

# The Path to Education in a Canadian Aboriginal Context

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*The researchers are members of the white mainstream who wish through research to gain a better understanding of the Aboriginal reality and hope to assist this heterogeneous group in its quest for self-determination and access to the majority culture. This article constitutes a section of thesis research and examines the associations between retention/identification with ethnicity, various aspects of identity formation, and mobility on levels of academic achievement of Canadian Aboriginal people. A secondary analysis of a sample of 636 respondents to the 1991 Aboriginal Peoples Survey was conducted. The variables examined include: participation in ethnic activities and Native language(s); having Aboriginal teachers; Aboriginal language(s) being used in the classroom; Aboriginal language facility; liking what was taught in school about Native people and history; and number of schools attended. Both bivariate and multivariate analyses indicated significant relationships between educational attainment and Aboriginal language facility, liking what was taught about Aboriginal people in elementary school, and number of high schools attended. Recommendations for future research include the use of more precise data on the variables of interest in order to predict confidently the factors that affect educational achievement among Canada's Aboriginal people.*

## *Participation in Aboriginal Ethnic Activities and/or Languages and Educational Achievement*

Through the years the education of North American Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> people and their success in mainstream society has been the topic of much debate. Historically, this debate has centered on the Native "problem" and how to encourage—or force—Native people to assimilate into the white, middle-class, Protestant culture that dominates this continent through the use of a formal education system (Adams, 1989; York, 1990). However, efforts to this end have largely been unsuccessful, primarily due to the strength of retention of Aboriginal culture and ethnicity and the use of methods of assimilation that have been notoriously barbaric and cruel such as the residential school system (Kirkness, 1998). For many Native people, the notion of Western formal education as it is popularly understood translates into abandonment of their culture and frustrated intellectualism (Bailey, 2000). As Bailey points out, "education is legislated by a white government" (p. 128, see also Marker, 2000; Wilson & Wilson, 2002). Furthermore, formal education is legally required and of dubious value to many who live on reserves (Adams, 1989).

Over time, Aboriginal people have come to desire those aspects of white culture and society that denote good things according to the dominant group:

wealth, health care, and consumerism, for example. Unfortunately, such appreciation has not been a two-way proposition. Native Canadian cultures, although slowly becoming recognized for their teachings and the many things they have to offer, have but for the struggles of the few all but disappeared (Adams, 1989; York, 1990). Those who have held onto and passed on traditional Native North American cultural beliefs not only to their children, but also to their people at large have been those who are in positions of relative power and authority. They are those who, in other words, have gained respect in the white dominant society. North American society respects education and the assumed intelligence that goes with it and rewards these achievements.

For most Aboriginal people, however, these rewards are out of reach. Bailey (2000) argues that for the Aboriginal person, success in mainstream education may mean "some form of personal amputation" (p. 126) and that the pursuit of mainstream rewards may not necessarily be a worthy goal. Be that as it may, upward mobility in Canada is dictated in large part by education levels, and for a number of reasons Native Canadian people in general are not achieving the educational levels of their counterparts in white mainstream society (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996b). Aboriginal dropout rates are staggering, fertility rates are about twice as high as the national average, and the risk of suicide and risky behavior such as alcohol and drug abuse is phenomenal: six times the national average in Canada, higher than in the United States (Miller, 1989; Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000; Robertson, 2003; Statistics Canada, 1998a).

It has been established that children living in poverty are more likely to leave school early than are their peers who possess more advantages (Clarke, 1997), and Native US and Native Canadian children are the most likely minority groups to live in poverty (Adams, 1989; Myers, 1993). Something that has the potential of being even more damaging is the tendency of researchers and educators to "mis-label ... the conditions of poverty as the conditions of culture and its incongruence with the school environment" (Clarke, 1997, p. 63). The tendency is to confuse minority-group behavior with minority culture, that is, to attribute those behaviors that are common to groups wielding little or no power and/or living in poverty to being an innate characteristic of that group's cultural value and belief system (Macionis, Clarke, & Gerber, 1994). Such assumptions blame the victim and assume that the cultural values of Aboriginal people are what constrain their upward mobility into the relative affluence of the rest of society (Adams, 1989). Macionis et al. (1994) state:

Such attitudes assume that social disadvantage stems from personal deficiency. This stereotypical view ignores some key facts: that most poor people in Canada are white and that most members of visible minorities work as hard as anyone else and are not poor. In this case the bit of truth in the stereotype is that, proportionately, Natives.... are more likely than whites to be poor. (p. 325)

As Sadker and Sadker (1994) point out, education is the most frequent vehicle to societal advantages such as wealth and power, and, therefore, the tremendously high dropout rate of Aboriginal children is a problem that must be addressed. Although Sadker and Sadker were addressing the problem of how the school system helps male students to a better education than that offered to girls, the same

argument can be made for those students considered lower-class or of minority status (Levesque & Lowe, 1992).

It is proposed that at the heart of these problems are issues of identity. Issues of identity go hand-in-hand with those of educational achievement, and indeed the retention of heritage and a strong cultural identity has been identified as being the single most important factor in predicting the academic achievement of Native Americans (Deyhle, 1989; Huffman, Sill, & Brokenleg, 1986; Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). Identification with others who are like oneself in terms of heritage and belief systems is important to the formation of identity for children (Harter, 1999). Because the educational system plays an extremely influential role in the lives of North American children beginning at an early age, it is crucial that impressionable youth be exposed to information and leaders who reflect back to them their own worth.

Unfortunately, for a great many Aboriginal children, subtle and blatant hostility and discrimination become evident early in life (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). The absence of Aboriginal teachers in the educational system makes for a lack of Native role models right from the beginning. In fact Kirkness (1986) found that 91-95% of Native students felt that white teachers did not like Aboriginal people, and so even those who purport to educate Aboriginal children become the vehicle of their failure. York (1990) notes that Native students are more willing to participate in classroom activities and discussions when their teacher is Aboriginal and are in general more responsive in the classroom setting (Sanders, 1987).

It is questionable whether the same rewards and goals are attainable by Native people as those enjoyed by the dominant society. The Manitoba Task Force on Post-Secondary Education and Balfour pointed out in 1973 that for Native students, "their often poor performance is not an absolute, but a function of unequal opportunity and the resulting low interest" (p. 14). When it becomes evident as a result of low expectations of the school system (Dingman, Mroczka, & Brady, 1995; Kenealy & Frude, 1991) that not only will Aboriginal children have to work twice as hard to obtain the achievement levels of their white counterparts, but also that society is actively preventing them from reaching these goals, many children would naturally give up and pursue other avenues in life. These alternative roads may not lead toward the realization of their full human potential. In fact it is likely that with a lack of education, the road leads to chronic poverty and the loss of human capital. As noted by Harter (1999), identity formation through identification with culture and heritage is important for later achievement in children, and such achievement levels include education.

The majority of Aboriginal youth do not complete high school. They leave the school system without the requisite skills for employment, and without the language and cultural knowledge of their people. Rather than nurturing the individual, the schooling experience typically erodes identity and self-worth. (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996b, p. 434)

Because a feeling of pride in one's heritage and culture is important to individual achievement in life, the fact that about a fifth as many Aboriginal people still participate in tribal traditions as in 1890 when the Native population was 10

times smaller (Peroff, 1997) creates the impression that pride in heritage may be lacking in the average Aboriginal student. This lack of participation, however, could well be due to the increase in modern distractions such as television, video games, and movies. Whatever the cause, a decrease in participation may also indicate a decrease in connection with their culture.

A decrease in connection with culture may lead to a decrease in self-acceptance. Earlier studies of Aboriginal adolescents found significantly lower levels of self-acceptance among those Natives in their early teens compared with their white counterparts (Bognar, 1981). As these children get older, matters of self-acceptance become worse at the postsecondary stage (Harter, 1999), and historically Aboriginal people have been grossly underrepresented among college and university graduates in Canada and the US (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). There is a great imperative to correct this lack of representation, because it is necessary in the maintenance of cultural integrity for "First Nations people to assume roles as teachers, doctors, lawyers, administrators, comptrollers, architects, historians, etc." (p. 6). Statistics Canada (1998b) reports that despite some small, general improvements in the educational attainment of Aboriginal people, Native people over 15 years old still remain half as likely as other Canadians of the same age to hold a postsecondary degree or diploma, one fifth as likely to be a university graduate, and over twice as likely not to have finished high school at all (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000; York, 1990).

Recent research and educational policies have recognized that the student's background, home life, culture, and innate intellectual ability play a much larger role in academic success than was previously acknowledged (Harter, 1999). Therefore, due to such inherent dispositions, the reality of education for each person is largely defined by the individual. The system itself, though, is still struggling to approach an approximation of individually tailored educational programs when it has been firmly mired for centuries in rather rigid, group-based ideologies (Adams, 1989). Such ideologies purported to encompass all students equally; however, certain minorities such as Native Americans have been notoriously offered substandard educational programs (Adams, 1989; Frideres, 1998; O'Brien, 1990; York, 1990). In fact a 1984 report issued by the Alberta government

concluded that native students "are being treated as second-class citizens by our educational system." It said there is "much to be done to redress the neglect, ill-conceived policies and paternalistic approach that has for too long symbolized the state of native education." (York, 1990, p. 51)

Such inferior educational programs have all but guaranteed that Aboriginal people as a group would be relegated to menial and low-paying jobs, if they were able to find work at all. Such institutionalized discrimination in turn has led to a societal group that, because they lack those things recognized as valuable by the mainstream society, are markedly disadvantaged.

No minority group seems as militantly preoccupied with cultural resurgence as do the Aboriginals of North America (Boyer, 1989). Such preoccupation undoubtedly exists because historically no other North American minority group has been so systematically abused and silenced as have Aboriginal people in terms of the cultural genocide that was attempted for the hundreds of years since first contact

with white Western ideology (Adams, 1989; Dickason, 1997; Frideres, 1998; York, 1990). As Fitzgerald (1993) points out, "Evidence suggests that, in today's ... society, we are dealing less with the revival of ethnicity (language and custom) and more with a resurgence of ethnic consciousness (assertions of identity)" (p. 83).

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (1996b) states:

In public schools, the absence of support for Aboriginal identities is overwhelming: no Aboriginal high school teachers; only a limited curriculum dealing with contemporary Aboriginal languages, cultures, history and political issues; an emphasis on intellectual cognitive achievement at the expense of spiritual, social and physical development; and the marginalization of youth in decision making about their education (p. 477).

Kay (1983) has this to say regarding issues of identity and the Aboriginal student: "the Native student with a strong cultural identity and a sense of Native history and is the student who remains in school longer, enjoys ... success, and has higher aspirations in his occupational outlook" (p. 30, see also Kirkness, 1998). According to the literature as addressed above, the presence of like role models, Native language(s), and family support are all important to the realization of the educational goals of Native people.

Studies that focus on the incentives, motivations, and causes of increased consumption of education by white mainstream society are valuable in identifying potential gaps that may be addressed to the benefit of those children who are raised as part of the majority. However, such studies need to be added to and enhanced with a focus on Native North American people with the admission that Aboriginal children do not grow up in an environment like that of white children. Aboriginal children grow up as part of a minority group in terms of Canadian society in general, and moreover are made keenly aware that this particular minority group has been considered less desirable, less intelligent, less worthy, and just generally *less* than any other group in North America (Miller, 1989). Further study into the areas of incentives, motivations, and causes of increased consumption of education, and practical application of such studies may go a long way toward rectifying present inequalities.

The purpose of this study is to explore the connections between educational achievement and participation in tribal and ethnic customs (such participation is considered cultural participation or retention for the purposes of this article) among Aboriginal people, because the acquisition and retention of an identity is integral to adaptation to and the adoption of a value system. Such a value system may or may not be that of the mainstream culture, but it is expected that through the study of cultural participation, Aboriginal language use, student mobility, the presence or absence of Aboriginal mentors or role models, and the positive or negative information presented about Aboriginal people (as these factors relate to levels of education), a better understanding will be gained of the importance of participation in ethnic traditions to adaptation to mainstream society, specifically toward education.

### *Method*

This study examined the relationship between educational attainment and mobility, participation in ethnic traditions (including language), perceptions of

Aboriginal-based content taught in school, and the presence of Native Canadian teachers. The sample was drawn from the 1991 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) and consisted of those individuals aged 30-49 with complete information. The ultimate sample size was 636.

The 1991 APS was a telephone survey conducted by Statistics Canada and based on the 1991 Census. Those who completed the Census form and indicated Aboriginal heritage were subsequently interviewed about a number of aspects of their lives and experiences. It was the first survey of its kind in Canada, and approximately 36,600 people of Aboriginal heritage were successfully interviewed. The data produced from this survey forms the 1991 APS and encompasses Native people living in scattered regions across Canada, both urban and rural. Thus there is representation from every province and territory and from large cities and small reserves (Statistics Canada, 1993).

### *Results and Discussion*

In terms of demographics, 73.9% (470) of the sample was between the ages of 30 and 39, and 26.1% (166) was between the ages of 40 and 49. Men constituted 43.1% (274) of the sample, and women 56.9% (362). Married people made up well over half of those included in the sample, at 61.2% (389). All areas of Canada were well represented according to population.

### *Ethnic or Tribal Activities*

It was hypothesized that Aboriginal people who participated in traditional tribal ceremonies would have higher levels of education than those who did not, and a Chi-square test indicated that for this sample there was no relationship between participating in traditional ethnic events and levels of educational attainment (Table 1). It is speculated that this absence of relationship may be due to the parity that exists for this sample between negative and affirmative answers to the question of whether the respondents participated in traditional cultural activities. The number of people who answered *yes* and *no* to this question were almost equal, which may lead a statistical test to conclude that no relationship exists. However, this result also may be evidence of the recent cultural resurgence that has taken place among the Aboriginal population of North America. It may be speculated that such participation is more valuable now than it may have been in the past, for example, 11 years ago when the 1991 APS was conducted, and thus it may be more rewarding to the individual to participate.

### *Language Retention*

Second, it was supposed that Native Canadian people who spoke an Aboriginal language, either as a mother tongue or that had been learned at a later age, would display higher educational attainment than those who did not. A Spearman's rho one-tailed test of significance indicated that a significant negative relationship existed between facility in Aboriginal languages and educational attainment (Table 2). In other words, being able to speak, read, or write in an Aboriginal language was associated with lower educational attainment. This result may be because Aboriginal language(s) may not have been useful in the day-to-day context of most educational institutions attended by the respondents. In Canada formal education



Table 1

*Chi-Square Results for Participation in Ethnic/Tribal Activities, Family Support, and Presence and Affirmation of Native Culture (N=636)*

Variable	n	Highest Level of Schooling %	df	$\chi^2$	Sig.
<i>Participation in Cultural Activities</i>					
Participated in traditional activities					
No	293	46.1			
Yes	343	53.9	4	1.491	.828
<i>Presence and Affirmation of Native Culture</i>					
Liked what was taught about Aboriginal people in elementary school					
No	133	20.9			
Yes, some of the time	182	28.6			
Yes, usually	321	50.5	8	50.429*	.000
Liked what was taught about Aboriginal people in high school					
No	115	18.1			
Yes, some of the time	178	28.0			
Yes, usually	343	53.9	8	45.018*	.000

\* $p < .05$ .

is delivered in English or French, and thus being able to speak a Native language may not assist the individual.

Native languages are most often spoken on reserves, where enclaves of people live who may have retained cultural traditions in isolation from mainstream society. Children on reserves, then, may be exposed to their Native language and may well have the ability to speak this language on entering elementary school. However, during elementary school, which is usually taught on reserve, the instruction has commonly taken place in English, as this is the language of instruction at the universities the teachers attend. On completion of elementary school, Aboriginal children usually must leave the reserve to attend high school in cities and larger centers where any Aboriginal language remaining in their repertoire may be further eroded. Alternatively, those who have gained an Aboriginal language at an early age may elect to remain on the reserve, which has limited educational opportunities, and forgo any opportunities to leave the community to obtain a higher education.

The cultural resurgence presently being experienced by Aboriginal groups may not have been present while the respondents from the 1991 APS were going to school. Harter (1999) notes that as people go through adolescence, issues of identity become paramount, and the perception of the fit between the individual and his or her peers becomes an urgent matter. Therefore, it could be conjectured that the Native person who may have spoken an Aboriginal language as a child might make no effort to retain that language if it does not facilitate the individual's efforts

to fit in with the adolescents in junior high or high school who may be predominantly white in many communities. However, the initial sense of identity and inclusion in the culture of origin may be internalized to the degree that it makes a positive difference in terms of educational achievement in the Aboriginal youth of today.

### *Mobility*

The third hypothesis for this study stated that Aboriginal people who attended several elementary and/or secondary schools, and thus may have had less interaction with extended family members and/or a less settled lifestyle, would show a lower educational achievement level than those who attended only one school. The variables of number of elementary schools attended and number of high schools attended were tested separately using one-tailed Spearman's rho tests of significance. The results indicate that a significant relationship exists between the number of elementary schools attended and levels of educational attainment for this sample (Table 2). Similarly, the one-tailed Spearman's rho results show a significant relationship for number of high schools attended. In other words, an increase in the number of schools attended is associated with increased educational attainment. This result was unexpected, as it had been previously shown that increased mobility generally means decreased education levels (Eberhard, 1989). However, those students who attended multiple schools may have been able to take advantage of the various strengths of such schools in terms of programs, equipment, or academic staff and therefore increase their own ability to take on higher levels of education. As well, the notion that increased mobility in terms of schools attended may lead to less contact with extended family may not be borne out, as often people move within the same neighborhood. Thus although the school catchment area may change, social contacts may not. Further, contact with extended family is no longer as dependent on face-to-face interaction as it once was, but may take place via such means as telephone, letter, or e-mail.

It is also important to note that attendance at only one school does not necessarily predict achievement in higher education. The notable exception to the extant findings that increased mobility leads to decreased educational attainment would be for those who attended residential schools. Aboriginal people who attended residential schools are likely to have attended only one school, but yet might have a lower educational attainment due to the negative experiences encountered in such an educational setting (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996a; York, 1990). Under such circumstances, attending a greater number of schools would be beneficial to the student.

### *Like Educators or Role Models*

It was predicted that Aboriginal people who had Aboriginal teachers for at least part of their schooling, or whose teachers used Aboriginal language(s) in their teaching, would evidence a level of education higher than those who did not. Instead, the results indicate a significant negative relationship between these factors. A one-tailed Spearman's rho was used to test the relationship between the scale variable of having Aboriginal teachers or having been exposed to Aboriginal languages in the classroom at any point during the respondent's education, and



Table 2

*Spearman's rho Results for Language Retention, Mobility and Like Educators/Role Models by Highest Level of Schooling (N=636)*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Highest Level of Schooling %</i>	<i>Spearman's rho</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
<i>Language Retention</i>				
Aboriginal language facility (able to speak, read, or write)				
None	411	64.6		
One of three	166	26.1		
Two of three	18	2.8		
Three of three	41	6.4	-.192*	.000
<i>Mobility</i>				
Number of elementary schools attended				
One	255	40.1		
Two	152	23.9		
Three	130	20.4		
Four	49	7.7		
Five	21	3.3		
Six or more	29	4.6	.121*	.001
Number of high schools attended				
None	375	59.0		
Two	178	28.0		
Three	56	8.8		
Four	19	3.0		
Five	7	1.1		
Six or more	1	.2	.158*	.000
<i>Like Educators/Role Models</i>				
Aboriginal teachers or language used in elementary and/or high school				
None	476	74.8		
One of four	92	14.5		
Two of four	46	7.2		
Three of four	22	3.5		
Four of four	0	0	-.077*	.026

\* $p < .05$ .

the results indicate a significant negative relationship (Table 2). For these respondents, being exposed to Aboriginal teachers and/or Aboriginal languages in school is associated with lower educational attainment. The greater the number of Aboriginal teachers and/or exposure to Aboriginal language use in the classroom, the lower was the educational attainment, and vice versa. This finding does not appear to support the contention that having like role models is important to the

realization of educational potential. It has been said to be important to have members of one's own group in positions of power and authority in order to recognize that one is capable of the same performance (Adams, 1989; York, 1990), and although this may be true for the Aboriginal youth of today, the presence of like role models was evidently not predictive of educational achievement for the sample used in this study.

Having a like role model means having someone to compare oneself with and to strive to imitate. Next to parents and other family members, teachers are a child's first role models, and as such they are influential, particularly in the elementary school years. However, when the participants in this research were going to school (approximately 1948-1980), Aboriginal people may not have been much encouraged to take pride in their heritage. To be Native was to be excluded from the social, educational, and employment arenas enjoyed by the white majority, and therefore it may not have been desirable to imitate like role models or to seek identification with Aboriginal cultures.

### *Presence and Affirmation of Cultural Identity*

Sixth, it was supposed that Native Canadian people who liked what they were taught at school about Aboriginal history and people would exhibit higher levels of educational attainment than those who did not like what they were taught about their own people. According to a Chi-square test, there is a significant relationship for this sample between liking what they were taught about Aboriginal people in elementary school and educational attainment (Table 1). Similarly, a significant relationship is indicated at the high school level. Respondents who liked what they were taught about Aboriginal people in elementary and high school displayed higher academic achievement than their counterparts who did not. It could be speculated that an increase in positive information about one's culture leads to an increase in pride in heritage and therefore greater academic confidence and achievement.

### *The Combined Effect of Cultural and Motivational Variables on Education*

Finally, it was hypothesized that when all the factors listed above were considered together, they would all be significant predictors of educational achievement. The dependent variable of highest level of schooling was recoded to create a dichotomous variable, and a stepwise logistic regression was used to find the model that best explained educational attainment. A backward elimination procedure was used with all the above variables available for inclusion, together with sex, marital status, and age. Using this procedure, the model that best predicted the dependent variable of educational attainment comprised the variables of language facility, high school mobility, and liking what was taught about Aboriginals in elementary school. This model's predictive ability is 62.6%.

The results of the logistic regression analysis are reported in Table 3. For each unit increase in language facility, the odds are 0.7 times lower that the individual will obtain some degree of postsecondary education as opposed to obtaining a secondary school education or less. In other words, for each Aboriginal language ability present (speaking, reading, writing), the likelihood of attending a postsecondary institution was lower than the likelihood of obtaining only a second-

**Table 3**  
*Results of Stepwise Logistic Regression for Obtaining Postsecondary Education*  
 (N=636)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
Language facility	-.357	.104	.001	.700
High school mobility (per unit increase)	.272	.098	.006	1.313
Liked what was taught about Aboriginals in elementary school				
No (baseline)	0	—	—	1.00
Liked somewhat	-.086	.190	.652	.918
Liked	1.140	.249	.000	3.128
Constant	-.423	.228	.063	.655

Cox & Snell  $R^2 = .079$

Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .105$ .

dary education or less. The ability to speak, read, or write in an Aboriginal language may indicate a level of commitment and adherence to the culture that reduces commitment to formal education. It could be suggested that being articulate in an Aboriginal language is not conducive to obtaining higher degrees of education and, as suggested above, may actually be detrimental.

The odds of obtaining some degree of postsecondary education are 1.3 times higher for each additional high school attended. Therefore, for each additional high school attended, the odds of continuing to postsecondary education increases by 31%. As stated above, earlier research results have indicated the opposite (Eberhard, 1989).

The odds of continuing to postsecondary education are just over three times greater for those individuals who liked what they were taught about Aboriginal people in elementary school relative to those who did not. In contrast, the odds of obtaining postsecondary education for those who somewhat liked what they were taught were not significantly different from those who did not like what they were taught.

Whether the individual liked what he or she was taught about Aboriginal people in elementary school emerged as a significant and perhaps the most interesting predictor of whether that person would obtain any postsecondary education. If the individual liked what he or she was taught in elementary school, his or her odds of obtaining some degree of postsecondary education were 313% higher. This result is as expected, because as pointed out above an increase in positive information about one's culture was speculated to lead to an increase in pride in heritage and therefore greater academic confidence and achievement (Deyhle, 1989; Eberhard, 1989; Huffman et al., 1986). As Harter (1999) notes, the sense of identity and competence cultivated during the middle childhood stage of development has far-reaching and long-lasting effects.

It is important to note that three of the variables that emerged as significant in the bivariate analysis also remained significant in the logistic regression analysis. Whereas both elementary and high school mobility were significant in the bivariate analysis, only high school mobility emerged as significant in the multivariate analysis. Similarly, liking what was taught about Aboriginal people in school was significant for both elementary and high school at the bivariate level; however, in the results of the logistic regression, liking what was taught mattered only at the elementary school level. So it can safely be stated that for the respondents studied here, facility with an Aboriginal language, the number of high schools attended, and liking what was taught about Aboriginal people in elementary school are the most influential factors in determining the likelihood of obtaining postsecondary education.

### *Summary*

This study examined the relationship between participation in Aboriginal cultural activities such as speaking the language and attending ceremonies or rituals and educational achievement for Native Canadian individuals, using data from the APS (1991). Admittedly this research is limited in scope of cultural activities investigated due to the narrowness and dearth of questions asked of the participants in this area. However, investigations were also made into traditional motivators for participation in ethnic or tribal traditions, such as like role models, access to information about the mother culture and its history, identification with this information, and continuity in lifestyle based on the number of schools each person attended.

It was hypothesized that greater participation in cultural activities would increase educational attainment for Aboriginal people, as participation is affected through pride in heritage and self-identification with that heritage. Motivations for cultural participation through fostering of pride in culture and heritage were examined as the presence or absence of Aboriginal language, attendance at fewer schools in the primary and secondary educational levels, presence or absence of role models, being taught about Aboriginal culture and history, and liking what was taught about Aboriginal culture and history. It was hypothesized that increasing such motivators as being taught about Aboriginal culture and history, having Aboriginal role models, speaking a Native language, attending fewer schools, and the presence of cultural participation would increase educational achievement levels in the Aboriginal population.

With the exception of liking what was taught about Aboriginal people in school, number of schools attended, and facility with an Aboriginal language, the factors hypothesized to be related to level of education were not supported, and in some cases the relationship for factors that were significant was opposite to what was expected. These results indicate that the factors that influence educational achievement may not be the same for all individuals. Alternatively, measurement problems or other factors may have had an effect on the results.

It is hoped that further investigation, both quantitative and qualitative, will be undertaken in future. Issues of identification with culture and identity formation may be more thoroughly examined from an individual perspective and more generally examined from the broad perspective provided by the next Aboriginal

Peoples Survey, the data for which are expected to be available in 2003. Such research will further our understanding and, it is hoped, will assist future researchers and policymakers in determining the factors that influence educational achievement in the Aboriginal community and what is required to equalize opportunities present for all cultures.

#### Note

<sup>1</sup>The words *Aboriginal* and *Native* are used interchangeably here and describe all those registered under the Indian Act and those of any group who identify themselves as Aboriginal or Native in Canada.

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