

2009 | The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A Holistic Approach to Measuring Success

This fact sheet presents an overview of the Canadian Council on Learning's 2009 report *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A Holistic Approach to Measuring Success*. To read the full report, visit www.ccl-cca.ca/SAL2009.

What is Aboriginal learning?

Aboriginal people in Canada have long understood the role that learning plays in building healthy, thriving communities. Despite significant historical and cultural differences, Canada's more than 1.1 million First Nations, Inuit and Métis people share a common vision of learning as a holistic and lifelong process.

According to research by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), an Aboriginal vision of learning is:

- **Holistic**
- **Lifelong**
- **Experiential**
- **Spiritually oriented**
- **Community based**
- **Rooted in Aboriginal languages and cultures**
- **An integration of Aboriginal and Western knowledge.**

In short, Aboriginal learning encompasses much more than what happens inside the classroom; it stretches over an individual's entire life and includes learning from family, community, ceremonies, traditions and the land.

Why a new approach to measuring Aboriginal learning?

In Canada, measurement approaches have typically been built upon only a partial understanding of Aboriginal learning, often choosing to focus on high-school attainment (or the lack thereof). The problem with such approaches is that they overlook many aspects of learning that are integral to an Aboriginal perspective and important to Aboriginal learners and the communities they live in.

The absence of a comprehensive approach to measuring Aboriginal learning is problematic, and can result in either information that is: a) irrelevant to Aboriginal communities, or b) fails to inform effective social policy.

Until now, a comprehensive framework for measuring Aboriginal learning has been unavailable in Canada or, in fact, most of the world.

The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A Holistic Approach to Measuring Success introduces the **Holistic Lifelong Learning Measurement Framework**, an innovative, first-of-its-kind approach to measuring Aboriginal learning in Canada.

Based on CCL's three Holistic Lifelong Learning Models, which were developed in partnership with Aboriginal learning experts across Canada, the Framework is comprised of three components: **Sources and Domains of Knowledge**, **The Lifelong Learning Journey** and **Community Well-Being**.

Each component of the framework includes a set of indicators that illustrate the full range of learning opportunities that occur across the life cycle (from infancy through to the senior years) and in a variety of settings (school, home, community, workplace and the land).

What does the report tell us about Aboriginal learning in Canada?

By providing a more balanced understanding of Aboriginal learning, this report offers a new narrative that supersedes the familiar storyline that concentrates on learning deficits and academic shortcomings.

This new, more complete understanding of lifelong learning for Aboriginal people can be summarized in a number of key findings.

Infant and children (ages 0 to 5):

- In 2006, more than one-quarter (28%) of off-reserve Aboriginal children (including 55% of Inuit children) participated in or attended a cultural gathering, ceremony or activity (such as fiddling or drum-dancing).
- In 2006, 50% of Aboriginal children living off-reserve, and 44% of First Nations children living on reserve, were receiving some kind of regular child care—compared with an estimated 51% of Canadian children. Among off-reserve Aboriginal children receiving child care, 18% were in a setting that promoted First Nations, Inuit and Métis traditional and cultural values and customs.

Youth (ages 6 to 18):

- Nearly one-third (31%) of off-reserve Aboriginal youth participated in social clubs or groups outside of school, a key source of informal learning, compared to 21% of Canadian youth.
- Four in 10 Aboriginal youth living off-reserve reported interacting with Elders at least one hour a week outside the classroom, which is considered a key source of learning about culture and traditions.

Young adults (ages 19 to 34):

- In 2006, 40% of Aboriginal people aged 20 to 24 did not have a high-school diploma, compared to 13% among non-Aboriginal Canadians.
- In 2006, 41% of Aboriginal people aged 25 to 64 had completed a post-secondary certificate, diploma or a degree. Although this rate was lower than that of non-Aboriginal people (56%), Aboriginal people were on more equal footing when it came to rates of attainment at the college level (19% versus 20%) and the trades (14% vs. 12%).
- The wider discrepancy in PSE attainment can be attributed to attainment rates at the university level; only 8% of Aboriginal people aged 25 to 64 had completed a university degree compared to 23% of non-Aboriginal Canadians.

Adults (ages 35 to 64) and Elders (65 and up):

- In 2006, 50% of off-reserve Aboriginal adults took part in traditional activities such as hunting, fishing or trapping—a key source of experiential learning.
- An overwhelming majority (98%) of Aboriginal adults regularly received some form of support (personal or emotional) from individuals in their community in 2006, a measure of the importance of social relationships to learning.
- More than two-thirds (70%) of First Nations adults living on-reserve volunteered within their community—a key source of community learning—compared to less than half (46%) of adult Canadians.

How can this information be used?

The **Holistic Lifelong Learning Measurement Framework** introduced in this report is grounded in an Aboriginal vision of learning and therefore provides a basis for informed policy and program development—the very changes that are necessary to develop the full potential of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people.

The framework and its indicators present a more complete and balanced assessment of the state of Aboriginal learning in Canada—one that highlights many strengths. That being the case, the multiple strengths described in this report do not mean that learning conditions in some communities are optimal, rather they should be seen as critical building blocks for future improvement.

CCL hopes that Aboriginal communities, governments and researchers will see the findings of this report as an opportunity to shift the current focus of policy and program development from one that reacts to learning deficits alone, to one that recognizes, builds upon and celebrates strengths. In this context, a shared appreciation for Aboriginal learning is possible, one that is holistic, lifelong and of benefit to all.