Literature Review

State of Practice: Essential Skills Applications

with First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Canada

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Suzanne Klinga, Consultant

CCDF 🌳 FCDC

Contents

INTRODUCTION

In May 2012, the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) began a project, *The State of Practice: Essential Skills Applications with First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Canada (FIMESA)*. The aim of the project is to:

- Increase the understanding of Essential Skills (ES) Applications for First Nations, Inuit and Métis by developing a comprehensive inventory of current ES practices aimed at increasing employability and employment for First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth and adults living in diverse environments and;

- Increase capacity in the field by developing an ES community of practice engaged in the development and assessment of the inventory, the widespread dissemination of results and promotion of ongoing innovation through the sharing of best practices in ES application and evaluation.

This project is meant to solidify the field's understanding of the state of practice with respect to ES applications tailored to First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations, help uncover factors which contribute to strong employability and employment outcomes and, through the establishment of an ES community of practice, identify, share and promote innovation and excellence in service delivery and evaluation.

The purpose of this literature review is to describe the current level of need for ES development among First Nations, Inuit and Métis, to explore the state of practice of ES initiatives with these populations in Canada and to examine innovative practices in an effort to determine potential "markers of excellence" in ES programming.

APPROACH

This literature review used primarily online and active (email and telephone) research to identify and gather data. Research includes Canadian sources only. The following are examples of sources used in the review:

- Literacy databases and websites, such as the National Adult Literacy Database (NALD), Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) and its Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, DeCoda Literacy Solutions online library, the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) Essential Skills Database, and the Centre for Workplace Skills: Best Practices Database.

- Governmental (federal and provincial/territorial), industrial/occupational, First Nations, Inuit and Métis organizations' websites and reports for First Nations, Inuit and Métis demographics; First Nations, Inuit and Métis issues related to education, literacy, ES and labour market attachment; and First Nations, Inuit and Métis Literacy/ES initiatives. These included, but were not limited to, Human Resources Development Canada, Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Government of Nunavut, Conference Board of Canada, the Association of Sector Councils, Mining Industry Human Resources Council, Aboriginal Human Resource Council, Métis National Council, Assembly of First Nations, Nunavut Literacy Council, Saskatchewan

Aboriginal Literacy Network Inc., Yukon Literacy Council, NWT Literacy Council, Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, Ontario Native Literacy Coalition, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology, Bowes Valley College, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and DataAngel.

- Documents and reports of, and informal interviews with, organizations directly delivering First Nations, Inuit and Métis focused ES initiatives, including but not limited to the New Brunswick Aboriginal Workplace ES Initiative, Douglas College, Nuu-chah-nulth Employment and Training Program, Coast Salish Employment and Training Society, Interior Salish Employment & Training Society, Aboriginal Community Career Employment Services Society, Igniting the Power Within, and Simon Fraser University Stepping Stones Project.

- Networks for suggested resources, reports and relevant contacts, such as the Aboriginal ES Guiding Team, the Project's Working Group and Steering Committee, CCDF Board Members, and Nunavut Department of Education staff.

The first section of the paper provides the context for why ES and literacy programs are needed for First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples in Canada. This section looks at the historic and current barriers to First Nations, Inuit and Métis participation in education and employment and it also examines the convergence of the development of ES and the growth of First Nations, Inuit and Métis self-determination movements in education. This convergence contributed to the development of best practices in literacy education and ES programming for Indigenous peoples. This development is explored in the latter part of the paper, which looks at the current state of practice of First Nations, Inuit and Métis ES and literacy education. Highlighted in this section are the current challenges to programming and implementation, as well as what works in terms of ES program development and delivery. A summary of these "markers of excellence" is made in the conclusion and will be used as a starting point for developing the project's ES inventory.

BACKGROUND

First Nations, Inuit and Métis Barriers to Full Participation in Education and the Labour Force

The history of Indigenous peoples'[1] learning and literacy identifies many factors which have contributed to low literacy and poor education attainment levels among First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. These factors include but are not limited to:

- little awareness or recognition of First Nations, Inuit and Métis history, culture or holistic approaches to learning;
- disconnect between schools and the family/community;
- little, no or inappropriate formal schooling;
- special learning needs not identified or addressed;
- poor first language skills;
- issues of poverty such as poor housing, nutrition and health, poor self-concept and self-esteem and unemployment;
- lack of government policies and adequate funding;
- the need for First Nations, Inuit and Métis to control their own education; and
- the effects of racism, colonialism and other forms of oppression (Nunavut Literacy Council et al., 2007).

Research (College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading, (CSC), et. al., 2008; Alberta Education: Aboriginal Services Branch and Learning and Teaching Resources Branch, 2005; Legacy of Hope, 2009; Walker, 2009.) examines the direct relationship between First Nations, Inuit and Métis lower literacy rates and the resulting skill gaps to these social, cultural and economic barriers which began many years ago and continue for First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples today. While the literature is quick to note that many Indigenous people live balanced, fulfilling, and contributing lives, it also documents the on-going effects of colonization, forced assimilation and long-standing endemic racism in Canada. *Bare Essentials: An Introduction to Essential Skills*, a publication on Ontario-based adult upgrading and literacy organizations, states that the educational, literacy and labour market attachment issues among First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples today need to be viewed within the context of a history of imposed government policies "intended to assimilate Aboriginal peoples into the European way of thinking" chiefly through the Indian Act and the Residential School system (n.d., p. 19). The devastating and far reaching impact of Canada's assimilation polices include: the loss of family, community and identity for many of the residential school survivors; the extensive loss of Indigenous languages; the banning of traditional ceremonies subverting the transmission of oral histories and traditional values and the long-term intergenerational impacts. [2] As expressed in *Bare Essentials*, "a

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[1] Indigenous refers to three groups of indigenous peoples in Canada as recognized by the Canadian Constitution: First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Each of these cultures includes a wide variety of nations, customs, traditions and languages.

[2] "Intergenerational Impacts" refer to "the effects of physical and sexual abuse that were passed on to the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Aboriginal people who attended the residential school system" (Legacy of Hope, *Exhibit: Intergenerational Impact*. 2009, p.2). Retrieved August 2012 from: http://www.wherearethechildren.ca/en/exhibit/impacts.html.

whole way of life has been devastated, a way of life that was a source of a sense of self-worth, purpose and direction for Aboriginal people" (n.d., p. 20).

As a result of the intergenerational effects of the residential school systems, on-going socio-economic inequalities and the failure of the institutional educational system to recognize Indigenous students' many skills and to foster the strengths of First Nations, Inuit and Métis learners, formal schooling continues to be a negative experience for many First Nations, Inuit and Métis students (National Aboriginal Design Committee, 2002). These barriers, both historic and current, keep First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples from realizing their full measure of success with education and employment. This is corroborated by existing statistics on First Nations, Inuit and Métis educational attainment, literacy levels, workforce attachment and income levels, which can be found in Appendix A.

The Origins of ES and the Growth of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Literacy and ES Programming

The Literacy Movement and the Origins of ES

The origins of Canada's ES are linked to Canada's growing literacy movement from the 1970s to the present. The development of ES methodology was influenced by an evolving and contextualized definition of literacy[3] and the key findings of a number of critical literacy studies, namely the 1989 Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities (LSUDA), the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and the 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALLS) (MacLeod, 2007, p. 5). Results of both the 1994 and 2003 International Surveys revealed a troubling statistic that 42% of Canadians (about 9 million Canadians aged 16 to 65) performed below Level 3 on the prose and document literacy scales, the level of literacy needed to function effectively in daily life and at work (HRSDC, 2005). Critical for the work on ES, the survey data also showed that:
- Literacy skill levels are clearly linked to occupations and industries;
- Literacy levels affect employment stability and income;
- Educational attainment does not necessarily guarantee literacy proficiency;
- Literacy is a continuum of skill development; and,
- Literacy skills must be used to be maintained and strengthened (McLeod, 2007).

In response to this growing body of national and international research linking a set of measurable skills necessary to success in life, learning and the workplace, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) initiated the Essential Skills Research Project (ESRP) in 1994. Building on earlier research done in Canada, the United States, Great Britain and Australia, the ESRP identified 9 ES needed in every occupation. [4] Adapting scales from IALs and the Canadian Language Benchmarks, ES complexity levels were established and ES methodology for profiling Canadian occupations using the

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[3] The International Survey of Adult Literacy defined literacy as "the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community, to achieve one's goals and to develop one's knowledge and potential." Source: *Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada (Backgrounder)* (1996) Human Resources Development Canada and National Literacy Secretariat. Source: National Adult Literacy Database: Retrieved June 2012 from: http://library.nald.ca/item/2544.

[4] These nine skills are Reading Text, Document Use, Numeracy, Writing, Oral Communication, Working with Others, Thinking Skills, Computer Use and Continuous Learning. Note that the first three skills are literacy skills. These skills are used in nearly every job. They provide the foundation for learning all other skills including advanced technical and professional skills and enable people to evolve with their jobs and adapt to workplace change.

National Occupational Classification system was created (HRSDC web site). In the 2005 report, *Towards a Fully Literate Canada: Achieving National Goals through a Comprehensive Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy*, the ES and literacy skills were recognized as the foundational skills needed to ensure full participation in Canadian society. The Advisory Committee's proposed vision statement for the national strategy begins: "All Canadians have the right (this author's emphasis) to develop the literacy and essential skills they need in order to participate fully in our social, cultural, economic and political life..." (2005, p.22). It is the fulfillment of this right to ES and literacy education to which many Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups have been working towards.

From the 1970s to the present, First Nations, Inuit and Métis organizations and policies related to literacy and, specifically, adult literacy have grown and worked towards emphasizing, validating and reclaiming Indigenous peoples' approaches to education. There is recognition by First Nations, Inuit and Métis educators of the importance of literacy and ES programs to help First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples move toward healing and self-determination.   Margaret Roberts, Director of Occupational Systems and Standards (1990-1995) who oversaw the ESRP, saw this connection between ES and First Nations students early in her career at Yukon College:

> "As a student advisor, Roberts experienced the challenges of assessing the basic skills required for each trade program. Most of the college's students were adults from First Nations outside Whitehorse who wanted to undertake trade or other skilled training. Many had left school before completing Grade 9... The students were anxious to get on with their occupational skills training and were not interested in academic education if it was not related to their chosen occupation. After joining HRSD in Ottawa, Roberts became aware of research on Generic Skills... It showed that one could develop a list of specific generic skills and through research relate them to specific occupations. Retrospectively, she realized that applying the Generic Skills methodology would have made a significant contribution to the challenges faced at Yukon College." (McLeod, 2007, pp. 8-9).

The importance of literacy and ES for First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations is emphasized throughout the literature. For example, participants at the 2011 Aboriginal Literacy Symposium stated that:

> "Literacy and Essential Skills are a key factor for positive change. That is why raising literacy levels among Aboriginal people is a fundamental strategy to alleviate the unacceptable realities facing Aboriginal people... The most profound skills in preparation for employment are literacy and Essential Skills..." ("Background/Session Information").

The Current State of First Nations, Inuit and Métis ES Training

While there is a wealth of literature on First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples' learning and issues related to labour market attachment and literacy/ES gaps (see Appendix A), research on First Nations, Inuit and Métis ES initiatives in Canada is somewhat fragmented. There does not appear to be a comprehensive inventory identifying and describing current First Nations, Inuit and Métis ES initiatives or any broad-based assessment of best practice models or the effectiveness of ES interventions.

Existing research on First Nations, Inuit and Métis ES programming tends to include: studies by provincial government ministries, industry reports on labour needs, conference proceedings, results of

surveys, focus groups and interviews with practitioners and participants, case studies of industry-driven workplace literacy/ES projects and documents generated by First Nations, Inuit and Métis agencies providing service delivery. The material is typically focused on individual provinces, particular industries or specific organizations. This literature is valuable, but not often accessed by front-line programmers, trainers or ES practitioners. As a whole, it identifies common challenges, a number of best practices and innovative approaches.

The Challenges to ES Programming Development and Implementation among First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples

There are 3 key reports that refer to the main challenges in delivering labour market programming globally to Indigenous peoples: *Aboriginal Labour Market Programming: A Scoping Review* (Harrison and Lindsay, 2009), *Ministry of Advance Education Workplace Essential Skills Initiative Phase 1: Aboriginal Learner Focus* (Douglas College, 2008) and *Barriers and Successful Approach to Preparing and Employing Aboriginal Trades People:* (MNP LLP for Industry Training Authority (ITA) of BC, 2012). All of these reports are from BC and only one is ES specific (Douglas College 2008). They highlight many barriers to effective labour market training, including ES and literacy development, with Indigenous participants. The common challenges highlighted in these reports are:

- **Lack of coordination between major stakeholder groups** (government, industry and First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities). This has resulted in participants having problems finding the programs to meet their education needs;

- **Lack of First Nations, Inuit and Métis control of programming.** This has resulted in poor student outcomes;

- **Common barriers to sustainable employment for First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples not typically addressed in labour market programming.** Barriers such as a lack of awareness of career opportunities, racism, disempowering beliefs, job retention problems, lack of jobs on-reserves, dislocation, inflexible academic requirements for training programs are rarely addressed in these initiatives;

- **Lack of long term support for First Nations, Inuit and Métis clients adapting and adjusting to the workforce;**

- **Lack of clarity around program goals and evaluative success indicators;**

- **Multiple and unique challenges in remote and rural communities** including limited access to training and supports such as daycare and associated costs. There is little or no access to public transport, major distances between remote communities and work and a lack of personal vehicles and driver's licences;

- **Lack of access to culturally relevant ES and technical skills training.**

- **Issues of "motivation, life skills, self-esteem, drug and alcohol abuse, and other issues which negatively impact the First Nations, Inuit and Métis learner's ability to successfully access and complete training"** (Douglas College, 2008, p. 1).

- **Lack of readiness or awareness at the community, family and individual level:** The ITA of BC study revealed that poor understanding of career opportunities among participants, poor

working conditions or occupational requirements, lack of parental or spousal support for the trainee, lack of awareness of the impact of training on family life and family responsibilities, poor awareness of workplace expectations and workplace culture, and need for basic life skills were key barriers to training First Nations, Inuit and Métis participants in the Skilled Trades;

- **Lack of funding:** Inadequate financial support for both trainees and programs assisting Indigenous trades people;

- **Lack of First Nations, Inuit and Métis awareness:** Little understanding in the workplace of First Nations, Inuit and Métis cultural differences and issues of racism and discrimination.

In addition to reviewing these reports, CCDF conducted informal interviews with a number of staff of First Nations organizations delivering ES training programs in rural and remote areas of BC.[5] These interviews revealed a number of important issues facing delivery organizations. For example, interviewees spoke about the lack of capacity to meet the growing numbers of participants seeking training, the lack of communication between First Nations, Inuit and Métis service deliverers, limited awareness and understanding of ES among community members and employers and the lack of information on current ES resources, strategies or tools.

One interviewee noted that given its importance to both Indigenous peoples' culture and the workplace, their program had added a tenth essential skill: listening. This raises a key question regarding the congruence between the current ES framework and the valued competencies associated with Indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge and activities (e. g. survival and land based skills, use of personal and collective memory, multiple literacies, observation of nature, listening relationship to place/ environment, etc.). No literature was found which directly addresses this question.

What is evident from both the published and active research is that the potential barriers impacting labour market initiatives for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people are rooted in diverse causes; causes that require innovative approaches that go beyond what is typically expected of training and employment programming (MNP LLP, 2012).

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[5] Issues regarding implementation were gleaned from four informal interviews and related here with permission from the following: Harvey McLeod, Executive Director and Georgina Beatty, Community Program Liaison of the Interior Salish employment & Training Society, Merritt, BC; Jan E. Green, B.A., B.Ed., M.Ed. (ALGC) Adult Alternative Learning Education Specialist, a-m'aa-sip Essential Skills, Nuu-chah-nulth Employment and Training Program, Port Alberni, B.C.; Leslie Kitson, Project Coordinator, Literacy and Essential Skills, Coast Salish Employment and Training Society, Duncan, BC.

WHAT WORKS?

First Nations, Inuit and Métis Perspectives on Learning

In response to the growth of First Nations, Inuit and Métis self-determination in education, over the last four decades there has been an increase in the research on Indigenous peoples' knowledge, literacy and learning. This research has been generated by First Nations, Inuit and Métis and non-indigenous literacy organizations, scholars and practitioners across Canada. It has contributed greatly to the body of work on literacy, constructivist approaches to learning and the effectiveness of First Nations, Inuit and Métis and non-Indigenous adult literacy and ES training programs.

The research addresses three main themes: 1) the definition of literacy from an Indigenous peoples' perspective; 2) First Nations, Inuit and Métis holistic and lifelong approaches to learning; and 3) learning strategies and best practices in adult First Nations, Inuit and Métis literacy and basic skills development programming.

Literacy from an Indigenous peoples' perspective is seen as integrated and embedded in the knowledge and language of the people (holistic) and inextricably linked to both individual and collective identity (Balonoff et al. 2006). Literacy from an Indigenous peoples' perspective goes beyond print-based literacy or the cognitive skills of reading, writing or numeracy needed to access the labour market. Rather, it is a lifelong process and "a way of life" based on a *wholistic*[6] worldview.

In its *Adult Learning Strategy*, the Government of Nunavut states that being literate is living your language, traditional values and culture (2005). Antone and Gamlin (2002) concur with this and state that literacy is the container and transmitter of culture; it affirms the worldview and empowers the spirit of Indigenous peoples. Literacy facilitates a sense of purpose, promotes achievement and aids in the development of self-determination (Antone and Gamlin, 2002).

Studies have revealed the sophistication, complexity and multiplicities of Indigenous literacies. The Ulukhaktok Literacies Research Project, a multi-year research project undertaken by the NWT Literacy Council in collaboration with the village of Ulukhaktok, NWT examined what constitutes literacy in the context of a northern Inuit community.   The research reinforced how Indigenous literacies are profoundly tied to individual and community identity.   The people of Ulukhaktok still value and use their mother tongue of Inuinnaqtun and their traditional literacies. The researchers found that these literacies were present even when the people were using English: "We see and hear people using English lexicon and syntax when everything else is Inuinnaqtun" (Balanoff et al., 2006, p.12).

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[6] "Wholistic refers to the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical aspect of human beings and our relation to Creator and environment" Antone and Gamlin. *Foundations for Aboriginal Adult Literacy*, 2002, p. 26. Retrieved June 2012 from: http://www.adulterc.org/Proceedings/2004/papers/Antone.PDF . At the Adult Education Research Conference (AERC), Antone made a distinction between the terms *wholistic and holistic.* According to Antone, "*Wholistic* describes the Aboriginal philosophy in which "everything is related" by virtue of shared origins and in which, by extension, the human being is considered an entire whole; that is, mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally as an individual, with one's family and extended family, one's people, and with the cosmos in sacred relationships. This is distinct from a "holistic" philosophy in which the term 'related' is taken as meaning 'all things are interconnected' by virtue of sharing an environment in which action leads to a type of 'domino effect' in a secular world." Antone &Gamlin. *Literacy and Learning: Acknowledging Aboriginal Holistic Approaches to Learning in Relation to 'Best Practices' Literacy Training Programs*, 2003, p. 9.
Holistic and wholistic are commonly defined as synonymous and are used so throughout this document.

The research also revealed the holistic nature of the hamlet's traditional literacies. **Figure 5** shows the critical elements of Ulukhaktok's literacies in comparison to those of English/Western literacy.

Figure 5

ENGLISH OR WESTERN	ULUKHAKTOK
Alphabetic and print-based	Pattern-based
Linguistic or meaning-based	Multi-modal (oral, aural, visual, kinesthetic and emotional modes)
Vehicle to transmit knowledge	Practices that generate knowledge
Points to the text	Points to the world (text includes the physical world and created or crafted works)
Context-free	Context dependent
Individual	Relational

Source: Living Literacies Slide Presentation: Ulukhaktok Literacies Research Project, Nunavut Knowledge Exchange. 2009. Retrieved June 2012 from: http://www.nwt.literacy.ca/research/living_literacies.pdf

This holistic approach to literacy is reflected in First Nations, Inuit and Métis learning principles and models. While First Nations, Inuit and Métis express their lifelong learning models differently, a result of diverse and unique cultures, histories and geographies, they share a common vision of learning as a purposeful, holistic and lifelong process (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, p. 5).

The literature identifies and describes a number of key attributes associated with Indigenous peoples' learning and skills development (Antone et al., 2003, Battiste, 2002 and 2005, Canadian Council on Learning, 2006 and 2007, George, 2002, 2007 and 2008, Alberta Education Aboriginal Services Branch, 2005). These fundamental qualities include:

- **Holistic** - Learning recognizes, engages and develops the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual (heart, mind, body and spirit) capabilities of the individual and the community in relation to all living things. It stresses the interconnectedness of all life.

- **Lifelong** - Learning happens at every stage of human life. It begins before birth and continues into old age. It happens both formally and informally and is intergenerational in its participation and practices. Knowledge and wisdom gained through a lifetime of learning are passed on to successive generations.

- **Learner-centred** - The learner is the most important person in the program; the learning process involves and empowers the learner and is based on and guided by the learner's strengths, experiences and aspirations; it's goal is to animate the learner's inherent talents

and gifts ; programming is flexible; content is based on the learner's needs and is relevant to their lives; learning progress is at the pace of the learner; the environment is warm , welcoming and inclusive; procedures are informal and non-threatening.

- **Experiential** - Learning is connected to authentic, lived experiences and is tied to place. The place of learning is the physical world; it is on the land and in one's community. Learning involves "embodied learning" and "performed knowledge" (Cordoba, 2006). One learns independently and directly by observing, listening and doing. Learning is reinforced through traditional ceremonies, introspection, meditation and storytelling.

- **Rooted in First Nations, Inuit and Métis languages and culture** – First Nations, Inuit and Métis learning is inseparable from language. Their languages carry knowledge as well as the historical and spiritual relationship with the land (Battiste, 2005). Language connects First Nations, Inuit and Métis to their cultural values and maintains their knowledge systems while ensuring cultural continuity.

- **Spiritually-oriented** - Knowledge is derived from creation and is inherent in and connected to all life. Thus learning is a sacred process with a sacred purpose. It is a lifelong responsibility; a journey to understand the physical world and to discover and actualize one's unique gifts and life purpose. The learning path each person travels can be understood as their "learning spirit." The "learning spirit" is what guides the learner's search and their path to knowledge. The "learning spirit" knows its own journey and is drawn to the learning experiences that will build its gifts.

- **Communal** - Learning is a communal and highly social process. Parents, family, Elders and community all have a role and responsibility in preparing young people for life. Elders play a key role. Through stories, lessons and the arts, First Nations, Inuit and Métis Elders teach language, history, traditions and culture. They live and embody their peoples' knowledge. Elders teach the community where they came from, show them who they are and guide them towards the future (Córdoba, 2006).

- **Integrates Indigenous and Western Knowledge** — Learning is an adaptive process that draws from the best of both worlds. It is a dynamic and creative process which nurtures and generates new forms and new practices.

- **Capacity Building** – Programming contributes to the economic, social, educational, political and spiritual development of the community; programming is delivered by First Nations, Inuit and Métis education/literacy/training organizations or in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis organizations; there is on-going support and advocacy for First Nations, Inuit and Métis to obtain control of their own education and to secure adequate long-term funding.

THE BUSINESS CASE: TALKING TO EMPLOYERS ABOUT THE ADVANTAGES OF ESSENTIAL SKILLS AND LITERACY TRAINING FOR FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT

A critical factor in the success of First Nations, Inuit and Métis labour market training programs, including ES programs, is the involvement of employers and governments in these programs.

Employers and governments must see the cost benefit of this training and research is beginning to emerge that demonstrates the "win-win" for employers and First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. Research confirms the pressing necessity and potential benefits of Canada's investment in increased First Nations, Inuit and Métis labour market participation (Murray and Shillington, 2011; Sharp and Arsenault, 2010; Hull 2006: Howe, 2011).   The literature also speaks to several key advantages in upskilling First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations.

Firstly, statistics show that the **First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations are growing populations in Canada and can provide an important source of labour in Canada's aging society**. Between 1996 and 2006, the First Nations, Métis and Inuit population increased 45%, nearly six times faster than the growth rate of non-Indigenous populations. In 2001, the First Nations, Inuit and Métis population accounted for approximately 4% of the total Canadian labour force (aged 15-64); by 2026 this figure is anticipated to reach 5%. In addition, the First Nations, Inuit and Métis population is much younger than the Canadian population average. First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth aged 24 and under made up approximately half of all Indigenous peoples in Canada, compared with 31% of the non-Indigenous population (Statistics Canada, 2006 Census).   The implication of these statistics take on real significance when seen within the context of Canadian predicted labour market shortages caused by low birth rates and an aging population. The First Nations, Inuit and Métis labour force is poised to become a significant resource within their own communities, regions and territories and within the broader Canadian labour market. Hull (2006) argues that the size and success of this future Indigenous labour force will depend on whether or not First Nations, Inuit and Métis educational levels improve.

A second key advantage is that **increased investment in improved workplace literacy skills and education attainment will yield a very high rate of return for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people and the country as a whole.** Murray and Shillington (2011) and Sharp and Arsenault (2010) argue that:

- Calculated on a the best case scenario "the investment of $984 million to eliminate occupational literacy skill shortages in Canada's Aboriginal workforce leads to a staggering increase in additional earnings of $2.256 billion a year;" [7]

- "It is estimated that if Aboriginal education and education-specific labour market outcomes reach 2001 non-Aboriginal levels by 2026, all levels of the Canadian government will incur an increase in total tax revenue of $3.5 billion in 2026. If this figure grows at a constant rate between 2001 and 2026 the cumulative increase in tax revenue over the period is an estimated $39 billion." [8]

Thirdly, there are significant **socio-economic benefits of closing the education gap**. In, *Bridging the Aboriginal Education Gap in Saskatchewan* (2011), Howe addresses not only the individual economic benefits of education (e.g. higher income) but the individual non-economic benefits (e.g. greater sense of accomplishment, better health choices). According to Howe's calculations bridging the Indigenous peoples' education gap in Saskatchewan would increase the present value of lifetime earnings for

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[7] Murray, S. & Shillington, R., *Understanding Aboriginal Literacy Markets in Canada: A segmentation analysis., DataAngel, Ottawa, ON*. 2011. p.131. Retrieved June 2012 at
http://www.nald.ca/library/research/tsmurray/aboriginal_oles/aboriginal_oles.pdf

[8] Sharp, A. & Arsenault, J. *Investing in Aboriginal Education in Canada: an Economic Perspective.* Centre for the Study of Living Standards. Ottawa, ON. 2010. p.25. Retrieved June 2012 at
http://www.cprn.org/documents/51980_EN.pdf

Saskatchewan's Métis and First Nations populations by $16.2 billion. Howe goes on to estimate that the non-monetary lifetime benefits would total an additional $48.6 billion.

Howe, using Saskatchewan statistics, shows that the social benefits of education include higher tax revenues, a well-informed population and lower dependence on welfare programs. According to Howe's calculation the external social benefits to the province would measure $25.2 billion in 2011 dollars. The total overall social benefits (the sum of individual monetary benefits + individual nonmonetary benefits + external social benefits) would equal a total of $90 billion or $90,000 per person in Saskatchewan.

In terms of the **benefits of ES, basic and literacy training benefits broadly**, studies (Bloom et al., 2007; Long, 1997 and the Construction Sector Council, 2010) have found that these programs have the following **positive outcomes for participants and businesses**:

- Improved productivity including increased quality and accuracy of work
- Increased workplace health and safety
- Enhanced workplace efficiencies including less time to complete tasks
- More confident and engaged workforce
- Reduced absenteeism and increased retention of workers
- Increased problem solving skills among workers
- Enhanced ability to work in a team
- More competent use of technology
- Improved labour-management relations
- Increased profitability
- Extended employment opportunities

Lastly, *The Business Case for Essential Skills in Construction* by the Construction Sector Council (2010) demonstrates that **implementing ES upgrading results is a substantial financial benefit to employers.** This study showed that first year apprentices across the trades who took part in ES upgrading (Reading, Document Use and Numeracy) were more likely to pass their Level 1 exams (96.8% of ES participants compared to 91% of non-participants), achieve higher final grades (82.7% average final grade) than non-participating participants (78.2% average final grade) and become more confident (75% of participating apprentices stated they had increased confidence in their ability to complete their apprenticeship training and 81.8% reported having more confidence in their ability to perform on the job). These outcomes resulted in financial savings for participating employers. The study calculated the cost of the ES program at $132.90 per apprentice and showed that if only 80% of

the participating apprentices who passed their training completed their apprenticeship employment requirements, the return to employers would be $26.34 on every dollar spent on ES training.[9]

Based on demographic trends, First Nations, Inuit and Métis are poised to play a key role in mitigating Canada's pending labour shortages. Investment in First Nations, Inuit and Métis education and literacy skills upgrading will not only improve Indigenous peoples' labour market outcomes and overall socio-economic well-being but also contribute to Canada's economic future. It is obvious from the literature cited herein, that there is a solid business case for increasing First Nations, Inuit and Métis educational attainment levels and a clear benefit of ES and literacy training in supporting this outcome. These messages need to be communicated widely to employers and governments. Presenting the business case is a best practice unto itself. Research to find initiatives doing this should be included in the ES inventory developed as part of this FIMESA project.

CONCLUSION: MARKERS OF EXCELLENCE IN FIRST NATIONS, INUIT AND MÉTIS ES PROGRAMS

A comprehensive overview of program effectiveness specific to Canadian First Nations, Inuit and Métis ES initiatives has not been done. The literature on best practices in Indigenous peoples Workforce/ES initiatives comes from a number of differing sources as cited in this review. Taken together, the literature highlights the following key features that appear to support effective First Nations, Inuit and Métis ES employment-related programming:

1. *First Nations, Inuit and Métis control and ownership of First Nations, Inuit and Métis education and training initiatives*

    Proceeding from *Moving Forward in Aboriginal Education*, a national policy roundtable on Indigenous education in Canada, identified First Nations, Inuit and Métis governance and control over their own education as an essential principle of Indigenous education (Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, 2005). This principle has been echoed in many documents on needed reform and promising practices in First Nations, Inuit and Métis education including the *Post-Secondary Education: In Support of First Nations and Inuit Students.* (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009); *Métis Post-secondary Education Systems: Literature Review* (Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, 2009); *and First Nation Control of First Nation Education: It's Our Vision, It's Our Time* (The Assembly of First Nation, 2009).

    In Canada, Indigenous control of Indigenous education /training has proven to be an essential ingredient in increasing educational attainment (Paré, 2004). Studies have shown the effectiveness of initiatives developed, designed and implemented by First Nations, Inuit and Métis organization/communities. In their 2011 report, *Reforming First Nations Education: From Crisis to Hope*, the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples points to the success of the Mi'kmaq Education Act, which provided for the transfer of jurisdiction of education to

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[9] The study goes on to say that ES upgrading is assumed to influence the productivity/effectiveness of apprentices in the workplace as well as their ability to complete their related employment requirement. However, within the scope of the research, it was not possible to examine these potential outcomes.

eleven Mi'kmaq First Nations. The report cites that: "Since June 2007 over 420 Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey students have graduated from grade 12. This is a graduation rate of over 70%" (Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2011, p.13).

Harrison and Lindsay in their 2009 study emphasized the importance that Indigenous peoples' control and ownership has in the ultimate success and effectiveness of employment training initiatives:

> A number of successful initiatives in Canada and British Columbia are based on Aboriginal-led design and delivery. For example, WorkBC has found that Aboriginal-operated programming such as that delivered through AHRDAs is more effective than traditionally delivered programming" (Harrison and Lindsay, 2009, p. 13).

Much of the literature that identifies and describes the key attributes associated with Indigenous learning and skills development (Antone et al., 2003, Battiste, 2002 and 2005, Canadian Council on Learning, 2006 and 2007, George, 2002, 2007 and 2008, Alberta Education Aboriginal Services Branch, 2005) reinforces the importance of supporting First Nation, Inuit and Métis ownership of their own education/training and highlights the best practices of on-going community capacity building, advocacy for sustained funding and continuous promotion of First Nations, Inuit and Métis educational control.

In addition, many of the best practices that follow below, such as partnerships, working with and in local First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and applying holistic, culturally-centred approaches to delivery are rooted in the principle of First Nations, Inuit and Métis controlled education and training initiatives.

2. *Partnerships*

Linked to First Nations, Inuit and Métis control of their own education and training is the effective practice of strategic partnerships. This includes partnerships between First Nations, Inuit and Métis service providers, educational institutions, First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, government and employers. Building strong formal relationships with all stakeholders at all stages of the initiative ensures the best possible program design, planning and delivery (Harrison and Lindsay, 2009). The establishment and involvement of Advisory/Steering Committees made up of partners and other stakeholders have also been cited. These committees enrich and contribute to the program as well as provide direct communication with partners (Workplace Education Manitoba (WEM), 2011). Partnerships provide opportunities for cooperation, exchange of information and sharing of resources among organizations with similar mandates and clients (MNP LLP, 2012). Research indicates that strong partnerships between initiatives with a focus on ESA and employers have helped facilitate the integration of ES into the workplace while creating ready-made networks and employment opportunities for program participants (Douglas College, 2008).

3. *Working with and in the Community*

Working directly with First Nations, Inuit and Métis community members is also identified as a success factors for ES initiatives. Defining practices include: the involvement of the

community in the development and recruitment processes of ES initiatives; understanding and developing delivery models applicable to diverse community environments (rural, remote, urban); the development of customized ES training to meet specific community needs; welcoming the community into program facilities; providing program information to participants' families; developing appropriate marketing strategies to reach community members such as community radio, flyers and community information sessions; and being visible in the community by attending events hosted by the community or community organizations.

An important element of working with communities is building capacity and creating a continuum of training by maintaining strong relationships with and supporting existing community resources, for example, sharing resources and professional development opportunities with community organizations. Providing outreach services and utilizing community facilities for program activities was also mentioned. These practices are particularly important when working with more remote Indigenous communities.

4. *Learner-centred Approach*

A learner-centred approach is seen as the foundational practice on which effective First Nations, Inuit and Métis ES initiatives are based (Oars et al., 2005). One of the main goals of effective initiatives is building the hope, self-esteem and self-awareness of participants. The learners' needs drive program planning, development and delivery. Promising practices include conducting community needs assessments, determining appropriate skill development needs and customizing program content to meet those needs.

Program structure should also reflect a learner-centred approach. Program logistics, such as scheduling, take into account and accommodate the learners' lives. Wherever possible, participants should have input into program details such as the time of classes, location, etc. In-take procedures should be informal and first contact focuses on establishing rapport with the participant. Formal assessments, while important, take place after trust has been established. Assessment is used to assist participants in identifying their skills and knowledge, to pinpoint skill gaps, set goals and establish an action plan that lays out a clear strategy for successfully meeting the needs and goals of the individual.

Oars et al. also emphasize the importance of encouraging and supporting voluntary participation. Many First Nations, Inuit and Métis people have negative experiences with education or may feel a stigma around poor literacy skills so it is important that the decision to participate be their own. Programs ensure that participants are aware of and understand all the elements and expectations of programming: pre-requisites, assessments, prior learning processes, necessary applications, orientations, training content or fees. Mandatory requirements or pre-requisites for entry into initiatives can be a barrier. These requirements, Oars et al. argue, need to be fully explained to the participant and vital to the participant's success in the program.

The literature states that effective training programs create a safe environment where participants are able to learn at their own pace, take risks, are accepted for who they are, are

not judged and are respected regardless of skills levels or background. Programs are inclusive and work to maximize the number of participants.

Finally, the literature notes that being learner-centred also involves implementing cost effective appropriate training and education methods for First Nations, Inuit and Métis learners living in rural and remote communities to ensure that programs are sustainable and are there for participants for years to come.

5. *Holistic Approach to ES Program Delivery*

The holistic approach to First Nations, Inuit and Métis ES programming was consistently identified throughout all the literature and is closely linked to learner-centeredness. A holistic approach is about taking into account and meeting the unique and multiple needs of Indigenous participants including the need for healing and empowerment (Harrison and Lindsay, 2009).   This approach is needed in training practices as well as in client supports. Notable practices described in the literature include providing participants with support for personal issues such as family difficulties, health problems, child or Elder care, transportation, finances, housing or substance abuse and helping to remove any barriers to client success.

Programming using this approach addresses all the client's skill needs including essential skills, life skills, employability skills, career planning, job search, academic upgrading and technical skills. Training is targeted and appropriate, covering the full range of skills necessary for long-term employment.

Initiatives take a hands-on approach to support. There is focus on participant life skill development as well as attention paid to their individual needs and cultural, social and economic backgrounds. There are regular check-ins, phone calls and individual sessions with participants. Clients are contacted and encouraged if they have attendance issues. Motivation is addressed with real incentives such as attendance allowance.

The literature also mentions the importance of reaching out to families and communities to ensure that all aspects of the participant's life are considered, particularly if participation requires the client to be absent from their home community. Programs work with families to help them prepare for the absence of their family member providing both the family and the program participant with a peace of mind (MNP LLP, 2012).

6. *Experienced and Knowledgeable Staff*

Effective programs hire experienced staff that are aware of and sensitive to the unique needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis clients. They are familiar with and are respectful toward Indigenous peoples' culture. Staff is experienced with employment-related training programs, understand issues impacting First Nations, Inuit and Métis trainees and the workplace and are flexible to these concerns (Oars et al., 2005).

Research shows that many ES program instructors are certified licensed teachers with specialization in Adult Education (Oars et al., 2005). In their survey of programs, Oars et al., indicated that while cultural homogeneity between participants and instructor is considered beneficial, what is more important is that the instructor be organized, skilled, able to build

rapport, motivate participants and provide learners with successful learning opportunities. In addition, effective programs have detailed staff job descriptions and provide staff with on-going professional development (Nunavut Literacy Council et al., 2007).

7. *Principles of Adult and Indigenous Learning*

Another success factor repeatedly identified in the literature was the importance of using both Adult and Indigenous learning principles and techniques. These principles include being responsive to different learning styles and using a wide range of instruction and evaluation strategies. Instructional methods focus on experiential approaches: doing, talking then reading rather the reading, talking and then doing (Nunavut Literacy Council et al., 2007). Learning is hands-on, interactive and has application to real world or workplace tasks. Innovative programs provide hands-on training using real settings such as the work site and actual workplace documents and materials. ES are taught within the context of both workplace and traditional activities. Modern training is linked to traditional values of intergenerational learning by inviting Elders to participate in the training (MNP LLP, 2012). Indigenous participants are encouraged to learn through the traditional methods of observation and imitation. In addition, best practices include researching, testing and developing new ES learning methods based on current technologies such as innovative computer applications and distance learning.

8. *Culture, Language and Tradition*

The literature on Indigenous peoples' learning clearly states that learning needs to be placed within culture (Battiste, 2005). Two best practices in this regard are: a) involvement of community and, b) the involvement of Elders in the development and delivery of programming. Workplace Education Manitoba (2011) recommends that Elders be members of Steering Committees, attend training events, teach or be available for one-to-one counselling with participants. In addition, the literature attests that effective programs are sensitive to the nuances and biases that appear in existing texts and use or develop culturally appropriate materials (e.g. assessment tools that are individually and culturally relevant for Indigenous peoples). Defining practices also include the use of narrative, art and music in teaching methods and explore ES within the context of traditional activities such as fishing, trapping, painting and storytelling (Nuu-chah-nulth Employment Training Program, 2012).

9. *Employer Involvement and Direct Workplace Experience*

Research suggests that direct links with employers should be made whenever possible (Douglas College, 2008). Effective programs incorporate various work experience opportunities that assist participants to acquire job-related experience, learn about workplace culture and develop employability skills. Harrison and Lindsay (2009) agree with this finding stating that skills training is best achieved through facilitated apprenticeships and job placements for specific occupations.

Effective practice in the area of workplace support include: developing effective communication between trainees and employers, working directly with employers to coordinate the participant's transition from training to the workplace, continuing to support

clients once they are on the job through mentorship and/or follow-up and diversity awareness training for employers to assist with creating a culturally aware and appropriate work setting.

10. *On-going Communication*

Studies point to the importance of creating and implementing a communication strategy for ensuring clear and on-going communication between staff, participants, employers and other stakeholder groups including the community. Sharing program information creates stakeholder awareness and establishes credibility.   Effective communication practices include the maintenance of accurate and detailed program reports that can be used to build a business case for on-going funding and support.

11. *Establish Evaluative Criteria and Methods*

Systematic on-going evaluation of programs is a best practice referred to in the literature (Oars et.al, 2005 and Nunavut Literacy Council et al., 2007). Research states that evaluation needs to be built in from the inception of programs and continued throughout (Nunavut Literacy Council et al., 2007). It also highlights the importance of identifying, collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative methods for measuring outcomes and demonstrating success (Nunavut Literacy Council et al., 2007)

12. *Promote the Business Case*

Tied to employer involvement is an on-going evaluation and the promotion of participant outcomes. Employers need to know what the benefit is for them in order for them to be involved and/or fund training. Successful participant outcomes connected to successful business outcomes will increase the likelihood of employer participation and investment which will increase the sustainability of programs.

The twelve criteria stated above suggest a credible starting point for the FIMESAI project's inventory development and examination of best practice in ES initiative development and implementation. More "markers of excellence" may be found once the inventory is fully developed. These twelve principles will serve as guide posts for the inventory research in identifying a range of best practices among ES initiatives for First Nations, Inuit and Métis looking to enhance their literacy and ES.

APPENDIX A: THE CONNECTION BETWEEN EDUCATION ATTAINMENT, LITERACY RATES, LABOUR MARKET ACTIVITY AND INCOME LEVELS OF FIRST NATIONS, INUIT AND MÉTIS IN CANADA

First Nations, Inuit and Métis Educational Attainment

Over the last 40 years, the issue of Indigenous people's educational attainment and the call for educational reform has been the subject of numerous government studies and research papers.

The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) identified the failure of federal , provincial and territorial government policies to meet Indigenous peoples 'goals for education[10] resulting in poor quality education for Indigenous youth, low secondary school graduation rates and the under representation of indigenous youth in post-secondary education. The Commission called for major reforms aimed at improving educational outcomes for indigenous youth. Chief among its recommendations were: control of First Nations, Inuit and Métis education by First Nations, Inuit and Métis people; provincial and territorial accountability to Indigenous people[11] , involvement of parents, the training and hiring of more indigenous educators, the development and implementation of culturally-appropriate and linguistic curricula and adequate financial resources (Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996).

Over a decade later, literature relating to the educational outcomes of First Nations learners (Mendelson, 2008; Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples , 2011; Report of the National Panel on First Nation Elementary and Secondary Education for Students on Reserve, 2012); echo the same serious issues and needed reforms addressed in the Royal Commission's report[12]. Shared themes include the need for federal legislation recognizing First Nations jurisdiction over education; creation of a First Nations education system; and adequate funding that is needs-based, predictable, and sustainable.

> Funding is seen to be among the most critical factors contributing to the poor educational outcomes of indigenous youth (The Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2011). Since 1996 federal funding for First Nations schools is based on a national funding formula that has been capped at 2% per year, despite increases in inflation, educational costs and First Nations population. In addition the funding formula does not include basic services such as school libraries, technology, assessments, athletic programs and facilities,

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[10] "In the main, Aboriginal people want two things from education:
- They want schools to help children, youth and adults learn the skills they need to participate fully in the economy.
- They want schools to help children develop as citizens of Aboriginal nations - with the knowledge of their languages and traditions necessary for cultural continuity" (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 1996).

[11] Based on the Indian Act of 1867 the education of non-status Indians, Métis and Inuit peoples became a provincial or territorial responsibility; education for status First Nations people on reserve became a federal responsibility (McCue, 2012). The federal government retains responsibility for elementary and secondary education on First Nations reserves, According to the Royal Commission's report nearly 70 per cent of Indigenous education (that of Métis, off reserve First Nations and Inuit learners) has been in the hands of provincial or territorial authorities.

[12] The report of the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples while focused on First Nations education noted the work of Inuit leaders to bring about educational reform to address the low attainment rates of Inuit students. With land claims agreements, Inuit pursued Inuit control of Inuit education and an Inuit centred approach to education respecting Inuit culture and history. The report did not address Métis educational issues.

curriculum development, language programs or school board services (The Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2011). The Senate Committee states: "The Committee heard from First Nations and non-First Nations witnesses alike: the way First Nations education is currently funded inhibits effective accountability mechanisms and is inadequate for achieving improved outcomes or specific levels of services" (Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2011, p.36).

According to a recent article by the Canadian Federation of Students the gap in post-secondary attainment levels of First Nations, Inuit and Métis is the result of multiple barriers including inadequate funding. The article notes that Indigenous students are more likely to enter post-secondary education as mature students with families to care for and are more than twice as likely to be coming from more distant rural communities both circumstances leading to additional costs. Indigenous students and their families are also more likely to be poorer, experience more unemployment or have lower income levels than their non-Indigenous counterparts making post-secondary education a financial hardship if not an impossibility.[13]

The article goes on to state that while post-secondary funding is available through the federal government's Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) only status First Nations and Inuit learners are eligible. Métis and non-status First Nations are excluded from this federal funding leaving them without the needed financial support to pursue post-secondary education. PSSSP funding is further limited by the annual 2 % cap placed on it in 1996, despite the continuous growth in the number of First Nations and Inuit learners, living costs, inflation rates and tuition fees. This has resulted in denied funding of approximately 10,500 Inuit and First Nations students between 2001-2006, with denied funding to 3,000 more per year.

According to Harvey McCue, First Nations educator and founder of the Native studies department at Trent University, "Increasing the educational achievements of Indigenous people has been an ongoing challenge for more than a century. It is evident that major reforms will be required before substantive positive changes in Aboriginal graduation rates at the secondary and post-secondary education levels will emerge" (McCue, n.d. , p.2).

Attainment Rates

Data from the 2006 Canadian Census[14] shows that 34% of Indigenous persons[15] between the ages of 25 to 64 had not completed high school and 21% had a high school diploma as their highest educational qualification. In 2006, the percentage of persons lacking a high school diploma by Indigenous group was Inuit 51%, First Nations 38%, Métis 24%.[16]

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[13] Many of these same barriers to post-secondary educational attainment for Métis people, such as low income levels and inadequate funding, are identified in the study "*Metis Post-Secondary Education Systems: Literature Review*" (Aboriginal Knowledge Learning Centre, 2009).

[14] Findings are based on 2006 census data. 2011 Census data profiling Indigenous peoples will not be available until April 2013.

[15] Census statistics are based on the 555,400 adults aged 25-64 who identified as an Aboriginal person.

[16] Statistics Canada- 2006 Census: *Educational Portrait of Canada 2006: Aboriginal Population*. Retrieved June 2012 from: http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-560/p15-eng.cfm

In terms of post-secondary education, 44% of First Nations, Inuit and Métis respondents had attained post-secondary educational levels -- 14% had trade credentials, 19% had a college diploma and 8% had a university degree in 2006.[17] With the exception of college or trade certification, there is a significant gap in educational levels between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous populations. This is particularly evident when comparing percentages of university degree graduates (8% compared to 23%). This gap has continued to widen between 2001 and 2006.

Figure 1[18]

Level of education, non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal populations, aged 25-64 years, 2006 (percent)
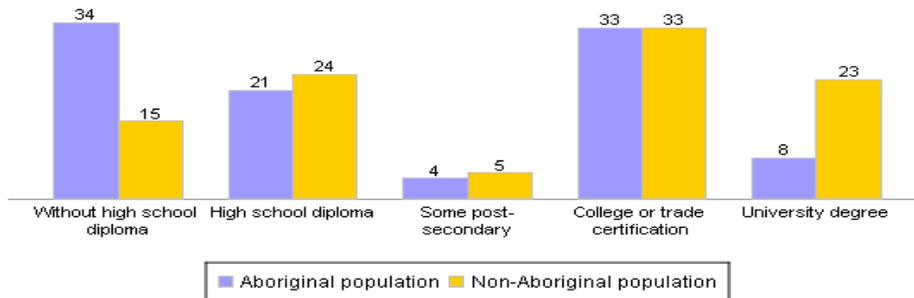
Source: Statistics Canada. Educational Portrait of Canada, Census 2006. Ottawa, Statistics Canada, 2008 (Cat. No. 97-560-X2006001).

The data did show an improvement of educational attainment (high school diploma or higher) among Indigenous youth. In 2006, 67% of Indigenous youth between 25-29 years had a high school diploma, compared to 33% of those 65 years and over. However, there was a sizable disparity between high school attainment levels for Indigenous youth compared to non-Indigenous populations of the same age groups; 67% compared to 90%.[19]

While their high school attainment levels rose, educational dropout rates among Indigenous youth continue to be notably higher than the national average. According to Labour Market Survey data (2007/2010) the dropout rate among First Nations living off-reserve, Métis and Inuit aged 20 to 24 was 22.6%, nearly 3 times that of non-Indigenous youth populations (8.5%).[20] Dropout rates for First Nations youth living on-reserve are not available, however, 39% of on-reserve First nations youth ages 20-24 have completed high school or obtained an equivalent diploma (Statistics Canada, 2006 Census).

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[17] Because of changes to Census questions comparisons of 2006 educational attainment data to 2001 data is only possible for university degrees. Based on the increase of aboriginal education attainment levels between 1996 and 2001 it is assumed that overall levels are continuing to improve.
[18] Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. *Indicators or Well Being in Canada: Learning-Educational Attainment.* Retrieved June 2012 from: http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=29#M_4
[19] Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. *2011-2012 Report on Plans and Priorities: Demographic Description.* Retrieved June 2012 from: http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1315424049095.
[20] Statistics Canada. *Education Matters: Insights on Education, Learning and Training in Canada: Trends in Dropout Rates and the Labour Market Outcomes of Young Dropouts.* Retrieved June 2012 from: http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/2010004/article/11339-eng.htm

Reserve status proved a variable to educational attainment. First Nations people living on-reserve were more likely to have lower education attainment levels than their off-reserve counterparts. In 2006, only 15% of First Nations people living on-reserve had obtained a high school diploma compared to 24% living off-reserve. Fewer First Nations living on-reserve had a college diploma or a university degree (14% had a college diploma compared to 20% off-reserve and 4% had a university degree to 9% off-reserve). Even more troubling, the 39% high school completion rates for youth (age 20-24 year) on-reserve had not altered since 1996, increasing the high school completion gap between on-reserve First Nations youth and their non-Indigenous   counterparts in the last decade by 5 percentage points (Mendelson, 2008).

Literacy Levels of First Nations, Inuit and Métis

Despite the growing body of national and international literacy research there is limited statistical data on the literacy levels of Indigenous peoples in Canada. The 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) provided the first survey of Indigenous peoples' literacy statistics. The survey was restricted to Indigenous peoples (16-64 years) living in urban Manitoba and Saskatchewan, select communities in the Northwest and Yukon Territories and the Inuit in Nunavut.[21]

The results from the survey were rated on a scale from 0 to 500 points. The scores were then grouped into five levels with Level 3 (276-325 points) determined to be the proficiency level associated with coping successfully in life and at work in a knowledge-based economy and roughly the skill level required for successful secondary school completion and college entry.

Comparatively, about 60 % of the urban Indigenous populations (Métis and First Nations) in Manitoba and Saskatchewan scored below Level 3 in prose literacy, compared with 45 % of non-Indigenous populations in Manitoba and 39 % of non-Indigenous populations in Saskatchewan. Just over half (54.8%) of the Indigenous people in the Yukon, 69% in Northwest Territories (NWT) and 88% of the Inuit in Nunavut scored below Level 3.[22]   While Nunavut had the lowest proportion of respondents scoring at or above Level 3 literacy (12%), a critical point not considered in the data analysis is that 60% of the respondents reported Inuktitut as their mother tongue and over half of the population reported using the language on a daily basis. [23] **Figure 1** shows the comparison of the percentage of Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations with Level 3 or higher literacy ratings.

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[21] The 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) was a large scale comparative assessment of adult prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills. The survey included data from over 20,000 Canadians between the ages of 16-65. Of the 20,000 people who responded 3,400 were Aboriginal Canadians. The survey was conducted in either English or French (Statistics Canada, 2005).

[22] Human Resource and Skills Development Canada & Statistics Canada. *Building on Our Competencies: Canadian Results of the international Adult Literacy and Skills Survey.* Ottawa, ON., 2005, Catalogue no. 89-617-XIE, p. 56.

[23] Human Resources and Development Canada & Statistic Canada; Human Resources and Skills Development Canada & Statistics Canada. *Building on our competencies: Results of the international adult literacy and skills survey.* 2005.

Figure 2

Level 3 literacy or above, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, selected regions, 2003
(percent)
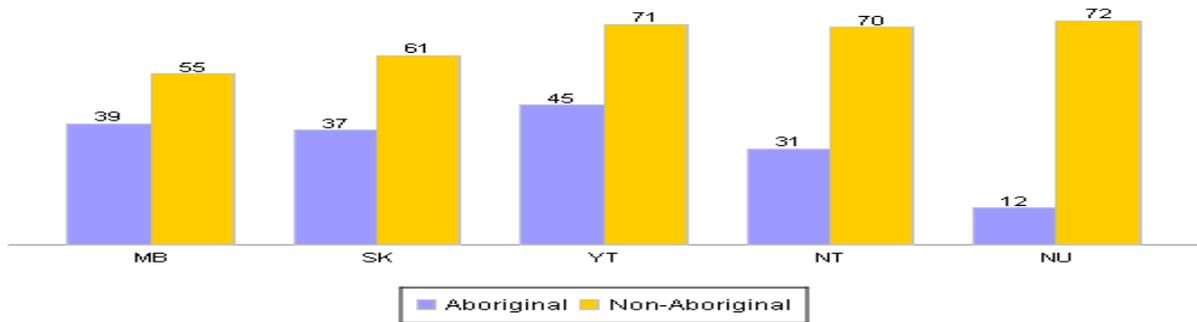
Source: Indicators of Well- being in Canada: Learning-Adult Literacy, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Retrieved: http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=29#M_4.

Figure 3 shows the prose proficiency levels of urban First Nations, Métis and non-Indigenous populations in urban Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Among First Nations, the proportion of adults aged 16 and over who scored below Level 3 was about 72% in urban Manitoba and 70% in urban Saskatchewan. Among the Métis, these proportions were 54% and 56% respectively.

Figure 3
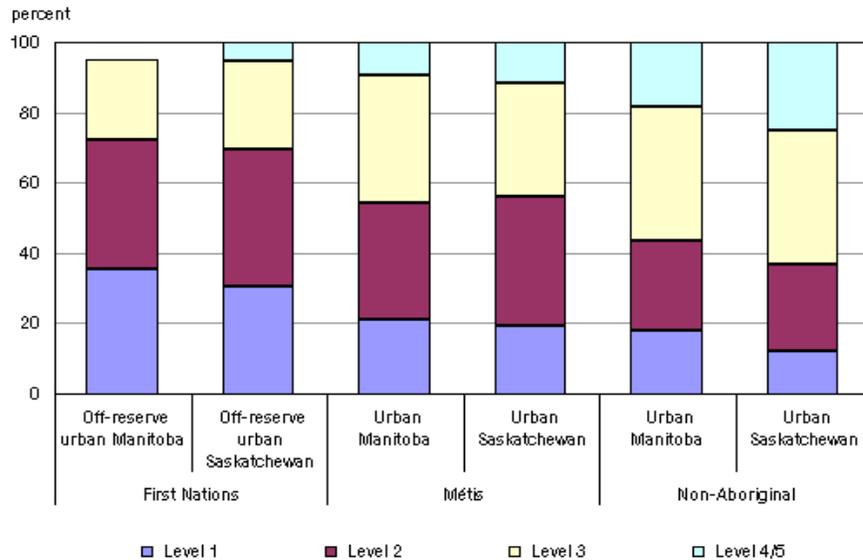
Source: Bougie, E., Literacy profile of Off-Reserve First Nations and Métis People Living in Urban Manitoba and Saskatchewan: Results from the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, 2003.

While the data show that Indigenous youth (16- 25 years of age) had higher prose literacy scores than Indigenous adults aged 55-65, over 65% of Indigenous youth respondents had prose literacy below

Level 3 literacy compared to 37% of non-Indigenous youth. Figure 4 shows the distribution of prose literacy by age of non-Indigenous and Indigenous youth.

Figure 4
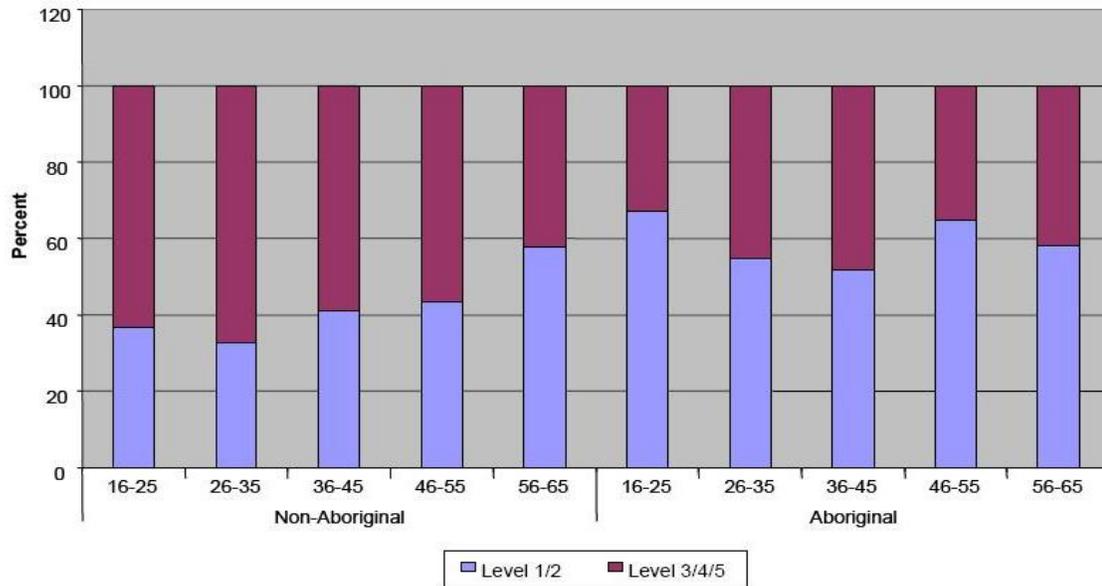
Source: Biswal, B., Literacy Performance of Working-age Aboriginal People in Canada. (2008), Retrieved June 2012 from:
http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/publications_resources/learning_policy/sp_850_07_08/sp_850_07_08e.pdf

While the IALSS data provided important information about Indigenous peoples' literacy in Canada, it has come under criticism. Critics argue that it did not include First Nations peoples living on-reserve and only measured literacy in French and English. It did not take into account literacy levels on participants' mother tongue. In addition, the survey was not culturally contextualized. Henry and Grandel (2011) in their review of the IALSS state that it did not take into account the domains of knowledge and multiple literacies associated with Indigenous languages, worldviews or traditions and as a result the data tended "to emphasize Aboriginal people as problematic, negative and less knowledgeable."[24]

The Connection between Education Attainment, Literacy Rates, Labour Market Activity and Income Levels

The IALSS data revealed a clear correlation between literacy proficiencies and education as well as a direct relationship between literacy scores and employment. Higher levels of education were associated with higher levels of literacy proficiency for Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. For example, 75% of Métis in urban Manitoba with post-secondary education reached Level 3 proficiency

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[24] Henry, Bobby & Grandel, Ross, *Aboriginal Adult Literacy Assessment Tool: Pilot Project Executive Summary.* Retrieved: http://salnweb.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/aalat_execsum.pdf

compared to only 19% of those with less than high school education. A similar pattern was observed among Métis in urban Saskatchewan (Bougie, 2003).

Poor literacy skills are also associated with poorer rates of employment. Among First Nations in urban Saskatchewan, 31% of those below Level 3 were employed versus 65% for those at or above a Level 3. Among Métis in Saskatchewan approximately 48% with below a Level 3 were employed compared to 65% of those with Level 3 or above proficiency.[25]

The literature shows that education attainment clearly impacts Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations' employment rates (Canadian Education Statistics Council, 2012). Because education attainment rates are lower for Indigenous populations than non-Indigenous populations, Indigenous peoples are more likely to have poorer labour market attachment (Merrill et al., 2010). Looking forward to today's economic reality for Indigenous peoples in Canada, the literature shows that educational attainment has made a significant difference during the downturn. From 2008 to 2009, employment rates for Indigenous people with less than a high school diploma fell by 5.5 percentage point to 47.7%. Employment rates for those with high school and some post-secondary fell by 3.3 percentage point to 66.3%. Those who completed post-secondary education were the least affected; their employment rated declined to 79.4%, a drop of just 1.8%.

The Income Gap

The disparity in educational outcomes and labour market participation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations are accompanied by economic inequalities. Results of a recent study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives confirm that there are significant levels of income inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. Key findings from this report are as follows:

- Indigenous people are among the poorest in Canada. In 2006, the median income for Indigenous peoples was $18,962 which is 30% lower than the $27,097 median income for the rest of Canadians;

- The income disparity between Indigenous peoples and the rest of Canada is narrowing at such a small rate that it will take 63 years to eliminate the gap;

- Income inequalities persist no matter where Indigenous peoples live: on-reserve, off-reserve, or in urban, rural or remote communities;

- Income inequalities persist despite increases in education attainment for Indigenous peoples over the last decade with the exception of Indigenous peoples with university degrees;

- Investment in Indigenous peoples education would not only improve their quality of life but would greatly benefit Canada's economy: Investment in increased Indigenous peoples' education and social well-being is estimated at a potential cumulative benefit of up to $115 billion over the 2006-26 period (Centre for the Study of Living Standards. 2009).

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[25] Canadian Council on Learning. *Lessons in Learning: Improving literacy levels among Aboriginal Canadian.* (Sept., 2008), pp. 2-3.

- MacDonald and Wilson (2010) in their study on the income gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Canada state that "... increased support for education may be the single most important investment that can be made to improve the economic opportunities for Aboriginal people in Canada..."[26]

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[26] Macdonald, D. & Wilson, D. *The Income Gap Between Aboriginal Peoples and the Rest of Canada*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Ottawa, ON. 2010. p.15. Retrieved June 2012 from:
http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/income-gap-between-aboriginal-peoples-and-rest-canada

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