Community Part Three

Community Issues

The Work Part

**Respond to each of the following questions in complete sentences.**

1. How might having more Aboriginal people designing and delivering health and welfare services to their communities help meet the challenges that you read about? Be specific about particular aspects of Aboriginal culture.
2. Using specific examples, describe in your own words at least three reasons why education is so vital to Aboriginal communities and what challenges exist in this area.
3. In your own word and using examples from the reading, describe some of the economic challenges facing Aboriginal communities and what might be at the root of these issues.

**Assessment**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Criteria / Level** | **Level 4** | **Level 3** | **Level 2** | **Level 1** |
| Knowledge | Responses are packed with accurate supporting details | Responses contain considerable accurate supporting details | Responses contain some accurate supporting details | Responses contain limited accurate supporting details |
| Thinking | Nothing is copied. All thoughts are clearly the student’s own and are very insightful | Nothing is copied and insights are pretty clever | I think I see some copying there. Think for yourself! | You’re responses aren’t wrong, but a lot of it isn’t actually you  |

The Reading Part

In this reading, you will explore certain issues of concern to Aboriginal communities in Canada. Aboriginal peoples care about the health and welfare of their communities and, particularly, about the welfare of their children. You will examine some of the educational challenges that First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities face. Linked to the educational issues are those associated with providing economic opportunities for diverse Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal peoples are gaining more control over health care, education, and local economies as part of the goal of self-determination.

**Health and Child Welfare**

Aboriginal views of health are holistic and take into account the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional well-being of a person. The wellness of an individual affects his or her family and, by extension, the community. Aboriginal communities have a renewed emphasis on healing the whole individual.

 The Aboriginal population is young – children and youth aged 24 and under make up almost one half (48%) of all Aboriginal people according to Statistics Canada. With this youth comes the opportunity to teach and encourage healthy lifestyles in order to reduce and prevent diseases, chronic health conditions and suicides. At the same time, though, the elderly are more likely to have chronic conditions that require more frequent access to health care. Providing health care facilities, services and workers requires the involvement of Aboriginal communities and governments.

***Health Challenges to Overcome***

The 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP Report) pointed out the gap in the health and well-being that exists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Although conditions have improved somewhat since the 1990s, there is still a significant disparity as reported by Statistics Canada and Health Canada.

* Compared to the general Canadian population, Aboriginal adults are less likely to report excellent or very good health than non-Aboriginal adults, and are more likely to suffer from an activity-limiting condition or chronic illness.
* Life expectancy of Aboriginal people is about six years shorter than that of the general Canadian population.
* Aboriginal suicide rates are close to three times higher than non-Aboriginal rates and are even higher among Aboriginal youth, especially Inuit young people.
* Fifteen percent of new HIV and AIDS infections occurs in Aboriginal people, despite the fact that represent about three percent of the population.
* The infant death rate is one and a half times higher for First Nations than the average Canadian rate.

 The causes of poor health among Aboriginal people are complex, but an important factor is poverty. Unemployment and the lack of economic opportunities can lead to conditions such as alcohol or substance abuse and poor nutrition, which in turn can have dire consequences such as accidents, violence and suicide. Lack of safe drinking water and unsanitary and crowded living conditions can also lead to illness and disease.

***Meeting the Health Challenges***

In 1945, Indian health services were transferred from the Department of Indian Affairs to Health Canada, the federal government branch responsible for overseeing the health of Canadians. By the early 1960s, Health Canada began providing direct health services to First Nations people on reserve land and to Inuit in the North. According to Health Canada’s website, by the mid-1980s, First Nations and Inuit communities began to control and administer health services. Here are three ways Health Canada is working with First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples today to help improve the health of their communities:

* The National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO), which was established in 2000, receives funding from Health Canada to undertake activities such as education, research and publication of health information materials. However, Health Canada does not control the content of NAHO materials or programs. According to the NAHO mission statement, NAHO “advances and promotes the health and well-being of all First Nations, Inuit and Metis through collaborative research, Indigenous Traditional Knowledge, building capacity, and community-led initiatives.”
* Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) is also funded by Health Canada. This program is for Aboriginals living in urban areas and large northern communities.
* Health Canada also produces *Canada’s Food Guide* for First Nations, Inuit and Metis. This guide provides nutritional information geared to the diets and lifestyles of Aboriginal peoples.

 Provincial governments are also working with Aboriginal communities to improve access to health care services. For example, since 1994, the Ontario Ministry of Health has been involved in the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy. The services and programs offered through this strategy are designed, delivered and managed by Aboriginal people. Services include community wellness workers, crisis intervention counsellors, translators and patient advocates. Another example is the Metis Nation of Alberta’s collaboration with Alberta Health and Wellness to better monitor the health of Metis people living in that province.

**Education**

Throughout this course, you have learned how Aboriginal cultures have been undermined by the actions of Canadian governments during much of the 20th century. During this time, Aboriginal peoples struggled to maintain not just their cultures but also their identities. One of the most significant challenges occurred in education. Residential schools attacked many aspects of their culture simultaneously, and so education is one of the key areas in which Aboriginal peoples continue to focus their efforts to affirm their sovereignty and strengthen cultural identities.

***Taking Back Control***

Starting with the 1972 publication of the National Indian Brotherhood’s “Indian Control of Education,” First Nations moved to take back control of their children’s education. They did so by opening band-operated schools on reserves. The teachers and administrative staff of these schools come mostly from the local community. These schools are funded by the federal government and most use provincial curricula as the basis of instruction.

 In provincial public schools, self-determination is achieved by working with ministries of education to implement First Nations language and cultural studies into the curriculum and revising existing curricula to be inclusive of Aboriginal peoples.

 Another more recent education report presented by the assembly of First Nations in 2010 titled, “First Nations Control of First Nations Education” builds on the National Indian Brotherhood paper of 1972. The 2010 policy paper includes the following three objectives:

* Ensure that lifelong First Nations learners have access to educational services and programs grounded in First Nations languages, values, traditions and knowledge.
* Build and sustain the capacity of First Nations communities and their institutions to deliver a wide range of quality programs and services for lifelong learning.
* Implement full and effective First Nations control of First Nations education now run by federal, provincial, territorial and First Nations governments.

 Inuit communities also joined the push for control of their children’s education. In Nunavik, the Kativik School Board was created in 1975 as a result of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. Inuit were empowered to take control over education. Today, students have the option of studying in English or French after Grade 3, and they study Inuit culture and the Inuktitut language throughout their elementary and high-school years.

 Today in Nunavut, in accordance with its Education Act, which was passed in 2008, the public education system must “be based on Inuit societal values and the principals and concepts of Inuit **Quajimajatuqangit**.”[[1]](#endnote-1) The curriculum must show a “respect for Inuit cultural identity” and must “promote fluency in the Inuit language and an understanding of Nunavut, including knowledge of Inuit culture and of the society, economy and environmental characteristics of Nunavut.”

 Most Metis children attend public schools with non-Aboriginal children. Taking back control might mean that Metis communities run their own schools, as in the case of Metis settlements in Alberta. In most cases, it means ensuring that the public-school curriculum recognizes Metis history and culture and that Metis parents have a voice at the school boards. For example, the Metis Nation of Ontario continues to work with the Ontario Ministry of Education to strengthen communication among school boards, schools, and Metis families.

***Challenges to Overcome***

Despite the growing control that Aboriginal peoples have taken of their children’s education since the 1970s, challenges still exist.

 High school graduation rates for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students continue to lag behind those for non-Aboriginal students. The 2006 census of Canada showed that nearly 50% of status Indians had not completed high school compared with 15% of non-Aboriginal Canadians. Similarly, 51% of Inuit adults had not completed high school. Even among those aged 20 to 24, the graduation rates of Aboriginal people lag behind those of non-Aboriginal Canadians.

 Funding is not equal either. The Assembly of First Nations has pointed to the funding cap on band-operated schools as a major problem undermining the quality of these schools as a major problem undermining the quality of these schools. Under current arrangements, band-operated school funding rises at only 2% per year while funding in provincial schools across Canada is not similarly fixed. In the last five years, funding for band-operated schools has risen only 10.8 percent, while provincial funding for schools has risen by 24 percent. The Assembly of First Nations estimates that First Nations students on reserve received $2000 less in educational support that other students in Canada. This is partly because Indian and Northern Affairs Canada’s funding formula is inconsistently applied and varies from province to province and region to region.

 Also, the numbers of Aboriginal people with post-secondary education remain far below the Canadian average. As of 2006, 41 percent of the Aboriginal population aged 25 to 64 had graduated from post-secondary education: 14% had trade certificates, 19% had a college diploma and 8% had a university degree. By comparison, 61% of non-Aboriginal people aged 25 to 64 had graduated from post-secondary education, with 23% having graduated from university. The gap in university graduation between the two populations widened between 2001 and 2006. The situation for Metis is less dramatic; half of Metis aged 25 to 64 have completed a post-secondary education.

 These factors combine to create a chilling statistic. In 2004, the Auditor General of Canada investigated the state of education among First Nations people living on reserve and estimated that it would take 28 years for the level of high school completion among the 15-to 64-year-old on reserve population to reach the general Canadian level. This is a serious problem in an economy that is becoming more knowledge-based and in which Aboriginal youth is the fastest growing segment of the population.

 The growing activism of Aboriginal organizations and leadership requires the partnership of various levels of government so that Aboriginal students have an equal opportunity to fully participate in the Canadian economy as entrepreneurs, employers and employees.

**Economic Development**

Despite challenges in education, First Nations, Metis and Inuit people are often successful entrepreneurs and take advantage of economic opportunities. However, discouraging statistics about poverty and economic issues still exist. In this section, you will read about the economic challenges facing Aboriginal communities and some initiatives that Aboriginal peoples are taking to meet them.

***Economic Challenges Among Aboriginal Communities***

Participation rates – the proportion of the adult population that is working or trying to find work – are much lower for First Nations and Inuit populations than for non-Aboriginal Canadians. Unemployment rates for these same groups are about three times higher; so, not surprisingly, rates of poverty are also higher. One in four First Nations children lives in poverty, while one in five Inuit and Metis children lives in a low-income family. A 2005 Statistics Canada survey found that 56% of house-holds in Nunavut responded that they did not have enough money to pay for the food they needed or to buy the quality or variety of the food they wanted.

 The reasons for these economic issues are not hard to find. As you have learned, on-reserve communities are often isolated and have an insufficient land base upon which to create sustainable economic development. Restrictions in the Indian Act make it difficult for people living on-reserve to use land or other assets as collateral for loans, which limits their access to capital they need to start, expand, or acquire businesses. Many reserves have poor infrastructure, such as substandard telecommunications and roads, and unsafe water supplies that make investment unappealing. Outstanding land claims restrict the ability of First Nations communities to move forward with plans to develop local economies. In addition, many First Nations people, especially on reserves, have not achieved higher levels of formal education, so employment in certain skilled trades and the knowledge sector is difficult. All of these factors undermine the ability of First Nations communities to develop their economies.

 For off-reserve populations, some of the same issues apply. Lack of education is a serious problem limiting Aboriginal people’s access to high-paying jobs. Racism can also limit job prospects, and social isolation can take a toll. Successful strategies to meet these challenges can come from various sources.

***Sources of Economic Development***

Over the past few decades, many attempts have been made to encourage economic development for Aboriginal peoples. These approaches have some from different levels of government; First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities; and Aboriginal entrepreneurs themselves.

*Government-Aided Initiatives*

Federal, provincial and territorial, and local governments continue to work with Aboriginal communities to support economic development.

* *Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development*
	+ Initiated in 2009, this framework seeks to solve many issues that inhibit economic development in Aboriginal communities. Among other things, it aims to
		- Increase access to loans for business
		- Strengthen the capacity of entrepreneurs to succeed in business
		- Meet the real needs of communities in all regions of the country
		- Increase skills development to help Aboriginal people secure long-term jobs
		- Collaborate with industry, educators, and the voluntary sector to match learning and training with job opportunities
		- Modernize lands management policies
		- Help link the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal private sectors
* *Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy*
	+ This federal government program trains Aboriginal people in areas of high labour-market demand. It provides training or skills upgrading; helps people overcome barriers of employment, such as low literacy or basic skills; and helps people find a job. This program also builds partnerships between Aboriginal organizations and employers.
* *Urban Aboriginal Strategy*
	+ This federal program, which has been running since 1998, seeks to improve social and economic opportunities of Aboriginal people living in urban area through the cooperation of governments and local Aboriginal communities and organizations. The strategy aims to improve life skills by encouraging Aboriginal youth to stay in school and by providing mentorship programs. It also promotes job training and entrepreneurship.

***Building on Success***

In 2009, the Conference Board of Canada profiled 10 particularly successful Aboriginal businesses and published a study identifying several attributes these businesses had in common:

* They had strong leaders who had a clear vision, worked hard and were highly collaborative and community focused.
* They were competitive and used sound business practices.
* They formed strong relationships and partnerships so as to get access to financing, to build up a client base, to access new resources and to build expertise.
* They actively participated with their partners, trying to build shared goals and trust and goodwill through clear communication.

 Viable Aboriginal businesses such as these are within reach for more Aboriginal communities, but only if resources such as an educated and trained labour force and financial capital or funds are available.

 Improvements in health and wellness and education for Aboriginal peoples – urban and rural; on-reserve and off-reserve – will affect economic opportunities for Aboriginal communities. Decisions and plans in these areas need to be made keeping in mind “the Aboriginal world view that places present experience in the context of seven generations” as explained by Mohawk scholar Marlene Brant Castellano. Aboriginal peoples follow this Seven Generations principle as they seek to meet the challenges facing their communities.

1. Inuit traditional knowledge of their environment and the inter-relationship of the natural elements, animals and people. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)