

**First Nations Post-Secondary Education and
Training Literature Review and Best Practices**

**Leading towards recommendations for comprehensive
post-secondary planning and evaluation framework
for Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey**

A research report submitted to
Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
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Acronyms

ACAP	Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Program
AFN	Assembly of First Nations
AHHRI	Aboriginal Health Human Resource Initiative
AUCC	Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada
BEd	Bachelor of Education
CABSS	Committee for Aboriginal and Black Student Success
CBU	Cape Breton University
CSLP	Canada Student Loan Programs
DAEB	Department Audit and Evaluation Branch (INAC)
Dal	Dalhousie University
FNAO	First Nations Administering Organization
INAC	Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
ISSP	Indian Studies Support Program
HRDC	Human Resource Development Canada
MCI	Mi'kmaq College Institute
MEd	Masters of Education
METS	Mi'kmaq Education Training Secretariat
MK	Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSAP	Mi'kmaq Science Advantage Program
NAIHL	National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning
NEO	Native Employment Officer
NIB	National Indian Brotherhood
NSCC	Nova Scotia Community College
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PSE	Post-Secondary Education
PSEAP	Post-Secondary Education Assistance Program
PSI	Post-Secondary Institution
PSSSP	Post-Secondary Student Support Program
RCAP	Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
SES	Socioeconomic Status
STAIRS	Social's Training Assistance Initiative Reinvestment Strategy
StFX	Saint Francis Xavier University
TYP	Transition Year Program
U of BC	University of British Columbia
UCEP	University and College Entrance Preparation Program
U of M	University of Manitoba
XTEAC	Xavier Teacher Education Advisory Committee
YITS	Youth in Transition Survey

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- *Joint AFN/INAC PSE Program Review*
- *Auditor General’s observations and recommendations* Chapter 5 of the November 2004 Report
- INAC’s response to the Auditor General’s observations and recommendations Chapter 5 of the November 2004 Report, entitled *Education Action Plan, 2005*
- The *First Nations Education Action Plan*, May 2005 addresses the Education Action Plan put forth by INAC in April 2005
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Chapter 1 – Setting the Policy Context

There is an abundance of recent publications concerning policies for post-secondary education of Aboriginals. These studies have been conducted by a range of organizations including Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, the Assembly of First Nations and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. These reports show remarkable consistency. Most of these studies describe the barriers to the participation of Aboriginals in post-secondary education and highlight various practices and initiatives that work to achieve higher rates of enrollment and retention. Most studies conclude with recommendations for achieving greater Aboriginal success. This chapter summarizes the major studies reviewed in making this report on Aboriginal post-secondary education.

A Synopsis of Key Reports

“Gathering Strength” (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1995) was the first of a series of significant policy papers on Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary education (PSE). While PSE was not the sole focus in this report, the educational issues and goals for post-secondary education are addressed. This report affirms that Aboriginal people “want education to prepare them to participate fully in the economic life of their communities and in Canadian society”(Gathering Strength, page 433). It stated that post-secondary institutions (PSIs) can improve rates of PSE graduation by supporting Aboriginal culture through increased Aboriginal studies programs and recruitment of Aboriginal students and staff. *The Commission also recommended that a standardized database be developed for collecting accurate information about Aboriginal PSE enrollment and retention.* It describes programs that have achieved higher success rates for Aboriginal students and suggests that a partnership between PSIs, Aboriginal communities and the provinces be developed so that self-governance can be achieved in Aboriginal education.

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2002) and the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (2004) supported an examination and comparison of Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. In these reports R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., outline the barriers to Aboriginal participation in PSE. It is found that all four countries share many of the same issues. The purpose of these qualitative studies was to highlight programs that have effectively increased the enrollment and completion rates of Aboriginals in PSE. They both confirm the need for continuing such initiatives. *A major barrier that Aboriginal people are facing is insufficient funding from their band and the federal government.* These students also experience under representation of Aboriginal people in post-secondary institutions, an insensitivity to their culture and mistrust for the education system. These papers also describe practices and initiatives that are being used to overcome these barriers. *These practices are divided into five strategies, including access programs, community delivery initiatives, Aboriginal control of education, partnership between Aboriginal communities and mainstream educational institutions, as well as student support that addresses Aboriginal needs.*

Together the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) conducted a review of the PSE Program (n.d.). In this report, the following areas of the PSE program were evaluated: goals and objectives, student needs, program authorities, transitional/preparatory programming, institutional support and funding. The common goal shared by AFN and INAC is to provide full financial assistance and support without limitations to promote greater participation of status Aboriginals in PSE and to close the 30-year gap. This report identifies who is eligible for PSSSP, as well as the programs and institutions in which students should be eligible to enroll. It addresses the specific areas where a change in funding would benefit Aboriginal students and institutions. *It also indicates a fair approach to allocating PSSSP funding from INAC to regional offices to status Aboriginal students, suggesting the elimination of regional offices in the delivery method and Aboriginal participation in regional allocations and decision making processes.*

In 2004, the Auditor General of Canada prepared a report of Indian and Northern Affairs' Post-Secondary Student Support Program. In this report, five main points were shared. First, INAC did not know whether funding to First Nations was sufficient to meet the education standards it had set and whether the results achieved were in line with the resources provided. Second, the time estimated to close the gap between First Nations people and the general Canadian population had increased from 27 years to 28 years. Third, the Post-Secondary Student Support Program had weaknesses in its management and accountability framework, including unspecified roles and responsibilities for delivering the program and allocation methods that did not ensure equitable access for all First Nation students. The fourth point the Auditor General's report made was that there were discrepancies in the information provided by INAC about the way the program operated and the way in which it determined success. The final point made in the report was that the Department should continue its review of the program with consultation from First Nations, so that the programs' design, administration and accountability can be improved.

In response to the Auditor General's observations and recommendations Chapter 5 of the November 2004 Report, INAC has prepared the Education Action Plan, 2005. To address the Auditor General's concerns, *the five areas this Education Action Plan deals with are strategy and planning, roles and responsibilities, funding, accountability, and performance measurement, monitoring and reporting.* INAC and First Nations have worked together to develop this management framework with the intent to enable Aboriginals to assume greater control of their education and to strengthen accountability of all stakeholders. This response demonstrates INAC's clear focus, dedication to strengthened relationships, and specific actions to promote the ongoing improvement of Aboriginal education.

The First Nations Education Action Plan, May 2005 addresses the Education Action Plan put forth by INAC in April 2005. The vision of this Action Plan is to design and implement sustainable education systems under the complete control of First Nations. Understanding that First Nations have cultural, demographic and socioeconomic characteristics distinct from the overall Canadian population and that First Nations build

upon different community institutions and occupations, it has been recognized that Aboriginals do not often benefit from generic PSE programs and policies. *This response identified that only Aboriginals can effectively incorporate these differences into programs and policies to address their specific needs in PSE.* First Nations expressed the need to take immediate action on the initiatives put forth by this Action Plan to resolve long-standing challenges faced by Aboriginals and to improve Aboriginal education for future generations.

In 2005, under the authority of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), the Department Audit and Evaluation Branch (DAEB) prepared an evaluation of the Post-Secondary Education (PSE) Program. Not having been formally evaluated since 1989, its primary purpose was to assess the current situation of the PSE program. This evaluation was also expected to compile information for the program from which to determine whether changes in the development of policy and programs were needed and to track the success of changes. An overview of the program indicated that the program remains relevant and has been successful in achieving its intended outcomes (improved educational attainment of First Nations and Inuit students and improved First Nations and Inuit contributions to First Nations, Inuit and Canadian society). Although expenditures have doubled between 1989-1990 and 2001-2002, requests for ISSP funding are continuously exceeding the available resources. Program participants advocate the continuation and increase of PSE funding because the guidelines for PSSSP students' living allowances are 14 years out of date. *One of the main issues identified as preventing the increase in PSSSP and ISSP funding was the data challenge. A lack of credible data has rendered INAC and Aboriginal administrators unable to fully address existing program issues.* The distribution of PSE program funding, presently based on previous years' allocation, has contributed to the inability of funding to be based on actual costs. *Establishing data collection and tracking systems and adopting national funding formulas will help to build a foundation on which the PSE program can allocate adequate funds to eligible Aboriginal students.*

In 2005, the Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium provided an examination of Aboriginal institutions and education. This study describes the benefits of Aboriginal-controlled post-secondary institutions. It explains the 1972 policy entitled Indian Control of Indian Education and the need for Aboriginal peoples to have increased control over their own education. It describes the lack of policy support for Aboriginal PSE institutions. *In this report, the Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium recommended that Canadian government policy grant Aboriginal controlled institutions the same authority as mainstream institutions.* It argues that they should be allowed the authority to grant diplomas, degrees and certificates and should be receiving equitable funding. With this authority Aboriginal controlled PSIs can continue to support Aboriginal learners in a culturally sensitive environment.

Michael Mendelson's article entitled *Aboriginal Peoples and Postsecondary Education in Canada*, commissioned by INAC in 2006 reviews the basic demographics of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, compares the PSE levels of Aboriginals with the general population, and discusses what would be required by the PSE system for

Aboriginal Canadians to achieve parity in educational attainment with the overall population. In this article, Mendelson reports that the Atlantic provinces have the greatest performance rates. The Aboriginal population in the Atlantic provinces is more likely to hold a non-university PSE certificate than the total population. *This article also reveals that the completion of high school is the first step toward increasing educational attainment, which in turn improves socioeconomic status. Other actions discussed as contributing to a foundation for improving educational outcomes for Aboriginals include setting specific and quantitative milestones for Aboriginal educational achievement, collecting and tracking data to measure whether these quantitative goals are being achieved, and appointing an agency with the support of all parties to oversee the development of information sources and to monitor and report on results.*

David Holmes prepared a report called, “Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students” for the Association of Universities and Colleges (AUCC) in 2006. Like other reports, this paper describes lower levels of Aboriginal post-secondary attainment compared to non-Aboriginals. It also notes differences in educational attainment level between provinces. AUCC distributed a questionnaire to university level institutions across Canada to get an overview of Aboriginal programs provided by Canadian universities. From this questionnaire, AUCC has highlighted programs from across the country that have improved PSE for Aboriginal students.

The Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development also issued a report on Aboriginal post-secondary education in 2007. In this report, the committee acknowledged that Aboriginal education policies are in need of reform. It agrees that improvements need not be done only in the primary and secondary levels of education but also in post-secondary education. The Committee developed a number of recommendations to ensure that no Aboriginal student is denied post-secondary education because of a lack of funding. *These recommendations include the development of a national database that reports successful initiatives used throughout Canada to support Aboriginal learners, the elimination of the 2 percent annual increase cap, the establishment of a tracking system for financial information, and the development of clear allocation methodologies for both PSSSP and ISSP funding.*

Looking Within the Region

In 2004, Jeff Orr and Coralie Cameron prepared “*We Are Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey*” for Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey and Indian Affairs Canada. This report was an assessment of the impact of the Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey (MK) self-government agreement on the improvement of education for participating Mi’kmaw communities. This report noted a 9.7 percent increase in PSE attainment for MK communities between 1991 and 2001. This increase in PSE success was attributed in part to initiatives PSIs adopted to attract and support First Nations post-secondary learners. The advocating for PSE programs that address the specific needs of MK communities has led to a 15.2 percent increase in their labour force participation. This study shows that MK communities are supporting PSE learners to achieve personal and community

development.

The Program Policy Template developed by MK for PSE assistance through Mi'kmaw bands was also reviewed. This program policy outlines the criteria needed to qualify for financial assistance, the priorities for distribution, the amount of funding available to individual learners and the responsibilities of the students that receive funding. It includes an explanation of the appeal process and describes incentives that are available to Mi'kmaw students that reach high levels of academic achievement. *This report shows that Mi'kmaw communities are working towards achieving greater data collection and tracking of student funding.*

Figure 1.1 Commonalities among Policy Studies related to First Nations PSE

	Greater Control for First Nations	Data and Tracking Needed	Best Practices for PSE Success	Need for Common Goals/ Partnerships	Increased Funding
“Gathering Strength”, report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1995	X	X	X	X	X
Council of Ministers Education, 2002	X	X	X	X	X
Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2004	X	X	X	X	X
AFN and INAC, n.d.			X		X
Aboriginal Institutes’ Consortium, 2005	X				X
Auditor General’s Report, 2004		X		X	X
INAC Action Plan, 2005	X	X		X	X
First Nations Action Plan, 2005	X	X		X	X
INAC, Dep’t of Audit and Evaluation Branch, 2005		X		X	X
Mendelson and INAC, 2006		X			X
Program Policy Template		X			X
Association of Universities and Colleges Canada, 2006	X	X	X		X
Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007		X	X		X

Summary

Figure 1.1 highlights five reoccurring themes in the policy studies reviewed. Studies have consistently identified compelling reasons to conclude that control by First Nations in PSE educational decisions will lead to greater efficiency and effectiveness. Almost every study has raised the importance of better consistency, clarity and unanimity in the collection, tracking and sharing of PSE data. Six studies identify compelling research on the most effective ways to improve PSE success by communities and institutions. More than half the studies underscored the advantages and opportunities of greater and more common goals and partnerships. And all policy studies confirmed that current funding levels were insufficient and advocated for higher levels of funding.

Chapter 2 – Rational and Background

Why is it important that Canada invest in the post-secondary education of Aboriginal peoples? Why should this be a priority above other minority groups?

The History of Aboriginal Education

Since as early as the mid 1600s, Aboriginal children have been subjected to a European style of education. This historic form of education typically consisted of missionaries imposing the religious beliefs and traditions of European-Canadians onto Aboriginals, and the rejection of Aboriginal culture, language and history. In 1876, under the Indian Act the Federal Government assumed complete control of education for all Aboriginal children living on reserves. Aboriginal persons rarely attained an education level greater than grade 8 because they were forced to relinquish their Indian status, a process known as enfranchisement. The goal of the government was to assimilate Aboriginals into mainstream society through the education system. Aboriginal children were recruited to attend mission schools. When voluntary recruitment was not effective, the Indian Act of 1911 forced assimilation by making attendance mandatory for all children between the ages of 7 and 15. Aboriginal children were taken from their homes and forced into residential schools where they were not allowed to speak their native tongue, wear traditional clothing or practice traditional ceremonies. This created not only an inability to integrate into the mainstream culture and a feeling of disconnect from their own community, but also a deep sense of identity loss.

For decades the barriers faced by Aboriginals seeking higher education seemed impossible to overcome. In the 1960s Canadian policy changed so that the government's goal was redirected towards providing quality Native education rather than assimilation. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), funded the few status Aboriginal students (approximately 200) eligible to pursue post-secondary education throughout the 1960s, but with this progress a step was taken back with the announcement of the White Paper Policy in 1969. The White Paper Policy was a federal government proposal that sought to transfer responsibility for First Nations education to the province. In opposition to this policy, First Nations organizations from across Canada issued a Red Paper Policy. This policy requested that the responsibility for education remain with First Nations and the

federal government. In 1973, the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB), currently known as the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) put forward its vision for First Nations control of education in the Red Paper called Indian Control of Indian Education.

Before 1977, the amount of financial funding Aboriginal students received fluctuated and there was no program that encouraged Aboriginal participation in Post-Secondary Education (PSE). In 1977 however, the Post- Secondary Educational Assistance Program (PSEAP) was established to encourage status Indians to attend PSE. With this all status First Nations and Inuit learners were eligible for funding which covered tuition, books, travel, counseling, living expenses and more. In 1989, the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) replaced the PSEAP, resulting in the elimination of some of the categories of expenses in which funding was offered and an inability for many eligible students to attend PSE. To be eligible for PSSSP assistance today, a student must be an Inuit or a Registered Indian who lives in Canada, either on or off reserve, be enrolled in a provincially accredited post-secondary education program or a university or college entrance preparation program, and maintain satisfactory academic standing (Report of the Auditor General of Canada, 2004).

Two other components of the PSE Program include the University and College Entrance Program (UCEP) and Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP). The UCEP, created in 1983, helps under-qualified Aboriginals participate in PSE through preparatory programs. The ISSP, developed in 1989, provides funding for programs within PSE institutions that support Aboriginal culture and people. Both the PSSSP and ISSP are federal support services but differ in delivery mechanisms. INAC distributes PSSSP funding directly to Aboriginal communities, who then deliver funds to eligible students according to the specifications of their regional councils. On the other hand, ISSP funding is allocated to Post-Secondary institutions and education organizations upon approval, by the federal government, of the submitted proposal outlining the need for the program, the targeted population, the objectives and methods, as well as a detailed financial plan. In some cases ISSP funding is delivered directly to First Nations communities, rather than to PSE institutions. In Nova Scotia the MK communities first use ISSP funding to make up for any PSE costs that are not covered by PSSSP funding and then directs any remaining funds to PSE programs and supports.

Throughout its lifespan, the PSE program has provided many benefits to Aboriginal people pursuing a higher education. INAC is working to achieve its goal of quality education for Aboriginals but funding remains limited to status First Nations and Inuit students. PSE funding is not accessible to First Nations and Métis who are not registered under the Indian Act. While the level of funding has continuously increased, the current budget does not sufficiently meet the financial needs of Aboriginal students. Thousands of status-Indians are being denied access to post-secondary education each year because of a 2 percent increase cap on annual funding. This cap, which was introduced in 1997, does not account for increased costs or the growing number of eligible Aboriginal students.

Demographics

Basic Demographics

Improving the education for Canadian Aboriginal learners requires both an understanding of the challenges of post-secondary schooling and of the basic demographics of the Aboriginal population. According to the 2001 Census, 976,305 Canadians identified themselves as Aboriginal, with a greater percentage of that population distinguishing themselves as North American Indian, followed by Métis and to a significantly lower proportion, Inuit. Aboriginals only make up roughly 3% of the total population (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000), but are the fastest growing population in Canada. Between 1971 and 2001, the Aboriginal population grew by 322%, while the non-Aboriginal population only demonstrated a 37% increase (Mayes, 2007). INAC predicts that the on-reserve Aboriginal population will grow from about 445,000 in 2003 to 700,000 by 2021 (Report of the Auditor General of Canada, 2004). This variation in population growth rates has resulted in a distinct age structure representing a much younger Aboriginal population than the overall population. Mayes (2007) has reported that nearly one half of Aboriginal peoples are under the age of 25 and greater than one third are below the age of 14. Given that the Canadian working population is aging, Aboriginal peoples have been recognized as a key population to occupy the labour shortages that will result from retiring baby boomers over the next couple of decades. In response to the age structure of the Aboriginal population and the need to ensure

economic stability, programs are being implemented and federal funding is being allocated to promote the access, retention and success of Aboriginal students in PSE to meet the demand for a well-educated and skilled work force.

A national policy paper entitled, “Knowledge Matters: Skills and Learning for Canadians” (2008), identified that “more than 70 percent of all new jobs created in Canada will require some form of post-secondary education, and 25 percent of new jobs will require a university degree.” Area of residence is a demographic factor that has been found to influence the educational attainment of Aboriginals in PSE and consequently impacts work force preparation. Recent findings identify that a greater percentage of the Aboriginal population live off reserve in urban areas and to a lesser degree, rural areas (Mendelson, 2006). Although the area of residence of Aboriginals in Canada is predominantly off-reserve, data shows that the on-reserve Aboriginal population has remained relatively similar to the percentage of the total Aboriginal population between 1996 and 2001 (Mendelson, 2006).

Mendelson has shown that post-secondary “Aboriginal educational achievement is highest in the cities, second in towns, third in the rural areas and least of all on reserves (2006).” This discovery has typically been attributed to the understanding that post-secondary institutions are generally located within or in closer proximity to urban areas where eligible residents have greater access and reduced transportation expenses. The off reserve Aboriginal population is however, reaching parity with the general population for non-university PSE.

While it is not possible to conclude the precise reasons for this trend, from this we can speculate that Aboriginal students will be encouraged to participate and remain in PSE by providing extra supports when coming from remote areas. For instance, rates of retention and success can be improved by providing enough financial support that allows students to travel home regularly throughout the academic year.

Socioeconomic Status of Canadian Aboriginals

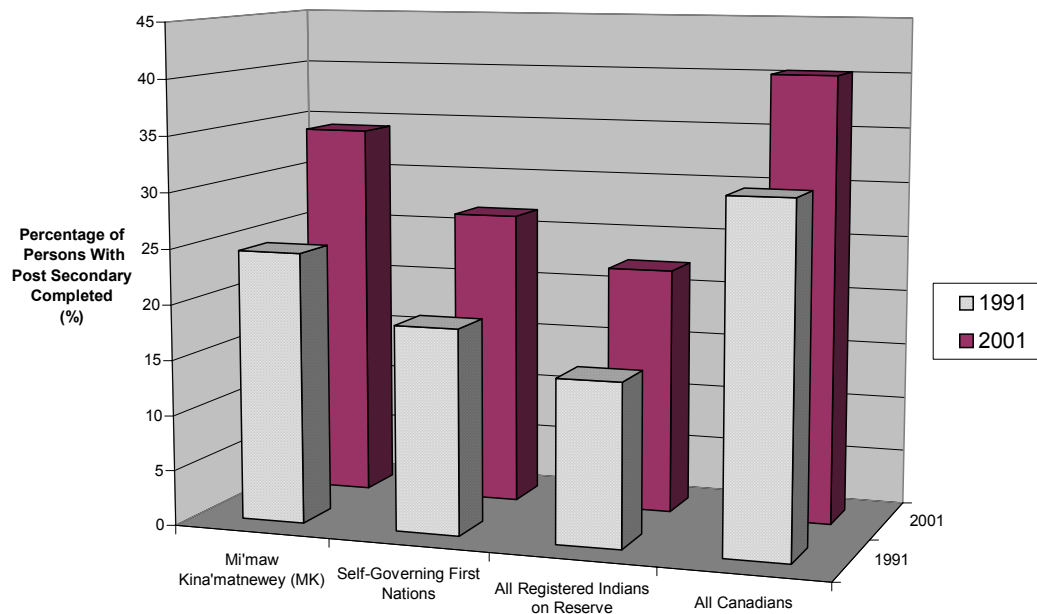
The socioeconomic conditions of Canadian Aboriginals have vastly improved in recent years. Canadian society has, however gradually come to the realization that much more needs to be done. Currently, Aboriginals of all identity groups receive considerably

lower incomes than the overall population. Aboriginal peoples living on Canada's reserves are subject to the lowest income of all (Mendelson, 2006).

An increasing number of new jobs in Canada require certification at the post-secondary level. With this in mind, Aboriginals who achieve post-secondary education stand to earn higher incomes and improve their chances of gaining employment. A number of studies have revealed that with regards to an investment in education, Aboriginals have "the highest average dollar return," with the highest returns accompanying a university degree (Mendelson, 2006). For example, the lifetime earnings for an Aboriginal female in Saskatchewan has been estimated to be more than 1 million dollars greater for someone with a university education compared to someone who does not complete high school (Howe, 2002 as cited in Holmes, 2006). As Aboriginals attain higher levels of post-secondary education, the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadian unemployment rates becomes smaller. This gap has been known to expand for those who acquire less than secondary certification; where as the gap narrows with education until a minimal disparity is reached among those attaining a degree at the university level. The relationship between higher education, better jobs and improved income has been thoroughly documented. This relationship implies that improving Aboriginal success in PSE will allow for improved socioeconomic status, which in turn contributes to greater equity in the Canadian society and economy. Higher educational attainment is a means to counteract low socioeconomic status, which means it is imperative that actions be taken to supply financial assistance to Aboriginal students to improve PSE.

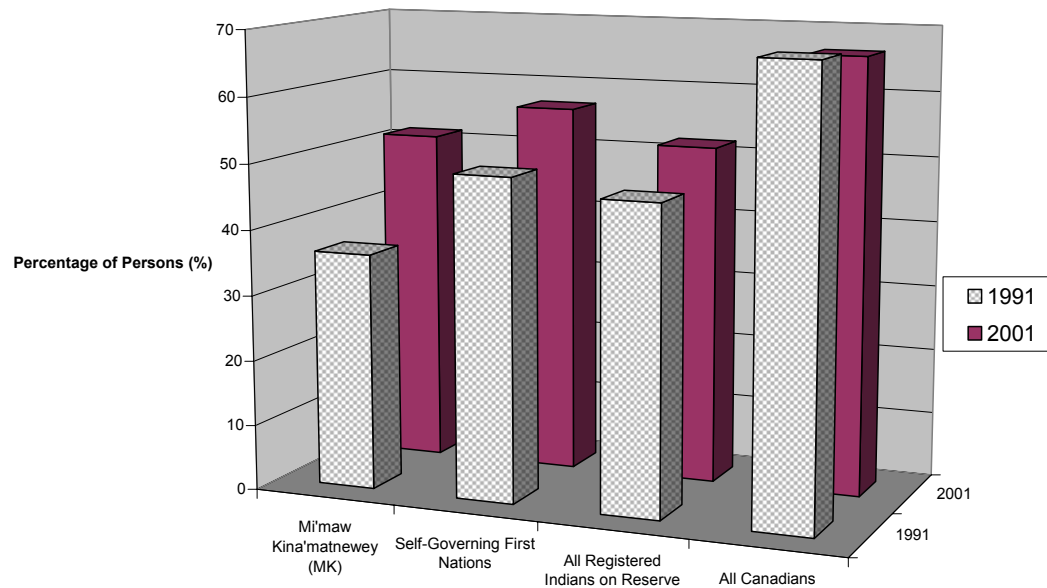
Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK) has committed to improving the educational success of community members and is working hard to ensure economic stability for its communities by working with post-secondary institutions to provide culturally responsive education that responds to the needs of their communities. Figure 2.1 shows a 9.7 percent increase in the percentage of persons with PSE completion between 1991 and 2001 from MK communities on the basis of census data (Orr & Cameron, 2004).

Figure 2.1 Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey Communities' Increase in Post-Secondary Completion: 1991 to 2001



The improved academic success of MK communities and increased post-secondary educational attainment can likely be positively linked to the 15.2 percentage point increase in labour force participation between 1991 and 2001. Figure 2.2 shows that MK communities have experienced an increase in the rate of labour force participation that is greater than the increase for all Canadians (Orr, 2004).

Figure 2.2 Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey Communities' Labour Force Participation Rate Change: 1991 to 2001



Gender and living conditions have also been identified as factors influencing the educational attainment of Aboriginals in Canada. In Canada and among other nations across the world, females tend to represent a disproportionately higher percentage of the Aboriginal student body in post-secondary institutions, which may explain why the funding and support problems they encounter are so distinct. The primary challenge Aboriginal women with families and single mothers, face in PSE is keeping up with their studies while caring for and supporting their children. Often the combination of child care challenges, insufficient funding and a lack of social support have hindered Aboriginal women's retention and success in PSE. Additionally, Aboriginals of Canada typically experience living conditions that are significantly more challenging than those experienced by the average Canadian. The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (2006) have recognized these difficult conditions including lower life expectancy, roughly a ten-year disparity, as well as higher rates of infant mortality, hospitalization, chronic disease and significantly higher rates of youth suicide. To improve the enrollment and retention of Aboriginals in PSE, it is imperative that financial and social support services at the government, institutional and community level be

available for eligible students, which responds to the complexities of Aboriginal living conditions.

Aboriginals in Post-secondary Education

Of the thirty countries associated with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Canada has the highest rate of attainment in post-secondary education (Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2008). Although Canada is doing well as a whole, the PSE of its Aboriginal population is considered poor in comparison. The rising number of Aboriginals graduating from post-secondary institutions implies that the situation is improving; however, Aboriginal people remain considerably underrepresented in PSE. Between 1986 and 1996 Aboriginal PSE participation rates increased but still remained 10 to 14 percent lower than other Canadian students (INAC, Evaluation of PSE Program, 2005). This increase in Aboriginal success over the past two decades has been more dramatic for females than their male counterparts. With the exception of non-university PSE, females have been known to do better in educational attainment not only among the Aboriginal population but also among the overall Canadian population. PSE completion rates are also considerably higher in the Atlantic provinces. Aboriginal high school graduates from all four Atlantic provinces are somewhat more likely to complete PSE than high school graduates from the general population (Mendelson, 2006). Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey in Nova Scotia witnessed an increase in the number of people who achieved a high-school certificate and a 9.7 percent increase in the percentage of people who completed PSE from 1991 to 2001. With respect to the level of education for the three Aboriginal identity groups compared against the total population, the Inuit have been found to have the lowest level of education, followed by North American Indians, while the Métis hold the highest level of education (Mendelson, 2006).

Completing high school is the first step towards attaining post-secondary education. Unfortunately, the highest level of schooling the majority of the total Aboriginal population demonstrates is less than high school. Low levels of educational achievement among the Aboriginal population, who are expected to alleviate labour shortages in the near future, will be detrimental to the economic well being of Canada.

Following 'less than high school,' non-university PSE is the second highest level of education attained by Aboriginals, followed by a university degree. With regards to educational attainment, two major gaps exist between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population. Firstly, Aboriginals demonstrate significantly lower rates of high school completion in comparison to the general population. Secondly, Aboriginals are greatly underrepresented in the enrollment and completion of PSE. To close these gaps, requires social and financial support, as well as incentives for students to complete high school and PSE. Students who see the personal and economic benefits of pursuing a higher education are more likely to do so. Although the high school drop out rate in Canada has been gradually decreasing, rates remain well above the national average for Aboriginal students (Career Development, 2008). In Nova Scotia between 1991 and 2001 the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey communities have experienced a 17.6 percent decrease in the percentage of peoples without a high school certificate, while the percentage for all on-reserve Registered Indians of Canada decreased by only 10 percent (Orr & Cameron, 2004).

To address this gap in high school completion, Aboriginal students need to view education as meaningful and beneficial, through such measures as seeing their own culture reflected and respected in educational institutions at all levels. In addition to providing culturally responsive programs, post-secondary institutions could implement practices to promote access to specific programs and to supply social and financial support to retain students, with the ultimate goal being to assist them in acquiring the knowledge and skills required to pursue individual careers and to contribute to the autonomy of the Aboriginal community.

The Political Context: Main Issues and Challenges

There are three main issues that are preventing the delivery of educational funding and programs to Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The first issue is political jurisdiction. There is considerable disagreement about whose responsibility it is to fund Aboriginal post-secondary education. Another problem is that Aboriginals are not receiving sustainable funding. There are unclear guidelines for allocating money to individual Aboriginal students. A third concern, which is related to funding, is that there is a lack of

reliable data to monitor and assess the effectiveness of post-secondary education programs in meeting the needs of Aboriginal peoples. Limited data collection has caused confusion for all parties and has contributed to disagreements regarding appropriate accountability. These long-standing issues have created challenges for Aboriginal communities wishing to achieve higher levels of post-secondary education. Any effective policy related to post-secondary education for Aboriginal people will need to address and resolve these three issues of jurisdiction, funding and accountability.

The Jurisdiction Debate

The responsibility for post-secondary education of Aboriginal learners has long been a debate among the federal government, provincial government and First Nations. It can be traced back for decades. Basic education is generally controlled by the province, but through the Indian Act the federal government claimed responsibility of Aboriginal education. The Indian Act however, does not specify control of Aboriginal education past the secondary level, and this is from where the problem stems.

INAC argues that because post-secondary education was not named in the Indian Act, the federal government does not have to assume primary responsibility for PSE support. INAC has argued that post-secondary education of all people, including Aboriginals is the responsibility of the province. The federal government has provided some funding and support for post-secondary Aboriginal students and programs but this support is limited. Indian Affairs views the assistance for Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary education as a social policy rather than a right (Report of the Auditor General of Canada, 2004).

First Nations' organizations argue that post-secondary education is their inherent right and that the federal government is responsible for all levels of education. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) believes that the federal government should recognize the need to support post-secondary education of Aboriginals, so that they can achieve a lifestyle that is equal to non-Aboriginals and so that they can participate as equal partners in Canadian society and economy (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). The Assembly of First Nations also feels that the federal government should provide sufficient jurisdiction over PSE to control their own educational destiny. First Nations communities

want to have enough PSE funding to ensure that all community members can access a culturally relevant and educationally meaningful PSE.

The lack of agreement between INAC and AFN and its communities has prevented adequate funding and programming for Aboriginal students in post-secondary education. Without the cooperation and compromise of all parties, this jurisdiction debate will remain a barrier to the education of Aboriginal peoples.

Following the evaluation of the PSE Program, INAC recommended that with collaboration from Aboriginal governments, a contemporary policy framework be developed. This policy framework should provide First Nations and Inuit communities with greater authority and jurisdiction. It should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of INAC, First Nations and Inuit. These responsibilities involve planning, implementing, monitoring and reporting as well as program refocusing if needed. Together these groups should set clear objectives and priorities for the PSE Program and set a standard of fairness for the allocation of funds (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005).

Greater First Nations authority began in 1997 with the creation of Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey. MK consists of ten member communities from Nova Scotia that work to achieve educational self-governance. Together, they have discussed the educational challenges in their Mi'kmaw communities and have cooperatively developed a strategic framework from which to improve the educational standards, resources, policies and monitoring systems that exist. MK works to protect educational rights and interests by providing training courses, developing an inclusive curriculum and working with PSIs to develop programs that are culturally relevant and sensitive. Through MK, Mi'kmaw communities have been able to achieve greater jurisdiction and better educational outcomes (Orr & Cameron, 2004).

Sustainable Funding

The level of funding for Aboriginal education in Canada is currently insufficient. Through the evaluation of the post-secondary education program, INAC concluded that “PSSSP student support levels fall below the allowances set for other Canadians under the Canada Student Loan Program” (INAC, Evaluation of PSE Program, 2005). The

Federal government does provide funding for thousands of Aboriginal students each year and the overall spending has increased, but INAC funding is not meeting the demands of all Aboriginal people. Although the number of students on waitlists for PSSSP funding is not agreed upon, there is consensus that not all eligible status-Indians are being funded. The current budget and 2 percent annual increase cap does not account for the heightened tuition fees, increased costs of living and growing number of Aboriginal high school graduates wishing to pursue a higher level of education.

The PSE program is not allowing for equal and effective access to funding. Because there is not enough funding for all eligible learners, individual First Nations communities are being forced to pick and choose who receives funding (Mayes, 2007). *There is no national funding formula or criterion that guides First Nations distribution of funds, so there is great concern and confusion about how money should be spent.* Funds provided by INAC are distributed differently in different First Nations communities. Some communities develop their own criteria and priorities, only providing funding for those students that meet certain standards, some spread funding evenly among all who apply and others allocate funds on a first-come first-served basis (Holmes, 2006). The result of these allocation processes is that some students are funded well and experience low levels of debt, while others are excluded entirely from PSE financial support. INAC recommends that a consistent but flexible approach to the allocation of funds be developed, where Aboriginal peoples from all communities are able to achieve access to PSE program support and that funding levels should consider the specific needs of individual regions and communities (INAC, 2005).

First Nations are asking for sustainable funding; that is funding that is *adequate and predictable* (First Nations Education Action Plan, 2005). First Nations want long term funding arrangements that will meet the needs of First Nations and a guarantee that they will not have to limit the opportunities of post-secondary students because of a lack of funding. The committee on Aboriginal and Northern Development attributed a decline in Aboriginal PSE enrollment to the PSE program's fixed budget. This fixed budget does not account for increasing tuition and living costs and as of 2000, has resulted in about 9,500 First Nations people being unable to attend PSE because of a lack of federal

funding (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 2004, as cited in Mayes, 2007).

First Nations want a funding program that is based on *actual costs rather than past expenditures*. In their study of the PSE Program, INAC found that the guidelines for PSSSP funding allowances are more than 14 years out of date and that the average student supported by PSSSP is experiencing between a \$500 and \$4,000 deficit for living allowances. The standing committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development heard of many shortfalls in PSE funding for Aboriginals during their study of Aboriginal Education in May 2006. One example of deficits in funding came from Darren Googoo, a member of the Membertou Mi'kmaw band in Nova Scotia. Googoo reported that his community has received less than a \$1000 increase in funds per student in the past nine years and has experienced about a 33% deficit in funding (Mayes, 2007). This limited funding makes it very difficult for First Nations bands to support all eligible students. The only way for First Nations to achieve their educational goals is to ensure that all interested and qualified applicants can participate fully in post-secondary education without having to acquire great amounts of debt. To this point in time, INAC has failed to correct this funding dilemma.

Tracking and Accountability

In the 2004 report of the Auditor General of Canada, a main concern was that “the Department does not know whether funding to First Nations is sufficient to meet the education standards it has set and whether the results achieved are in line with the resources provided.” The department claimed it did not have enough information to validate an increase in the PSSSP budget saying that “the success of the PSE Program is constrained by the absence of a contemporary policy framework” (INAC, 2005). INAC is requesting better data collection from First Nations communities and post-secondary institutes so that they can increase PSE financial support and accountability. INAC’s current method of distributing funds to First Nations regions varies.

In 1989 INAC developed a new management and accountability framework for the PSE Program, where the Department transfers a fixed sum of money to First Nations

regions based on previous allocations, without reference to the actual number of eligible students. First Nations then allocate post-secondary financial assistance to students, according to their own priorities and the requirements made by the department. INAC indicated to First Nations that this framework intended to give them more flexibility and control over how they use program funds. This change in policy however, greatly affected the accountability between all parties involved. The roles and responsibilities of each party were not specified and there is limited monitoring of program compliance and expenditures by the Department. The way in which INAC allocates funds to First Nations does not ensure equitable access to as many students as possible (Report of Auditor General of Canada, 2004).

Some First Nations communities are receiving an excess of funding while others are not given enough money to support all eligible applicants. INAC needs a tracking system of eligible learners, so that a link between eligible student population and funding can be established (Mayes, 2007). Both INAC and First Nations agree that the distribution of funds should not be based on previous expenditures and deliveries but on actual needs. INAC claims it can not adopt a new model until a reliable tracking system is put in place. With representatives from First Nations and Inuit governments, INAC wants to develop a policy framework that establishes a standard of fairness regarding funding levels and eligibility that all parties uphold and are accountable for achieving. Once this policy framework is developed, INAC can establish funding levels that support the policy (INAC Evaluation of the Post-Secondary Education Program, 2005).

There are several explanations for the lack of credible data needed to improve the PSE Program. Post-secondary institutions (PSI) are limited in their ability to collect data on the enrollment and completion rates of Aboriginal students. Although many universities and colleges request that students self-identify their ancestry, statistical information is often incorrect because there are so many different definitions of Aboriginal ancestry (Malatest, 2002). In addition to the problems with self-identification, most PSI departments are not required to keep records of Aboriginal student performance.

Many reports on the enrollment and retention of Aboriginals in PSE rely on the Canadian census. The census is also an unreliable tracking system because; according to Malatest (2002) many Aboriginal people distrust the census and avoid providing this kind of information to the government. In the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples it was stated that, “The gathering of information and its subsequent use are inherently political. In the past, Aboriginal people have not been consulted about what information should be collected, who should gather that information, who should maintain it and who should have access to it. The information gathered may or may not have been relevant to the questions, priorities and concerns of Aboriginal peoples. Because data gathering has frequently been imposed by outside authorities, it has met with resistance in many quarters.” (Gathering Strength, 1995).

Limited tracking is not only a problem for the delivery of funds for individual Aboriginal persons within the PSSSP program. There is also a lack of data for the ISSP program. Many programs supported by ISSP are not being assessed. This results in an inability to distinguish successful programs that truly benefit and support Aboriginal students from unsuccessful programs. “The challenge is defining what information should be collected in a consistent way across communities, who should do it, and how it can be maintained in a way that respects confidentiality” (Gathering Strength, 1995).

Summary

Figure 2.3 provides a summary of suggested roles of INAC, First Nation’s communities and PSIs in relation to data collection and tracking. This chart can serve as a template for further discussions amongst these parties about the establishment of greater input and communication related to these roles in data tracking.

Figure 2.3 Data Collection and Tracking Policy Template



Barriers and Obstacles to a Higher Education

In addition to the major political challenges, Aboriginal peoples wishing to achieve a higher level of education also face a variety of personal barriers that are more prevalent for them than for other Canadians. Many of the barriers faced by today's Aboriginals are the same barriers that were experienced by Aboriginals in the mid 1900s. These obstacles are part of a dynamic system. Most First Nation and Inuit learners have more than one hurdle to climb, so it is important that these barriers are not addressed in isolation. No one barrier can be named the cause for the state of Aboriginal education. These barriers can however be categorized into seven major themes, including financial, bureaucratic, historical, socio-cultural, geographic, educational and institutional.

Access and Funding Barriers

Inadequate funding has been named the number one barrier to Aboriginal post-secondary education (Mayes, 2007). The PSE funding cap, growing number of eligible students, unclear guidelines for the distribution of funds and increased costs have resulted in a vast number of Aboriginals who are being denied access to PSE financial support. There is no clear quantification of student demand, because of a poor tracking system, but requests are definitely exceeding the available funds. In 2000, the AFN collected 3,700 names of applicants who were on waiting lists for post-secondary education and they estimated that approximately 10,000 people were denied PSE funding (INAC, 2005). Eskasoni, like many other communities receive more applicants than they can support. Eskasoni denies funding for 40 to 70 students each year (Mayes, 2007). This is difficult for both the community and the individual students who worked hard to reach PSE eligibility. Countless bands across Canada experience the same dilemma. Aboriginal communities are forced to make difficult decisions that result in the disappointment of qualified PSE students.

Many bands have been forced to establish strict guidelines for continuing the funding of Aboriginal students. Limited band funding can create an uneasy relationship between the bands and individual people. If students are unable to meet the minimum requirements, funding can be cut-off and PSE studies can be interrupted. Some bands have made requirements where, students must take a minimum of five credits per

academic year and maintain a certain grade level, and others have said students must work part-time while studying (Malatest, 2002). These standards are sometimes difficult to meet and can make it impossible for some to continue to receive financial support.

Accessing band funds can be especially difficult for Aboriginal students that do not live on a reserve. Aboriginal people that live off-reserve feel that they must compete with others for funding. They believe that the distribution of funds is unfair and vague (Malatest, 2002). It is often based on ones' relationship with the band rather than on individual qualifications. Even when Aboriginal students are told that they will be supported by the band, their funding is not always guaranteed. Funding can run out before the end of the academic year or it can come too late, so that PSI deadlines are not met and students must withdraw from their program.

Most students testify that they would not have attended university or college without PSSSP support (INAC, 2005). Aboriginal families do not often have the resources needed to support their children through a university or college education, and for this reason, the idea of obtaining a large student debt is especially aversive for Aboriginal students. PSE funding is crucial for the success of Aboriginals so that they do not require a Canadian or provincial student loan. Many Aboriginals state that PSSSP funding is their only option that makes a post-secondary education affordable.

This financial barrier is experienced by First Nations learners from the Atlantic region as well. In a survey conducted by Millie Augustine for INAC and Atlantic Policy Congress (2002), Mi'kmaw and Maliseet students from 4 universities and 2 colleges in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were asked to suggest structures and courses that could be implemented to attract more Aboriginal students to PSIs in the future. Many students reported a need for greater financial support. Two examples of the comments these students made are:

- “The Department should provide funding based on the number of students accepted rather than a specific amount per year. The need is higher than what is being funded (e.g. 100 students being accepted, but the band is only receiving funding for only 50 students).”

- There should be a “set” funding policy (formula) across the board so that each student receives the same amount.”

Bureaucratic Barriers

There are various departments responsible for post-secondary education, training and upgrading that work within each First Nation’s band. Each department has its own set of goals and priorities that guides how it should support Aboriginal education, its community and learners. For example, Human Resource Development Canada (HRDC) supports students that are attending one year post-secondary education programs and training and INAC’s PSE Program funds PSE students that are enrolled in programs of at least two years in duration. In addition to the HRDC and INAC departments, there are also often social, health, and employment committees. All departments share the common goals of increasing First Nation’s autonomy by improving the employment, economic and social strength of Aboriginal communities, but there is a great disconnect between each department. In most First Nation’s communities, the different departments do not regularly and formally communicate with one another. These departments do not meet to establish a coordinated approach to supporting Aboriginal learners and for this reason there is confusion for Aboriginal learners that are looking for assistance.

Because there are multiple departments that support PSE, learners can be unsure of which department they should approach for funding. Learners are not always aware of what qualifications and standards each department sets, so are confused about their own eligibility for funding. In the survey conducted by Millie Augustine for INAC and Atlantic Policy Congress (2002) a common theme for First Nations PSE students was found. When asked, “What type of (other) support structures/courses do you think could be provided to attract to more Aboriginal Students in the future?” many students felt that their Bands did not support every PSE institutions in the same way. Many students felt pressured to attend specific PSIs to ensure funding. In this study (APC and INAC Atlantic Regional Office, 2002) one student said, “(The) Band/DIAND should provide funding for tuition and living expenses for community colleges. Some people do not want to go to University, or may want to do so later on in life, but in the meantime they want to go to College but are unable to do so, as there is not funding in place.” Another student

made a similar comment saying, “Some bands do not allow students to choose which University they want to attend.” These comments show that students are not always aware of the priorities of different departments and not sure how they can access funding for the programs they wish to attend.

The limited discussion that exists between departments can also allow for the duplication of PSE financial support. A problem that has been experienced by some Aboriginal communities, is program jumping. Program jumpers are individual students that access funds from multiple departments over time, therefore receiving financial support without always using their PSE credentials. It has been argued that this serves to take potential funds away from other eligible Aboriginal students who have also applied for PSE support.

By working together and communicating, departments can ensure that there is little to no duplication of funds. Funding that supports the needs of the community could be optimised by developing community-based and coordinated committees that clarify community needs and departmental objectives. By establishing such committees, Aboriginal students could have better access to funds. All departments would be more able to support the education and training needed to achieve quality employment that is meaningful to the individual and to the community.

Historical Barriers

Another barrier to PSE originates from the history of Aboriginal education. Many First Nations people associate education with assimilation. In recent history, Aboriginal students were forced into an education that ignored and insulted their culture. Government policies used the education system to assimilate Aboriginal children into mainstream European-Canadian society. Aboriginal children endured physical and sexual abuse in residential schools and were forced to practice European values and traditions. A process called enfranchisement alienated Aboriginal people with a mainstream education from their own communities by forcing them to abandon their Indian status. Even after enfranchisement was no longer a consequence of formal education, Aboriginal people were pressured to abandon their culture and assimilate into the dominant, white society.

The history of Aboriginal education is very negative and controversial. This history has caused an abundance of distrust for the education system, among First Nations and Inuit peoples. These wounds are still deep and present; as a result there is still some resistance to formal education, especially when it is controlled by the government. Even today, many Aboriginal students report on the presence of strong assimilative forces within post-secondary institutions (Malatest, 2002). Educational institutes and government policies can however, help Aboriginals overcome this historical barrier by creating a more inclusive environment and by providing Aboriginals with the independence they need to manage and control their own educational programs.

Socio-cultural and Personal Barriers

A major problem, perhaps the greatest problem experienced by Aboriginal students when attending post-secondary education, relates to personal challenges and pressures associated with the gap between institutional expectations and Aboriginal cultural expectations. More Aboriginal students dropped out of the University of Manitoba for personal reasons, than for all other reasons combined; 80 percent of all PSE withdrawals in Manitoba were due to personal or family issues (Malatest, 2002). Low socio-economic status, limited family and community support, feelings of loneliness and inadequacy as well as discrimination all combine to cause the withdrawal of students from college and university studies.

Aboriginals are often challenged by a low socio-economic status. Poverty is higher, community employment levels are lower and many Aboriginal youth do not complete high school. These socio-economic conditions make it less likely that Aboriginal peoples will obtain a higher education. Aboriginals are at higher risk for drug use (Malatest, 2004) and have a greater incidence of disabilities (Holmes, 2006). In one study by den Heyer and Wein (2001, as cited in Orr & Cameron, 2004) it was found that the needs for Mi'kmaq students with special education were about double what the provincial (Nova Scotia) figures showed. Aboriginal students are also more likely to have dependants (Holmes, 2006). Attending university and college becomes more difficult when students have the additional responsibility of caring for their children or disabled family members. These social conditions can result in the abandonment of education.

Families play a powerful role in PSE behavior as well. “The majority of Aboriginal families do not have adequate employment incomes to provide funds for themselves or their children to attend post-secondary education institutions” (Malatest, 2002). Aboriginal parents are more likely to have negative attitudes towards post-secondary education because of its historic contribution to assimilation. These negative feelings greatly influence the attitudes of youth towards post-secondary education. Research shows that youth are about half as likely to attend PSE if their parents do not think a post-secondary education is essential (Lambert, Zeman, Allen & Bussiere, 2004). Aboriginals are more likely to come from families with lower levels of education, and so are more likely to end their studies before completing PSE (Lambert, Zeman, Allen & Bussiere, 2004).

Aboriginal communities can generate the same types of barriers as Aboriginal families. Aboriginal children have fewer role models with a high level of formal education and witness fewer Aboriginals from their own communities attending PSE. This limited experience with formal education often makes the idea of attending PSE more intimidating and foreign for Aboriginal learners. Aboriginals also report alienation from community members who feel that achieving a post-secondary education is conforming to the white, dominant culture (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). Aboriginal students may feel more ostracized because they have received a PSE from mainstream society. This exclusion from their own community members can make it difficult for Aboriginal people to commit to PSE.

Kirkness & Barnhardt, (as cited in Malatest, 2004) argue that the largest personal barrier to Aboriginal education is discrimination. In the report prepared for the Council of Ministers of Education, Malatest and Associates stated that “Too often, very little of what most Aboriginal students bring in the way of cultural knowledge, traditions, and core values is recognized or respected in the post-secondary education system. The reality of the university world is substantially different than the Aboriginal personal and community reality” (2002). Aboriginal students do not see themselves reflected in the PSE setting. Universities and colleges can be hostile environments where Aboriginal culture is not understood or valued. This can result in feelings of loneliness, isolation and despair. Many Aboriginal students report heightened anxiety and stress when attending

PSE and also a sense of powerlessness and frustration because their culture is not recognized by the educational institutions they are attending (Malatest, 2002). Any of these factors alone, whether discrimination, lack of family and community support or poor socio-economic status could be enough to drive Aboriginal students away from PSE. A combination of these personal barriers can only worsen the chances for PSE success.

Geographic Barriers

Relocation and travel costs are significant barriers to First Nation's post-secondary education. PSSSP funding does not often cover the high costs of travel, especially when Aboriginal students have dependants to pay for as well. First Nation's students tend to live considerable distances from universities and colleges (Malatest, 2002). They often have to leave their small communities to relocate in larger urban settings to attend PSE. PSSSP funding does not allow for multiple visits home, for spending time with family and friends in their Aboriginal communities. An inability to travel home throughout the academic year can result in greater feelings of isolation and loneliness and can increase the likelihood of non-completion.

This geographic barrier is evident among First Nations students living in Atlantic Canada. In the survey conducted by Millie Augustine (APC and INAC Atlantic Regional Office, 2002) one student stated that, "We need more money for those who have had to move off reserve to attend University. Students who have their communities located close to the University have the opportunity of being able to go home every night, and do not have to pay for food, rent, and utilities. Additional funding should be provided for the students that live off reserve during the course of obtaining their degree."

Educational Barriers

There is a noticeable gap between the educational attainment of Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in Canada. Almost half of the Aboriginal population has not completed grade 12 and for those Aboriginals that do attend PSE, their rates of retention are significantly lower than non-Aboriginals. There are many explanations for this lack of academic success.

Aboriginal children and youth have fewer role models who have a high level of formal education living in their communities. Aboriginal children receive limited exposure to the PSE experience and are not always encouraged to aspire for an education beyond the high school level. Many Aboriginals, especially males, do not consider PSE a possibility for their future. Aboriginal people that do not name post-secondary education as a priority early in their lives are less likely to be prepared for PSE (Institutional Strategy and Practice, 2008). Researchers have also found that Aboriginal youth tend to be less engaged in high school. They are less likely to be members of sports teams, to join volunteer groups and participate in social activities. This limited involvement in high school life, can lead to a negative high school experience, which can then produce negative attitudes towards PSE (Lambert, Zeman, Allen & Bussiere, 2004).

Many Aboriginal children and youth live in small communities where access to full, comprehensive education is less available than in larger areas (Holmes, 2006). Because most First Nations communities are small, their schools have difficulty providing a range of educational services (Report of the Auditor General Canada, 2004) which can lead to weaker skills in math, science and technology. Young Aboriginals are often not graduating with the courses they need to succeed in college and university, so they are required to take preparatory courses to gain admissions into PSE programs. Mature Aboriginal students also experience academic difficulties when attending PSE. Mature students typically take long breaks without receiving formal education, and so are underprepared when they enter PSE programs. This lack of academic preparation contributes to the high drop out rates for Aboriginal peoples attending PSE.

Low levels of PSE retention can also be attributed to the curriculum taught. Canadian educational institutions do not typically use a curriculum that supports Aboriginal ways of learning. Most programs and courses do not provide an Aboriginal perspective. The setting for most universities and colleges is competitive, while Aboriginals tend to prefer a cooperative and supportive learning environment (Holmes, 2006). Aboriginals often prefer to learn through observation rather than formal instruction (Swisher, 2003) and would rather demonstrate learning through practice than through a test of rote knowledge (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000).

Institutional Barriers

Mainstream universities and colleges not only overlook Aboriginal peoples' preferred way of learning, but also ignore Aboriginal cultures. Most educational programs have established practices and policies that serve the values and norms of the majority while ignoring other minority groups (Malatest, 2002). The percentage of Aboriginal faculty and staff in post-secondary institutions is not representative of the general population. Aboriginal people are particularly under-represented in administrative positions. Most non-Aboriginal faculty and staff have a limited understanding of Aboriginal culture. They tend to be unaware of the diverse needs of Aboriginal students and do not always recognize Aboriginal traditions and values. This lack of cultural knowledge and services for Aboriginal people promotes a lack of educational meaning for First Nations and Inuit learners. Many students fail to find a purpose for what they are learning and struggle to see how PSE can help them improve the social conditions of Aboriginal people.

Many Aboriginal students are motivated to take programs that they see as culturally relevant and meaningful. In one study (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005), 68 percent of students wanted to enroll in professional programs that would help them meet the needs of their communities. Such programs include social work, education, law, medicine and health. Unfortunately these kinds of programs tend to have strict admissions criteria and are in high demand by all students, so Aboriginal students can be overlooked (Holmes, 2006). Aboriginal students are left competing for positions in these programs, unless educational institutions reserve seats specifically for minority groups. Aboriginal students should be accepted into and supported by these programs so that they can obtain careers that will contribute to the social and economic well being of their communities.

To make PSE more meaningful, Aboriginal peoples should also be allowed more involvement in educational planning and decision making. To this point, there has been limited Aboriginal control over the design of academic and support programs and authorities are not being asked to incorporate Aboriginal knowledge into the traditional curriculum taught. This lack of cultural relevance and representation has contributed to the lower success rates of Aboriginal students.

In the Augustine (2002) study many Atlantic Canadian First Nations students recognized institutional barriers to PSE success and named a number of supports, resources and programs that could improve the Aboriginal PSE participation rates. In the survey (Augustine, 2002) students were asked, “What type of (other) support structures/courses do you think could be provided to attract other Aboriginal students in the future?” Similar to the analysis done in the best practices paper related to secondary students’ perspectives on educational support as cited in Orr and Cameron (2004), we have categorized all of the student responses from Mi’kmaw and Maliseet post-secondary students attending 4 universities and 2 colleges in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The students’ responses could be divided into 6 categories (See Figure 2.4). 12.2% of the 82 responses named the need for tangible resources such as computers, rooms/buildings dedicated to Aboriginal learners, and more scholarship money. 35.4% of the comments noted the need for more Aboriginal programming and events such as Native Studies courses and degrees, Mi’kmaw language courses and a monthly newsletter that includes Aboriginal concerns. 28.1% of responses recommended that PSE institutions have better human supports such as councilors, tutors, advisors and Elders that are available on a regular basis and 6.1% of responses asked for greater representation of Aboriginal peoples on decision making and management councils, such as the Board of Governors, Student Council and Harassment Committees. 11% of comments recognized a need for better recruitment and support for first year students and 7.3% of comments named some other support that would benefit Aboriginal PSE students such as, the need for internship, Bachelor of Education and Law programs and greater Native student participation on PSE sports teams.

Figure 2.4 Institutional Needs Recognized by First Nations PSE Students from 6 Atlantic Canadian Universities and Colleges

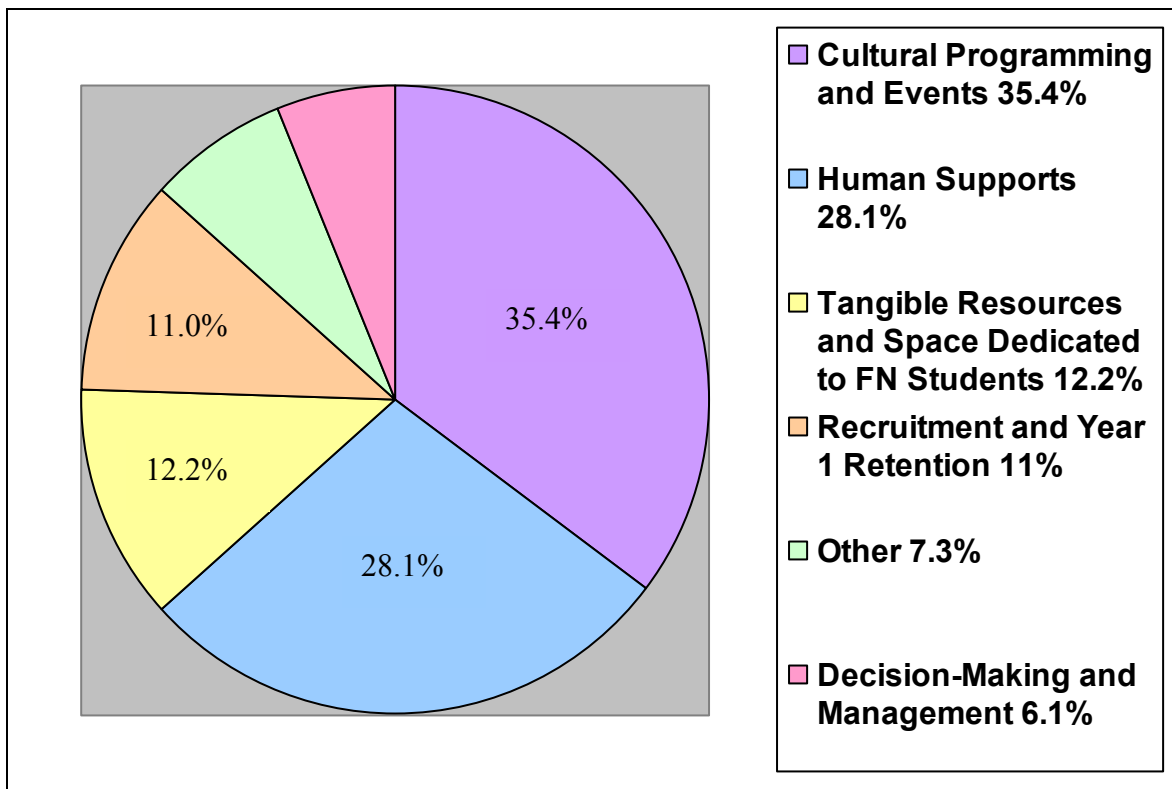


Figure 2.5 Barriers to Aboriginal access, retention and success in PSE

<i>Access/ Funding</i>	<i>Bureaucratic Conundrum</i>	<i>Historical</i>	<i>Personal/ Sociocultural</i>	<i>Geographic</i>	<i>Educational</i>	<i>Institutional</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INAC 2% cap of PSSSP funding, despite higher costs and more graduates • limited band funding, waitlists, and unfair distribution • limited funding for non-status Aboriginals and Métis • poor program support and upgrades • difficult application process • debt aversion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of funding and program coherence/coordination • confusion for individual learners, for which department to approach and apply for funding • program jumpers that are funded by multiple sources over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • resistance to assimilation • distrust of education system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lower socio-economic status • lower PSE confidence, higher anxiety and feelings of loneliness in PSE environment • lack of family and community support • higher levels of family responsibility such as child and elder care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reluctance to leave Native community • high travel and housing costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gap in high school educational attainment • differences in perceptions of academic preparation • mature students have long periods of time without formal education • fewer PSE role models • negative high school experience • difference between Aboriginal and mainstream university learning styles • lack of meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • insensitivity to Aboriginal culture • strict/rigid admissions criteria • lack of First Nations involvement in planning and decision making

As mentioned previously, many of the barriers that Aboriginals face with post-secondary education, whether financial, bureaucratic, historical, socio-cultural, geographic, educational or institutional are the same barriers that Aboriginals faced years ago. Many post-secondary programs have been put in place to reduce these challenges but there is still a great need for improvement. No one program or initiative will solve all the problems encountered by Aboriginal PSE learners. Aboriginal students experience challenges from all levels, political, social and personal and so should receive guaranteed support. By investing in the education of Aboriginals the federal government can help create a more promising future for the lives of individual Aboriginals and their communities and can build a stronger Canadian economy. Figure 2.5 summarizes the barriers which have been gleaned during this extensive review of the post-secondary education policy literature in relation to First Nations peoples in Canada. Strategies to overcome these barriers will be taken up in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 – Best Practices

This chapter presents and analyzes an extensive review of the policy literature related to the best practices that have been identified as effective in improving the access, retention and success of Aboriginal students in post-secondary education. The best practices are categorized as follows: Access and Attraction, PSE Programming, Areas of Support, Data Collection and Tracking, and Collaboration and Communication. This review includes national perspectives and findings, as well as proven and promising practices at work within the member nations served by Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey.

Access and Attraction

The initial steps in assisting Aboriginals in the attainment of higher levels of success in post-secondary education are to first attract students to what the institutions have to offer and then to adapt admissions policies to accommodate needs and promote admittance. *Early intervention in early school-age children has demonstrated itself as an effective means of attracting prospective students to pursue PSE.* It is important to imbed the idea of post-secondary education in the minds of young children. It is vital that students be educated as early as grade four, age 10, about the opportunities that await them upon completing high school and learn of the subjects to study in school to prepare them for higher learning in their field of interest. As well it has been shown that when family and community members are encouraged to recognize PSE as a realistic path for their children, it served to encourage students to complete high school and assist them in making the right decisions on their journey to higher learning. This is especially significant for Aboriginal learners as they are more likely to come from families that lack a history of education at the post-secondary level. When it comes to early intervention, timing is crucial. If interventions are too late in a student's stage of schooling, there is the possibility that they may have already mentally dismissed PSE as an option for their future (Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2008).

Institutions who adopt proactive Aboriginal recruitment processes greatly increase their odds of attracting prospective students to enroll in their programs. Post-secondary institutions can recruit Aboriginal students through both on-campus and off-campus services. On-site services can be as simple as having a handbook or web site database informing prospective Aboriginal students of the range of academic programs, support services and financial aid offered. They also provide contact information enabling students to seek further information regarding admissions and programs, biographies on support staff, even profiles of successful Aboriginal graduates (Holmes, 2006). Often times, universities keep in contact with Aboriginal organizations, education directors and community leaders by regularly mailing out information pertaining to the programs they provide with an Aboriginal focus. *One of the most effective methods of attracting Aboriginal students is employing an Aboriginal liaison officer as an integral part of the institution's recruitment team.* The responsibilities that this position entails include organizing campus visits, tours and open houses and inviting Aboriginal community members to participate in and organize activities and gatherings on campus to work towards overcoming the barriers that stand between the community and post-secondary institutions.

Post-secondary institutions have also taken on a range of off-campus recruitment services. Similar to the workings of Aboriginal liaison officers, some universities invite upper year Aboriginal students to serve as representatives of the institution to visit Aboriginal communities and schools to act as role models for secondary students and to work on projects with the intentions of making PSE more relevant to Aboriginal communities (Holmes, 2006). Further actions that institutions have taken to motivate potential students include hosting summer camps and school break programs, as well as organizing career fairs to encourage students to stay in school, to convince them that PSE is a viable option and to communicate the broad range of jobs that are accessible to them in the future if they take the appropriate subjects. Post-secondary institutions have also been known to recruit students attending local colleges, as they tend to have a greater proportion of Aboriginal students enrolled. This recruitment method is only used by 44 percent of universities due to the negative sense of poaching that it instills in college institutions that students are drawn from (Holmes, 2006).

The Native Ambassador Postsecondary Initiative (NAPI) is a joint project involving the University of Calgary, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology and Mount Royal College piloted as a collaborative project in 2004-05. It is designed to provide information on postsecondary education and to provide positive role modeling to Aboriginal youth enrolled in junior and senior high and other youth programs. The primary goal is to motivate Aboriginal students of all grades and ages to consider pursuing a postsecondary education. Ambassadors from Mount Royal College, SAIT and University of Calgary are available to visit Aboriginal youth in junior and high schools and colleges in order to facilitate “blue print for the future” type workshops, provide campus tours for visiting groups, and travel to regional Aboriginal career fairs. The program is sponsored by Canada Heritage Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centre Initiative, the Alberta Lottery Fund and Trans-Canada Pipelines (as cited in Holmes, 2006)¹

At the Université du Québec a Chicoutimi the *Camp d'initiation scientifique* operated by the *Centre d'études amérindiennes* offers a one-week summer camp for francophone Aboriginal high school students in the fields of science and arts. The objective of the program is to pique the interest of Aboriginal school children in the arts and sciences and to give them a taste for future university level studies. The program consists of visits, creative workshops, laboratory experiences, meetings with researchers and organized sports. The program is updated and enriched each year to allow the same students to re-enroll. Between 1995 and 2005, 498 students have participated in these camps (as cited in Holmes, 2006)

One practice that has been found to improve the access of Aboriginal learners to PSE is specific admission policies that accommodate the specific needs of Aboriginal students without lowering admissions standards. Some post-secondary institutions have adopted alternate admission policies for students of Aboriginal status who did not achieve high grades in secondary school. Under this policy, prospective Aboriginal students having grades slightly below the admissions cut-off may be considered by a special advisory committee and be requested to present additional documents to support their admissions. Documents include, such factors as, transcripts, recommendations, letters of reference, essay response or personal resume outlining work, volunteer and life experiences. *Alternate admission policies promote access to PSE for Aboriginal learners who fall short in meeting admissions criteria and evaluate their eligibility on a more*

¹ Throughout this evaluation framework, examples of best practices used by different post-secondary institutions across Canada are enclosed in text boxes, as cited in Holmes, D. (2006). Redressing the balance: Canadian university programs in support of Aboriginal students. *Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, Ottawa.*

holistic level. The only set backs to allowing alternate admissions criteria for Aboriginal students are that sometimes members of the non-Aboriginal population view this method as favoritism. To eliminate these negative sentiments, alternate admissions policies should be used for all underrepresented groups seeking PSE access, if not the entire pool of applicants to ensure that all applicants meet minimum entrance qualifications considered necessary to succeed in the program.

At the University of British Columbia there is an Aboriginal Admissions Policy “which considers educational history, work experience, educational goals and other achievements that indicate an ability to succeed at university.” Students who do not meet the university-wide minimum grade of 67 percent for admission are considered on an individual basis with input from the First Nations House of Learning (as cited in Holmes, 2006).

Improving Aboriginal access can be as straightforward as increasing the capacity of the institution to accommodate more students and to reserve seats in programs that have limited enrollment for Aboriginal students that meet minimum entrance requirements. Aside from reserving seats to promote equity among minority groups, it is also important to promote equal representation of the sexes within educational institutions. To bring the enrollment and success of Aboriginal males in PSE closer to parity with Aboriginal female students, institutions need to adjust admission policies such that a given number of spots are held for males who meet the admissions qualifications. With this approach, the rate of Aboriginal males participating in PSE rises without discriminating against other applicants because they meet the same admissions criteria.

Career development practices, both short term (e.g. career fair, take your child to work day) and long term (e.g. job-shadowing, co-op programs), have also been identified as an effective yet underused method to increase Aboriginal access to PSE. Although career development alone cannot be held accountable for PSE participation, a link between career development and a positive outlook on pursuing PSE can be established indirectly. According to the *Youth in Transition Survey* (YITS) in 2004 (as cited in Career Development, 2008), the level of academic and social engagement in secondary education was higher for those who pursued PSE than for those who did not. This finding implies that both academic engagement and success are influenced by the degree to which the student perceives that their schooling assists them in achieving their future

goals, personal or professional (YITS, 2004 as cited in Career Development, 2008). From this, it can be inferred that career development services can positively influence one's decision to participate in PSE as it helps students to make "relevant connections between what they are learning now and what they might pursue in the future" (YITS, 2004 as cited in Career Development, 2008). Institutions that offer career development services assist students by opening their eyes to the wealth of career opportunities and helping them to better match their interests and abilities with a suitable career path (Career Development, 2008). These services work to motivate students to pursue higher education, to facilitate positive attitudes toward PSE and to promote social inclusion. When successful, career development reduces the incidence of dropouts and improves the level of educational attainment, as well as smoothes the transition from high school to PSE and school to work. *Ultimately, career development practices help Aboriginal students to overcome the cultural barrier of negative attitudes toward PSE that hinder their participation and impart a positive attitude of the opportunities that PSE provides to help them set and achieve their goals.*

A study conducted by the federal department of human resources in 1994 found that "students who study in co-operative work-study programs at the college and university levels have higher rates of employment upon graduation and earn more than those who did not follow co-op programs" (Gathering Strength, 1996). Participation in such programs enables students to sample a range of work experiences, to create occupational contacts and to receive additional income to support educational advancement (Gathering Strength, 1996). In light of this, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommends that "Canada's corporations, small businesses and governments become active partners in Aboriginal self-government education by identifying co-op placement and internship opportunities in their organizations, in consultation with Aboriginal people" (Gathering Strength, 1996). In doing so, non-Aboriginal Canadians can support their Aboriginal neighbours in achieving their goal for self-reliance.

Post-secondary institutions within Nova Scotia have been making great strides to improve the access of First Nations students to PSE. The Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) assists underrepresented groups in accessing PSE by setting aside one

seat in each program to be filled by the first qualified applicant (Institutional Strategy and Practice, 2008). NSCC has also designed and distributed postcards displaying successful First Nations graduates to inform prospective students how to learn more about First Nations Students Services offered at their institution. The School of Education at StFX University has a policy of admitting all qualified students, of Aboriginal and African ancestry. By 2009, this program will have been successful in graduating almost 100 Aboriginal students with Bachelor of Education (BEd) and Masters of Education (MEd) degrees since the policy was implemented in 1995. Furthermore, the StFX School of Nursing has recently proposed to the Aboriginal Health Human Resource Initiative (AHHRI) to develop and pilot a Bridging Year Program for Aboriginal students to address community needs for health care education (Committee for Aboriginal and Black Student Success, 2008). This proposal outlined specific recommendations, such as reserving seats, early recruitment and flexible admissions criteria to attract First Nations students to the StFX Bachelor of Science in Nursing program (CABSS, 2008). An additional two universities in Nova Scotia that have taken action to increase the participation of First Nations in PSE include Dalhousie and Cape Breton University. The objective of Dalhousie's Transition Year Program (TYP), established in 1970, is to increase the participation of both Native and Black students in PSE by introducing its students to university life, preparing them for admission to PSE programs, and assisting them academically and financially as they pursue their first degree (Transition Year Program History, 2006). Catherine Martin and Associates (2000) have reported that the success rate for Mi'kmaw graduates attending the TYP is bleak. As a consequence of a poor return on the investment in this program, some Nova Scotia Bands have opted to develop their own pre-university access programs (Catherine Martin and Associates, 2000). The Elmitok access program for First Nations students, offered at CBU, has been recognized by other universities and Mi'kmaw communities as the most successful access program available (Catherine Martin and Associates, 2000). The CBU Access program serves as an excellent model for other post-secondary institutions planning to implement preparatory programs in the future (Catherine Martin and Associates, 2000).

Elmitek, also known as the *Cape Breton University Access Program*, is a one-year postsecondary program designed for Mi'kmaq students who wish to further their education by attending university. "Elmitek", a Mi'kmaq expression for showing someone a path to follow, succinctly explains the program to its Aboriginal participants, many of whom use English as a second language. Elmitek points to a path that students may travel toward successful completion of a university education. The Elmitek program is designed to make the transition into the university environment less traumatic and more successful for Aboriginal students. Their ranks are comprised of newly graduated high school students and mature students who have not been in a formal education system for several years. The Elmitek program utilizes several methods to make postsecondary education more accessible:

- Several classes are offered in First Nations communities.
- During the first year, students are required to attend classes at the Cape Breton University campus only one day a week.
- Workshop sessions are scheduled to prepare students for their classes and assignments.
- A coordinator is assigned to maintain close contact with and to support students at each site.

(as cited in Holmes, 2006)

Post-Secondary Education Programming

For too long, Aboriginals have been deprived of an education with an Aboriginal focus and now more than ever, it is critical that Aboriginal history, language and culture become part of PSE systems. Aboriginal education in Canada is not limited to, but can be categorized into three approaches: the add-on approach, the partnership approach and the First Nations control approach (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). The add-on approach involves the enriching of existing curriculum and practices to foster a sense of inclusion of Aboriginal students participating in an educational setting centered on and in mainstream culture. This approach is achieved simply by incorporating lessons on Aboriginal culture, using Aboriginal culture as a relevant background to teach a topic, or modifying teaching practices to integrate traditional processes such as a talking circle (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000).

The add-on approach is one that requires little effort to put into practice and according to Marie Battiste (2007, as cited in Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000) fails to support Aboriginals in overcoming their historic educational oppression. This approach is an inadequate means for post-secondary preparation of Aboriginal students to contribute to the self-government of their own communities.

The partnership approach represents a collaboration between mainstream educational institutions and Aboriginal communities, in which the community conveys their needs and the institution provides the knowledge and skills to meet those needs (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). This bi-cultural partnership involves the shared development of a curriculum that addresses the needs of the Aboriginal community by assisting Aboriginal peoples to achieve socioeconomic and political autonomy. Students who do not see themselves reflected in the curriculum of post-secondary institutions are less likely to enroll or to remain enrolled until graduation. However, literature strongly suggests that Aboriginal involvement in curriculum development improves the enrollment and retention rate of Aboriginal students. The primary benefit to this approach is that it implements Aboriginal-focused programs in mainstream institutions that are relevant to the needs and interests of Aboriginal students and the greater community. Aboriginals are not as well served by generic programs offered in mainstream institutions. Native studies programs often equip students with the specific Aboriginal knowledge and skills to become legal representatives, educators, nurses, social workers, among other professions that address the unique cultural needs of Aboriginal communities. The University of British Columbia (U of BC), for instance, supplies west coast First Nations communities with Aboriginal foresters and fishers from the culturally responsive programs offered at their institution (Holmes, 2006). More and more post-secondary institutions are offering Native studies programs to satisfy the Aboriginal desire for appropriate First Nations cultural knowledge, in support of self-governance. Post-secondary institutions cannot provide culturally responsive programs for Aboriginal students, unless they also provide staff and faculty with cross-cultural awareness training and hire Aboriginal faculty and staff. Such training and human resource policies and programs educate and affirm employees within PSE with regards to Aboriginal culture, issues, rights and policies in order to break down barriers and build up understanding between education faculty and Aboriginal students.

The *Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Program (ACAP)* at the University of Regina, operated in conjunction with First Nations University of Canada, provides information to clarify thinking and dispel myths about Aboriginal Peoples. The program establishes linkages between historical events and present day issues. Through a series of workshops, the program covers First Nations history and culture, demographics and labour force issues, and sovereignty and treaties. The information and ideas presented in day one are the underpinnings of discussion that occur on day two. The ultimate goal of ACAP is to develop understanding and respect and to build relationships (as cited in Holmes, 2006).

The third approach to Aboriginal education is the First Nations control approach. The aim of Aboriginal communities in this approach is withdrawal from the mainstream to regain complete control of Aboriginal education. Both curriculum development and delivery are the sole responsibility of the Aboriginal community. This approach to Aboriginal education ensures the preservation of First Nations culture, language and politics through student participation in Aboriginal-centered programs and practices. These education and training institutions, exercising Indian control of Indian education, demonstrate qualities that mainstream institutions should be striving for to improve the retention and success of Aboriginal students.

Three factors that LuAnn Hill (n.d.) identifies as being unique to First Nations control in post-secondary institutions are responsiveness, flexibility and access. First Nations institutions design and deliver programs that respond to the demands of the labour force both within and outside Aboriginal communities, address the unique learning styles of Aboriginal students in a supportive learning environment, and provide access to people typically underrepresented and competing for a seat in mainstream institutions (Hill, n.d.). Other qualities distinguishing Aboriginal from mainstream PSE include taking a holistic approach to education, community involvement and commitment to student support. The obvious drawback to Aboriginal institutions is that many remain unsupported by federal funding and their programs unrecognized provincially.

Post-secondary institutions within Nova Scotia, like many of those across Canada, have developed a wide variety of programs that focus on Aboriginal issues, with the intent to produce professionals who will fulfill high demand occupations within Aboriginal communities (Holmes, 2006). Cape Breton University (CBU) operates an

Integrative Science Program that integrates Aboriginal and western views of the natural world to produce environmental scientists for the Aboriginal community (Holmes, 2006). In addition to this Science Program and Elmitok mentioned earlier, the Mi'kmaq College Institute (MCI) at CBU offers four other Aboriginal-centered programs. First, the Mi'kmaq Business Development Program was established to teach business education, in the areas of business development, management and administration, than can be tailored to be effective in all First Nations communities (Mi'kmaq College Institute, 2008). Second, the Court Workers Certificate provides the community with more qualified workers within the legal system who will provide First Nations people with appropriate legal representation, help to prepare for court appearances and respond to decisions made by the court (Mi'kmaq College Institute, 2008). Third, Natural Resources Certificate Program provides training in water testing and sampling, the operation of computer-based management systems and geomatic information systems, as well as the management of waste, woodlands and water resources (Mi'kmaq College Institute, 2008). Finally, the Mi'kmaq Science Advantage Program (MSAP), extending from secondary to at least one year of post-secondary schooling, promotes the success of Aboriginals in a science of technology program by linking secondary school science and preparation for a post-secondary science degree/diploma (Mi'kmaq College Institute, 2008). In addition to PSE programming, the MCI offers a broad range of Mi'kmaq Studies courses designed to educate native and non-native students with the history, language, culture, and socioeconomic development of the Mi'kmaq First Nations (Mi'kmaq Studies Courses, 2008). Together, these culturally sensitive programs and courses will enable First Nations students to acquire the skills required to meet the specific needs of the community.

Toqwa'tu'kl Kjjjitaqnn / Integrative Science Program. Integrative science at Cape Breton University contains science courses which bring together science knowledge as conventionally understood, combined and enriched with understandings from the holistic world views of Aboriginal Peoples, especially the Mi'kmaq First Nations in Atlantic Canada (as cited in Holmes, 2006).

To address the underrepresentation of First Nations in the public education system and the need for educators in First Nations communities, the School of Education at StFX has committed itself, through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Mi'kmaw community in 1995, to the training and preparation of First Nations students to teach in band and provincial schools (Tompkins & Orr, 2008). "Generally Mi'kmaw pre-service teachers compose between 5-8% of the total pre-service teacher population" (Tompkins & Orr, 2008). It has been reported that the majority of the Mi'kmaw pre-service teachers are parents or grandparents, ranging in age from 22 to 55 (Tompkins & Orr, 2008). Despite the challenges of parenting, travel, financial support and program demands, Mi'kmaw pre-service teachers have demonstrated a retention rate as high as 88% (Tompkins & Orr, 2008). The StFX School of Education was successful in graduating 68 Mi'kmaw pre-service teachers since its conception in 1995 (Tompkins & Orr, 2008). The high completion rate of Mi'kmaw students from the StFX Bachelor of Education program can be attributed in part to the advise given from the Mi'kmaw and African Nova Scotia Liaison committee on ways to recruit, support and retain visible minority students and the integration of the Mi'kmaw community into the Xavier Teacher Education Advisory Committee (XTEAC) to ensure a voice at the policymaking table and that the School of Education is being responsive to community needs (Tompkins & Orr, 2008). Mi'kmaw part-time programming, offered since 2005 through face to face and distance education venues, has also been recognized as being effective in attracting and retaining an increased number of pre-service teachers who have been historically underrepresented in the region and who are challenged by full-time study (Tompkins & Orr, 2008). In addition to high retention and completion rates, Mi'kmaw student success is evident in the high employment rates of Mi'kmaw teachers within band and provincial schools across Nova Scotia (Tompkins & Orr, 2008). The StFX School of Education has demonstrated great success in increasing the number of First Nations enrolling in and completing the Education program, and in producing skilled educators to meet the needs of First Nations communities.

Support

Providing support is a key element in promoting the access, retention and success of Aboriginal students in PSE. Support is required from all levels, government, institution and community to address the personal, financial and academic needs of First Nations pursuing a higher education. At the institutional level, supporting students can be as simple as designating a physical space on campus where Aboriginal students, staff and faculty can interact or where social and cultural gatherings can be held, ultimately creating a sense of a “home-away-from-home” (Holmes, 2006). Institutions could also provide facilities with Internet access, toll-free telephones and fax machines to open the lines of communication between Aboriginal students and members of their families and communities to alleviate feelings of isolation and loneliness (Holmes, 2006). Since a sizable percentage of the Aboriginal student body are mothers, *child care services offered at the PSE institutions that they are participating in would be a great benefit*. One method that seems to stand out from the rest in supporting Aboriginal students in PSE is the “Elders-in-Residence” program (Holmes, 2006). This program involves universities inviting members of the Aboriginal community, particularly elders, to serve as mentors and counselors to students and occasionally as guest speakers and resource providers for the institution. Aboriginals who are accustomed to close-knit communities tend to find the atmosphere of post-secondary institutions impersonal and intimidating, thus implementing the “Elders-in-Residence” program in post-secondary institutions can help to relieve such feelings. In addition, the knowledge that elders bring to Aboriginal students through this program helps to preserve Aboriginal culture, as well as narrow the generation gap generated by the legacy of assimilative schooling and strengthen the pride felt by Aboriginal people (Malatest, 2002).

The University of British Columbia's First Nations House of Learning is physically located in the 22,000 square foot 12 year-old *First Nations Longhouse*, a custom-built facility on the main campus that is designed to serve as a "home away from home" for Aboriginal students. Services provided include:

- a coordinator of student services
- First Nations (personal) counselling
- computer centre
- S'Takya Child Care Centre (for 16 pre-school children. Fee subsidies available.)
- Xwi7xwa Library
- social activities
- Elders programs
- graduation ceremonies

The Longhouse also houses a number of Aboriginal education programs and the *Institute of Aboriginal Health* (as cited in Holmes, 2006).

Aboriginal students interested in living on campus at the University of Saskatchewan are invited to apply to become part of the new *Aboriginal Living and Learning Community* in autumn 2005. Located on the eighth floor of the South Residence, the community consists of two four-bedroom apartments housing eight students. The focus of the community is the spiritual, personal, and community needs of the students. Ceremonies, Elder support, and team-building will help create a home for members within the larger university community. A residence life coordinator will help the community's residence assistant (RA) address any problems or issues that come up. The RA will also help community members to adjust to university life and get involved (as cited in Holmes, 2006).

At Thompson Rivers University a key feature of "The Gathering Place – Aboriginal Cultural Center" is the *Elder in Residence* program. The presence of the Elder is a cultural anchor, a guide and an informed support to Aboriginal students and the whole TRU community. The Elder also promotes cross cultural awareness and understanding of Aboriginal history, culture, tradition, protocol, and information on contemporary Aboriginal issues. The overall role of the Elder in Residence is to provide a traditional approach to support for Aboriginal students and the TRU community. The Elder in Residence program started in 2004 (as cited in Holmes, 2006).

Supporting students in PSE can also be achieved at the community level. When Aboriginal communities should encourage children to pursue PSE, both for personal and community gain, and work to eliminate negative attitudes toward and distrust for mainstream education that had developed during times of residential schooling. Community involvement in university or college life, whether in the form of recreation, athletics, fundraising, presentations and the like, also helps to foster a sense of belonging

within the dominant culture. The institution and the community together play a critical role in providing students with the type of personal support they need to achieve a higher education.

The personal supports provided by educational institutions are inaccessible to students who lack adequate financial support to cover the expenses of attending PSE. Unlike non-status Indians and Métis, status Indians and Inuit experiencing financial strain are qualified through the PSSSP to apply for financial support from the federal government channeled through band councils. Furthermore, special programs that Aboriginal students participate in at post-secondary institutions are also funded by the federal government through the ISSP. Although both serve the benefit of providing financial assistance to students and the post-secondary programs they enroll in, a cap has been placed on annual funding, thus creating a large pool of eligible Aboriginal students without the financial aid to enroll.

A further hindrance is that the overall budget of the PSSSP and the ISSP are connected. Increasing the amount of funding available in one program takes away funding available in the other. So, given the overall cap on these programs, the controversy arises as to whether it is more beneficial to limit the number of Aboriginal students receiving financial support or to restrict the development and upgrading of funded Aboriginal programs. *This barrier could be addressed by removing the annual funding cap to ensure the access of all eligible Aboriginal students to PSE, which in turn will work towards closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal enrollment and success in PSE. A further recommendation would be to base funding on actual costs to ensure that the financial support allotted is sufficient in covering the expenses that come with attending post-secondary institutions.* It would also be beneficial to students if the range of expenses funded were expanded, from tuition, books and supplies, to include, when applicable, additional costs such as travel, living expenses, housing, child care, counseling and other legitimate expenses that are typically encountered during the attainment of PSE.

First Nations students who are not funded federally by INAC must rely on the financial support of their family or resort to federal, provincial or private loan programs (Holmes, 2006). Often times, depending on their family circumstances, First Nations

students refrain from depending on student loans in fear of taking on a larger debt load (Holmes, 2006). A means by which institutions can indirectly assist students who have inadequate financial support is to implement services which help them to find alternate financial resources. These services could also help students find and apply for part-time and summer employment and help make them aware of the various scholarships and bursaries that are available to improve their financial situation and access to PSE.

At the institutional level there are a number of ways in which programs and practices support Aboriginals in meeting success in PSE. Representation of Aboriginal people as faculty and staff within post-secondary institutions has been identified as a leading factor in Aboriginal retention and success in PSE (Malatest, R.A. & Associates Ltd., 2004). In its absence, students of underrepresented groups have described the experience as an intimidating one with little or no relevance to their Aboriginal culture. Increasing the number of Aboriginal faculty and staff employed at post-secondary institutions gives Aboriginals, as it would for other minority groups, greater representation and control in PSE.

The University of Regina's manager of employment equity has created an electronic list called "*Careers for Aboriginal Scholars*". Any faculty member, Aboriginal scholar, graduate student or prospective graduate student from across North America may join the list, which is an information sharing network where universities can list faculty position postings or graduate student recruitment announcements. "*Careers for Aboriginal Scholars*" has more than 200 recipients on the list and is used by many Canadian universities in seeking out qualified Aboriginal applicants for faculty positions (as cited in Holmes, 2006).

One basic approach to improving Aboriginal enrollment and retention is providing bridging programs at PSE institutions that smooth the transition from secondary schooling and community living to the life of a post-secondary student. These capacity building programs help students meet qualifications for program entry and prepare students academically to manage a full course load. In these programs, typically extending over a full academic year, students take a reduced number of credit courses and are required to participate in a non-credit program created to assist students with developing skills in studying, writing, mathematics and technology to name a few (Holmes, 2006). StFX University in Antigonish offers year one students a similar

transition program known as EXCEL. Some transition programs also include additional support through tutoring, mentoring and academic advising. Tutoring offers students academic support in their core subject areas but also has been designed to ensure students' unique learning styles and study habits are blended with institutional expectations, as well as helping students through counseling regarding any social and community challenges that they face during PSE (Institutional Strategy and Practice, 2008). Through this support, students come to view tutoring services as a safe learning environment where they can develop positive relationships with their tutors, regardless of whether academic support is needed (Institutional Strategy and Practice, 2008). To facilitate academic success, tutors and instructors adapt teaching practices to accommodate Aboriginal students' preferred ways of learning. According to Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen (2000), most Aboriginal people are accustomed to the "field-dependent" style of education, which describes the process of learning by observing role models, whereas mainstream institutions typically demonstrate a "field independent" or abstract style of education. It is important that post-secondary institutions modify practices and implement programs to support Aboriginal learning styles in PSE. Students also benefit from bridging programs, such as career mentoring programs that prepare students to transition from PSE to the work force.

Other programs that support Aboriginal students at the post-secondary level are described as outreach programs. Outreach programs have been a positive asset to the development of Aboriginal education. They have been established to address the financial and social hardships that students encounter when pursuing PSE at institutions distant from their Aboriginal communities. Instead of traveling to remote institutions to attain a higher education, students are provided with alternative options that vary from one institution to the next. Community-based delivery provides the option of attending PSE programs in their own community by having instructors travel to and teach courses in the community or by appointing a local educational institution to deliver the course, both of which can be referred to as 'live courses' (Holmes, 2006). Another option is to receive instruction via video-conferencing, radio networks or online computer courses. Furthermore, for educational programs requiring field experience, students should be given the opportunity to do their practicum in their residential communities. An

additional means of making PSE accessible is to encourage those already in the work force to upgrade their education through part-time study (Knowledge Matters: Skills and Learning for Canadians, 2008). This model has been used with both Mi'kmaq Bachelor of Education cohorts of StFX. This provides Aboriginal students who may have significant family financial obligations with the opportunity to continue earning a living while pursuing a higher education (Knowledge Matters: Skills and Learning for Canadians, 2008).

Carleton University's *Bachelor of Social Work in First Nations* program is offered offcampus in northern communities. All of the programs have been developed as a result of discussions initiated by the communities themselves. In response to these requests, the school has set up BSW programs at several sites in Ontario and Quebec. The school is involved in partnerships with the Seven Generations Educational Institute in Fort Frances, Ontario, and the Moose Cree Education Authority in Moose Factory, Ontario. In Aboriginal communities it is a part-time program offered in partnership with Aboriginal education institutes. This six-year program is geared towards people working full-time in Aboriginal communities or with an Aboriginal population. Students take classes on a weekend schedule. When possible, the class schedule is spread out over the course of a regular term. Instructors travel to the different communities to teach a cohort of students. All courses are designed with some Aboriginal content. Some field seminars are conducted using WebCT. The first eight students graduated in 1997 (as cited in Holmes, 2006).

A Mi'kmaq Student Advisor and the Mi'kmaq Resource Centre provided by the Mi'kmaq College Institute at CBU have demonstrated themselves as effective methods of supporting First Nations students through PSE attainment. The Mi'kmaq Student Advisor serves as a "valuable information source and a helpful contact for students, faculty and staff, educational counsellors, Mi'kmaw organizations, government departments and employers" (Mi'kmaq College Institute, 2008). The Mi'kmaq Resource Centre "houses documents such as academic theses, articles and scholarly papers, books, and cultural artifacts unique to Aboriginal history, consolidate and accessible in one location" (Mi'kmaq College Institute, 2008). In recognition of the benefits that First Nations students receive from culturally responsive services offered at post-secondary institutions, StFX has employed a half-time Aboriginal student coordinator and plans to make the position full-time in the 2008-2009 academic year. The variety of support

available to Aboriginals pursuing PSE, whether academic, financial, social or personal, is growing. With these supports, more and more Aboriginal students are able to access and complete PSE, which in turn brings the Aboriginal community closer and closer to social and economic parity with the wider Canadian society.

Data Collection and Tracking

Inadequate unsystematic data collection and tracking systems are recognized as one of the leading causes of financial barriers met by Aboriginals in PSE. Due to a lack of data collection and tracking, INAC administrative authorities are hesitant to remove the cap on annual funding or to increase financial support for Aboriginal students. INAC's *PSSSP Administration Handbook* (1989) states that "support will be provided within the limits of funds voted by Parliament. If support of the number of eligible applicants exceeds the budget, applications will be deferred" (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005). When INAC and First Nations Administering Organization (FNAO) representatives were asked the question of whether they agreed or disagreed that overall funding of the PSSSP is adequate in meeting the needs of all eligible Aboriginal students, there was a dramatic difference in their responses (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005). More than 70 percent of the INAC representatives strongly agreed or agreed with this statement, whereas roughly 90 percent of the FNAO representatives strongly disagreed or disagreed (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005). To prove to the Minister of Finance that PSSSP does not adequately satisfy all eligible Aboriginal applicants, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) conducted a national telephone survey to quantify the number of students on waiting lists for PSE funding (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005). The names of 3,700 applicants we found on waiting lists as of May 2000 (First Nations Post Secondary Education Review, as cited in INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005). AFN later reported an estimation of 9,465 applicants of Aboriginal ancestry who were unable to access financial support for PSE (National Chief's covering letter, 2000 as cited in INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005). The reason given, to over half of the First Nations applicants, for the deferral of their applications was a lack of funding (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005). PSSSP funding plays a vital role in the ability of Aboriginal learners to access PSE institutions,

as 77.4 percent of students surveyed admitted that PSE would not have been a feasible option without PSSSP funding (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005). The lack of credible data has rendered administering authorities unable to fully address basic management concerns about PSSSP in a systematic manner (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005). Collecting and tracking information regarding the approval and deferral of Aboriginal applicants for PSSSP funding should help to demonstrate to INAC how well the PSE program satisfies all eligible claims. With respect to student records, detailed information should be collected regarding the number of students who are funded, students who are eligible but not funded, and students who do not qualify for funding (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2005). Data should serve to show the Department the need to expand the PSE program budget to make funding available to all eligible Aboriginal students.

Policy frameworks should be developed to outline specific measures for collecting accurate information about the number of Aboriginal applicants who are approved and denied funding, but also for the allocation of funds. The fairness and consistency in delivery methods of PSSSP funding is another area requiring review by FNAO and INAC officials (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005). The current method of delivery is one in which INAC distributes funds to each region depending on previous year's allocations. INAC's regional offices then take responsibility to allocate their PSE budget among eligible First Nations students in their district (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005). Three delivery methods have been used – “regional budget increments are distributed to FNAOs in proportion to existing base budgets; in proportion to annual populations (determined on the basis of band membership or a specific age cohort); or according to set allowances per eligible student in each community” (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005). The distribution of PSSSP funding by INAC should not be based on previous year's allocations to regional offices nor be allocated using inconsistent methods, but rather national funding formulas should be developed at the PSE program level, to ensure adequate funding is available for Aboriginal students to attend PSE (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005).

Too often, significant numbers of Aboriginal learners are not given the opportunity to take advantage of PSE as a result of inadequate PSSSP funding (Mayes,

2007). This inadequacy in funding has resulted, in part, from the program's inability to keep pace with the realities of society, such as rising tuition costs (Mayes, 2007). As is supported by Nathan Matthew of the First Nations Education Steering Committee, this dilemma has the potential to be corrected if the program takes into account actual tuition costs and "all the issues around what it costs to live; food, transportation, accommodation, and child care" when allocating funds (Mayes, 2007). Darren Googoo, Director of Education for Membertou First Nations, reported that his community receives roughly \$12,200 to send one student to a post-secondary institution (Mayes, 2007). However, Mr. Googoo claims that the amount received 9 years ago, when he assumed the position, was \$11,726 per student (Mayes, 2007). With marginal increases in student funding over the past decade and rising expenses associated with pursuing a higher education, how can communities be expected to send the same numbers of students to PSE? With costs reaching up to \$16,700 to send one student to a post-secondary institution, it has been calculated that communities, in this case, Membertou is 33% under funded on a per student basis (Mayes, 2007). From these findings it can be suggested that by tracking and considering the current costs of tuition, books, housing, living expenses, child care, travel, tutoring and counseling associated with pursuing a higher education, the allocation of funding by the PSE program will better reflect actual costs and better support First Nations students in achieving a PSE.

Aside from the inconsistencies demonstrated in the amount and delivery of PSSSP funding to Aboriginal applicants, inconsistencies have also been noted on how INAC managers rank student-funding priorities compared to FNAOs. INAC and FNAO demonstrate a shared view of the top two student funding priorities, being students returning to continue a post-secondary program and recent graduates of high school, yet their ranking of priorities differ markedly from one another thereafter (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005). The development of a collaborative partnership between INAC and First Nations representatives should enable them to establish a collective view of the priorities under which Aboriginal students should receive PSSSP funding, as well as the ranking of priorities. Furthermore, this partnership should enable PSE stakeholders to better define and appoint the roles and responsibilities involved in the delivery of ISSP funding. The current ISSP roles and responsibilities outlined by the PSE Program Terms

and Conditions in 1989 have been said to create a hierarchical rather than a partnership dynamic among stakeholders, with INAC regional offices at the heart of three separate operational groups (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005). Such a structure hinders the PSE program “objective of working together in partnership with First Nations, the private sector and other governments” (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005). To achieve greater coherence and effective dialogue between INAC headquarters and regional offices, regional offices and post-secondary institutions more collaboration is necessary.

ISSP funding has a somewhat different delivery mechanism than PSSSP funding. Similar to PSSSP funding, INAC headquarters establishes yearly regional funding, however, regional offices are expected to form regional committees who, with the cooperation of Aboriginal leaders, set goals and priorities for the district; review and rank program proposals; and make recommendation for ISSP funding (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005). MK ISSP funding is allocated to equalize the costs of PSE not covered by PSSSP funding and appears to be well received by the communities. However, this method of ISSP funding allocation leaves little or no funding for targeted community programs. Several problems arise from current methods of ISSP allocation. The first step in improving the ISSP is to base funding on demand rather than previous years’ allocations (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005). Secondly, to address the lack of data regarding the overall distribution of ISSP funds, the Standing Committee (Mayes, 2007) recommends that the Department outline specific measures for collecting and tracking information regarding ISSP allocations to better evaluate whether the actual needs of Aboriginals and post-secondary institutions are met and to determine whether an adjustment needs to be made to the upper limit of the amount allocated to account for actual funding needs (Mayes, 2007). A third matter that requires review is the understanding that ISSP funding is, for the most part, short-term and project-based (Mayes, 2007). Because current approaches limit ISSP funding for new Aboriginal programs and institutions, the National Association of Indigenous Institutes for Higher Learning (NAIHL), among others advocate formalizing long-term and/or core funding as a means to support Aboriginal program development and to bring stability to First Nations educational institutions (INAC Evaluation of the PSE Program, 2005).

In addition to PSE funding, information gathering and tracking of Aboriginal learners should also be performed. The Department, post-secondary institutions and First Nations communities should keep a statistical profile of PSE applicants, including prospective, current and graduated students, regarding age, gender, Aboriginal identity, area of residence, financial resources (familial, loan programs, scholarships, bursaries, employment), level of education, barriers encountered, supports needed to meet success, academic achievement, evaluation of available programs and services, employment prospects, whether they are working in their field of study, whether they are working in their communities and whether they are working for the government (Jamieson, 2006 as cited in Mayes, 2007). Collecting this range of student information will help to develop a sense of whether the supports and programs offered by post-secondary institutions are effective in assisting Aboriginals meet success in PSE and autonomy in their communities. Many of the problems surrounding the success of Aboriginals in PSE are predictable (Mayes, 2007). The Standing Committee stresses the importance of developing a good information base to determine how students are doing and to make educated decisions based on that (Mayes, 2007). Keeping track of student academic achievement in PSE would help to identify difficulties First Nations students experience in core subject areas, which can then be dealt with at the community level through capacity building programs to ensure the success of future students attending PSE. Gathering and tracking information regarding Aboriginal learners will assist communities in better understanding their academic weaknesses and better setting them up to meet success in PSE.

The use, quality and success of Aboriginal programs provided by post-secondary institutions is another area requiring data collection and tracking. Monitoring student enrollment in specific programs will enable First Nations communities, institutions and INAC to better evaluate whether programs are worthwhile to continue or whether funds would be better spent on programs of greater interest to Aboriginals and their community. The quality of Aboriginal programs should also be subject to ongoing review by institutions. Procedures should be implemented to assess how well instructors present knowledge in ways that are conducive to students' learning styles, how well programs support student achievement and how well program content relates to Aboriginal culture.

Understanding the qualities of programs enables improvements to be made to them. Above all, it is critical to track the success of programs. The success of a program is not only measured by the number of students receiving credentials, but also by the ability of those students to take the knowledge, skills and attitudes that they have acquired to attain quality jobs and to contribute to Aboriginal autonomy.

Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey has made great efforts to achieve greater tracking and accountability. With INAC financial support MK has hired Dadavan Systems Inc. to develop a web-based tracking system that meets the needs of both First Nations and INAC. This software database records the educational outcomes for First Nations' students and communities at the early childhood, elementary, secondary and in the near future the post-secondary level. The Dadavan system tracks all nominal roll requirements (name, age, address), PSE finances (tuition, books, travel, rent) and PSI/course requirements (name of institution, degree sought, credits). With this tracking system MK hopes to continue educational improvements by tracking the indicators of student success.

Communication, Partnership and Interagency Collaboration

None of these initiatives will work without the cooperation and partnership of individual Aboriginal people, their communities, post-secondary institutions and INAC. By forming partnerships with Aboriginal communities, universities and colleges have been able to increase the enrollment and success of Aboriginal students. Post-secondary institutions have been able to meet the needs and priorities of Aboriginal students by asking Aboriginal representatives to join governing bodies and get involved in the management and improvement of post-secondary programs. Such collaborations have provided Aboriginal communities with more control of their own education.

Aboriginal communities are calling for better communication with INAC. The PSE Program is currently constrained because of the absence of a contemporary policy framework (INAC, 2005). First Nation and Inuit authorities and INAC representatives need to decide on and assign the roles and responsibilities of each party. Through better monitoring and reporting of funding, accountability can be achieved. The more that INAC and Aboriginal representatives share the same objectives for the PSE Program, the

stronger the PSE program will be in setting clear guidelines for the distribution of funds. With better communication and shared accountability, INAC will be in a better position to increase funds and remove the 2 percent annual funding cap, so that more Aboriginal students can attend PSE.

Membertou, a Mi'kmaw community in Cape Breton has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Nova Scotia Community College (Mayes, 2007). This memorandum is an agreement that the community college will invest in Membertou, by visiting and promoting the importance of PSE. NSCC has also reserved placements for Aboriginal people wishing to enroll in their programs. Membertou is also working with Cape Breton University to create programs of study that provide meaning to Aboriginal learners (Mayes, 2007). Together, Membertou and the college are developing programs that address the needs of the community.

Membertou is a great model for other First Nations and Inuit bands across Canada. It has made higher education a priority and has noticed great improvements. Aboriginal communities can increase PSE enrollment and retention by communicating directly with individuals in the community. Communities like Membertou, have recognized the need for PSE to achieve quality employment and therefore encourage its people to work towards a higher education. Membertou has created a supportive environment, where every student that applies for PSE funding receives funding (Mayes, 2007). The example of Membertou shows that Aboriginal communities can achieve success in education and employment.

In 1998, Membertou First Nations founded the Social's Training Assistance Initiative Reinvestment Strategy (STAIRS) Funding Committee consisting of the various departments mentioned above. This committee enables departmental members to effectively communicate the needs of the community in achieving autonomy and set priorities for student PSE funding. In this particular case, the individual departments maintain control of their own funding envelopes. Rather than pooling their individual silos, as it has been deemed by some as an unworkable option because each department receives funding with distinct guidelines for priority and allocation, Membertou has taken a different approach to acquiring funding for Aboriginal PSE. Membertou's STAIRS Funding Committee made available up to \$350,000 – \$400,000 per year by reinvesting

child welfare funding into PSE training. In this approach, Aboriginals are still given the money that they are entitled to, but in a way that better ensures attainment of higher education and further autonomy of the Aboriginal community.

To address the longstanding issues of incoherence and inconsistency among various department levels, including government officials, post-secondary institutions and First Nations representatives, in the setting and practice of PSE funding policies, priorities and allocations, the development of community-based coordination committees are being explored. The intention of such committees is to bring together all departments involved in the post-secondary education of Aboriginals to collectively:

- establish guidelines under which students are eligible for funding
- decide on what priority is put on training to meet community needs
- develop ways to support students
- agree on the level of financial support students should receive
- select the department best suited to fund students applying to specific fields of study.

The objectives and the extent to which they are achieved are subject to variation depending on the level of cooperation the committee, and the individual departments that comprise it, are willing to take on. The departments involved in this coordination committee could include Directors of Education, Social and Health, Native Employment Officers (NEO), as well as representatives of Band Council, Provincial Training, Human Resource Development Canada (HRDC)/ Mi'kmaq Education Training Secretariat (METS) and the Provincial Student Loans Department. In reference to the Stone Soup fable, a tale of two travelers on a pilgrimage who rest on the side of the road in an impoverished village and who, with the contributions of townsfolk, turn their 'stone soup' into a hearty stew on which they all dined, we are reminded of the benefits that cooperation brings. Through the cooperation and contribution of departments, the access, retention and success of First Nations in PSE can be vastly improved. Figure 3.1 provides a schematic model that may serve as a template for initiating a comprehensive interagency PSE evaluation framework at the level of each First Nations community, in a manner similar to the Membertou funding committee.

Figure 3.1 Mi'kmaw Interagency PSE Committee

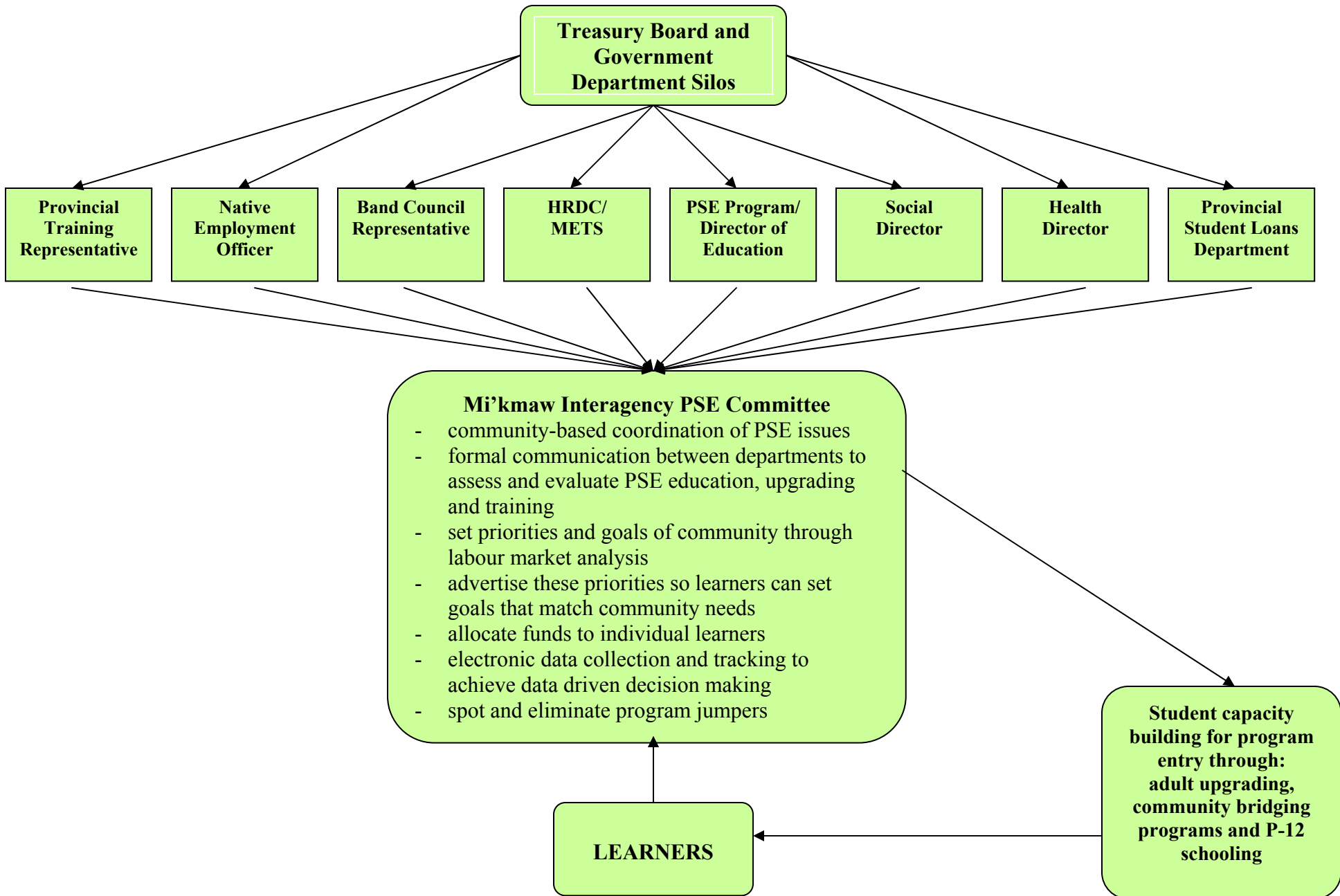


Figure 3.2 Options for Community-Based Coordination

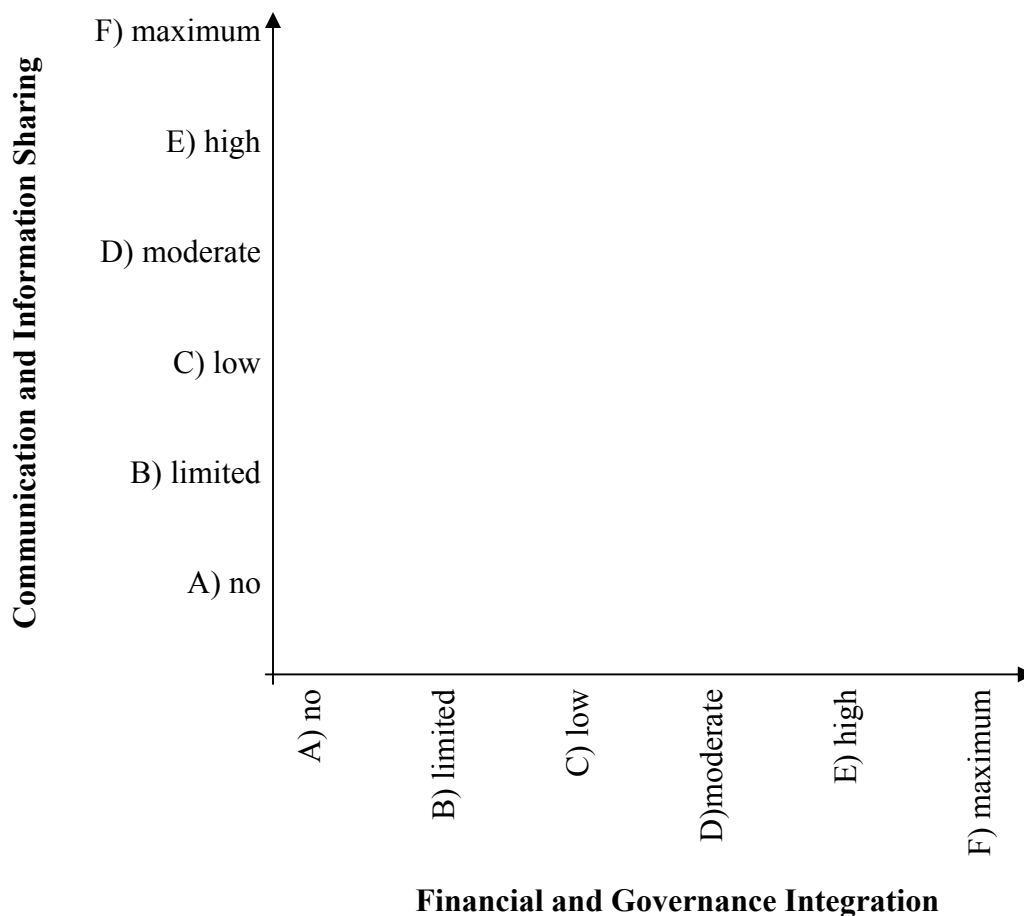
Options for Community-Based Coordination	
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • represents status quo • no formal communication or coordination between different departments • each department sets its own priorities and allocates funding based on its own standards
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited communication among departments • no sharing of departmental funds (funding is allocated based on individual guidelines)
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an interagency committee is formed (collaboration among departments) • committee determines community needs and sets common priorities • committee reviews applications for funding and decides together which department will be responsible for supporting each student (funding allocations continue to be based on the priorities of individual departments)
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an interagency committee is formed • departments establish common priorities and shared goals for the community • the committee creates a pooled source of funding without contributing from their individual pots (ex. Membertou's redirection of child welfare money to PSE support and upgrading/training)
E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an interagency committee is formed and departments establish common priorities and goals for the community • a pooled source of funding is formed (each department directs upwards of 10% of their budget to the interagency committee)
F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an interagency committee is formed and departments establish common priorities and goals for the community • all funds brought to the committee by each department is pooled together to make one large PSE budget • the committee collectively decides which department is best suited to fund each student applicant and how funding is allocated

As identified by the *Options for Community-Based Coordination* chart (Figure 3.2), Membertou’s STAIRS funding committee represents Option D, where the members of the committee collaborate to set common priorities for student funding and to determine community needs and goals. At this level of coordination, the committee works together to review student applications for funding and to decide which department is best suited to financially support applicants, as is done by committees representing Option C. Committees adopting Option C differ from those embracing Option D in that they do not assume the responsibility to redirect sources of current funding to support PSE training. Committees taking on Options A or B demonstrate greater independence

and greater incoherence among department levels. Option A represents status quo; the lack of formal communication and coordination between departments involved in First Nations PSE and the allocation of student funding based on the priorities that they have set for themselves. Efforts in communication, though limited, are not demonstrated unless organized committees commit to the guidelines described by Option B. Similar to Option A, Option B does not require committee members to share PSE funding. The sharing of funding is not evident in coordination committees who have not selected Option D, E or F as their course of action. Committees who adopt Option D, E or F as their course of action reflect highest levels of coordination through well-defined community needs and student funding priorities. The way in which options E and F differ is the extent to which they pool funds. Departments within committees representing Options E transfer upwards of 10% of their individual funding envelope to an interagency pot from which eligible First Nations learners receive financial PSE support. Coordination committees representing Option F request that each department enter 100% of its funding envelope into one large pot to support Aboriginal learners in PSE.

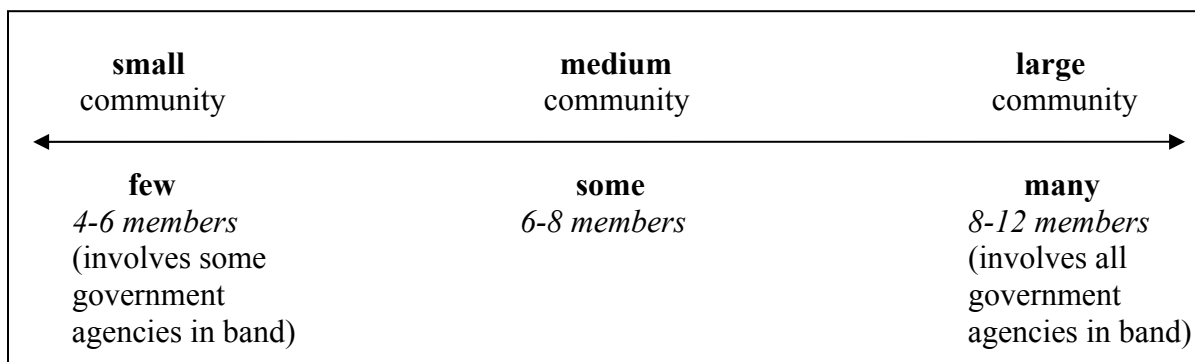
Aside from the obvious benefits of greater coherence and coordination among stakeholders in Aboriginal PSE, establishing community-based coordination committees enables the spotting and elimination of “program jumpers,” as well as provides students with capacity building opportunities to ensure entry into programs of interest.

Figure 3.3 Varying Levels of Communication and Governance Among Interagency Committees



First Nations communities can decide the level of communication among committee representatives and the amount of funding that is shared among them (See Figure 3.3). They can also decide the size of the committee by choosing what representatives they want involved (See Figure 3.4). Smaller communities may feel that it is more viable to constitute committees that have fewer representatives from each department, have fewer departments represented, or have one individual represent multiple departments. Regardless of the size of the committee, the primary goal of increased communication can be achieved allowing priorities and goals of the community to be met.

Figure 3.4 Community Size Dictates the Composition of its Interagency Committee



Summary

Figure 3.5 synthesizes strategies for best practices related to improving access, retention and success of First Nations PSE students. Six major areas are part of this categorization and support policies that identify strategies related to enhanced and improved access/attraction, PSE programming, student support, data collection and tracking, shared communication through multiple levels and interagency collaboration. The final chapter identifies a series of recommendations that are meant to foster further policies, procedures and practices to enhance PSE within Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey communities.

Figure 3.5 Best Practices for Aboriginal access, retention and success in PSE

Access/ Attraction	PSE Programming	Support	Data Collection/ Tracking	Collaboration/ Communication	Interagency Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • early intervention • proactive recruitment • proactive admissions policies • reserved seats in limited enrollment programs • increase PSE capacity to enroll more students • career development opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Native studies programs that are sensitive to Aboriginal knowledge • cross-cultural awareness training for faculty and staff • embrace the partnership approach to Aboriginal education • Aboriginal involvement in curriculum development • Establish Aboriginal controlled institutions that control governance and knowledge systems 	<p><i>Student</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Elders-in-Residence” • physical space on campus • community involvement in school life <p><i>Financial</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase PSE funding • base funding on actual costs • assist students in finding and applying for alternate financial resources <p><i>Programs and Practices</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hire First Nations staff • outreach programs • culturally sensitive programs • develop an awareness of Aboriginal needs and learning styles • offer tutoring, mentoring, counseling, advising services • student capacity building for program entry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop a standardized collection and tracking system • document information concerning student eligibility and deferral for PSE access and funding • track student success and programs of interest in PSE • track the use, quality and success of PSE programs • track the allocation and delivery of funds for students (PSSSP) and programs (ISSP) • collect and track actual funding needs of students and institution 	<p><i>INAC/ Community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop a mutually agreeable PSE policy framework • clarify responsibilities and strengthen shared accountability • increase available funding • remove 2% annual funding cap <p><i>Institution/ Community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal representation in governing bodies and faculty • implement programs to meet community needs <p><i>Individual/ Community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encourage students to pursue higher education through awareness programs • provide community support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish a community-based coordination committee • communicate the needs and goals of the community • establish guidelines for student funding eligibility • set priorities on educational training • develop student support methods • decide on the level of financial support students receive • appoint departments best suited to fund students pursuing specific areas of study • redirect or pool sources of funding • reduces the occurrence of program jumping

Chapter 4 – Recommendations

First Nations communities have made great efforts to support Aboriginal students in the attainment of a PSE, despite the policy limitations. Knowing that Aboriginals have been subject to an assimilative nature of schooling in the past and realizing the likelihood of labour shortages in the future, INAC is preparing to take action to invest in the PSE of Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginals are of particular interest in ensuring the stability of the Canadian economy because they are the fastest growing population in the country. Today's economy is a knowledge-based one with a considerable proportion of its jobs requiring some form of post-secondary education or training. Aboriginals are faced with a multitude of barriers in the pursuit of PSE. Through extensive research, these barriers have been explored and best practices have been recommended to improve the access, retention and success of Aboriginals in PSE. With the necessary supports, Aboriginals have the opportunity to achieve a higher education, attain quality jobs and contribute to the self-government of the Aboriginal community and to the economic well being of Canada.

Based on the extensive literature review of the history, barriers and best practices in Aboriginal education, 5 recommendations have been developed that should increase the enrollment, retention and success of Aboriginals in PSE.

Recommendation 1 – Ensuring better preparation, access and transition programming for post-secondary education. For years there has been a gap in the enrollment of post-secondary education between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. Narrowing the gap and on a larger scale, supporting the economic growth of Aboriginal communities and Canada can be achieved by:

- 1.1 **continuing** to support Aboriginal communities in promoting the importance of higher education in achieving quality jobs and autonomy for their communities through career fairs and information sessions
- 1.2 **using** proactive recruitment practices such as informative pamphlets, websites and summer camps to attract prospective students. These practices should be directed towards Aboriginal males as well as females with dependants, as these groups are typically underrepresented in PSE, and inform students of high demand areas of employment within their community to help them better choose a reliable course of study in PSE. Recruitment should also be directed towards Aboriginals at an early stage in their schooling, so that students view a PSE as a realistic option for their future
- 1.3 **offering** transition programs at the community level that prepare students for a full academic course load in PSE
- 1.4 **insisting** that post-secondary institutions establish flexible admission policies that address the special circumstances of Aboriginal students without lowering admissions standards. Admissions standards should

evaluate students on a holistic level by considering such things as transcripts, life experiences, references and interviews

- 1.5 **insisting** that post-secondary institutions reserve seats in high demand, if not all, post-secondary programs that meet the specific needs of the Aboriginal community
- 1.6 **allowing** coordination committees in each First Nations community to set and implement priorities around key community-driven programs

Recommendation 2 – **Supporting Mi'kmaw students through more appropriate, coordinated and intensified community and institutional efforts.** Once assisting Aboriginal students in accessing PSE, it is important to provide the supports needed to complete the program. Rates of retention can be increased by:

- 2.1 **promoting** affirmative action by increasing percentages of students, faculty and staff as well as offering programs that reflect Aboriginal culture, language and community. This can be achieved by accepting all Aboriginal students, faculty and staff that meet minimum requirements for applied positions
- 2.2 **encouraging** members of the community to participate in the school life of their Aboriginal students by getting involved in and organizing recreational activities, culturally appropriate presentations and fundraisers
- 2.3 **insisting** that PSIs provide academic support for Aboriginal learners through tutoring, mentoring, counseling and academic advising
- 2.4 **recruiting** members of the Aboriginal community to volunteer as participants in counseling services and the Elders-in-Residence program to provide students with personal support on campus
- 2.5 **recommending** that PSIs offer outreach programs, such as community delivery, to enable students to achieve PSE without experiencing the financial and social hardships that come with relocating
- 2.6 **providing** supports to diverse programs, using common best practices

Recommendation 3 – Better coordination, enhancement and prioritization of PSE funding. Two of the greatest barriers to the access and retention of Aboriginals in PSE are limited funding and the lack of coordination in allocating funds. The financial burden experienced by Aboriginals can be alleviated by:

- 3.1 **removing** the 2% annual increase cap on funding. With the cap on funding, innovative strategies need to be developed to support students in PSE with inadequate financial assistance. Removing the funding cap will provide the financial support to allow more students to access PSE and to allow funding to be based on actual costs
- 3.2 **extending** the PSE program budget beyond tuition and book costs, to cover additional expenses such as travel, counseling, housing and child care
- 3.3 **establishing** equity of funding. National funding formulas should be designed and implemented to promote equity in the allocation of funds to First Nations bands and students
- 3.4 **insisting** that PSE funding is reevaluated so that all eligible Aboriginal learners receive funding levels that match those received by other Canadians through the Canada Student Loan Program
- 3.5 **informing** students of alternate means of financial assistance such as loan programs, scholarships and bursaries, part time and summer employment opportunities
- 3.6 **having** an interagency committee prioritize funding across post-secondary training programs

Recommendation 4 – Coordinated, coherent, community-based and regional tracking and analysis of PSE student data. Funding based on actual costs cannot be achieved unless the data challenge is resolved. This data challenge can be resolved by tracking all post-secondary education students across various programs in one community-based data base, to enable each community to regularly assess and represent its human resource needs and assets. This tracking system should include:

- 4.1 the **gathering** of accurate data on a yearly basis regarding the actual funding needs of individual students to ensure data-driven decision-making. Individual First Nations communities should be gathering data on the current costs of tuition, books, housing, living expenses, child care, travel, tutoring and counseling so that INAC can review and adjust PSE budget and allocations based on these reports
- 4.2 **tracking** the number of eligible students who have applied for PSSSP funding and the portion of students who are accepted and denied. The

amount of funding each student receives should also be recorded, as well as any deficit in funding

- 4.3 a **record** of the number of potential PSSSP applicants for the following academic year. Aboriginal administering organizations and its regional offices should be tracking and predicting the numbers of students who will be graduating and possibly attending PSE at least one year before applications for PSE financial support are due
- 4.4 the **analysis** of labour market demands and employment trends to support students in meeting the needs of Aboriginal economy
- 4.5 **standard guidelines** identifying criteria and priorities for allocating PSSSP funds to individual Aboriginal learners
- 4.6 an **outline** of specific measures for collecting information regarding individual student demographics, performance, retention and source of funding so that comparisons can be drawn between institutions to improve Aboriginal PSE
- 4.7 an **examination** of the participation in and success of Aboriginal support programs funded by ISSP. The percentage of Aboriginal students using the program, and a student evaluation of support services should be collected
- 4.8 **descriptions** of successful programs and initiatives Aboriginal learners experience in PSE so that other institutions can adopt similar strategies
- 4.9 **guaranteed** privacy protection and confidentiality
- 4.10 **coordinated** data collection and tracking across post-secondary training programs

Recommendation 5 – Establishment of interagency committee in each MK community to coordinate and plan across departments for more PSE coherence. Collaboration and coordination between the community, institution and government is essential in supporting Aboriginal student success in PSE. A stronger partnership can be built by:

- 5.1 **organizing** a community-based interagency committee for Aboriginal post-secondary training to set priorities and share PSE information. Members would include a band council representative, education, health, social, NEOs, METS and provincial training representative
- 5.2 **discussing** the needs and wants of all parties and developing common goals for Aboriginal PSE and promoting these goals to all band members

- 5.3 **clarifying** the data tracking and policy setting responsibilities for each party and determining how and whether they are being achieved
- 5.4 **organizing** regular meetings for MK members and other Aboriginal PSE stakeholders to attend that assess the progress of the PSE program and initiatives for Aboriginal education

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