



UAKN ATLANTIC

Fostering the Educational Success of Off-Reserve Aboriginal Learners on Prince Edward Island

KEY FINDINGS

Findings highlighted the following points to be important for student success:

- Solid relationships with caring teachers; a caring school environment; effective delivery of curriculum; hands-on activities; and internal/external support.
- Barriers to educational success identified were expressed as not enough social time in school; student and parent feelings of failure, frustration, and pressure; transition to new schools; and stories associated with racism.
- To provide learning experiences where students feel successful; to use multiple instructional methods; to thread more Aboriginal content and ways of knowing into mainstream education; to promote the Mi'kmaq language, culture, and spirituality; to have a greater Elder presence in education; and to promote sports, extra-curricular activities, and other such events throughout the school community.
- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaders, educators, parents, and community members to engage in rich discussions and to create an action plan related to educational success and wellbeing among Aboriginal learners on Prince Edward Island.
- Holistic principles that encompass the value of education and learning that supports the wellbeing of self, family, community, the land, the spirits and one's ancestors hold great strength when looking at educational success.

INTRODUCTION

According to Statistics Canada (2010), 1,730 of the population of Prince Edward Island self-identified as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit. Moreover, though, according to Statistics Canada (2010), about seven out of 10 Aboriginal people on Prince Edward Island reside off-reserve. No known research has focused on the educational experiences of *off-reserve* Aboriginal learners on Prince Edward Island. The purpose of this research is to address this knowledge gap and to describe the educational successes, challenges, and needs of off-

reserve Aboriginal learners in Prince Edward Island.

PARTNERSHIPS

Cox & Palmer Prince Edward Island

Native Council of Prince Edward Island

Prince Edward Island Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

University of Prince Edward Island

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to describe the educational success, challenges, and needs of off-reserve Aboriginal learners in Prince Edward Island. Semi-structured focus groups and individual interviews were used to ask the following research questions:

1. What aspects of the elementary to postsecondary educational system promote the educational success of off-reserve Aboriginal students?
2. What aspects of the elementary to postsecondary educational system do off-reserve Aboriginal students find challenging?
3. What are the educational needs of off-reserve Aboriginal learners in Prince Edward Island?

For this qualitative study, 55 participants volunteered for 26 interviews, which consisted of eight focus group interviews and 18 individual interviews based on the criteria of being an off-reserve Aboriginal person living in PEI and being a Kindergarten to post secondary student, a parent/caregiver of a student and/or an Elder. The approach of the qualitative research sought to capture the participants' subjective realities and presented their ideas through thematic explanations.

MAIN FINDINGS

Upon analysis of the data there were a number of dominant themes related to educational successes of off-reserve Aboriginal learners in Prince Edward Island that emerged. These themes were: having solid relationships with caring teachers; experiencing a caring school environment; experiencing the effective delivery and communication of curriculum; experiencing hands-on activities; and having and using internal and external supports. In particular, participants talked about: not enough social time in school; a need for better delivery of curricular content in school, student and parent feelings of failure, frustration, and pressure; the difficulties faced when students transition to new schools; stories associated with racism; and difficulties maneuvering within and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures.

The thematic recommendations or needs of off-reserve Aboriginal learners on Prince Edward Island are presented through six main themes. These thematic points are: to provide learning experiences where students feel successful; to use multiple instructional methods; to thread more Aboriginal content and ways of knowing into mainstream education; to promote the Mi'kmaq language, culture, and spirituality; to have a greater

Elder presence in education; and to promote sports, extra-curricular activities, and other such events throughout the school community.

Findings highlighted the following points to be important for student success: solid relationships with caring teachers; a caring school environment; effective delivery of curriculum; hands-on activities; and internal/external supports. With regard to challenges, some thematic findings were: not enough social time in school; student and parent feelings of failure, frustration, and pressure; transition to new schools; and stories associated with racism. With regard to student needs, some thematic findings showed that students need to experience success; teachers need to use multiple instructional methods; more Aboriginal content and ways of knowing need to be threaded into all levels of education; and sports and extra-curricular activities must be accessible within the school community. The implications of this study call for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaders, educators, parents, and community members to engage in rich discussions and to create an action plan related to educational success and wellbeing among Aboriginal learners on Prince Edward Island.

CONCLUSION

The research revealed a number of dominant themes related to the educational successes of off-reserve Aboriginal learners on Prince Edward Island. Partnerships and relationship building were highlighted throughout the study. Key themes revealed that having a solid relationship with caring teachers; experiencing a caring school environment; experiencing the effective delivery and communication curriculum; experiencing hands on activities; and access and utilizing of internal and external supports.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In 2010, the British Columbia Ministry of Education's released a set of learning principals that fosters educational success for Aboriginal peoples. Although these elements do not encompass the essence of quality education and learning for *every* Aboriginal person, these principles are a general reflection of what quality education and learning is for many Aboriginal peoples. As Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people work together to improve the education of Aboriginal learners, it is important to incorporate aspects of these principles into the discussions that ensue. These principles were mentioned or alluded to by participants involved in this study. This study recommends that these principles be adapted to strategies in fostering educational success of the off-reserve Aboriginal learners in Prince Edward Island.

- The education and learning of one Aboriginal person supports the wellbeing of self, family, community, the land, the spirits, and one's ancestors.
- Quality education and learning is holistic, self-reflective, relational, and experiential.
- Quality education and learning recognizes the role Aboriginal knowledge and ways of knowing.
- Quality education and learning requires and exploration of one's identity.

- Quality education and learning is a process of generational roles and responsibilities.
- Quality education and learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
- Quality education and learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and can only be shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

For more information on this project visit:

<http://uakn.org/research-project/fostering-educational-success-for-off-reserve-aboriginal-learners-on-prince-edward-island/>

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The Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, the UAKN, is a community driven research network focused on the Urban Aboriginal population in Canada. The UAKN establishes a national, interdisciplinary network involving universities, community, and government partners for research, scholarship and knowledge mobilization. For more information visit: www.uakn.org



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