# University of Alberta

First Nation, Dead Last: Reframing the Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve
Program Through the Lens of Policy Texts and Statistical Representations.

by

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## DEDICATION

For Natanis:

"…and will you succeed? (Yes! 98¾ % Guaranteed).

Kid, You'll move mountains!"

– Dr. Seuss (1990) Oh! The Places You'll Go

**ABSTRACT**

**FIRST NATION, DEAD LAST:**

**EXAMINING THE ABORIGINAL HEAD START ON-RESERVE PROGRAM**

Aboriginal children on-reserves across Canada are lagging far behind their non-Aboriginal counterparts with regard to educational achievement. Related research and statistics provide evidence that a high proportion of Aboriginal people not graduating from high school and that Aboriginal children are entering into the school system unprepared and ill-equipped to succeed both in the short and long term. In response, the federal government established the Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve (AHSOR) program in 1997 in order to equip young students with the tools necessary for success in school and to get a good start in life. The objective of this research is to explore the extent to which the AHSOR program achieves the stated objectives of the program which are to "help enhance child development and school readiness of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children living in urban centres and large northern communities" (Health Canada, 2011b, para. 1, emphasis added) as well as those children living in First Nation communities. Following a detailed exploration of the program, this thesis concludes that the AHSOR program is unlikely to meet the program's overarching objectives. Further, this thesis concludes that this program, as a singular approach, will not be sufficient in improving the levels of educational disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have come to fruition without the kind, generous, and attentive support of my graduate advisor Dr. Makere Stewart-Harawira. It is because of her support, relentless commitment to the advancement of Indigenous peoples rights around the world, and passion for her work that has given me hope and courage to proceed without hesitation. Dr. Stewart-Harawira has changed the way I see the world, both as an Aboriginal woman and as a scholar - and for that I am forever grateful.

The thesis would also not have been possible without the tireless and brilliant work of those Aboriginal scholars who came before me. While at times it may seem as though your past work has gotten lost along the way, rest assured, your words and ideas live on through me and from those who are soon to follow. I respectfully acknowledge your efforts and your contribution to the community.

I would like to acknowledge my family, both extended and immediate. From time to time this dream of mine became clouded with anxiety, fear, doubt, and sheer exhaustion. Please know that your gentle words of support held me up during the most indescribably difficult times and this work, in some way, belongs to you too.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge and honour my husband and daughter.

Natanis: Know that I started this journey for me but in the end I finished it because of you. One day, when you're older, may you come to understand the importance of higher education as an Aboriginal woman and may this work guide you and give you strength and courage to do anything you want to do.

Sam: I love you, always. Thank you, thank you, and thank you!

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

The Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve (AHSOR) program has been actively in operation at various sites on First Nation reserves throughout Canada since 1997 and is an extension of the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) that was implemented two years prior in 1995 (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2013b). The AHSOR program (see also Chapter 2) is a unique early childhood education (ECE) program designed to enhance child development and school readiness, and also in that it is an early childhood development program that is both locally controlled designed (Cleghorn & Prochner, 2010). Although admission criteria to the AHSOR program varies by community, the program structures are somewhat similar in design since the AHSOR program is centered around six interrelated program components; namely: Aboriginal culture and language, health promotion, nutrition, parental/family involvement, and social support (Health Canada, 2011b; Cleghorn & Prochner, 2010).

Since the AHSOR program's inception in 1997, available data regarding the AHSOR program indicates that this type of early childhood educational programming has grown significantly both in popularity and in participation (Health Canada, 2003a, b, c; Health Canada, 2000; Budgell & Robertson, 2003). The available literature further suggests that the AHSOR program, as a singular approach, intends to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal children by ensuring 'school-readiness' (Health Canada, 2003b), and that is also aims to reduce other related effects arising from inequalities in health (e.g. other aspects of well-being such as: increased risk of disease, higher social assistance dependency rates, low levels of employment later in life, higher incidences of high school dropout (Budgell & Robertson, 2003; Reynolds, 1994; Devany, Ellwood & Love, 1997; Temple, Reynolds & Miedel, 2000; Schweinhart. Montie,

Xiang, Barnett, Belfield & Nores, 2005). In this regard, First Ministers' Accord on Health Care Renewal (2003) recognized:

> … addressing the serious challenges that face the health of Aboriginal
>
> Canadians will require dedicated effort. To this end, the federal
>
> government is committed to enhancing its funding and working
>
> collaboratively with other governments and Aboriginal peoples to meet the
>
> objectives set out in this Accord including the priorities established in the
>
> Health Reform Fund. Governments will work together to address the gap
>
> in health status between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians
>
> through better integration of health services (Health Canada, 2006, para. 1)

What has yet to be determined, however, is whether or not this early childhood development program for Aboriginal children between the ages of 0 to 6 is as effective as it purports and intends to be in relation to the extent to which on-reserve First Nations children are 'ready for school' so that they can 'get a good start in life' (Privy Council, 1997). While there is a significant amount of literature and data to support the overall progress, or lack thereof, of Aboriginal children, youth, and adults with regard to education generally; there is not however, a body of data or related literature that examines the extent to which the AHSOR program is achieving its aims and goals. Indeed, as Ball (2012) states "To date, no program of controlled empirical research has evaluated the impact of AHS. Beyond annual evaluations for purposes of operational accountability, no known research has focused on evaluating the Aboriginal head Start On-Reserve Program" (p. 350) This also holds true for the AHSUNC program in that, as Cleghorn and Prochner (2010) indicate, "there have been no independent studies on the AHS program and the results from a government evaluation – the Aboriginal Head Start Urban and Northern Communities National Impact Evaluation, 2002-2005 – have never been released to the public" (p. 37).

Understood in this way, is not yet known with any degree of certainty how the AHSOR program, as a stand-alone early childhood development program, could affect so much change for one group in particular. Yet year after year, hundreds of AHSOR program sites across the country are transferred millions of dollars in federal funding to design, develop, and implement a program for children between the ages of 0 to 6 years with, what appears to be, very little understanding or consideration given to requisite coordination of supports and programmatic elements that are evident in successful early childhood development programs that will engender the transformational and trans-generational promises that the AHSOR program intends.

## Research Question(s)

The aim of this research is to explore the extent to which the Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve (AHSOR) program is achieving the stated aims and objectives pertaining to school-readiness of Aboriginal children living on reserve. Thus the questions that guide this research are:

1. In what way has the need for early childhood educational programming, such as the AHSOR program, been determined and how has this need been contextually defined?
2. If the intent and purpose of the AHSOR program is to prepare young on-reserve children for school, how is school-readiness measured, analyzed, or quantified? Furthermore, are there contextual factors that either positively or negatively influence school readiness in children?
3. Are there other identifiable elements that significantly impact the success or progress of the AHSOR program for Aboriginal children living on reserve?

**Research Context**

Research and literature, both historic and recent, paints an alarming picture of the day-to-day life of Aboriginal Canadians (Collins & Jensen, 2009; Campaign 2000, 2011; Cooke, Beavon, & McHardy, 2004; Kendall, 2001; Noel & Larocque, 2009). Inarguably, it is increasingly evident that Aboriginal Canadians continue to fare far worse than their non-Aboriginal counterparts in nearly every aspect of day-to-day life; from overall well-being, to health status, and in every other socio-economic indicator (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2011). For the most part, Aboriginal Canadians are poorer (Noel et al, 2009; Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), 1996a), far less educated (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003; AANDC 1996a; National Indian Brotherhood, 1973), less employed and employable (Kendall, 2001; Mendelson, 2004, Statistics Canada, 2011d), are more likely to die sooner and from preventable diseases (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010; Frohlich, Ross, & Richmond, 2006), have higher incidences of incarceration (Office of the Correctional Investigator of Canada, 2012; Statistics Canada, 2009a), are more likely to lose children to the foster care system (AANDC, 1996a; Trocme & Blackstock, 2004), and are at greater risk of living in deplorable, inexcusable housing situations both on and off reserve (National Council of Welfare, 2007; AANDC, 1996a; Statistics Canada, 2008a).

The fact that these conditions exist for Aboriginal people in Canada, and that they are more likely to occur than for non-Aboriginal people, is no secret to both the public and to various levels of government. Indeed, research by various government departments; health agencies, and social justice groups from around the world such as the World Bank (2010), the United Nations (2004), and the Centre for Social Justice (n.d, 2010) illuminates the need for change in this regard. In some instances, research targeted to various levels of government indicates that unless meaningful and coordinated policy decisions are made; then no real change will occur at all (National Council on Welfare, 2007; The Senate,

2009). While this research is confined to Canada, it should be noted that that this situation is common amongst Indigenous peoples worldwide. In a recent report by the United Nations' Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues entitled *The State of their World's Indigenous Peoples* (2009) states that while:

> …full access to quality health care is a human right of all individuals, and it is therefore critical to ensure equal access to health care, including through efforts to eliminate discrimination and marginalization faced by Indigenous peoples. However, to address the root causes of indigenous people's health problems, there must also be full recognition and exercise of indigenous peoples' collective right to communal assets and self-determination. (Chapter 5, Barriers to Accessing Health Services, para. 2)

The same UN report further articulated "urgent and concerted efforts are needed to improve the health situation of indigenous peoples" (p. 162) in that "indigenous peoples experience disproportionately high levels of maternal and infant mortality, malnutrition, cardiovascular illness, HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis" (page 8). What is striking in light of these recommendations and fact sets is that effective policy decisions made by all levels of government on behalf of Aboriginal Canadians remain elusive. Indeed, year after year, the quality of life and the standard of living for Aboriginal people remains far behind that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts, sometimes so much so that Aboriginal peoples are dying sooner and from diseases that are both preventable and far less likely to occur among the rest of Canadian society (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010; The Senate, 2009; Frohlich, Ross & Richmond, 2006). The United Nations echoes this sentiment in their report on the *State of the World's Indigenous Peoples* (2009) in that they note "little has changed, despite the groundswell of developments in the area of human rights standards specifically addressing indigenous peoples' human rights" (p. 208).

The Canadian federal government, under whose jurisdiction Aboriginal education lies, has, over time, implemented a number of policies aimed at improving the conditions experienced by this group. However, these policies have been piecemeal at best in that they aim to improve either one aspect of their well-being, or a few factors affecting their overall socio-economic status, but are less likely to be holistic, coordinated and/or pan-governmental enough to ensure an meaningful and measured improvement and/or progress to their overall health and socio-economic status will occur (The Senate, 2009; Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2011, Ch. 4d). Jacklin & Warry (2004) further assert that:

> The fact that …communities are experiencing so many
>
> difficulties…suggests that better planning and consultation, collaborative
>
> policymaking, and improved financing …are necessary in order to
>
> increase…effectiveness. As it stands, (health policy) appears to be nothing
>
> more than a superficial bureaucratic solution to the very real and deeply
>
> rooted sociocultural problems facing First Nations in Canada. (p. 231)

It can be postulated that until such a time occurs, and until a multi-faceted and coordinated policy approach is utilized, Aboriginal Canadians will continue to suffer as a result of poor policy decisions made on their behalf.
The lack of holistic policy based approaches aimed at improving the lives of Aboriginal Canadians is best understood by Health Canada's (1994) report entitled *Strategies for Population Health: Investing in the Health of Canadians:*

> The major health problems of disadvantaged groups are a serious issue
>
> that must be attended to. However, they should not be the exclusive focus
>
> of a population health strategy; because resolving large problems of

relatively small groups will not give us the overall results we are looking

for in terms of improved health and prosperity of the entire population.

But equitable opportunities for health of disadvantaged groups must be a

special concern in a caring and democratic society that values the health of

all residents. (p. 28)

Perhaps it is for this reason (i.e. that the health and well being of one group is no more important than the health and well-being of all Canadians regardless of their current plight and dire stature within the larger Canadian social landscape) that effective holistic policy-based approaches have yet to be enacted. Yet what is troubling here is that while the Aboriginal population remains relatively small, both the 'problems' and the size of the Aboriginal population are increasing at an unprecedented rate. Statistics Canada, for instance, estimates that by the year 2031 the "Aboriginal identity population in Canada could be between 1.7 million and 2.2 million… representing between 4.0% and 5.3% of the total population" (2011, para. 1). Statistics Canada (2011a) further estimates that the "average annual growth rate of the Aboriginal identity population as a whole during this period would be between 1.1% and 2.2%, compared with 1.0% for the non-Aboriginal population" (para. 2) (see Figure 1).
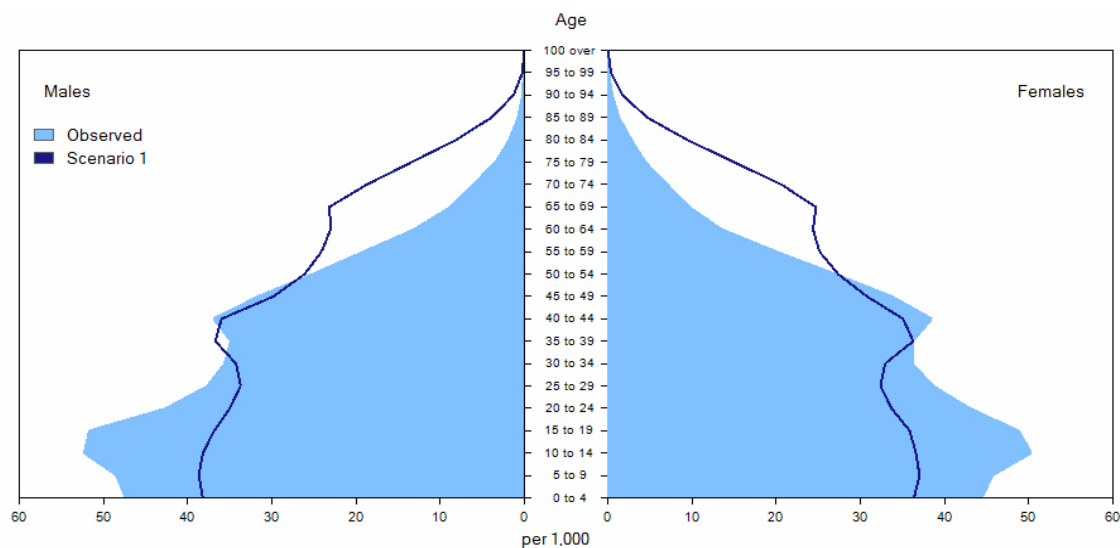


**Figure 1: Projected Aboriginal Population Growth 2006-2031**

It is expected that the ever-increasing Aboriginal population will likely result in commensurate "large(r) problems" (Health Canada, 1994, p. 28) which will warrant national attention, yet it is also acknowledged that an increased focus may not result in the "improved prosperity of the entire population" (Health Canada, 1994, p. 28). Given the desperate inequalities between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population, efforts to remediate these disparities should be pursued not for the sake of the state garnering increased global capital, but for the sake of human wellbeing. The reality that these conditions exist for Aboriginal people almost exclusively is a matter of human rights and a matter of human equality. Indeed, the United Nations (2009), for instance, notes that addressing disparities "may ultimately ensure indigenous peoples their rightful place within the international community and create new tools with which to reconstruct political and legal relationships with nation states and others" (p. 191). On the other hand, improving social conditions on a piecemeal basis (as is the present case) so that improved labour market participation and national economic output can improve falls short of this objective. Indeed, efforts by the state to improve conditions for Aboriginal people so that the country can profit, is in some ways, worse than doing nothing at all and profit-seeking and improved global capital earned on the backs of the marginalized is inexcusable.

With that in mind, the lack of holistic approaches aimed at improving conditions for Aboriginal people through various government led initiatives based on loose policy cannot and will not affect real progress. Policies regarding Aboriginal people as a singular approach, given the complex interaction of social contextual factors specific to the Aboriginal peoples of Canada as a result of the lingering and intergenerational effects of colonization, marginalization and oppression are simply not effective on a stand-alone basis. For instance, while it may be possible to increase access to employment for Aboriginal people by removing barriers and

providing protection against discrimination, these quasi-structural changes exists only in isolation and is not effective at changing the causes of underdevelopment (Kendall, 2001) unless simultaneously accompanied by improved access to capital, resources, capacity/training, and markets (Kendall, 2001).

With regard to the content of this research, the same may also hold true for Aboriginal specific educational programming. The Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve (AHSOR) program, for instance, is an early childhood development initiative that intends to provide opportunities for Aboriginal children to "develop positive self-esteem, ...a desire for learning and …opportunities to enhance all aspects of their development" (Health Canada, 2003b, p. 3) while simultaneously reducing the latent "negative health effects experienced by some Aboriginal children due to high rates of poverty and lack of social supports…" (Health Canada, 2003b, p. 3). What has yet to be fully determined in this regard, is that while it may be possible to employ an early childhood development program for on reserve Aboriginal children as a means to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal children and to "enhance all aspects of their development" (Health Canada, 2003b, p. 3) this may not be entirely achievable without simultaneously addressing other, perhaps more complex, social problems affecting the Aboriginal community, as well as complex issues directly affecting the primary caregivers upon which Aboriginal children and youth ultimately depend on.

**Purpose of the Study**

The intent and purpose of this research is not to problematize a particular group of people. For certain groups (Aboriginal peoples in particular), there is an ever-present awareness of a constructed collective "Indian" identity that is framed by mainstream Canadian society and which problematizes Aboriginal peoples through a cultural deficit lens and implicitly asks the question: 'how does it feel to be a problem?'. As W. E. Burghardt Du Bois (1897) writes:

Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question:

unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the

difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They

approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or

compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to

be a problem? They say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or I

fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your

blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a

simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it

feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word. (p.194)


In many ways, Aboriginal peoples need not always contend with a veiled contempt for their community and culture, as DuBois suggests. A significant number of Canadians make it clear, both explicitly and implicitly, that Aboriginal peoples are the problem and that 'if only they tried harder', 'had more self-respect', 'got their priorities right' that the desperate situations encountered by a significant number of Aboriginal peoples would improve and the Indian 'problem' would vanish. Indeed, time and again Aboriginal peoples are confronted with messages about the Indian 'problem' being too costly, seemingly endless, and entirely too expensive to warrant any further attention or focus.

To be clear, this research inquiry does not intend to support the continued problematization of Aboriginal people, but rather focuses on an examination of the objectives, purpose and outcomes of the AHSOR program with consideration given to the complex interaction of social inequalities affecting Aboriginal people that may contribute to our continued marginalization, oppression, and poor social progress. An examination of the available research, data, statistics, and existing policies regarding Aboriginal people may help illustrate and/or explicate this and

may further *assist in shifting the gaze of interrogation from the colonized to the colonizer*. Furthermore, the examination may also contribute to an increased awareness on the part of all levels of government, policy makers, and administrators alike that failure to consider these interactions in the development and implementation of Aboriginal policy supports neo-colonial pursuits that: (1) do little to improve the well-being of Aboriginal children on-reserve, (2) fail to decolonize the educational process for Aboriginal children and youth, (3) reaffirm and strengthen the dependent relationship between the Crown and Aboriginal peoples, and (4) support the continuation of poorly designed and loosely coordinated policy regarding Aboriginal peoples.

It could be argued that historic and present-day policies regarding Aboriginal people in Canada are a means to achieve a mutually desired end (i.e.: progress) based on welfare-liberal state ideologies. Understood in this way, government activities and investments are therefore motivated by egalitarian aims and in which principles for change emphasizes human need and mutual obligation (Olssen, Codd, & O'Neill, 2004). It could be conversely argued; however, that these activities are neither benign nor motivated by mutual gain, but are rather neoliberal, and perhaps neo-colonial, in their pursuit as they are motivated by core philosophical concepts which support the 'entrepreneurial spirit' in both private and public realms (Olssen et al, 2004) and one that is further dominated by economic motives.

Whatever position one takes, some of us are aware of the government policies that continue to assert an assimilative agenda which drags forward the relentless pursuit of the complete colonization of our people by various means. Efforts to dismantle and disengage the pernicious effects of colonization within policies and legislative frameworks, therefore, must continue if the well being of Aboriginal people is to improve at all. For some of us, these efforts require moving beyond accepting the rhetoric framed as both benevolent and benign that is far too common throughout policies regarding Aboriginal people, to developing a deeper

understanding of the true intent and aspirations contained therein through the use of a different theoretical lens. In the process of researching the topic of this study, it became apparent that there was a profound disconnect between the stated aims and goals of the program under examination in this study, and the governmental policy statements that precipitated the development of the AHSOR program. Indeed, while on the one hand the AHSOR program has been publicly described as a program that will prepare young First Nation children for school so they can get a "good start in life" (thereby reducing observed inequalities in health) (Privy Council, 1997, Investing in Children: para. 6), other related literature suggests that early childhood education, and education in general for Aboriginal people, is a matter of public investment for the purpose of improving economic output of the state increasing individual wealth, benefitting from increased taxation, and gaining a competitive advantage (Marginson, 1993, in Becker, 1964). The justification for this economically driven approach has come to dominate the Canadian state's agenda for education, particularly since the mid-1990s. The impacts of which are particularly apparent in early childhood education programs and in the AHSOR program specifically.

**Research Methodology**

As my graduate supervisor will attest, the research methodology section of my research inquiry has, by far, taken the longest to produce. The first two iterations of this chapter attempted to evade the subject matter altogether and the third attempted to fallaciously place a well-known research methodology over top of my research question as a means of fulfilling the 'research methodology' criterion common in all graduate level theses and dissertations. The most recent review and edit of this section also proved to be unsatisfactory in meeting these requirements; not because the research methodology I had chosen was invalid for the topic of inquiry, but rather in that it placed two methodological approaches unnecessarily into a binary. That is to say, I attempted to illustrate that a selected methodological approach was satisfactory in that it did more, proved more,

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illustrated more, than some other approach and was therefore the best at supporting my research question. However, for the purpose of answering the primary questions fundamental to Indigenous research methodology such as "who is this for" and "why does this methodology work" remained not only elusive to the reader and the researcher, but also left these questions unanswered almost entirely. Furthermore, the binary I created made me culpable for "falling into a mainstream positivist trap" (Wilson, 2007, p. 194) that would invariably lead to "judgement and subjugation, an us and them dichotomy" (Wilson, 2007, p. 194). In the search, once again, for a research methodology that would best represent my position and support my research question, I delved into the world of Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM) in hopes that this might, finally, help me reach the denouement to this long-contemplated section.

In the months that would follow my initial inquiry, not only did I learn that IRM was befitting, but that it would require me to contemplate and articulate so much more about myself as an Aboriginal person and scholar. For those who have laboured alongside me in this journey understand in a way that few others do when I say that describing my methodological approach, or my research paradigm, has proven a frustrated, yet rewarding, endeavour for me and for a few reasons that will be explained below.

**Indigenous research methodology.**

My driving purpose throughout these past few months has been to dismantle: (1) the mental blockage that kept me from writing this chapter with sincerity, forthrightness, and candour, and (2) to determine and demonstrate how and why the IRM approach upholds and supports my research question while simultaneously acknowledging and respecting Indigenous-based principles, values, and ethics concerning Indigenous research specifically. My search to locate the most appealing and fitting methodological approach over these past few months has proven, if nothing else, frustrating. Frustrating in the sense that when

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researching IRM, it becomes exasperatingly evident that there is no single, one-size-fits-all approach. As many Indigenous scholars will attest (Pidgeon & Hardy Cox, 2002; Kovach, 2005), there is also no quick and easy guide to IRM that researchers can hold up and assess to see if all the predetermined requirements of this methodological approach have been met. What is apparent; however, is that there is a broad range of processes and principles (Steinhauer, 2002; Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2003, 2007; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, 2005; Absolon & Willett in Brown & Strega, (Eds.) 2005) pertaining to IRM that aim to equip Indigenous researchers with a set of methodological 'tools' that are embedded in Indigenous worldviews. While there failed to be a 'fail-proof' IRM that I could use as a framework for this specific inquiry, there were however, common elements within each approach under the auspices of IRM that would help guide me to this point and that would further liberate me and direct me towards a more decolonized understanding of the powerful significance and related implications of research for, by, and with Aboriginal communities. More specifically, and with regard to IRM processes, matters pertaining to location (Absolon et al., 2005), position and relationships (Wilson, 2003, 2007; Weber-Pillwax, 2001), and honoring and respecting Indigenous voice and worldviews (Tuhiwai Smith, 2005, Martin, 2002; Steinhauer, 2002) appeared consistently throughout my research of this topic and further assisted in uncovering my 'truth' as an Aboriginal person and as an Aboriginal scholar.

### Indigenous research methodology: the process.

….we have to know our historical truth.
- Absolon and Millet, Research as Resistance, 2005, p. 119.

When I was initially approached by my graduate supervisor about the purpose and intent of my research, she asked me outright why I wanted to do this research and more specifically: *who is this for and why*?. I attempted to answer her question to the best of my ability and to answer her in the manner I had been trained so

formally to do. In the most academically sound way I told her that this research was ultimately for my own people (who is this for?), and that I was undertaking it since the topic of inquiry had yet to be studied (the why?). When she pressed me further on the issue, I told her that I was pursuing this topic as it I found it particularly disparaging that an early childhood education program targeted to one of the most vulnerable segments of Canadian society had not yet been investigated or analysed as a means of determining if the program was achieving its intended outcomes, and further, to determine if any latent effects of such a program (improved social outcomes) were materializing. This was a good starting point, she said, but she pressed further and further, until I could no longer put forward any more rational arguments. Perhaps she knew instinctively at the time, as I do now, that I was not prepared to answer these questions with any certainty, as I had not yet unpacked the true reasons behind both my pursuit of higher education and a thesis on Indigenous Peoples education. Throughout most of our conversations on the true purpose and intent of this research inquiry, I kept reiterating that I wanted this research to be as objective, value-free, and as apolitical as possible.  At the time, I was convinced that if I upheld the European and Western tenets of scientific research, I might possibly be considered as a valid Indigenous voice/position within European realms of scientific inquiry and within Western academia. My understanding at the time was borne from the multitude of dissertations and theses by Indigenous scholars that not only identified and made apparent their connection, relationality, and location of the individual researcher had to his or her community, but that it was of all things: subjective. From this standpoint, my narrow and colonized views of 'scientific inquiry' made it nearly impossible for me to see, read, hear, and understand what was being relayed to me as it did not fit the criterion for objective and value-free assessment so common in European scientific inquiry. With each passing day, and with each new reading, I grew a deeper understanding of the significance of the tenets of IRM not only for myself, but also for all Aboriginal researchers in relation to research by, for and within Aboriginal communities. What also became evident was that Indigenous research, by its very nature, couldn't be apolitical, value-free, or objective. Wilson

(2003) suggests "knowledge (that) is approached through the intellect leads to the belief that research must be objective rather than subjective; that personal emotions and motives must be removed if the research "results" are to be either valid or credible" (p. 171). Kovach (2005) also states that "Indigenous researchers...make research political simply by being who we are. Value-neutral research methodologies are not likely to be a part of the Indigenous researcher's experience" (p. 21). Tuhiwai-Smith (2005) articulates further in saying that "Research is a site of contestation not simply at the level of epistemology or methodology but also in its broadest sense as an organized scholarly activity that is deeply connected to power" (p. 87). Absolon and Millett (2005) concur and extend it to encompass an understanding that "...research conducted from a "neutral" or "objective" location is Eurocentric and is, therefore, unethical" (p. 107).

What I failed to reveal to my supervisor at the time was that the value-free, apolitical, and objective approach afforded me a comfortable anonymity and allowed me to avoid the inevitable confrontation of my positionality and relationality to the broader Indigenous community (for whom I claimed this research to be for). The literature review of IRM included the review of a multitude of theses and dissertations of other Indigenous scholars who had come before me and their analyses made it clear, at least on the surface, that they had no contentions, no uncertainties, no chaos surrounding who they were, who they represented, and how they were connected. Their ability to articulate their location and identify so seamlessly was not something I could identify with and so I cast their approaches aside. I did so not because they were not valid, but because I had yet to take the journey and could, therefore, not self-locate and represent my own truth (Absolon et al, 2005). Up to this point, I had been claiming, comfortably from the sidelines, that I was 'one of them', part of the larger Aboriginal struggle; I belonged. However, and what I knew instinctively, was that I had not yet considered the relevance and implications both personally, professionally, and academically of doing so.

**Indigenous location, position, and relationships in research.**

Absolon and Willett (2005) explain that Aboriginal researchers must "locate themselves" (p.117) and in doing so, "the context from which they come becomes validated" (Absolon et al, 2005, p. 117). They go further to state that researchers authenticate their "relations within community" (Absolon et al., 2005, p. 118) to demonstrate a connection, and that to write in the absence of location or connection:

> …to community or tribal group could be perceived and interpreted as
>
> second-hand writing or as writing in a vacuum...(and that) location
>
> exposes the researchers' current context as details about the researchers
>
> such as where they are from, their race and gender, who they are
>
> connected to, and what their research intentions are become revealed. We
>
> take the view here that it is impossible to conduct valid and ethical
>
> research about Aboriginal peoples without locating because location
>
> asserts the identity of the writer and the importance of the research.
>
> (Absolon et al., p. 118)

Wilson (2007) also contends that "researchers...need to place themselves and their work firmly in a relational context. We cannot be separated by our work, nor should our writing be separated from ourselves.... Good Indigenist research begins by describing and building on these relationships" (p. 194). Sinclair (2003) further suggests, "location in Indigenous research, as in life, is a critical starting point" (p. 122). Given these contentions, it became obvious that it was necessary to dismantle my attachment to the intellectualization of Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Weber-Pillwax, 2001, p. 173) as a means of upholding,

acknowledging, and honouring Indigenist research methods, but so that I may also free myself from the internal "chaos, conflict, and confusion about who (they) I really am (are)" (Absolon et al., 2005, p. 119). Part of my story, and most certainly part of my chaos, stems from poor/weak connection to family and community and as Weber-Pillwax (2001) contends:

> ...without a strong family and/or community base, as individuals we are weakened psychologically in our abilities to situate ourselves respectfully and comfortably in a world of many cultures, societies, and nations. We are unable to break our own sense of isolation because we are unable to identify and describe the source of such isolation consciously. (p. 168)

Furthermore, my internal chaos and confusion also stemmed from what W.E.B. Dubois (1897) refers to as "double-consciousness" (p. 194) that is, most likely, a manifestation of my upbringing in a non-Aboriginal community/household where my identity and location were informed largely by the "other world" (Dubois, 1897, p. 194). As I will explain further elsewhere, I had really only been able to articulate myself by "looking at one's self through the eyes of others, or measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Dubois, 1897, p. 194). As I would grow and mature, my understanding of myself and my heritage often had me at odds and in a never-ending struggle to merge my "double self into a better and truer self" (Dubois, 1897, p. 194). Much of my adult life, both personally, academically, and professionally, has been about reconciling these two identities, about reconciling my double-consciousness, in the hopes that one day I would prove to be worthwhile, sufficient - the right kind of Indian. What I failed to understand was that in doing so, that by engaging in "the double aimed struggle...on the one hand to escape white contempt for a nation of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, and on the other hand to plough and nail and dig for a poverty-stricken horde, could only result in making

him a poor craftsman, for he had but half a heart in either issue" (Dubois, 1897, p. 195).

Framed by Dubois and Weber-Pillwax's views, it was possible for me to locate the source and to the largest contributing factor to the ongoing delay in completing this chapter. It was now possible to know, see, and feel, that my history, my present connections, my identity - for which I wanted to deny and suppress - were the tools that would inevitably set me free and allow me to recover myself enough to situate, location, and position myself within this research. These realizations align with Absolon and Willett (2005) who contend:

> As our recovery from colonialism progresses, we speak about our past and present experiences with more awareness, understanding, and knowledge, and we revise the stories of our lives. Revision through location is essential and integral to our recovery process. We will tell our stories one way today, then revise and retell them tomorrow. The means by which we locate may also be revised. Sometimes we locate with song, dance, or story or we locate using ceremony, language, or tradition. (p. 112)

In the section to immediately follow, I will put forward my story, and my truth, about how I have come to understand my identity, my location, and positionality to the Aboriginal community. The story and language used herein is the means by which I assert my "presence and power" (Absolon et al, 2005, p. 113) in defining and locating myself.

**Researcher's position, location, and relation.**

> Then it dawned on me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil.
>
> - W. E. Burghardt Dubois, *The Strivings of the Negro People*, 1897.

My married name is Tibetha Kemble; my adoptive name is Tibetha Aweta Deane Missall and my birth name is Baby Girl Stonechild. I am a registered member of the Piapot First Nation, which is located in southeast Saskatchewan just outside Fort Qu'Appelle in the traditional territory of Treaty No. 4. I am the birth daughter of Annette Marie Stonechild (deceased) who explained on the *Application to Surrender* that she was placing me in the care of the Child Welfare system because she believed that she was 'not ready to take on the responsibility of being a parent'. The adoption and birth records that are now available to me make it clear that the beginning of my life was both confused and complicated. My birth mother, a Cree girl, found herself pregnant at the age of 13 by a man nearly two decades her senior. My birth father, a Metis man, had no fixed address and his only known occupation was that of a traditional hunter and trapper. The details about the relationship between my birth parents was not made available on any of the birth or adoption records, but I sense almost intuitively, that my conception must have been unforeseen and possibly unwanted. When I was 34 years old, I sought out my birth mother only to learn that she died at the age of 31, or when I was only 18 years old. I have little connection to my community, to my relatives, and the contact I've attempted to make over the years have proven strained, suspicious, indifferent, and distant. While my connection to my community and to my own people is not as entrenched or as strong as those who live and grew up on-reserve, I am cognitively aware of my historical connection to my community and feel connected in each cell of my body and know instinctively that I belong, but that my off-reserve upbringing means that I might forever be as the outsider looking in.

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I was raised in a non-Aboriginal home by two loving and caring parents who, to the best of their knowledge and ability, tried to keep my culture alive in me while being raised in an entirely non-Indigenous environment. I've spent a limited amount of time living on-reserve, except for the year my family and I spent in Assumption (Chateh), a reserve community in the uppermost corner of Northern Alberta. My adoptive father worked tirelessly in First Nations schools for the majority of his career as a Fine Arts instructor and he was the one who would often drag me to pow-wows at the Ben Calf Robe School and make me wear mukluks instead of my beloved Converse sneakers. I attended provincial school alongside my brother (a Cree from the Saddle Lake Cree Nation, also adopted) and it became obvious very early on that we were the only Indian students. Provincial school was also where we first learned of our pre-determined place in society - on the margins. I was not fully cognizant of the role the public school system played in the formation of my identity on the margins until much later in my life; however, and as Howard Adams writes in his book *Prison of Grass* (1975):

> As soon as native children enter school they are surrounded with white-supremacist ideas and stories - every image glorifies white success. Because they are unable to resist it, they become conditioned to accept inferiority as a natural way of life. They soon recognize that all positions of authority … are held by whites. These people make all the rules and decisions that determine the fate of Metis and Indian people, it makes them self-conscious and withdrawn....Consequently, the children internalize inferior images as part of their true selves often with strong feelings of shame. (p. 14-15)

My brother and I both suffered intolerable racism and violence for our heritage at the hands of fellow students and by adult teaching faculty. By the time I dropped out of high school at the age of seventeen, the public education system had

accomplished what it intended to, and what I was unable to fight back against: it had created the Indian it had in mind - the Indian who despised it's own, the Indian who blamed other Indians for their own suffering, the Indian who distanced him/herself from their community, and the good Indian who regurgitated national rhetoric and hatred about First Nations people in general and who, most of all, was ashamed of its own skin. I was, as I now fully understand, assimilated and colonized.

This would change however by the time I was 19, when I would meet a man who would change to course of my life forever. I was living in Vancouver at the time when I met a man named Ernie Yow, a registered member of a Northern BC First Nation.  He was the first person to ask me if I was of First Nations ancestry, and more specifically, if I was "status". I, unaware of the matter of Indian Status at the time, could only muster up the safest answer to this question: I am half Indian, half Chinese. I made up the part about being Chinese as I'd learned early on that my heritage and bloodlines proved less offensive if vindicated by a superior race and that I might be a "successful whiteman in mainstream society" (Adams, 1975, p. 15) if I paid only partial tribute to my true identity. Ernie looked me square in the face, called me out on my half-truth, and told me that I should learn more about my people. He told me to apply for my status card; he told me I would not regret it. He also took me to my first pow-wow as an adult where I knew, almost instantaneously, that I was home. At that pow-wow I felt an overwhelming sensation unlike any I'd experienced before: I felt alive, I felt at home, I felt like this is where I should be. When the drums started up at the Grand Entry I started to cry, and I cried for three days thereafter. All the stagnant energy I'd carried around with me finally had origins; it could finally be explained and I knew that I had to keep going. And so I did.

In the 15 years since my registration as an Indian under the *Indian Act*, much of my life has been dedicated to the pursuit of equity and justice. I should note that both terms are subjective and that since I write from the outside looking in; what I

perceive as 'equity' and 'justice' may mean something entirely different for an Aboriginal person who writes from the inside looking out. Equity and justice, to me, means being recognized and heard; it means having the same opportunities, the same standard of living, and the same right to life. For others, however, these terms might mean something different based on their subjective experience. Indeed, my off-reserve upbringing influences my perspective and pursuits greatly. Much of my life as an Aboriginal person, growing up on the outside, has meant that I have never known poverty; I have never known ill-health related to poor housing or poor health care; I have never known or been witness to social exclusion as a result of living on-reserve; and I have never been unjustly pursued by the justice or child-welfare systems. My pursuits and viewpoints, therefore, are based on an intellectualization of the issues, but that are grounded in an ever-growing connection to my community; which invariably leads to the final part of my location and position within this research.

I am an employee of the Department of Indian and Northern Development and have been an employee, in a variety of capacities, for nearly a decade. The various positions I have assumed in the organization have grown not only in scope and complexity, but also with regard to responsibility and accountability. I also grew personally throughout this time, and as my pursuit of a graduate degree came closer to completion, I found myself pondering my role within the organization (that is, to what am I complicit with?) as the Department pursues its mandate " to make Canada a better place for First Nations and Northern peoples" (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2009, para. 2).

For the majority of my career, I have worked primarily as the liaison between First Nations and the Department. This afforded me the opportunity to work in reserve communities and to hear directly from those who are affected, and continue to be affected, by the latent and salient effects of marginalization and social exclusion that have manifested since contact and in the years since the Indian Act was first introduced. At the same time, it has also meant that I must try

to understand and represent the non-Aboriginal world. In doing so, however, I now understand that I was almost always trying to make two worlds, so obviously in collision with each other, mesh into a peaceful and united force. As the years progressed, I grew an awareness that I was "confronted with the paradox that the knowledge his (my) people needed was a twice-told tale to his white neighbours, while the knowledge which would teach the white world was Greek to his (my) own flesh and blood" (Dubois, 1897, p. 195). Being confronted with a growing realization of the futility of one's work was - to say the least - disheartening. However, this newfound awareness permitted me to question, and re-question, the purpose, intent, and vision of my place in both worlds.

Trying to maintain internal peace between my double-lensed, double-conscious view of the world, wrought havoc on my identity. I laboured intensely to justify, on the one hand, that the policies, mandates, and legislative requirements imposed by the Crown were benefitting First Nation people, all the while knowing and feeling that I was complicit in potentially harmful and exploitative acts. Frustrated and exhausted, the words of W. E. B. Dubois (1897) echoed in my head:

> This waste of double-aims, this seeking to satisfy unreconciled ideals, has wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of eight thousand people, has sent them often wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation, and has even at times seemed destined to make them ashamed for themselves. In the days of bondage they thought to see in one divine event the end of all doubt and disappointment. (p. 195)

The question, as a researcher, then is: what now? By describing my location, position, and relationality, readers (and ultimately those who benefit from this research) may be better positioned to understand how I approached this work and through which lens/perspective I view the matters under investigation. It is my hope that I have made clear that while I am not firmly anchored to my own

community, or any community in particular, my experiences and the processes through which I have decolonized my thinking make it evident that this research is for Aboriginal peoples both in Alberta and throughout Canada, by an Aboriginal researcher, and for which the benefactors will ultimately be all Aboriginal children living either on or off reserve.

### Indigenous research methodology: the principles

Steinhauer (2002) states that the first stage of developing an Indigenous Research Methodology is to "decide what type of methodology to use" (p. 71) and that in doing so, we "try to find something that will accommodate what we are trying to accomplish" (p. 71). Shawn Wilson (2001) further states that the process described by Steinhauer can also be understood as a 'research paradigm', which is the "set of beliefs about the world and about gaining knowledge that goes together to guide your actions as to how you're going to go about doing your research" (Wilson, 2001, p. 175). Inherent to the development of an Indigenous paradigm, Wilson (2001) contends, are the researcher's ontology (beliefs about the world), epistemology (how one views and thinks about reality), methodology ("how you are going to use your ways of thinking to gain more knowledge about your reality" (Wilson, 2001, p. 175), and axiology (the researcher's set of morals or ethics).

In previously describing my location, relation, and position within this research; my ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology - while conflicted at times - reveal themselves. That is to say, my pursuit to reconcile and appease my role within two conflicting worlds was indeed futile, and that it is not possible to achieve any meaningful resolution to these pursuits. While this places me in a rather precarious position (ie: where do I belong?), it is possible for me to forge ahead, letting two identities wage war with each other, while aligning and further identifying with what Dale Turner (2006) describes as the "word warrior" (p. 72). Turner (2006) asserts that a word warrior is "an indigenous person who has been

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educated in the dominant...discourses. The primary responsibility is to be intimately familiar with the discourses ...of the state *while remaining citizens of Indigenous nations"* (p.119, emphasis original). Finally, Turner (2006) contends, word warriors "function in the secular world of global politics and ideas, yet their actions are guided by indigenous and non-indigenous ways of understanding the world" (p. 119), which as Turner suggests, aligns with traditional Indigenous perspectives regarding research that similarly call for the recognition of partnership (Assembly of First Nations, 2009).

Although I cannot fully know the exact outcome(s) of this research, this work respects the guiding IRM principles that are widely acknowledged within the Aboriginal community (Wilson, 2007). Moreover, this work is further guided by what Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) calls *Reframing*. Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) contends that *Reframing* is about "taking much greater control over the ways in which Indigenous issues and social problems are discussed and handled". In doing so, issues that were previously framed in a way that avoided or negated history and that were placed in a larger "indigenous problem basket" (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 153), ultimately lend to the cyclical nature behind many of the "social problems …beset(ting) Indigenous communities" (p. 153).

**Methods, Theories and Process**

The realization that very little examination had been undertaken as to the effectiveness of the ASHOR program in achieving its purpose and goals turned the initial focus of my research to a study of federal policies and statements regarding the AHSOR program. As Chapter 3 discusses, in order to better understand how the AHSOR program originated and the processes by which it remains in place in various sites on reserve across Canada, a comprehensive review of federal policy statements was undertaken. While it was not my original intent to undertake a critical discourse analysis of policy documents, what has resulted in light of these efforts might indeed be considered as such. What became

very apparent in this process was the consistent use of language and discursive practices within these policy texts which framed the current situation in Aboriginal education in a manner which not only blamed the victim but also indicated that federal programs and policies appear to be less inclined towards reducing disparities and enabling some measure of equity, than 'making use' of the Indian population to achieve greater national economic output and to alleviate fiscal pressures.

### Examining the discourse.

To better understand the notion and theory surrounding discourse analysis, especially in relation to the Crown/First Nation relationship, it is useful to contextualize language as a social practice in relation to power. According to Fowler (in van Dijk, 1985) "when we talk about power we may be referring to relationships between parents and children, employers and employees, doctors and patients, and government and its subjects, and so on" (in van Dijk, 1985. p. 61). Furthermore, these relationships are neither "natural nor objective; rather, they are artificial, socially constructed intersubjective realities" (in van Dijk, 1985, p. 61). Most importantly to these relationships is that language is a major mechanism in this process of social construction and "it is an instrument for consolidating and manipulating concepts and relationships in the area of power and control" (in van Dijk, 1985. p. 61). Not only is language used to enforce and "exploit existing positions of authority and privilege….the use of language constitutes and statuses the roles upon which people base their claims to exercise power, and the statuses and roles which seem to require subservience" (in van Dijk, 1985. p. 61). As Foucault (1971) articulates, the conditions necessary "for the appearance of an object of discourse" (p. 45) must consist "of a complex group of relations" (Foucault, 1971, p. 45) and that these:

> …relations are established between institutions, economic and social
>
> processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of
>
> classification, modes of characterization, and these relations are not

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present in the object; it is not they that are deployed when the object is

being analyzed; they do not indicate the web, the imminent rationality, that

ideal nervure …They do not define its internal constitution, but what

enables it to appear, to juxtapose itself with other objects, to situate itself

in relation to them, to define its difference, its irreducibility, and even

perhaps its heterogeneity, in short, to be placed in the field of exteriority.

(p. 45)

Fowler (1985) further states that the most massive and pervasive linguistic practice working to maintain power differentials is the imposition of ideology by official and public institutions (such as governments) (Fowler, in van Dijk, 1985, p. 67). Althusser (1971, in Fowler, 1985) refers to these instruments as ideological state apparatuses…(that) work to reproduce the existing power structure (Fowler, in van Dijk, 1985, p. 67) and that these apparatuses have the power to legitimize the existence and behaviour of the ruling authorities and that they also operate by "bathing society in official discourse: laws, reports, parliamentary debates, sermons, textbooks, lectures" (Fowler, in Van Dijk, 1985, p. 68). In sum, these discourses construct and reiterate certain signs and insist upon a certain "set of concepts that make up a certain reality – one that is favourable to the groups for whom the ideology was constructed" (Fowler, in Van Dijk, 1985, p. 68).

Referring back to the Purpose of the Study, it is also useful to illustrate that the use of critical discourse analysis evident in this study as a tool for social change in that discourse analysis "takes the side of oppressed social groups" (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 64) and that "Critique aims to uncover the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of unequal power relations, with the overall goal of harnessing the results of critical discourse analysis to the struggle of radical social change" (p. 64). Understood in this way, and given the revelation of the persistent use of discourse that was favourable to one group (the government) and that placed Indian people in "the field of exteriority" (Foucault, 1971, p. 45), it

became evident that the study was not simply about examining the extent to which the AHSOR program was achieving its stated goals and objectives, but that it was also about interpreting discourse (in the form of text, policy statements, laws, reports) and understanding how these operate in direct contradiction to the overarching goals of *Indian Control of Indian Education* and that further the unequal power relations through "artificial, socially constructed intersubjective realities" (Fowler, in van Dijk, 1985, p. 61). The end result of this process was the profound revelation and understanding that although Indian education in Canada has undergone dramatic shifts over the past two centuries, the persistent imposition of ideology by institutions that places First Nations in an inferior subservient position has meant that commitments made by the government can be seen as nothing more than a calculated process intended to confuse and subjugate through syntactic nominalizations[1].

### Framing the economic agenda: Aboriginal on-reserve programs and human capital theory.

As I will show in Chapter 4, the bulk of the research for this study appears to confirm the argument that education policies and programs function to affirm unequal economic ends that benefit the competitive advantage of the state and overall wealth of the nation. From this viewpoint, the concept of Human Capital Theory as a supportive framework is useful as a tool towards gaining a deeper understanding of governmental motives and true intentions in this regard. Human capital theory, as an economic concept, is not new. In fact, theories surrounding human capital investments as they relate to improvements in economic growth

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[1] Syntactic Nominalization refers to the arrangement of words that, through the process of nominalization, render verbs into nouns. According to Van Dijk (1985), nominalizations are "endemic to authoritarian discourse of all kinds: official publications, academic writing, legal language" (p. 71) and have two ideological consequences. First, Van Dijk argues, they "are a source of new nouns, coding of experience, that can be transmitted to the appropriate social group by propaganda or education. Second, they permit the deletion of both agency and modality…thus making mysterious the participants, obligations, and responsibilities spoken by the discourse" (1985) that is premised on a specific "practice...of impersonality (1985).

span nearly two-and-a-half centuries (Mincer, 1984). In more recent times, notably since the 1995 OECD report (Peters, 2003) however, human capital investment, as it directly relates to education, has tended to focus on the rates of return to investments in education and the resulting economic development of a particular country. Human Capital Theory (HCT) differs from the traditional understanding of capital that is generally understood the accumulation of wealth through income sources over a long period of time (Becker, 1964). HCT as it relates to investments to education; however, produce "human, not physical or financial capital because you cannot separate a person from his or her knowledge, skills, health, or values that way it is possible to move financial or physical assets while the owner stays put" (Becker, 1964, p. 16). The essence of human capital theory in this regard, is that investments are made in human resources so as to improve their productivity and therefore their earnings (Benjamin, Gunderson, & Riddell, 2002). Becker (1964) states that HCT and human capital analysis, "assumes that schooling raises earnings and productivity mainly by providing knowledge, skills, and a way of analyzing problems" (p. 19). Sharpe and Arsenault (2009) and Riddell (2006) add that investments in human capital raise earnings because it enhances workers skills, thus making employees more productive and more valuable to employers. Roy, Roberts & Ali (2012) also note:

> It is an established fact that the progress that a country can make in improving economic and social conditions of its citizens depends greatly on the rate of economic growth that the country can achieve consistently over a long period of time…. The formation of human capital is greatly facilitated by education and knowledge …(and) that the highest social rates of return to educational investment were derived from primary education. (p. 1)

Sharpe et al. (2009) point out that "rates of return to investments to education are high – and possibly higher than has generally been believed" (p. 2) and that

"policy interventions that result in additional schooling being acquired by individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, or those who face other barriers to acquiring human capital, may yield a substantial return in the form of enhanced earnings, in addition to contributing to equity objectives" (Riddell, 2006 in Sharpe et al, 2009). But the benefits of investments to education for the acquisition of human capital are not limited to purely individual economic outcomes. Research also suggests that investments to education also result in direct market outcomes, including but not limited to: economic growth, static market spillovers, benefits from increased taxation, and reduced unemployment (Sharpe et al. 2009; Sharpe & Arsenault, 2010). As Becker (1964) maintains, education "was one of the most important single determinant of economic growth" and to which Schultz (1960, in Becker, 1964) adds:

> I propose to treat education as an investment in man and to treat its consequences as a form of capital. Since education becomes part of the person receiving it, I shall refer to it as human capital....it is a form of capital if it renders a productive service to the economy. (p. 571)

Denison (1964) argues that education can contribute to economic growth in two ways:

> First, it may raise the quality of the labour force, defined to include all occupations from the highest to the lowest. This may be presumed to increase labour productivity independently of any tendency for a larger number of educated people to speed the enlargement of the society's stock of knowledge relevant to production. Second, an upgrading of the educational background of the population may accelerate the rate at which society's stock of knowledge itself advances (p. 14).

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Through an examination of the policy texts and government statements, Chapter 5 will make it evident that while benevolent and benign language are used to superficially frame the context for which these programs and services are provided, HCT reframes this understanding by reconceptualising it as a means to increase labour production, economic advantage, and overall national economic growth.

## Limitations of the Study

While the AHSOR program could be examined through a variety of lenses in order to determine whether the program is or is not meeting other stated objectives or goals (i.e.: local control, raising self-esteem, desire for learning etc.), this thesis examines only the extent to which the AHSOR program is meeting one of its stated goals related to improving school-readiness in on-reserve First Nations children between the ages of 0-6. The observations and conclusions drawn from this examination process are not intended to be totalizing; that is, the conclusions about the extent of effectiveness of the AHSOR program in relation to improved school-readiness, as it applies in this study, may not necessarily apply to every First Nation community participating in the program. Indeed, it may very well be that in the absence of a national evaluation by Health Canada, a First Nation community may have initiated an evaluation of their own program as a means of determining its effectiveness. In this way, the observations and conclusions drawn herein refer only to the evaluations, or lack thereof, made available by the federal department who assumes ultimate responsibility.

## Thesis Organization

This introduction has provided a brief overview of the AHSOR program as it relates to the research questions which are to more closely examine the extent to

which the program is achieving its stated goals and objectives to prepare young on-reserve children for school so that they can 'get a good start in life'. This was followed by three subsections that contextualized the: (1) research (i.e.: purpose of the research), (2) history of Indian education in Canada, and (3) theories and methods used to examine the thesis questions and shape my conclusion. This section also provided an overview of the research methodology used for the purpose of this study, as well as a personal narrative as to how I came to understand my location, position, and relation in relation to Indigenous Research Methodology.

The proceeding sections are organized as follows: Chapter 2 (Part 1) provides the historical context of First Nation education in Canada and will briefly discuss the history of early childhood education for on-reserve Indian children in Canada. This will be followed by an overview of the history of the AHSOR program in Canada, from it's earliest beginnings to it's present status, and it will also describe how the AHSOR is an example of unique early childhood development strategy designed to address an existing policy gap for on-reserve children under the age of 4. Part 2 of Chapter 2 presents a literature review of the current research and analysis of the AHSOR program and will identify the gaps within this research as to the effectiveness of the AHSOR program in achieving its programmatic purpose and goals. Chapter 3 presents a review of relevant reports and data that contextualize the need and purpose of the AHSOR program by examining and interrogating the policies, governmental policy statements, and supporting data used by various levels of government related to Aboriginal programming specifically.  This chapter conceptualizes how HCT shapes the environment in which Aboriginal education operates and acts as the primary ideology shaping Aboriginal educational policy in Canada. In order to gain an understanding of the importance of examining the AHSOR program in meeting it's stated objective and goals.  Chapter 4 examines the role and significance of 'school-readiness', as measured by the Early Development Index (EDI), for 'at-risk' and impoverished children as an intervention strategy. Included in this section is an in-depth

examination of each EDI risk factor as they relates to both the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal populations to illustrate not only the importance of early childhood education in mitigating negative social outcomes, but also that Aboriginal children, given the propensity and degree to which they are represented within each EDI subdomain, may benefit the most from well-planned and designed early childhood education programs in this regard. Chapter 5 concludes the examination and analysis of the AHSOR program in Canada and presents recommendations for areas for future research with regard to the AHSOR program as well as concluding comments. Chapter 5 also presents a section entitled After Thoughts, where I discuss, from a more personal perspective, my final thoughts on the methods, theories, and processes used within this work that I may not have fully articulated to the reader.

**Chapter 2**

## Part 1: Background

This section will briefly describe the historical context of First Nation Education in Canada. The intent in this regard is to further inform the summary overview of the Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve (AHSOR) program from its inception in 1995 (and its foundational ties to the U.S. Head Start program), to its expansion to the on-reserve population in 1997, and finally to its present day status. As a means of better understanding the U.S Head Start model that was used as a framework for the Canadian AHSOR program, an overview of the research and efficacy of the U.S Headstart will be discussed. This chapter will conclude with a related discussion regarding the manner in which the ASHOR program meets an observed (yet not outwardly stated) policy gap for Indian education for on-reserve children under the age of 4.

## Historical Context

While it is important that the *current* state of affairs for First Nation people in Canada be contextualized (as seen in the Research Context), it is equally important to articulate and historicize First Nation education in Canada from the initial establishment of missionary schools in the 1700s to the present band-run schools operated on-reserve today. By articulating in this way, the present day status of Indian education on-reserves is foreshadowed by a long and painful history that reflects not so much on the perceived failure by the government of Indian people in this regard, but to the relentless pursuit of assimilation that has, for the most part, created the education 'system' operating in nearly every First Nation community in Canada today. In doing so, the victim-blaming ideology that is far too prevalent in discussions regarding First Nations issues in Canada is instead refocused on how our people have survived in spite of these actions, and

persit in the pursuit of the vision of First Nation education articulated in Indian Control of Indian Education over four decades ago. What becomes apparent when framed in this manner, is that the vast array of issues facing First Nations communities, including those pertaining to First Nation education, are not borne from nothing. As countless First Nation people and communities will attest; our collective history is neither brief nor apolitical. As survivors of the Indian Residential School era have also testified, it is also not devoid of deep and profound pain. Rather, the history that frames our current relationship with the Crown is based on four-hundred years (Battiste, 2008) of struggle; one the on hand by the Government to control, dominate, assimilate, and in many instances exterminate, the Indian from the settlers landscape, and on the other by First Nation peoples who have long sought to have their inherent rights upheld, recognized, and respected by the representatives of those with whom they entered into treaties in good-faith nearly one and a half centuries ago.

Indeed, prior to contact, "Indians had evolved their own form of education. It was an education in which the community was the classroom, its members were the teachers, and each adult was responsible to ensure that each child learned how to live a good life" (National Indian Brotherhood (1973), as cited in Kirkness,1999, p. 2). In other words, Indian education was "designed by, provided for and carried out by Indians" (Frideres, 1987, in Wotherspoon, 1987). According to Kirkness (1999), this was expressed in daily living, in relationship to one another, and "in humility, in sharing, in cooperating, in relationship to nature – the land, the animals, in recognition of the Great Spirit, in the way our people thought, felt, and perceived their world" (p. 2) and, perhaps most importantly, Indian education was to preserve and maintain their way of life (Friesen, 1985). This learning modality would fundamentally change upon arrival of European missionaries in the early 1700s wherein day & mission schools were established whose primary objective was to civilize the Indian through religion.  However, day and mission schools would soon be replaced by Residential schools in the late 1800s as Indian Affairs believed that "they accelerated the process of assimilation, removing the

children…from their homes and in some cases from their communities for extended periods of time" (Dickason, 2002, p. 315).

Prior to the establishment of the Indian Residential school system; however, Indian education was closely tied to the negotiation of the Numbered Treaties throughout Canada. Between 1871 and 1877 (Regan, 2010), the Numbered Treaties initially focused on what the government had hoped would be a "simple land transaction to avoid making long-term commitments to the Indians" (Stonechild, 2006, p.15). However, growing tensions among the Aboriginal population in Treaty 1 in 1871 would alter the Treaty making process in Canada altogether. Discontinuities between the Indians and the Crown about the perceptions of the reserve allotments, and what the Crown deemed to be "preposterous demands" (Stonechild, 2006, p. 17) about the size of ceded land, increased hostilities among the Indians to an extent that forced Crown negotiators to find it necessary to "make numerous other concessions including provisions for education, economic assistance (agriculture) and …medical care" (Stonechild, 2006, p. 12). However, the fulfillment of the Crown to their obligations set out in these Treaties was foreshadowed by the overarching mandate by senior Departmental officials at the time[2] to reduce expenditures in this regard. Growing concerns among bureaucrats at the time regarding the "high cost of concessions made to Indians" (Stonechild, 2006, p. 17) in the Numbered Treaties meant that Indian Affairs officials were to "slash costs wherever possible" (Beal and McLeod, 1994, in Stonechild, 2006, p. 20). Throughout the same time, the Canadian government introduced the *Indian Act* in 1876, which was its first national legislation regarding Indians that was "modelled largely on the policy experience of Upper Canada and containing the practices developed under British colonial administration" (Stonechild, 2006, p. 17). By 1883, Indian bands across the country were suffering under this regime, and in many instances were

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[2] Prime Minister John A. MacDonald appointed Lawrence Vankoughtnet, Edgar Dewdney, and Hayter Reed to the management of Indian Affairs; all of who were instrumental in devising the repressive measures imposed on Indians at the time (Stonechild, 2006).

destitute. The underlying mandate to reduce expenditures on commitments made in the Numbered Treaties resulted in a letter from the Fort Edmonton chiefs in 1883, where they stated: "We were once a proud and independent people and now we…can get neither food nor clothing, nor the means necessary to make a living for ourselves…the treaty is a farce enacted to kill us quietly…let us die at once" (Stonechild & Waiser, 1997 in Stonechild, 2006, p. 18). The Resistance of 1885 by the Indians followed shortly thereafter and was swiftly met by the "imposed draconian measures that took away the Indians' freedom of movement, suppressed their traditional beliefs, and removed their children to residential schools" (Stonechild, 2006, p. 19). The intent of the imposed restrictive measures was to "do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the other inhabitants of the Dominion as speedily as they are to fit to change" (Stonechild, 2006, p. 19). Following a study on the impacts of industrial schools for Indians in the United States, Nicolas Flood Davin, issued a report "that led to the construction of the initial schools in the North-West Territories" (Stonechild, 2006, p. 20). From this time onward, Indian Residential schools became the "primary federal policy instrument for the assimilation of Indian children in Canada" (p. 20).

Whereas day schools and mission schools were intended to civilize the Indian through religious education, Residential schools on the other hand were devised as a means of isolating the child from his parents and influences of the reserve (Kirkness, 1999) and to move Aboriginal communities from their "savage state to that of civilization" (Milloy, 1999, p. 1). In a statement by Frank Oliver, Minister of Indian Affairs in 1908, he noted that residential schools and education policy crafted by the state, would "elevate the Indian from his condition of savagery" (in Milloy,1999, p. 1) and make them "self-supporting member(s) of the State, and eventually a citizen in good standing" (Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996, in Milloy, 199, p. 1). In 1894, school attendance was made compulsory through an amendment to the Indian Act and by 1900, of the total estimated population of children between the ages of 6 to 15, approximately 3,285 were

"enrolled in 22 industrial schools and 39 boarding schools, and another 6, 349 were in 226 day schools" (Dickason, 2002). In the decades to follow the *Indian Act* amendment, attendance at federally-run schools saw rapid expansion; however, at the turn of the century support and enthusiasm for industrial schools waned as rising costs per pupil became evident, and as opinion about the Indian's perceived lack of physical, mental or moral get-up to compete with non-Indians on equal terms' once placed into the general community, and with growing concerns over the treatment of Indian children attending these schools. In a report issued in 1902, it was noted that out of "2,702 graduate students, only 599 were doing well" (Titley, 1986, p. 80) and that children were being beaten for speaking their own language" (AANDC, 1996a). Reports on the well-being of Indian students attending residential schools often noted that, in many schools, siblings were often forbidden social contact, and that a significant number of residents endured sexual and physical abuse, hard physical labour, hunger, malnutrition, and deliberate exposure to diseases such as tuberculosis. Despite growing recognition of the shameful condition of Indian children at many residential schools, residential schools would not be phased out until much later in the century. Citing poor management and oversight of the schools by the state, in addition to rising costs, and increasing charges of abuse, a gradual phasing out of the residential school program was underway and it would not be until 1996 (Canadian Encyclopedia, 2012) that the last residential school in Canada would close its doors. However, while the doors on these schools may have been closed (perhaps denoting finality in the minds of the federal government), the residential school experience is still very much alive among hundreds of thousands of Indian people across Canada. Indian people are now coming forward with factual accounts of their own personal experience about the true extent of the horrors and offences they endured at the hands of the government throughout this dark era.

The decades preceding the final closure of residential schools saw various alternative attempts to employ the assimilative agenda that was predominate before the turn of the century. In 1951, parliamentary investigations that preceded

a revision to the Indian Act, rejected Indian Affairs education policy (as it was presented at the time) an instead insisted that Indian children be integrated into the provincial system through attendance at off-reserve public schools (Dickason, 2002). By the 1960s, out of the estimated 38,000 Indian children in school at the time, it was approximated that nearly one-third were attending provincial schools (AANDC, 1996a; Dickason, 2002). Concurrently, growing unrest by First Nation communities about the lack of autonomy in controlling education for their people coalesced around responses to other political and administrative shifts concerning the recognition and equalization of Aboriginal rights[3]. Under the liberal administration of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau from 1968 to 1979, a radical shift in ideology regarding the special status and rights of Indian people in Canada came into view. As part of Trudeau's call for a *Just Society*, Trudeau emphasized participatory democracy premised on:

> …freeing an individual so he will be rid of his shackles and permitted to
>
> fulfil himself in society in the way in which he judges best, without being
>
> bound up by standards of morality which have nothing to do with law and
>
> order but which have to do with prejudice and religious superstition".
>
> (English, 2009, p. 20)

Trudeau's focus on Aboriginal rights in this sense centred on the ideology that the *Indian Act* was discriminatory since it offered unequal treatment and a separate legal status to one group in particular. Furthermore, the prevailing concerns Trudeau had in relation to "collective rights" (English, 2009, p. 513) been especially concerning in this regard. In 1969, Jean Chretien, then Minister of Indian Affairs, issued the *White Paper* that called for the full, free and non-discriminatory participation of the Indian People in Canadian society" (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 1969: Foreward: p.1) and as such

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[3] For further discussion, see also: Dickason, O. Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times (2002). Chapter 22.

proposed to repeal the Indian Act. In response, the National Indian Brotherhood issued a policy statement entitled *Indian Control of Indian Education* (1973) that marked a significant departure for Indian Education in Canada. In response to sections of the *White Paper* which, hoped that all Aboriginal students would be absorbed into provincial systems and mainstream society (Battiste, 1995), the *Red Paper* [4] rebuked these efforts and instead called on the federal government to recognize "four areas for attention and improvement" (National Indian Brotherhood,1973; New Policy: n.p.); namely: responsibility, programs, teachers and facilities. Perhaps more significantly, the *Red Paper* called attention not to the perceived failures by the federal government of the recipients of assimilative education, but rather shifted focus onto the failure of the federal, provincial, and territorial governments (AANDC, 1996a) to implement effective and appropriate policies to address First Nation goals for education and to uphold the tenets of Aboriginal education of parental responsibility and local control.  In response, the federal government formally withdrew the *White Paper* and instead noted their commitment to the realization of the stated goals contained within the *Red Paper*. A statement issued by Jean Chretien, then Minister of Indian Affairs, notes:

> I have given the National Indian Brotherhood my assurance that I and my
>
> Department are fully committed to realizing the educational goals for the
>
> Indian people which are set forth in the Brotherhood's proposal. The
>
> Department desires to work constructively with Indian communities on a
>
> partnership basis which encourages full, free and frank discussion and
>
> which places major responsibility for educational decisions and directions
>
> in the hands of the Indian community concerned. (Federation of
>
> Saskatchewan Indians, 1975)

Since that time, many other First Nation communities across Canada have now assumed control over their own education; however, the extent of control remains

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[4] Also known as Citizens Plus, first drafted by the Indian Chiefs of Alberta (1970)

a highly contested site, in that while First Nation councils have assumed authority over education and educational content must still comply with federal requirements. Furthermore, funding restrictions related to elementary and secondary education guidelines made the implementation and fulfillment of local control nearly impossible since Treasury Board regulations stipulate that "local control and administration of education programs by Bands should not entail any additional cost" (Kirkness, 1999, p. 12). Lastly, the concepts of *control* versus *operation* have ensured that the recognition and transfer of education to bands impossible in that "control is to have power over, to exercise in directing influence, whereas to operate means to manage or keep in operation" (Kirkness, 1999, p. 13). The divergence between these two concepts, and the Departments insistence on maintaining the status quo in terms of authority, has meant that the recognition and commitment to realizing the goals in *Indian Control of Indian Education* has been minimal, at best, and contributes to the persistent claims of the "Canada as Peacemaker" (Regan, 2010, p. 83) mythology. As Regan (2010) aptly states:

> …the Canadian government is attempting to negotiate reconciliation between the Crown and Indigenous people on a number of fronts. Thus, Canada has granted, or 'bestowed upon' Indigenous peoples limited political recognition and self-government within a multicultural state, has negotiated modern treaties and land claim settlements based on the extinguishment of Aboriginal title and rights, and has implemented a range of policies, programs and services designed to help Native communities solve the Indian problem that has been created by past policies. All of these actions are highly contested by Indigenous people, who point out that trust has been broken on a number of fronts. They seek full political recognition as self-determining peoples and treaty partners. Moreover,

they wish to govern their own affairs, including education, justice, health,

and social programs – all of which are key to their decolonization and

cultural revitalization. (p. 84)

Despite the ongoing assault on First Nations people through various assimilative and destructive educational agendas, Kirkness (1999) argues, "we have not allowed ourselves to become completely assimilated" (p. 13). According to Battiste (1995), "twenty-five years of control of education in some schools has ushered in a new era in which Aboriginal education has been redefined" (p. x) where First Nations have begun to move from "models of colonial domination and assimilation to those that are culturally, linguistically, and philosophically relevant and empowering" (p. x/xi). However, despite positive changes that have equipped some First Nations with limited control and authority over the direction of education, both First Nation and federal levels of government have also recognized that fundamental change is still needed.

More recently, and as previously stated (p. 13), data reveals that fulfilling the promise of Aboriginal education has yet to be fully realized in that the majority of First Nations people do not have equal access or opportunity to education, nor have Aboriginal parents and Aboriginal communities had the "opportunity to implement their vision of education" (AANDC, 1996a; 1.5 Need for Fundamental Change, para. 1) recommendations to the federal government made by First Nation communities and councils call for education programs that are carefully designed and implemented with parental involvement that will enable children to "participate in two worlds with a choice of futures" (AANDC, 1996a; 1.5: The Need for Fundamental Change, para. 1). However, even in the face of growing concerns by First Nation leaders and communities about both the state of First Nation education and the ongoing struggle for control, the federal government persists in adhering to paternalistic, top-down approaches (such as the newly proposed *First Nation Education Act,* AANDC, 2012e) that seemingly ignore previous commitments to realize the goals put forward by First Nation people in

the *Red Paper.* The struggle for control, the desire for fundamental change, and the desire to have equal opportunity and access to education for Indian children continue and there are a significant number of commitments and obligations that have yet to be realized.

**Early Childhood Education and Care for On-Reserve Indian Children in Canada**

Early childhood education (ECE) and care for on-reserve Indian students in Canada has a relatively short history when viewed within the broader framework of Indian Education in Canada. Prior to 1994, funding for the provision of First Nation early childhood development and care was nearly non-existent (Greenwood, 2006). According to Greenwood (2006), where those ECE programs and services were provided, they were often "sporadic and inadequately funded and as a result were short-lived" (p. 13). However, by the mid-1990s, Canada announced the First Nation/Inuit Childcare Initiative and Urban and Northern Head Start Program that was a manifestation of the then Liberal Party's 'Red Book' (Greenwood & Shawana, 2003) and which created 6,000 new child care spaces in First Nation and Inuit communities across Canada (Greenwood, 2006). The federal government expanded their efforts in 1995 through the announcement of the Aboriginal Head Start Program (AHS) that was "designed to foster and enhance the development and school-readiness of Indian, Metis, and Inuit children in urban and large northern communities" (Greenwood & Terbasket, 2007, p. 75). By 1996, First Nation ECE and care was brought to the forefront through significant lobbying by First Nation people in Canada and secured national attention through its inclusion in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (hereafter called the Royal Commission) wherein it was noted:

> Early childhood is one of the most important points in the learning
>
> process. In recent decades, research has confirmed the critical importance
>
> of infancy and early childhood as a foundation upon which identity, self-

worth and intellectual strength are built. Trauma, dislocation and

inconsistency in early childhood can affect the rest of the individual's

life. But if the child's environment is rich in love, intellectual stimulation

and security, the capacity to grow is invigorated. Because early childhood

is regarded as so important to later development, educators have turned a

spotlight on learning before formal education normally begins. (AANDC,

1996a; 3.1: Early Childhood Education, para. 2)

Quoting from an earlier study conducted by the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning in 1994, the Royal Commission reiterated the compelling argument for the provision of ECE to children growing up in poverty:

Children who come through a carefully planned process of early education

gain significantly in competence, coping skills, and (not least important) in

positive attitudes towards learning…. We're convinced that early

childhood education significantly helps in providing a level playing field

of opportunity and experience for every child, whatever her background.

(Ontario, 1994, cited AANDC, 1996a; 3.1: Early Childhood Education,

para. 10).

Recommendations made by the Royal Commission (Chapter 5; 3.5.3, 1996) regarding ECE urged federal, provincial and territorial governments to work collaboratively to develop and integrated early childhood funding strategy that would extend services, that had not yet been provided for up to this point, to all First Nation children regardless of residence; that maximized Aboriginal control over service design and administration, and that promoted parental involvement and choice in early childhood education options (AANDC, 1996a).

**History of the Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve Program**

In 1995, the Federal government announced the launch of the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) which was designed to enhance child development and school readiness (Cleghorn & Prochner, 2020) of "Indian, Metis and Inuit children living in urban and large northern communities" (Health Canada, 2011b). While there appears to be some discontinuity as to the primary purpose and overarching goal of the AHS in the related literature (Health Canada 2000; Budgell & Robertson, 2003; Palmantier, 2005; Pubic Health Agency of Canada, 1998; Health Canada, 2011b), Health Canada; however, reports that the "goal of AHS is to instil a sustaining, caring, and nurturing environment based on a holistic model encompassing the emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental health needs of children for life long learning" (Health Canada, 2003b, p.3 ). Furthermore, the Public Health Agency of Canada (2013b) also states that the AHSUNC was also established to

> …support the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical development
>
> of Aboriginal children, while supporting their parents and guardians as
>
> their primary teachers. It addresses general health concerns in vulnerable
>
> populations and works to benefit the health, well being and social
>
> development of Aboriginal children. (para. 2)

The literature suggests that the delivery of targeted programs and services under the AHSOR program will "provide(s) opportunities for Aboriginal children to develop positive self-esteem, ...a desire for learning and …opportunities to enhance all aspects of their development" (Health Canada, 2003b, p.3). A less stated, yet somewhat more meaningful, goal of the AHS is to reduce the latent "negative health effects experienced by some Aboriginal children due to high rates of poverty and lack of social supports…" (Health Canada, 2003b, p.3)

**Aboriginal head start on-reserve: early beginnings.**

Often excluded from the available literature regarding the AHSOR program, is both the history and purpose of the program as well as its intended effect on the target population it intends to serve. Literature on earlier Head Start and early childhood compensatory programming in the US, such as the American Indian Head Start (AHIS) (Cleghorn & Prochner, 2010, p. 34) formed "part of the original Head Start Initiative in 1965" (Cleghorn et al, 2010, p. 34). In the late 1960s the US Head Start "worked with local communities and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to incorporate and extend the existing BIA kindergartens and to develop staff training" (Cleghorn & Prochner, 2010, p. 34).  While the non-Indian Head Start programming did not pay "explicit attention to culture" (Cleghorn et al, p. 34), mounting pressure from parents and the American Indian community "ensured that culture was included as a program component" (Jipson, 1991, in Cleghorn & Prochner, 2010, p. 35). While the AIHS had an explicit cultural component, both the AIHS and the United States Head Start program were designed and further developed by early childhood experts in the early 1960's as a means of responding to President Johnson's War on Poverty (Zigler & Styfco, 1993; Vinovskis, 2005, Zigler & Styfco, 2010; Zigler & Muenchow, 1992). At the time in the United States, it was estimated that approximately 15 million children were living in poverty and that "through education and self-help programs…the War on Poverty could succeed in transforming the lives of poor Americans" (Zigler et, al. 1993, p. 2).

U.S. Head Start program designers believed in a "whole-child" (Zigler & Styfco, 1993, p. 3) approach that would enhance children's overall social competence through the "provision of comprehensive services" (Zigler & Styfco, 1993, p. 4) in order to create a unique multifaceted intervention. Efforts were then placed on designing this intervention program in a manner that would emphasize the importance of supporting and enhancing five (5) key areas of the child: (1) nutrition, (2) physical and mental health, (3) parental involvement, (4) social

services for families, and (5) early childhood education (Zigler, et, al, 1993; Henry, Gordon, & Rickman, 2006). Since the program's inception in 1965, the core elements of the Head Start program have remained fundamentally the same and it continues to place emphasis on the holistic needs of the child to enhance social competencies such as school readiness (Henry et al, 2006), socioemotional development, cognitive development (Besahrov, Germanis, Higney, Call, 2011; Love, Tarullo, Raikes, Chazan-Cohen, 2005) high school completion (Love et al, 2005; The White House, 1997; Devaney, Elwood, & Love, 1997), employment (Woodhead, 1988), reduced dependency of social transfers, reduced juvenile delinquency (Reynolds, 1994), and criminality (Love et al, 2005).

Initial public response to the U.S. Head Start program was "immensely positive" (Zigler & Styfco, 2010, p. 57) and the total number of children who enrolled in the program's initial summer cohort was 560,000 with funding to support this initiative set initially at $10 million and then increased to $70 million given the volume of applicants to the program throughout the U.S (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). By 2009, the number of children enrolled in Head Start projects operating throughout the United States increased to approximately 904,000 and the total amount of federal funding to support all Head Start related activities ballooned to $7,110,283,000 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Early research into the efficacy of the Head Start program on poor children focused not so much on its holistic effect (i.e.: enhancing social competence), but rather on the cognitive gains (i.e.: increased IQ) of children at what was deemed a *critical period* (Bloom, 1964; Zigler and Muenchow, 1992) of their development and intellectual growth. Research findings at the time tended to show that children experienced immediate increased in IQ scores (Datta, 1979) that led to correlated increase in the program's popularity by both the general population and by government administrators. This expressed popularity stemmed from research that showed that increases in IQ would lead to increased achievement later in life and

in that way, Head Start was achieving its goal, at least in a limited way, of improving the social competency of poor children as it had originally intended.

As the program matured, so too did the research into its efficacy on achieving its founding goal of enhancing social competence to mitigate the effects of poverty and to transform the lives of poor children. Longitudinal studies of the program found that while the program did indeed provide immediate gains in IQ that faded out over time (Love et al, 2005); Head Start children had better health, immunization rates, and nutrition as well as enhanced socioemotional traits (McKey, Condelli, Ganson, Barrett, McConkey & Plantz, 1985). Additional studies found similar results and further determined that Head Start children had better school adjustment than peers who had no preschool (Copple, Kline & Smith, 1987); had fewer absences, did not miss as many tests and seemed less likely to be retained a grade (Hebbler, 1985; Currie & Thomas, 1995); and that children who attended Head Start…performed better academically (Hebbeler, 1985) than their non-Head Start peers.

**Head start: from the U.S. to Canada - making the transition.**

Canada's Aboriginal population has historically been, and continues to be, the most disadvantaged group among all social measures including housing, education, employment, and social mobility to name only a few. In most instances, Aboriginal people in Canada fare far worse, sometimes even alarmingly so, than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.  Aboriginal children, by extension of these facts and statistics, are said to be "the most socially disadvantaged population in Canada" (Ball, 2012, p. 339) in that they "suffer from significantly higher incidence rates on nearly every health indicator, especially chronic middle ear infections and early hearing loss, respiratory tract disorders and asthma, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), and accidental injury" (Adelson, 2005; Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2004; Kohen, Uppal & Guevremont,

2007; Smylie & Adomako, 2009 in Ball, 2012, in Howe and Prochner, 2012). The complexities and negatively associated latent educational trajectories (i.e.: low levels of high school completion) as a result of this disproportionate disadvantage is said to be associated with the observed poor educational outcomes for Aboriginal peoples specifically. The Council of Ministers of Education (2004), for instance, stated in their report entitled Quality Education for All Young People: Challenges, Trends, and Priorities that:

> There is a recognition in all educational jurisdictions that the achievement rates of Aboriginal children, including the completion of secondary school, must be improved. Studies have shown that some of the factors contributing to this low level of academic achievement are that Aboriginals in Canada have the lowest income and thus the highest rate of poverty, the highest rate of drop-outs from formal education, and the lowest health indicators of any group. (p. 22).

In light of these recognitions and observations (among others), increasing focus over the past four decades has been placed on the agendas of all levels of government in an effort to improve the social conditions and resulting social inequality for Aboriginal people in Canada, including young children. Within the past decade; however, even more attention has been placed on improving the health and well-being of Aboriginals given the number of Aboriginal groups and First Nations leaders speaking out against deep social inequalities between the groups in a country that has prided itself on being one of the most advantageous and rights-based countries in the world (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2012; Parliament of Canada, 2001) despite evidence to the contrary (Amnesty International, 2005 & 2012). Canada has responded with a number of social interventions and supports whose primary goal is to reduce the known levels of inequality between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, one of which was the

development and implementation of the Aboriginal Head Start and subsequently the Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve program.

### Expansion to on-reserve aboriginal population.

In a 1997 Speech from the Throne the federal government made a commitment to work collaboratively with all other levels of government to develop a "comprehensive strategy to improve the well-being of Canada's children" (Privy Council, 1997; Investing in Children: para. 7). Included in this commitment was the expansion of the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) to "reserves to ensure that all Aboriginal children have the opportunity to get a good start in life" (Privy Council, 1997, para. 8). Concurrently, the Government of Canada also extended it commitment to improving the health of Aboriginal people by stating in it's report entitled *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan - A Progress Report* that the AHS would be further expanded to include "on-reserve Aboriginal children and that 202 projects in 1999-2000 would receive funding to deliver this program" (Department of Indian and Northern Development, 2000, p.23).

While there is little difference in the content of the AHS and AHSOR programs, both of whom are designed to implement the six core program components of culture/language, education, health promotion, nutrition, social support and family involvement (Health Canada, 2011b) there is however, one major distinctive difference between programs in that the AHSOR program is designed to demonstrate that "locally controlled and designed early intervention strategies can provide First Nation preschool children with a positive sense of themselves, a desire for learning, and opportunities to develop fully and successfully" (Palmantier, 2005, p. 5).

This program implementation follows a 1997 Speech from the Throne wherein Canada recognized that "experiences of Canada's children, especially in the early years, influences their health, their well-being, and their ability to learn and adapt through their entire lives" (Privy Council Office, 1997, Investing in Children, para. 3). Canada further recognized that "children need a substantial investment of time and attention for healthy development" (Privy Council Office, 1997; Investing in Children: para. 7) and that one way of attending to this need, which further meets the agenda of improving health and well-being especially for Aboriginal children, is to "expand our Aboriginal Head Start program to reserves to ensure that all Aboriginal children have the opportunity to get a good start in life" (Privy Council Office, 1997; Investing in Children: para. 8).

Although the AHSOR program finds its foundational program elements in the U.S. Head Start (Stout & Harp, 2009), the primary variation between programs rests in the overall purpose and goal of the AHSOR program, in that it is a population health initiative aimed at improving the health and well-being of Aboriginal children living on reserve versus a strategy employed for the purpose of eliminating poverty and its latent effects on society.

The AHSOR four year pilot phase starting in 1998 was approved a total of $100 million dollars to be disbursed as follows: $15 M in 1998/1999, $33 M in 1999/2000, $27 M in 2000/2001, $25 M in 2001/2002 and $25 M per year thereafter (Health Canada, 2003b, p. 4). Popularity and support of the AHSOR program has increased substantially since its inception as is evidenced by the total number of children participating in the program. In 2000-2001, for instance, Health Canada reported that 6,467 Aboriginal children in 314 Head Start sites across Canada participated in the program. By 2011, the number of Aboriginal children enrolled in the program increased to approximately 9,000 and the funding allocated to the program increased substantially to $59 million annually.

**The AHSOR program: unique programming to address the policy gap.**

The AHSOR program is unique educational programming for First Nations children on reserve in that it is an early intervention strategy specifically targeted to "support the developmental needs of First Nations children ages zero to six and their families" (Health Canada, 2011b, Linkages to Federal Child Development Programs: para. 2). Furthermore, it is also a program whose "goal is to support programming that is designed and delivered by First Nations communities in an effort to meet their unique needs" (Health Canada, 2011a, para. 1).  Given the ever-growing recognition by levels of government to support the realization of the stated goals within the *Red Paper* the AHSOR program provides a loose policy framework, or what Health Canada calls a "blueprint of options" (Health Canada, 2003d, Introduction: para. 1), "for First Nations to *consider* in developing their Head Start program standards" (Health Canada, 2003d; Introduction: para. 1, emphasis added). In this way, Health Canada states that the examples of standards contained in the First Nation Head Start Standards Guide "are not to be imposed upon First Nations. The reason (sic) the words "shall" and "should" appear in these examples reflect the type of wording used in standards" (Health Canada, 2003d, p. i).

The AHSOR program is also unique in that, until recently, early childhood interventions (or development/education) for on-reserve children between the ages of 0-6 has fallen into a 'policy gap', meaning that AHSOR program intends to address an observed need for which there exist no legislative requirements or existing policy frameworks to which the Department of Indian and Northern Development (DIAND) must comply.  Section 116 of the *Indian Act*, for instance, states, "Subject to Section 117, every Indian child who has attained the age of seven years shall attend school" (Minister of Justice, 2013; para. Attendance: sec. 116) and that in some instances the Minister may "…(*a*) require an Indian who has attained the age of six years to attend school" (Minister of Justice, 2013, para.

Attendance: 116 (2) (a)).  Despite the age-specific limitations regarding the Department's fiduciary responsibilities pertaining to the primary and secondary education of Indian children on-reserve, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada's (2013a) Elementary and Secondary Education Guidelines note that eligible students are those who are "Aged 4 to 21 years (or the age range eligible for elementary and secondary education support in the province of residence) on December 31 of the school year in which funding support is required" (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013a; Eligible Students: 6.1 (Nominal Roll), para. 2). This suggests that although the Department is only legislatively bound to provide education for Indian children between the ages of 6-16 (as stated in the Indian Act), it is apparent that the scope of responsibility has extended to children between the ages of 4 to 6 (depending on provincial age-range eligibility standards). However, financial support to First Nation councils is *only* to support the provision of *elementary and secondary education*, indicating that early childhood development programming falls outside this scope of responsibility and/or authority.

In that regard, while DIAND has not legislative requirement to support the early learning needs of on-reserve Aboriginal children, Health Canada on the other hand, is "responsible for helping the people of Canada maintain and improve their health" (Health Canada, 2011c). While on-reserve Aboriginal peoples fall under the exclusive legislative authority of the Crown, Aboriginals peoples are also the concurrent responsibility of Health Canada in that they are also considered within Health Canada's larger interpretation of "people of Canada" and in this way is "committed to improving the lives of all of Canada 's people" (Health Canada, 2011c, para. 1).

Whereas the Department presently only provides funding to support elementary and secondary education programs and services to on-reserve children and youth between the ages of 4-21; Health Canada steps in where the Department leaves off in that it provides support for early childhood development programming for

children under the age of 4, thereby attempting to fill the policy gap regarding the early educational requirements of Indian children.

### Health Canada: addressing health inequalities through early childhood development.

In many respects, the development and implementation of the AHSOR program is unique in that since it falls under the policy umbrella of Health Canada it is also a program that intends to address observed health inequalities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. For the most part, education and early childhood education are not normally associated (or viewed as well-aligned) to the overall mission, goal, and/or mandate of Health Canada. Indeed, many would assume that Health Canada, as a means of achieving their goal to "maintain and improve" (Health Canada, 2011c) the health of Canadians, means the pursuit of programming tailored to meet the physical and/or mental health needs of Canadians. However, while 'health' is typically understood as a state of *physical* well-being, health can also be understood as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (World Health Organization, 2003, para. 1). Understood in this way, individual (or a society's) health is measured by various indicators of health, that are a summary measure usually expressed as a number, which provides information on a particular topic. Health indicators, however, are influenced by social determinants that are, according to Mikkonen & Raphael (2010), the primary factors that shape the health of Canadians. While some may argue that individual lifestyle choices alone largely shape an individual's health, Mikkonen et al. (2010), argue that social determinants – or living conditions – are ultimately what determine the health of a nation as represented by its citizens. In brief, healthy individuals and healthy societies are measured and quantified by various health indicators; and these individual indicators of personal health (which is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being) are influenced by social determinants of health – or by the social conditions in which Canadians must live.

While there are a variety of social determinant models that exist, Mikkonen et al. (2010, p. 9), point out that observed inequalities in health between individuals within a society are attributed to the following 14 determinants:

1. Aboriginal status
2. Gender
3. Disability
4. Housing
5. Early life
6. Income and income distribution
7. Education
8. Race
9. Employment and working conditions
10. Social exclusion
11. Food insecurity
12. Social safety net
13. Health services
14. Unemployment and job security

In this context, Health Canada may able to improve the health of its citizens by first attempting to address the observed inequalities among social determinants. For example, and with particular regard to the content of this research, education related policies and programs (determinant #7, above) that are specifically targeted to address the needs of a specific group of people (Aboriginal people on-reserve) is one means to achieve this end and with greater influence. Mikkonen et al. (2010) further assert, "Each of these social determinants of health has been shown to have strong effects upon the health of Canadians. Their effects are actually much stronger than …with behaviours such as diet, physical activity, and even tobacco and excessive alcohol use" (p. 9). To this end, Health Canada is addressing observed health inequalities among Canadians through the development and provision of early childhood education/development programs for Aboriginal children under the age of six.

**The AHSOR program: current status.**

Since its pilot stage in 1998, it is not apparent that modifications (either moderate or extensive) to the program structure and/or content have been made. The

existing literature and information made available to the public would suggest that the program has stagnated somewhat and even more, the perhaps it is not achieving what it intended to achieve. ASHOR program related information makes clear that enrolment in the program has seen a sizeable increase since the program's inception; however, further indications as to the extent of successful transition of these students into the school system and in later academic outcomes, remains absent. Although the program was initially supposed to produce a report on National activities and outcomes on an annual basis, the last known report made available to the public on the AHSOR program was in 2000-2001. Programmatic changes and/or modifications are not apparent, nor is it possible to determine if those children involved in the program received the requisite supports in early childhood to affect change in later years and to intervene as a means of improving social outcomes.

While Health Canada does not provide current enrolment per participating First Nation across each region, a few First Nation communities post publicly, and therefore make it evident, that AHSOR programming is in place and available to those who are eligible and can be supported by funding contributions from Health Canada. Given the lack of available data and information about the program, determinations as to whether or not the program has analyzed its efforts and evolved based on findings is not apparent. At present, it is not possible to determine if young Indian children have been equipped with the 'tools they need to get a good start in life'.

Part 1 of this chapter has provided an overview the Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve (AHSOR) program from its earliest adaptation from the US-based Head Start program to an early childhood intervention program for Aboriginal children initially, in 1995 for urban children, its expansion to the on-reserve population in 1997, to its present day status. Part 2 of this chapter will provide an overview of three (3) early childhood development programs for disadvantaged children in the U.S. to demonstrate their role as successful interventions in this regard. This will

be followed by a review of the current research concerning the AHSOR program in Canada in order to demonstrate the gap in interrogating and understanding the extent to which the AHSOR program has been implemented as an effective early intervention to ensure school-readiness for on-reserve First Nation children in Canada.

## Part 2: The Role of ECD in School Readiness: Case Studies and Current Data/Research

The preceding chapter provided an introduction and overview of the AHSOR program, as well as the guiding research questions and methodological approached used herein. The objective of this chapter is to build upon and contextualize these research questions in order to support observations and conclusions about the AHSOR program made in later chapters (Chapter 5 & 6) concerning the extent to which the program is achieving its stated goals related to school-readiness. As such, a review of the literature regarding three (3) of the most widely studied early childhood development programs in the United States (i.e.: the Abecedarian, Perry Preschool (High Scope), and U.S. Head Start) will serve as foundational information for which Canadian literature concerning the AHSOR program will be compared. The intent is to a) illustrate information gaps within the literature regarding the Canadian context, b) to examine the question of whether or not the AHSOR program is meeting its stated objectives and likely implications for Aboriginal children regarding school readiness and their ability to benefit from ECE programming.

### Early Childhood Development and School-Readiness

To adequately prepare young children for school (i.e., 'school-ready'), a variety of early childhood development (ECD) programs have been developed, both nationally and internationally, as a means of improving the likelihood that all children will: enter school systems prepared; that education/ achievement gaps can be lessened; and so that children, especially those who are economically disadvantaged and/or marginalized, have the opportunity to participate fully in

society and to reduce inequities that are generally "sewn in early childhood" (World Health Organization, 2007, p. 6).

Duncan, Claessens, Huston, Pagani, Engel, Sexton, Dowsett, Magnuson, Klebanov, Feinstein, Brooks-Gunn & Duckworth (2007) argue that school readiness and later school achievement, when facilitated by high quality early childhood interventions (or ECD) for 'at-risk' preschool children, "produce gains in cognitive and academic skills and reduce behaviour problems…(and) early educational interventions have also been found to result in long-term reductions in special education services, grade retention, and increases in educational attainment" (Duncan et al., p. 1430). Furthermore, UNICEF contends that ensuring school-readiness for children, especially for those children considered at-risk or disadvantaged, is that school-readiness is viewed as a "viable strategy to close the learning gap and improve equity in achieving lifelong learning and full developmental potential among young children" (UNICEF, 2012, p. 4). Further, UNICEF argues that school readiness:

> … supports the adoption of policies and standards for early learning, expanding the provision of opportunities beyond formal centre-based services to target those who are excluded. School readiness has been linked with positive social and behavioural competencies in adulthood as well as improved academic outcomes in primary and secondary school, both in terms of equity and performance. In addition, school readiness has been garnering attention as a strategy for economic development. Approaches to economic growth and development consider human capital as a key conduit for sustained and viable development, the inception of which begins in the early years. (p. 4)

In addition, ensuring school-readiness in children is said to have associated benefits at the individual and societal levels. For the individual, ensuring school-

readiness by age six "predicts children's ability to benefit from academic instruction in the early grades of elementary school. Academic performance in in the early grades, in turn, is claimed as a significant predictor of whether the child completes high school" (Doherty, 1997, p. 2). Moreover, according to Doherty, a "lack of appropriate social skills at the time of school entry is one of the best predictors of delinquent behaviours in early adolescence" (Doherty, 1997, p. 2) The World Health Organization (2007) suggests that "what a child experiences during the early years sets a critical foundation for the entire life course" (p.3). In that regard, early childhood development that is inclusive of "physical, social/emotional and language/cognitive domains strongly influences basic learning, school success, economic participation, social citizenry, and health" (p.3).

**Case Study #1: The Abecedarian Project**

The Abecedarian Project was initially conceptualized as a randomized controlled trial of the efficacy of early intervention for children born to low income, multi-risk families (Ramey, Campbell, Burchinal, Skinner, Gardner, & Ramey, 2000). The purpose of the Abecedarian project was to test the degree to which continual, consistent enrichment of the early environment might alter the trend towards progressively lower intellectual test scores and to reduce academic failure in such children (Campbell & Ramey, 1995). Educational activities were provided from early infancy within a full time, up to ten hours a day, childcare facility that operated on a year round schedule (Campbell, Pungello, Burchinal, Kainz, Pan, Wasik, Sparling, Barbarin, & Ramey, 2012; Barnett & Masse, 2007). Children in the project attended the center from as young as six weeks old (Ramey & Ramey, 2002) until such time as they entered into the mainstream public education system at age 5. In this regard, the Abecedarian Project is the most intensive early childhood development program to date.

The study randomly assigned the 112 eligible children to either a control or treatment group who were mostly of African American decent and who were born between 1972 and 1977. Of the 111[5] infants eligible to participate, 57 were randomly assigned to the treatment group and 45 were randomly assigned to the control group. The children enrolled in the program were chosen based on the their likelihood of being at risk of developmental delay, both socially and intellectually. These risks included such factors as family income and maternal education level (Campbell & Ramey 2007). The project's childcare centres employed the early childhood educators who possessed high academic credentials and who participated in intensive and ongoing in-service training. The project utilized the "Learning games – The Abecedarian Curriculum" (Barnett et al., 2007) and "Partners for Learning" curriculum which not only emphasised language development, but all other developmental domains including medical and nutritional services.

In addition to the Abecedarian Project's comprehensiveness, it is also the only project to analyze results in program participants on a longitudinal basis. The ABC Project has studied and analyzed the effects of early intervention on the program's participants over a 30-year period and has reported positive outcomes in program participant academic achievement, intellectual outcomes, school progress, decreased placement in special education, and maternal outcome improvements for the treatment group and less positive effects in these same domains for the control group. Research on the outcomes of the ABC intervention through age 21 found that:

- Individuals treated in preschool completed more years of education by age 21 than did preschool controls (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002; Pungello, Campbell, & Barnett, 2006; Campbell & Ramey, 2007; Ramey & Ramey, 2002);

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[5] The study cohort of 112 infants was reduced to 111 given the assessment and further classification of 1 infant as special needs that were outside the scope of the Abecedarian study.

- Children who received preschool treatment had higher IQ scores over time than children in the preschool control group (Barnett, 1995; Campbell & Ramey, 1995; Campbell et al., 2001; Ramey & Ramey, 2004);

- Students in the preschool control condition were more likely to be placed in special education (Ramey et al., 2000) and that "in comparison 12% of the preschool only group was placed in special education versus 48% of the control group" (Campbell & Ramey, 1995);

- The project had a small effect on the graduation rate of program participants (Barnett, 1990 & 1995) and the mean years of education was 12.2 years for the treated group versus 11.6 for the control group (Pungello et al, 2006);

- Individuals in the preschool treated and control groups did not differ significantly in the percent employed; however, they did differ significantly in the level of employment they reported. More specifically, young adults with preschool treatment were more likely to be engaged in skilled jobs (e.g. 47% of treated versus 27% of controls).

In addition to the direct benefits of the Abecedarian project noted above, a cost benefit analysis of this program was conducted. While the total program cost was estimated at $67,000 per child (Pungello et al, 2006; Campbell & Ramey, 2007), the estimated benefit to society was $68,278 due to increased earning of the mothers who were more able to participate in the workforce while their children were receiving free, high-quality care from infancy through age 5 (Campbell et al., 2007). In doing so, mothers were provided the opportunity to make greater progress in terms of educational and occupational success, as their children were engaged in full-time intensive development[6]. Furthermore, on the basis of findings of program participants at age 21, it was estimated that the Abecedarian

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[6] It is argued that the intensity of the program (up to ten hours a day) allowed mothers to pursue higher education and meaningful employment as the early childhood education program operated on a full-time, year round schedule as opposed to similar programs who offered less intense, part-time programming.

project saved $2.50 for every dollar spent on the early childhood program (Campbell et al., 2012).

In order to achieve these outcomes however, research has highlighted the importance of high quality early childhood education programming and that, in its absence, the performance results related to academic outcomes and school progress may not be significantly enhanced through middle adolescence and/or adulthood (Campbell & Ramey, 1995; Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Campbell et al., 2002; Ramey et al., 2000; Pungello et al., 2006; Barnett & Masse, 2007; Ramey & Ramey, 2002; Campbell et al., 2001). Barnett et al. (2007) recommend that "policy makers attend to quality, including the curriculum, as well as quantity" (p. 122) in that the Abecedarian study had "strong supervision, a well-designed curriculum, well-compensated staff, and on-going evaluation" (Barnett et al., 2007, p. 122) as well as low teacher to student ratios (Campbell et al., 2001). In this way, it is argued "clear and careful consideration should be given to the content and methods of any preschool program to ensure that it is capable of producing the desired positive effects on cognitive and socio-emotional development" (Barnett et al., 2007, p. 123).

**Case Study #2: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study**

The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study is a scientific experiment that has identified both short term and long-term effects of a high-quality pre-school education program for young children living in poverty (Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield, & Nores, 2005). Between 1962 and 1967, the program's founder David Weikart and his colleagues operated the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program for young poor children in the Ypslanti, Michigan school district as a means of intervening to avoid school failure and other related socio-economic outcomes (Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield, & Nores, 2005).

The Perry Preschool Project chose a sample of 123 children who chosen as eligible participants based on a risk assessment that determined that they were at high risk of school failure. Of the 123 children, 58 were randomly assigned to a treatment group that received a high quality preschool program starting at age 3 or 4 and lasting for one to two years (or until school entry). The treatment group received teachings based on the High/Scope Preschool Model which emphasized the natural development of young children, and that also placed a focus on music, movement, and computer proficiency (Schweinhart, 2003a, p. 3). In addition, the High/Scope Project encouraged parents to use the model in childrearing and featured a daily routine that that encouraged children to learn actively and was part of a larger nationwide training network (Schweinhart, 2003b, p. 2). However, in terms of intensity, whereas the Abecedarian offered year round, full time instruction, the High/Scope Program operated for only 8 months of the year and offered only part time instruction during the day. The second group of 65 children were also randomly assigned but received no preschool programming throughout the same time frame. Data was collected on the two cohorts on an annual basis starting at age 3 through 11 and then again at ages 14, 15, 19, 27, and 40. At each data collection interval, information from both cohorts was collected on the following domains: education, economic performance, crime prevention, family relationships, and health. Research collected on the data sets captured at each interval determined:

- At age 19, the preschool group was ahead by 1.2 grade equivalents on language and math….and the preschool group scored significantly higher (on) …achievement tests (Barnett, 1990);
- By age 27, the program treatment group completed a significantly higher level of schooling than did the no program group with a means of 11.9 years versus 11.0 (Schweinhart, 2003a; Schweinhart , Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield & Nores, 2005);
- They also had better high school graduation rates (67% v. 49%) and post secondary enrolments (Zigler, Taussig, & Black, 1992);

- At age 27, results indicated that the program participants committed fewer delinquent or criminal acts, the acts they committed were less severe, and they were less likely to be chronic offenders than were control group members (Yoshikawa, 1995; Barnett, 1990);

- Overall, participants randomized to the PPP condition completed more education and had better family environments, higher incomes, and better quality health insurance coverage than participants in the control group (Muennig, Schweinhart, Montie, & Neidell, 2009);

- For females…by age 27, the program group is one-third as likely to be a high-school dropout, with further educational attainment – of associate, bachelor's, or master's degrees by age 40 (Nores, Belfield, Barnett, & Schweinhart, 2005);

- Only 15% of the experimental group were classified at some time during their school years as mentally retarded, while 35% of the control group were so classified (Schweinhart, Berrueta-Clement, Barnett, Epstein, & Weikart, 1985; Weikart, 1996); and

- At age 19, 50% of the experimental group were employed while 32% of the control group were employed. Further, only 18% of the experimental group reported that they were currently receiving welfare assistance as compared to 32% of the control group (Schweinhart et al., 1985).

A cost benefit analysis of the effects of the Perry Preschool Program found five (5) individual and societal benefits resulting from participation in the program. Nores et al., (2005) argue that the first benefit is "earnings: as participants obtain education and human capital, they become more productive" (Nores et al., 2005, p. 248). Secondly, Perry Preschool participation was also said to produce higher tax contributions associated with increased earnings, and thirdly, an associated benefit was seen in lowered criminal activity. Lastly, the PPP is also said to reduce both welfare reliance which impacts society in terms of reduced tax burdens as well as individual gains from higher economic well being (Nores et al., 2005). Research consistently indicates that the cost-benefit of investments to the

High/Scope Perry Preschool Program amount to "$7.14 per $1 invested" (Nores et al., 2005, p. 256).

Similar to the Abecedarian Study, Perry Preschool literature and analysis placed emphasis on high-quality structural elements inherent to early childhood education such as high-quality curriculum, program intensity, duration, low teacher to student ratios, and active parent involvement. The combination of these programmatic elements, Frede (1995) argues, ensure positive effects on program participant outcomes.

**Case Study #3: The United States Head Start Program**

A brief summary of the U.S. Head Start Program was described in Chapter 3. In this section, in order to gain an understanding of the program in relation to its effectiveness, a review of the Head Start program's benefits to participants which similarly stress the impact of high quality early childhood education interventions for at-risk young children on school readiness and later achievement is provided.

The Head Start Program was initiated in 1965 and was designed to "break the cycle of poverty by providing preschool children from low income families with comprehensive services to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological needs" (Besharov, Germanis, Higney, & Call, 2011, p. 14-1). The program's overall goal was to "bring about a greater degree of social competence in preschool children from low income families" (US Department of Health and Human Services in Love, Tarullo, Raikes, H., & Chazan-Cohen, 2005, The Head Start Program and the Families it Serves, para. 1) that is inclusive of cognitive, intellectual, social and physical and mental development. Although not the initial goal of the Head Start Program, school-readiness has become an increased focus of the program and has also broadened the program participation parameters to include children from 0 to 3 and 3 to 5 years old.

While the Abecedarian and High/Scope Programs were studies, the US Head Start is the Nation's primary federally sponsored child development program. Data collected in 2003 found that 1670 grantees[7] served 909,608 low income children at various Head Start sites across the US and that the majority of the Head Start sites were full day (6 hours or more), and center-based. The children enrolled in the Head Start program received interventions aimed at meeting the six stated objectives (McKey et al., 1985, p. 20) listed below:

1. Improvement of the child's health and physical abilities and the family's attitude toward future health care and physical abilities;

2. Encouragement of self-confidence, spontaneity, curiosity, and self-discipline;

3. Enhancement of the child's mental processes and skills with particular attention to conceptual and communication skills;

4. Establishment of patterns and expectations of success for the child;

5. Increase the ability of the child and the family to relate to each other and to others; and

6. Enhancement of the sense of dignity and self-worth within the child and her or his family.

Early analysis of the program found mixed results regarding the program's effectiveness in achieving it's stated goals in that:

….one year after Head Start, the difference between Head Start and non-Head Start children on achievement and school readiness tests continue to be in the educationally meaningful range….by the end of the second year there are no educationally meaningful differences on any of the measures (McKey et al., 1985, p. 26).

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[7] ECD Centers who qualify to administer the Head Start Program are considered "grantees".

However, the overall impact of the Head Start Program has been found to produce meaningful impact on self-esteem, achievement motivation, and social behaviour (McKey et al., 1985; Reynolds, 1994) and to make improvements to food and nutritional intake of low-income children as well as health status (Currie & Thomas, 1995). Generally, follow-up studies on the Head Start found:

- When children were 24 months and again when they were 36 months of age Early Head Start Children, contrasted with the control group, included higher scores on the Bayley Scales of Infant Development lower ratings of aggressive behaviour problems, greater engagement of the parent in the interactive play…provided warmer home environments, and (parents were more likely) to read to their child every day (Love, Tarullo, Raikes, H., & Chazan-Cohen, 2005).

- Head Start is associated with reductions in grade repetitions, high school drop out rates…teen pregnancies and with improvements in children's medical care and health status (Currie et al., 1995)

- Head Start children were found to perform better on various measures of school performance.

Very little analysis on the cost-benefit of the Head Start has been performed, and since there are a variety of complexities in determining this ratio[8]; one study concluded that the U.S. Head Start Program:

> …passes a benefit-cost test, at least for children who participated during
>
> the first few decades of the program. For the current version of Head Start,
>
> we have rigorous evidence of short-term impacts from a recent
>
> experimental evaluation but no direct data on long-term effects since
>
> experimental subjects have just recently finished participating in the
>
> program. However there are reasons to believe that with a cost of $7,000
>
> per child Head Start does not need to yield very large short-term test score

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[8] The challenges inherent in calculating the cost-benefit of the Head Start lie in the number of head start sites across the US, the corresponding varying levels of children enrolled in the program, and the varying levels of funding per child per site.

impacts in order to pass a benefit-cost test (Ludwig & Phillips, 2007, p.

36).

Unlike the other two case studies, wherein the standard of quality of the program were of utmost importance, the US Head Start holds no such comparison. Indeed, research as to the limited efficacy of the program points to the lack of high-quality standards, low levels of parental participation, and low levels of academic credentials of preschool program administrators.

**Case Studies Discussion: Important Considerations**

Consistent within the research on both the Abecedarian and High/Scope Perry Preschool Programs, are the assertions that high-quality early childhood educational interventions produce positive outcomes for at-risk young children between the ages of 0 to 6. The data presented in the analyses above suggests that both the Abecedarian and Perry studies were effective at mitigating the risk factors in young, marginalized and impoverished students and furthermore, that these programs had long lasting socio-economic and educational effects. In many instances, program participants who received the treatment were found to have higher levels of high school graduation, low levels of unemployment, were more likely to have higher levels of educational attainment, were less likely to be poor, and had higher IQ's and test scores while in school.

These and other positive outcomes are closely related to each study's program structure and other important factors in quality early childhood education programs. Frede (1995) argues that structural elements such as: (1) low child-teacher ratios and small class sizes, (2) intensity, onset, and duration of the programs, (3) relationships with parents, (4) classroom processes and curriculum content, all play a significant role in the successful outcomes observed in children who participated in either of these studies. In that regard, the extent to which early childhood educational intervention programs adhere to effective program designs,

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argues Frede (1995), largely contributes to these observed positive outcomes. With regard to class-teacher ratio and small class sizes, Frede (1995) also determined through longitudinal analyses, that "small class sizes and low child-to-teacher ratios contribute to positive, long-term benefits for children from low-income families" (Frede, 1995, p. 120) and that the intensity and duration of the intervention (Frede, 1995, p. 115; Gomby, Larner, Stevenson, Lewit & Behrman, 1995, p. 14) have the most significant impact in that "long-term benefits for children have been generated by programs that serve children in center settings on half-day or full-day schedules, some including home visits on a weekly or monthly schedule" (Gomby, et al., 1995, p. 9),). Perhaps most importantly, both Yokishawa (1995) and Frede (1995) concur on the importance and emphasis on supervision and training for all early childhood program staff and that interventions should occur in early infancy since they will "generate larger effects than waiting until a year before children enter school" (Frede, 1995).

The literature and case studies presented above support the argument that effective early childhood education programs have structural and programmatic elements that lend to their success in enhancing school-readiness and producing positive educational and socio-economic outcomes both in the short and long terms. More specifically, the related literature suggests that the observed positive outcomes are largely attributed to structural elements inherent to each program, including: duration and intensity, timing/onset, program quality and standards, low child-to-teacher ratios, and that are located in centers and operate on a full-time schedule. Empirical evidence from the past forty years illustrates the efficacy of a variety of early childhood educational interventions, especially those attributed to the US Head Start program, were the impetus behind the enactment of the Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve Program nearly two decades ago. However, since that time, and unlike the programs in the US, research and or analysis of the program in relation to its efficacy on its stated objective of improving 'school-readiness' has yet to be undertaken. What research is available on the AHSOR program is indeed sparse and places an emphasis on one or two

elements of the program rather than one that focuses on a holistic assessment of the program in achieving its overarching goals and objectives. In the section to immediately follow, a summary of the available research on the ASHOR program illuminates the research gap in this regard is presented.

**Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve: An Example of Indigenization**

The continuity and transmission of Aboriginal language and culture is of "great concern" (Galley, 2005; Abstract) since it is recognized that "Aboriginal societies in North America have relied on the oral transmission of stories, histories, lessons and other knowledge to maintain a historical record and sustain their cultures and identities" (Hanson, 2009). Hulan and Eigenbrod (2008) also suggest that the maintenance of these is the means by which "knowledge is reproduced, preserved and conveyed from generation to generation" (p. 7).

Understood in this way, Aboriginal communities can be seen as undertaking a variety of measures to ensure the continuity and survival of their languages and cultures. As sociologist Augie Fleras (1996, p. 149) argues, indigenization is one such measure in that it is an "infusion of Aboriginal perspectives and realities at all levels of decision making and power-sharing between Aboriginal peoples and governments in Canada. Indigenization has also been understood as "distinct from indigenous principles" (Galley, 2005, p. ii) in that indigenization is merely the process of involving the adaptation of one or more indigenous principles, but that the "interconnected nature of all the principles is not evident" (Galley, 2005, p. 34). Galley further argues that " just because a government program looks indigenous does not mean that indigenous principles are being upheld. The danger of only bringing indigenous accouterments into programs and thinking that these accouterments are *indigenous* is that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people will confuse indigenization with indigenous and be satisfied with the window dressing without the substance" (Galley, 2005, p. 35, emphasis in original).

In her work entitled *Indigenization as Neoliberal Rule: The Case of the Canadian Aboriginal Head Start Initiative* (2005), Galley re-conceptualizes the practice of indigenization as a process whereby government programs use "Aboriginal cultural practices and languages as a method to achieve desired results" (Galley, 2005, p. 99). While Galley notes that early demands by the Aboriginal community to make such inclusions for the sake of cultural and linguistic transmission to future generations, the inclusion of Aboriginal culture is now being selectively included, or "*redwashed* with cultural accouterments" (Galley, 2005, p. 99, emphasis in original) as a means of achieving program results for programs financially supported by transfer payments from the federal government. In that regard, what was once a statement of resistance for the active inclusion of Aboriginal culture and language by First Nations communities against various levels of government has now become "enmeshed in the complex administrative tactics of government" (Galley, 2005, p. 100) which has little to do with cultural transmission and continuity and more so with "adhering to government accountability standards" (Galley, 2005, p. 100).

The end result, Galley argues, is that while Aboriginal communities have administrative control of the Head Start program, this fact alone neither necessitates nor guarantees that Aboriginal communities will be able to adhere to the "interconnected nature of indigenous principles" (Galley, 2005, p. 102) and in doing so, this process disallows the transmission of culture to younger generations. An example, Galley explains further, is that the Aboriginal Head Start Program has "*exposed* Aboriginal children to their languages and cultural practices. However, exposure does not ensure the continuity of Aboriginal languages and culture" (Galley, 2005, p.101, emphasis in original).

Galley presents a valuable point, most notably with regard to the culture/language component of the AHSOR program, in that given the nature of the funding source coupled with an increasing desire for accountability to both First Nations communities and to the Treasury Board, the true transmission of culture and

language to a younger generation is compromised by the enmeshment facilitated by indigenization. Understandably, questions regarding the extent to which this generation has been culturally and linguistically short-changed in order to adhere to the tenets of governmental accountability will remain a challenge to the Aboriginal community if not adequately addressed. Ultimately, while the selective valorization of indigenous principles into programs such as the Aboriginal Head Start is an important contribution and beginning point, it must go further to demonstrate the interconnectedness of indigenous principles. This would require, according to Galley, an "inquiry into the interconnected nature of indigenous principles: language, experiential knowledge, story, land and spirituality and alternative ways of manifesting them within federally funded programs" (Galley, 2005, p. 101) in order to be truly representative of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, but also for the successful and meaningful transmission of culture and language to younger generations of Aboriginals.


**Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve: An Example of an Early Childhood Intervention Strategy**

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) states "healthy child development, school readiness and health in later life has sparked a growing consensus about early child development as a powerful determinant of health in its own right" (PHAC, 2013a, Key Determinant -- 8: Healthy Child Development, para.1). Moreover, "experiences from conception to age six have the most important influence of anytime in the life cycle on the connecting and sculpting of the brain's neurons. Positive stimulation early in life improves learning, behaviour and health into adulthood" (PHAC, 2009, p. 73). However, risk factors such as poverty and family status "compounds the stresses that all families face and can have a negative effect on children's development" (PHAC, 2009, p. 73).   To ensure healthy child development, and to counteract the negative impact of risk factors, intervention strategies "can be geared to the reduction or elimination of

risk factors and/or the development or enhancement of protective factors"
(Fleming, 2002, p. 28) so that healthy child development can occur.

In her work entitled Promoting *Healthy Child Development: A Population Health Approach* (2002)*,* Fleming reiterates the understanding that healthy child development and socio-economic status are two key determinants of health, and further, that healthy child development is also positively affected by the quality of parent-child interactions. Fleming argues that Natural Teaching Strategies (NTS) (a parent training intervention) equips parents with tools to acquire the attitude, knowledge, and skills to apply contingent responsiveness and scaffolding strategies while engaging with their children and as a result, healthy child development for at-risk children will be enhanced.

Although the Aboriginal Head Start program is not the single focal point of Fleming's work, the final chapter reports on the results of a study that incorporated the NTS intervention for participants in the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities. Fleming's research included a sample of families consisting of "34 families of 3-4 year old at-risk children enrolled in Head Start" (Fleming, 2002, p. 100), however, only families with complete data were presented in her analysis. In addition, the sample participants also demonstrated that they had "one or more of the following risk factors: education less than grade 10, family income less than $20,000, divorced or lone parent, and unemployed" (Fleming, 2002, p. 101).

Fleming further asserts that since children living in poverty are less likely "to receive the key building blocks of early development such as adequate stimulation, supervision, guided learning experiences, nutrition, decent medical care, a safe and secure environment, and access to early childhood development programs to supplement learning in the home" (Fleming, 2002, p. 94). In that regard, that the application of the NTS on the intervention group would assist parents to become "more contingently responsive with their children…more

responsive in interactions" (Fleming, 2002, p. 100). Fleming hypothesizes that NTS would likely result in: "less initiate(d) parent-child interaction, fewer non-engage behaviours…parent-child engagements would be extended, and this would be reflected in longer turn taking sequences…and that parents would provide more praise in interactions" (Fleming, 2002, p. 100). In this way, and given that "adult interactions characterized by high responsiveness and low directiveness", NTS appears to foster children's development in that it encourages children's active engagement in the constructive learning process of practice, experimentation, choice-making, and problem-solving (Mahoney, 1988; Robinson & Powell, 1992, as cited in Fleming, 2002, p. 97).

Fleming's analysis determined that the NTS intervention on participants in the Head Start Program resulted in the following (Fleming, 2002, p. 116-117):

1. The intervention was effective in changing the parents' behaviour while interacting with their children;
2. An increase in the average number of turns per engagement and the number of engagements with 10 or more turns suggests that parents were extending interactions with their children;
3. Greater frequency of praise behaviours also suggests that the interactions were more positive;
4. Children in both the treatment and the control group demonstrated proportionally more initiating and fewer-non-engaging behaviours at 6-months; and
5. That the study emphasized improvement of the parent-child relationship via parent training.


**Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve: An Example of Local Control**

In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood issued the Red Paper entitled *Indian Control of Indian Education* in response to then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's

*White Paper* which proposed ending the special legal relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian state and dismantling the *Indian Act.* Of notable significance, the *Red Paper* made a direct statement to the Federal Government about Indian reclamation of the right "to direct the education of our children" (National Indian Brotherhood, 1973, p. 3) and that the "past practice of using the school committee as an advisory body with limited influence, in restricted areas of the school program, must give way to an education authority which are necessary for an effective decision-making body" (National Indian Brotherhood, 1973, p. 6)

Since the 1972 Red Paper there have been a number of significant changes to Indian education on reserve, such as the establishment and/or expansion of First Nation operated schools and Indigenous Institutes for Higher Learning (AFN, 2010). However, the Assembly of First Nation asserts in their Indian Control of Indian Education (ICIE) policy paper entitled *First Nation Control of First Nation Education*, presented as a renewal of the ICIE presented in the 1972 *Red Paper*, that:

> …the federal government's implementation of the ICIE 1972 policy was
>
> limited to providing a basic framework for First Nations to administer
>
> community schools with some degree of involvement in the delivery of
>
> programs that had previously been managed by the federal government.
>
> The Canadian government's inadequate implementation of the ICIE 1972
>
> policy allowed for only a modest level of control by local communities in
>
> the form of delegated authority. The unilaterally designed devolution
>
> process instituted by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)
>
> transferred limited administrative control of education by First Nations
>
> without including the necessary transfer of the resources that would have

allowed for full implementation of First Nations controlled education

systems. (Assembly of First Nations, 2010, p. 6)

The lack of Aboriginal control over Aboriginal education is viewed by some as the "central force in the continuing colonization of First Nations and other Aboriginal groups" (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003) in that "government regulations have constrained the emergence of effective planning, financing, and delivery processes in First Nations initiatives in education" (Schissel et al, 2003, p. 25/26) and that Indigenous peoples will "regain control of their lives, identities, and cultures only when they are able to achieve autonomy from Eurocentric thought and institutions" (Schissel et al, 2003, p. 27).

As previously described (Chapter 3), one of AHSOR program's early goals was to demonstrate that "locally controlled and designed early intervention strategies can provide First Nation preschool children with a positive sense of themselves, a desire for learning, and opportunities to develop fully and successfully" (Palmantier, 2005, p. 5).

Although the principles of local control by First Nations communities with regard to the AHSOR program are evident, what becomes clear is that this 'control' is delimited by the program parameters which stipulate: (1) the extent and manner in which curricula is developed and designed; (2) organizational structure of the Head Start program; (3) the management of human resources (including elders); (4) policy and procedure development, and (5) the extent of parent involvement (Health Canada, 2005). In that regard, while the AHSOR purports to support increased local control over the design and implementation of early childhood programming, it seemingly does so at a peripheral level and reaffirms AFN's position that local control can be considered moderate at best.

In her work entitled *The Image of the Child from the Perspective of Plains Cree Elders and Plains Cree Early Childhood Teachers*, Akerman (2010) states that in

the 1960's and 1970's "Canadian early childhood education programs for Aboriginal children were "virtually non-existent" (University of Saskatchewan, 2008, p. 7 in Akerman, 2010, p. 19)", and that by the 1990's programs slowly began emerging. Akerman highlights the relevance of the Head Start program in this regard and notes that the Head Start intends to "address(es) the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical needs of young Aboriginal children through half-day preschool experiences in 125 sites across Canada" (Public Health Agency, 2004 in Akerman, 2010, p. 19/20 )" Akerman argues that by "focussing on culture, language, parental involvement and Aboriginal practitioners, Aboriginal Head Start has been successful in fostering cultural knowledge of children" (Western Arctic Aboriginal Head Start Council, 2006, in Akerman, 2010, p. 19/20 )"

Akerman's views are echoed in the most recent issue of the *First Nations Longitudinal Health Survey* (First Nation Information Governance Center, 2012: Regional Health Survey, 2008/10), where it was determined that of the one-third of Aboriginal children in Canada who attended Head Start within their respective communities, these children "are more likely to be able to speak or understand a First Nation language" and that "Culturally focused early childhood education programs such as the Aboriginal Head Start can also support First Nation children's cultural learning" (2012, p. 349). The Regional Health Survey notes, however, that while it is not possible to assert a causal relationship in this regard, "language and culture are central to the Aboriginal Head Start programs, and an evaluation of Aboriginal Head Start in urban and northern communities found that most Aboriginal Head Start centres use at least one Aboriginal language as a primary language of instruction" (2012, pg. 356). However, Akerman argues, "despite its success, Head Start, like many Aboriginal early learning programs, often relies on outside professionals for the foundational planning of its early childhood education services" (University of Saskatchewan, 2008, in Akerman, 2010, p. 20). In this context, the objective of redirecting control of Indian education from the state to First Nation communities is both hindered and blurred

by indirect control by way of institutionalized standards and guidelines that delimit locally designed and managed early childhood programs, such as the Aboriginal Head Start.

**Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve: FNIHB: Child and Youth Program Cluster Evaluation**

With regard to the commitment made on October 30, 2009, Health Canada published a Final Evaluation Report entitled *Children and Youth Programs – Cluster Evaluation of the: (1) Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve, (2) Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program, (3) Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, and (4) Maternal Health* (2010).[9] The scope and purpose of the report was to "respond to the requirements of the Federal Accountability Act, and to support FNIHB submissions for funding renewal in 2010" (Health Canada, 2010, p. iii). The evaluation also intended to "meet reporting requirements under the CY[10] Cluster RMAF[11]" which stipulate that "the relevance and effectiveness of all grants and contribution programs be reviewed on a five year cycle" (Health Canada, 2010, p. 5). The evaluation included "all First Nation communities, located south of the 60th parallel, that receive FNIHB[12] CY funding" (Health Canada, 2010, p. iii) and included:

- 547 children in the 225 families surveyed;
- 118 community staff members; and
- 23 staff from the First Nation and Inuit Health Branch.

Additional objectives of the Cluster Evaluation were to "describe the relevance and effectiveness of the CY programs in contributing to an improved health status of First Nations children, youth and communities" (Health Canada, 2010, p.1).

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[9] These four programs represent what Health Canada calls the "CY Cluster" or the "Child and Youth Cluster".
[10] CY: Child and Youth
[11] RMAF: Regional Management Accountability Framework.
[12] FNIHB: First Nation and Inuit Health Branch

However, Health Canada later notes that the Cluster Evaluation Framework focussed more on capturing the "commonalities among programs; and (ii) to enable reporting of high level results" (Health Canada, 2010, p. 2) rather than on determining "**whether or not these individual programs are or are not achieving their intended results**"[13] (Health Canada, 2010, p.20, emphasis added). In order to assess the extent of the relevance and effectiveness of the Child and Youth Cluster, Health Canada presents an "Evaluation Issues and Evaluation Questions" table that outlines the evaluation questions that are intended to generate an evaluation of the Relevance and Effectiveness of the CY Cluster programming (see Figure 2, adapted from Health Canada, 2010, p. 44).

| Evaluation Issues | Evaluation Questions |
|---|---|
| Relevance | R1: Does the CY Cluster address clearly identified health needs of FN children and youth? |
| | R2: To what extenr is this cluster linked to a Government priority? |
| | R3: To what extent is this cluster appropriate to the federal government and a core federal role? |
| Effectiveness | E1: Is the grouping of children's programming, be it 2, 3, or 4, meeting the individuals health needs? If so, how? |
| | E2: Do the children's programs work together at the national, regional, community levels to meet expected logic model outcomes? If so, how? |
| | E3: Are there are uninteded positive or negative outcomes as a result of carrying out the CY Cluster? |
| | E4a: Does the grouping of the children's program investments contribute to increaed First Nations ownership to deliver child health programs and supports? |
| | E4b: Do the grouping of the children's program investments contribute to increased human capital resource capacity (ie: training) to deliver children and youth programs in FN communities? |

**Figure 2: Evaluation Issues and Evaluation Questions (CY Cluster Evaluation)**
Source: Adapted from Health Canada, 2010.

The Child Youth Cluster Evaluation survey results lend to six (6) recommendations to Health Canada's Senior Management Board; which were:

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[13] Health Canada (2010) notes "a cluster evaluation differs from a 'program evaluation' in that it measures the outcomes of the 'cluster' as a whole, using common indicators rather than outcomes of the individual programs…" (p. 21). The limitation of the CY Cluster evaluation, in relation to evaluating whether a program is its intended results is that "…even if the cluster evaluation determines that the CY Cluster (as a whole) is achieving expected results, one or more of the individual programs may or may not be achieving its expected program results" (p. 20).

1. Meeting the Health Needs of FN children and their families (Health Canada, 2010, p. 104)

   a. Recommendation #1 – that Health Canada monitor new and emerging health needs for First Nations and Inuit children and their families, including: (1) children with special needs and their families, (2) maternal mental wellness; (3) healthy nutrition; and (4) First Nations languages and culture.

2. Collaborating and Networking (Health Canada, 2010, p. 105)

   a. Recommendation #2: To effectively describe the continuum of programs, provide meaningful information on program outputs and outcomes and to support future evaluation and reporting, FNIHB needs to: (1) asses the relationship with other program areas; (2) review the reporting requirements and standardize the program activity reporting; (3) identify gaps in programming; and (4) identify where increased coordination would improve health outcomes.

3. Program Planning and Reporting (Health Canada, 2010, p. 105)

   a. Recommendation #3 and #4: Resources and guides should be developed and/or updated to provide communities with the tools to identify and prioritize and address health needs. The CY Cluster logic model should be updated to clearly identify the outcomes for children and families**.**

4. CY Training and Capacity Building (Health Canada, 2010, p. 105-106)

   a. Recommendations #5 and #6: (1) A training and capacity building strategy should be developed to address issues such as: planning and communication, tool development, development of culturally appropriate, standardized and accredited training with innovative delivery options (e-learning and distance education); and recruitment and retention issues. (2) Tools to monitor the effectiveness and impact of training on workers and communities, as well as mechanisms to share best practices should be developed.

Listed as one of the "Negative Unintended Outcomes Identified by Community Staff" (Health Canada, 2010) was the "impact of FNIHB's health transfer policy…" (Health Canada, 2010, p. 88, emphasis added) and, further, that the community also had concerns about "FNIHB's plan behind the cluster-based approach" (Health Canada, 2010) As previously noted, the Child and Youth Cluster Evaluation, while evaluating the effectiveness and relevance of Child and Youth programming to the improved health of First Nation children and youth, did so only on an aggregate level and assessed only the extent to which the Child and Youth cluster: a) addressed the identified health needs of First Nation children and youth; b) linked to a government priority; c) was appropriate to a core federal role; d) the grouping met individual health needs; e) the cluster programs worked together, at all levels, to meet logic model outcomes; f) had any positive or negative outcomes as a result of the CY Cluster; g) contributed to First Nation ownership; and h) contributed to increased human resource capital.

Largely absent from the Cluster Evaluation is a relevant discussion pertaining to the Health Transfer Policy Objectives, which correlate to Evaluation Question E4a ("Does the grouping of the children's program investments contribute to increased First Nation ownership to delivery child health programs and supports?" (Health Canada, 2010) and which specifically delineate that the primary goal is to:

> …enable Indian communities to design health programs, establish services
>
> and allocate funding according to community priorities; to strengthen and
>
> enhance accountability of Chiefs and Councils to community members;
>
> and to ensure public health and safety is maintained through adherence to
>
> mandatory programs. (Health and Welfare Canada, 1999, p. 5)

While the Cluster Evaluation does note that "staff indicated that First Nations are more involved now than 5 years ago in decisions about the CY programs and

setting priorities" (Health Canada, 2010, p. 93) it also states that "First Nations are directly involved in the planning stages to develop community health plans as well as in the program delivery" (Health Canada, 2010). What is not known; however, and in addition to whether any of these cluster programs is meeting its intended outcomes, is whether or not First Nation communities are "communities have the flexibility to change the objectives and activities of a program, modify the resources dedicated to one service and reduce resources for another according to community priorities" (Health and Welfare Canada, 1999, p. 24) as part of the Health Transfer Policy's goals make clear.

Jacklin and Warry (2004) contend, "although the policy has been marketed as a mechanism for healing and self-determination, its formation has been guided primarily by political-economic factors, and as a result there have been limited benefits at the local level" (p 215). Moreover, since the Health Transfer Policy is far too limited in scope, Jacklin et al., (2004) contend that the policy "cannot and was not intended to address self-determination in health care" and that it also does not have the potential to improve the health of First Nations, as "the major causes of poor health among Aboriginal people are beyond the mandate of Health Transfer" (Jacklin et al., 2004, p.230).

What becomes evident from Health Canada's Children and Youth Programs Cluster Evaluation, is that the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of each program within the Cluster is limited, first, by the Health Transfer Policy that frames it, and secondly, by the Cluster in which the Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve Program is included. To that end, while Health Canada has evaluated the Child and Youth Cluster of programs within the First Nation and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) to determine the relevance and effectiveness of all grants and contribution programs, and to support its obligations under the Financial Administration Act (FAA), it has not, as previously indicated, evaluated the outcomes of any of the programs within the Child and Youth Cluster, most

significantly for the purpose of this inquiry, are those related to the Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve Program.

**Health Canada: Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve (AHSOR) Program: 2000-2001 Annual Report**

In 2003, Health Canada issued the *Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve (AHSOR) Program: 2000-2001* Annual report which intended to "look at the AHS On Reserve Program from an implementation/developmental perspective and to establish formative and measurable elements upon which future comparisons will be made" (Health Canada, 2003b, p. 5). Although the report suggests that a report on the AHSOR will be an annual exercise, there was only one (1) annual report produced and published by Health Canada regarding the AHSOR and there were no further reports upon which "future comparisons" (Health Canada, 2003b, p. 5) could be made.

The AHSOR program evaluation process used two approaches to measure the "impact that Head Start has made both in First Nation communities and regionally" (Health Canada, 2003b, p. 5). The first approach consisted of the implementation of a National Process Survey that included "a questionnaire for each of the following at every Head Start site: Staff/Early Childhood Educator (ECE), a First Nations community member and the Program Administrator" (Health Canada, 2003a, p. 5). The second approach included "creating an impact baseline which will serve to establish an initial set of measureable criteria[14], creating a "snapshot" of the program" (Health Canada, 2003b, p. 5). The evaluation included AHSOR program projects from each community, in each province, across Canada. The total number of participating sites is as follows (see Figure 3):

---

[14] Criteria were based on elements of the program including the six Head Start program components.

| AHS On Reserve Project Demographics as reported by Regions 2000-2001 | | |
|---|---|---|
| Region | Total Number of Project Sites | Total Reported Number of Children Served by Projects |
| Atlantic | 36 | 663 |
| Quebec | 38 | 1443 |
| Ontario | 15 | 643 |
| Manitoba | 20 | 659 |
| Saskatchewan | 77 | 1234 |
| Alberta | 53 | 933 |
| Pacific | 75 | 892 |
| TOTAL | 314 | 6467 |

**Figure 3: AHS On Reserve Project Demographics as reported by Regions (2000-2001)**
Source: Health Canada (2003b) http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/pubs/famil/_develop/2000-01_ahs-papa-rpt/index-eng.php

Responses from each region involved in the AHSOR program evaluation provided information and feedback on the following elements: (1) Regional AHSOR Committee Structure and Membership, (2) Regional Committee Operations and Activities, (3) Regional Operating Costs, (4) Total number of sites open and serving children; (5) Total number of children identified with special needs, (6) Total number of parents involved in the program, (7) Total number of staff, and (8) child-to-staff ratios, (9) number of visits with health and dental staff, and (10) total number of children on waiting lists.

The data presented in the 2000/2001 Annual Report suggests that a high proportion of participating children are being assessed as 'special needs'. The Pacific region, for instance, reports that 892 children in the program, or approximately 14% were special needs (see Figure 4). However, what is striking in light of this data is that special needs classification rarely occurs before the age of 3, peaking at age 4, suggesting that early interventions between the ages of 0 to 3 may prove beneficial should the AHSOR program be structurally equivalent to the effective early childhood educational intervention programs in the US.

| Region | No. of Children Identified with Special Needs | | | | | | | | No. of Children in Program (by Region) | % of children with Special Needs |
| | Age | | | | | | | SUM | | |
| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Atlantic | 0 | 2 | 10 | 17 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 32 | 663 | 5% |
| Quebec | 2 | 4 | 3 | 13 | 23 | 10 | 2 | 57 | 1443 | 4% |
| Ontario | Aggregated | | | | | | | 30 | 643 | 5% |
| Manitoba | 0 | 0 | 20 | 16 | 18 | 35 | 4 | 93 | 659 | 14% |
| Saskatchewa | 0 | 1 | 8 | 16 | 21 | 7 | 1 | 54 | 1234 | 4% |
| Alberta | 0 | 1 | 3 | 15 | 24 | 11 | 5 | 59 | 933 | 6% |
| Pacific | 0 | 1 | 8 | 20 | 42 | 24 | 7 | 102 | 892 | 11% |

**Figure 4: AHSOR Number of Children Assessed as Special Needs**
Source: Adapted from Health Canada (2003b), retrieved from: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/pubs/famil/_develop/2000-01_ahs-papa-rpt/index-eng.php

Other significant data reports that a high proportion of children on-reserve are on waiting lists for the AHSOR program within their respective communities (see Figure 5), and as other related research suggests, there are approximately 70% of on-reserve children who are not enrolled in Head Start.

| Region | Number of Project Sites in Region | Total Reported Number of Children Served by Projects | Total Reported Number of Special Needs Children Served by Projects | Total Reported Number of Children on Waiting Lists for the Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve (AHSOR) Projects |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Atlantic | 36 | 663 | 32 | 89 |
| Quebec | 38 | 1,443 | 57 | 596 |
| Ontario | 15 | 643 | 30 | 90 |
| Manitoba | 20 | 659 | 52 | 178 |
| Saskatchewan | 77 | 1,234 | 47 | 548 |
| Alberta | 53 | 933 | 59 | 270 |
| Pacific | 75 | 892 | 100 | 120 |
| Total | 314 | 6,467 | 377 | 1,891 |

**Figure 5: AHSOR Number of Children on Waiting Lists**
Source: Adapted from Health Canada (2003b), retrieved from: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/pubs/famil/_develop/2000-01_ahs-papa-rpt/index-eng.php

Lastly, the majority of participating regions reported low child-to-staff ratios. As Figure 6 illustrates, child-to-staff ratios ranged from as low as 1:5 in Alberta) to a high of 1:10 in Quebec. This observation positively aligns with research that

implicates low child-to-staff ratios with effective ECE programming that further affects educational outcomes and school-readiness in at-risk children.

| Region | Child to Staff Ratio |
|---|---|
| Atlantic | 1 to 8 |
| Quebec | 1 to 10 |
| Ontario | 1 to 7 |
| Manitoba | 1 to 6 |
| Saskatchewa | no data |
| Alberta | 1 to 5 |
| Pacific | 1 to 6 |

**Figure 6: AHSOR Child to Staff Ratios per Region**
Source: Adapted from Health Canada (2003b), retrieved from: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/pubs/famil/_develop/2000-01_ahs-papa-rpt/index-eng.php

However, what remains to be seen, and what is consistently absent from AHSOR program data and literature is the extent to which program participant children have had their "emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs" (Health Canada, 2003b, p.3) met and furthermore, to what extent are they adequately prepared for school.

Part 2 of this chapter provided a review of the literature pertaining to three (3) of the most widely researched early childhood programs in the United States who, similar to the AHSOR program, similarly focus on improving the level of school-readiness in impoverished and marginalized children. To illustrate the gap in related Canadian literature, a secondary review of the available literature from Canadian sources concerning the AHSOR program were presented. The conclusions drawn from this process indicates that the majority of the existing literature focused more on one particular aspect of the AHSOR program (i.e. local control, indigenization, example of early childhood intervention strategy), but did not however, examine the program's effectiveness in meeting its stated objectives. Moreover, other conclusions drawn from this process were that the AHSOR program might lack the necessary programmatic elements that are inherent and observed within similar programs in the U.S. The following chapter moves from perceptions of the ASHOR program as meeting a policy gap for Indian education

for on-reserve children, to a review and analysis of relevant policy documents and government policy statements.

## Chapter 3: Federal Government Policy Review

The objective of this chapter is to provide a review of policy documents and governmental policy statements regarding investments to Aboriginal-specific programming in Canada. Using Human Capital theory and discourse analysis as a framework mechanism and a method, this chapter will conceptualize federal 'investments' to Aboriginal-specific programming in Canada as ones that are 'made-on' First Nations people as a means of improving Canada's national and global socioeconomic position and alleviating fiscal pressures, rather than what the AHSOR program has outwardly stated; which is that investments are made to reduce observed inequity in the health, well-being, and educational outcomes of Aboriginal children by ensuring they are school-ready. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, early childhood education for on-reserve Aboriginal children has until only recently become a priority for the federal government; however, First Nation leaders and communities have long expressed the desire for early childhood education as a means of enhancing the learning opportunities of young children on reserve. This chapter will discuss how observations and recommendations made by external bodies (e.g. Auditor General of Canada, Statistics Canada) regarding the First Nation 'education' and 'funding' gaps, in conjunction with revelations about the impending demographic 'tidal wave', both of which are informed and influenced by human capital theory, have formed the basis of policy and programming initiatives related to early childhood education, and Aboriginal educational programming generally. The first part of the chapter reviews the differential educational achievement of Aboriginal children as compared to non-Aboriginal children, and contextualizes this in relation to the need for AHSOR program. A discussion of the differential financial provisions for education on and off-reserve First Nation students follow this and central to this chapter is a review and federal policy documents which locate responsibility for early childhood intervention programs. By reframing the need for First Nation early childhood

education in Canada in this way, this chapter concludes with a discussion on the underlying economic agenda for investments made to Aboriginal specific programming, and the AHSOR program specifically.

**The Achievement Gap in Aboriginal Education**

Data compiled by numerous organizations reveal that Aboriginal peoples continued to lag far behind their non-Aboriginal counterparts in terms of high school graduation and within other measures of educational achievement. As the 2011 Status Report for Programs on First Nation Reserves issued by the Auditor General of Canada attests:

> 4.17 Meanwhile the proportion of high school graduates has risen steadily in the general population across Canada but not among First Nations students living on reserves. Based on census data from 2001 and 2006, the education gap is widening. The proportion of high school graduates over the age of 15 is 41 percent among First Nations members living on reserves, compared with 77 percent for Canadians as a whole. In 2004, we noted that at existing rates, it would take 28 years for First Nations communities to reach the national average. More recent trends suggest that the time needed may be still longer. (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2011, Chapter 4, p. 13)

Similar concerns raised earlier by the Auditor General in 2004 resulted in the formation of the federal government's goal of *Reforming First Nations Education* in Canada. In 2008, the Department developed two programs entitled *The Education Partnerships Program* (EPP) and *the First Nation Student Success Program* (FNSSP) respectively, each intended to contribute to realizing this goal.

According to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (AANDC, 2013c), both programs were intended to "represent an important step in making long-term, collaborative improvements in First Nations education"(AANDC, 2013c, para. 3) and that "Governments, communities, educators, families and students all have a role to play in achieving real results. That is why we want to work with all of our partners to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal people" (AANDC, 2013 c, para. 5). Since the establishment of both the EPP and FNSSP programs, investments to education by Aboriginal Affairs – above and beyond the statutory funding requirements for K-12 FTE[15] - have resulted additional proposal based funding for 38 FNSSP Projects across Canada that support approximately 21,000 students on reserve. On October 2, 2012, then Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, the Honourable Chuck Strahl, announced an additional $100 million dollar investment to both the FNSSP and EPP programs (AANDC, 2012d) to support early literacy programming for young children as well as for the establishment of partnerships with provincial school systems.

Despite the formation of additional education programs to support the reform, the National Panel on Elementary and Secondary Education for Students On Reserve found:

> These programs have supported change, but change is slow, not
>
> comprehensive and is plagued by uncertainty given the requirement for
>
> proposal-driven funding. They have become part of the patchwork
>
> approach to the provision of education in First Nation schools; and this
>
> patchwork is completely incapable of supporting a school environment

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[15] FTE: Full Time Equivalent. First Nations are funded based on the number of FTEs on the Nominal Roll.

that enables First Nation students to achieve at a level equal to or better than their peers in Canada. (Assembly of First Nations, 2012a. p. 14)

The Auditor General (2011) further adds:

4.16 Education gap.

….INAC started work to respond to the recommendation, but we found that it has not maintained a consistent approach and cannot demonstrate improvements to date. It did not fully implement the action plan drafted in response to our audit (Office of the Auditor General, 2011, p. 13)

A report issued by the Chiefs of Ontario (2013) echoes these concerns in their recent report *Comparison of the DIAND Funding Formula For Education with the Saskatchewan Provincial Funding Formula* wherein they state, "to date neither band controlled nor provincial school boards have been able to demonstrate with certainty that current educational programming offered to First Nation students on and off reserve has produced desired achievement levels" (Chiefs of Ontario, 2013, p. 11). As the report suggests, aggregated data based on Nominal Roll submitted to the Department identifies that achievement levels of on-reserve students remains, in many instances, startlingly low (see Figure 7 and Figure 8).

High School Graduation Rate of First Nation Students living on reserve, by region, 2007-2008 to 2009-1010.

| FISCAL YEAR | 2007-2008 | | 2008-2009 | | 2009-2010 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PROVINCE | Provincial | Private | Provincial | Private | Provincial | Private |
| Atlantic | 45.95 | 0 | 71.43 | 0 | 71.51 | 0 |
| Quebec | 46.55 | 28.57 | 40.1 | 65.9 | 50 | 62.79 |
| Ontario | 35.23 | 43.64 | 33 | 32.79 | 33.39 | 30.95 |
| Manitoba | 27.33 | 75.47 | 28.5 | 62.5 | 28.18 | 41.03 |
| Saskatchewan | 38.6 | 0 | 45.75 | 0 | 40.63 | 0 |
| Alberta | 44.42 | 0 | 34.13 | 0 | 36.01 | 0 |
| British Columbia | 47.24 | 64.29 | 49.56 | 75 | 45 | 68.18 |

**Figure 7: High School Graduation of First Nation Students living on reserve, by region, 2007-2008 to 2009-2010 (Provincial and Private schools, based on Nominal Roll).**
Source: Adapted from statistics contained within the Chiefs of Ontario (2013): *Comparison of the DIAND Funding Formula For Education with the Saskatchewan Provincial Funding Formula*

**Graduation Rates for First Nation Students On Reserve (based on Nominal Roll)**
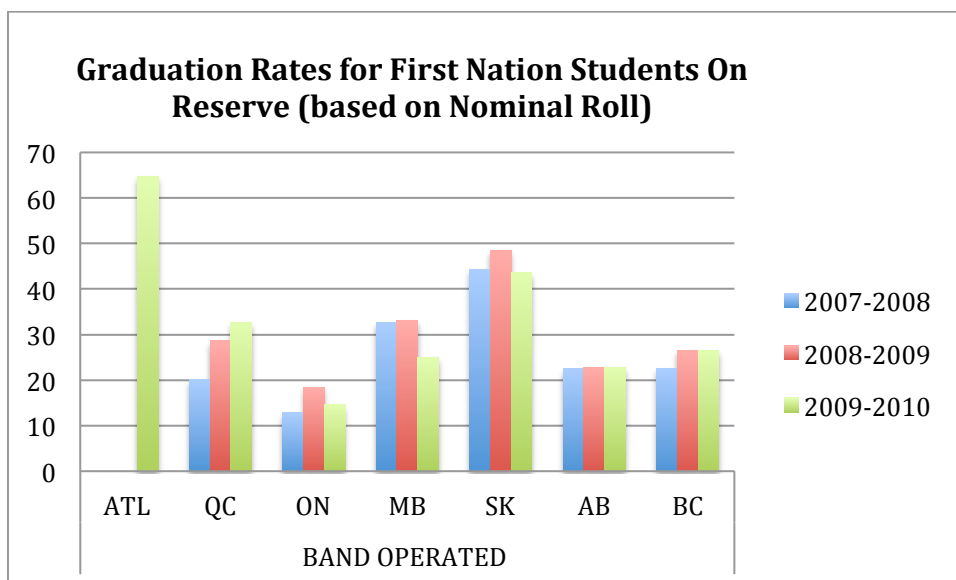
*Figure 8: Graduation Rates for First Nation Students On Reserve (based on Nominal Roll)*
Source: Adapted from statistics contained within the Chiefs of Ontario (2013): *Comparison of the DIAND Funding Formula For Education with the Saskatchewan Provincial Funding Formula*

## The Funding Gap in Aboriginal Education

At the same time, Aboriginal communities and First Nation leaders began expressing growing unrest with regard to observed education funding disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Reports issued by the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples entitled *Reforming First Nation Education: From Crisis to Hope* (The Senate, 2011) as well as the joint report issued by the Assembly of First Nations and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (AANDC, 2011; Assembly of First Nation, 2012a) based on the *National Panel on Elementary and Secondary Education* in 2010 identified the funding gap as a major obstacle to achieving meaningful results.

After an extensive consultation and engagement process, both the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and the National Panel's issued final reports which make direct reference to funding gaps and the resulting lack of progress in Aboriginal student achievement and outcomes. The National Panel's (Assembly of First Nations, 2012a) recommendations in this regard (2011) state:

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Recommendation #4

Immediate measures for implementation in fiscal 2012-2013 are

recommended:

Increase education funding for 2012-2013 school year by an amount equal

to the percentage increase for provincial schools in the province in which

the FN school is located (Assembly of First Nations, 2012a, p. 38).

The Standing Senate Committee echoed these recommendations in their
observations:

> Although the stated objective of federal education programming is to
>
> "provide eligible students living on First Nations' reserves with
>
> elementary and secondary education programs comparable to those
>
> required in provincial schools, it is unclear how this policy objective can
>
> be met without the provision of sufficient funding. Time and again we
>
> heard about the disparity in funding between students residing on-reserve
>
> and those who attend schools off the reserve. Commenting on this
>
> disparity, Colin Kelly told us, "you have heard chiefs tell you that they get
>
> approximately $2,000 less per student; that is very much their reality. It is
>
> very difficult to introduce the kinds of programs that are needed, the kinds
>
> of interventions that are needed, and attract and keep staff.
>
> Even more frustrating to First Nations is the fact that the federal
>
> government often pays substantially higher fees for First Nations students
>
> attending public schools through tuition arrangements with provincial and

territorial school boards than it pays for students on nearby reserves (The

Senate, 2011, p. 35)

A statement issued by Carolyn Bennett, Member of Parliament for the Liberal

Party of Canada, quotes findings from First Nations communities who contend

that First Nation students receive one-half to two-thirds"(Bennett, 2013b), or in

some instances $2,000 less (Canadian Chamber of Commerce, 2011), funding for

education than their provincial school counterparts. Another report by the

Canadian Chamber of Commerce (n.d.) further states:

> Currently the widely agreed upon figure is that funding for First Nation
>
> education is only 60 to 70 per cent of that for non-First Nations students.
>
> A 3-year pilot project started recently in Manitoba found funding of
>
> $7,200 per student (from the federal government) at the Waywaysecapo
>
> First Nation high school and $10,500 per student at the provincial high
>
> school only a few kilometres away. Differing views exist on the
>
> underfunding; all agree that funding is grossly inadequate. (Canadian
>
> Chamber of Commerce, n.d.; Underfunding, para 3)

The Assembly of First Nations (2012b), in preparation for the Special Chiefs

Meeting on October 1-3, 2013 issued a report entitled *Federal Funding for First

Nation Schools* wherein average per-student funding for on-reserve and provincial

schools was compared for the period of 1996 to 2001 (see Figure 9). The AFN

determined that funding disparities between on-reserve and provincial schools for

on-reserve students increased from $832 in 1996 to $3477 by 2001.

**Average per-student funding, First Nation schools and provincial schools, 1996-2011**
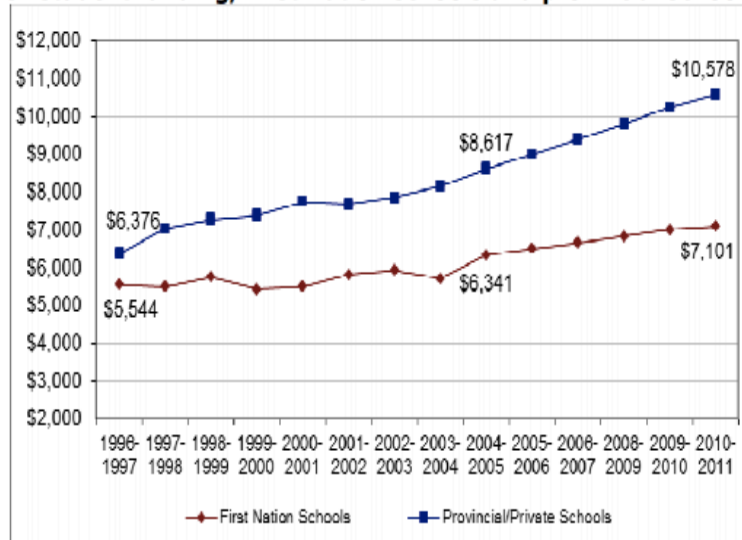
**Figure 9: Average Per-Student Funding, First Nation schools and provincial school, 1996-2001**
Source: Assembly of First Nations, 2012b. *Federal Funding for First Nation Schools*

Shortly after the Special Chiefs Meeting in 2012 and in response to the AFN's report, the Department issued a "press release with misleading funding numbers to deny a funding gap for First Nations students even existed" (Bennett, 2013b). Even more, Bennett contends that the federal government continued to deny a funding gap when asked directly to address the question of the amount of per student funding. A Ministerial Inquiry (Bennett, 2013a) made on behalf of Bennett reveals that the government was not able to directly quantify, and therefore defend, their position that a funding gap does not exist. Rather, the response issued by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC, 2013d) is similar to the press release posted on their website which states:

> In 2010-2011, the Government of Canada provided $1.51 billion to
>
> support First Nations elementary and secondary education. An additional
>
> $304 million was provided to First Nations for construction and
>
> maintenance of education facilities on reserve…

On a per capita basis, AANDC provided approximately $13,524 per full-time equivalent student in 2010-2011 for elementary and secondary education expenditures. Not included in this calculation is an investment in 2010-2011 of approximately $304 million to maintain and improve education infrastructure for band-operated schools. It should be noted that there is considerable variation in the level of per-student funding across the country, and any funding comparisons must consider the factors that influence per-student funding levels in order to be meaningful (see Explanatory Notes for more information).

A closer examination of the "Explanatory Notes" (Department of Indian and Northern Development, 2013d, para. 3) reveals even further that the calculations provided to support the assertion that funding for on-reserve education is comparable to that of on-reserve students attending provincial schools are " …for illustrative purposes only" (AANDC, 2013d, Explanatory Notes: para 5) and cannot be used to quantify counterclaims by First Nations who argue that funding disparities between on-reserve and provincial schools exists.


**On-Reserve First Nation Education: The Question of Equitable Funding for Equal Opportunity**

While debates continue on the matter of comparable funding to that of provincial schools for on-reserve First Nations students continues, there are equally notable concerns regarding adequate and equitable funding for First Nations education so as to engender equal opportunity.

As many, if not all, First Nation communities across Canada attest, the current level of funding for on-reserve education remains inadequately low since a

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funding cap was placed on First Nation education in 1996. A report issued by the Assembly of First Nation argues "INAC's chronic underfunding of First Nations schools has created a First Nations education funding shortfall across Canada" (Assembly of First Nations (AFN), n.d, para. 5). Furthermore, the Assembly of First Nations states that "For INAC's entire First Nations elementary and secondary education budget (totalling $1.56 billion in 2009-2010), there is: A funding shortfall of $620 million in 2009-2010, beyond the 2% cap; a cumulative funding shortfall of over $3 billion since 1996" (AFN, n.d., para 6/7). Similar findings by the First Nation Education Council (FNEC, 2009) determined that funding for "instructional services has been underfunded by 4.2 percentage points" (FNEC, 2009, p. 16) since 1996. FNEC further estimates that as of 2008, there is an immediate funding shortfall of $233 million, a projected annual shortfall of $304 million in 2010, and a growing $2.0 billion historical funding shortfall (see Figure 10).
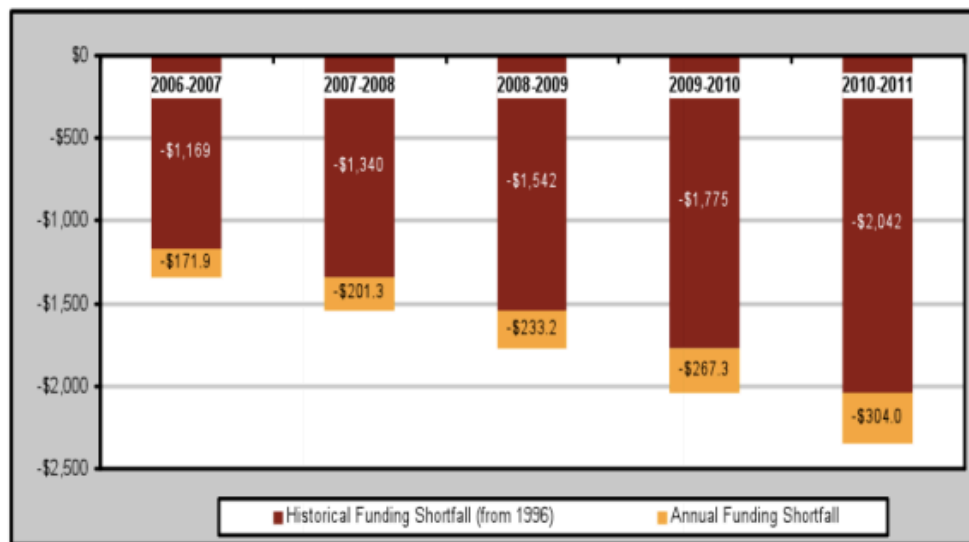


**Figure 10: First Nations education funding shortfall (in millions of $), BOFF – instructional services**
Source: First Nation Education Council (2009): Paper on First Nation Education Funding.
http://www.fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/FNEC-funding-paper-Feb2009.pdf

Various recommendations made by organizations such as the Assembly of First Nations (2012b), the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (2013), the Chiefs of Ontario (2012), and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce (2012) (to

name only a few) make it clear that funding for First Nation education requires substantial attention and that in order to achieve meaningful progress. Indeed, many note that in order to affect positive progress in this regard, and to ensure equal opportunity for young Aboriginal Canadians – additional funding to close the funding gap is direly needed.

While the precise amount required to fulfill the funding requirements of First Nations in this regard varies depending on source, a report issued by Parliament Canada (1999) entitled *The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* suggests that funding for education (in addition to other social investments) through a proposed implementation strategy would require "that governments increase spending to reach $1.5 billion by Year 5 of the strategy, and $2 billion in the subsequent 15 years" (Parliament of Canada, 1999; Some Major Findings of the Report, para. 1). According to the report, annual investments in addition to regulated statutory requirements would only require an addition $1.2 billion thereafter (Waslander, 1997, p. 977).

**Re-Contextualizing the Need: Governmental Policy Statements**

The AHSOR program is positioned between two federal departments who are both responsible for improving the lives of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. While the Department of Indian and Northern Development (DIAND) is primarily responsible for managing its legal obligations to Indians set out in the *Indian Act* (including education for those eligible recipients between 6 to 16 years of age); Health Canada (HC) (including the First Nation and Inuit Health Branch) is concomitantly mandated to improve the overall health and well being of Indians in Canada, which, as previously described, is determined by indicators of health such as, but not limited to, education and early childhood education.

In this regard, and given the growing recognition of the disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, both federal departments have responded

with the creation of a wide array of programs and services that are targeted to meet broad Departmental objectives that lend to improved health and well being among Aboriginal people. While DIAND and HC program goals and objectives are relatively clear, what is less clearly stated are the larger goals to make sufficient targeted investments so that Canada (inclusive of Aboriginal people), and all Canadians can prosper. In this way, investments in human capital, including those made towards education, are done so not simply a means of reducing disparities in observed inequality among individuals, but rather (and perhaps most troubling) to increase unstated but implied broader goals of global competitiveness, national prosperity, and individual wealth.

A review of Ministerial speeches and press statements reveal a consistent theme which posit a less stated, yet greater overarching goal, of improved national economic growth and prosperity rather than the stated goals to reduce disparities and improve the health, well being, and educational outcomes for a particular segment of society. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development's (2013b) Key Priorities make it clear that the Government supports First Nation, Inuit and Metis people in their effort to:

- Improve social well-being and economic prosperity;
- Develop healthier, more sustainable communities; and
- Participate more fully in Canada's political, social and economic development to the benefit of all Canadians (AANDC, 2013b, para. 2).

In 2012, the then Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, John Duncan, made a speech at the Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, Quebec, in relation to *Investments in First Nation Education* (AANDC, 2012b) where he stated:

> I'd like to talk to you about a topic that is important to all of us and that is
>
> First Nation education…. Ultimately, we all recognize the benefits of an

educated society…. A good education opens doors, creates opportunity

and can lead to a good job. Over the long term, more job opportunities will

lead to healthier, more self-sufficient First Nation communities. And that

is a goal we all share. It is good for First Nations and it is good for

Canada…. A good K-12 education opens the door to opportunities, to

jobs, and to personal success and prosperity. (para. 3)

Earlier that same year at the Crown-First Nation Gathering (AANDC, 2012c), Minister Duncan articulated:

Education and skills training are keys to taking maximum advantage of

economic opportunities and continuing to build capacity within First

Nation communities. We've launched or extended several programs

designed to improve education results….These initiatives benefit all

Canadians because Canada will increasingly need First Nations to fill

skilled jobs. This is something we all know and it's a unique opportunity.

We believe in making targeted investments in shared priorities and we

believe in getting results. Economic independence cannot be imposed by a

government program. It is something that must be built from the ground

up… (2012c, para. 10)

At the same historic 2012 Gathering, Prime Minister Stephen Harper added:

Canada's growing and vibrant economy will require a skilled and growing

labour force in every region: urban, rural and remote. Aboriginal peoples

are Canada's youngest population. It is therefore in all of our interests to

see aboriginal people educated, skilled and employed, and there will be no

better point in history to ensure that happens. (Prime Minister of Canada,

2012, para. 6, emphasis added)

On March 29, 2012 the Conservative government released *Budget 2012: Canada's Economic Action Plan – Jobs, Growth and Economic Prosperity (*Government of Canada, 2012) wherein it was noted:

Equipping First Nations people with the skills and opportunities they need

to fully participate in the economy is a priority for this Government and

First Nations. In many areas of the country, First Nations communities are

ideally placed to contribute to and benefit from large economic

projects….(Government of Canada, 2012, p. 18; Helping First Nations on

Reserve Access the Labour Force, para. 2).

While the statements above reflect more recent policy decisions, historical reports issued by the Department illustrate the long-standing desire to make adequate use of the Indian population through targeted investments for the sake of improved economic conditions for all Canadians and not simply for the Aboriginal population who have been historically disadvantaged.

Perhaps the most widely known and controversial statement in this regard, is the now infamous *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy* (also known as the *White Paper*) (AANDC, 1969), which was presented to the First Session of the Twenty-eighth Parliament by the Honourable Jean Chretien, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in 1969. Although rejected and counter-argued by the Aboriginal community with the issuance of the Red Paper, the *White Paper* recommended, among other things:

Governments can set examples, but they cannot change the hearts of men. Canadians, Indians and non-Indians alike stand at the crossroads. For Canadian society the issue is whether a growing element of its population will become full participants contributing in a positive way to the general wellbeing or whether, conversely, the present social and economic gap will lead to their increasing frustration and isolation, a threat to the general well-being of society. For many Indian people, one road does exist, the only road that has existed since Confederation and before, the road of different status, a road that led to a blind alley of deprivation and frustration. This road, because it is separate road, cannot lead to full participation to equality in practice as well as in theory. In the pages to follow, the Government has outlined a number of measures and a policy which it is convinced will offer another road for Indians, a road that would lead gradually away from different status to full social, economic and political participation in Canadian life.

This is the choice. …. Indian people must be persuaded, must persuade themselves, that this path will lead them to a fuller and richer life. (AANDC, 1969, para. 10 & 11)

**Human Capital Theory and the Demographic 'Tidal Wave': Understanding the Impetus for Investments to Indian Social Programs**

As the above noted policy statements make clear, the federal government has consistently engaged in the precarious pursuit of the double-aimed goal of investing 'just-enough' to lift Aboriginal people out of the point of deprivation it

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created centuries ago while simultaneously stimulating the national economy and individual wealth. In order for the government to achieve meaningful outcomes in this regard, targeted and adequate investments in human capital are made (see Chapter 1).

With specific regard to the Aboriginal population in Canada, an analysis of investments to Aboriginal education completed by Sharpe and Arsenault (2009), & Sharpe, Arsenault, Lapointe, & Cowan (2009) hypothesize that direct returns to the Canadian economy through improved educational and labour market outcomes indicates a significant return on investment in this regard. More specifically Sharpe, Arsenault, Lapointe, & Cowan (2009) estimate that should Aboriginal outcomes in both education and labour market output reach similar levels to those in 2001 by non-Aboriginal by the year 2026, the "annual output [compared to the status quo] is $6.5 billion **higher is 2026. Cumulatively,** output gains are estimated at **$401 billion**" (p. v). Furthermore, Sharpe & Arsenault (2009) also estimated that tax revenues would likely be **"$3.5 billion higher in 2026. Cumulatively**, the increase in tax revenues is estimated at **$39 billion**" (p. 24, emphasis original). Lastly, and perhaps most notably, is that in the event that every gap[16] be closed entirely between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people by 2026, "government expenditures are $**14.2 billion lower …Cumulatively**, savings in the form of government expenditures are estimated at **$77 billion**" (Sharpe & Arsenault, 2009, p. 24, emphasis original).

Similar observations were made earlier by Waslander (1997) who noted that in the absence of incremental government investments in the Aboriginal population of $2 billion per year over 20 years, the maintenance of the "costly status quo" would likely result. Waslander (1997) asserts "the economic potential of Aboriginal people is so much underutilized at present (in 1996) that an increase of $5.8 billion in the annual value of production (and hence income earned) by Aboriginal people is possible" (p. 976) and that the "ultimate gain would be $5.5

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[16] Employment, education, labour market participation, unemployment etc.

billion for governments and $4.3 for Aboriginal people, for a total of $9.8 billion"
(p. 977).

From these perspectives, it is clear that while the "equity-efficiency tradeoff (sic)"
is weak (Sharpe, Arsenault, Lapointe & Cowan, 2009, p. 70) investments to
human capital by way of investments to education for Aboriginal people is a
"low-hanging fruit with far reaching and considerable economic and social
benefits for Canadians" (Sharpe, Arsenault, Lapointe & Cowan, 2009, p. 70).

With a growing understanding of the considerable benefits to increased human
capital, both in terms of market and non-market return, through direct investments
to Aboriginal education, it is not surprising that current federal expenditures in
this regard go hand-in-hand with recent revelations that investments in the
Aboriginal population may serve as an immediate and direct solution to the
impeding labour shortage, but also to alleviate increasing fiscal shortages arising
from the divergent demographic trends related to large, aging non-Aboriginal
population and a growing population of young Aboriginal peoples.

As Calvin Helin notes in his book *Dances with Dependency*, the "Aboriginal
demographic tidal wave …could contribute significantly to swamping Canada's
finances". Helin (2006) further adds:

> Census data from 2001 shows that Canada's Aboriginal population is on a
> very steep rise. Of the 1.3 million people that reported having at least
> some Aboriginal ancestry, nearly 1 million persons identified themselves
> with one or more of the Status, non-Status, Inuit, or Metis Aboriginal
> groups. That is a comparative increase to 3.3 percent from 2.8 percent of
> the total population from the previous census five years earlier. By
> comparison, Canada's overall population was approximately 30 million,
> and has experienced a steep decline in rate of growth from the baby boom

era. It is clear that the two populations are going in opposite demographic

directions with the Aboriginal population rapidly rising while the

mainstream population is in dramatic decline. (p. 44)

These demographic trends present considerable challenges to the federal government in that they translate into "looming potential costs, which, until addressed, will impact individual taxpayers directly in their wallets and will have serious long-term repercussions to the well-being on Canada generally" (Helin, 2006, p.53). More specifically, Helin (2006) argues that huge numbers of the workforce are: (1) living longer, (2) retiring and are no longer contributing to the economy's tax base, and (3) will soon be utilizing expensive health care and social programs. The culmination of these demographic trends, in conjunction with a young, growing, and underemployed, under-educated Aboriginal workforce will likely result in what has been described as a "fiscal demographic tsunami (on a) scale never seen before in Canada" (Helin, 2006, p. 59). Helin (2006) further urges both the federal and First Nations governments to consider "effective measures …to develop and implement a strategy which results in wide-scale Aboriginal employment and wealth creation…In the end…the Canadian economy and nation will be the beneficiary of such cooperation" (p. 59).

Helin's recommendations in 2006 were earlier stated in a report issued by Michael Mendelson (2004) for the Caledon Institute of Public Policy entitled *Aboriginal People in Canada's Labour Market: Work and Unemployment, Today and Tomorrow,* wherein Mendelson (2004) notes:

Aboriginal entrants into the labour market will be absolutely vital in filling

labour demand requirements over the next decades, especially in western

Canada. To a larger extent than is generally recognized, Canada's future

prosperity depends upon how successful we are in achieving equitable

results in our labour markets for Aboriginal Canadians (p. 1)

In this regard, while it has been recognized that tremendous potential exists to resolve and/or alleviate Canada's economic pressures as a result of a burgeoning aging population through effective training and employment of Canada's exceedingly robust Aboriginal population, this will fail to be achievable or sustainable without concomitant investments to Aboriginal education. Since it is known that increased educational attainment results in increased employment opportunities and raises individual employability, the Aboriginal population – in its current state – will not meet expectations held by the federal government in this regard. Statistics consistently indicate the employment rates for on and off reserve Indians remains disproportionately high, as does the high levels of high school non-completion. As Mendelson (2004) notes:

> …the bad news us that relative unemployment rates of Aboriginal people was a bit worse in 2000 than in 1991 and 1996 over two-and-a-half times that of the total population[17]. This means that we have not made progress in five years in improving the labour market position of Aboriginal peoples relative to the general population". (p. 18)

On the matter of educational attainment (or high school / post-secondary achievement) Mendelson (2004) further adds, "Whereas fewer than one-third (31.3 percent) of all Canadians have less than a high school diploma, almost one-half (48.8 percent) of the Aboriginal identity population did not graduate from high school" (p. 15). Recommendations stemming from Mendelson's 2004 report for the Caledon Institute of Social Policy suggest that the Aboriginal workforce will become increasingly important over the next decade and a half and that "the children who will make up the new entrants into the labour market are today at home, in schools, and in child care centres" (p. 35). In this regard, governments must concern themselves, Mendelson (2004) argues, with putting great effort into

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[17] Unemployment rates in 1991, 1996 and 2000 for Aboriginal people were 24.5, 24.0, and 19.1 respectively while the total unemployment rate was 10.2, 10.1, and 7.4 throughout the same periods. The relative unemployment rate for Aboriginals in 1991, 1996, and 2000 was 240, 238, and 258 respectively (adapted from Mendelson, 2004).

programming for Aboriginal families and children and to "actively look(ing) for every possible way to invest wisely in improving the odds for Aboriginal children and youth" (p. 38).

**Concluding comments.**

The debate concerning the adequacy of K-12 education funding for First Nation students on-reserve in an effort to address the persistent education and funding gaps is likely to continue for some time. At the same time, and what much of the literature and supporting data presented herein suggests, Canada is facing a serious and impending demographic and social 'tidal wave' given the high proportion of non-Aboriginal Canadians who will soon be exiting the workforce thereby placing greater demands on the social services sector in conjunction with the rapidly expanding young and undereducated Aboriginal population who would most likely be able to lessen these effects should targeted and sufficient investments in education be made. However, what is also evident is that while nominal increases to Aboriginal education have occurred (see Figure 11), they lag far behind those of the provincial school system so much so that, as many have argued, the cost of maintaining the status quo and failing to address the education funding shortfall would result in the loss of $401 billion in output gains to the economy and an additional loss of $39 billion in tax revenues (Sharpe & Arsenault, 2009)

**DIAND Expenditures on ESE**
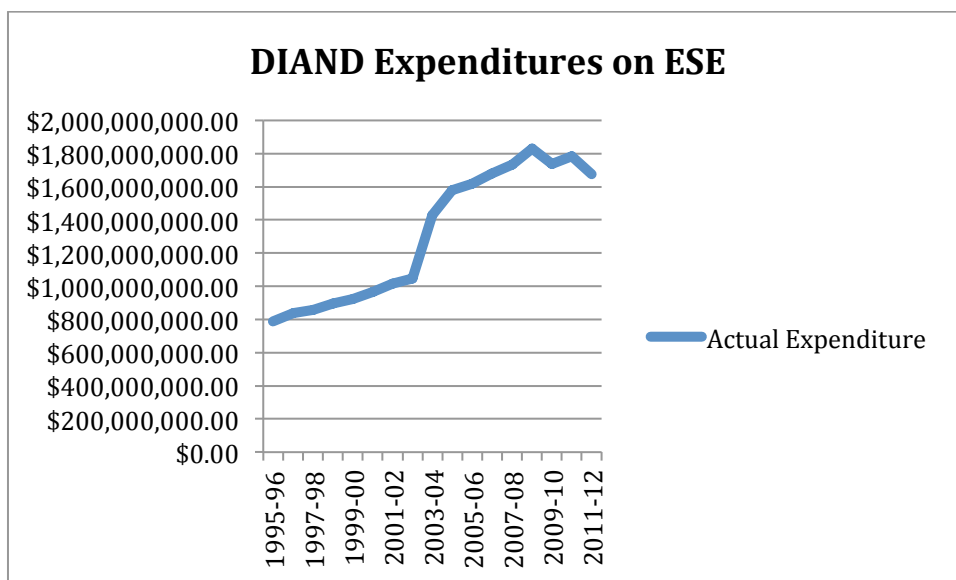
**Figure 11: DIAND Expenditures of Elementary and Secondary Education**
Source: Adapted from the Treasury Board Secretariat's Departmental Performance Reports for the period 1995-1996 to 2011-2012 (See: Treasury Board Secretariat, 1996 to 2012)

Despite the ongoing dialogue about the need to increase funding for K-12 education for on-reserve students, very little has been said about the need to invest in the early childhood education needs of the same population. As recommended by the Royal Commission in 1996, each level of government were to work cooperatively to:

**3.5.3**

…. support an integrated early childhood education funding strategy that

(a) extends early childhood education services to *all* Aboriginal children regardless of residence;

(b) encourages programs that foster the physical, social, intellectual and spiritual development of children, reducing distinctions between child care, prevention and education;

(c) maximizes Aboriginal control over service design and administration;

(d) offers one-stop accessible funding; and

(e) promotes parental involvement and choice in early childhood education

options (AANDC, 1996a; Recommendations, para. 1).

Since the 1996 Royal Commissions' recommendation in this regard, it could be said that, to some extent, this recommendation has been effectively realized through the creation of the Aboriginal Head Start Programs, in both urban and rural communities. However, what remains to be seen is whether the federal government, and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development in particular, will fund more comprehensive programs for early childhood education for all Aboriginal children as a statutory requirement rather than as an annual grant or contribution as is the case in present terms through Health Canada. In the absence of statutory funding for First Nations children under the age of 4 by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, will likely mean that First Nation ECE will remain in precarious balance, all the while relying on funding opportunities that lack stability and predictability that are direly needed to protect the interests of this highly vulnerable population.

As previously noted, investments to the early childhood education needs of First Nations children are evident by way of the Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve Program (AHSOR). Indeed, the AHSOR program began as a four year pilot project in 1998 and was initially approved $100 million dollars to be disbursed incrementally over 4 years and then supported by annual investments of $25 million thereafter (Health Canada, 2003b). Furthermore, since the program's inception, popularity and support for the program has increased, as evidenced by the growing enrolment figures (as well as those that point to a growing waiting list of eligible applicants). More recent AHSOR program data for the 2010-2011 fiscal year indicates that the number of Aboriginal children enrolled in the program has increased to nearly 9,000 children in communities across Canada and

that funding allocated to the program has increased substantially to $59 million annually.

While increased enrolment and investment in the AHSOR program are positive indicators, the program still faces significant challenges in meeting its policy objective to prepare young children for school years. In addition to the precarious position in which the AHSOR program is both situated and funded, program participants themselves are also at risk of not being able to benefit fully from a program designed to prepare them for school, as the complex interaction of historical, contextual, situational, and social realities are neither recognized nor addressed simultaneously. Even more (and what will become evident in later chapters), is that structural elements of successful early childhood development programs for 'at-risk' and impoverished youth appear to be absent both in content and form within the AHSOR program.

This chapter sought to demonstrate the influence of human capital theory and economic rationalism ideologies in the formation of current development in Aboriginal education in Canada. When viewed from this standpoint, it is postulated the targeted investments made in this regard are done so as a means of increasing national prosperity rather than addressing the observed inequalities in educational outcomes, adequate funding levels, and overall improved health and wellbeing of a segment of the Canadian population that has historically been at a calculated disadvantage. In the proceeding chapter, a examination of the role of school-readiness and the early development index (EDI) will be undertaken to illustrate the extent to which Aboriginal children are at an increased disadvantage when compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts in order to demonstrate the significance of early childhood education for on-reserve First Nations children in Canada. It is also the purpose of the next chapter to reveal that the current state of early childhood education in Canada for First Nations children, when provided upon the loose policy framework developed by federal departments, fails to achieve what it intends to achieve in relation to ensuring 'school-readiness', but

that it also fails as an investment to increase human capacity (and hence productivity).

## Chapter 4: Examining School Readiness and Early Development Index (EDI) Risk Factors

The previous chapters provided a historical overview of the AHSOR program and a review of the policy and theoretical frameworks that have shaped the environment for Aboriginal education in Canada. With the understanding that the AHSOR program is intended to prepare young First Nation children for school, the objective of the next chapter is to examine and discuss the importance of 'school-readiness' for impoverished and marginalized students as well as the various socio-environmental risk-factors that place these students in a position of increased risk of not being ready for school. In the final sections of this chapter, a cross-comparison analysis between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people within each of the risk-factor subdomains will be undertaken to illustrate the extent to which on-reserve Aboriginal children are at increased risk of not being school ready given the tendency to be overrepresented within in each risk category. It is also the objective of this chapter to illustrate the magnitude of importance and the role that early childhood education, especially for impoverished and marginalized students, has with regard to increasing the likelihood of early school success and later positive outcomes in other social domains.

Health Canada (2003b) states that the Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve program is "designed to prepare young children for their school years by meeting their emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs" (p. 3) through the simultaneous implementation of the program's six core components including: "culture and language, education, health promotion, nutrition, social support, and parental and community involvement" (Health Canada, 2003b, p. 3). In doing so, Health Canada (2003b) asserts that it is meeting "the unique needs of First Nations children and families while ensuring integration with existing children's programs" (p.3). The impetus for preparing First Nations children for school is borne from the 1997 federal Speech From the Throne which contained a commitment to "measure and report on the readiness to learn of Canadian children so that we can assess our progress in providing our children with the best

possible start" (Privy Council, 1997; Investing in Children, para. 8). Since the Throne Speech (1997) commitment was issued, measuring and reporting on 'readiness-to-learn' has been underway through assessments using list of indicators (Cognitive development and language outcomes; Emotional development outcomes; Social development outcomes; and Physical health outcomes) created by the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) (Statistics Canada, 2008c).

**Defining School Readiness**

Although consensus the most appropriate standards and tools required to measure 'school readiness' has yet to be achieved among researchers, many contend that school readiness can be understood as: (1) the child's ability to meet the demands of school, such as co-operation, listening to the teacher, and benefitting from the educational activities offered by the school (Janus & Duku., 2007, as cited in Muhajarine, Puchala, and Janus, 2011; Doherty, 2007); (2) "the child's ability to meet the task demands of school, such as sitting quietly, and to assimilate the curriculum content at the time of entry into the formal school system" (Doherty, 1997, p. 13); (3) the level of development at which an individual (of any age) is ready to undertake the learning of specific materials (Kagan, 1990), and (5) "the basic minimum skills and knowledge in a variety of domains that will enable the child to be successful in school" (UNICEF, 2012, p. 9) . Success in school, UNICEF contends, is determined by a range of "basic behaviours and abilities, including literacy, numeracy, ability to follow directions, working well with other children and engaging in learning activities" (Rouse, Brooks-Gunn and Mclanahan, as cited in UNICEF, 2012, p. 9).
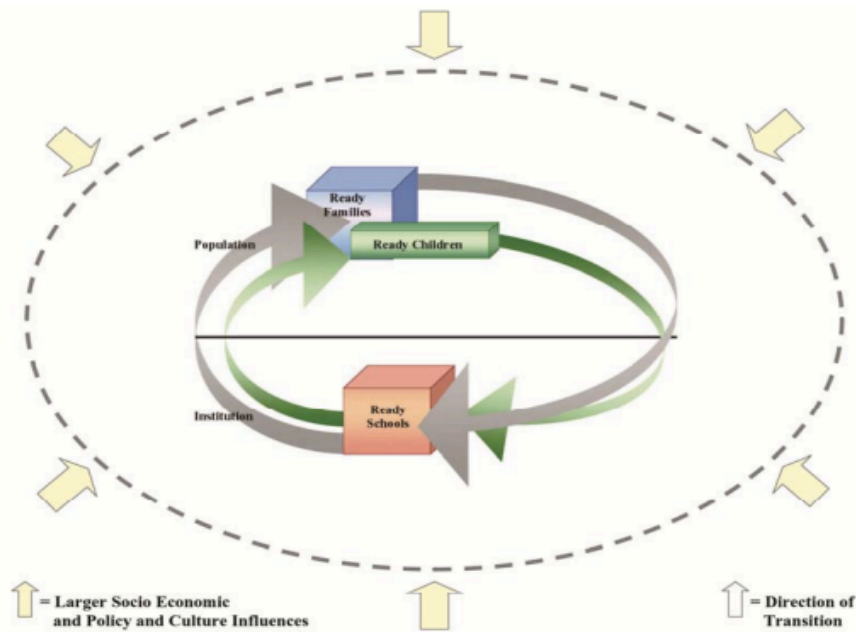
UNICEF (2012) further expands on the definition of school readiness in that not only is it defined "by two characteristic features" (p. 6) (transition and gaining competencies) but that these features span three dimensions; namely: "children's readiness for school, schools' readiness for children, and families' and communities' readiness for school" (UNICEF, 2012, p. 6) (see Figure 12). These three dimension must work in tandem in order to best support children "because school readiness is a time of transition that requires the interface between individuals, families, and systems" (UNICEF, 2012, p. 7) that involves "children moving into a new learning environment(s), families learning to work with a sociocultural system (ie: education), and schools making provisions for admitting new children into the system (UNICEF, 2012, p. 8). Achieving harmony among all three dimensions ensures that "children and families are prepared for school and schools are prepared for them" (UNICEF, 2012, p. 16) and as a result, children are more likely to enrol in school on time and stay until they complete primary school (UNICEF, 2012, p. 25). Ramey and Ramey (2004) contend:

…Scientific evidence affirms that children who do not have positive early

transitions to school – that is, those children who have early failure

experiences in school – are those most likely to become inattentive,

disruptive, or withdrawn. Later, these students are the most likely to drop

out of school early, to engage in irresponsible, dangerous and illegal

behaviours; to become teen parents; and to depend of welfare and

numerous public assistance programs for survival" (p. 473)

Reynolds, Mavrogenes, Bezruczko, & Hagemann (1996) also recognize the significance of the interconnected nature between children, families, and schools in the transition process in that they contend that early childhood interventions for "at-risk children can be facilitated through modifications in the family and school contexts…(and that) both cognitive and family support factors appear to initiate a pattern of performance that results in longer-term effects of preschool intervention on children's school competence" (p. 1135).

**At-Risk Children and School Readiness**

Of particular significance is the impact of school-readiness on later school achievement and socio-economic outcomes for at-risk children. Ramey and Ramey (1998) argue that the absence of school-readiness, especially for disadvantaged children, "bodes ill for future school performance. Poor school readiness predicts increased likelihood of low levels of academic achievement and high levels of retention in grades, special education placement, and ultimately school dropout" (p. 111). Furthermore, "these same children are at an elevated risk for teen pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, unemployment, social dependency, and poor parenting practices (Ramey & Ramey, 1998, p. 111).

Janus and Duku (2007) state that "children's school readiness, as measured by EDI, is sensitive to socio-economic, demographic and family factors" (p. 394) and that "children with identified risk factors[18] were more likely to have lower EDI scores and were more likely to be at a disadvantage (to be vulnerable) at school entry, thus contributing to the existence of the gap" (Janus & Duku, 2007, p. 394). The Canadian Council on Learning (2009) found that in the province of British Columbia "39% of Aboriginal children…are "not ready" for school in at least one of the five domains of child development" (p. 36) (see Figure 13).
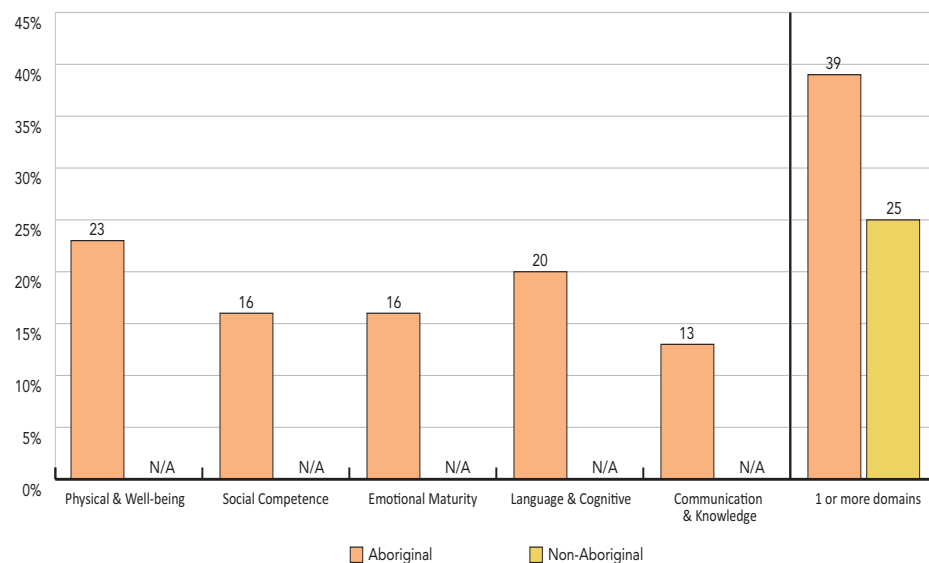


**Figure 13: Aboriginal Child School-Readiness in British Columbia 2000-2004**
Source: Canadian Council on Learning (2009). http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/StateAboriginalLearning/SAL-FINALReport_EN.PDF

The Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit (2009) similarly determined that a significant number of Aboriginal children in Saskatoon had higher incidences of low scores on all Early Development Imperative (EDI) indicators of school-readiness and that "Aboriginal children, on average, were rated lower…In each of the sub domains[19] within the sub domain cluster compared to non-Aboriginal children" (p. 32) (see Figure 14) and that "a

---

[18] Risk factors include: Socioeconomic status, family, child health, parent health, parent involvement, and demographic. Janus & Duku, 2007.

[19] EDI Sub domains include: Physical health and well-being, Social competence, Emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, communication skills and General Knowledge.

high proportion of Aboriginal children's scores were designated at-risk in *all* sub domains" (Muhajarine, Puchala, and Janus, 2011, p. 311, emphasis original).
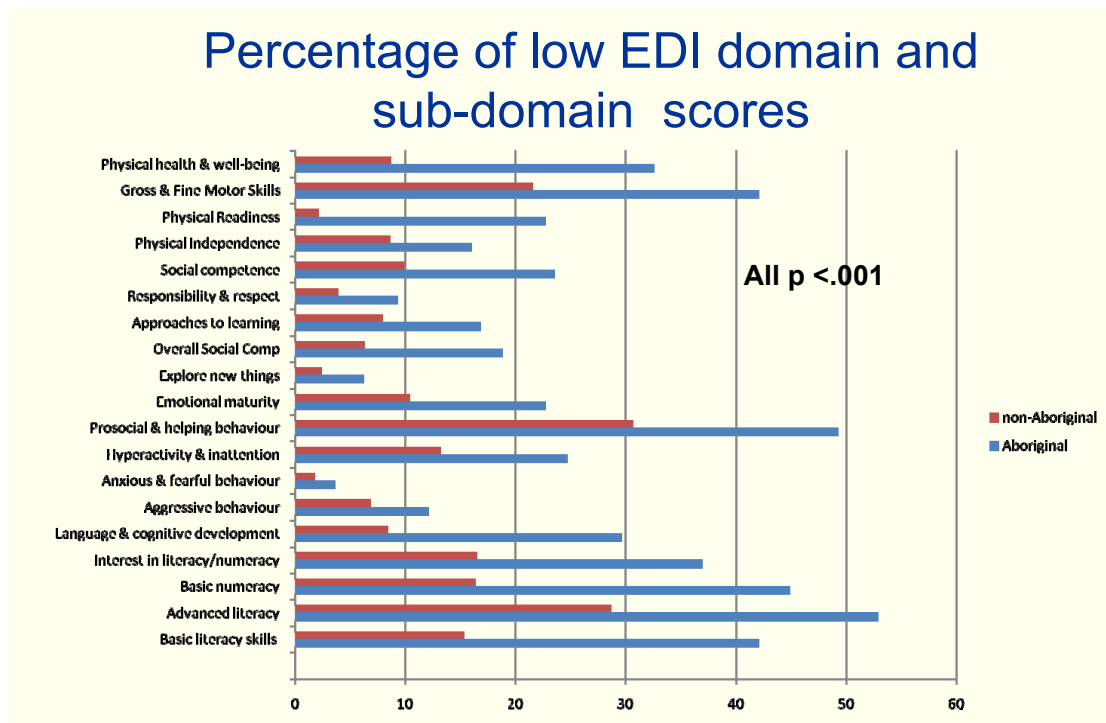


**Figure 14: Percentage of Low EDI Domain and Sub-Domain Scores (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal)**
Source: *www.councilecd.ca/files/PanCanadianEDI_Muhajarine.pdf*

**Aboriginal Children's EDI Risk Factors**

As previously stated, Muhajarine et al. (2011), contend that school readiness in young children is negatively affected by risk factors, including: "poverty, unemployment, transiency, parental education levels, lone-parent families, and home ownership rates" (p. 312) The degree of risk posed to school readiness, therefore, is said to be influenced to the extent to which a child resides in a household characterized by one or more of the causal risk factors. In order to more fully understand the extent to which Aboriginal children are 'at-risk' in relation to EDI and school readiness, information pertaining to the current status of Aboriginal: (1) poverty, (2) unemployment, (3) parental education levels, (4) lone-parent households, and (5) home ownership rates will be explored. In doing so, it will become apparent that school readiness, as facilitated by early childhood development programs, can be positively influenced; however, for Aboriginal

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children residing on-reserve, the extent and depth of risk experienced by this group far exceeds their non-Aboriginal counterparts. As such, the importance of high-quality early childhood programs for on reserve children between 0 – 6 becomes increasingly important in that these programs have the potential to improve not only school readiness, but that other latent affects (such as high school graduation, employment etc.) later in life can also be positively influenced.

**EDI risk factor: poverty.**

*Defining poverty.*

Poverty is difficult to define and although poverty has been largely examined there appears to be no single conclusive definition of poverty for which all groups may equally rely on. Regardless, poverty has been defined in a variety of ways, most of which are situated as either objective or subjective in their interpretations. For instance:

- Income poverty has been defined subjectively as the condition of not having enough income to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter (Brooks & Gunn, 1997).
- Within the scientific community, poverty is defined in objective terms and is often further informed by way of Adam Smith's understanding of poverty which is: "By necessities, I understand not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but whatever the custom of the country renders is indecent for credible people even of the lowest order, to be without" (Adam Smith, 1776, p. 715)
- According to the Canadian government, the definition of poverty objectively related to the Low Income Cut Off (LICO) which is further understood as an "Income threshold below which a family spends at least 20 percentage points more of its income on food,

shelter, clothing than the average family" (Statistics Canada, 2008b, 2012c, 2013b)

- Phipps (2003) contends that poverty can be subjectively understood as In "having less than others in society" (p. 4) and that poverty is a "feeling that you do not have enough to get along" (p. 4).

Conflicting ideas about how poverty should both be measured and defined continue to be debated both publically and within the academy, making the investigation into poverty a difficult path to navigate. UNICEF (2000) suggests, perhaps most aptly, that poverty be considered as:

…a relative state – the falling behind, by more than a certain degree, from the average income and life-style enjoyed by the rest of society in which one lives…(and that for those who are poor, their) resources (material, social, and cultural) are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life in the Member states in which they live" (2000, p. 6).

### *Poverty in Canada.*

Unlike the United States, Canada does not have an official poverty line. The manner in which poverty is both measured and subsequently determined in Canada rests in the degree to which a family or an individual surpasses the Low Income Cut Off (LICO) point for their particular household. According to Statistics Canada (2007), LICO varies by family size and is dependent upon the size of area of residence (See Figure 15)

| Low income before tax cutoffs (1992 base) for economic families and persons not in economic families | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Size of area of residence | | | | | |
| Family Size | Rural (farm and non-farm) | Small urban regions | 30,000 to 99,999 | 100,000 to 499,999 | 500,000 or more |
| 1 | 14,303 | 16,273 | 17,784 | 17,895 | 20,778 |
| 2 | 17,807 | 20,257 | 22,139 | 22,276 | 25,867 |
| 3 | 21,891 | 24,904 | 27,217 | 27,386 | 31,801 |
| 4 | 26,579 | 30,238 | 33,046 | 33,251 | 38,610 |
| 5 | 30,145 | 34,295 | 37,480 | 37,711 | 43,791 |
| 6 | 33,999 | 38,679 | 42,271 | 42,533 | 49,389 |
| 7+ | 37,853 | 43,063 | 47,063 | 47,354 | 54,987 |

**Figure 15: Low Income before tax cut-offs (1992) for economic families and persons not in economic families.**
Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada (2009b). Income Research Paper Series, *Low Income Cut-offs for 2006 and Low Income Measures for 2005*.
http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75f0002m/2009002/s2-eng.htm. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 75F0002MIE, no. 004.

As Figure 5 suggests, the LICO for a family of four living in an urban area with a population greater than 500,000 is set at $38,610 of the total before tax income. This suggests that in order for a family of four to not be considered 'poor', their total household income would have to surpass $38,610.00, or the point at which "income levels at which families or persons not in economic families spend 20% more than average of their before tax income on food, shelter and clothing" (Statistics Canada, 2009b; Notes: para. 10)

The issue of poverty in Canada is not new. Although marginal improvements have been made over the past two decades, there continues to be a significant proportion of Canadians who are considered 'poor'. In 2010, for instance, the Parliamentary Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development (HUMA) released a report that called for the federal government to immediately commit to a federal action plan to reduce poverty in Canada. The House of Commons (2010) report entitled *Federal Poverty Reduction Plan: Working in Partnership Towards Reducing Poverty in Canada*, is the result of an extensive three-year study on the federal role in addressing poverty and noted although the

"House of Commons unanimously resolved to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000…no long-term action plan was developed to meet this goal and monitor progress. Despite some improvement, poverty remains a significant problem in Canada (House of Commons, 2010, p. 1). The House of Commons (2010) report further notes:

- In 2008, 9.4% of Canadians lived on a low income. This was slightly up from 2007 when Statistics Canada observed the lowest rate of low income since it began collecting this information in 1976 (9.2%) and was significantly lower than the high of 15.2% observed in 1996. Despite this progress, low income remained a significant challenge for 3.1 million Canadians. (p. 15)

- The overall incidence of low income varies considerably across Canada's provinces. In 2008, low-income rates were highest in British Columbia (11.4%), followed by Québec (11.2%) and Ontario (9.3%). Prince Edward Island had the lowest low-income rate at 5.2%. While the overall low-income rate increased between 2007 and 2008 in Canada, it decreased in some provinces, such as Manitoba (from 10.1% in 2007 to 8.6% in 2008) and New Brunswick (from 8.4% to 7.1%). The general trend in recent years (before 2008) was downwards, particularly in certain provinces: the low-income rate in Newfoundland and Labrador decreased from 12.2% in 2003 to 7.3% in 2008, while Alberta's low-income rate dropped from 10.7% to 5.6% over the same period (p. 15).

The Conference Board of Canada in its report entitled: *How Canada Performs: A Report Card on Canada* (2013) reported, "…more than 11 per cent of working-age Canadians live in relative poverty. This is triple the rate of Denmark, and double that of Switzerland, Finland, and Austria. Canada scores a "D" grade and ranks 15th out of 17 peer countries—only Japan and the U.S. do worse" (Conference Board of Canada, 2013; Working-Age Poverty: How Does Canada Compare to its Peers, para. 1) (see Figure 16).
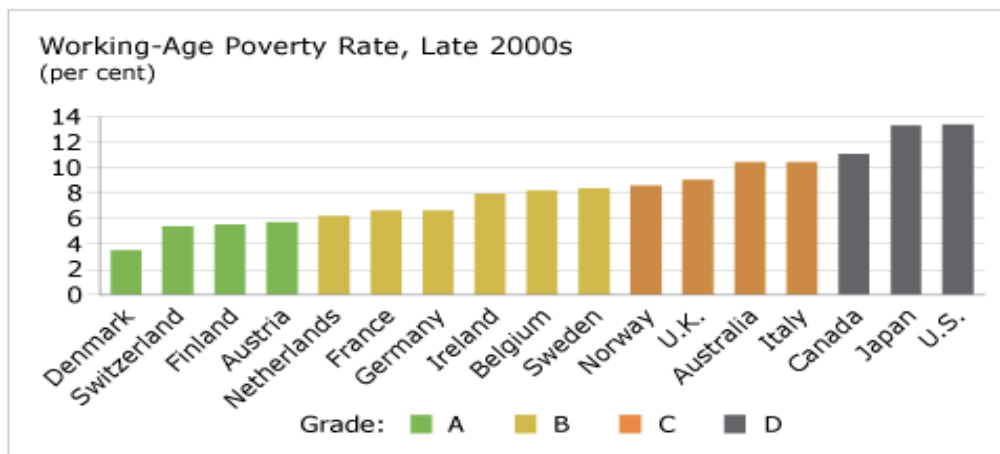


**Figure 16: Working-Age Poverty Rate in Canada**
Source: Conference Board of Canada (2013)
http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/details/society/working-age-poverty.aspx

While the Government of Canada stated that it "will take the Committee's recommendations under advisement as it continues to find ways to help Canadian men and women succeed, and continue to evaluate the effectiveness of its programs with a focus on results for Canadians" (Parliament of Canada, n.d: Conclusion, para. 3), more recent information collected by the Central Intelligence Agency (n.d.) reports that the population of Canadians below the poverty line in 2012 was 9.4% (see Figure 17), which suggests little to no improvements have been made, despite active commitments and poverty reduction strategies that have been employed throughout the country.

**Population below poverty line (%)**

| Country | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Canada  | 15.9 | 15.9 | 10.8 | 10.8 | 10.8 | 9.4  | 9.4  |
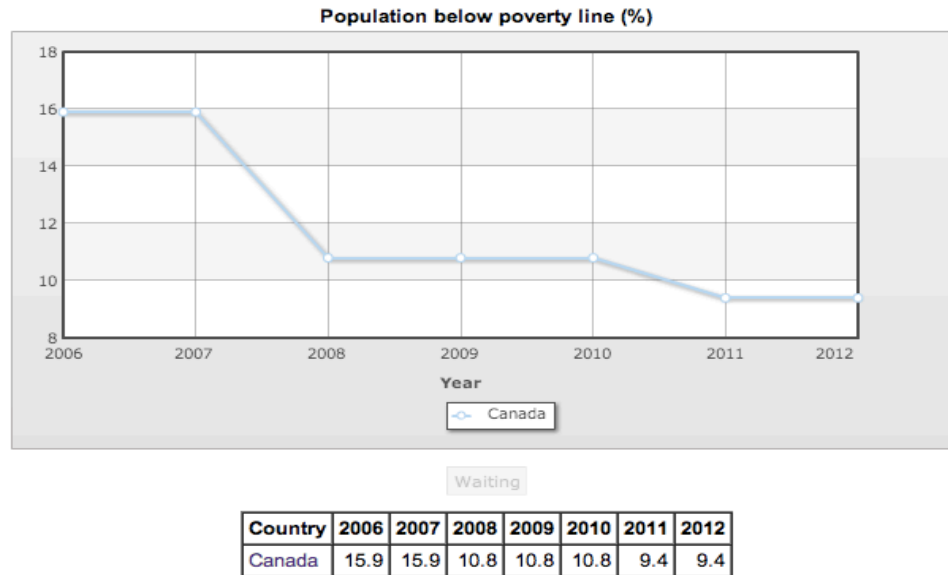
**Figure 17: Canadian Population below poverty line**
Source: Central Intelligence Agency (n.d) https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ca.html

*Aboriginal people, poverty and income inequality.*

Statistics consistently indicate that Aboriginal poverty and income inequality are more prevalent and persistent compared to non-Aboriginal national averages, and this persistence becomes even more pronounced for those Aboriginal people who reside on reserve.

For instance, Statistics Canada (1998) reports "44% of the Aboriginal population was below Statistics Canada's low-income-cut-offs, compared with the national average of 20%" (Statistics Canada, 1998; Low Income Among Aboriginal Population, para. 2) and that "in 1995, average *employment income* of Aboriginal people was $17,382, 34% below the national average of $26,474" (Statistics Canada, 1998; Earnings of Aboriginal People, para. 2). Furthermore, "average earnings of Aboriginal people were lower in every age and education category compared with the national average" (Statistics Canada, 1998; Earnings of Aboriginal People, para. 2).

By 1997, income inequality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples had seen little improvement and as Bernier (1997) reports in the *Dimensions of Wage Inequality Among Aboriginal Peoples*:

> …on average, Aboriginal peoples earn less that Canadians as a whole. (and that)…there is greater inequality in the distribution of wages for Aboriginal workers than for Canadian workers as a whole, even after allowing for demographic differences. Not only do Aboriginals earn lower wages than Canadians as a whole (for comparable work) -- intergroup inequality -- but they also experience a more unequal wage distribution -- intragroup inequality. (p. 15)

Improvements in the income disparity between non-Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people were still not apparent by 2001 and, even more, income distribution and subsequent income disparity between the two groups had worsened. Mikkonen and Raphael (2010) determined that "the average income of Aboriginal men and women…was $21,958 and $16,529 respectively, which is 58% of the average income of non-Aboriginal men and 72% the average income of non-Aboriginal women" (Mikkonen et al, 2010, pg. 41).

More recently, the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) (2010) determined that for "every dollar non-Aboriginals earned in 2006, Aboriginal peoples earned only 70 cents – a slight narrowing from 1996 when it was 56 cents for every dollar" (CCPA, 2010, para. 2) Even more striking is that while the income inequality gap between the two groups narrowed slightly between 1996 and 2006, at the current rate the income inequality gap would take 63 years to disappear unless a new approach were developed (CCPA, 2010, para. 3). The situation worsens for on-reserve Aboriginal peoples, in that the CCPA reported that "First Nations people working on urban reserves earn 75 cents for every dollar a non-First Nations person makes; on rural reserves they earn 53 cents per

dollar that a non-First Nations person makes" (or 88% more) (CCPA, 2010, Key Findings: para. 2).

These obvious income inequalities and deep and persistent levels of poverty between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada has received international attention over the past decade, and in a report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, ranked Canada's Human Development Index (HDI) as eighth in the world (United Nations, 2004). However, when calculating HDI for Canada's indigenous peoples, Canada was further ranked as "forty-eighth among the countries in the report" (United Nations, 2004, p. 2, para. 2) and that "Canada recognizes that key indicators of socio-economic conditions for Aboriginal people are unacceptably lower than for non-Aboriginal Canadians" (United Nations, 2004, p.2, para. 33). The UN Special Rapporteur report makes final recommendations to Canada which further articulate:

> 86. Priority attention must be given to the persistent disparities between Aboriginal people and other Canadians as reflected in higher poverty rates and lower than average health, educational, housing and welfare services for Aboriginal people, which continue to be among the most pressing issues facing Aboriginal people. (United Nations, 2004, p. 29, Conclusions)

While these are important recommendations, and while it appears that Canada has committed to improve on the conditions of poverty for all citizens, statistics continue to indicate that significant progress has yet to be made and that priority to address the alarming rates of poverty and unemployment for Aboriginal peoples has yet to be fully enacted, and as such, Aboriginal peoples remain socially excluded and are not able to participate and enjoy the same standard of life as non-Aboriginal Canadians (Sharma, 2012).

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**EDI risk factor: unemployment.**

*Employment and unemployment in Canada.*

The past three Canadian Censuses (e.g. 1996, 2001, and 2006), as well as available labour market information for the current fiscal year, reveal that the employment and unemployment situation in Canada has remained somewhat stable of the past decade.

In 1996, Statistics Canada found that based on the total number of persons aged 15 years and over, the national unemployment rate was 9.2%. Yet this national statistic, which is comprised of combined provincial unemployment rates, varied significantly by province. Alberta and Saskatchewan, for instance, had the lowest rate of unemployment for those aged 15 and over at 7.2% while Newfoundland & Labrador, on the other hand, saw an unemployment rate for the same age group of approximately 25.1% (Statistics Canada, 2010, as cited in Health Canada, 1999)

After the 2000 economic boom (which decreased the unemployment rate to 6.8%), the national unemployment rate increased to 7.2% (Akyeampong, 2007, p. 5) and then decreased again in "2006 to 6.3% " (Akyeampong, 2007, p. 5) (see Figure 18):

Unemployment rate, Canada, 1976-2010
(percent of labour force)

**Figure 18: Unemployment Rate, Canada 1976-2010**
Source: Statistics Canada (2010a). Unemployment Rate Canada 1976-2010. Retrieved from:
http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=16

However, more recent statistics reveals that although unemployment has
undergone dramatic shifts throughout the thirty years (e.g., below six percent in
2008), the unemployment rate is again on the rise (see Figure 19).



Unemployment rate

**Figure 19: Canada's Unemployment Rate 2013.**
Source: Statistics Canada (2013c) Labour Force Survey: March 2013. Retrieved from:
http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/130405/dq130405a-eng.pdf

*Aboriginal employment and unemployment rates in Canada.*

Statistics from the 2006 Census reveals that while the national unemployment rate for non-Aboriginal people was 6.3%, this figure was more than doubled at 14.8% for Aboriginal people (Statistics Canada, 2011b). A closer look at the related statistics reveals that while the statistics above pertain to all those who identified as "Aboriginal", which includes North American Indian, Inuit, and Metis, this aggregate figure worsens when Aboriginal identity is further refined. For instance, both the North American Indian and Inuit populations experienced unemployment rates of 18% and 20.3% respectively (Statistics Canada, 2011b), or approximately 20 to 25% higher than the aggregate figure (see Figure 20) .Even more alarming is that while Statistics Canada presents labour force activity information for urban Aboriginal people, Mikkonen et al., (2010) in their report entitled *Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts* (2010), determined "for First Nations Canadians living on reserve the figure was 28%, twice the rate of Aboriginals living off-reserve" (pg. 41), and most importantly, approximately 3.8 times the unemployment rate of non-Aboriginals for the same year (e.g. 2001).

| Canada ⚠ | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Aboriginal identity (8B)** | **Labour force activity (8)** | | | | | | |
| | **Total - Labour force activity** | **In the labour force** | **Employed** | **Unemployed** | **Not in the labour force** | **Participation rate** | **Employment rate** | **Unemployment rate** |
| Total - Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal identity population [2] | 25,660,105 | 17,144,205 | 16,019,655 | 1,124,550 | 8,515,900 | 66.8 | 62.4 | 6.6 |
| Total Aboriginal identity population [3] | 819,855 | 517,375 | 440,920 | 76,455 | 302,475 | 63.1 | 53.8 | 14.8 |
| North American Indian single response [4] | 469,240 | 276,600 | 226,830 | 49,780 | 192,635 | 58.9 | 48.3 | 18.0 |
| Métis single response | 291,310 | 204,155 | 183,780 | 20,375 | 87,160 | 70.1 | 63.1 | 10.0 |
| Inuit single response | 32,775 | 20,100 | 16,020 | 4,075 | 12,675 | 61.3 | 48.9 | 20.3 |
| Multiple Aboriginal identity responses | 5,590 | 3,595 | 3,285 | 310 | 1,995 | 64.3 | 58.8 | 8.6 |
| Aboriginal responses not included elsewhere [5] | 20,940 | 12,920 | 11,005 | 1,915 | 8,015 | 61.7 | 52.6 | 14.8 |
| Non-Aboriginal identity population | 24,840,255 | 16,626,830 | 15,578,735 | 1,048,095 | 8,213,425 | 66.9 | 62.7 | 6.3 |

**Figure 20: Aboriginal Unemployment in Canada**
Source: Statistics Canada (2011b) Labour Force Activity (8), Aboriginal Identity (8B), Age Groups (13A), Sex (3) and Area of Residence (6A) for the Population 15 Years and Over.

A summary of statistical information collected from the 1996, 2001, and 2006 Censuses reveals that as the national unemployment rate decreases, so too does the Aboriginal unemployment rate. As Figure 21 suggests, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal peoples experiences similar declines in each census year; however, the relative rate of unemployment remain dramatically higher than their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2006)
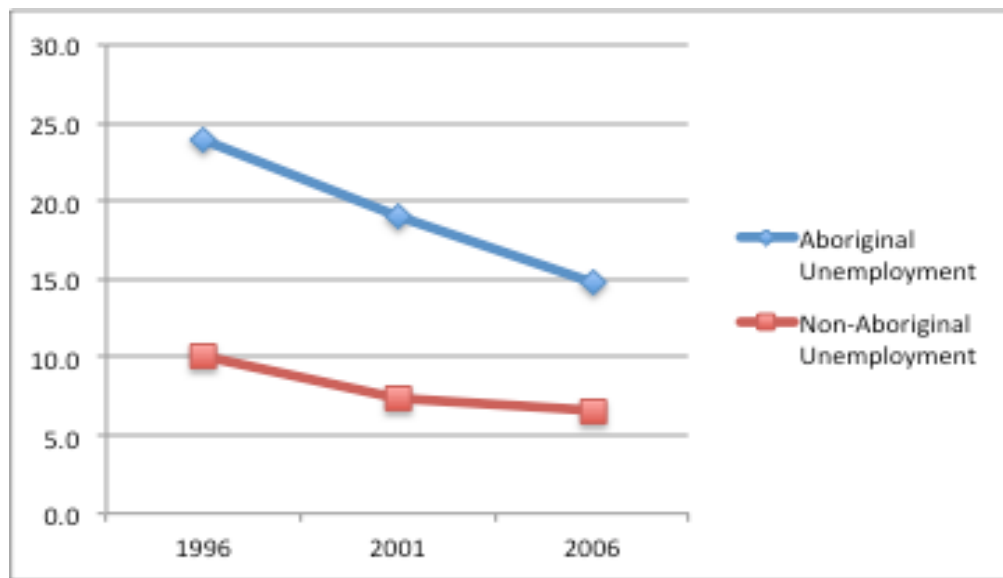


**Figure 21: Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Employment 1996, 2001, and 2006 Census Years**
*Source:* Adapted from: Statistics Canada (2006); Mendelson, M. (2004)

Although improvements in Aboriginal unemployment have made some gains within the recent past, Statistics Canada (2005a) notes that "Gaps between the employment and unemployment rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people remained" (Statistics Canada, 2005a, Improvements for Aboriginal People in Recent Years: para. 2) and that while Aboriginal unemployment rates fell in certain provinces, (i.e.: the unemployment rate for Aboriginal people in the West fell from 16.7% in 2001 to 13.6% in 2005) this improvement is overshadowed by the fact that, this was more than "double the rate of 5.3% among non-Aboriginal people" (Statistics Canada, 2005a, para. 5).  By 2009, unemployment for Aboriginal peoples had made no marginally significant gains in that the unemployment rate rose sharply for Aboriginal people, rising from 10.4% in 2008

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to 13.9%. However, at the same time, the rate for non-Aboriginal people rose from 6.0% to 8.1% (Statistics Canada, 2011c).

Similar to the concluding made by the United Nations Special Rapporteur with regard to the depth and persistence of poverty experienced by Aboriginal people in Canada, a similar conclusion was made in relation to the persistent level of unemployment. More specifically, the United Nations (2004) concluded that:

> 87. Whereas certain indicators point to some progress in new job
>
> openings, unemployment rates among Aboriginal people are alarmingly
>
> high and are not being addressed adequately in the current economic
>
> climate. It is encouraging that economic development opportunities are
>
> opening up for numerous Aboriginal communities, but employment is still
>
> severely limited on most First Nation reserves, as well as for Inuit, Métis
>
> and the urban Aboriginal populations. (Conclusions: para. 87)

In it's recommendations, The United Nations (2004) concluded that Canada should:

> (Poverty, social services, education and health)
>
> 101. ….intensify its commendable measures to close the human
>
> development indicator gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal
>
> Canadians in the fields of health care, housing, education, welfare and
>
> social services. (Conclusions, para. 101)

As these related statistics indicate: some marginal progress has been made. It also appears that measures to address the inequity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples have been taken. However, and as previously indicated and as current statistics reveal, these measures appear to be failing in that at the current

rate of progress, efforts to eliminate the obvious disparities would take approximately 63 years to close.

**EDI risk factor: parental E\educational attainment.**

*Educational attainment in Canada.*

Statistical information from the past two censuses reveals that education has become a priority for Canadians and that low levels of education among non-Aboriginal Canadians is steadily on the decline. According to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2013), "from 1971 to 1996, there was a significant decline in the number of Canadian age 15 and over with less than Grade 9 (from 32% to 12%) and a corresponding increase in the number of Canadians who had completed some form of post-secondary education schooling (from 17% to 34%)" (National Picture: para. 1) (See Figure 22).
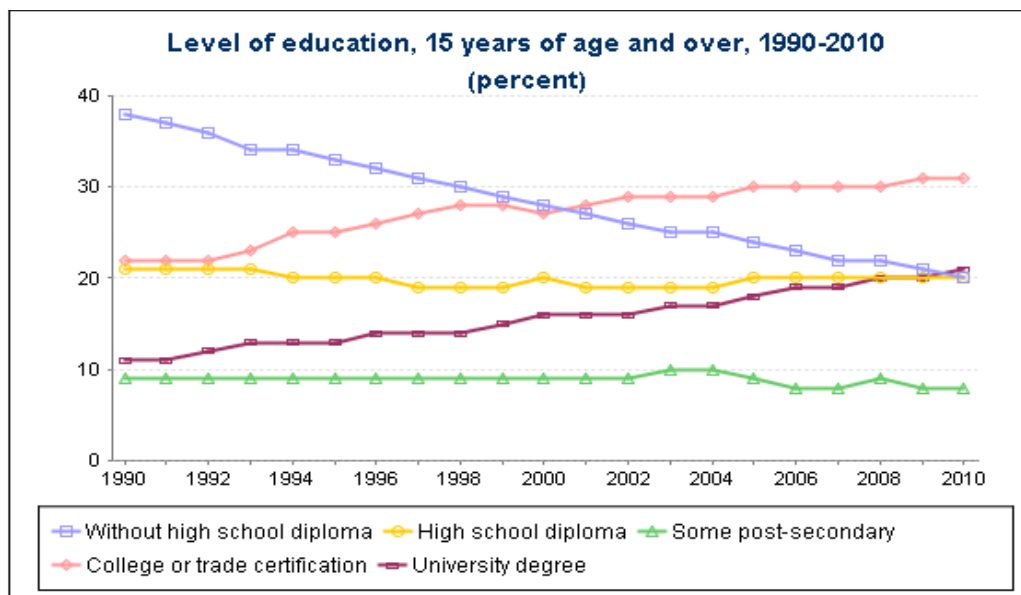


**Figure 22: Level of Education, 15 years of age and over, 1990-2010 (percent)**
Source: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2013a)
http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=29#M_1

By 2011, the level of high school achievement for non-Aboriginal Canadians had decreased once again to 19.5%, which is down 1.5 percentage points from 2010 and .70 percentage points in 2011 (see Figure 23).
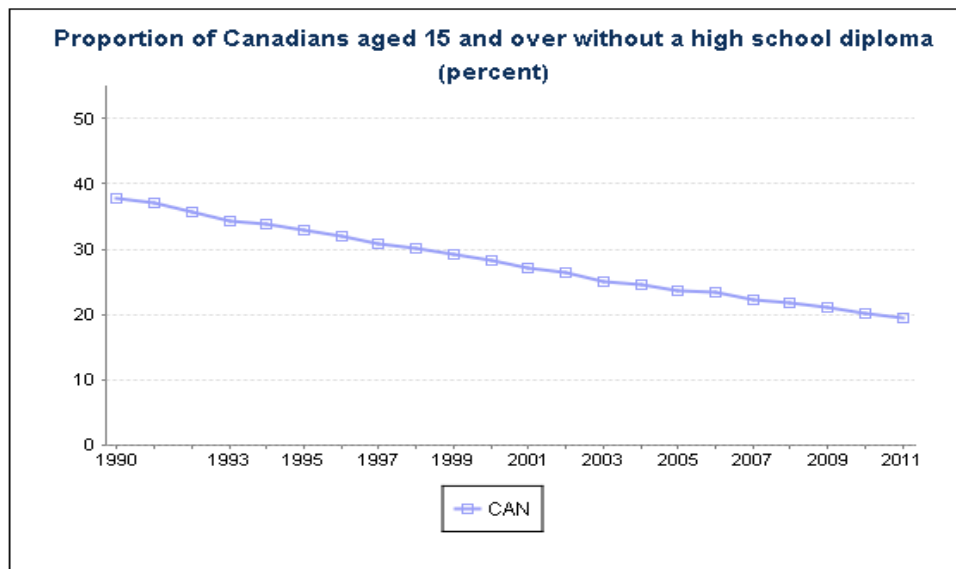


**Figure 23: Proportion of Canadians aged 15 and over without a high school diploma (percent)**
Source: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2013b),
http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/cv3@-
eng.jsp?seriesid=1&fromind=1&sid=8&submit=Submit&iid=29&chrtid=1

These statistics indicate that a growing proportion of Canadians are completing high school and related statistics concerning employment suggest that there is a positive correlation between high school completion and employability (Statistics Canada, 2012d). Indeed, Statistics Canada (2012g) states, "higher levels of education are typically associated with higher employment rates". In Canada in 2009, 82% of the adult population aged 25 to 64 with a tertiary education were employed, compared with 55% of this age group with less than high school education" (Statistics Canada, 2012g, para. 1). Along with increases to educational attainment comes an increased likelihood of employability and stability of employment (see Figure 24). Statistics gathered at the height of the economic downturn in Canada suggests that those who had greater levels of education had an increased likelihood of maintaining employment versus those who had not completed high school. Statistics Canada (2012g) indicates:

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…Between 2008 and 2009, the decline in the number of employed individuals at the Canada level mostly reflected net employment losses among those with less than high school graduation. During this period, the number of individuals without high school graduation who held a job decreased by 10.2% …Those with high school graduation or some (non-completed) postsecondary education as their highest level of education were also negatively affected as their net employment fell by 3.6%. By contrast, those with postsecondary education (trades, college, CEGEP or university certificate below a bachelor's degree; a bachelor's degree or beyond) experienced more stable employment levels. (p. 6)
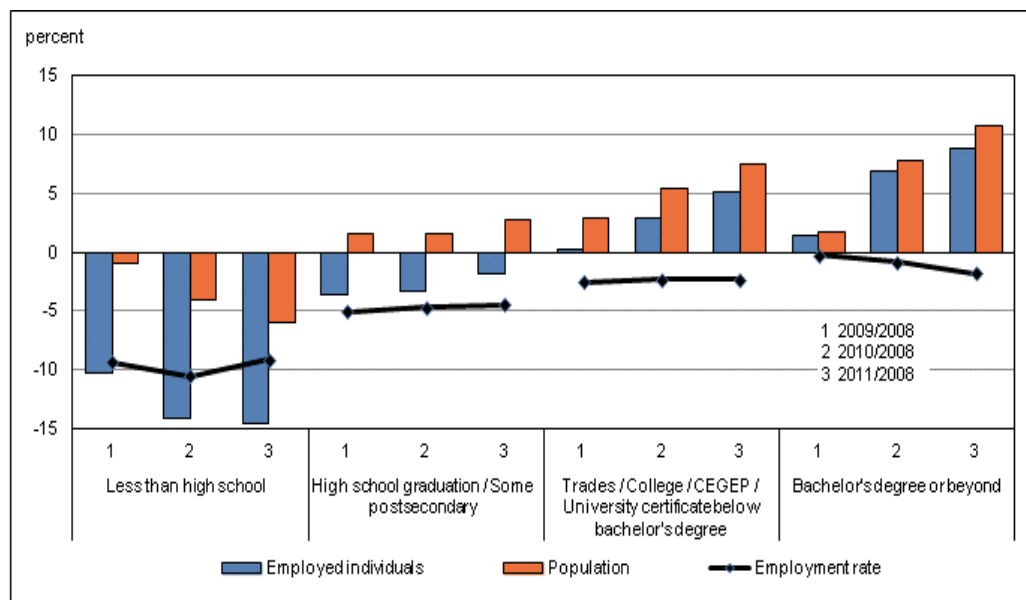


**Figure 24: Percentage change in number of employed individuals, population and employment rate, population aged 15 or older, third quarters, unadjusted, by educational attainment, Canada, 2008 to 2011.**
Source: Statistics Canada (2012g): http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-599-x/2012009/c-g/c-g04-eng.htm

*Educational attainment and Aboriginal peoples in Canada.*

The 2011 Senate report entitled *Reforming First Nations Education: From Crisis to Hope – Report on the Standing Senate Committee of Aboriginal Peoples* found that as of 2006, "at least half of the on-reserve population aged 25-34 did not have a high school leaving certificate, compared with 20% for other Canadians of the same age" (p. 16). When the 2001 and 2006 census statistics are compared, the Senate (2011) contends that "little progress gas been made in improving the on-reserve educational achievement rates" (p. 16).  Indeed, the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples survey found that high school graduation rates ranged between a low of 4% in the Northwest Territories to a high of 16% in Quebec (see Figure 25). Even further, in 2001 the percentage of Aboriginal peoples with less than high school diploma varied between a high of 56% in the Northwest Territories to a low of 31% in the Yukon (Statistics Canada, 2006)

| Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2001 - Educational Attainment by Province (Off-Reserve Aboriginal Population) HIGHEST LEVEL OF SCHOOLING | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| PROVINCE | Less than high school (%) | High School (%) | Some Post Secondary (%) |
| Atlantic | 39 | 8 | 19 |
| Quebec | 39 | 16 | 9 |
| Ontario | 34 | 13 | 12 |
| Manitoba | 44 | 9 | 12 |
| Saskatchewan | 40 | 8 | 15 |
| Alberta | 37 | 9 | 15 |
| BC | 35 | 10 | 12 |
| Yukon | 31 | 5 | 16 |
| NWT | 56 | 4 | 10 |

*Adapted from the Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2001.

Figure 25: Off-Reserve Aboriginal Educational Attainment, 2001 - Aboriginal Peoples Survey
Source: Statistics Canada (2006).

By 2006, educational attainment levels for Aboriginal peoples on reserve had not improved considerably, in that Statistics Canada (2009c, 2009d) determined that

the national average of high school completion was 15% and that the number of
Aboriginal peoples on-reserve with less than a high school diploma was 50% (see
Figure 26).

Proportion of the First Nations people and Registered Indians aged 25 to 64 living on and off reserve by level of
educational attainment, Canada, 2006

| First Nations/Registered Indians | Less than high school | High school diploma | Trades certificate | College diploma | University certificate or diploma below bachelor level | University degree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | percentage | | |
| First Nations people living[1] on reserve | 50 | 15 | 13 | 14 | 4 | 4 |
| First Nations people living[1] off reserve | 30 | 24 | 14 | 20 | 4 | 9 |
| Registered Indians[2] living on reserve | 50 | 15 | 13 | 14 | 4 | 4 |
| Registered Indians[2] living off reserve | 31 | 23 | 13 | 19 | 4 | 9 |

Notes:

1. Includes persons who reported a North American Indian identity only.
2. Includes persons who reported being Registered or Treaty Indians as defined by the *Indian Act* of Canada, regardless of their Aboriginal identity.

**Figure 26: Level of Educational attainment: Registered Indians 25-64 living on and off reserve.**
Source: Statistics Canada, 2009c, 2009d

Mendelson (2006) echoes these findings and further asserts in the report entitled
*Aboriginal Peoples and Post-secondary Education in Canada* that "an alarming
number of First Nations students living on reserve are not graduating from high
school" and that nationally "58 per cent of on-reserve aboriginal people between
the ages of 20 to 24 had not graduated from high school. Among all people across
Canada, the comparable rate was 16 per cent" (p. 18) and these facts suggest that
"every Canadian…be deeply concerned" (Mendelson, 2006, p. 24).

An later report by Mendelson (2008) entitled *Improving Education on Reserves: A
First Nations Education Authority Act*, found:

> Had educational outcomes on reserve been improving in the last several
>
> years, better results should have been apparent in the 2006 Census for at
>
> least the 20-to 24-year-old age cohort. Instead we are seeing no
>
> improvement at all. Indeed, the static educational attainment data imply

that educational outcomes for residents on reserve are actually getting

worse in relative terms. During the 1996 to 2006 period, the number of

20- to 24-year-olds in Canada as a whole with less than high school

graduation decreased from 19 percent to 14 percent. The high school

completion gap among the 20- to 24-year old age cohort on reserve has

therefore increased in the last decade by five percentage points. (p. 1)

The Canadian Council on Learning noted similar findings in their report entitled *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A Holistic Approach to Measuring Success* (2009) that:

The familiar and concerning statistics of low high-school completion rates

remain an important part of the picture of Aboriginal learning. In 2006, 40%

of Aboriginal people aged 20 to 24 did not have a high school diploma,

compared to 13% among non-Aboriginal Canadians. The rate was even higher

for First Nations living on reserve (61%) and for Inuit living in remote

communities (68%). These numbers are distressing given the importance of a

high-school diploma in the pursuit of further education, training and

employment (p. 6).

These statistics suggest that not only is there an observed and distressing achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, but that even more, this gap is alarmingly disproportionate. As the statistics suggest, First Nations people in Canada, in general, are less likely graduate from school and even more, that Aboriginal children were at greater risk of not being "school ready" which has been determined as a precursor to longer-term educational outcomes (Doherty, 2007; Forget-Dubois, Lemelin, Boivin, Dionne, Seguin,

Vitaro, 2007; Hair, E., Halle, T., Terry-Humen, E., Lavelle, B., & Caulkins, J., 2006; Lloyd, C & Hertzman, J., 2009; Muhajarine, Puchala, and Janus, 2011).

**EDI risk factor: lone parent household.**

*Canadian lone parent households.*

Canadian household demographics have undergone considerable changes over the last fifty years. A variety of factors have influenced these household demographic shifts, most notably is that the period between 1961 to 2011 witnessed the end of the baby boom, the legalization of the birth control pill, the introduction of 'no-fault divorce', and the growing population of women who were participating in the paid labour force and in higher education (Statistics Canada, 2012e).

Throughout the same time period, the number of lone-parent households increased to 16.3% of all census families, which is almost double the rate of 8.4% in 1961. Between 1981 and 2001, "the proportion of lone-parent families went from 11% to 16% and these families accounted for more children 18 and under in 2001 – 21% compared with 14% in 1981" (Statistics Canada, 2005b). For the 2001 to 2011 census years, the percentage of lone parent families increased steadily from 15.7% in 2001 to 15.9% in 2006 and then rose again to 16.3% in 2011.

Statistics related to the lone parent head of household demographics indicates that the percentage of female lone parent heads of households is also increasing. Statistics Canada (2012f) reports that female-headed lone parent households increased from 12.7% in 2001 to 12.8% in 2011, which represents approximately 1,200,295, or 8 out of 10, Canadian household were headed by females (Statistics Canada, 2012f) (see Figure 27). Alternative statistics suggest that in 2001, "19% of Canadian children …lived in OPFs" (Ambert, 2006, p. 6) and that most of these children lived with a single mother. Furthermore, the "majority of OPFs are headed by a female parent…(and) in Canada, 25% are headed by a single woman as a result of non-marital birth" (Ambert, 2006, p. 6).

| Census Family | 2001 | | 2006 | | 2011 | | Percentage Change |
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage | 2006 to 2011 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lone Parent Families | 1,311,190.00 | 15.7 | 1,414,060.00 | 15.9 | 1,527,840.00 | 16.3 | 8.00 |
| Female Lone Parents | 1,065,360.00 | 12.7 | 1,132,290.00 | 12.7 | 1,200,295.00 | 12.8 | 6.00 |
| *Adapted from Statistics Canada, (September 2012) | | | | | | | |

**Figure 27: Distribution and percentage change of lone parent families, Canada 2001 to 2011.**
Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada (2012f).

When lone parent households are further demarcated by ethnicity, the 2006 Canada Census revealed that a significant proportion of visible minorities occupied the lone parent category. The Edmonton Social Planning Council (2013) reports, "the prevalence of lone-parent families in Canada is disproportionately higher within visible minority populations" (para. 1). Based on statistics gathered from the 2006 Census, the percentage of lone parents households who were non-visible minority in Canada was 8.0% compared to 10.2% (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2013; Mata, 2011) for those considered visible minority status. Even further, it was also subsequently determined that there is a greater likelihood of lone parent status reporting among Black, Caribbean, and Latin American visible minorities (Mata, 2011, p. 15) (see Figure 28).

| Percentage of Lone-Parent Status (LPS) by Ethnic Origin (25-64 years old) | |
|---|---|
| Somali | 37.9 |
| Jamaican | 29.1 |
| Haitian | 27.3 |
| Spanish | 11.8 |
| North American Indian | 17.5 |
| Inuit | 16.3 |
| Chinese | 4.5 |
| Pakistani | 4.3 |

**Figure 28: Percentage of Lone Parent Status by Ethnic Origin (25-64 Years Old)**
Source: Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2012. Retrieved from:
www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1105&pop=1&page=0&itemid=271

*Lone parent families: consequences and issues.*

As was previously indicated, females head a significant proportion of lone parent families in Canada, and as such, Ambert (2006) suggests, "largely as a consequence of their gender structure, OPFs[20] share certain economic characteristics" (p. 7). More specifically, "…between 35% and 65% of OPFs are below the poverty level – this includes families that are poor for just a few months and others that are so for many years" (Ambert, 2006, p. 7). Although these statistics are striking, the incidence of poverty experienced by female lone parents is improving somewhat. Statistics Canada (2005b) states "while lone mothers in 2000 were almost five times more likely to have low income than mothers with spouses (43% vs. 8%), this proportion is lower then 1980 (52%)" (para. 5). The Library of Parliament (2009) reported that in 2007, 6.5% of children in two-parent families experienced low income, while more than one in four children (26.6%) in lone-parent families headed by females faced this reality" (p. 8). The percentage of children in female-headed lone parent households who experience low income in 2007 is markedly improved from 2006 wherein approximately 28.2% of the same population experienced low-income.  Nevertheless, while low economic status may be marginally improving for female lone parents in Canada, there are subsequent and perhaps even more deleterious impacts for the children of female lone parent households.

In addition to the direct consequences of lone-parent status for mothers[21], effects of lone parent households is said to more negatively affect children in that they are more likely to (Ambert, 2006; Statistics Canada, 1999; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, Yeung, & Smith, 1998; Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2013; Caspi, Moffitt, Wright, & Silva; 1998; Kerr, 2001; Ross, Roberts, & Scott, 1998; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006; Aquilino, 1996; Appleyard, K., Egeland, B. E., van Dulmen, M. H. M., Sroufe, L. A., 2005)

---

[20] OPF = One Parent Families
[21] Chronic unemployment, low levels of educational attainment, persistent poverty (Statistics Canada, 2005b; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006).

- Exhibit behavioural problems including hyperactivity, aggressiveness, fighting, and hostility;
- Become young offenders;
- Do less well in school, repeat grades, and stay less long in school;
- Have relationship problems, in part due to their behavioural problems.

As these children mature, they are also more likely to:

- Have a child nonmaritally, particularly during adolescence;
- Have achieved lower educational levels;
- Be unemployed and do less well economically
- Have a criminal record for violent offences and serious property offences;
- Have marital problems and divorce.

Generally, the pressures associated with lone, or single, parenting are greater than those experienced by dual-parent households. Indeed, research suggests that the presence of two parents "means that there are fewer chances of becoming poor, that more help with children and emotional support in raising them (children) is available" (Ambert, 2006, p. 24). However, statistical data suggests that lone parent households in Canada are an ever-present reality and the consequences, both direct and indirect, negatively impact not only the mother but also more significantly, children.

### *Aboriginal lone parent households in Canada.*

Similar to the observed trends in lone parent households for the Canadian population, in general, the prevalence of lone parent households within Aboriginal communities has also been increasing over time. For instance, between the period of "1981-1996, the proportion of single mother families among the Registered Indian population has increased from 20% to 23%, which is twice the rate among

other Canadian families" (Hull, 2001, p. x). Data collected from the 1996
Canadian Census revealed:

- Young Aboriginal women, 15-24 years old, are more than three times as
  likely to be single mothers are other young Canadian women (Hull, 2001,
  p. xi;
- In 1996, about one of three (33%) Aboriginal mothers was a single mother
  compared to one of six (16%) other Canadian mothers (Hull, p. xi);
- The Registered Indian population has the highest prevalence of single
  mothers (Hull, 2001, p. xi);
- Aboriginal single mothers had an unemployment rate of 30% in1996,
  compared to an unemployment rate of 18% among other Canadian single
  mothers (Hull, 2001, p. xi);
- In 1995, 72% of Aboriginal single mothers identified government transfer
  payments as their major source of income compared to 49% of other
  Canadian single mothers (Hull, 2001, p. xii);
- The average incomes of Aboriginal single mother families were about
  one-half to one-third of those husband-wife families in 1995 (Hull, 2001,
  p. xii);
- Aboriginal female lone parent families had an average annual income of
  less than $16,000 compared to an average of about $22,000 among other
  Canadian female lone parents (Hull, 2001, p. xii); and
- On average, Aboriginal women are single mothers for longer periods of
  time than other Canadian women (Hull, 2001, p. 6)

In addition to the 1996 Census data, Lindsay (1992) and Quinless (2013) also note
that, generally speaking, Aboriginal women are more likely to be mothers and
much more likely to be single parents than other Canadians (Lindsay, 1992;
Quinless, 2013) and that Aboriginal single mothers experience economic
disadvantage to a "greater degree" (Hull, 2001, p. xii) than do others. By 2001,
the percentage of Aboriginal female lone parent families increased sharply among

Registered Indian population on reserve from 19% in 1996 to 26% by 2001 (Hull, 2006) (see Figure 29).

**Female Lone-parent Families as a Percentage of All Families Among Selected Aboriginal Identity, Canada 1996 and 2001**
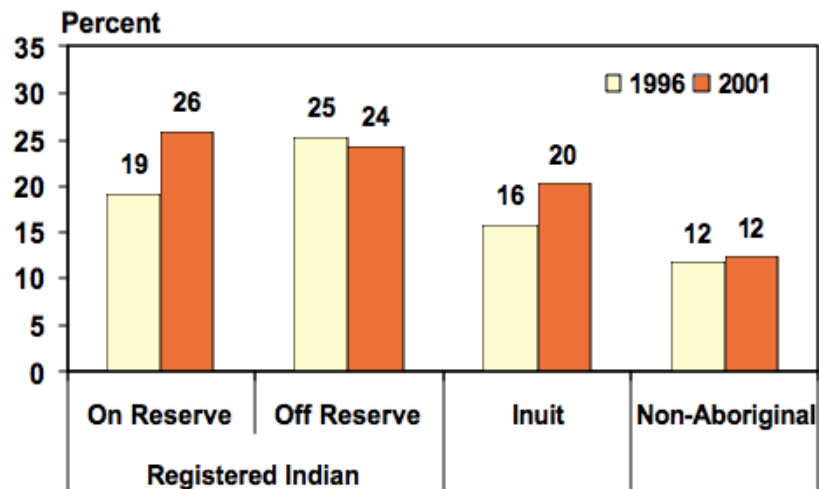


Figure 29: Female Lone-parent Families as a Percentage of All Families Among Selected Aboriginal Identity, Canada 1996 and 2001
Source: Hull (2006). http://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection/R2-162-2001E.pdf?

And by 2006, the proportion of Aboriginal female lone parent families on reserve increased again to 29% (AANDC, 2012a), or approximately 8 percentage points over a ten-year span. The Aboriginal Children's Survey (Statistics Canada, 2008d) found that an even larger proportion of off-reserve children were living in lone-parent households compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts (41% compared to 13%) (Statistics Canada, 2008d) (See Figure 30) representing a 28-percentage point differential.

**Living arrangements of children under the age of six, Canada, 2006**
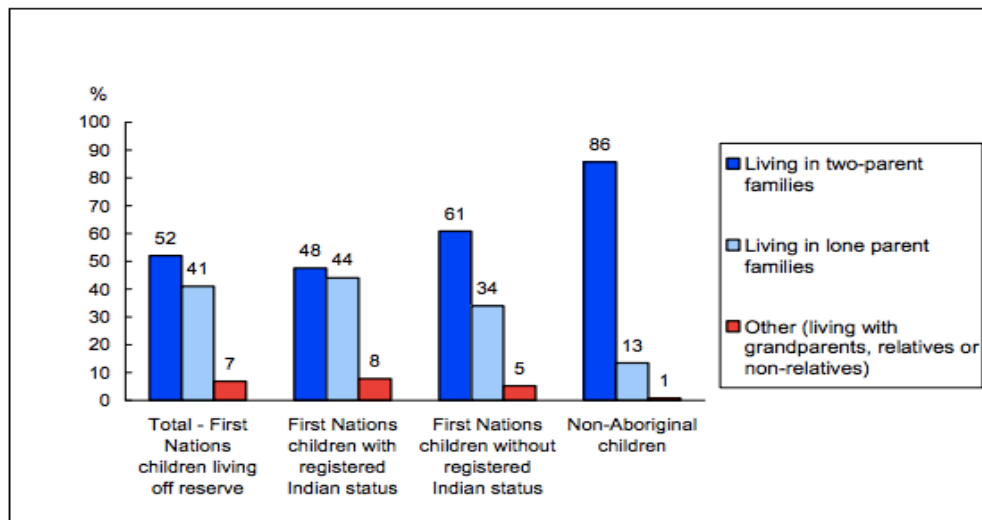


Source(s): Statistics Canada, *Census, 2006.*

**Figure 30: Living Arrangements of Children under the age of six, Canada, 2006**
Source: Statistics Canada (2008d) Aboriginal Children's Survey, 2006: Family, Community, and Child Care.

Data from consecutive censuses reveals that the prevalence of female-headed lone parent households within the Aboriginal communities, both on and off reserve, is increasing at a greater rate than that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Important consideration that will be further explored in the section to follow, are with regard to the multiple negative socio-economic factors experienced by Aboriginal female lone parents on reserve that also negatively impact children and that further contribute to the risk factors that influence school-readiness.

### *Aboriginal female-headed lone parent families: increasing the "at-risk" status of children.*

As previously indicated, the prevalence of female-headed lone parent families within the on reserve Aboriginal community is steadily on the rise. While the negative impacts of on-reserve Aboriginal female lone-parent households is somewhat buffered by 'networks of care' (Quinless, 2013), which refer to the "interrelated cultural and social system provided by the extended family members and friends to support female led" (Quinless, 2013, p. 3) lone parent Aboriginal families, the related impacts of low levels of maternal education, employment, and income are important considerations that must not be overlooked. This is

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especially true given the extent to which these factors, in concert with each other, affect the degree and level of school readiness 'risk' for Aboriginal children on reserve.

The term "triple jeopardy" has been used to characterize the Aboriginal single mother households in that they are "at risk of experiencing poor social and economic conditions because they are women, because they are Aboriginal, and because they are poor" (Hull, 2001, p. 2). In that regard, an brief exploration into the current socio-economic status of Aboriginal single mothers in Canada will be undertaken to better understand the extent and degree of risk faced by Aboriginal children of female-headed lone parent households.

*Aboriginal female-headed lone parent families: employment/income, poverty, and educational attainment*

According to Hull (2001), "single mother families have consistently been shown to have lower incomes and higher rates of poverty than other families" (p. 5). In 1996, the National Council of Welfare found that family type is the most important factor in determining the risk of poverty and, even further, that in 1996, "61% of lone parents had low incomes, and that 91% of lone parent families headed by women under the age of 25 were poor" (National Council of Welfare, 1998, as cited in Hull, 2001, p. 5).

For Aboriginal women, the reality of poverty as a single mother is even more prevalent and documented studies from the 1980s found that the "average income of Registered Indian lone parent households was $10,723 compared to $19,870 among Registered Indian two-parent households" (Hull, 2001, p.5). By 1995, the prevalence of low income status among Registered Indian female lone parents on-reserve improved somewhat in that the average annual income was $13,000 compared to $17,000 among other Canadian single mothers (Hull, 2001, p. 6).

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However, average annual incomes for on-reserve Aboriginal female-headed lone parent families remained unchanged between the years of 1995 to 2002 in that Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (2012a) states "while the average annual income of non-Aboriginal women in 2002 was only about $26,000, it was still approximately $9,000 higher than that of Registered Indian single mothers" (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2012a, p. 23). Indeed, a variety of reports indicate that Aboriginal women on-reserve are consistently earning less than their non-Aboriginal counterparts and that even by 2006, "the average incomes of Aboriginal women were about 77% of the average incomes of non-Aboriginal women" (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2012a, p. 77).

In addition to the propensity for on-reserve Aboriginal female lone parents to be living in poverty, they are also more likely to be unemployed and have lower labour force participation rates. Hull (2001) states, "the labour force participation rates among other Canadians were higher than those among the Aboriginal identity population for all family types. However, the difference was largest for single mothers, amounting to almost 20 percentage points" (p. 56). Furthermore, "the Aboriginal identity population had higher unemployment rates than the other Canadian population. The highest unemployment rates were found among Aboriginal single mothers and Aboriginal single fathers whose unemployment rates were both between 29% and 30%" (Hull, 2001, p. 56)

Considerable evidence suggests a large proportion of on-reserve female Aboriginal lone-parent households in Canada are low income, often times well below that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts, and can therefore be described as impoverished. Correspondingly, there is also evidence to suggest that a significant number of children on reserve are also living in poverty as a result of their mother's household and socio-economic status. Campaign 2000's *2011 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada* found that "Poverty is a critical issue for First Nations communities...and that very serious issues of

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poverty and social exclusion affect tens of thousands of children, youth and lone-parent families in their daily lives and have a detrimental impact on their health, social, educational and economic well-being" (2011, p. 9). Anderson (2003) in his report to the Canadian Council on Social Development summarized data collected by Campaign 2000 and the 2006 Canadian Census and found that 52.1% of all Aboriginal children who lived in urban settings lived in poverty, which is nearly double that of the total number of children living in poverty throughout Canada throughout the same period. For those Aboriginal children living in rural and First Nations communities, the situation is similarly distressing in that "one in four Aboriginal children lives in poverty" (Campaign 2000, 2012, p. 2) Earlier reports noted similar findings, and in one study commissioned by the Social Affairs Division of the Parliamentary and Information Services Branch stated that in "2005...33.7% of First Nations children...under 15 years of age lived in low income households" (Statistics Canada, 2006, as cited in Collin & Jensen, 2009, p. 18).

As previously noted, there are associated risks to children who are raised in female-headed lone parent households; however, the effect of poverty on children from these families specifically, has an even greater negative consequence. Health Canada (2003e) for instance, reports:

> Low income children are more likely to experience health and
>
> developmental problems as family income falls…. children are twice as
>
> likely to die before their first birthday and are over twice as likely to suffer
>
> from long term disability and other health problems….Children from the
>
> poorest neighborhoods in Canada have a life expectancy between 2 and
>
> 5.5 years shorter than children from wealthy neighborhoods... . (p. 40)

A U.S. study found that "children in families with incomes less than one-half of the poverty line were found to score between 6 and 13 points lower on the various standardized tests" (Duncan et al., 1998, p. 408) and that income poverty

associated with single parent families, "has a strong association with a low level of preschool ability, which is associated with low test scores later in childhood as well as grade failure, school disengagement, and dropping out of school" (Duncan et al., 1998, p. 420). Research on the impacts of poverty on various health domains for children found "there is an important link between income and health status of children" (Phipps, 2003, p. 14) and that there is a "significant negative association between poverty and child health" (Phipps, 2003, p. 14) For instance, the "persistence of poverty is significantly and positively related to the presence of internalizing symptoms…. Thus, the length of time children spend in poverty has a significant effect on their feelings of dependence, unhappiness, and anxiety" (McLeod & Shanahan, 1993, p. 357). Furthermore, physical health of children living in poverty is also compromised in that related research has found that low birth weights, chronic asthma, lead poisoning, infant mortality, stunting, number of short-stay hospital episodes and higher incidences of accidents were more prevalent for poor children than non-poor children (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997).

A direct correlation has been made between educational attainment and poverty in that the likelihood of poverty is reduced when higher levels of education are obtained and conversely, higher levels of poverty are experienced with lower levels of educational attainment. Indeed, many recognize that education is the key to improving, among other variables, socio-economic well-being (Health Canada, 2009, p. 8) since education is viewed as the "catalyst for success in the labour market and plays a pivotal role in a person's ability to get a stable, well-paid job" (Health Canada, 2009, p. 12).

The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada (2000) reports:

> In the past 30 years, we've begun to address historic issues and enhance
>
> the control of Aboriginal people over their own lives. We've seen positive

results: the gap in living conditions between Aboriginal and non-

Aboriginal people has narrowed, education levels have improved,

unemployment has fallen, housing conditions and infrastructure have

improved. (p. 1)

As was previously discussed, levels of educational attainment for other Canadians is on the rise; however, various reports and statistical data suggest that educational attainment for Aboriginal people has remained stagnant, and in many cases, declined. For Aboriginal women on-reserve, educational attainment remained relatively unchanged over the past three census takings, and as observed in 1996, the proportion of on-reserve Registered Indian women over the age of 15 with less than a Grade 9 was a staggering 58%; whereas by 2001, this percentage decreased to 56.6% but then increased again to 57.4% by 2006 (see Figures 31, 32, 33).

The data presented in Figures 31, 32, and 33 suggest that there are a significant number of Aboriginal women on-reserve with low levels of education. In addition, data also suggests that there are a significant number of on reserve, Aboriginal, female-headed, lone parent households. When these data sets are combined, it becomes evident that a high proportion of children on reserve reside in families with an Aboriginal female lone-parent with less than a high school education.

Table 4-1: Female Population 15+ Not Attending School Full Time by Highest Level of Schooling, 1996

| | Total Aboriginal | Registered Indians | | | Inuit | Métis | Other Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Total | On-reserve | Off-reserve | | | | |
| Total - Highest level of schooling | 333,990 | 135,805 | 60,035 | 75,770 | 9,400 | 51,320 | 137,465 | 9,860,985 |
| Subtotal - Less than grade 9 | 56,895 | 33,510 | 19,680 | 13,830 | 3,890 | 7,895 | 11,600 | 1,357,990 |
| No schooling or kindergarten only | 6,735 | 4,310 | 3,265 | 1,045 | 1,165 | 575 | 685 | 117,110 |
| Grades 1-4 | 7,445 | 4,315 | 2,675 | 1,640 | 485 | 1,150 | 1,495 | 182,180 |
| Grades 5-8 | 42,710 | 24,890 | 13,735 | 11,150 | 2,245 | 6,170 | 9,410 | 1,058,700 |
| Subtotal - Grade 9 - 13 | 129,400 | 52,190 | 21,250 | 30,940 | 2,795 | 21,300 | 53,115 | 3,615,600 |
| (%) With secondary school graduation certificate | 29.4 | 20.4 | 17.2 | 22.6 | 18.4 | 29.0 | 38.9 | 45.2 |
| Subtotal - Trades and/or other non-university only | 99,655 | 35,425 | 13,805 | 21,620 | 2,275 | 15,600 | 46,350 | 2,774,280 |
| (%) With certificate or diploma | 70.5 | 67.6 | 69.0 | 66.7 | 62.6 | 69.7 | 73.4 | 77.6 |
| Subtotal - University | 48,040 | 14,675 | 5,300 | 9,380 | 440 | 6,520 | 26,405 | 2,113,110 |
| (%) With university degree | 42.5 | 34.0 | 30.3 | 36.0 | 30.7 | 37.2 | 48.7 | 59.2 |
| Subtotal - Post-secondary education | 147,695 | 50,105 | 19,105 | 31,000 | 2,715 | 22,120 | 72,755 | 4,887,395 |
| (%) Incomplete - without degree/certificate/diploma | 38.6 | 42.2 | 41.7 | 42.5 | 42.7 | 39.9 | 35.6 | 30.4 |
| (%) Complete - with degree/certificate/diploma | 61.4 | 57.8 | 58.3 | 57.5 | 57.3 | 60.2 | 64.4 | 69.6 |

**Figure 31: Female Population 15+ Not Attending School Full Time by Highest Level of Schooling**
Source: AANDC, 2001. Retrieved from: http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ/STAGING/texte-text/awp_1100100016870_eng.pdf

Population Aged 15+ Not Attending School Full-time by Highest Level of Schooling, Gender, Aboriginal Identity and Area of Residence, Canada, 2001

| Highest Level of Schooling | Total Aboriginal | Registered Indian | | | Métis | Inuit | Other Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Total | On Reserve | Off Reserve | | | | |
| | | | | Percent | | | | |
| Women 15+ | 283,520 | 161,080 | 71,680 | 89,400 | 78,725 | 11,205 | 32,510 | 10,571,390 |
| **Less than grade 9** | 16.2 | 19.3 | 26.6 | 13.5 | 10.0 | 32.7 | 10.5 | 11.2 |
| No schooling or Kindergarten | 2.2 | 2.6 | 4.4 | 1.1 | 0.7 | 9.5 | 1.3 | 1.1 |
| Grades 1-4 | 2.1 | 2.4 | 3.3 | 1.7 | 1.5 | 3.7 | 1.3 | 1.5 |
| Grades 5-8 | 12.0 | 14.3 | 18.9 | 10.6 | 7.8 | 19.6 | 7.9 | 8.6 |
| **Grades 9 - 13** | 39.5 | 39.1 | 36.7 | 40.9 | 40.4 | 31.2 | 42.3 | 34.8 |
| Without certificate | 28.8 | 29.8 | 29.5 | 30.0 | 27.6 | 24.6 | 28.4 | 18.8 |
| With certificate | 10.7 | 9.3 | 7.3 | 10.9 | 12.8 | 6.7 | 13.9 | 16.0 |
| **Non-university** | 30.3 | 27.9 | 25.3 | 30.0 | 34.6 | 29.5 | 32.2 | 29.1 |
| Without certificate | 8.6 | 8.4 | 7.4 | 9.2 | 8.6 | 10.8 | 8.6 | 6.2 |
| Trades certificate | 9.3 | 8.8 | 9.0 | 8.6 | 10.4 | 8.5 | 9.7 | 7.8 |
| Non-university certificate | 12.4 | 10.7 | 8.9 | 12.1 | 15.7 | 10.2 | 13.9 | 15.1 |
| **University** | 14.0 | 13.8 | 11.4 | 15.7 | 15.0 | 6.6 | 15.1 | 24.9 |
| Without degree* | 8.6 | 8.8 | 8.0 | 9.4 | 8.8 | 4.1 | 8.8 | 9.5 |
| With degree | 5.4 | 5.0 | 3.5 | 6.3 | 6.2 | 2.4 | 6.3 | 15.4 |
| **All Post-Secondary**** | 44.3 | 41.7 | 36.7 | 45.6 | 49.7 | 36.0 | 47.3 | 54.0 |
| No degree or certificate | 17.2 | 17.2 | 15.4 | 18.6 | 17.4 | 14.9 | 17.4 | 15.7 |
| Degree or certificate | 27.1 | 24.5 | 21.3 | 27.0 | 32.3 | 21.0 | 29.9 | 38.3 |

**Figure 32: Population Aged 15+ Not Attending School Full Time by Highest Level of Schooling, Gender, Aboriginal Identity and Area of Residence, Canada, 2001.**
Source: Hull (2006). Retrieved from: http://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection/R2-162-2001E.pdf?

| | | Registered Indian | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | On Reserve | | Off Reserve | |
| | | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Total - Highest degree, certificate or diploma | | 99,705 | 98,605 | 100,230 | 128,950 |
| No degree, certificate or diploma | | 62.2% | 57.4% | 43.4% | 38.7% |
| High school diploma or equivalent only | | 13.3% | 16.3% | 22.7% | 23.0% |
| Postsecondary education | | 24.5% | 26.3% | 33.9% | 38.3% |
| Trades/apprenticeship or other non university | | 20.8% | 18.7% | 26.2% | 26.3% |
| University certificate below bachelor level | | 2.0% | 3.5% | 2.4% | 3.7% |
| University with degree | | 1.8% | 4.2% | 5.2% | 8.3% |

**Figure 33: Highest Level of Schooling, Registered Indian, by Gender and Place, Canada, 2006.**
Source: AANDC, 2012a.

The statistical data pertaining to the: (1) low income/poverty, (2) employment/unemployment and participation rates, and (3) educational attainment of on-reserve Aboriginal female-headed lone parent families suggest that although 'lone-parent' status places other Canadian children 'at risk' for school readiness, the lone-parent at-risk status holds especially true for Aboriginal children on reserve given that their primary caregiver is likely to:

- Have income well below the poverty line (indicating that these households are in deep poverty);
- Earn significantly less than other lone-parent mothers in Canada;
- Have disproportionately low levels of participation in the paid work force;
- Are highly likely to be unemployed; and
- Have exceedingly low levels of educational attainment.

**EDI risk factor: home ownership.**

*Housing: the Canadian context.*

Safe, affordable, and adequate housing is said to provide an important foundation for healthy social and physical development, especially for those attempting to emerge from poverty (Senate, 2009a, p. 83). In this way, "appropriate housing is (a) necessary …condition for success" (Senate, 2009a, p. 83). The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) (2003) adds:

> Good quality housing is important to the health and well being of
>
> Canadians. The way homes are designed, constructed and maintained has
>
> a direct influence on occupants' health and quality of life. The use of
>
> appropriate building materials, the provision of adequate heating and
>
> ventilation and the physical layout and features of the home can all
>
> influence the health and well being of residents. (p. 1)

In addition to the role housing has on the physical health of citizens, housing is also said to influence national and individual economic growth given its contribution to the employment and investment, and it is said to influence our natural environment as more and more homes are being built in a more sustainable way (CMHC, 2003, p. 1-2). Housing, it would appear, plays a significant role in the individual lives of Canadians but also with regard to the prosperity and well being of the Nation. In that regard, a brief examination as to: (1) the extent to which Canadians are able to access housing to meet their needs, and (2) the extent of home ownership among Canadians will be discussed immediately below.


*Affordability.*

While the majority of Canadians are well housed, CMHC notes that significant improvements need to be made given the high number of Canadians who have difficulty accessing affordable housing. Indeed, CMHC (2003) found that in 1996, there were approximately "1.8 million Canadians who had difficulty accessing affordable housing" (p. 6). CMHC further notes that specific segments of the

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population such as "lone parent families, persons with disabilities, Aboriginal peoples, recent immigrants and seniors experienced a higher than average incidence of affordability problems" (2003, p. 6). A closer examination of the ability of Canadians to access and meet their core housing needs found that, over time, the incidence of some Canadians who were unable to meet their core housing needs actually worsened (see Figure 34). For instance, in 2002 the incidence of core housing need among all Canadians was 13.9 %; the depth of core housing needs among those who had difficulty with accessing acceptable housing was $2,030; and the number of Canadians who were unable to access acceptable housing was 1.31 million. By 2008, these figures worsened in most instances in that the incidence rate decreased only marginally from 13.9% to 13.0%; the depth increased by 70; and the number of Canadians unable to access acceptable housing increased dramatically from 1.31 million to 1.37 million persons (CMHC, 2011, p. 78).

**Housing conditions in urban[1] Canada, 2002-2008**

| | | All households | | Living in acceptable housing (meets all standards) | | Living in housing below one or more standards | | | | | |
| | | | | | | Able to access acceptable housing | | Unable to access acceptable housing | | | |
| | | | | Not in core housing need | | Not in core housing need | | In core housing need | | | |
| Year | SLID Panel | Number (millions) | Per cent | Number (millions) | Per cent | Number (millions) | Per cent | Number (millions) | Incidence (%) | Median depth[3] ($) | Average depth ratio (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2008 | 5 and 6 | 10.58 | 100 | 7.09 | 67.0 | 2.11 | 20.0 | 1.37 | 13.0 | 2,100 | 27.6 |
| 2007[2] | 4 and 5 | 10.36 | 100 | 6.99 | 67.5 | 2.10 | 20.3 | 1.27 | 12.3 | 1,910 | 26.1 |
| 2006[2] | 4 and 5 | 10.16 | 100 | 6.87 | 67.7 | 1.96 | 19.3 | 1.32 | 13.0 | 1,990 | 27.0 |
| 2005[2] | 4 and 5 | 10.02 | 100 | 6.84 | 68.3 | 1.84 | 18.3 | 1.34 | 13.4 | 1,970 | 27.5 |
| 2004 | 3 and 4 | 9.64 | 100 | 6.75 | 70.0 | 1.59 | 16.5 | 1.31 | 13.6 | 2,070 | 28.2 |
| 2003 | 3 and 4 | 9.53 | 100 | 6.65 | 69.8 | 1.56 | 16.3 | 1.32 | 13.9 | 2,030 | 28.0 |
| 2002 | 3 and 4 | 9.43 | 100 | 6.57 | 69.7 | 1.55 | 16.4 | 1.31 | 13.9 | 2,030 | 27.8 |

**Figure 34: Housing Conditions in Urban Canada 2002-2008**
Source: CMHC, 2011.

In other words, "Canada is experiencing a housing crisis" (Mikkonen et al, 2010, p. 29) and that over the past 20 years, rents "have risen beyond the cost of living" (Mikkonen, et al, 2010, p. 29) so much so that that the proportion of people spending more than 30% of their total income on rent has risen to increasingly

high levels throughout Canada (e.g. 43% in Vancouver, 42% in Toronto, and 36% in Montreal) (p. 29) (see: Figure 35)

**Figure 9.1 Percentage of Canadian Households Spending More than 30% of Income on Shelter Costs, 1991-2006**



**Source:** Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) (2009). Housing in Canada Online. Available online at http://data.beyond2020.com/CMHC/. Ottawa: CMHC.
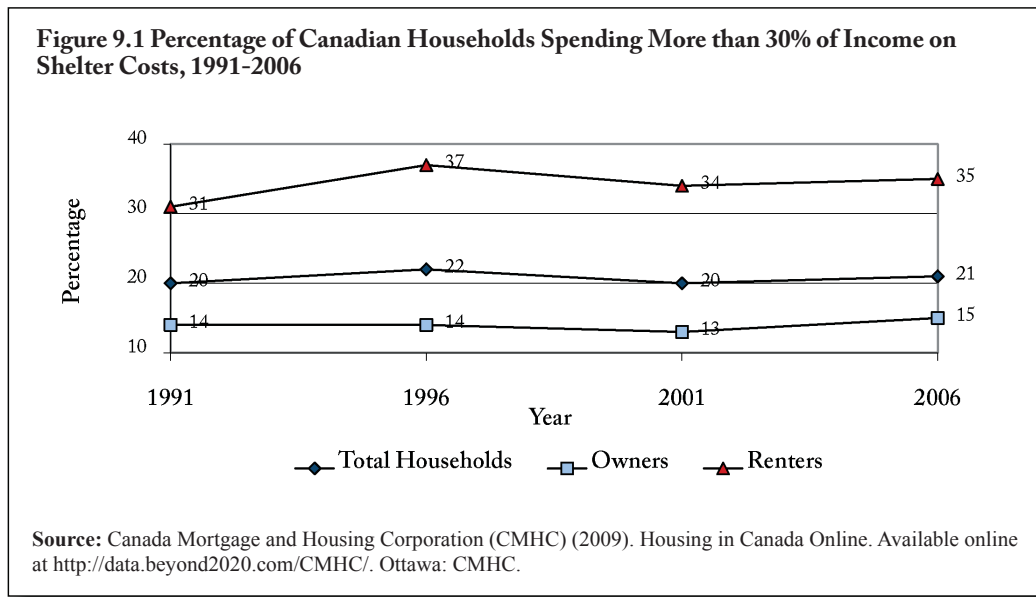
**Figure 35: Percentage of Canadian Households Spending More than 30% of Income on Shelter Costs, 1991-2006**
Source: CMHC, 2009a.

The Public Health Agency of Canada (2009) found similarly distressing results in that approximately "13.0 % of Canadians report being unable to access acceptable housing" (p. 2). According to Statistics Canada (2010b), in 2006 the Canadian population was 31,612,897, which suggests that 4,109,676 people in Canada were unable to access acceptable housing that year. With so many Canadians without access to acceptable housing, it becomes evident that "Canada has not been able to meet the housing policy objective of providing adequate and affordable housing for all citizens (Carter & Polevychok, 2004, as cited in The Senate, 2009, p. 83). This is likely due to the fact that Canada has yet to develop and enact a comprehensive housing policy that would ensure all Canadians have access to adequate and affordable housing. In the Senate's 2010 report entitled *In From the Margins: A Call to Action on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness*, housing is somewhat of a "policy orphan" (p. 83) in that no one level of government is taking responsibility for the housing of citizens and the "building industry avoids

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(it) because of low profit margins" (The Senate, 2009, p. 83). While the issue of meeting the core housing need has remained largely out of plain sight, there have been third party examinations of the current housing situations in Canada that were undertaken in an effort to ameliorate and improve housing for all Canadians. More specifically, in 1998 the United Nations reviewed Canada's performance with respect to the right to adequate housing and noted that it was:

> …gravely concerned that such a wealthy country as Canada has allowed problems of homelessness and inadequate housing to grow to such proportions that the mayors of Canada's ten largest cities have now declared homelessness 'a national disaster'". (Nicholson, 2004, as cited in The Senate, 2009, p. 93)

Despite this assessment and many others (Public Health Agency, 2009; Wellesley Institute, 2010; CMHC, 2008, The Senate, 2009), there remains to be seen any reasonable movement towards improving housing and meeting the core housing needs of Canadians.

### *Home ownership in Canada.*

Home ownership, according to Statistics Canada (2012h), is one of the most "significant investments made by individual Canadians" (p. 7), as it tends to build the wealth over an individual's life course. The resulting asset yields housing services, which are particularly critical to families with children, and can be liquidated later in life for retirement income or other needs (Statistics Canada, 2012h, p. 7). Perhaps more importantly, home ownership is "an established path to status and security" and represents permanency and stability in life (Ray & Moore, 1991, p. 2). Buying a home is an "influential statement of success, security and stability" land a means of fitting into the social fabric (Adams, 1984, as cited in Darden & Kamel, 2001, p. 59).

Home ownership rates, as represented by aggregated statistics, among Canadians suggest that more and more people are making the decision to own a home rather than rent. Statistics Canada (2013a) reports that between the periods of 1981 to 2006, home ownership increased by "7 percentage points from 62% to 69%" (p. 6). However, these statistics mask "diverging trends across income classes" (Statistics Canada, 2013a, p. 6) in that "rates of home ownership have fallen among young lower-income households, but have risen for young upper-income households" (Statistics Canada, 2013a, p. 6), indicating housing stratification based on income and social status. Indeed, for couples aged 20-39 with children in the bottom income quintile, "home ownership fell from 47% to 35%, while for young couples with children in the top income quintile, home ownership increased from 88% to 94%" (Statistics Canada, 2013a, p. 7). Indeed, Statistics Canada (2010c) further notes:

> Family income has been closely related to both the level of homeownership and the increase in homeownership since 1971. There was a substantial difference in homeownership across income quintiles throughout the period; this difference increased over this time, as a result of the fact that the homeownership rate declined for the lowest-income group but rose for higher-income groups. (p. 7)

While home ownership rates in Canada have increased, the data suggest that this increase is largely stratified by income quintile and that this stratification has indeed worsened over time. For those families in the lowest income quintile, home ownership – as a means of establishing status and security, building an asset base, and establishing a foothold in the fabric of society remains elusive. At the same time, for those families in the highest income quintile, the ability to purchase a home, and therefore strengthen status and security, remains within their grasp and increases the distance between those who have, and those who have not.

The available data on housing and home ownership in Canada paints a stark picture; one that suggests that there are a significant number of Canadians who: spend more than 30% of their income on meeting their basic shelter costs; are not able to access affordable housing; and who, due to market and socioeconomic pressures, are not able to purchase a home. Increasing rental costs, along with stagnant wages and precarious employment for many, means that the housing situation in Canada will most likely remain unchanged for some time. For minority groups and Aboriginal people specifically, this reality poses tremendous challenges.

### *Aboriginal peoples and housing in Canada.*

In 1996, The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) released its foundational document for improved relations between the Federal Government and the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. The RCAP specifically:

…concerns government policy with respect to the original historical nations of this country. Those nations are important to Canada, and how Canada relates to them defines in large measure its sense of justice and its image in its own eyes and before the world. We urge governments at all levels to open the door to Aboriginal participation in the life and governance of Canada. (AANDC, 1996b; Volume 1, Looking Forward, Looking Back: Opening the Door, para. 1)

While the Royal Commission made specific recommendations to the Federal government regarding all aspects of Aboriginal peoples lives, of notable concern are the recommendations related to housing for Aboriginal people. More specifically, the Royal Commission (AANDC, 1996a) noted the following:

ABORIGINAL HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES are in a bad

state, by all measures falling below the standards that prevail elsewhere in

Canada and threatening the health and well-being of Aboriginal people.

The inadequacy of these services is visible evidence of the poverty and

marginalization experienced disproportionately by Aboriginal people. Our

terms of reference call for us to consider these problems, particularly the

issue of "sub-standard housing". (V3.Ch.4; para. 1)

Since the release of the Royal Commission in 1996, available data and literature
suggest that marginal improvements have occurred in relation to addressing the
core housing needs of Aboriginal peoples across Canada. For instance, the
Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC, 2005) reports, "while the
percentage of households in core housing need remains unacceptably high, and
well about that of non-Aboriginal households, it is declining and the gap is
narrowing[22]" (CMHC, 2005, p. 39). While the decreases in the number of
Aboriginal households whose core housing needs are not been met have
marginally declined, CMHC further states:

Aboriginal households are also much more likely to live in housing that

falls below the adequacy and suitability standards than non-Aboriginal

households. In 2001, six percent of Aboriginal households lived in

inadequate homes (dwellings that required major repairs and were in core

---

[22] In 2001, the core housing needs of North American Indians was 26.6% which is
a decrease from 33.0% in 1996, but still considerably higher than non-Aboriginal
households whose needs were 13.5% and 15.3% in 2001 and 1996 respectively.

housing need), compared to just two percent of non-Aboriginal

households. (CMHC, 2005, p. 39)[23]


This data is further reflected in the comparative analysis in the Royal Commission
(AANDC, 1996a; Aboriginal and Canadian Housing Conditions: V3, Chapter 4)
and noted the following disparities (see Figure 36):

- Houses occupied by Aboriginal people are twice as likely to need major

  repairs as those of all Canadians. Almost 20 per cent of dwellings —

  47,000 homes — are in poor condition according to assessments by

  occupants. These conditions are present despite the fact that Aboriginal-

  occupied housing is generally newer than that occupied by other

  Canadians (para. 3)

- On reserves alone, DIAND estimates that some 13,400 homes need major

  repairs and close to 6,000 require replacement, amounting to 26 per cent

  of the total, or two and a half times the proportion of Canadian dwellings

  in need of major repairs. (para. 4)

- Some of the most dramatic disparities between the Aboriginal and non-

  Aboriginal populations occur in the community services associated with

  dwellings. For example, Aboriginal households are more than 90 times as

  likely as other Canadian households to be living without a piped water

  supply. Indeed, most Canadian households without a piped water supply

  are probably Aboriginal households. On reserves, DIAND data show more

---

[23] CMHC defines core housing need as: "if it falls below one or more of the
adequacy, suitability, or affordability standards and cannot find local rental
housing to meet all three standards" (CMHC, 2005, p. 39)

than 10,500 dwellings still without indoor plumbing, or 14 per cent of the

total. (para. 5)

**Comparison of Canadian and Aboriginal Housing Indicators, 1991**

|  | Canada | Aboriginal[1] | Aboriginal Position |
|---|---|---|---|
| Occupied dwellings | 10,018,265 | 239,240 | 2.4% of Canadian households[2] |
| In need of major repairs | 9.80% | 19.60% | 2 times as many in need of major repairs |
| Built before 1946 | 17.70% | 13.60% | 25% less than the Canada-wide proportion |
| No piped water supply | 0.10% | 9.40% | More than 90 times as many with no piped water |
| No bathroom facilities | 0.60% | 3.20% | More than 5 times as many |
| No flush toilet | 0.50% | 5.30% | More than 10 times as many |
| Average number of persons per dwelling | 2.7 | 3.5 | About 30% higher than the Canadian average |
| Average number of rooms per dwelling | 6.1 | 5.8 | Slightly smaller |
| Tenant-occupied dwellings | 37.10% | 48.70% | Almost 1/3 more tenants, not counting band-owned housing |
| Average gross rent per month | $546.00 | $495.00 | $51 per month lower on average |
| Owner-occupied dwellings | 62.60% | 41.20% | About 34% fewer owners |
| Owner's major payment per month | $682 | $603 | $79 per month lower on average |

**Figure 36: Comparison of Canadian and Aboriginal Housing Indicators**
Source: AANDC, 1996a. Retrieved from:
*http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20071211053835/http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/si36_e.html#4 - Housing*

Further reports published by CMHC throughout the past decade indicate that the
housing reality for the majority of Aboriginal peoples remains the same. In 2005,
for instance, CMHC noted that:

Aboriginal people are over represented in the homeless population in

every major city where statistics are available. In 2002 in Hamilton,

Aboriginal people represented two percent of the city's population yet

made up 20 per cent of the homeless population. In Edmonton, Aboriginal

people made up 43 per cent of the homeless population while accounting

for only six percent of the overall population". (p. 42)

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In 2006, CMHC did not note any improvements in this regard, however, in their annual CMHC Housing Observer (2006) it was again noted that Aboriginal households face "tremendous obstacles in accessing adequate accommodation, including low incomes and unemployment, and legal impediments on reserve..." (CMHC, 2006, p. 49) and that while there was "some lessening in core need incidence since 1996, Aboriginal peoples housing conditions, both on and off reserve, have a long way to go to catch up with those of other Canadians..." (p. 49)

By 2009, a shift in policy led to initiatives aimed at improving housing conditions on reserve as a means of meeting the core housing needs of Aboriginal people on-reserves throughout Canada. For instance, the On-Reserve Non-Profit Housing Program led by the CMHC intended to assist "First Nations in the construction, purchase and rehabilitation of rental housing on reserve" (CMHC, n.d.; para. 1). This non-profit housing program was designed to provide "direct loans for First Nations" (CMHC, n.d., para. 4), that are insured under the National Housing Act and are further guaranteed by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

In addition to the policy developments to alleviate some of the core housing needs on-reserve, CMHC also noted that the off-reserve incidence of core housing need decreased from 24.0 per cent in 2001 to 20.4 per cent in 2006 (CMHC, 2009b, p. 92). CMHC went on further to say that:

> Despite this decrease, the share of off-reserve Aboriginal households among households in core housing need increased from 4.8 per cent in 2001 to 5.5 per cent in 2006. This increase was a consequence of the off-reserve Aboriginal household population growing at much faster pace (34.9 per cent change) than the non-Aboriginal population (8.2 per cent change) between 2001 and 2006. (CMHC, 2009b, p. 92)

With regard to affordability, whereas it was previously noted that affordability was an issue facing approximately 12% of the Canadian population, affordability for Aboriginal peoples, specifically, was estimated to be an issue for "16 per cent of the 74,000 on-reserve households" (AANDC, 1996; v3, Chapter 4: 1.1 Aboriginal and Canadian Housing Conditions, para. 3), indicating that 12,000 on-reserve household could not afford the full cost of adequate accommodation. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada further estimates that "Of the other 62,000 households on reserves, 15,000 are in houses subsidized by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) that meet their needs. Thus, about 47,000 households on reserves probably cannot afford the full cost of adequate accommodation" (AANDC, 1996a; Volume 3, Chapter 4: Housing Conditions of Aboriginal Peoples, para. 1, emphasis added).

More recent reports on Aboriginal housing in Canada, such as the situation for the Attawapiskat First Nation, garnered national media attention and shed increasing light on the desperate need, and what some have deemed third-world living conditions, faced by thousands of Aboriginal peoples across Canada (The Huffington Post, 2011; Palmater, 2011).

In that regard, while housing in Canada is viewed by some as being in a state of 'crisis', and as the stratification in affordability and home ownership rates increases, more and more Canadians are unable to meet their basic core housing needs. In contrast, data suggests that the housing situation faced by far too many Aboriginal people, both on and off-reserve, must also be improved not only in terms of affordability, but also with regard to quality.

**Aboriginal Children's EDI Score & Risk Factors: Discussion**

A child's EDI (Early Development Instrument) score is said to largely influence the extent to which they are 'school ready'. In turn, a child's corresponding level

of school readiness, especially for marginalized and disadvantaged students, is said to then determine their later achievement and completion of school, as well as other important socio-economic outcomes. For many on-reserve Aboriginal children in Canada, EDI scores have been determined to be significantly lower than their non-Aboriginal counterparts, and as such young Aboriginal children are entering the school system both ill-equipped and ill-prepared.

As discussed in the sections above, EDI scores are affected by the following risk factors: (1) poverty, (2) parental unemployment, (3) level of parental educational attainment, (4) lone parent household, and (5) home ownership. The data comparisons between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada in each of these domains suggests that while these risk factors are prevalent among non-Aboriginal society, thereby placing non-Aboriginal children at risk of not being 'school ready', Aboriginal people, and their dependents, within these domains are at a significant disadvantage. As such, young Aboriginal children on-reserve are at greater risk of not being 'school ready' which in turn affects their ability to do well in school and later in life. Indeed, the comparative analysis within each of these domains suggests that Aboriginal children on-reserve are increasingly at risk in that: their parents are more likely to be poor, and for significant periods of time; their parents are more likely to be unemployed and participate less in the paid workforce; their parents are less likely to have a high school diploma or post-secondary education; they are more likely to live in a female-headed lone parent household; and that they are more likely to live in poor quality housing. These domains, when taken as a whole, present an enormous challenge for educators in that although early education intervention can play a significant role in mediating the surrounding socio-economic challenges faced by their parents, these domains place increasing pressure on children as they progress through the education system which further contributes to the known disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners, most commonly referred to as the 'achievement gap'.

Indeed, ensuring school readiness in disadvantaged children has been recognized as a "powerful framework for improving equity in access to education and in learning outcomes, especially for marginalized children" (UNICEF, 2012, p. 16) who typically have "poorer academic achievement, social skills and cognitive functioning than children who are not from economically disadvantaged families" (Maggi, Irwin, Siddiqi, Poureslami, Hertzman & Hertzman, 2005, p. 11). Moreover, "school readiness is gaining currency as a viable strategy to close the learning gap and improve equity in achieving lifelong learning and full developmental potential among young children" (UNICEF, 2012, p. 4).

The significance of school-readiness in this regard, has important implications for the First Nation population in Canada given the report issued by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2000), which states that the "progress in closing the education gap for Indian students living on reserves has been unacceptably slow. At the current rate of progress, it will take over 20 years for them to reach parity in academic achievement with other Canadians" (p. 4-5). Even more distressing, is that a follow up report issued in 2004 found that the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people had increased to 28 years "because the Department has not used a consistent methodology to monitor the gap" (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2004, p. 10).

The challenge, therefore, has been to intervene at a critical period within disadvantaged or marginalized children's development. As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, studies in the U.S. and around the world have found considerable success in this regard, and in a number of instances, early childhood development intervention between the ages of 0 to 6 has proven successful in improving outcomes for impoverished and marginalized students including, but not limited to: high school completion rates, employment, higher levels of income later in life, higher levels of post-secondary education, lower levels of juvenile and adult crime, lower rates of teen pregnancy, and higher home ownership rates. Given these positive outcomes as a result of early intervention, early childhood

education for Aboriginal people has become of increasing importance to all levels of government in that these targeted early interventions will have a significant and positive effect at both the individual and societal levels. As previously discussed (Chapter 3), the societal benefits have been recognized in terms of the sizeable return on investment and most notably with the increased participation in the paid labour force; increased levels of educational attainment; and lower levels of dependency; all of which align with the broader governmental goal of improved national economic performance and gains to individual wealth. On the other hand, the significance of investments to early childhood education for the Aboriginal community in particular, are viewed as an effective means of affecting positive change, and towards achieving equity, in each of individual and community-level statistical sub-domains that consistently indicate slow or negligible progress.

This chapter examined the role and significance of ensuring 'school-readiness' for marginalized and impoverished children, as well as the socio-environmental factors that place these students at increased risk of not being ready for school. To further illustrate the extent to which First Nation children on reserve are at increased risk of not being school-ready, a cross-sectional statistical analysis was undertaken within each of the EDI risk-factor subdomains to illuminate that while a significant number of non-Aboriginal children are at risk of not being school-ready, Aboriginal children are at a far greater risk given the prevalence and depth to which they are situated within each subdomain. The next chapter will synthesize the arguments and conclusions drawn from this examination and will provide commentary on areas for future research.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

When I started my graduate program some time ago, I entered into it with a somewhat naive understanding of what being Aboriginal really means within the Canadian context. What came about after nearly five years studying and researching within my program, is that I started off with only a faint, fairly colonized, and obstructed view of what being Aboriginal actually meant. The time in between then and now has been lengthy indeed, but in many ways the time it took for me to get here has been absolutely necessary. The gradual process throughout these years has brought about fundamental changes within me; not only in the manner in which I see myself within the broader Canadian landscape, but also in relation to how I more fully understand the context, and the means by which, Aboriginal peoples have come to this point in time.

This thesis, for example, took nearly two years to produce. As I discussed in the Research Methodology section, this thesis (through its own workings) was obstructed by my initial inability to confront my identity and to locate and position myself within this work. By initially refusing to dislocate myself from the comfortable anonymity afforded by approaching this work from the sidelines, it was not possible for me to break away from the mindset that was sold to me, and which I consumed without interrogation, under the auspices that my voice and my work could only be valid and truthful if it followed the guidelines of European scientific research. What I now understand is that by virtue of my existence, and by the existence of those who came before me, my work cannot be apolitical and cannot simply observe from the sidelines while claiming to be a piece of scholarly work intended to affect change. What followed was a breakthrough in this research that has led to, what I perceive to be, as a piece of work that articulates my profoundly new understanding of what being Aboriginal *really* means in this country, and one that is founded upon a deep dedication to fact-finding and truth telling; which I will explain briefly below.

In Chapter 1, I presented the research questions that would guide this work and followed this with an explanation of the purpose, the method used within this work to examine the research questions, the theoretical framework that would support my assertions, and the research methodology that located, positioned and situated my voice in this examination. I argued that the AHSOR program, as an early childhood program whose goal is to prepare young on-reserve Aboriginal children for school entry, may not be as effective as it intends to be. Even further, I also argued that the effectiveness of the ASHOR program in its present state, and in the absence of analysis or data regarding program outcomes, is compromised by the lack of consideration given to the requisite coordination of supports and programmatic elements that engender transformation and trans-generational change. To support these arguments; however, it was imperative to reframe the program by examining the discourse surrounding Aboriginal education as to reveal the highly calculated economic agenda by the state. In doing so, this examination moved away from the persistent problematization of Aboriginal people and instead redirected the gaze from the colonized to the colonizer.

The first part of Chapter 2 factually historicized Aboriginal education in Canada and placed into context the ever-present undercurrent within Aboriginal policy that is rooted in ideology that seeks to 'solve the Indian problem' while simultaneously asserting the assimilative and destructive agenda that has served as the foundation for the Indian/Crown relationship for two centuries. Understood in this way, I articulated the history of early childhood education in Canada and followed this with an overview of the AHSOR program from its inception to its present day status. What I also made apparent in this chapter is the unique, yet precarious position, in which the AHSOR program is situated. Using the *Indian Act* as a foreground, I explored the policy gap for on-reserve early childhood education and noted that the AHSOR program is unique programming in that it addresses this gap. However, while Health Canada steps in to provide educational

programming where the Department of Indian and Northern Development leaves off, I also articulate the possibility of expanding the role of the Department in meeting not only its legislated requirements, but also those obligations that, at present, fall outside the scope of the *Indian Act*.

The second part of Chapter 2 articulated the role of early childhood education programs in increasing school-readiness in impoverished and marginalized students. To illustrate the significance of early childhood education in this regard, I presented an examination of three (3) case studies of similar early childhood programming in the United States that have demonstrated marked improvement for at-risk young children both at school-entry and in other later social outcomes. This examination illuminated commonalities among the programs with regard to specific programmatic, structural elements inherent to the positive outcomes and levels of school-readiness in young impoverished and marginalized students. Namely, the three case studies all demonstrated that children who participated in these programs had an increased likelihood of school-readiness as a result of attending early childhood education programs that are: (1) well-designed, (2) intense (i.e.: full time vs. part time), (3) longer in duration (i.e.: lasted throughout early infancy up to school-entry versus being applied only at one point in time), (4) delivered by high-trained and qualified staff, (5) and that focus is on the whole child. I then provided a review and examination of the available literature regarding the AHSOR program specifically to demonstrate the wide gap. I determined that while there are important pieces of scholarly literature that examine one or two aspects of the ASHOR program, they do not; however, examine the extent to which this program is as effective as it intends to be in achieving its purpose and goals. What also became evident was that the federal department, Health Canada, who has authority over the AHSOR program has not evaluated the program not in terms of its effectiveness, but rather as a means of determining if the "CY cluster contributes to the overall mandate of FNIHB[24] in

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[24] FNIHB: First Nations and Inuit Health Branch

assisting First Nations to address health barriers and attain health levels comparable to other Canadians, by building strong partnerships with First Nations to improve the health system" (Health Canada, 2010, p. v). Indeed, in the 2008/2009 Children and Youth Programs: Cluster Evaluation, Health Canada (2010) makes it clear "this evaluation is *not intended* to evaluate or measure the results of the four individual programs in the CY cluster, but rather to examine the contribution of services and supports as a group" (p. 2, emphasis in original). The lack of intention to evaluate or measure the results of the AHSOR program is also evident in the examination and review of only report issued by Health Canada in 2003 entitled *Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve (AHSOR) Program: 2000/2001 Annual Repor*t. Similar conclusions resulted from this review and further supported the literature gap as to the effectiveness of ensuring school-readiness in on-reserve First Nations children.

In Chapter 3, I provided a review of policy documents and governmental policy statements regarding investments to Aboriginal-specific programming in Canada through the lens of Human Capital theory and by way of discourse analysis. When reframed in this way, I argued that investments in Aboriginal-specific programming in Canada are those that are 'made-on' First Nations people as a means of improving Canada's national and global socioeconomic position and alleviating fiscal pressures, rather than ones that are made under the auspices of benevolent and benign programming 'for' Aboriginal people such as reducing the observed inequity in the health, well-being, and educational outcomes of Aboriginal people.

In Chapter 4, I examined the role of school readiness for at-risk marginalized and impoverished students in reducing negative outcomes both at school-entry and in later social outcomes. In order to demonstrate the significance of school-readiness for on-reserve First Nation children, I examined each of the Early Development Index's identified risk factors that inhibit or reduce the likelihood of First Nations children being ready for school. To better articulate the magnitude of risk that

First Nations children face in this regard, I presented a cross-comparison statistical analysis of each of the identified risk factors. The results of this process illustrate that First Nations children are indeed at great risk of not being school-ready, and in this way deliberate and careful consideration must be given to the design, development, and implementation of early childhood education programs that are based on empirically studied and successful model programs such as those presented in Chapter 2 (Part 2).

**Areas for Future Research**

The conclusions drawn from this examination make it clear that there is considerable room for further examination and analysis regarding the effectiveness of the program in making on-reserve First Nations children school-ready. Given the potential of well-designed early childhood education to affect the extent to which young, impoverished and marginalized students are ready for school, the AHSOR program should be analyzed in greater detail given its impact to First Nation children and communities in this regard. More specifically, an independent review on a longitudinal and empirical basis regarding the educational outcomes (among others) may well lay a foundation for improved programming (should students not be directly benefitting, as evidenced by increased positive outcomes) and thus, improved outcomes. Even further, a national evaluation of the AHSOR program specifically might also elucidate on programmatic best practices in communities where an observed improvement has occurred. In general, future research may very well contribute to a greater public understanding of the AHSOR's program curricula content, staff training and certification, the comprehensiveness of the program content, as well as to the timing and intensity of programming. Perhaps the most comprehensive recommendations regarding the AHSOR program are those made by Ball (2012) who states:

> A valuable next step would be to undertake a methodologically sound
> longitudinal research study with comparison groups to determine the

extent, nature, and sustainability of Indigenous children's gains that are attributable to AHS participation. Also, to achieve equity for Indigenous children through ECEC[25], the federal government should prioritize the following actions:

- Invest in community based, culturally relevant, accredited, career-laddered training for Indigenous ECEC practitioners, incorporating non-traditional delivery models (e.g., blended, cohort driven) and supports (e.g., Indigenous mentors, preparatory and ongoing skills supports, transportation and computer hardware).
- Develop ECEC leadership that encompasses Indigenous knowledge.
- Expand access to holistic, locally fitting ECEC programs like AHS for Indigenous children from birth to 8 years of age.
- Support Indigenous children's transitions to school and early experiences of success.
- Fund longitudinal and comparative research on innovative Indigenous ECEC programs such as AHS and others. (p. 360).

In the absence of further investigation; however, it is likely that lingering questions about the role of First Nation educational programming of this kind and the manner in which it contributes not to the improvement of our well being, but rather to the colonial process of maintaining the status quo, will arise.

It is also worth noting the role of the AHSOR program as an example of a locally controlled and designed program as an area for future research. Throughout the process of completing this thesis, questions arose within me about the true nature and intent of the AHSOR program as a locally controlled and designed program. The complexity and duality of the Crown/First Nation relationship, coupled with loose policy and program frameworks almost preclude this objective entirely and instead left me with the impression that the AHSOR program only provides the

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[25] ECEC: Early Childhood Education and Care

illusion of control. As a result, the responsibility for the ultimate failure or success of the program squarely in the hands of local First Nation communities, while the federal government stands at the sidelines echoing its benevolent intentions while ignoring their complicities.

**Concluding Comments**

As Aboriginal people, the reality and crises of our day-to-day existence need not be quantified by government statistics or reports in order to be made real. Rather, it is made real by our ever-present awareness of the growing number of empty desks in band-run schools; in the corresponding overrepresentation of our people in the provincial school system; in the disproportionately small numbers of us entering post-secondary institutions; in the growing number of our children in the child welfare system; in the persistent and alarming number of us who are poor, homeless, and without food and clean water. It is also made real in the in the growing number of us who crowd social assistance offices when forced from our home communities because of the social and economic destitution found therein; it is also in the number of Aboriginal men and women who are discriminated against in society; under the law, in the workplace, in our wages, and in the low-level jobs we often occupy.

We know these truths acutely. We see it, feel it; we live it. We also understand and recognize that our present is foreshadowed by a long and painful history that, to many, situates and makes meaningful, work done by countless Aboriginal people who seek equity and recognition.  The struggle for our people in the face of these crises has historically been about the recognition and restoration of our rights; about the recognition and fulfillment of treaty obligations; about rectifying and truth telling of the injustices of the present and the past. It has never been about maximizing our wealth, positioning ourselves as leaders in the capital markets, or as full participants in Canadian society. We are Canada. For the non-Aboriginal population however, statistics and governmental reports regarding our people work well to support and justify neo-liberal pursuits whose ultimate goal is

not to support the vision and principles of a renewed relationship between Aboriginals and the Crown, or to pay recognition to the undeniable history that has gotten us to this point, but rather to capitalize on the backs of the truly disadvantaged for the sake of national economic prosperity and individual wealth generation. The pursuit of these goals has historically been, and continues to be, about 'making the most out of the Indian' and less about honouring the treaties and other promises made thereafter.

Coming to understand and articulate the discontinuity between these aims formed a significant part of this work. Although not the primary intent and purpose, governmental discourse was reframed in order to rearticulate and reposition the situation as it should be: governmental goals that are less-than-altruistic and that have been sold, and consumed, as both benign and benevolent through calculated and carefully crafted discourse in policy texts, government reports, and statistical analyses. In turn, these efforts have resulted in the valorization of the federal governmental that reify the mythology of "Canada as Peacemaker" (Regan, 2010, p. 83) while simultaneously rendering our crises as 'perceptions of maltreatment' by the state rather than as fact.

For me, the question remains: what now? Coming away from all of this leaves me with ever greater questions, but more importantly - even greater hope for the future of Aboriginal education in Canada. As Taiaiake Alfred (1999) articulates, "education holds the promise for positive change" (p. 132) and that:

> Education holds the key because in creating a general historical sensitivity and a critical awareness of reality, it activates a basic human urge to move reality closer to the ideal – to close the gap that, until now, the state has worked to obscure by denying history, lying about its true intentions vis-à-vis indigenous people, and co-opting those who might challenge it's power (p. 132).

Achieving these educational ideals remains a significant challenge for First Nation communities. We are faced with a multitude of social maladies that plague and stagnate our growth in this domain; yet there is hope and there is a deepening resistance among our people to the "processes of imperialism" (Stewart-Harawira, 2005, p. 201). As Stewart-Harawira (2005) so aptly states: "For indigenous peoples, the immediate and urgent question is the nature of our response" (p. 201).

Indeed.

**After Thoughts**

> ...it is our brokenness that leads us to healing. Each of us, in our own way,
> lives a fractured life. There would be no need for spirituality if this
> weren't so. By the time he was an elder, Jack had learned that the search
> for spirituality is the great bond that joins us. The problems of the world
> are not political in nature - they are spiritual. The difficulty comes when
> we try to solve the world's problems with our minds alone. Our heads
> can't lead us home, though; spiritual matters must be resolved with the
> heart. The head has no answers, and the heart has no questions...
> (Wagamese, 2011, p. 171).

In the weeks that followed the final submission of this work to my graduate supervisor, I had the honour of meeting with the committee members who were selected to review and evaluate it.  The discussion that emanated from the meeting with Dr. Randy Wimmer, Dr. Larry Prochner, and Dr. Makere Stewart-Harawira not only offered different perspectives to the research questions I posed from within my work, but also invaluable insights as to how I might close the somewhat fragmented circle of information about the research methodology, theoretical framework, and related processes and methods used herein.

In light of their observations, and after reviewing my work after this meeting, it dawned on me that perhaps I have left some lingering questions in the mind of reader; or that perhaps the reader may want to understand more definitely the reasons behind the chosen methodologies, theories, and processes that I have not fully articulated throughout this work. Although not intentional, much of what I have left unsaid stems first and foremost from my orientation to understanding and speaking about issues from an intellectual versus a spiritual or emotional level. When writing the Research Methodology section of this work, for example,

I described how I was left nearly speechless, wordless perhaps, since Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM) inspires, if not absolutely requires, the researcher to approach the topic under study from an emotional and spiritual place; a place of complete honesty and vulnerability. Prior to undertaking the emotional and spiritual journey required in this regard, I was not able to articulate and situate this work from an Indigenous perspective, nor could I claim that it was adhering to the tenets of IRM, since I was approaching it from an entirely intellectual level; one that was devoid of an apparent connection to my heart, to my being, and to my spirit as an Aboriginal woman and scholar. Painful as it was on many levels, I laboured through the process; clinging to a faint spectre of hope that what would result would invariably free this work from the intellectual and make a connection to an emotional and spiritual foundation. My hope is that although this work was not community-based and since I did not work " as part of a team of Indigenous scholars and thinkers...with the guidance of Elder(s) or knowledge keepers" (Wilson, 2007, p. 195); that the principles of IRM however, emanate throughout this work and are ever-present in the language, purpose, and desired outcomes that I speak of herein. The principles of IRM, while not explicitly stated throughout, guided this work and guided me to ensure that I was showing "respect for all forms of life" (Wilson, 2007, p. 195) and that the manner in which I presented data, information, and historical contexts in this regard were premised in the "spirit of kindness, honesty, and compassion" (Wilson, 2007, p. 195).

On a secondary level, the process I described within the research methodology was painful on many levels since it required that I speak truthfully and vulnerably about the pain I have long carried in my heart and mind and it forced me to confront my brokenness that would invariably lead to healing. Perhaps more importantly, the process also guided me to the realization that, as Richard Wagamese so eloquently states, I live a "fractured life" (2011, p. 171). While some may chose to escape the discomfort this location affords; I, on the other hand, am now more at ease with the inherent discomfort and have purposely

chosen to live and speak from within the fractured space: it is what I know; it is how I see and navigate through the world.

The unique position, or the fractured space I occupy in this world, is both complicated and political in that I am neither an insider-looking-out nor am I am outsider-looking-in: I am both. My adoption and subsequent upbringing in a non-Aboriginal environment has meant that I have had to interpret the world through two sets of lenses; one set sees and interprets the world from the Indigenous point of view, and vice versa. Much of my time as a youth in the non-Aboriginal world, for instance, was spent absorbing, interpreting, analyzing the messages I heard about my people from the non-Aboriginal perspective. As I grew older, and as my profession afforded me the opportunity, I have spent countless hours observing, interpreting, analyzing from an Aboriginal perspective, and all the while trying to reconcile the painful discontinuity between these two worlds. As I have previously described, navigating and occupying this space has been painful and has wrought havoc on my identity; however, the fractured space from which I speak has formed organically and is neither forced nor shape-shifted to suit this purpose. My early life experiences have equipped me with the tools to occupy this space comfortably and with purpose, which I will briefly outline below.

I am the adopted daughter of two loving parents who were themselves by-products of two maladjusted generations. My adoptive father, for instance, was raised in a highly intellectual home in the 1930's where children were neither seen nor heard. As he would later describe to me, his emotional and spiritual self was both suffocated and sublimated during his childhood and it would not be until his late fifties that his emotional and spiritual journey would begin and where his healing could happen. My adoptive mother, similarly, was raised in the early 1950s in the deep southern state of Virginia. Her upbringing meant that she too could not, and would not be permitted, express herself or explore her emotional and spiritual side at the expense of family honour and pride. Even up to her death in 1992, I have little recollection of my mother allowing herself the space express

and exert her emotional and spiritual self. The end result was that I was raised in a fairly emotionally vacant household. It was here, rather early in life, that I became an expert at interpreting the silence, at paying close attention to gestures and facial expressions, at gauging the emotional temperature of any given room, of reading between the lines, and at interpreting all the things left unsaid. Even now as an adult, I am unconscious at times of my ability to interpret various messages from others, but that ultimately guide my understanding of issues. It is from these experiences that I have grown to be the individual I am today: the observer, the interpreter.

This invariably leads to theoretical frameworks and processes that guided and were evident throughout this work. I chose Human Capital Theory as the theoretical framework in that it so well articulated what I believe was the understated, yet firmly embedded, agenda within governmental policy texts that I studied for this purpose. While it did occur to me that perhaps an alternate theory might better support and align with Indigenous Research Methodology; choosing an alternate framework did not honour my experiences and could not articulate factually what it was I was trying to say. Akerman (2010), for instance, employed Grounded Theory to her work on *The Image of the Child from the Perspective of the Plains Cree Elders and Plains Cree Early Childhood Teachers*, since it allowed for the "explanation of a phenomena" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 487 in Akerman, 2010, p. 24) that was interested in the "views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, and ideologies of individuals than in gathering facts and describing acts" (Creswell, 2008, p. 439 in Akerman, 2010, p. 24). Although I am keenly interested in garnering an increased understanding of values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions etc. in a broad sense, the topic under consideration in this work is guided by my experiences from within the fractured space and through the various lenses that I use to understand and interpret the world around me. I have, and am perhaps complicit with, the first-hand knowledge of the inner-workings of the Crown/First Nation relationship. I have observed from both points (inside and outside) the relentless desire, on the one hand, to solve the Indian problem by way

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of targeted investments, and on the other, for the unyielding pursuit of increased control by First Nations and for a lessening of the paternalistic controls the *Indian Act* enforces. I have sat in these rooms, observing the silence, studying the faces, and interpreting all the things left unsaid.

I have also come to better understand through observation and analysis that Indian education in Canada has historically been, and perhaps continues to be, less about achieving equity.  Rather, a discussion on the matter often turns to the extent of financial returns on investments where Indigenous peoples are rendered voiceless, faceless, and to mere numbers and statistics. Human capital theory, therefore, situates and makes real the experiences and the observations that I have bore witness to over the years and that fuel the desire to speak truthfully, with purpose, and in a way that "brings benefit to the community" (Wilson, 2007, p. 195).

While I was not entirely conscious of it at the time, when writing the chapter on Methods, Theories and Process (p. 24) I was utilizing what is commonly referred to as discourse analysis. It would not be until my graduate supervisor alerted me to this fact that I began to pay closer attention to both my actions and intentions. Up to that point, I had not yet examined why I was analyzing discourse in government policy text, or what had prompted me to do so. In preparation for the committee meeting, I took some time to reflect on why discourse analysis was the chosen tool to examine and help make evident the points I argue throughout my work. Then it dawned on me that - perhaps unbeknownst to me - I had been formally trained to do so. In the years since I first started working for the government, the process for coding and decoding text to and from the Department is silent yet pervasive. It permeates in most of the work that we as bureaucrats engage in, and that has demarcated much of my career from within this institution. Over the years, I have become grown increasingly aware of how language; specifically words, sentences, verbs, and nouns, are manipulated and massaged in order to send the message of benign and benevolent intent. Understood in this way, further reflection on the process I used when analyzing policy texts became

increasingly apparent. Indeed, I grew an increasing awareness and further came to the realization that when I reframed the agenda and understood more clearly government's ulterior intentions, common words within policy texts, governmental reports, and statistical analyses suddenly started springing up and off the pages. In fact, words that I initially assessed as meaningless or benign, suddenly took on a different shape and an entirely different tone. From this point, I searched government texts, both recent and historic, that spoke specifically about Aboriginal education. For the most part, these texts were fairly inexplicit about the underlying intent of investment; however, others were more explicit in this regard. To support assertions made within this work about the true intention of investments to Aboriginal education, I chose texts that framed Aboriginal education in the light of serving a more specific federal purpose: to fill a labour gap and to reduce mounting fiscal pressures. More recent government policy texts make explicit reference to the 'investment in Aboriginal education' and/or individual or national 'prosperity', which may very well be an indication that Aboriginal education in Canada has been aligned to meet the broader goals and direction of the current leadership of this country. While I did not, in fact, count the number of times certain phrases or words appeared, it was clear in my reading that the predominant theme was that of a return on investment, a theme that I also observed to be recurring in alternate sources (e.g., books (e.g. Helin), statistics (e.g. Statistics Canada) etc.). Hence, this became the lens through which I analyzed these texts and has assisted me to articulate my position within this work. Cumulatively, and when these texts when taken as a whole, a much darker picture emerged - one that placed the marginalized further outside the boundaries of true equity and one in which the government maintained it's entrenched position of power that strived even harder to achieve a position of positive fiscal balance.

But I am not alone in this practice. Mikmaq scholar, lawyer, and professor Pamela Palmater (2013), for instance, often engages in discourse analysis and in a recent blog post on her website entitled *Fact Versus Rhetoric: Response to INAC's*

*Misinformation About Bill S-2*, she engages in the process of deconstructing and rearticulating (from a fact-based Indigenous perspective) messages from the Crown about the impending legislation affecting First Nations people on reserve entitled the *Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act*. These practices are not unique, nor are they new. Indeed, First Nations and the Crown have long engaged in the practice of coding and decoding text; from the early days of treaty negotiations, to even more present terms in relation to funding agreements, statements by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, and perhaps most notably by the Prime Minister of Canada. But we are not alone; there are many, including myself, who willingly or unwillingly, knowingly or unknowingly, passively or actively: we are engaging in this way, and this process has shaped our relationship for nearly two hundred years.

And perhaps it is for this reason that I chose Indigenous research methodology, human capital theory, and discourse analysis for this purpose; that is, it appropriately situated the facts, fairly represented my experience, and made real the experiences of many Indigenous people across Canada who can feel their invisibility but who are unable to articulate the reasons behind it. Although somewhat unique in its approach, my hope is that this work speaks truthfully and factually from my fractured space and that it gives voice to all the things left unsaid, and to the spaces in between the lines.

Lastly, I would like to address the Dedication of this work to my daughter Natanis Deane Kemble, who, when I started my graduate program 5 years ago, was only 5 weeks old. My days spent at home with her as an infant, coupled with the nights I spent away from her to attend graduate courses at the U of A, brought an entirely different meaning and purpose to the direction of my studies, as well as to the final piece of the large picture – my master's thesis. When initially confronted with the idea of choosing a topic, my final choice was ultimately shaped by the growth and development of my daughter throughout these years. As she grew, I grew. As she learned, I learned. As she expressed her desire for increasingly more

challenging learning opportunities, I stretched to meet her needs. Then, and even now as she is on the crux of entering the education system full-time, I was confronted with the reality that her life, my life, our life, could have been so much different. That perhaps had my life taken a different course, we might have had the challenge of addressing her early childhood education needs in an on-reserve setting and that Natanis and I might have had to approach her development in the face of a dire lack of available financial and other resources. Larger questions emerged from these realizations such as: knowing what I know, understanding what I understand: Would I send Natanis into the AHSOR program? Why? Why not? Even further, would I want the AHSOR program to be the place where her foundation for learning and her future success rests?

The answers to those questions did not come easily. Being honest with myself meant that I could not deny that, I would most likely not send my daughter into the AHSOR program, if only for the very basic fact that the program has yet to fully understand and articulate itself – both successes and failures – to the population it serves. From the point of view of an on-reserve parent, perhaps my answer would be different; perhaps the AHSOR program is the only choice available; the last vestige of hope in a rather stark and bleak reality that far too many Aboriginal people in this country must endure.

That is not to say that the AHSOR program is a failure. While there is considerable burden placed on early childhood development programs in general (i.e.: often they are deemed to be the panacea to predominant social malaise within communities or groups), I believe that the AHSOR program holds considerable promise and the program is starting the process of evaluating outcomes so that improvements to the program can be made, and so that participating children can benefit to the fullest extent. In the end, however, the challenge for the future of the AHSOR program, for those who implement, design, and deliver it, as well as for policy-makers, will be evidenced in the extent to which they rise to the challenge.

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