

Post-secondary Education: In Support of First Nations and Inuit Students

Executive Summary

Saskatchewan Ministry of Education

Diverse Education Systems
and Learning Animation
Theme Bundle

ABORIGINAL LEARNING

Knowledge Centre

2008



Disclaimer

This report has been prepared for the Canadian Council on Learning's Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre by Jane Preston for the Diverse Educational Systems Animation Theme Bundle led by Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. It is issued by the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre as a basis for further knowledge exchange. The opinions and conclusions expressed in the document, however, are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre members.

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The Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (AbLKC) is one of five knowledge centres established in various learning domains by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL). CCL is an independent, not-for-profit corporation funded through an agreement with Human Resources and Social Development Canada. Its mandate is to promote and support evidence-based decisions about learning throughout all stages of life, from early childhood through to the senior years. The AbLKC is co-led by the First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium (FNAHEC) and the Aboriginal Education Research Centre (AERC) College of Education, University of Saskatchewan.

The AbLKC is guided in its work by a Consortium of over 100 organizations and institutions, a Steering Committee, and six Animation Theme Bundles (Bundles) led by members of the Consortium. The Bundles are:

1. Learning from Place - Narcisse Blood, Red Crow Community College, Cardston, AB
2. Nourishing the Learning Spirit – Dr. Marie Battiste, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK
3. Aboriginal Languages and Learning – Dr. Leona Makokis, Blue Quills Community College, St. Paul, AB
4. Diverse Educational Systems and Learning – Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (Ted Amendt), Regina, SK
5. Pedagogy of Professionals and Practitioners – Dr. Sakej Henderson, Native Law Centre, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK
6. Information Technology and Learning- Genesis Group, John and Deb Simpson, Yellowknife, NWT

From the start, the AbLKC recognized that the reporting and monitoring function of the Canadian Council on Learning required a dialogue with Aboriginal Peoples to define successful learning from Aboriginal Peoples' perspectives. Together with CCL, the national Aboriginal organizations and interested individuals who have taken up this work in communities and institutions across the country were invited to share their philosophies and understandings of successful learning. The result was three Holistic Learning Models with shared philosophical values and principles. It is the view of the AbLKC that the iterative Models, which can be found at www.ccl-cca.ca/aboriginallearning/, will serve as a framework for development of indicators to report and monitor successful learning, as a framework in planning for successful learning for individuals and communities, and in discerning what is, indeed, 'a promising practice'. We believe there are many other potential applications of these Models.

In working toward an understanding of what constitutes successful learning and what Aboriginal Peoples aspire to and need to succeed in their learning endeavours, AbLKC wishes to acknowledge that what is available as evidence of success in the existing literature is partial, often unclear and largely undefined

and may not always be representative of Aboriginal Peoples' perspectives. Responding to the aspirations and needs of Aboriginal learners means valuing their collective intellectual traditions and identities as Aboriginal Peoples.

A full report of *Post-secondary Education: In Support of First Nations and Inuit Students* (in English only) is available electronically on CCL's Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre website at www.ccl-cca.ca/aboriginallearning and the AERC website www.aerc.usask.ca and at the FNAHEC website www.fnahec.org.

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Promotion of the spiritual, emotional, physical, and academic well-being of First Nations and Inuit peoples requires improvements to and sustainability of post-secondary educational opportunities for First Nations and Inuit peoples. The urgency for and the benefits from endorsing post-secondary education for First Nations and Inuit peoples are supported by statistical information. As compared to non-Aboriginal people, First Nations and Inuit peoples have lower levels of post-secondary certification, higher rates of unemployment, and below average incomes. In addition to educational and economic advantages, attaining higher levels of education is related to increased health and a better standard of living. Advocating increased post-secondary education for First Nations and Inuit peoples is advocating an invigorating, fortifying future for Aboriginal People, their families, and their communities.

There are, however, a multitude of barriers that First Nations and Inuit peoples must overcome as they acquire post-secondary qualifications, which include: historical obstacles; educational obstacles; social, economic and geographical challenges; cultural and pedagogical issues; lack of roles models and lack of career counselling; and, financial obstacles. Although overcoming these formidable obstacles may seem like a daunting task, progress has been made and is reflected by the increasing number of First Nations and Inuit peoples who are currently attending and completing post-secondary programs.

Still, success is so much more than enrolment numbers and retention rates. Within this document, success is measured by programs, practices, models, and initiatives which have conscientiously responded to the aforementioned challenges First Nations and Inuit peoples encounter as they pursue post-secondary education. For example, one aspect of such success is reflected within those post-secondary institutes and programs which manifest First Nations and Inuit self-determination. As well, success is exemplified in programs, practices, models and initiatives which accommodate transitional supports, the wisdom of Elders, Aboriginal resources, Aboriginal instructors and staff, community-based programs, curricula and andragogy mirroring Aboriginal languages, cultures, beliefs and values. Unfortunately, one aspect of First Nations and

Inuit post-secondary education that is experiencing only limited success is in the area of funding. In order to improve success in First Nations and Inuit programs, it is vital that adequate finances be supplied to and ease of funding be accommodated for First Nations and Inuit students and post-secondary institutes.

The First Nations University of Canada (Saskatchewan), The Institute of Indigenous Government (British Columbia), the Brandon University of Northern Teacher Education Program (BUNTEP) (Manitoba), and the Nunavut Arctic College are examples of particular institutions/programs which are meeting the specialized needs of First Nations and Inuit peoples. Through explication of the governmental influences, the policy structures, and the curricular elements of these leading First Nations and Inuit post-secondary institutions/programs, a number of generalizations can be made about successful post-secondary education for First Nations and Inuit peoples. In accordance with the points made above, these said institutions/programs are managed by First Nations and Inuit leaders. The policies directing these institutions/programs are intended to reflect and perpetuate First Nations and Inuit cultures and values. The curriculum which is utilized within these centers and programs focuses upon the cultural values and social needs of First Nations and Inuit peoples. As a result, success is an eminent component within these organizations and programs.