

2

School Completion and Workforce Transitions among Urban Aboriginal Youth

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Introduction

Across Canada, young people of Aboriginal origin have lower levels of post secondary education than the national average. In the general population, we know that young people who do not complete high school also have greater difficulties making the transition to the labour force than those who complete high school. Using Cycle II of the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS), this study explores differential patterns of school completion and transition to the workforce between predominately urban Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth. We also examine the role of students' families' values toward education, and students' levels of connectedness or engagement with schools as contributing factors to the likelihood of school completion.

First Nations Educational Attainment

The gap in levels of formal educational achievement between Canadians of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal origin is well documented. Essentially, the research shows that First Nations students have consistently lower average educational achievement than the student population at large (King 1993; Hull 2000; 2005; White and Maxim 2002b). This lower attainment appears to be correlated with several life outcomes, including lower income (Maxim, White and Beavon 2003), reduced well-being (Beavon and Cook 2003; Wilkinson 1997), and lower rates of labour force participation (White and Maxim 2002a; White, Maxim and Gyimah 2003; Hull 2005).

In its April 2000 report, the Auditor General of Canada identified this discrepancy in educational attainment as unacceptable. Targeting education as a policy priority is predicated on the research that suggests there are real and substantial social and economic returns to improvements in human capital (Jankowski and Moazzami 1995; White, Maxim and Beavon 2003). This return is particularly dramatic for Aboriginal persons who increase their educational attainment (see also MacPherson 1991).

While across the board progress in the level of education among Aboriginal youth has been made over the past few decades, the available literature points out

certain consistent patterns of under achievement. One observation, for example, is that First Nations people residing off-reserve have a greater educational attainment than those living on-reserve (McDonald 1991; Canada 1991). Armstrong, Kennedy and Oberle (1990) find, using 1986 data, that only 25% of those identifying themselves as “North American Indian” in the census completed high school as compared with one-half of the non-Indian population. Siggner (1986) found that in 1971 less than 3% of the First Nations out-of-school population had attained any post secondary education. Encouragingly, by 1981 that proportion had risen to 19%, but this was still less than half the national average. By the early 1990s, only 2.3% of Aboriginal high school completers were going on to university (King 1993).

In a study of First Nations high school dropouts from Ontario schools, MacKay and Myles (1989) report that while the enrolment of students increased throughout the 1980s, the overall graduation rate from high school for registered Indians varied between 33% and 55% of the grade nine cohorts they studied. This is much lower than for the non-Aboriginal population where completion rates of more than 70% were reported in all of the districts that MacKay and Myles studied. Tait (1999) reports that nationally, in 1986, Aboriginal people were 2.2 times more likely not to complete high school than non-Aboriginal people. Disconcertingly, by 1996 that relationship for Aboriginal people was measured at 2.6 times more likely not to have completed high school (for further discussions, see Urion, 1993).

The picture is not completely gloomy since some signs of improvement appeared between 1986 and 1996. The percentage of young Aboriginal adults with less than a high school diploma dropped from 60% to less than 45%. Those completing any form of post-secondary education increased from 15% to 20%, while the number of Aboriginal persons holding a university degree doubled from 2% to 4%.¹ However, even more gains appeared in the non-Aboriginal population, and this meant that the differences between the two populations generally widened. In the same decade, the largest increase in the gap between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal educational attainment was for persons 20–29 years of age (Urion 1993).

More recent studies in British Columbia (2000a, 2000b) indicate that 61% of Aboriginal students compared with 23% of non-Aboriginal students do not complete high school in six years; 14% of Aboriginal students do not progress to grade nine compared with 4% of non-Aboriginal students; and Aboriginal students are behind age-grade level norms in every grade in every district examined.

Nationally, White and Maxim (2002b) looked at three measures of educational attainment: age appropriateness for the grade the students were in, graduation rates, and dropout rates. The average age-appropriate rate of First Nations students lagged behind the general population by approximately 78%. The age-appropriate rate was much higher among younger students, however, with the rate among

students in grades nine or lower being 90.8%, but this dropped significantly to 55.4% among the high school grades. White and Maxim calculated the graduation rate from a sample of those students who were included on the nominal rolls, and who graduated or withdrew from grades 12 or 13 only. The First Nations' graduation rate among this sample averaged 19.8%. The third measure of educational attainment used in the study was the withdrawal rate. The sample used for this measure included Band-resident registered Indian students who were 16 years of age, actively registered at the schools, and who graduated or withdrew in 1995–1996. Among those, the withdrawal rate is 17.8% (see Reyhner 1991; 2001; and Ward 1995 for similar US studies).

White and Maxim also found that Band students who chose to go to provincially operated schools had a higher age-appropriate rate than those in the Band-operated schools, but that students tended to withdraw in larger numbers. Before grade nine, the age-appropriate rate for students in provincial schools was 92.8% while in Band schools it was 86%. After grade nine, the age-appropriate rate dropped to 62% for provincial schools, and 43.8% for Band schools. The withdrawal rate for provincial schools was 18.2% as compared with 11.8% for Band schools (see also Kirkness and Bowman 1992). White and Maxim (2002b) noted, however, that provincial schools do not differ significantly on graduation rates or withdrawal rates compared with Band schools.

Overwhelmingly, the research shows that the returns of education are dramatic. Maxim, White and Beavon (2003) suggest that although levels of educational attainment among First Nations people continue to be lower than among non-Aboriginals, the economic rate of return of higher education is much higher for First Nations people. This suggests that formal education is a major factor in allowing the First Nations population to achieve economic parity with the rest of the country. One of the brightest rays of hope lies in the finding that there are community correlates with educational achievement. The most promising is that as the average level of education increases in the parental population, there are incremental gains in students' levels of achievement. This indicates that as we make improvements in the achievement of this cohort and the next generation of students, these improvements will trigger even greater positive consequences in later generations.

We noted above that the recent studies suggest that students at the primary level show better achievement than students at the high school level. This may indicate that primary students are adequately prepared and that there are structural impediments to the success of these Aboriginal students in the high school system itself.² Conversely, it could also suggest that students' preparation at the primary level is inadequate. That inadequacy may be a result of curriculum, instruction quality, social or early promotion, a combination of these, or a range of other issues. It may also be the case that both problems exist, but are masked at the primary levels because the students are at or closer to home; laws force students to remain in school until age sixteen; parents play a greater positive role of encouragement at

the elementary level; or, the lack of skills matches due to a deficiently integrative curriculum is less pronounced.

In a recent study, Spence, White and Maxim (2006) looked at five categories of community level explanatory variables: isolation, school type (Band versus provincial school), demographic factors (such as age and sex distribution), economic indicators (such as labour force participation and per capita average income), and human capital. They attempt to see how these influence three measures of school attainment: age appropriateness by grade level, drop-out rates, and graduation rates. The preliminary results indicate that isolation is not a powerful explanation for educational attainment, while demographic factors do play a role. They found the age dependency ratio has a strong negative effect on the graduate rate. This is no surprise, as we would expect a dilution effect of resources at the community level; that is, there would collectively be less financial, emotional, and time resources available as the proportion of children to adults increases. Other important factors they identified include the proportion of single adults (which decreases the age appropriate rate and graduate rate, and increases the withdrawal rate), and the community's educational levels were very positively associated with educational achievement in the younger generation. More research has to be done, however, to determine the relative influence of these many competing issues.

The Youth in Transition Survey

The Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) is a longitudinal survey conducted by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and Statistics Canada to provide information about school achievement and school-to-work transitions among young people. The survey focuses on several factors influencing education, training, and work, while capturing data about the levels of educational attainment. The data set can be used to detect some of the explanatory factors for these outcomes. A major strength of the YITS is that it looks at several influential factors relating to school completion, including demographic factors such as family background, as well as personal aspirations and expectations, school experiences, academic achievement and employment experiences.

The original plan for Cycle 1 of the YITS was to conduct a longitudinal survey for each of two cohorts, one aged 15, and one aged 18–20. The age 15 cohort in Cycle 1 of YITS focussed on reading and mathematics skills, and included students who had also been participants in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). This study focuses on the second cohort, or Cycle 2, which Statistics Canada identifies as the “18–20 year-old YITS Cohort.” These young people were born in the years 1979 to 1981 inclusive.

The sample design for the 18–20 year old group is similar to that of the Labour Force Survey conducted monthly by Statistics Canada (see Statistics Canada 2003 for survey details). The initial target sample consisted of 29,000 persons. The sample frame *excluded* those living in some remote areas, including the

northern territories, communities identified as “Indian reserves,” and Canadian Forces bases. The survey was conducted during January and February 2000, with approximately 22,000 youth participating in the first survey cycle.³ The survey was conducted over the telephone using computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI) software. Of the 22,378 completed interviews, 782 individuals identified themselves as having an “Aboriginal” cultural or racial background. This category includes many different Aboriginal groups. Specifically, the question the survey participants were asked was:

People in this country come from many different cultural or racial backgrounds. I'm going to read you a list. Are you ... Aboriginal, that is North American Indian, Métis, or Inuit?

Access to the survey data is restricted by Statistics Canada to pre-qualified researchers who must conduct the analysis through an RDC.⁴

A Note on Problems and Caveats

While allowing us to tap into the wide diversity of urban Aboriginal youth, the ethnicity identifier we note above poses substantial limitations upon our analysis. First, it relies on the young person to self-identify. That is to say, the definition appears more closely related to the identity question asked in the census than the origins question. Thus, there are the potential problems of false positives—those who indicated being Aboriginal but who are not—and more likely, false negatives—those who are Aboriginal but fail to identify themselves as such—within the sample. Fundamentally, the question casts a broad net and does not allow us to clearly distinguish between those who actively identify as Aboriginal and those who do not, and between those who might be “visibly” Aboriginal and those who are not.

The underlying homogeneity imposed by the question also prevents us from distinguishing between registered Indians and other Aboriginal peoples. This is problematic because previous research has shown that many registered Indian families move regularly between reserves and urban residences (Norris, Cooke and Clatworthy, 2003). Non-registered Indian Aboriginals, on the other hand, are probably more likely to have greater residential stability. Even those who change accommodations frequently among this latter group, are more likely to remain in the same school district than those who move between different communities.

The sample size also posed a substantial limitation on the range of analyses that we could conduct and on the results we can report. On the grounds of confidentiality, the RDC (Statistics Canada) does not allow the reporting of results that have used variables with five or fewer unweighted cases. This precludes the construction of some tables. For example, the numbers in the Aboriginal subportion of the sample are too small to permit a reliable analysis of gender-specific reasons for leaving school. Of course, these issues of definition, and the relatively small sample size, impose substantial caveats on our conclusions.

The Results

Given our review of the YITS data, we have concluded that the study can focus on three statuses: non-high-school graduates (those still in high school and those who left), high-school graduates (those seeking employment and those who continued to further schooling), and post-secondary students. We then can examine some correlates of school continuance, such as parental attitudes and student perceptions of treatment in the institution. We report the findings in two sections of this report. The first, as illustrated by **Figure 2.1** (page 49), is a graphic presentation that uses labelled paths to illustrate the comparison between Aboriginal respondents and non-Aboriginal respondents.

Figure 2.1 shows the students' education/employment status. The left-hand side of the figure provides estimates for non-Aboriginal youth, while the right-hand side provides estimates for Aboriginal youth. The percentages on the outside of the diagram indicate the distribution of young people by level of schooling.

The major difference between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal samples stems from the differences in the proportions who do not acquire a secondary school diploma, and in the proportions who go on to some type of post-secondary education. Almost 43% of the Aboriginal sample does not have a secondary school diploma. This figure is only slightly less than twice the 23.5% estimated for the non-Aboriginal sample. Interestingly, similar proportions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students report having a high-school diploma. On the other hand, about 54% of the non-Aboriginal students participate in some form of post-secondary education, while only 35.5% of the Aboriginal students are exposed to education or training beyond high school.

Among those students with less than a high-school diploma, about 12% of the non-Aboriginal and 21% of the Aboriginal samples are continuing in school. Similar percentages of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal youth (11% and 22% respectively) are "leavers" or "dropouts." In summary, about twice as many Aboriginal as non-Aboriginal youth do not complete high school, but the split between proportions of leavers and continuers is similar for both groups. One major difference between the two groups without high school completion is in the relative proportions of leavers who are employed. About 75% of the Aboriginal youth who leave school before completing high school are employed within a year while only about 48% of the non-Aboriginal school leavers are employed.

This disparity raises an interesting issue. While it is common to focus on the relative "push" factors for leaving school early, the higher rate of employment among Aboriginal students could suggest that employment might be a bigger draw than school for Aboriginal students. That is to say, it is possible that the attractiveness of employment might be drawing proportionately more talented Aboriginal students away from the school system than non-Aboriginal students. We present this possibility since it is difficult to believe that there are more employment opportunities for urban Aboriginal youth than non-Aboriginal youth

with less than high school education. Other research, plus some limited analysis of the YITS survey, also suggests that Aboriginal youth tend to live in families that are disproportionately single parent, and with fewer economic resources than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Consequently, even marginal jobs can provide a substantial improvement in a family's standard of living.

Under these circumstances, the job market serves as more of a pull factor for Aboriginal than for non-Aboriginal students. If this pattern holds up, then the policy implications for keeping Aboriginal youth in school are quite different than if we focus on push factors alone. If we view school dropping out as primarily a function of the school environment, then ameliorative policies should clearly be directed toward schools. On the other hand, if there are substantial pull factors relating to families' socioeconomic circumstances, then changing the school environment only will not address a large portion of the problem. Under these circumstances, we require policies that negate the economic attractiveness of leaving school early. While many options are conceivable, linking increased family welfare and other support payments to students remaining in school could offset the advantages of employment income for young people. We also suspect that significant gender differences exist, but the numbers in the Aboriginal sample are too small to permit a reliable analysis of gender-specific reasons for leaving.

Among those who complete high school, but do not go on to some form of post-secondary education, rates of employment are reasonably high but not exceptional. About 72% of the non-Aboriginal high school graduates are employed while about 78% of the Aboriginal students are employed. The higher employment rates for Aboriginal young people at both the non-high-school graduate and high-school graduate level suggests that the less well-educated Aboriginal students are of better "quality" than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. This reasoning is also consistent with the fact that proportionately more non-Aboriginal youth continue to post-secondary education than Aboriginal youth. If we assume that underlying intellectual and other performance abilities are similarly distributed among the two samples of young people, then it is reasonable for us to conclude that proportionately more of the "capable" non-Aboriginal than Aboriginal youth continue to post-secondary education. Relatively more "capable" Aboriginal youth, however, may seek employment prior to post-secondary education.

While one might take a positive view of the fact that 72% of the non-Aboriginal and 78% of the Aboriginal high-school graduates are employed, we should also remember that 28% of the non-Aboriginal and 22% of the Aboriginal students are unemployed. From census data, we know that these rates of unemployment will drop as the young people age. Still, the employment picture for young people who complete high school, but do not pursue post-secondary education is not all rosy. Among those students who seek post-secondary education, the relative proportions of leavers, continuers, and graduates are not too different across the two groups of young people. There is, however, a higher propensity for

Aboriginal youth to be post-secondary school leavers than non-Aboriginal youth (14% vs. 9%).

Although it is not shown in the diagram, we should also point out that the type of post-secondary education in which Aboriginal students participate is different from that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Far more non-Aboriginal youth go on to university than Aboriginal youth, while Aboriginal youth are more likely to be engaged in trades, certificate, or diploma programs offered through non-university venues such as community colleges.

While Figure 2.1 provides some relevant descriptive material, the distribution of students across the two groups begs a series of interesting questions. First, what is the relative impact of school push factors in comparison to employment pull factors for those students who have less than high school completion? We generally assume that students—particularly Aboriginal students—who leave school early are “turned off” the formal education system. While this position undoubtedly has merit, it may also be the case that employment opportunities, as remuneratively limited as they may be, might be more attractive to Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students. We could easily see this being the case if proportionately more Aboriginal students are living in dire economic circumstances than non-Aboriginal students.

We also know little about those students (in either group) who chose to return to school to continue their education. Ironically, the ratio of leavers to continuers among those with less than high school is similar for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, although the absolute rate for Aboriginal students is twice that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Yet another factor that needs further exploration is the degree to which those Aboriginal students who go into post-secondary education, in comparison to those who do not, reflect a similar pattern to non-Aboriginal post-secondary participants. Unfortunately, the small sample of Aboriginal students in the YITS survey precludes any detailed analysis.

Some initial analysis also suggests that there are gender differences in the patterns of school participation across the two groups. Unfortunately, the numbers are too small to conduct detailed analysis for some categories. And, of course, there is the big issue of “aboriginality” itself. The YITS survey treats Aboriginal young people as a homogenous entity. Previous research by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada suggests that residential patterns and other characteristics of registered Indian children are quite different from the Inuit, Métis, and other non-registered Aboriginal youth.

Correlates of School Continuance—Results and Discussion

Several factors are known to be related to students’ tendencies to leave school early. Within this study, we will examine five dimensions for which data are available within the YITS survey. Those dimensions include parental attitudes

Table 2.1: Sample Sizes for All Tables.

	Non-Aboriginal		Aboriginal	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Below High School Completion	1,889	3,041	172	201
High School Graduation	2,461	2,889	102	86
At Least Some Post-Secondary	6,293	4,985	137	83

toward schooling; students' attitudes toward schooling; students' social experience (acceptance); students' levels of school engagement; and the stability of the learning environment.

Typical of the correlates we examined, is the question: How important was/is it to your parent(s) or guardian(s) that you graduate from high school? Was/is it:

1. Not important at all
2. Slightly important
3. Fairly important
4. Very important

We retained this four-point rating scale for our analysis. Individuals who reported that they didn't know, refused to answer, or were part of a valid skip, were excluded from the analysis. This resulted in 781 of the 782 young people in the Aboriginal sample being retained, and less than 200 of the 22,000 others being excluded. The overall sample size for each category analyzed is presented in **Table 2.1**. Weighted Ns were used for all of the analyses conducted in this study.

Parallel figures for the data presented in the tables are provided in the appendix (pages 46–48). Those figures also provide 95% confidence intervals about the point estimates. All of the differences identified in the following discussion are based on findings of statistically significant differences. We should note that the very large sample size among the non-Aboriginal sample often results in statistically significant differences by gender within that sample, even when the differences are substantively very small. Thus, care should be taken when interpreting those differences. This comment is not as applicable to the Aboriginal sample, however, since the unweighted cell sizes are much smaller.

Parents' Attitudes Toward Education

The survey raised two questions regarding parents' attitudes toward education. These were: "How important was/is it to your parent(s) or guardian(s) that you graduate from high school?" and "How important was/is it to your parent(s) or guardian(s) that you get more education after high school?" Responses to both of those questions are listed in **Table 2.2** and **Table 2.3** (page 42). **Table 2.2** shows that we have significant differences by level of education, with those with the lowest levels of education indicating least levels of importance to parents. This indicates there may be some correlation between how well students do, and how much support for education is expressed by parents. The exception is Aboriginal

Table 2.2: Importance to Parents of Graduating from High School.

	Non-Aboriginal		Aboriginal	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Below High School Completion	3.67	3.64	3.52	3.72
High School Graduation	3.9	3.90	3.93	3.76
At Least Some Post-Secondary	3.93	3.91	3.98	3.68

Note: 1=not important at all; 4=very important

Table 2.3: Importance to Parents of Education Beyond High School.

	Non-Aboriginal		Aboriginal	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Below High School Completion	3.3	3.15	2.96	3.04
High School Graduation	3.45	3.33	3.21	3.00
At Least Some Post-Secondary	3.74	3.7	3.53	3.43

Note: 1=not important at all; 4=very important

males with some post-secondary education who report lower parental interest; this may be due to small number effects. We see small differences by gender with females who go on to further education expressing stronger parental support for education. Aboriginal students appear to have lower levels of parental support generally but, overall, they follow the same pattern as the general population.

Table 2.3 reports significant differences by level of parental attitude to increasing one's education, with those with the lowest levels of education indicating lowest levels of parental interest in higher education. In contrast to the attitude of parents to completing high school, we see a substantial increase in positive reinforcement as one moves up the educational continuum. While patterns of increasing interest are similar, Aboriginal youth generally report lower levels of importance than non-Aboriginal students within each level of education. We also note a gender effect. Males tend to report lower levels of importance than females within each level of education (except those who did not finish high school).

Students' Attitudes Toward Schooling

The two indicators included in the YITS regarding students' attitudes toward schooling were: "School was often a waste of time" and "During my last year in high school, junior high, or elementary school, I thought that many of the things we were learning in class were useless." The response to the first of these questions appears in **Table 2.4**, the second in **Table 2.5**.

Table 2.4 suggests that those with higher levels of education are less likely to agree that school was waste of time, although the variability is not large and the results are mixed. We see a gender effect where males are generally more likely

Table 2.4: School was Often a Waste of Time.

	Non-Aboriginal		Aboriginal	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Below High School Completion	2.06	2.23	2.14	2.12
High School Graduation	1.90	2.04	1.92	2.02
At Least Some Post-Secondary	1.85	1.98	1.87	1.96

Note: 1=strongly disagree; 4=strongly agree

Table 2.5: Thought Many Things Learned in Class were Useless.

	Non-Aboriginal		Aboriginal	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Below High School Completion	2.45	2.56	2.55	2.55
High School Graduation	2.37	2.46	2.59	2.28
At Least Some Post-Secondary	2.33	2.36	2.41	2.5

Note: 1=strongly disagree; 4=strongly agree

to agree with these statements than females, whatever level of education. Interestingly, we do not see major differences by Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal status.

Table 2.5 indicates that, generally, more students believe that “things learned in class were useless” than “school was often a waste of time.” Those with higher levels of education are generally less likely to agree that things learned were useless but again, results are inconsistent and the variability is not large. Finally, males are more likely to agree than females and Aboriginal youth are more likely to agree than non-Aboriginal youth that many things learned in class were of little value. One exception is Aboriginal women who graduated high school. This latter trend may be explained by some of the employment problems encountered when a woman trying to enter the labour force has only a high school diploma.

Students’ Social Experiences

Students’ social experiences refer to how the respondents perceived their treatment while in school. The two indicators here employed were: “I was treated with as much respect as other students in my class” and “People at school were interested in what I had to say.” The responses to question one are reported in **Table 2.6** and the second question in **Table 2.7** (page 44).

Table 2.6 indicates that students with more education were more likely to believe they were treated with the same level of respect as others. That is, as youth continued in school, they perceived less disrespect. There are, however, several anomalies in the table. Aboriginal youth with some post-secondary education were less likely to agree than non-Aboriginals with some post-secondary education, particularly males. Aboriginals with some post-secondary education had profiles similar to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal high-school graduates.

Table 2.6: Treated with as Much Respect as Others in my Class.

	Non-Aboriginal		Aboriginal	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Below High School Completion	2.93	2.93	2.80	2.85
High School Graduation	3.03	3.06	2.94	3.07
At Least Some Post-Secondary	3.25	3.2	3	2.83

Note: 1=strongly disagree; 4=strongly agree

Table 2.7: People at School Were Interested in What I Had to Say.

	Non-Aboriginal		Aboriginal	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Below High School Completion	2.9	2.90	2.84	2.74
High School Graduation	2.93	2.94	2.98	2.97
At Least Some Post-Secondary	3.07	3.00	2.3	3

Note: 1=strongly disagree; 4=strongly agree

Table 2.7 indicates that those with higher levels of education tended to believe that others were interested in what they had to say despite gender and Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal status. The major exception is Aboriginal females in post-secondary who were among the least likely to believe that others were interested in what they had to say. We do know that many female Aboriginal students tend to leave post-secondary and return later. This migration in and out of formal schooling may be linked to these feelings of not being appreciated. There also may be pressures to build familial relations, care for family, or even start families themselves. These external issues may affect perceptions of people at school.

Conclusions

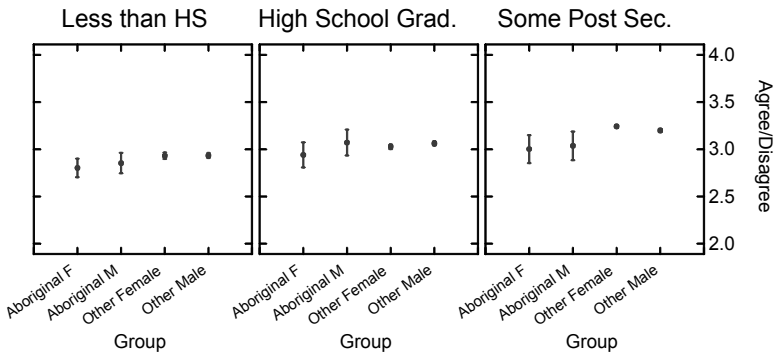
The roles of students' families' values toward education, and students' levels of connectedness or engagement with schools may be contributing factors to the likelihood of school completion and continuance. The findings from this study suggest that patterns of school completion differ for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Larger proportions of Aboriginal students drop out of school and smaller proportions continue to the next higher level of education. Employment patterns also differ. In particular, Aboriginal students who drop out of school often have higher relative levels of employment than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. This difference is greater at the lower levels of school attainment. Unfortunately, the relatively small numbers in the sample restrict our ability to conduct a detailed analysis by gender.

The YITS survey provides some further insights into the conundrum of school completion and school-to-workforce transitions among Aboriginal youth. Again,

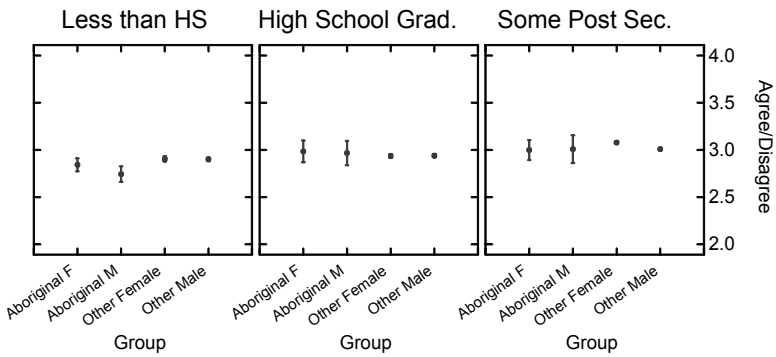
the small sample size and the relative heterogeneity of those self-identifying as Aboriginal limits our depth of analysis. Ideally, future research in this area would see both an increased sample size among the urban aboriginal population and the inclusion of on-reserve youth.

Appendix

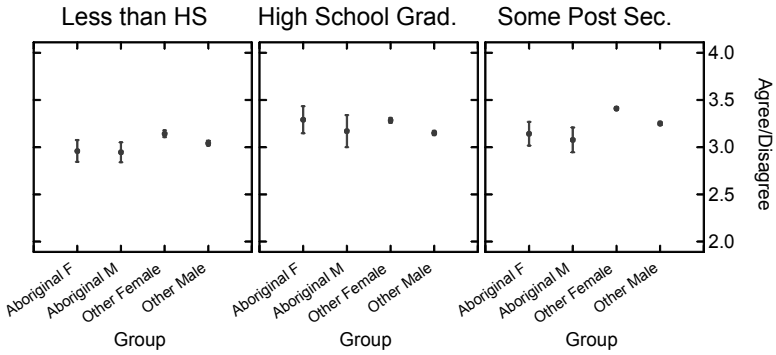
Treated with same respect as others



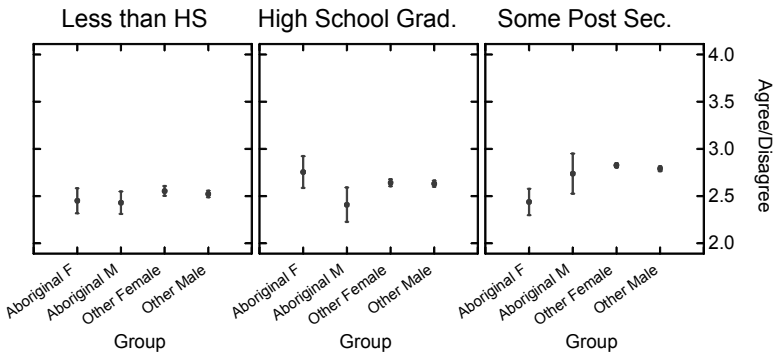
Others interested in what I had to say



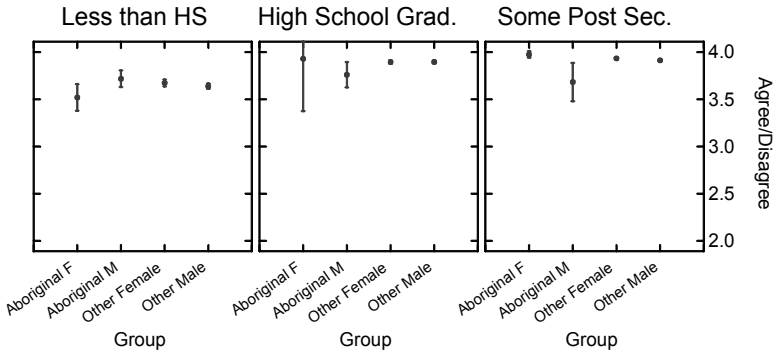
I had friends to talk about personal things



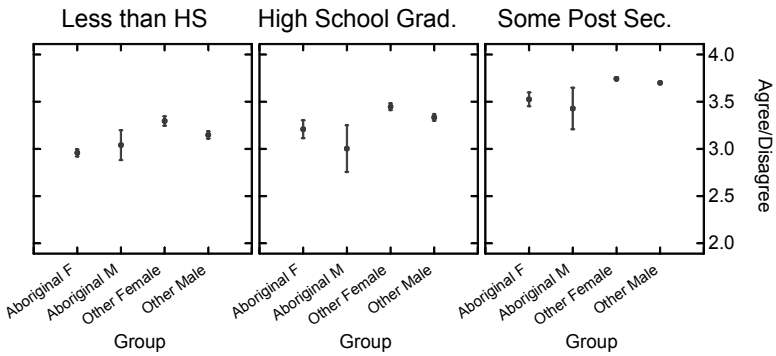
Liked to participate in school activities



Parents value high school graduation



Parents value post secondary schooling



School was often waste of time

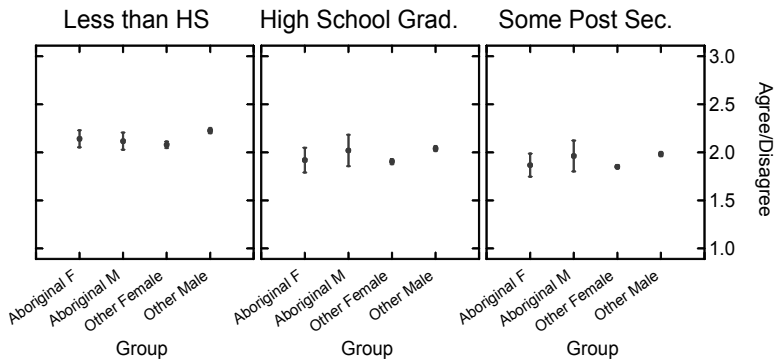
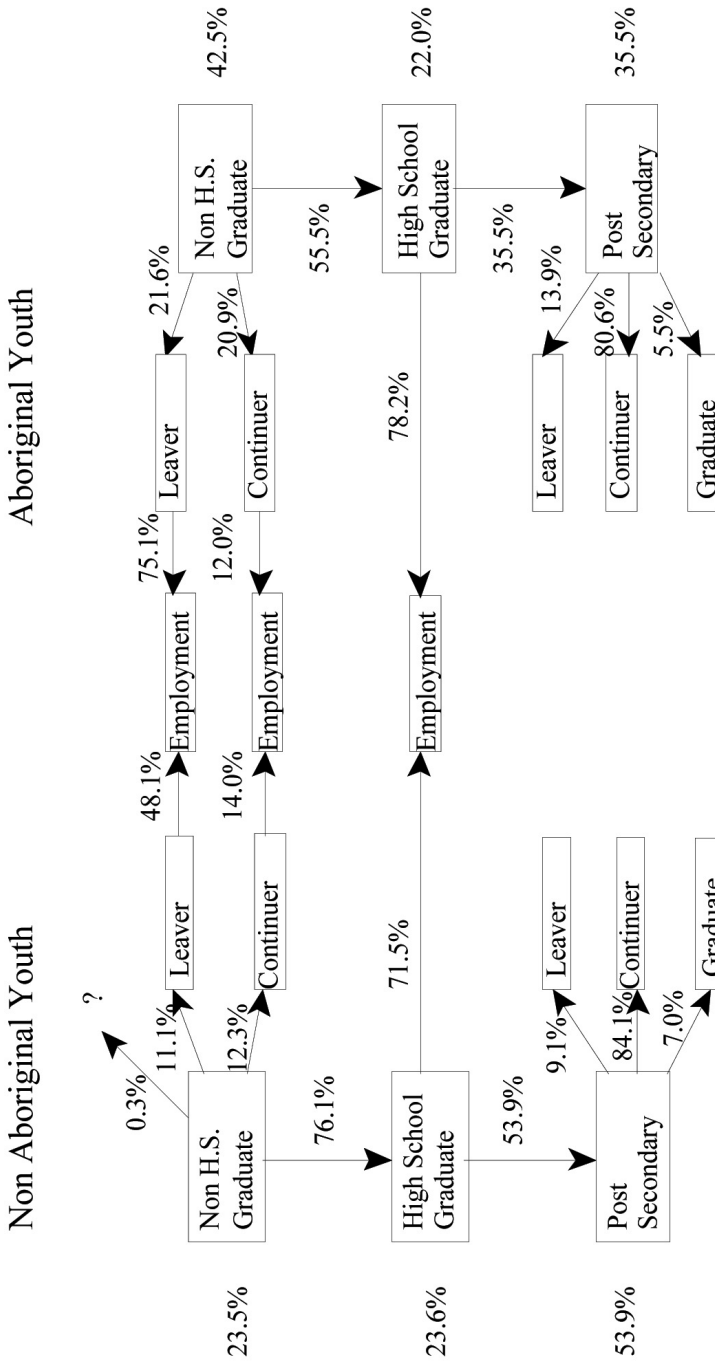


Figure 2.1



Endnotes

- 1 Unfortunately, temporal comparisons within this period are complex. Bill C-31 allowed for the reinstatement of “status” to many individuals, particularly women. At the same time, as Guimond (2003) clearly documents, there has been substantial “ethnic drift” which has resulted in many individuals redefining themselves as “Aboriginal” within the census. Higher levels of educational attainment by those reinstated under Bill C-31 and changes in personal definition could account for at least some of the apparent gains in educational attainment within the Aboriginal population.
- 2 There is a steadily growing body of literature on the experience of Aboriginal youth within the school system (Barman, Hebert and McCaskill, 1986; Battiste and Barman, 1995; Graham, 1997; Binda and Calliou, 2001). Most of this literature, however, is based on individual narrative and qualitative research. It indicates that there are some cultural structural barriers for Aboriginal students, including lack of traditional language availability and culturally inappropriate teaching methods. More empirical studies have mixed results. In the US, Ward (1998) tests and finds some support for the hypothesis put forward by Ledlow (1992) that Indians living in traditional communities confront a persistence in traditional culture and native language that impede their development and educational attainment (see also Shields 1995, 1996, and 1997 and Deyle 1992). Other research indicates otherwise. James et al. (1995) argue that the use of traditional language and traditional affiliation has a positive affect or at least has no negative affect (i.e., does not predict an increase in failure).
- 3 Collection for Cycle 2 took place from mid-February to mid-June, 2002. Unfortunately, the results from that survey are not currently available for analysis through the RDC.
- 4 Unlike many of the General Social Surveys, there is no public access to the files through Statistics Canada’s Data Liberation Initiative. We produced a proposal to access the YITS Cycle One (18–20 year olds) through the Research Data Centre (RDC) at the University of Western Ontario. We had originally been led to believe that the second cycle of the YITS (20–22 year olds) would be available through the RDC program. In the end this was not the case. We therefore applied for access to Cycle One (18–20 year olds). This was based on two inter-related factors:
 - 1) Cycle One allows us to assess the school graduation, school leaving (graduation or dropout) as well as early transition to the first job. This allows the greatest interface with the non-Aboriginal populations, a large proportion of which have left high school by the age of 20 years.
 - 2) Cycle Two (20–22 year olds) was going to take considerable time to be made available according to those in charge of the RDC process. We still have no access to this data. The proposal for access to the YITS goes through a process similar to a grant application to the SSHRC. The Statistics Canada personnel responsible for the access to data review the proposal for scholarly significance and ethical issues. They also solicit academic reviews of the proposal to ensure it has merit intellectually and will contribute to general knowledge. They are very restrictive about allowing any exploratory investigations. Our proposal for access was accepted after it was clear to them we had a scholarly interest in looking at the Aboriginal data and we had an informed interest in comparing the patterns to other populations.

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