued that they should also be considered “citizens plus” with additional treaty and constitutional benefits. The *Hawthorn Report* was generally well received by First Nations leadership. The White Paper did not receive such support from First Nations leadership at the time.

The release of the White Paper marked a turning point for First Nations people in Canada, bringing to the forefront issues of inherent rights, treaty law, self-determination, and education. A 1970 declaration by the National Indian Brotherhood and the Indian Chiefs of Alberta entitled *Citizens Plus*, but commonly referred to as the *Red Paper*, was the first in a series of First Nations leadership responses to the White Paper. One of the most important documents on education, the 1972 *Indian Control of Indian Education* (ICIE) policy paper was presented by the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) as a direct response to the threat of government abolishment of treaty law. Following a national conference on First Nations governance, the NIB presented the ICIE policy paper to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. The paper declared that First Nations people must conduct the education of First Nations youth so that their educational content and values would be intrinsically grounded in indigenous beliefs. The

document demanded that First Nations be treated as equals to the federal government, and that the relationship exist on a nation-to-nation basis.

In later years the NIB reorganized as the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and re-released the policy paper twice, once in 1976 and again in 2001. In 2001, there were only a small number of schools still under management by the federal government. However, very few of the schools not managed by the federal government were really operating within the community leadership framework demanded by the ICIE policy paper.<sup>4</sup>

Support for the AFN's position continues across First Nation communities. One author builds on the ICIE paper, stating, "Native teachers are key to progress in the education of Indians" (Kirkness, 1999, p. 57). Kirkness also suggests that there is a connection between the creation of strong First Nations identities in students, academic success, and instruction by First Nations teachers (1999, p. 57).

Neither the federal government nor the Minister of Indian Affairs has ratified the AFN Policy Paper, and each elected AFN National Chief has kept it at the top of the agenda. However, the goals of self-determination through control of education remain elusive. Only a handful of communities have since taken over management of their reserve educational systems, and when they have, it often has had to be done with insufficient resources.

First Nations controlled post-secondary institutions are closely related to the idea of Indian control of Indian education. Stonechild (2006) notes four types of Aboriginal-controlled institutions in Canada:

1. The Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (renamed First Nations University of Canada) is the first Aboriginal college/university to be controlled by First Nations communities.
2. The second type of institution is controlled by local tribal councils and focuses on brokering programs from other institutions. Examples include Yellowquills College in Manitoba and the Blue Quills College in Alberta.
3. The third type of institution is a community-learning centre, which provides upgrading and distance education.
4. The fourth model is an unaccredited institution offering training like self-government. (p. 103)

Across Canada, several First Nations/Aboriginal learning institutes have been created and now form the National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning (NAIIHL). This national group works to realize the goal of creating and sustaining opportunities for community-controlled post-secondary education (NAIIHL, n.d.). Operating again under a similar philosophy to Indian control of Indian education, First Nations and other Aboriginal Institutes seek to provide post-secondary opportunities that are culturally relevant and responsive to community needs. These range from providing space for mainstream institutions to offer community-based academic programs (e.g., paramedic training programs) to partnerships with mainstream institutions to deliver Aboriginal-specific courses (e.g., registered practical nursing for Aboriginal communities) to community-initiated programs of study (e.g., adult language immersion). These programs serve youth and adult learners, with a higher concentration of adult Aboriginal students than found in

mainstream institutions. In most instances, Aboriginal institutions face issues around accreditation, lack of financial support (often directly connected to accreditation), and lack of (mainstream) credentialed community-based educators to design and deliver curriculum. These institutions remain forward-thinking and continue to persevere for First Nations post-secondary education that is responsive and relevant to First Nations' realities.

Other national associations exist such as the National Aboriginal Student Services Association (NASSA) whose membership includes Aboriginal Student Service units from across colleges and universities in Canada to “empower institutions of higher learning to become welcoming environments where Aboriginal Peoples can successfully pursue educational goals while maintaining their cultural identities” (Canadian Association of Colleges and Universities, 2007). These national associations are important for keeping the issue of post-secondary education on provincial and national government agendas, and are responsive to the growing needs of Aboriginal students.

### **Contemporary status of First Nations education**

Education has evolved not only in communities at the elementary and secondary levels, but also at the post-secondary level. Governments are slow to respond to the needs of the booming Aboriginal youth population, but one area that has received attention is language.

According to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), “language is instrumental in creating a strong cultural identity, and key in maintaining a vibrant culture” (INAC, 2002). It is through language that values, culture, teachings and history

are transmitted. When generations of people lose their mother-tongue language, the implications move beyond linguistic literacy to the cultural literacy of a people (INAC, 2002). In 2002, the federal Department of Canadian Heritage created an Aboriginal languages initiative to fund various programs that support preserving, revitalizing and promoting Aboriginal languages and culture over the subsequent 11 years. This includes teacher training, community/adult education programs, and instituting language programs in schools. According to the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures (2005), funding has been completely inadequate to address the needs of the scores of Indigenous languages in Canada.

Recent decades have been marked by a resurgence of First Nations identity as that of Indigenous people. Territories are being fought for in the courtroom, economic and political self-determination is moving forward, and language and culture are being revitalized. At the core of this revitalization of identity are education and the ability to educate one's own people on their culture, worldview and language. The battle for self-determination has been fought on many levels, but education has remained a central issue and is key to future generations' ability to know who they are as First Nations peoples. According to Battiste and Henderson (2000), Indigenous students are alienated from the process of education and from the curriculum itself: "[In] most existing educational systems, Indigenous heritage and transmission of that heritage are missing. Even if part of the heritage is present, it is presented from a Eurocentric perspective" (p. 88). Barman, Hébert and McCaskill (1999) argue that without control over education, the cycle of learning is broken—taking with it cultural awareness and identity, and that "the socialization of children, through education, shapes all aspects of identity, instilling

knowledge of the group's language, history, traditional behavior, and spiritual beliefs" (p. 1).

Looking at the contemporary landscape, any discussion of First Nations education also needs to acknowledge the often invisibility of off-reserve and urban First Nations people. In 2001, approximately 700,000 Aboriginal people in Canada lived off-reserve, 71 per cent (this figure includes Métis, Inuit and First Nations) of the country's entire Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2006, p. 285). According to the Statistics Canada 2001, 28 per cent of Aboriginal people live in Census Metropolitan Areas (Statistics Canada, 2005c). In many cases, children living off-reserve attend provincial schools with little First Nations curricular content. There are, however, many examples of schools in mainstream communities, especially those with a high proportion of First Nations children, that aim to provide cultural content both in the curriculum and in co-curricular programming. For example, Queen Elizabeth District High School in Sioux Lookout, Ontario, operates a program called the Aboriginal Alternative Education Program that provides specialized programming and supportive learning environments for Aboriginal students.<sup>5</sup>

### **Post-secondary education funding**

Before the 1950s, any First Nations person who wanted to attend post-secondary education would have had to finance the endeavour on his or her own. In many cases, aspiring young people would petition their local First Nation government for funds. It was up to the discretion of the local leadership and their budgetary capacity to fund students in post-secondary pursuits. Until 1951, university education came with a price

tag. The *Indian Act* of 1886, section 86 provided for the enfranchisement (loss of Indian status and accompanying treaty rights) upon receipt of a university degree:

Every Indian who is admitted to the degree of doctor of medicine, or to any other Degree, by an university of learning, or who is admitted, in any province of Canada, to practice law, either as an advocate, barrister, solicitor or attorney or a notary public, or who enters holy orders, or who is licensed by a denomination of Christians as a minister of the gospel may upon petition to the Superintendent General, ipso facto become and be enfranchised. (Government of Canada, 1886)

In the 1950s, Indian Affairs provided informal funding to student applicants on a “case by case basis.” In 1968, Indian Affairs began supporting First Nations and Inuit students seeking post-secondary education. In the 1968–69 year they funded 250 students who were ineligible for funding under the Adult Occupational Training Act. (Stonechild, 2006, p. 63). In 1977, the federal government established the Post-secondary Education Assistance Program, supplemented later in 1983 with funds to support preparatory programs for university and college studies. The goal of the program was to fund the maximum amount of students who qualified for entrance into colleges and universities (Stonechild, 2006, p. 63). In 1988, Indian Affairs created the Indian Studies Support Program to support the development and delivery of special post-secondary programs for Aboriginal Peoples. In the early 1990s, additional monies were added to the funding programs, but in 1996 the Post-secondary Education Assistance Program was capped at two per cent annual growth despite much higher increases in: tuition expenses, the number of students attending post-secondary institutions and the populations of First Nations and Inuit (Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2006, p. 4).

Many myths exist around First Nations and Inuit education funding. The reality is that this funding is tenuous and provided based on strict criteria, and it is only sustained from year to year based on the academic success of the student. Each First Nation<sup>6</sup> sets criteria for funding allocations, and may exclude members based on residency, previous support, desired program of study, or prior academic achievement. With factors such as the cost of living in the community where the post-secondary institution is located, the number of dependents, and the cost of supplies and books for specific programs, many students find their sponsorship amount is inadequate. Because post-secondary support has not increased in over a decade, First Nations are often forced to limit the amount of money per student in order to fund a greater number of students, while still turning away as many as 25 per cent of applicants (Grand River Post-secondary Education Office website, 2006). Students who receive funding may also be eligible for provincial loans, based on their current income or the income they earned the previous year. This is often problematic for mature students who worked during the previous year. The financial burdens of First Nations and Inuit students have recently gained bureaucratic attention, but it is unclear if changes will come in the near future to significantly and sufficiently increase post-secondary funding.

### **Education and First Nations health human resource capacity**

Aboriginal people continue to be under-represented in professional and financial occupations in Canada's labour force. At the same time, there has been a significant increase in the representation of Aboriginal workers in primary and unskilled jobs (Frideres & Gadacz, 2005, p. 103). In 2005, the Aboriginal workforce in health

occupations and natural and applied sciences was half that of the non-Aboriginal workforce (Frideres & Gadacz, 2005, p. 107). Aboriginal employees are likely to be paid less than non-Aboriginal employees for the same work. In the 1990s, First Nations people consistently earned two-thirds of what non-First Nations workers did, regardless of the level of education (King, 1993).

Residential schools have left their mark on many Aboriginal families in Canada. Families may have parents and grandparents or other extended family members who went to residential schools. The multi-generational effects continue to impact the relationship First Nations people have with education. Residential schools have also affected the perceptions First Nations people have of health care, and the way it is practiced. Generations of First Nations people have been disconnected from their traditional health care and healing practices. This disconnection from traditional notions of health and wellness is a challenge to efforts to inspire First Nations students to consider a career in health.

Today, First Nations children continue to be underserved by their education systems, both on- and off-reserve. Even with First Nations-controlled schooling, the complications of mandated provincial curricula and serious under-funding have created schools that appear to be in the hands of First Nations communities but are in fact mere shadows of their provincial counterparts, with often limited success in meeting the needs of First Nations students. Similarly, First Nations students attending mainstream (non-band-supported) provincial schools are regularly marginalized in terms of their cultural needs. In addition, inappropriate curricula, lacking content on First Nations histories,

cultures and knowledge, continually fail to inspire students to academic success. This perpetuates the void of qualified First Nations professionals, especially in health care.

### ***SPOTLIGHT: Community Health Representatives***

In the 1960s, the Department of Indian Affairs and Health and Welfare created a new health care position in Inuit and First Nations communities—the Community Health Representative (CHR). Community Health Representatives (or Community Health Workers) are public health educators who promote “well-being and access to services by applying their specific skills in a community’s language and culture” (McCallum, 2006, p. 1). This new workforce was established to bridge gaps between Inuit and First Nations community members and non-Inuit/non-First Nations doctors and nurses. Initially, both men and women were trained for the positions, but today the vast majority of CHRs are women.

McCallum (2006) describes the early curriculum of the CHR training programs and the communities involved:

Training involved three parts. The first part was an “orientation” running from six weeks to two months and supervised by field nurses. It involved surveying reserves for facts about health and “health attitudes” and learning about the work of teachers, the RCMP, missionaries and government workers. The second part was a 3-month “formal training” program, which took place in a central area, in a classroom, and focused on germ theory, nutrition, first aid and teaching methods. After six weeks of general health education, the group was divided into men and women for another session of two weeks’ length: women attended discussions of public health nursing subjects; and men received practical sanitation training. The third part of the training program was a probation period of continued on-the-job training supervised by local nurses and health committees. After one year, CHRs would be considered for permanent full-time public service posts with the Medical Services Branch.

During the first program, seven men and three women were trained in Norway House and hired in their own communities. There were five other CHR programs run in the 1960s alone, all west or north of Norway House. (pp. 2-3)

Since 1970, there have been vast changes in the field of community health work. For example, CHRs were among the first health professionals to address addictions issues. The National Indian and Inuit Community Health Representatives Organization (NIICHRO) is lobbying for standardized “core competency” training for all workers, a rewarding career path and suitable salaries (McCallum, 2006, p. 6). Today there over 900 CHRs working with bands and the First Nations Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) to improve the health status of Inuit and First Nations in Canada. They continue to be critically important (and often underpaid) health educators serving Inuit and First Nations communities (McCallum, 2006, p. 6).

## **INUIT EDUCATION**

As the lands of the Indigenous people of the Arctic, Inuit traditional territory spans United States, Canada, Greenland, and Russia. In Canada it includes the provinces of Labrador and Quebec and the territories of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. Inuit have also had a significant presence in the south for at least the last century, in cities such as Ottawa, for example. However, statistics and government reports have not always adequately recorded that presence.

Mainstream education among Inuit was very limited until the mid-twentieth century, despite a European presence in the Arctic from the sixteenth century onwards. Arctic missionaries provided basic education from a few trading-post settlements and received minimal government support for their efforts (McLean, 1995, p. 183).

Indigenous Inuit education persisted throughout the Arctic, with the transfer of life skills, advanced training and mastery education in areas such as hunting, harvesting, family development, governance, and ecological management.

### **A call for formal education**

In the 1920s and 1930s the ethnographer Diamond Jenness, while working with the Canadian Arctic Expedition, made several calls for the establishment of a formal education system for the Canadian Inuit, focusing on things like vocational training in naval navigation, mechanics, carpentry, metal working, health care, and wireless telegraphy (McLean, 1995, p. 182). The government did not accept his proposals. It saw instead a need to support the hunting and trapping lifestyle of Inuit. The government thought it was dangerous to provide education, as it would take Inuit away from their

traditional economic activities and might result in an inferiority complex because of the limitations of their economy (McLean, 1995, pp. 182-183).

The federal government's education policies in the north shifted after World War II. It called for: "equal opportunity is to be afforded to all Indian, Eskimo, and white children, and those of mixed blood who, regardless of creed, are to be fitted for the life which they will have to fare in a rapidly changing world" (McLean, 1995, p. 184). This was a marked shift away from previous reliance on missionaries to provide (limited) education to Inuit (Dickason, 1992, p. 396). In this new approach, the federal government developed a full-scale education plan for the north, including building permanent schools in many Inuit settlements and communities. The new educational agenda was part of the federal government's plan to create larger, more permanent settlements in the north. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (2004) describes these new settlement initiatives and the impact on Inuit life:

...Inuit were moved to communities at the request of the federal government with the promise of health, education and housing services. It was at this critical juncture when Inuit society began to unravel under the stress of rapid change. The extended family was no longer the key social unit as government agencies began to assume many responsibilities [for] health, education, and justice . . . As well, southern culture began to inundate the north and began to heavily influence the younger generation in particular. In turn, these changes undermined the traditional role of elders and began to impede the transmission of knowledge and values between generations. (pp. 4-5)

As part of the settlement shifts, the first Inuit day schools were opened in 1949, and by 1955 plans were in place for a network of schools (McLean, 1995, p. 184). It took several years for most of the plans to be realized (Douglas, 1994, p. 159). A 1952 (cited in McLean, 1996) report outlined aspects of the new Inuit educational agenda:

- Not to induce families “to congregate in settlements where they are unable to hunt and trap.”
- To teach elementary English and simple arithmetic.
- To teach health, hygiene, and the rudiments of geography and science.
- To focus on practical skills such as craftsmanship and sewing.
- To encourage “promising” Inuit students to achieve higher education, become community leaders, and fill positions currently occupied by Euro-Canadians in the north. (pp. 187–188)

The explicit objective of this agenda was to support the ability of Inuit to continue living as hunters and trappers, while also ushering Inuit movement into wage labour (McLean, 1996, p. 188).

### **Legacies of removal and epidemic disease**

While the federal government was planning Inuit education, Inuit were experiencing one of the largest tuberculosis outbreaks in history. Linked to government-sponsored removals and economic shifts, Inuit per capita rates of tuberculosis were the highest in the world. Dickason (1992) describes these relocations:

Throughout this period the policy of “encouraging” Inuit to relocate in areas selected by the government was in full force; as Jenness remarked, permanent villages were not within the Inuit experience before the arrival of whites, and not one that has been developed since has been on a site selected by them. At first the relocations were co-coordinated with the fur trade; the HBC [Hudson Bay Company] was informed in 1934 that if it wished to continue its operation in the North, it must assume responsibility for Native welfare without expense to the department. That failures resulted is hardly surprising; the considerations that guided the selections did not always match with the conditions needed by the Inuit for survival.

This was illustrated by a series of attempts that began in 1934 when twenty-two Inuit from Cape Dorset, eighteen from Pond Inlet, and twelve from Pangnirtung were transported to Dundas Harbour. What had appeared to officials to be a suitable location, accessible by sea, abounding in marine life and with good prospects for furs, turned out to have ice conditions in winter that impeded both hunting and the dog-team travel needed to maintain traplines. After two years the Inuit had to be evacuated, some to go back to their home bases but others to try life in still

another location. In the succeeding years Inuit were transported to one site after another (Croker Bay, Arctic Bay, Fort Ross, Spence Bay), each one of which proved to be unsuitable for the hunting and trapping way of life that officials were convinced must be preserved. (pp. 396–397)

While the federal government had relinquished their responsibilities to the Hudson Bay Company, their commercial interests took precedence over Inuit well-being with devastating results.

Dickason (1992) links tuberculosis in some Inuit regions with Canadian federal interests in northern sovereignty. In 1964, over 70 per cent of Keewatin Inuit were placed in sanatoriums for periods ranging from three months to nine years. Many Inuit children were adopted into southern families without their surviving parents or extended families having given consent, and without their being notified (Dickason, 1992, p. 397). The federal government considered plans to relocate the remaining Inuit population to the south, but such plans were rejected in the end because:

...the North needed its people, above all those who knew how to cope with its rigorous demands. A new reason had also emerged to reinforce the argument for more balanced use of natural resources: the need for settlement to support Canada's claims to sovereignty. (Dickason, 1992, p. 397)

The legacy of these removals and government-created settlements continues to be felt by Inuit today. The manufactured settlements that came of these policies became the hubs of Euro-Canadian education in the Arctic, another symbol of southern imposition on the northern landscape. The tuberculosis epidemic is connected to current Inuit health issues, including health human resource shortages. Government-imposed policies fuelled the tuberculosis epidemic through settlement shifts without adequate support for proper housing and health care. The response to the health crisis led to the disappearance of many Inuit through the adoption of children into southern families and the placement of

the ill in sanatoriums. Inuit who had escaped the tuberculosis epidemic were left not knowing about family members who were sent away for treatment. Inuit who received treatment endured months or even years away from home, isolated from any contact with their family members. Men in white coats and masks removing family members with tuberculosis made understandably lasting impressions. This pain is worsened by not knowing whether those family members survived. As significant numbers of people were being removed from Inuit territory, those remaining were left to contemplate what had happened to their loved ones.

Similar to the legacy that residential schools left, the legacy of forced removals of TB sufferers has left many Inuit with a mistrust and fear of health care practitioners. Mistrust and fear continues to grow as information on surviving and dead Inuit from that period surfaces. Storytelling keeps the legacy alive for future generations, who have absorbed the negative experiences of Inuit and Euro-Canadian medicine.

### **Inuit-controlled schools**

The original government-designed schools for Inuit were essentially transplanted southern schools, in terms of both organization and staff. The schools were English-only and did not connect to the lived experience of Inuit (Annahatak, 1994, p. 15). Betsy Annahatak (1994), an Inuk education counsellor from Nunavik, describes the later shift away from this approach:

It was not until 1975, through the establishment of a new school board that resulted from the James Bay Agreement (a political land claim agreement between the Quebec government and the Inuit in Nunavik), that we gained some measure of control in the education of our children. From that process of empowerment came the teaching in our own language during the first three primary grades, plus several hours per week of teaching

Inuktitut language, cultural skills, and religion in all grades from three to secondary levels. (p. 16)

Even with this new level of autonomy, teachers and schools often found themselves unprepared and under-funded for their new agenda.

Contemporary education among Inuit is often criticized. One of the strongest criticisms is that the schools are based in the “southern” mode of education, which is inherently incompatible with Inuit ways of learning and knowing.<sup>7</sup> Stairs (1992) asserts that “education in the North has been historically disruptive,” and that it removes students “from their ecology and social networks” (p. 122). Douglas (1994) notes that patterns are changing, however, as Inuit professionals move into school staffing positions (p. 162). This shift towards increased Inuit teachers and aides contributes to staff continuity as well as student confidence and consistency.

### **Land claims settlements**

Starting in the 1950s, Inuit in Canada began assertive efforts to gain recognition of their Aboriginal rights. Inuit of Canada maintain associations with Inuit from Greenland, the United States and Russia, all of who are seeking similar recognition and redress. In 1971, the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC) was formed to pursue Inuit land claims within the Northwest Territories. Its efforts culminated in the 1993 Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA). The most widely known aspect of the agreement is the creation of the Territory of Nunavut (out of lands formerly within the boundaries of the Northwest Territories). Lesser known aspects of the agreement have also had significant impacts on Inuit life in Nunavut, particularly on education. Inuit in Quebec were active participants in the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement of 1975, according them a level of

self-government in Nunavik along with financial compensation and support for government and social needs, such as education. The Inuvialuit settled their claims with the Northwest Territories government in 1984. This agreement included provision for self-government and allowed the Inuvialuit greater control over their education system. The Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement of 2004 between Inuit of Nunatsiavut, the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Government of Canada constitutes the fourth Inuit/Inuvialuit land claim.

The push for Inuit land claims came alongside and in conjunction with the push for greater Inuit control of education. Inuit insistence on Aboriginal rights supported their education efforts and demonstrated the rights of Inuit to determine their educational agendas. As the settlement agreements continue to be implemented, Inuit continue to pursue greater jurisdiction over the education of their people from early childhood through post-secondary schooling and adult education. Recent reports, such as those put out by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, outline the Inuit agenda for increased control of and support for education (ITK, 2005; ITK, 2004).

The land claims settlements and creation of new governments have also led to increased access to technology in the North. Inuit have effectively lobbied for the technological infrastructure to support initiatives at all levels of education, but much work remains in order to bridge the educational gaps Inuit face. Several post-secondary institutions and partnerships are working to bridge those gaps. Among them is Nunavut Arctic College (NAC), offering academic diploma and degree programs from three campuses and 24 community learning centres (NAC, n.d.). The NAC health curriculum includes programs such as community health representative, health careers access, and

nursing (degree and diploma). NAC has also partnered with southern universities to offer programs like the Akitsiraq Law School, a partnership between NAC, the Akitsiraq Law School Society and the University of Victoria Faculty of Law. This program graduated 11 new lawyers in 2005 (NAC, 2007). The University of the Arctic is a network of universities, colleges and other organizations committed to higher education in the north (including institutions from Canada, the United States, Russia, Finland, Norway, Iceland, and Greenland). It promotes research in the north, including environmental and health studies. The Nunavut Sivuniksavut program housed out of Algonquin College in Ottawa is another important program for Inuit youth in Nunavut, preparing students for educational, training and career opportunities created through the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement.

### **Education and Inuit health human resource capacity**

The National Aboriginal Health Organization released a discussion paper on Inuit health human resource capacity building in 2004 called “What Sculpture is to Soapstone, Education is to the Soul: Building the capacity of Inuit in the health field.”<sup>8</sup> NAHO’s research findings give important insight into the developing Inuit health human resource landscape. For example, they found that high school students had limited access to many of the courses required for entry into post-secondary health studies (NAHO, 2004, p. 9). These limitations are due to the number of interested students and qualified teachers (NAHO, 2004, pp. 9). Distance education options are available but the success rate in those courses is lower than that of face-to-face teaching. Post-secondary students and graduates also responded that nearly 75 per cent felt “ready for life in the south” (where

many go for college programs and where all go for university courses), but only 56 per cent felt “ready for post-secondary studies” (NAHO, 2004, p. 7).

NAHO found the following at the post-secondary level:

- Most Inuit students are in certificate and diploma college programs, mainly in northern colleges. About one-third of Labrador’s and Nunavik’s students and 14 per cent of Nunavut’s students are in universities.
- More than half of Nunavut's students are in one-year certificate studies.
- Reported post-secondary withdrawal rates in 2002 included: Inuvialuit, 2 per cent; Labrador, 12 per cent; Nunavik, 16 per cent. Nunavut statistics were not available. Post-secondary school withdrawal rates ranged from 11 per cent to 32 per cent (based on 11 institutional responses).
- The majority of post-secondary students are women, as are most high school students planning to continue their education. The imbalance is quite startling, with two to three times more women in most programs. Nunavut data, however, indicated that almost equal numbers of men and women are attending southern schools. (NAHO, 2004, pp. 7–8)

This information is very useful in forecasting the Inuit health human resource landscape.

Inuit health professionals are likely to be women working in entry level technical and care positions; however, if resource allocation responds accordingly, then the opportunity clearly exists for them to advance to longer training programs and more advanced careers in the health care field.

As noted by Annahatak (1994) and Douglas (1994), education has not always served Inuit needs and interests. The Inuit are striving to adapt mainstream education to better meet their many needs, including increased health human resource capacity. The urgency of this issue is clear: “Inuit schooling levels are low while the need for highly educated, skilled workers and professionals is described as critical” (King, 1993). Inuit post-secondary funding is insufficient to meet this demand. Inuit share similar concerns

to First Nations and Métis about insufficient federal government support for education, and the long-term impacts to community development and self-determination.

***SPOTLIGHT: Aboriginal midwifery***

Within the last ten years midwifery has become once again a legal field of health care practice in Canada, and Aboriginal people are somewhat marginalized in many of the current debates about midwifery legislation, education and registration. However, many Aboriginal people across North America have persisted in their original birthing traditions, and are experiencing resurgence of those traditions. They are asserting sovereignty over the birthing process as an important aspect of a larger political stance of independence and self-reliance. In so doing, they often challenge the external regulations being developed to govern non-Aboriginal midwifery.

Midwifery education is flourishing in Native community-based programs in Ontario and Quebec and in four-year university programs elsewhere in Canada. The Aboriginal Midwifery Education Program (AMEP) is the first four-year university program for Aboriginal Registered Midwives and has been designed for Aboriginal students, particularly those living in northern Manitoba. Practising midwives operate out of various other health centres or are hired privately. There are also a number of community-based birthing centres, including: the Inuulitsivik Maternity Centre in Puvirnituq, Nunavik; the Rankin Inlet Birth Centre, Nunavut; the Iewirokwas Midwifery Program, Akwesasne Mohawk Territory; and Tsi Non:we Ionnakeratstha Ona:grahsta—Six Nations Birthing Maternal and Child Centre, Six Nations of the Grand River. Inuit midwives have also organized Irnisuksiiniq—Inuit Midwifery Network. These programs and initiatives build bridges between indigenous birthing traditions and clinical approaches to provide safe and culturally respectful birthing support to First Nations, Inuit and Métis families.

While these programs do provide important cultural and community-based health care training, midwifery programs such as the Tsi Non:we Ionnakeratstha Ona:grahsta—Six Nations Birthing Maternal and Child Centre are problematic because they do not qualify graduating students with midwife licences to practice outside of reserve communities. As well, some of these programs, (again, such as Tsi Non:we Ionnakeratstha Ona:grahsta) are considered “private,” and are therefore not usually funded by communities who administer the Post-secondary Student Support Program, nor do they usually qualify for provincial government student loans.

## **MÉTIS EDUCATION**

Today, Métis people live in every province and territory in Canada, but many can trace their heritage back to the Red River Colony and/or other early Métis settlements in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Over 300,000 people identified as Métis in the 2001 Canadian census, (Statistics Canada, 2006). As the descendents of Europeans and Indigenous Peoples, the Métis developed an amalgamated culture rooted in two different traditions. Many were active in the fur trade while others took up farming in their settlements such as Batoche (near Duck Lake, Saskatchewan), St. Albert (in Alberta) and in the Cypress Hills of southern Saskatchewan. Missionaries established themselves in these settlements and, using a Euro-Canadian education model, gave religious instruction to the Métis. The missionaries were also active in agricultural training as they saw a direct link between farming and guiding the Métis towards assimilation.

### **Métis residential school experiences**

The earliest Catholic missions and day schools on the Red River go back to 1818, but the overall pattern of missionary education was not structurally organized until the latter part of the century. Miller (1996) describes the earlier missionary education efforts (or lack thereof):

The Oblates laboured in the region from 1845 onward, and from the late 1850s the Grey Nuns were to be found at a number of sites in what would become Alberta. Prior to the time of Canada's acquisition of Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1870, the Roman Catholic presence had not yet taken on the form of a boarding school. Rather, the Oblates and sisters operated rudimentary day schools, or the priests traveled with and worked among the Indian and Métis groups of the plains without stressing education of the Aboriginal peoples. (Miller, 1996, p. 95)

Before 1870, the missionaries' main focus was on converting Métis and First Nations to Christianity, and not necessarily providing education. In some cases, priests might have taken a special interest in a Métis child they deemed to show promise. Louis Riel was one of those Métis boys sent to Montreal for training in the priesthood.

In 1879, Sir John A. Macdonald commissioned a report on U.S. Indian boarding schools in order to guide the design of Canadian "Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds" (Miller, 1996, p. 101). The report adamantly recommended the integration of Indian and Métis students in the new educational experiment. Instead, Métis students were unofficially recruited, but by 1896 the federal government was insisting that only Status Indians could be enrolled in the three industrial schools in the northwest (Miller, 1996, pp. 102–104). This move was the first of many attempts by the federal government to marginalize the Métis.

Even when the government attempted to address specific Métis needs, their efforts typically fell short. In 1896, a small reserve in northern Alberta was established, the first reserve exclusively for Métis settlement. By 1899, the Grey Nuns were operating a boarding school modelled after those designed for First Nations' education. However, the government did not follow through with their promises of farming equipment, and the settlement dispersed. By 1908, the settlement's land leases (which the government had coordinated for the Métis) were cancelled, and the reserve was opened up to French-Canadian settlement (Dickason, 1992, pp. 360-361).

The actual number of Métis children who attended industrial and residential schools is unknown. But many, if not most, schools definitely had Métis pupils. These schools left a long-lasting impact on Métis today—similar to that experienced by First

Nations. In the past as in the present, Métis people have often slipped through the cracks, both in terms of being serviced and in terms of having their histories documented, especially in relation to government programs.

### **Contemporary Métis education**

The Canadian federal government assumes no fiduciary responsibility for Métis education. It is left instead to the provinces, but they have not always accepted this delegation of responsibility. For example, the Government of Saskatchewan did not assume responsibility for Métis education until 1944 (King, 1993). In the 1991 Canadian census, it was reported that in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta over half of all Aboriginal school-aged children were Métis. In British Columbia, over one-third were Métis. It also reported that, nationally, almost one-third of all Aboriginal school children were Métis (cited in King, 1993).

School districts in and around Métis settlements (especially in the northern areas of the prairie provinces) have operated under significant Métis leadership (King, 1993).

According to King (1993), in these districts:

...there has been de facto Métis control of Métis education but it has not been formalized nor made policy by provincial governments. For all intents and purposes, Métis children receive the same education offered by the provincial government to all other students in the province. (King, 1993)

As previously noted, when First Nations, Inuit or Métis children attend mainstream schools, their unique needs often are not recognized or even considered, which renders those children invisible. Dorian and Yang (2000) report that Métis students attending college or university often find that the elementary and secondary education they received did not prepare them to succeed against the academic rigour of most post-

secondary institutions. Student experiences at the University of Saskatchewan, for instance, reveal several contributing factors that impact completion rates for Métis students. They note that “first and upper year Aboriginal students, including Métis, were admitted to the university with averages much lower than that of general first year applicants” (Dorion & Yang, 2000, p. 178). Secondly, “aboriginal students participated at a lower rate than would be expected from their proportion of the general provincial population, and their academic achievement was, on average, relatively lower than that of other students” (Dorion & Yang, 2000, p. 178). These factors lead to higher drop-out rates for Métis and other Aboriginal students than for the general student population.

While Indian control of Indian education has not produced the successes initially anticipated, the quest for Métis control of Métis education has even further to go:

No one has spoken of Métis Control of Métis Education except the Métis people. No government has taken on this policy to devolve control of educational services to Métis people. Research into the application of Métis Control of Métis Education needs to be done. (King, 1993)

Dorion and Yang (2000) connect low rates of literacy and high school completion among Métis people with factors contributing to a lack of economic security for Métis people of all ages. In Saskatchewan, for example, where the authors focused their study, “21.8% of Métis people over age 15 had less than a grade 9 education, and 65% did not receive any form of post-secondary education” (Dorion & Yang, 2000, p.177). While these findings are based on 1991 Canadian census data, the authors contend that the lack of literacy skills, basic education and post-secondary attendance has had significant consequences for Métis communities, as “the largest pool of employable Métis people (65%) lacked the education necessary to compete for employment in what is becoming a technology and information based economy” (Dorion & Yang, 2000, p. 177).

## **Métis post-secondary education**

The lack of federal involvement in Métis education extends into the post-secondary realm as well. Métis college and university students face extreme financial burdens—often while experiencing continued marginalization within mainstream institutions. As a result, Métis students are extremely under-represented at the post-secondary level and within the skilled labour force.

The Post-secondary Student Support Program does not include provisions for supporting Métis college and university students. As a result, Métis students often have to incur great debt to finance their college and university studies. A 1991 report by the Gabriel Dumont Institute entitled *A Post-Secondary Education for Métis People* (cited by Cecil King in his research study presented to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples) outlines these financial hardships:

The evidence shows that the Métis person who graduates as a teacher in Saskatchewan in 1991 will be less well off economically than if they had stayed on welfare. Upon graduation as a teacher, they will not be joining the middle class but will be in the ranks of the working poor. A single student with no dependents in the B. Ed. program in 1990 with no other source of income would accrue \$13,008 of debt that was eligible for remission and \$21,138 to be repaid in full.

Another student in the same class, single with three children, deemed to be more in need, would incur an even greater debt load. This individual would owe: \$17,280 eligible for remission and \$56,160 to be repaid in full. (King, 1993)

King (1993) also notes the following:

... the expenditures of the graduate teacher would exceed the teacher's income while the expenses and income of the welfare recipient and the person on minimum wage equal out. Income levels and expenditures of the graduate Métis teacher do not equalize until the sixth year of teaching according to the Institute's calculations. This is in contrast to an Indian teacher graduating at the same time, who because of sponsorship is never

in a deficit position during schooling and becomes a self-sufficient contributing professional in the first year of teaching.

The debt factor has long-term effects on Métis students' aspirations. Even for those who do get some post-secondary education, they are inhibited from going on to longer programs such as engineering, medicine, or post-graduate work. A Masters level graduate could carry a debt of \$40-50 thousand dollars.

Various levels of government complicate the debt issue because rules are set by the federal government for Canada Student Loans which impact on Métis students while at the same time policies and regulations are set at the provincial level which are layered on top of the federal framework. Métis involvement in decision-making at both these administrative levels is minimal. Programs, which on the surface are meant to provide easier access to Métis students, have become so complex that they now are a disincentive to access to education. (King, 1993)

The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples discusses the issue of Métis students and post-secondary funding. Recommendation 3.5.22 proposes that a scholarship fund should be established for Métis students who do not have access to financial support under existing policies (RCAP, 1996).

While some might argue that these economic hurdles are similar to those faced by non-Aboriginal post-secondary students, they fail to take into account the larger picture of the Canadian education system as a system that has historically failed Métis people.

In 2007, Métis provincial organizations initiated a funding program for students entering health careers called the "Health Careers Support Program." This is a four-year national initiative funded by Health Canada intended to support and increase the number of Métis health care professionals, which will soon result in more Métis health practitioners across the country.

*The Gabriel Dumont Institute: a model for Métis-controlled post-secondary education*

The Gabriel Dumont Institute is a Métis-operated post-secondary institution with more than a decade of experience in Métis education and research. With its focus on preparing students for a Métis future, the institute has been “instrumental in the development of technical infrastructure and the education of professional personnel for the Métis Nation” (Dorion & Yang, 2000, p. 180). The institute established a four-year teacher education program and has succeeded in developing and delivering culturally relevant training and education programs in Métis communities all across Saskatchewan. Programs include business administration, law enforcement, human justice, health care, resource technology and management, recreation and early childhood education, and housing administration (Dorion & Yang, 2000, p. 180). Since these are all areas where Métis people lag behind in education, training, and skills, the institute is positively contributing to the development of an economically strong and diverse Métis Nation. Qualitative research completed with faculty, staff and students concluded that the “institute programs greatly enhance the employability and income of Métis students” (Dorion & Yang, 2000, p. 184). Successful completion by students requires more than technical programming, however, as many students attributed their academic success to the development of positive identity as Métis students. Strong cultural identity fostered self-esteem and confidence, enabling the successful completion of a degree or diploma (Dorion & Yang, 2000, p. 185). The institute has also witnessed substantial changes in cultural awareness among students since it opened, changes which have helped to raise political awareness. Graduates who rejoined their communities asked for the “institute's vision statement to be altered to represent more of a connection between education and Métis autonomy and sovereignty as Indigenous Peoples” (Dorion & Yang, 2000, p. 185).

The Dumont Institute should be celebrated for its great success, but it cannot solve the entire gap that exists with respect to Métis education and its impacts on Métis people. For one thing Métis students receive little funding for post-secondary training or education which presents a significant economic barrier since most students are left with a \$30,000–\$50,000 student loan debt upon completion of a four-year degree (Dorion & Yang, 2000, p. 186). Those students who do manage to succeed despite the economic barriers find that the skills and knowledge acquired in college or university do not protect them from the racism and discrimination they face in the workplace (Dorion & Yang, 2000, p. 186). Colonialism's legacies still affect the lives of Métis people—something that they share in common with other Aboriginal Peoples in Canada and beyond. Indian control of Indian education should apply to Métis people within a Métis context and it should result in movement at all levels of educational attainment. Otherwise, colonialism continues unabated.

***SPOTLIGHT: Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada***

The Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada (IPAC) is a group of First Nations, Métis and Inuit medical doctors and students from many Nations across Canada who are interested in Indigenous Peoples' health. The organization was founded in 2004 with the goals of supporting the establishment of a First Nations, Inuit and Métis physician workforce and to promote the health and well-being of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples in Canada.

IPAC's organizational mandate is to serve the interests of Indigenous physicians, medical students and the health related interests of Indigenous people in Canada by:

- Developing a data system to accurately monitor the number of Aboriginal medical students/residents and physicians;
- Contributing to Aboriginal knowledge (cultural competence, medical education, curriculum, sharing of Aboriginal knowledge, research, and appropriate knowledge translation systems);
- Mentoring and support systems for Aboriginal medical students by Aboriginal physicians and the wider systems involved in training and supporting medical students;
- Providing support to each other as members;
- Addressing issues of indigeneity and medical practice;
- Developing and supporting the implementation of Aboriginal medical student and physician recruitment and retention strategies; and
- Making contributions to national strategies around Aboriginal health as well as local and regional initiatives in addition to exploring individual levels of advocacy that support health improvements at the patient and community levels. (Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada, 2007)

IPAC regularly participates in research initiatives related to their mission, vision and mandate, especially in the area of recruitment and retention of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people to medicine.

## **RECONTEXTUALIZING ABORIGINAL EDUCATION WITHIN A HEALTH HUMAN RESOURCES PERSPECTIVE**

Understanding the historical context of education, particularly from a health human resources perspective, assists in developing a framework for effective policy formation, institutional changes and community action. The historical impediments to education for First Nations, Métis and Inuit provides us with the knowledge we need to be able to do things better. This has already begun in recent decades to narrow the gap of skilled-profession Aboriginal workers and mainstream Canadian workers. The gaps still persist and they continue to have an impact on health and wellness in First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, both in rural areas and urban centres. Indigenous individuals involved in health care professions are typically found in entry-level positions, and they often lack the training or resources to advance within the field.

Several progressive organizations, particularly Aboriginal health professional groups, policy think tanks and mainstream post-secondary institutions, have partnered with Aboriginal communities and institutions to improve the opportunities for First Nations, Métis and Inuit to advance in health careers. These efforts need to be supported and expanded with appropriate resource allocation. Increased Aboriginal post-secondary enrollment is often described as a great accomplishment for mainstream education and institutions, but it is important to remember that First Nations, Métis and Inuit are the fastest growing populations in Canada. The increase in enrollment, therefore, cannot be wholly attributed to new programs and initiatives as demographic variables would have had an impact.

Mainstream Canadian education has historically done very little for the advancement of traditional knowledge around health and wellness for Aboriginal people.

Formal educational institutions, such as day-schools and residential schools, removed the youth from community education, and the young learners' cycle of knowledge was broken. Unsuccessful educational experiments and low academic success rates limited opportunities for higher education and professional training. First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth are still the least likely in Canada to graduate high school, and even those who do are often unprepared for post-secondary education. Community-controlled education provides a framework to alter the patterns established by earlier forms of education, but these new initiatives will only be successful when they are properly supported. Curricula must reflect the cultures and values of the communities as well as their training needs.

At the post-secondary level, First Nations, Métis and Inuit student success continues to rise, but challenges remain. First Nations students with Indian status and many Inuit students are able to apply for financial support through the federal government's Post-secondary Support Program, but that program continues to be underfunded. No equivalent program exists for Métis or non-Status First Nations students.

Those First Nations, Métis and Inuit students who are able to finance their education are still likely to face obstacles regarding cultural insensitivity, family/community responsibilities, housing and travel. Given the low attainment levels at the high school level, many Aboriginal students may also require additional academic support. Many mainstream institutions have created programs to assist students in overcoming these obstacles, with varying levels of success. Several colleges and universities have designed access and support programs focusing on health sciences in an attempt to improve the First Nations, Métis and Inuit health human resource landscape.

Indigenous institutes often partner with mainstream institutions in these areas as well, providing important access to First Nations, Métis and Inuit students who might not otherwise enter or remain at a mainstream college or university. Other Indigenous institutes, such as the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI) located on the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory, are creating programs for Indigenous health knowledge and practices (FNTI, n.d.). Programs like these can help bridge the gap between mainstream and Indigenous health practices, improving First Nations, Métis and Inuit health. Post-secondary institutions clearly are essential to the First Nations, Métis and Inuit health human resource landscape, but they must further their efforts in areas such as community collaboration, access programs and student support. Post-secondary institutions also need to support educational initiatives at the elementary and high school levels that help students to be better prepared for higher education and overcome some of the barriers to academic success.

### **Barriers and responses to academic success for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students**

Historical barriers to education have transcended generations and still impact Aboriginal students today. There are additional barriers, some of which stem from issues around residential schools, but which are also contemporary in nature. These can include: academic preparedness; issues surrounding math and science; geographic, demographic and social barriers; and having English as a second language (ESL). Contemporary approaches to dealing with these barriers are discussed briefly below.

### **Academic preparedness**

Not being properly prepared is a major barrier to post-secondary success in the health fields and across all the other disciplines. Students graduating from remote or reserve schools often have weaker skills and are less academically prepared to succeed in mainstream universities and colleges. A study by Hull, Phillips and Polyzoi (1995) in the 1980s revealed that most reserve students were at least one year behind the expected grade level by the age of 13 (p. 39). This lack of preparedness is a significant barrier for Aboriginal post-secondary students, and contributes to low retention rates at college and university (Malatest, 2002 p. 12). Another study by Wiebe, Sinclair, Nychuk and Stephens (1994, p. 153) revealed that in a premedical studies program at the University of Manitoba, 80 per cent of students felt academically unprepared to enter their program and the premedical studies program helped them succeed further.

### **Math and science**

Aboriginal students are not taking math and science at the levels needed for entry into health-based post-secondary education and health careers. Malatest (2002) states that while many students are not graduating high school, those who are, do not graduate with necessary courses such as math and sciences, core courses required to enter into health related disciplines (p. 12). Mullens (2001) notes that the critical shortage of Aboriginal people in science-based fields such as health is a result of students not taking math and science (p.8). The lack of exposure to careers and skills of people (role models) in science and health disciplines is also cited as a direct cause of the lack of interest in taking science and math courses (Mullens, 2001, p. 8). “Science and health educators

estimate that fewer than one per cent of aboriginal students are majoring in science related courses. For example, of the 45,000 engineering students enrolled in the 34 engineering faculties across Canada, approximately 140 are Aboriginal students” (Mullens, 2001, p. 10). According to Mullens, in 2001 only a hundred of Canada’s 58,000 physicians were of Aboriginal ancestry (Mullens, 2001, p. 10).

### **Geographic, demographic and social Barriers**

Many Aboriginal students entering college and university are mature students. This demographic has different barriers to education, such as relocation of family costs, day care, and family responsibilities (to parents, children and other dependents). This is especially prevalent for students from northern parts of the provinces, and Inuit may require some separate discussion.

The level of educational attainment for Aboriginal Peoples in Canada is significantly lower than the Canadian average. In 1996, Canadian census data shows that 53.5 per cent of Aboriginal populations over the age of 15 had completed less than high school (Statistics Canada, 2001). Low attainment impacts students in the future as well as the current labour force because of the lack of role models. In a study in 1992 by the University of Manitoba, respondents felt that the main factors that dissuaded them from attempting post-secondary education was the lack of role models who had taken university programs, meaning to them that university was not a viable option (Malatest, 2002, p. 12).

Another issue that can impact academic success is English as a second language or dialect (ESL/ESD). A 2001 study on Saskatchewan ESD found that 74 per cent of

Saskatchewan's Métis and First Nations students had English as a second dialect and that Aboriginal student students were coming to school "speaking an Aboriginal language or a vernacular dialect of English at home and in their communities...Because vernacular dialects of English are strongly influenced by Aboriginal languages, Aboriginal students develop distinctive pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, discourse and pragmatic usage" (Epstein & Xu, 2003, pg. 7). One of the impacts of ESD students is the "problem of inexplicably low levels of literacy...Canadian Indian children are often two to four grades behind in their measured reading levels" (Olson, 1993. p. 389). This has far-reaching effects when students are considering post-secondary education.

### **Access programs**

Many colleges and universities have responded to the increasing Aboriginal student enrollment rates by implementing access programs offering alternative entry and admissions routes for students who may not have the required courses or admissions average. These courses may exist for specific programs (e.g., medicine or law) or across all disciplines. For example, Manitoba colleges and universities have had such programs since the 1970s, and they have resulted in higher success rates than those in the other provinces. Since the introduction of the "Special Premedical Studies" program at the University of Manitoba, success rates went from only one Aboriginal student having ever graduated as a physician (before the access program) to a 43 per cent success rate (Malatest, 2002, p. 25). This extra year of university allowed them to finish courses and receive support from the institution and relieved them of a lot of family and financial stress (Malatest, 2002, p. 25).

Emotional, financial and academic support for students are all linked closely to the provision of access programs. Institutions that offer access programs for Aboriginal students typically have support services geared to Aboriginal students.

### **Institutional responses to Aboriginal students**

Post-secondary institutions across Canada have also responded to the increasing number of Aboriginal students by providing Aboriginal student services. In Ontario, institutions have been receiving funding since the 1980s through the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy (now called the Aboriginal Education Strategy). This funding provides institutions with funding for Aboriginal services and programs. Most institutions have some kind of Aboriginal Student Service provision ranging from one Aboriginal student support worker to large Aboriginal student centres.

Initiatives from peer mentoring and tutoring to advisement, advocacy and recruitment have been implemented across Ontario institutions in an attempt to respond to Aboriginal student needs. The Gabriel Dumont Institute has a comprehensive institutional support program for Métis students as do programs at the University of Winnipeg, University of Manitoba, University of Alberta, and the University of Calgary. The National Aboriginal Student Services Association (NASSA) in the Canadian Association of Colleges and Universities provides training and advocacy for institutions across Canada who currently have or are looking to implement Aboriginal student services.

## **First generation students**

Recent research demonstrates that in some populations of Canadian students, there is a link between the likelihood of students pursuing post-secondary education and the educational attainment levels of their parents. The Canadian Millennium Foundation surveyed the 2003 Canadian graduating class to distinguish characteristics contributing to the pursuit of post-secondary education. The link between parents and students was inextricable: “Aboriginal respondents whose parents had pursued PSE were more likely to report that parents, other family members, friends and post-secondary representatives encouraged them to pursue a post-secondary program than were other Aboriginal respondents” (Malatest, 2007, p. 36). “First generation students” are students who are the first generation in their family to pursue post-secondary education (Malatest, 2007, p. 1).

The importance of having an enabling social network was revealed with the Aboriginal student population. The Malatest (2007) report indicated that:

Aboriginal respondents whose parents did not have a background in PSE were less likely to report encouragement from other family members (64 per cent) or a post-secondary representative (32 per cent) than were those whose parents had some PSE experience (77 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively). (p. 36)

Aboriginal students who are first generation students rely on their parents and family to encourage and relate to their experience. For Aboriginal students, they are far less likely to have parents who had obtained post-secondary experience (37 per cent) than are non-Aboriginal youth (58 per cent) (Malatest, 2007, p. 37), and this is a barrier to success in post-secondary education.

The Canadian Millennium Foundation has done important work measuring and responding to post-secondary education in Canada. It was established in 1998 as a private, independent organization created through an act of Parliament. Programs like

research, bursaries, scholarships, and institutional program support are its foundation.

Institutional responses to the barriers faced by First Nations, Métis or Inuit students through student services and access programs continue to be a positive move forward. As the populations of Aboriginal people continue to increase, the integrity of institutional efforts will require continuous enhancement and appropriate resource allocation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Through Medicine Stories I teach and I learn. I heal and I am healed. I tell and I listen. Both Teller and Listener are necessary to Story. Both Telling and Listening are Intense. Intentional. Giving. Receiving. Giving (Graveline, 2004, p. 17).

Telling and listening are important elements of transferring knowledge. The failure of colonial/mainstream educational approaches for First Nations, Métis and Inuit from initial contact to the present day requires telling and listening. These failures have resulted in a Canadian health human resource landscape in which First Nations, Métis and Inuit health professionals are significantly under-represented. The failures have also contributed to poor health for many Indigenous people.

In recent years, significant movement has been made to advance the First Nations, Métis and Inuit health human resource issue forward so that qualified Aboriginal professionals will be in the communities that need them the most. The need for a critical evaluation and amendment to the education system is required so that First Nations, Métis and Inuit can move forward as healthy and sustainable communities, families and individuals.

***SPOTLIGHT: Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada***

It was the early 1970s. Jean Goodwill, a Registered Nurse from Little Pine, Saskatchewan, and Baccalaureate-prepared public health nurse Jocelyn Bruyère, from Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Manitoba, worked with others to create a gathering place for Aboriginal nurses in Canada. The inaugural meeting of the Registered Nurses of Canadian Indian Ancestry (RNCIA) was held in 1975 in Montreal/Kahnawake. RNCIA's primary goal was to help improve the health status of Aboriginal people. Most of its objectives dealt with six basic principles: health promotion and research, consultation, facilitating Aboriginal control of Aboriginal health, influencing nursing education, recruitment, and maintaining a registry of Aboriginal registered nurses. RNCIA included both Status and non-Status registered nurses. The organization changed titles over the years: in 1983 it became the Indian and Inuit Nurses of Canada; and in 1992 it adopted its current title, the Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada (A.N.A.C.).

The A.N.A.C. has worked tirelessly to recruit more Aboriginal nurses to the field. It has promoted nursing at career and job fairs, and gathered financial support for educational bursaries for Aboriginal students in nursing programs. Members of the organization also assisted in the creation and work of the Indian and Inuit Health Careers program, access programs and the Native and Northern Nursing programs. These programs attempt to make nursing education both accessible and relevant to Aboriginal students. The A.N.A.C. also promotes the hiring of Aboriginal nurses, and it announces job opportunities with the Medical Services Branch and lobbies on behalf of registered nurses working for the branch. The organization plays a central role in relaying problems related to medical services, including the under-representation of Aboriginal nurses, recruitment and retention, and cultural alienation of Aboriginal patients in the health system. The A.N.A.C. conducts research, and holds workshops to advise bands and nurses about contracts and responsibilities, and provides professional support for those in transfer situations.

The A.N.A.C. has also been active in health research, delving into the health issues of most importance to Aboriginal communities: family violence; diabetes; drug, alcohol and tobacco use; HIV/AIDS; and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. Moreover, A.N.A.C. members have contributed significantly to the development of theories of nursing practice within Aboriginal communities, from cross-cultural nursing to the latest developments in Aboriginal nursing education.

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## END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> In Canada today, Indigenous Peoples (or Aboriginal Peoples) are categorized under three umbrella groupings: First Nations, Inuit and Métis. These categories are organized around historic political relationships between different Indigenous Peoples and the Crown, as well as by regional and genetic factors. Herein, the term “Indigenous” is used to refer to all three groups, especially in the pre-contact historic period, while the specific categories of First Nations, Inuit and Métis are used to discuss specific experiences. Further, more specific Nation and geographical names are used where and when appropriate. “Aboriginal” is used mainly in the contemporary context, in reference to Canadian legal terms.

<sup>2</sup> Some of these include the creation of reserves where First Nations were often confined with insufficient economic opportunities (in terms of both traditional and monetary economies), the dispersal of Métis people from their settlements, and the removal of northern peoples (i.e., Inuit, Innu and Cree) from their traditional harvesting territories into permanent settlements with insufficient resources.

<sup>3</sup> The granting of citizenship to First Nations was an action of the federal government done without First Nations consultation. While some First Nations people embraced the recognition of Canadian citizenship, others continue to renounce it as a colonial tactic against First Nations’ sovereignty and lands.

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion, see Sabrina E. Redwing Saunders and Susan M. Hill, “Native education and in-classroom coalition-building: factors and models in delivering an equitable authentic education,” *Canadian Journal of Education*, forthcoming.

<sup>5</sup> This program is also known as “Gigendaasoo'ow-Wido'win,” an Anishnawbe term that translates to “gaining knowledge through teaching one another.” This program is based on alternative learning methods that are more consistent with traditional Indigenous methods of teaching and learning. This program is jointly funded by the local school board and the Ontario Ministry of Education. The goal of the AAEP is to help aboriginal youths to finish high school, upgrade, receive assistance with literacy, or participate in employment-related training.

<sup>6</sup> Many First Nations have concentrated their efforts through consortium relationships where a centralized office will administer funds for several Bands. Inuit funding is dispersed through the four regional areas in the Arctic and through provincially designated organizations for southern Inuit residents. For example, the Mississaugas of New Credit administer post-secondary funds for Ontario-based Inuit.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Douglas (1994).