

Seeing Ourselves in the Mirror: Giving Life to Learning

Executive Summary and Highlights

Report of the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre's
Second National Conference in partnership with the
First Nations Education Steering Committee

Vancouver, British Columbia

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ABORIGINAL LEARNING

Knowledge Centre

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Disclaimer

The final report was prepared by Malreddy Pavan Kumar for the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (AbLKC) of the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL). The AbLKC is publishing this Executive Summary and Highlights of the conference report as a basis for further knowledge exchange. The opinions and conclusions expressed in the document, however, are those of the author and participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of AbLKC members.

The AbLKC is one of five knowledge centres established in various learning domains by CCL. CCL is an independent, not-for-profit corporation funded through an agreement with Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. Its mandate is to promote and support evidence-based decisions about learning throughout all stages of life, from early childhood through to the senior years. AbLKC is co-led by the First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium (FNAHEC) and the Aboriginal Education Research Centre (AERC), College of Education, University of Saskatchewan.

AbLKC is guided in its work by a consortium of more than 100 organizations and institutions, a steering committee, and six Animation Theme Bundles led by members of the consortium. The bundles are:

1. **Learning from Place**—*Narcisse Blood, Red Crow Community College, Cardston, Alberta*
2. **Comprehending and Nourishing the Learning Spirit**—*Dr. Marie Battiste, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan*
3. **Aboriginal Language and Learning**—*Dr. Leona Makokis, Blue Quills First Nations College, St. Paul, Alberta*
4. **Diverse Educational Systems and Learning**—*Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (Ted Amendt)*
5. **Pedagogy of Professionals and Practitioners and Learning**—*Dr. Sakej Henderson, Native Law Centre, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan*
6. **Technology and Learning**—*Genesis Group, John and Deb Simpson, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories*

A full report (in English only) is available on the CCL website www.ccl-cca.ca/aboriginallearning, the AERC website www.aerc.usask.ca and the FNAHEC website www.fnahec.org

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is based on the second annual conference of the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (AbLKC), held in Vancouver, on the territory of the Coast Salish people of British Columbia, from February 27 to March 1, 2008. Since its inception in April 2006, AbLKC's chief mandate has been to provide a national focus (network and infrastructure) for knowledge exchange and to improve the lifelong learning of Aboriginal learners.

The first annual conference, *Modern Knowledge, Ancient Wisdom: An Integration of Past and Present for a New Tomorrow* in 2007, showcased the holistic learning models developed as part of a collaborative project with the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), national Aboriginal organizations, and interested Aboriginal professionals and community people. The Animation Theme Bundles were also introduced as a platform for further knowledge exchange and dialogue for effective individual, community and institutional change in learning to advance social, cultural, economic and political development of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, recognizing Aboriginal peoples' relationships with Canada, their relationships with place, and the importance of valuing Indigenous world views, knowledge, experiences and perspectives.

The second annual conference's theme, *Seeing Ourselves in the Mirror: Giving Life to Learning* is in line with AbLKC's mandate and focus. It expresses hope for inclusion of First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and youth in the Canadian landscape and hope for a new vibrancy in learning that nourishes all our spirits, minds and bodies.

This report provides a comprehensive review of the conference keynotes, presentations, and discussion groups. It also provides an in-depth analysis of the featured speakers on Indigenous Knowledge who shared a diverse range of knowledge and perspectives—from Hawaii to Nunavut—on learning and humanity. In addition, the report features the progress of the bundles' research and mapping of promising practices.

The pre-conference proceedings focus on the philosophy of learning within Aboriginal cultures. To that end, keynote speaker Lorna Williams delivered an extensive account of the linguistic, cultural and cosmic significance of holistic learning for Aboriginal peoples. This section also outlines the workshop presentations, which focussed on alternative approaches to mainstream learning that highlight the importance of engaging the spiritual dimension of learning through prayers and smudging; integrating cultural knowledge and traditions through beadwork, storytelling and such, and emphasizing cultural literacy as opposed to the textual literacy of writing and reading.

The third part of the report covers the Town Hall Meeting, including the opening address by Dr. Paul Cappon, President and CEO of CCL. As the conclusion to the conference, the Town Hall Meeting served as a participants' forum to discuss and provide feedback on the work of AbLKC thus far, the challenges ahead and the relevant policy implications to Aboriginal learning.

1. PRE-CONFERENCE

a. *Keynote Summary: Lorna Williams*

The main objective of Lorna's address was "to ask ourselves to define and to articulate the education that was provided to us, before the Euro-western education came into this land." This includes the educational culture of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. Such an exercise, in Lorna's view, yields a perspective on "the way we live today in a world—a very western-oriented and a western-valued world." Once we understand the nature of Aboriginal life in the contemporary world, we will be able understand their needs with a clear and consolidating vision. In Lorna's estimation, reformulating the existing Euro-western educational system requires a holistic educational model to address Aboriginal educational needs.

In an attempt to develop this model, Lorna set out to answer the following questions:

"What is teaching, what is learning, what is education, what is holistic education, and what is holistic learning? When we look around the world, the worlds of Indigenous peoples, what do they say it [holistic learning] is?"

To answer these questions, Lorna visited a number of terms from Aboriginal languages. In Navaho (Dene) the term *gea* refers to teaching and learning. The term elucidates the need for human relationships, or simply "good relationships," from which one could learn about the times, even before one comes into life, and onto this planet. In this sense, one is already learning to develop "those good relationships" with the world. Another word in Dene, *peoto*, implies skilful knowing. The extended meaning of the term implies "what to do, what to do when we need, and to know when we need to do it."

Lorna subsequently made connections with the term *ofdaneehoot*—a Saanich word. According to Lorna, the entire purpose of Aboriginal education could be expressed in this single metaphor—to become a whole human being.

Mainstream education does not have a place for such metaphors or their meanings.

If, then, all learning, as evinced in these metaphors, should contribute to becoming a good human being—to be in good relationships with others—it means that learning can be acquired only by being a full participant in life. This includes participating in the ceremonies, work life, joy and humour that exists in each Aboriginal community.

In the Aboriginal sense of learning, for learning to take place requires multiple mentors, not one. In this sense, as a learner, a person must negotiate with the teaching styles of many adults in a day. In addition to the Elders, one must learn from peers, siblings, old people, animals and plants.

In a stark contrast to this, western classrooms promote homogeneous forms of learning and place individual gifts above community learning.

Observation is said to be one of the cornerstones of Aboriginal learning, largely because it encompasses and stimulates a wide range of learning concepts. For one to observe, one needs to

know how to look, how to select, how to focus, and how to avoid. Because much of the learning is also indirect, teaching in a classroom space is non-existent in the Aboriginal cultures. Children were expected to learn most concepts in a self-regulatory fashion. They were self-motivated, even though it is the old people who guided them.

Western schools follow various recipes for stimulating and nurturing mental activities that are rooted in a formal setting. They are not designed to nurture the whole person, or a whole experience of learning through that person. Moreover, learning in schools is age-segregated; it is created to separate children from adults. So it wasn't the residential school systems alone that separated children from the adults; it was normative institutional practices of logic and individualized learning that has been in place in Euro-western schools for a long time. Implicit in this culture of education, it was thought that adults were not a good fit for socializing with children.

As a result, many children today are facing social pressures that motivate them to contend for power. The relentless emphasis on grades, achievements, rewards and "success" are a good example of this consequence.

In the Aboriginal world, learning and education are set to demonstrate the value of not differentiating individuals. Although Aboriginal cultures recognize that people are unique and have special gifts, they believe that the outcomes of the individual gifts should serve the entire community. Every individual's gift makes communal wealth. And it is expected that every person in the community contributes to this wealth. In essence, if western education promotes stratification, Aboriginal learning systems harness diversity.

In this connection, Lorna recounted two distinct metaphors from Aboriginal languages and extends their reference to the communal aspect of learning. The first word, *gathesheetha*, refers to a process of "being awakened" that children experience at about age six. By virtue of this, the child then becomes aware of his or her arrival on this earth. The second word, *huisehuise*, articulates the successful transition of a child into adolescence. In this process, it is understood that the community has done a good job in raising the child on his or her way to becoming a full human being.

It is this gift of wholeness and humanity that Aboriginal people could give to the western world, while simultaneously reviving it within their cultures.

In conclusion, Lorna talked about the force against which we have to always, constantly, work, to avoid being crushed by it, and that's "the force of the Euro-western analytical mind. We need that mind, we have that mind, but it's not the only mind. Let us join ours to this mind, to become a whole human being."

b. *Extending Our Learning; Emerging Holistic Learning Principles: Pre-Conference Small Group Closing Activity Summary*

This session consisted of a group activity following the pre-conference sessions. The groups involved in the session provided written comments and reflections through a process of one–three–six, which culminates in a collective result and refined understanding of the issue or topic at hand. This three-step process has members work individually to respond to the questions posed and then share their understandings in groups of three to refine their common and collective

understanding of questions, and, finally, in their small group of six, to develop their collective understanding and present it to the whole group for further consideration.

The discussion points were guided by the following questions:

- What information have you gained about the praxis (process by which theory, lesson or skill is enacted or practised) of holistic learning?
- What are the implications for the environment created for learners and learning?

Responding to the first question, participant #1 of the first group stated that learners should have many mentors on a daily basis. Holistic learning is continuous. Holistic learning combines and transfers the essential skills we require in our daily life, work life and spiritual world.

Participant #2 affirmed that education is a beginning—all other challenges can be tackled by strengthening this base. Teaching and educating the whole human being is vital. This cannot be achieved without the social and cultural guidance of families and ceremonies, observation, learning and mentoring. In the process, healing through art and storytelling is crucial, as is the possible integration of Aboriginal learning with the mainstream education.

Concurrent with this notion of integration, participant #3 underscored the importance of trust, and establishing real/authentic relationships with those Aboriginal people with whom one interacts and engage on a regular basis.

Participant #4 stressed on the practical methods of learning such as hands-on, informal ways of learning involving the whole group, wherein the knowledge should be shared but not forced.

Participant #5 took a more nuanced and spiritual approach to learning, stating that it is not just the mind that is the locus of learning, it is the body, the spirit and beyond. In this way, Indigenous people can revive their roots, values, family and identity to define who they are and share their knowledge, values and talents in a genuine way.

Participant #6 asserted that involving gifts and teaching how to honour them can induct “a transference paradigm shift” to the importance and value of Indigenous knowledges to knowing.

In the second group, the responses were notably different:

While it is necessary that the learning environment needs be a place of acceptance and understanding so that the learner is able to reach the internal soul and spirit of his or her intellect, participant #1 maintained that learning must always be flexible—as we learn in different ways, different learning styles must be valued and encouraged.

According to participant #2 “acceptance” of Aboriginal students in educational institutions will ensure that they “belong” to the system. Displaying Aboriginal pride and identity will most certainly help Aboriginal people to negotiate their social position and belonging in the contemporary world.

Similar to this assertion, participant #3 believes that continuing research and practice in the educational system can lead to connecting with the mainstream system with greater strength. This would earn the respect and acknowledgement of other educational systems as Aboriginal learning/teaching practices will be built with confidence. Participant #6 also echoed these remarks, while underlining the importance of “our ways” and “honouring,” which are key principles for accepting difference and diversity.

Holistic learning is natural learning. Participant #4 maintained that holistic learning is a very natural way of learning, and it does not require external incentives for motivation.

In addition to these, the two groups involved in the discussion concluded that holistic learning models should possess the following attributes:

- a sense of belonging;
- connection with nature;
- recognizing the uniqueness of each learner;
- forming close relationships;
- encouraging more than one “expert” to learn from;
- honouring of self, family and community;
- honouring one’s culture and place and incorporating that into learning; and
- using learning materials that reflect local culture and experience.

2. CONFERENCE

a. Keynote Speaker Addresses

i. His Honour, the Honourable Steven L. Point, Lieutenant Governor

His Honour, the Honourable Steven L. Point started his address by praising the journey of Aboriginal people in the field of education since the first arrival of the Europeans. Prior to this, he remarked that education consisted primarily of Elders as teachers in Aboriginal curriculum. The success of Aboriginal people then was measured by “how much you were eating and how much you later gave away at your potlatch.” The main purpose of education had been, and therein the training ensued, was to prepare society to live and survive in harsh environments, and to read the signs of the future.

The realities of the world since then, however, have changed both drastically and irreversibly, and so did the aims and objectives of education and educational systems. Aboriginal people were taught new languages and culture; the natures of their classrooms have changed, along with their expectations in a new society and culture. The new mantra of education is no longer survival, but jobs and business.

Aboriginal people have lost many of their teachings, and their journey has traversed a full circle as a result of this transformation. In this seemingly circular voyage, Aboriginal people face the indomitable challenge of redefining new goals and objectives for their education. Although it is by no means an easy one, the solution to this challenge seems to reside within the old

Aboriginal wisdom, approached with a fresh perspective: “to teach our children to survive in a modern world, or to survive off the land in harmony with our surroundings.”

Commenting on the value of the traditional teachings, the Lieutenant Governor referred to a Creeway film, in which students learn how to hunt geese, prepare them and pray along with them when they were alive. Such training, even in real life, has been a part of the school year, not apart from it. There is much that the Elders knew and shared with us—and this cannot be lost. The work that AbLKC has initiated with regard to incorporating Elders in educational planning has great potential for changing the direction of future generations of learners within and beyond the Aboriginal community.

His Honour then proceeded to share some of his experiences and thoughts since he assumed the role of Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia. He is currently interested in early childhood literacy, especially for isolated communities. He had founded a committee to look into ways that are culturally appropriate and age-appropriate for Aboriginal learners. This committee subsequently led to the production of books that are made available to those who wish to use them. These books are supplied to many communities who are building schools and libraries across the country.

His Honour noted that the challenges Aboriginal people face today are greater than ever. In this regard, he recounted an incident where he was refused a seat on the airplane on his way to the conference, and the memory it invoked of his daughter’s disappointing judgment in a bicycle decoration competition in her community. As disconcerting as the incidents were, these events spoke to him of the rejection that Aboriginal people continue to face as they try to survive and endure in a new culture.

Of course, the Lieutenant Governor aptly recognizes that Aboriginal people have fought bravely the new challenge called education, even though they often appeared to be “fighting shadows in the wind, and sometimes fighting themselves.” But there are survivors of these struggles, and a new generation of fighters emerging as time passes. There are also winners. The fact that conferences like this one are being held with such clear vision and wisdom is a sign of boundless energy—a sign that Aboriginal people are still fighting, laying down a vision for a better future. It is also clear, from these events, that the Aboriginal peoples’ future is not determined by the actions and policies of states and governments, but of their own sense of identity and determination to rise.

There are new generations of Aboriginal people who are successfully receiving degrees leading to PhDs, and they’re not forgetting their values or culture. His Honour believes that it is this new generation that will continue the battle and reach the “finish line,” while upholding the Aboriginal tradition and its contribution to the world and to humanity. Just like how “so much has been taken away from us, we have a tremendous amount to offer the world.”

ii. Her Honour, Judge Mary Ellen Turpell-Lafond

Her Honour, Judge Mary Ellen Turpell-Lafond began by introducing her own work in the area of Aboriginal learning. While acknowledging the issues raised by an earlier speaker—Lorna Williams—she remarked that the title of the conference is rather fitting, as it clearly “mirrors” jurisdictions concerning Aboriginal people in Canada.

On that note, Judge Turpell-Lafond framed her talk around the following questions:

- What are the social conditions, and what are the learning conditions for Indigenous children in Canada?
- What should be our guideposts when we think about improving and changing that situation?
- What are the ways to create building blocks of education that are so fundamental, in terms of pedagogy, in terms of traditional knowledge and Indigenous knowledge, and building jurisdiction over First Nations education in Canada?

Her Honour Judge Turpell-Lafond reiterated the importance of these questions because “the starting point for Indigenous children in Canada is not the same as the starting point for other children.” Echoing Lorna William’s concerns, Judge Turpell-Lafond asserted that “we can never lose this context” of Aboriginal learning, especially in the context of understanding the difficulties Aboriginal people face with negotiating funding models. At the same time, broader challenges that determine the Aboriginal learning process should not be undermined or treated differently.

Social and Learning Conditions

For decades, Judge Turpell-Lafond has been involved with child-care and welfare issues both within and outside of British Columbia. Apart from this, she has worked in the areas of education, health care and the justice system. However, education has personal significance to Judge Turpell-Lafond, as she believes that “in the system of support for children and for families, education is a bedrock social system of support.”

This view is all the more salient if we consider the way Aboriginal social systems have been shaped during the colonization period. Colonialism has placed education at the heart of the social processes with the introduction of the residential school systems in Canada.

As an admirer as well as a representative of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which was adopted by the United Nations in 1989 and endorsed by Canada in 1991, Judge Turpell-Lafond informed participants that by virtue of Article 6 and Article 30, Aboriginal people have the right to determine their education with the involvement of families, parents and communities. Thus the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* is not simply about the right to free Aboriginal people from discrimination, but also about the right to self-determination of their children’s education.

Interestingly, this principle of family and parental control over children’s education is the central aspect of the “Indian Control of Indian Education” position paper released by the Indian National Brotherhood in 1972.

Further to the UN Convention on children’s rights, Judge Turpell-Lafond noted that the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the UN General Assembly endows a

number of additional provisions to Aboriginal peoples with regard to their existing social conditions and future visions.

With these developments unfolding, Judge Turpell-Lafond finds it equally important to explore the current state of Aboriginal Children in Canada. Her analysis takes the following areas of concern into consideration:

- Aboriginal children in care,
- disparities in graduation, and
- gender disparities in graduation.

a) Aboriginal Children in State Assisted Care

In the last 10 years, of the 45,000 total children who are in state assisted care in British Columbia, 9,160 children are of Aboriginal descent.

b) Disparities in Graduation

British Columbia has a very high graduation rate of 80.4%. For Aboriginal children, the graduation rate is 48.4%, which is also considerably higher.

This very significant disparity in graduation rates for Aboriginal students compared with the general population may point to significant social and cultural issues that remain unaddressed. Judge Turpell-Lafond believes that there is no systemic mechanism in place currently to find out “how many are being supported, how many are being exposed, and have their rights—as Indigenous children—to Indigenous language, knowledge and culture included in the education experience.” Therefore graduation rates are only part of the story, but they are an important indicator.

For Aboriginal children in state assisted care, Judge Turpell-Lafond’s research revealed that only 21% graduate from high school. In addition, she noted that many of the graduates were graduating without the prerequisites to attend post secondary education. If we exclude Metis and Inuit children, the high school graduation rates are even lower, at 15.5% for First Nations children. These figures are consistent with the graduation rates for Aboriginal children across Canada. In some cases, due to lack of support for transition into higher education, the graduation rates decrease to 30% from 50—60% at the post-secondary level.

The lack of success in transition and in general graduation rates is variable. In British Columbia, where most of Judge Turpell-Lafond’s work is focussed, at any given point of time, one in ten Aboriginal children is not living with their parents. Within that, one in six Aboriginal children seeks support from a child welfare agency. This means these children experience a great deal of disruption in their lives, which further translates to a barrier to attending schools and being educated in the early childhood stage.

She noted that lack of daycare has ramifications for health care, which affects children’s performance in school. Health issues have had a major impact on low levels of Aboriginal students’ graduation at an appropriate age.

Generally speaking, there is a common belief that Aboriginal children start very well at school, but “along comes this critical point, usually grade nine or grade eight, when they drop out.” This, however, is untrue. Many students in Judge Turpell-Lafond’s experiences stay in school but do not progress in the school system due to a host of problems associated with trauma and, most importantly, being removed from their families.

c) Gender Disparities in Graduation

The gender dynamics and disparities in the educational systems, especially in British Columbia and Western Canada are remarkably high. It has been reported that men have higher incompleteness rates at school than women. The greatest challenge to Aboriginal education in this regard is to develop a school system in which the learning experiences for both men and women would be honoured.

Guidespots and Barriers

Judge Turpell-Lafond believes that First Nations children need their family and community support throughout their school years to promote a stronger school attachment enabling them to complete their education. The culture of social inclusion, belonging, is a very important aspect of socialization in Aboriginal culture. Since the majority of First Nations children in Canada are not educated within their community, they face enormous challenges with respect to both cultural contexts. These challenges can be addressed, in Judge Turpell-Lafond’s opinion, through governmental intervention, and through a strong control of education by Aboriginal people.

Barriers to these propositions are harder to overcome when, along with a few other states, Canada has not supported the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Apart from that, Judge Turpell-Lafond notes that there is a culture of “norming”—accepting as normal—low expectations for Indigenous children in the mainstream educational system. In most cases, especially in inner-city schools, she observed that Aboriginal children are viewed as having “not really a need to learn, but to be fed.”

In fact the opposite practice, the norming of higher expectations in parts of British Columbia, has resulted in an increase in the graduation rate for Aboriginal children by about 15 percentage points, due to the support provided by the First Nations Education Steering Committee and the First Nations Chiefs maintaining high standards in education.

Building Blocks

An important contributor to Aboriginal students’ success is the celebration of Aboriginal culture, and positioning of languages and rights in the human rights context is also very significant. This provides a basis for understanding and promoting resilience, so that children who are not living at home or have been involved with a child welfare agency, can relate, learn and reinvent their Aboriginal roots.

Evidence-based programs and research in Aboriginal learning is as important as cultural resilience. Research and data have the capacity to debunk the theories, myths and misconceptions that are inconsistent with Aboriginal people's contemporary social conditions. Research from a more holistic view of Aboriginal child care is more important than isolated pockets of research on specific issues. For instance, Aboriginal children need to be understood, not simply in terms of learning, but "are they healthy, are they safe, how is their well-being, how's their educational achievement, how is their transition into adulthood into the workforce, into the labour force?"

b. AbLKC Animation Theme Bundle Lead Presentations

i. Animation Theme Bundle #1: Learning from Place

The *Learning from Place* bundle was offered to Red Crow Community College (RCCC), in partnership with the First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium (FNAHEC). RCCC is an entity of Kainai, or the Blood Tribe, and it is allied with colleges and education departments in each of the four Blackfoot-speaking communities, as well as the colleges of FNAHEC. The entire community of networks has been successful at maintaining an intricate complex of spiritual, linguistic, social and philosophical systems in spite of colonial destruction.

Since 2002, RCCC has played a vital role in the repatriation of the Kainai education through a series of undergraduate courses that are anchored in the Blackfoot knowledge systems, and in 2003, the college introduced a year-long Traditional Land Use Study program.

All these developments at RCCC have formed a solid background to the research work carried out by bundle #1. Although the bundle received specific instruction from AbLKC on how to organize the research on place, the bundle leaders felt that it was important to modify, and adhere to the principles and methodologies that are specific to the Blackfoot knowledge systems, which are not easily found or understood in mainstream literature on place and education. Therefore the bundle approached the research from a holistic learning point of view instead of focussing on a literature review.

Blackfoot Concepts on the State of Learning

This bundle employed place-based scientific tenets of a particular First Nations knowledge paradigm—namely, that of the Blackfoot—to explore learning from place as complex and localized lifelong practices, ongoing in many communities.

Concept 1: *Kitaowahsinnoon* (Our Nourishment)

The essence of the concept is expressed in the following metaphorical themes:

*Naato'si, Kokomiki'somm, lipisowaahs, Paahtsiipisowaahs
lihkitsikamiksi, Miohpokoiksi
Sspommitapiiksi, Ksaahkommitapiiksi, Soyitapiiksi
Naatoyitapiiksi, Akaitapiiksi, Aamato'simaiks*

Concept 2: *Aitapissko* (Place with Presence)

This concept refers to the spiritual presence, which can occupy a particular place, through which individuals can communicate and develop mutually beneficial, reciprocal social relationships.

Concept 3: *Aoksisawaato'p* (Dialogue)

This concept refers to "activities in place that assume the valid nature of the *aitapissko* concept, such that we regard spiritual presence(s) as we would any respected Elder." We conduct our proximity to such places with respect. Through *aoksisawaato'p*, the person who visits places will gain experiences and learning that are qualitatively different from mainstream approaches to cultural sites.

Concept 4: *Aokakio'ssin* (Systems Awareness)

A complex practice realized through conscious attempts to expand our familiarities with processes and events continuously taking place in our surrounding environment, while also eliciting appropriate responses based on our perception.

Philosophically considered, *aokakio'ssin* is based in an understanding of our abilities to perceive events in our immediate environment, both to receive and respond to various forms of communication. It is not only the presence of the objects, but one must also be aware of their absence in order to accurately develop communication with places, plants, animals and spirits in our environment.

Concept 5: *Innaihtsiyysin* (Co-existence)

Many of the monuments in the territories of the Blackfoot people mark the original sites of alliances established in the past, which include treaties and other agreements for sharing resources.

Blackfoot people believe in exchange, be they between animals, humans or other societies. In that sense, each monument to *innaihtsiyysin* carries important lessons for the maintenance of "socio-ecological order, and each comprises a tangible presence that, when revisited and the stories retold, functions to sustain and renew the relationships that are most vital to our continued existence."

Concept 6: *Ainna'kootsiyo'p* (Mutual Respect)

Mutual respect refers to the conservation of resources, and the manner in which the Blackfoot interact with nature and its gifts in a sustainable manner. "The Blackfoot understanding of conservation: the preservation of a quality resource requires measured use, timely renewal and vigilance. When applied toward relationships between living beings, the same approach becomes *ainna'kootsiyo'p*, a condition that might be described as mutual respect."

On another level, accepting the gifts of nature, such as berries and meat that we are endowed with for sustenance, and not taking more than we need, is also a symbolic testimony of mutual respect.

Concept 7: *Aatsimihka'ssin* (Reconciliation)

For a number of decades after the enactment of Treaty Seven, members of the Blackfoot community were restricted to the Blood Reserve boundaries, preventing access to their regular places and resources.

To reconcile the lost relationship with lands, the Blackfoot rely upon *aatsimihka'ssin*, gestures that are meant to demonstrate their respect for these places and their recognition of their importance in our lives. "The expression of *aatsimihka'ssin* may take the form of gifts, as when we present food or tobacco to *aitapissko*. But even more important is simply *being in place*, visiting, *aoksisawaato'p*, sharing with place our celebrations, our spiritual ceremonies and the education of our youth."

ii. Animation Theme Bundle #2: Comprehending and Nourishing the Learning Spirit

The earlier work of bundle #2 focussed on the vitality of lifelong learning in conceptualizing the Aboriginal learning spirit. The concept was extended to articulate learning as a lifelong process of personal development, emotional stability, character and resilience, while defining education as the primary source of learning analytical skills such as literacy and numeracy. In the process, the resources for the Aboriginal learning spirit were identified within family, community and culture with the socialization of values, behaviours and schooling. The bundle aimed to explore the indicators that require perspectives on learning spirit in the domains such as the health of mothers; access to early childhood education programs; reading and being read to; educational attainment; dropout rates; literacy skills; post-secondary attendance; adult literacy; knowledge of Aboriginal languages; bilingual immersion in schools; parental engagement; and community health.

The current work of bundle #2 closely espouses the above themes, albeit with a strong emphasis on a conceptual understanding of the learning spirit.

Although it is not easy to offer a precise definition of the learning spirit, due to its all-embracing, all-inclusive and philosophically elusive nature, Aboriginal wisdom teaches that "knowledge is held by the spirits, shared by the spirits and comes from the spirits...Our body then can be seen as a carrier of the learning spirit" (Pavan Kumar, 2008 p.20).

Learning is the primal force and purpose of the life journey. It begins before birth, ascending through six stages, and enters the seventh stage after birth. The life spirit knows what the life journey is for each of us, and it travels with us offering guidance and keeping us on course to learn. The force of the spirit is by no means deterministic; by virtue of individuals' will, the spirit can guide us in the direction each of us desire. Since the essence of spirit is to learn, our desire to learn becomes the learning spirit.

As Relland describes "our individual spirits are infinite in that they have existed since the beginning of time and possess all of the knowledge of the universe...the spirit existed long before it was joined to our physical body and it will continue to exist long after the body returns to Mother Earth" (Relland, 1998, p. 82).

Consistent with this notion, that learning spirit exists for a purpose, the learning spirit inculcates that the following:

- We each have a purpose, and we fulfil life's purpose through the Creator's gifts in the form of body, mind and spirit.
- We influence other life forms with our energy or are influenced by others; these influences can take the form of feelings, words, thoughts and actions affecting us and those around us.
- Spirit is an energy life field; it is a consciousness that continues through life, and beyond.
- Each form carries the energy within a learning path, a learning spirit that remains through different life forms.
- Learning continues through different forms or life journeys and remains in cell memory of people, places and things.

If spirit is an effective thought, the fact that spirit can translate into energy through thought processes has been amply demonstrated in the literature. Thought, feelings and emotions are vibrations that cause predictable patterns in the substance(s) it is projected onto. For instance, Masaru Emoto's (2001) experiments with water crystals have shown that the thought process has an impact on the way our physical bodies act, react and generate energy.

Other researchers have found that surgical patients' recovery was 50–100% times better when someone prayed for them (Chopra, 2000 p. 26). These examples show that emotion, thoughts and words (used in prayers) can generate a vibrant impact on our actions in the form of human energy. In fact, in the human realm, words and actions are considered the most visible form of energy, as they have direct impact on our social life. Therefore to bring in unexplored unconscious emotional issues to active senses is to bring new forms of largely unexplored meanings to learning.

By the same token, traumatic life experiences can trigger negative thought processes, thereby generating negative actions and emotions, which eventually impede the learning process of individuals who are affected by them.

iii. Animation Theme Bundle #3: Aboriginal Language and Learning

Bundle #3's research titled, *oskawasis wacistwan*, is hosted by the Blue Quills First Nations College in Alberta. This Cree term literally translates to "new child's nest," reflecting the centrality of the bundle's focus on developing language-based learning for Aboriginal children.

The project is stated to be at the beginning stage of "gathering sticks for the language nest." The bundle's research is motivated by the Aboriginal community's identity, self-determination and recognition of their tradition. Among other aspects, this movement for cultural revival includes notions such as:

- *Ewahkotoyahk*—all Aboriginal people are related
- Community relationships are central to overall learning
- Family and extended family is the central unit of learning

- Grandparents' roles are equally important to the community's well-being—connection to the past, culture, living stories and languages are the crucial elements of learning.

Because children are the future of the community, they are the nurturers of the Aboriginal legacy. Extending this notion, bundle #3 outlined the approaches to Aboriginal learning under various conceptual terms. They include Living Stories, Returning Home, Parent Councils, Our Teachers, and Activities and Resources.

Living Stories

Stories are the heart of Aboriginal culture. Telling stories to children about the impact of the residential schools is important because it enables them to be aware of the hardships and the cultural destruction caused by the colonization of Aboriginal education. It is important that grandparents play the role as storytellers, or being *kohkoms*, especially in teaching the lost languages, thereby initiating the healing process.

The healing process advocates against—*nitawasisak*—sending children away from home and family. It therefore encourages, in consideration of the residential school legacy, children to stay at home and learn their mother tongue before they are required to attend formal schools at a later age.

Returning Home

Returning home, as a metaphorical and symbolic theme, is part of recreating a "synchronicity" of time and place, and a sense of 'urgency' to returning to the Aboriginal community the traditional learning methods.

Parent Council

Aboriginal communities across the country need to create parent councils by advertising and putting up posters for parental involvement in schools. In addition, they need to create "Creetime" during which parents of all children attend schools, along with their children, and teach preschoolers and young parents basic language skills. At least four parents and one grandparent are considered to be a good size for a Parent Council. Within the Council activities, it should be considered that "teaching commitment to younger ones" about speaking Aboriginal languages is more important than the languages themselves. The parents, in this way, should be able to connect language to a wider range of things, including art and play, as well as creating a safe and loving environment.

Our Teachers

Nohkom mena nimosom—our teachers—have an immense responsibility to create a safe, non-intimidating environment for learning, by sharing knowledge and wisdom, humour, and stories from Aboriginal traditions.

Activities and Resources

Activities such as prayers, smudging, practising Cree names, playing, singing, food making, art and drumming are the tried and tested ways of Aboriginal teachings. Since Aboriginal activities and methods are scarcely funded in the mainstream and Aboriginal educational systems, Aboriginal communities should be prepared to accumulate their own resources for teaching languages. Activities such as games, exercise, family picnics, gathering food (picking wild onions and berries) and singing can foster a sense of community by bringing together people along with their resources.

One of the major challenges to language learning in Aboriginal community is the time-space conundrum. In the modern context, Aboriginal people struggle to bridge the spiritual richness of their culture with the constantly changing material nature of modern science.

Lack of resources, especially funding for Aboriginal languages and teacher education, continues to be the greatest challenge of all. In today's educational systems, due to structural and institutional barriers, Aboriginal teachers face the daunting task of teaching two generations of children who don't speak native languages.

Nevertheless, it is important to overcome these short-term hardships for long-term gains because the gains would be sustainable and far-reaching. Learning language leads to spiritual, mental, emotional and physical rewards, and to fulfilment. It also instils a sense of self-identity and cultural pride. Although the future is certainly challenging, it is certainly not bleak.

iv. Animation Theme Bundle #4: Diverse Educational Systems and Learning

Saskatchewan's Ministry of Education has entered into an agreement with AbLKC to lead the work of Animation Theme Bundle #4, *Diverse Educational Systems and Learning*. The Ministry's First Nations and Métis Education Branch is leading this work in collaboration with a national working group with representation from First Nations education systems, tribal colleges, provincial education systems, school division officials, university faculty members and adult learning providers.

The objective of bundle #4 is to identify and communicate promising practices that have proven successful for First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners across a variety of educational systems and settings. The systems are inclusive of early learning, K–12, and post-secondary educational systems, with a focus on the areas of governance, policy, curricula and assessment.

Literature reviews have been completed in early learning, K–12, and post-secondary educational systems. Findings have been presented at a variety of symposiums and conferences during 2007–2008. The jurisdictions considered for the research include federal, provincial, territorial, First Nations, tribal college, Métis and Inuit governance bodies. Four pillars or themes that are central to the inquiry include:

1. Learning to Know,
2. Learning to Do,
3. Learning to Live, and
4. Learning to Be.

A summary of promising practices that have been identified within early learning systems are represented by the following themes:

- family and community engagement (including Elders and traditional knowledge keepers);
- ensuring a culturally responsive, holistic perspective of learning;
- demonstrated respect for languages and cultures; and
- a focus on identity through curriculum that is centred on the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual development of the child.

With regard to these thematic models on a systems approach to early learning, promising practices are found within the Step by Step Child and Family Center, in Kahnawà:ke, Quebec. More examples are found in the early intervention program for First Nations, Métis and Inuit children living in urban centres and large northern communities. Other cases include locally controlled, developmentally and culturally appropriate preschool programs. Apart from this, the following six components are touted as the core of early learning for Aboriginal children: language and culture, education, health promotion, nutrition, social support, and parent involvement.

A summary of promising practices that have been identified within K– 12 systems are represented by the following themes:

- Indigenous knowledge that is evidenced through affirming curricula and content;
- student engagement;
- effective teacher education;
- school and community relationships—family and community engagement; BS
- transition programming.

Promising practices within K–12 systems are found throughout Canada. In Saskatchewan, where the bundle's research is based, the Ministry of Education has been actively promoting partnership models between provincial school divisions and First Nations and Métis organizations. In June 2003, the Saskatoon Public School Division (SPSD) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Saskatoon Tribal Council to establish a partnership focussed on promoting, strengthening and facilitating First Nations and Métis education in all of their schools and communities. In June 2006, SPSD also signed a renewed Memorandum of Understanding with the Saskatoon Tribal Council that included the Central Urban Métis Federation Inc. In the planning process, they adopted the partnership name, *okicīyapi*, a Dakota word that means "working together for the better good (common purpose)."

A summary of promising practices that have been identified within post-secondary systems are represented by the following themes:

- transitional supports;
- engaging Elders and traditional knowledge keepers to support both programming and students;
- providing resources that contain the perspectives of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples;

- employing First Nations, Inuit and Métis staff members;
- development of community programs that are based on economic imperatives; and
- the use of curricula and pedagogy that are reflective of First Nations, Inuit and Métis ways of knowing.

Promising practices within post-secondary systems have been identified at Nunavut Arctic College. The college has three campuses and 24 community learning centres in 26 of Nunavut's communities. The business and management courses that are offered at the College are designed to train the professional workforce of Nunavut. The college has a Language and Culture Program where students receive 75% of their instruction in Inuktitut. The Nunavut Research Institute is a division of the college. The college has established successful partnerships with the following universities:

- McGill University Teacher Education Program,
- Dalhousie University Nursing Program, and
- University of Victoria Law Program.

FNAHEC has been identified as demonstrating promising practices in post-secondary education. FNAHEC has been successful in building and maintaining partnerships among tribal colleges in Alberta with the motives of developing and monitoring legislation, regulations and policies for First Nations and adult post-secondary educational programs.

v. Animation Theme Bundle #5: Pedagogy of Professionals and Practitioners and Learning

This bundle examines the representation of Aboriginal people in the professions—as educators, lawyers, doctors, and engineers, among other important professional roles—and offers a perspective on how Aboriginal professionals can work alongside non-Aboriginal professionals .

The literature review shows that the best results in professional learning for Aboriginal people come from small, well-focussed action. Yet, these professions need to be clearly identified; the structural and conceptual factors limiting Aboriginal learning needed to be redefined and readdressed.

While more and more Aboriginal people are completing post-secondary education in diploma or certificate courses, the gap in graduation rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada remains unconscionable, most particularly at the university level. The literature lists inadequate funding, poor academic preparation and perceptions of not being welcome on campus as the major causes for this situation.

In spite of the fact that Métis, First Nations and Inuit people with post-secondary education are as likely to succeed in obtaining professional employment as the non-Aboriginal people, the provincial governments have no goals, no objectives nor any benchmarks to sustain or enhance the current state of success.

To bolster the current trends, the bundle recommends:

1. Institute a national and provincial dialogue about creating a national strategy for Aboriginal peoples in the professions, while the Crown fulfils its obligations by honouring Aboriginal and treaty rights.
2. Create Canada-wide set of indicators to measure the skills and knowledge required in professions.
3. Reduce external contracts for hiring professionals in Aboriginal development, and enhance the internal capacity of Aboriginal people.

At the same time, existing measures in various professions should be used as background for further development and strategy:

- Recent data indicate that Aboriginal women educated for health services is 16.6% (compared with 19.5% for non-Aboriginal women) and Aboriginal men educated is 3.1%.
- In the higher domains of the health professions, Aboriginal people have a weak representation. In fact, less than 1% of Aboriginal people have degrees in medicine, dentistry, and optometry combined.
- In 2005, there were estimated 100–150 Aboriginal physicians in Canada, which is less than 0.25% of all the physicians in Canada.
- Aboriginal women obtained education-related careers at 15.2% (15.8 % for non-Aboriginal women) and Aboriginal men at 5.3%, the same as non-Aboriginal men.
- Aboriginal lawyers are the most visible manifestation of Aboriginal sovereignty and intellectual capacity. Law societies' statistics show that in 2004 there were about 71,000 Aboriginal practising lawyers in Canada.

Corresponding to the trends in the data and the changing face of professionals in Canada's knowledge society, bundle #5 focussed its analysis on four related themes:

1. explaining what is happening in Aboriginal professions and why,
2. defining accomplished efforts and new approaches to training Aboriginal students,
3. making a vigorous effort to bridge the long-standing divide between the academy and the professionals and
4. bringing in Aboriginal practitioners to provide Aboriginal students with training and guidance on the problems they face in their professions.

Educational Pedagogy of the Aboriginal Professional

The heart and soul of learning programs with Aboriginal pedagogical models is the healing processes of caring about the students through their heritage and knowledge. Aboriginal students need to comprehend: "How do I stay close to the passions and commitments that took me into this profession—challenging myself, my colleagues and my institution to keep faith with this profession's deepest values?"

The bundle's evidence shows that the most important factor of success in professional education and practice is relationships. Aboriginal students in professional education learn best through relationships and examples. Aboriginal students and professionals state that "learning is not a

thing or a concept, but rather an organic or natural process of comprehending an interlocking network of relations that are linked together to generate meaning.”

Mentorship in professional education and practice demands a close relationship between the learner and the learned. To that end, academic programs that are open to Aboriginal student critique, challenge and change should be generated. Passive mentorship as it exists in the current academic systems is not consistent with Aboriginal learning styles.

Emotional Learning

Professional societies give logic and reason more credit than emotional intelligence. Institutions are endowed with power that places logical reason at the top of the hierarchy. This undermines Aboriginal sensitivities and emotions.

Yet, in Aboriginal cultures, students are taught to learn by their culture by exploring their “feelings about themselves, the work they do, the people with whom they work, the institutional settings in which they work, the world in which they live.” Nevertheless, today’s educational institutions overlook the fact that good pedagogy requires emotional intelligence, which has been demonstrated time and again by educational researchers.

Against these institutional shortcomings, bundle #5 proposes that a transformative learning exists in some professional education and practice. “Transformative learning among Aboriginal students and professionals is holistically self-recruiting and self-reinforced, and has profound feelings and consequences.” Furthermore, it is built on the power of choice, the power to choose to learn. It nurtures the deepest part of who Aboriginal people are and their vision of who they want to become, rather than what the institutions want them to become.

The Role of Professional Societies in Emotional Learning

In encouraging emotional intelligence, the bundle maintains that “dialogue or a disciplined process of **group** reflection creates an ethical circle or a circle that can distinguish between emotions that illuminate our social circumstances and those that simply reveal our own shadows.” Both kinds of knowledge and dialogue are valuable, but they invite quite different responses.

In this respect, bundle #5 contends that every serious effort at social change requires organized groups of people to support each other to generate the collective power necessary to make a difference. Without communities that encourage individuals to assert core professional values, Aboriginal people may simply revert to conventional wisdom and refuse to accept needed changes. The following sections outline some of the important responsibilities of professionals who have the duty to bring about this change.

The Role of the Professionals in Pedagogies

Professionals have a most powerful role in societies; they shape institutional dynamics, as much as they are oblivious to their own privileges. The bundle recognizes that, if professionals are even partly responsible for creating institutional dynamics, they possess the power to alter them.

Therefore “they need to help students understand and take responsibility for all the ways we co-create institutional pathologies.” In this respect, the bundle offers the following recommendations:

- Aboriginal Elders should actively create and sustain a college of Elders in each Aboriginal and treaty territory to increase the understanding of Indigenous knowledge and heritage in professional education.
- Professional associations and self-governing bodies in professions should actively support the professional training and development of Aboriginal people by:
 - a) establishing scholarships for Aboriginal people;
 - b) encouraging their members to gain an understanding of Aboriginal perspectives and constitutional rights;
 - c) spearheading initiatives to introduce Aboriginal cultural perspectives and constitutional rights into professional training programs;
 - d) providing leadership by encouraging implementation of the recommendations relevant to their areas of expertise; and
 - e) providing distance education options for Aboriginal people already engaged in self-government or service activities in their communities who cannot leave for extended periods.

vi. Animation Theme Bundle #6: Technology and Learning

The Technology and Learning bundle adopted a new title for the project in 2008: *A New Paradigm Integrating Essential Skills for Aboriginal Learners*. Continuing from its work in 2007, bundle #6 is led by the Genesis Group, an Aboriginal-owned training company, working to develop educational technologies that will enhance science studies for Aboriginal students and increase the retention rates.

The Genesis Group has partnered with ShirWin Knowledge and Learning Systems, an educational technology firm that strives to improve the quality of adult education by using theory and multimedia applications.

This presentation is specially geared toward the Interactive Apprenticeship Study Project, initiated recently by the Genesis Group. This project aims to design:

- learning material for trades preparation,
- learner-centered application focussing on identified pre-trades competencies, and
- materials that are built on immersive and interactive technologies.

The departure point of this project is that traditional models of learning have weak retention rates in current educational systems. Based on previous research, bundle #6 argues that teaching, reading, audio/video and demonstration models have lower retention rates compared with discussion groups, teaching by practice and student self-programmed interactive learning.

Thus bundle #6 contends that traditional models of learning, especially standard testing, lecturing and laboratory learning are the remnants of an old and unsuccessful paradigm on Aboriginal

learning in science education. Against this, they propose a new paradigm based on models that have proven to be successful.

First, the new model emphasizes flexibility, enabling students to learn from wherever they are, without having to attend formal classes in a school setting. This enables students to operate from workplaces and homes. The second aspect of the new model is to promote an engaging environment with regard to the content of learning, which ensures the maintenance of the learning standards while keeping students interested in further aspects of the subject.

The engagement aspect is also tied to the third element of the new paradigm, applicability. By emphasizing practice-based knowledge, application over theory and concepts, this paradigm appeals to learners who are already at different stages of their work and learning life. This approach features a less-intimidating, even “fun” environment for the learner—the fourth element of the paradigm.

The Genesis Group uses a number of video games, online quizzes and other animated models to draw the attention of students at the beginner level.

With this proposed paradigm, bundle #6 expects to complete an internet-based framework. It will form an advisory panel for the educational and cultural direction of Aboriginal learning in sciences.

Eventually, this would lead to the integration of educational and cultural content into the proposed internet-based framework.

Once the project is completed in 2009, the Genesis Group will follow a three-step plan to recruit and train students. The first step, web-based, includes the completion of a questionnaire. In the second step, a skill test will be conducted, while in the third step, the skill levels of the applicants will be assessed and appropriate programs will be recommended.

c. Indigenous Knowledge Featured Speakers

i. Dr. Manulani (Manu) Meyer

Manu opened her address with a hauntingly melodious song and greetings in the Hawaiian language.

Following this, she shared her experiences as a student at Harvard, her experiences at home, and the way they shaped her personally as an educator and educational philosopher. She described how there are fundamentally different ways of seeing things, such as seeing a colour with a different meaning and interpretation in mind. Some of these divergent ways of seeing the world have been denied by colonialism, oppressive forms of knowledge, scientific power and other forms of dominance. When it comes to understanding Aboriginal people, empirical and so-called objective forms of inquiry had “absolutely no idea of how to debate these ways of seeing in a real critical way.” Therefore, Manu believes that “it’s time for us” to deconstruct the colonized ways of seeing and reconstruct Indigenous ways.

By this Manu does not mean to debate the purpose or the meaning of “seeing things” in a negative or antagonistic way; instead, her intentions are confined to articulating them with rigour and clarity.

Manu then posed a series of questions to the audience, and continued her address in an interactive manner by elaborating the answers she had received. The first set of questions addressed the difference between knowledge and knowing.

If knowing is experiential, Manu believes that knowledge is an accumulation of ideas and information. Knowing, in other words, is “showing” the knowledge, which must be imbued by “feeling.”

The term epistemology is concerned with both knowledge and knowing. In more definitive terms, epistemology can be defined as the study of knowledge; where it comes from, its form and function.

Following this definition, Manu discussed seven tenets of Hawaiian “ways of knowing” and their epistemology, which is fundamentally different from the Western epistemology—all of which are paving the way to her new concept called the *Triangulation of Meaning*.

Spirituality and Knowing

Spirituality forges questions about the deeply enduring respect of lands, oceans, languages and rituals, family and other foundational aspects of life for Hawaiians. These are generally spiritual principles, “if played out as epistemology, that help us enter spaces of wonderment, discernment, right viewing of the world and mature discourse.”

Physical Place and Knowing

For Hawaiians, place is the locus of all knowledge, its origin and function. We come from place, and we grow in place. In developing relationship with place, one does not really learn about land, but one learns from land. Place is seen as fullness, as interactions, as thoughts planted. Therefore for Hawaiians, place is not merely physical; it engages knowledge and contextualizes knowing.

Cultural Nature of Senses

In Hawaiian epistemology, individuals are empirically configured by the past; senses and body are the tools and recording devices in which one retrieves and stores data. By this account, Manu states that all our senses are culturally shaped. All experiences, all aspects of culture evolving in place, shape the building blocks of knowing—our sensual organs are culturally configured.

Relationship and Knowledge

In Hawaiian society, one is in constant interdependence with others and with natural surroundings. In this sense, Hawaiians construe that knowledge is a byproduct of slow and

deliberate dialogue with an idea, with others' knowing or with one's experience in the world. By understanding the other, one understands one's self, which is one of the central themes of Hawaiian epistemology.

Utility and Knowledge

Ideas and knowing are not significant in themselves, but whether those ideas affect how one acts is much more vital. Knowledge that does not heal, bring together, challenge, surprise, encourage or expand our awareness is not part of the consciousness this world needs to know.

Words and Language

Manu stated that language became a causality with respect to spirituality, relationships and utility, even though Hawaiian culture has a rich tradition of textual and oral history. The reason for this being, Manu said, is the notion that "thought" creates, and intention shapes the observable world. For instance, one's thought about the effects of poverty affects how one responds to it. But it is the *intention* that gives life to words and metaphors because they have references to reality, and real-life objects.

The Body Mind Question

Hawaiians view intelligence and knowledge as embedded at the core of our bodies—stomach. Hawaiians do not seek objective truths, which would advocate the separation of objective reality as a matter of mental perception. Our thinking body is not separated from our feeling of mind. Our mind is body. Our body is mind. And both connect to the spiritual act of knowledge acquisition. This union of body and mind is also an integral part of the *Triangulation of Meaning* that Manu subsequently developed.

With respect to these seven tenets of Hawaiian epistemology, Manu provided a number of suggestions on how they can be incorporated into our research. Manu believes that these suggestions have far-reaching implications for Aboriginal educators and knowledge practitioners:

1. Knowledge is a spiritual act that animates and endures.
2. We all are earth, and our awareness of how to exist with it stems from this idea.
3. Our senses are culturally shaped, offering us distinct pathways to reality.
4. Knowing something is bound to shape how we develop a relationship with it.
5. Function is widened with regard to knowing something
6. Intention shapes our language and creates our reality.
7. Knowing is embodied and in union with cognition.

In light of these, Manu stated that like the Hawaiians, all Aboriginal language traditions and their knowledge forms should be celebrated, articulated and put into effect. Quoting Jacques Derrida, Manu reminds us that literacy has in fact been the downfall of the Western knowledge tradition.

The *Triangulation of Meaning* in Hawaiian culture refers, and courses through, the unison of Body, Mind, and Spirit. Words and knowledge only point to the Truth; genuine knowledge must be experienced directly.

For instance, locating a place may require the use of a compass and pencil, and finally the third dimension—place. Manu stated, “The use of three points to discover one’s location in both two and three dimensions is the art of triangulation.” Our schooled minds have shaped triangulation in a singular dimension—with a relentless focus for objectivity and reality.

Body is the form around which consciousness is shaped. It harnesses the senses of our observation and perception of external realities. Mind aids us to understand that objectivity is a subjective idea and it cannot possibly describe all of our experiences.

The mind part of the triangulation harnesses what is seen, counted and expressed into a meta-consciousness that explains, contextualizes or challenges.

The third dimension, Spirit, is often misconstrued as a religious or dogmatic paradigm. It is part of the whole, or better described as “data moving toward usefulness, moving toward meaning and beauty.” The spirit of this triangulation engenders questions and meanings about the very purpose of reason, and the knowledge of our lives. The spiritual category holds more than the extension of the first two categories. It is the frequency by which all connect. Yet, Manu said, “It is not a linear sequence. All three categories occur simultaneously.”

The major thrust of Manu’s argument is the possible—at times, deliberate application of the triangulation model in our research. She has found significant uses for it in curriculum development, assessment development and pedagogical development in her own educational practice.

ii. Herman Michell

Herman Michell opened on a thanking note. He asked the audience to close their eyes and listen to a personal vignette that recounts his foray into Indigenous science education. The vignette describes Herman’s memories of his mother in his childhood, and her storytelling moments in the evenings in their cabin in Northern Saskatchewan.

Herman’s memories of his mother, especially her storytelling style and technique, reminded him of an exhilarating sense of how rich in content and complex in articulation the Aboriginal tradition is.

The colonization of Aboriginal knowledge and tradition has not only destroyed but has also replaced traditional learning and teaching styles with modern pedagogical models. This has posed a great many challenges to Aboriginal tradition, especially when it came to presenting knowledge in a systemic and disciplinary fashion, more so in the case of the Indigenous science.

Unlike the scientific view of reality that is connected with cultural and individual perception, the Aboriginal view of the world cuts through all forms of life. It flows through the land, the plants and the relationships. This holistic vision of reality and the world is central to Aboriginal tradition.

More often than not, Aboriginal people have tried to incorporate foreign systems of thought into their learning. It has done them more harm than good. These experiments nevertheless made Aboriginal people realize the importance of reconnecting themselves with place and their role in it.

Apart from this, Herman argued that young generations need to have a scientific community of Aboriginal people and role models to look up to and to follow a specific path.

Herman proposed a number of strategies to develop this path:

1. Existing Native Studies programs across Canada should incorporate a science curriculum, and English and Aboriginal languages, as well as bring students to historical places on field trips.
2. The standards of science education should not be lowered. Aboriginal students should learn the very best of Eurocentric science, but at the same time they should be connected with Indigenous sciences.
3. The design of classrooms should be conducive to Aboriginal learners; Eurocentric, military-style learning is not suitable for them.
4. Aboriginal-oriented materials, including teaching resources, are crucial for both teachers and students in science education.

To enhance these strategies, Herman argued for the establishment of research teams across the country to identify the needs of Aboriginal science education. In his own case in Saskatchewan, he is currently involved in developing key research questions on the curriculum redesign at the grade 12 level. The research team comprises various Aboriginal scholars and administrators from Saskatchewan, including the First Nations University of Canada and the University of Saskatchewan. The core question of the group is to inquire what knowledge exchanges were being planned, and how does this work impact culture and sustainability.

The subsequent part of the talk prompted a dialogue with the audience concerning the development of science curricula and infrastructure for science education in Canada's educational systems.

The discussion elicited the following critical remarks:

- In previous science projects, transforming Elders' knowledge into coded, mapped and systematic forms of paper-pen and experimental knowledge has proven to be difficult, if not futile.
- Aboriginal people do not experiment with knowledge in the formal sense, which is a common practice in science; instead, they live it and pass it on through generations.
- Elders' information is being used as a collateral form of knowledge in the dysfunctional fight that the leaders face in the Eurocentric political realm.
- Aboriginal people always had medicinal knowledge to manage the natural resources as good as that of contemporary science.

- Just like the emphasis on the Elders, emphasis should be placed on the younger generations too.

Herman concluded his address with a story consisting of a dialogue between an Elder and a young man. The story contrasts the scientific knowledge of formal education with the Aboriginal wisdom about life, the world and Mother Earth.

iii. Willie Ermine

Willie began his address thanking the ancestors, spirit helpers, grandfathers and grandmothers who have always been with him.

Willie framed his talk around the question of what is Indigenous knowledge. To answer this, he explored a number of Cree words and metaphors. The word, *eskeetaboway* in Cree is directly related to education and knowledge. Another word *kiskaysee* refers to remembrance. In this way, an array of Cree words connotes and defines knowledge as “an animation of memory.”

Other Cree words elicit the importance of heart, and more specifically, thinking with heart, in which both emotional and intellectual realms are unified. In order to be able to unite both heart and mind, human beings must be in a certain state of comprehending, articulating and animating their memory—the State of Being.

Although the Cree language doesn't tell us exactly how to think with heart, or look at memory, and achieve the state of being, it portrays these concepts as a system of thought. It is in the contemplation, commemoration and reawakening of memory that the essence of learning is found. Willie states that “thinking out loud” is the most important aspect of Aboriginal knowledge systems.

Subsequently, Willie defined the process of knowing through discussion points from the audience. Seeing, feeling and recalling narratives and older traditions are the underpinnings of Aboriginal knowledge production.

Knowledge also comes with the process of elimination, by recognizing what is a valid piece of information and evidence. That said, not all information is necessarily knowledge.

Western civilization has books and information at the heart of the educational system and acquiring knowledge. Although this method can be considered a valid way of knowing, it undermines cognitive and spiritual dimensions of knowledge such as intuition, dreams and premonition, and sixth sense. These are, according to Willie, the fundamental elements of the external dimension knowledge in the Aboriginal wisdom.

Aboriginal Knowledge: External Dimension

a) Intuition

Intuition is a common means of understanding the world in Aboriginal cultures; just as important is hunch. Intuition is in fact, “if you look at it that way, one can make some kind of projection of oneself into the future.”

b) Dreams and Premonition

Dreams expand our imagination, extend the horizon of future and provide perspectives on the present as to what to do and what is to be done for humanity and community. These notions are embedded in all Aboriginal communities.

c) Sixth Sense and the Spirit of Being

Prayers and spiritual learning are also of equal importance in Aboriginal learning. What physicists describe as energy is not all that different from the way Elders think about spirituality. Whether it is a physicist contemplating particles or an Aboriginal Elder contemplating spirituality—both have similar value systems and meaning. They both speak to the forces and the mysteries of life. Therefore, we need to look at the primary forces of life to understand the nature of energy in order to effectively transform ourselves as being human, and to become humans.

Internal Dimension

The other aspect of Aboriginal knowledge formation is internal, which is embedded in us. This knowledge, too, is driven by the forces of intuition. We approach an object or a thing by the innate reason for its use and effect, whether it is a pen, knife or beaver.

There is also the ethos of embedded knowledge, or the Spirit of the Collective, which has four characteristics: (1) liveliness; (2) responsiveness, (3) intelligence; and (4) awareness.

Every object, including a chair or a cup, is a physical being that is alive, and therefore spiritual. All objects in the world are aware of their surroundings and actions inflicted on them. In fact, when chemists conduct research on atomic sub-particles, the sub-particles respond to experiments—they are responsive.

Awareness comes from “how we interact with the environment,” and the values we adopt in using the knowledge arising from the use of the object, whether the awareness is in the form of ideas or in the shape of the objects.

In Aboriginal cultures, treating others with respect, caring for them and teaching the right things are communally embedded and are spiritual as such.

Willie concluded his talk by introducing another word, *eginanima*, which is a reminder of all the attributes of knowledge and how all the qualities therein have a purpose: to transform and shape one into an “optimum human being.” Quoting Joseph Campbell, Willie reminded his audience of the communal well-being of Aboriginal cultures, and their message that knowledge is “Thou, not IT.”

iv. **Pauline Gordon**

Pauline’s speech drew from her extensive experience in the field of education. Although she is the Assistant Deputy Minister of Education, Culture and Employment for the Government of the Northwest Territories, in this speech she brought forth examples of her personal life as well as her personal struggles through the educational systems.

Pauline's main focus in the presentation was to explore the role of Indigenous knowledge in relation to the educational system through the voyage of four generations of her family.

Pauline stated that her recent involvement with a United Nations conference, where she was invited to speak, had brought on a moment of epiphany in her career as an Aboriginal educator. It had forged an experience to articulate and appreciate the meaning of education, finally coming to terms with her identity and profession.

She proceeded with an exercise to demonstrate the struggles of Aboriginal identity by asking the audience to draw a picture of themselves as children and describe the picture in three words. Later she connected these images, and the words to describe them, to the often-negative emotions associated with residential school experiences. However, she compared these experiences, as well as the memory associated with the negative past, to the promises of the present. She acknowledged that the very fact that there were hundreds of people present at the conference, exemplified who Aboriginal people are and what they have achieved.

With regard to the struggles of Aboriginal people in education, Pauline stated that the resilience of the Aboriginal people since the abolition of the residential schools has been so great that "they did not have to wait for the UN Declaration of Rights" to get where they are at today.

Resilience

This theme of resilience remained central to Pauline's subsequent presentation, as it ran through the narration of the four generations of Pauline's family.

Her father was of Métis descent, with a large family of 13 children. Her father attended a residential school. Since the formal training methods during his days were not rigorous, he could still maintain his traditional knowledge of hunting and trapping. Pauline's mother was born in Alaska, and also briefly attended a residential school.

Pauline's father spoke French, Cree and English, while her mother spoke only Inuikayah. For the better part of their life, they lived off the land, and many of their children were born on the land.

Soon after all the children left the family home, some to residential schools, Pauline's mother became an alcoholic. Pauline compared this experience with the loneliness and emotional detachment instigated by the forceful separation of children from mothers and other family members by the residential schools. The separation of people from families disrupted the traditional family roles of people as fathers, mothers and grandparents.

Pauline was raised as a Catholic under her father's influence. A number of her siblings were sent to the residential schools, some of whom failed to return home. In effect, Pauline never met some of her siblings. And, she confessed to the audience, she still suffers from emotional anxiety as a result of these events.

Except for a couple of her older siblings, most of Pauline's immediate brothers and sisters had lost their language. This was partly due to the fact that the educational systems they were

encouraged to enter “took away everything that they had which had given them the real sense of their whole being.” The schooling system reduced most of them to guilt and, more importantly, imposed a shameful view of their own tradition, languages, and culture. Children were taken away at a tender age to the missionaries and schools, which instilled negative views of their own past and of their ancestors.

The feelings of shame were constantly reinforced by relentless teachings that Aboriginal people are inherently subservient to “somebody else.” Internalizing these notions, many Aboriginal people were drawn to the image of being non-Aboriginal.

The generation of Pauline’s children, however, embraced a sense of tradition as well as change in their learning, which they had acquired from the unique educational system of the N.W.T. school boards.

They were fluent in a number of languages. Although Pauline’s daughter preferred French, she subsequently learned Cree. Pauline regards this as a unique example of her resilience, given that people questioned her ability and interest in learning Cree. But, as Pauline states, her daughter had no choice but to learn, because “if you’ve lived it, there is no other way that you can speak about it, other than from your heart.”

In spite of this, Pauline came to the realization that the rigorous schooling system had taken away her children from the family. So for her grandchildren’s generation, she decided to follow a slightly different approach.

In her role as a policy-maker, in later years, Pauline established kindergartens in the Northwest Territories, which provided greater involvement of parents in children’s lives.

Policy Recommendations

With this example in mind, Pauline made a number of recommendations for policy reforms for early childhood learning:

1. Aboriginal people are a land-based community. Language, culture and livelihood are rooted in the land. The context of spirituality, dance, family structure, art and other aspects of culture emanate from land-specific knowledge. There are no resources (funding) or emphasis in the current educational systems to enable Aboriginal people to promote land-based learning. This aspect needs to be taken into consideration.
2. A “grad extension” program, which monitors the performance of students before promoting students to higher levels, is more suitable for Aboriginal people than the standard schooling system.
3. Recent success in the Inuit community, with the rise of graduation rates from 0% to 53.5% from 1960s to 2007 is an indicator of Aboriginal people’s success, resilience and hardship. These indicators should suffice the policy-makers to invest and take an interest in Aboriginal education.
4. Acquisition programs that are designed to improve the language skills of teachers should be replicated and amplified across the country.

5. Mentorship programs for teachers from the South proven to be successful. Being in a barren land such as the N.W.T. requires a different kind of mental approach, and mentors are always useful in accommodating thoughts and emotions that are conducive to the North.
6. It is probable that, as many claims are being settled, especially in the North, many Aboriginal people are going to settle in education due to their ability to demonstrate leadership and skills.

Following these recommendations and remarks, Pauline concluded the talk with a dialogue from the audience regarding the pictures they drew of their childhood early in the session. She reviewed and discussed the negative feelings associated with childhood in the residential schools, but also the positive spirit everyone present in the room now espouses to change the course of the Aboriginal people's education, and its future.

d. Closing Keynote Speaker Address: Chief Leah George-Wilson

Chief Leah George-Wilson, who is a treaty negotiator for the Government of British Columbia, started her address with a revelatory remark: although she had no experience in the field of education, she had come to understand through experience that education is essentially linked to treaty issues. She defines education as "who we are, what we need to know to be who we are in the world." Because, learning is all around us, as her own learning experiences demonstrate, Leah praised the conference organizers for choosing the title "Giving Life to Learning."

Leah was the only child in her family who obtained a university degree. This was viewed by her family as climbing the ladder of success, and lifting people with her along the upward path. In due time, Leah's achievements were worn as a badge of honour by not only her family but also the entire community. Once Leah completed university, she was tempted to believe that she knew "a lot about everything." But it wasn't long before she understood that she did not learn enough. Once she returned to the community, she understood that education is not simply about being in school; education should be an all-encompassing experience, which should concern all people in all areas of knowledge and life including health, economic development, land negotiation agreements and resource distribution.

In her own work, as the co-chair of the First Nations Summit, she found that education is essentially tied with larger issues of economic development.

Having stated that, Leah considers the process of healing from past wounds, and more importantly, the knowledge that facilitates this process, is more important to Aboriginal people than any other formal educational achievements or the definition of success. The process includes healing from the displacement caused by the colonization and the residential school system. In addition, Leah believes that education and learning geared toward land and environmental knowledge could be beneficial to this healing process.

Leah also cited Al Gore's movement on global warming, which concerns most Aboriginal people today. However, instead of seeking external help on global warming, Leah believes that Aboriginal people should take responsibility of their environment for the sake of future generations. Like the

environment, from which Aboriginal people derive knowledge, language is an integral part of Aboriginal learning.

According to Leah, Aboriginal policy needs to find a way to merge all such determinants of learning into a singular system, not a divisive one. The current systems of government, Leah noted “are not connected in that way, so we need to continue to incorporate language and culture, and education in all of the things that we do.” Leah concluded her address by saying that “we want all of our children to feel amazement and wonder about who we are, because it is amazing. And it is wonderful.”

3. TOWN HALL MEETING

The Town Hall Meeting (open to all conference participants) was held for the AbLKC’s Consortium, National Advisory Committee, and Associate members. Its purpose was to provide an update on the progress of the AbLKC Business Plan 2006—2009, to share future planned activities and projects, and to provide opportunity for feedback and dialogue about CCL’s mandate and specifically the work of AbLKC.

a. Dr. Paul Cappon’s Address

Dr. Paul Cappon, CCL President and CEO, stated that the AbLKC is playing a vital role in fulfilling CCL’s mandate. Paul regards the last four years of CCL as having been the most exciting as they are beginning to bear the fruits of its hard work.

The knowledge centres, in particular, have been integral to CCL’s delivery of its mandate, which is to inform Canadians regarding the state of learning as well as identifying and sharing effective practices and “to build the capacity of individuals, organizations and communities.”

The work of AbLKC has thus far demonstrated that it can make significant contributions to all aspects of CCL’s mandate.

With nearly 90 Consortium members, AbLKC has created a vehicle for putting work effectively into practice. The development of a strategic plan with its Animation Theme Bundles has not only provided the basis for organizing their work but has also been a vital source of describing and sharing that work with others. That said, much remains to be done, and hopefully this Town Hall session will provide AbLKC with the necessary dialogue and insights needed to advance the implementation of its work.

One of the major success stories for CCL up to this point has been its work on “Redefining Success in Aboriginal Education.” It is a clear example of how the various parts of CCL have been working together toward the same goal. With its precision and clarity in addressing CCL’s goals, AbLKC has reflected CCL’s capacity to collaborate with Aboriginal groups and organizations, ministries of education and, most importantly, the Aboriginal community. Paul further stated that



“CCL’s capacity to do that in no small way comes as a result of the efforts of this Centre. This is something that you should be extremely proud of.”

CCL is currently in the process of embarking on the next phase of its first mandate. This is a period of reflection, as well as planning, which will hopefully lead to a second mandate. Paul recognizes that “the distributed organizational model reflected in the formation of the five knowledge centres is beginning to demonstrate both how appropriate that model is for addressing lifelong and life-wide learning, and, as importantly, how effective it can be in making a difference in the lives of communities, organizations and individuals.”

CCL’s first mandate has given us an opportunity to learn a great deal. Within this, AbLKC has contributed a great deal to collective learning, as well as pointed out areas that warrant further pursuit.

In this context, the symposium at the Town Hall session is a celebration of AbLKC’s achievements, as well as means of planning and organizing its continuing work. “Done in the collaborative manner that is a hallmark for CCL and this Centre, it will result in plans and strategies well grounded in addressing the learning needs of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.”

b. Highlights of Accomplishments

Rita Bouvier, a Co-ordinator with AbLKC, whose office is situated in the Aboriginal Education Research Centre (AERC), College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, provided a snapshot of the work in progress, highlighting the short-, medium- and long-term goals, and outcomes and impacts of the work of each of the Animation Theme Bundles and collectively for AbLKC as a whole. A summary of the key points in the PowerPoint presentation follow.

Short-, Medium- and Long-term Goals

1. Continue to refine and define understanding of success in Aboriginal learning and contribute to development of indicators.
2. Share evidence-based knowledge of promising practices in Aboriginal learning with critical partners (national Aboriginal organizations, governments, policy-makers, educators, Aboriginal communities):
 - Six Animation Theme Bundles
 - Reclaiming the Learning Spirit Conference
 - Aboriginal Literacy Conference
 - Reexamining Indigenous Peoples Knowledge
 - Identifying Principles and Values of Responsive systems.
3. Effect change in cultural, social, economic and political conditions of Aboriginal people.
4. Effect change in Canadian perspectives on First Nations, Inuit and Métis learners, learning and peoples.

Outcomes and Impact—Animation Theme Bundles

Bundle #1: Place

- Living document outlining natural laws, teachings and relationships

Bundle #2: Spirit

- Literature review, dialogue, survey
- Resource bibliography
- Experts in the field
- Gender, literacy literature reviews

Bundle #3: Languages

- Literature review
- Resource bibliography
- Experts in the field
- Case studies of promising programs

Bundle #4: Systems

- Literature reviews and scans for early learning and K–12 (post-secondary planned)
- Mapping promising programs and practices

Bundle #5: Pedagogy and Professions

- Review and scan of professional bodies' response to Aboriginal learning
- Case studies of promising programs
- Report on promising practices of aboriginal teacher education programs (Pending September 2008)

Bundle #6: Technology

- Review and scan of literature and field
- Survey on promising practices

Outcomes and Impact—Collective Work

- The commitment of six Animation Theme Bundle leads, their organizations and working groups to take up the work of AbLKC.
- Strategic hiring of co-ordinators who have expertise in Aboriginal learning and strong affiliation with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and organizations.
- Working with CCL in defining success in Aboriginal learning; holistic learning models, national indicators for reporting and monitoring
- Creating ties with Aboriginal national organizations
- Working closely with CCL to identify research gaps, contributing to On-line Resource Centre, State of Learning Reports and Composite Learning Index in the future etc.
- Knowledge Exchange and Information Sharing events locally, regionally and nationally
- Joint projects with the Adult Learning Knowledge Centre (Reclaiming the Learning Spirit Report and Action Plan pending), Assembly of First Nations (Learning as a Community for Renewal and Growth) and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (Education Summit)
- Partnerships with the Canadian Association for School Health, National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, Centre of Excellence for Child and Adolescents with Special Needs, Canadian Educational Association and AERC

c. Discussion Review

Following the presentation of Rita Bouvier on AbLKC's mandates and achievements, the Town Hall meeting discussion ensued, based on the following questions:

- What has been the greatest impact of AbLKC from your perspective?
- What do you see as a significant policy issue affecting Aboriginal learners and learning?
- What actions might you or your organization take to become more involved?

General Comments

The responses came from all corners of the audience, including university professors, CCL staff and researchers as well as the Aboriginal community.

Concerning the impact of AbLKC, many participants commented that the organization's ability to pull various Aboriginal institutions together in the form of consortium has been a remarkable achievement. Another major achievement has been AbLKC's capacity to garner various Indigenous ways of knowing through these institutions.

AbLKC's journey in the past two years, however, has been full of challenges. For instance, a participant from Nova Scotia commented that he had received an e-mail from AbLKC on 'redefining success' in Aboriginal learning, and was keen to know the processes and procedures involved in this project.

Yet, for some, the proposed work model of configuring success lessons provides a roadmap for the Aboriginal communities to build on; it could be applied in communities across Canada. It also deepens the understanding of holistic learning, the understanding of the spirit, language and land.

It was commented that, since the conference was not restricted to academics, but also included teachers, artists and community members, its aims will be better represented with knowledge sources participating from multiple social groups. In this sense, it should be considered that the work of AbLKC has been positive, proactive and not reactive.

Undoubtedly, events such as this conference enable various organizations to exchange knowledge and information. It is clear that many of the sessions, which brought forth promising practices, will contribute to research applications locally, regionally as well as nationally.

In the last two years, AbLKC moved beyond forums and meetings of actions. In its development as an organization, AbLKC provided a democratic space for people to speak and provided an opportunity to listen. According to some participants, it is certain that in five years' time, changes will be noticeable.

In all, AbLKC's work has allowed people to be constructive and offer success models. However, CCL alone cannot achieve tangible results; "It is the people, institutions and Consortium members who are the potential actors in fulfilling AbLKC's objectives and face the challenges that lie ahead."

In reference to Judge Turpel-Lafond's presentation, it is observed that both CCL and AbLKC will go a long way in establishing Aboriginal education as a human right.

Challenges

Although many participants were impressed with the work of CCL, it was pointed out that most non-Aboriginal teachers, who in fact form a majority of the teaching community in the Aboriginal schools across Canada, were not informed of AbLKC's work.

Other challenges identified were:

- AbLKC's work and models, including its research findings, do not have a connection with the provincial educational systems.
- It is widely acknowledged that there needs to be a more secure funding base for AbLKC; if CCL is not renewed for the second term, the work produced by AbLKC may not be sustainable.
- Apart from CCL's basic funding, other funding options from corporations, universities, the Assembly of First Nations and Aboriginal friendship centres should be explored on a consistent basis.
- In all, even though there is commonality of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people who have a unique place in Canada both culturally and historically, more effort and attention is needed for the learning issues of Inuit people.

Although the current context of CCL's continuation is based on its summative evaluation, CCL has been extended for five additional months without additional funds. This may be tenuous but the continuation will have a tremendous impact on building the organization with the help of other resources. Yet there is no doubt that more funding is needed from provincial and federal resources.

Implications for Policy

It is evident, in the current policy concerning Aboriginal people, that there is a continued absence of equity in financial resources for learning initiatives. Furthermore, there is no viable and vested interest or initiative by the government to take Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives and make them part of public educational systems. AbLKC's work also faces similar challenges concerning policy implications of its research. The following are some of the suggestions offered by the participants for AbLKC's strategic approach to policy:

- Many communities are initiating processes to consult with provincial educational systems with regard to Aboriginal education.
- The direction for learning set by AbLKC is good for all children and students.
- The current policy indicators on Aboriginal education are "hard pressed to identify single policy issues—often do not promote a positive picture of Aboriginal people." Their emphasis on statistics does not represent the real Aboriginal educational situation.

- Decolonization should be practised as a policy, where non-Aboriginal people are educated about Aboriginal people in the educational systems. In other words, policies should “ensure decolonization and empowerment is part of the curriculum.”
- Aboriginal people, especially parents, need to have a control over the institutions where their children are schooled.
- The importance of anti-racist education should be stressed.

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