

What Explains the Educational Attainment Gap between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Youth?

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Abstract

Aboriginal people generally have lower levels of educational attainment than other groups in Canada, but little is known about the reasons behind this gap. This study is the second of two by the same author investigating the issue in detail. The first paper (Frenette 2011) concludes that the labour market benefits to pursuing further schooling are generally not lower for Aboriginal people than for non-Aboriginal people. This second paper takes a more direct approach to the subject by examining the gap in educational attainment between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth using the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS), Cohort A. Aboriginal people who live on-reserve or in the North are excluded from the YITS and, thus, from this analysis. The results of the analysis show that most (90 percent) of the university attendance gap among high school graduates is associated with differences in relevant academic and socio-economic characteristics. The largest contributing factor among these is academic performance (especially differences in performance on scholastic, as opposed to standardized, tests). Differences in parental income account for very little of the university attendance gap, even when academic factors are excluded from the models (and thus do not absorb part of the indirect effect of income). Differences in academic and socio-economic characteristics explain a smaller proportion of the gap in high school completion than in university attendance.

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