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# Aboriginal Literacy

*Continuing Ontario's Participation*  
in  
Developing National  
Aboriginal Literacy  
Goals and Strategies

*August 2003*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The National Aboriginal Design Committee (NADC) extends its gratitude to the following, without whom this project would not have been possible. This project not only enhanced the knowledge and experiences of the NADC Ontario Members, it also facilitated the sharing of their expertise with people involved in Aboriginal/Indigenous education/literacy in other provinces and territories across Canada, as well as others countries, such as South Africa, Guatemala, Guyana, and the United States.

- a. The Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), who provided the funding for the NADC Ontario members to conduct research on Aboriginal literacy initiatives;
- b. The National Literacy Secretariat (NLS), who provided the funding for the larger national initiative of which this project was a part;
- c. The Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (ONLC), who were financial sponsors for the MTCU dollars;
- d. The First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI), who were the financial sponsors for the NLS monies; and,
- e. Most important of all, the Creator, from Whom we consciously and consistently seek guidance and support.

This report covers the period May 2002 to July 2003. (Funding arrived mid-July 2002, but the NADC had already committed to an event that took place in May 2002.)

# I. INTRODUCTION

The NADC began under the auspices of Beverly Anne Sabourin and Associates (BASA). In Phase I of this project, BASA compiled an inventory of more than 90 (ninety) basic and intermediate adult literacy programs sponsored and/or initiated by Aboriginal Peoples, and involving Aboriginal learners as clients. Phases Two and Three developed evaluation mechanisms:

*“...to consider those factors and variables from project inception to evaluation, that have contributed to success...”*

of Aboriginal literacy programs. The aforementioned inventory, as well as two chapters entitled “Common Threads” and “Critical Indicators” constitute “The Language of Literacy, A National Resource Directory of Aboriginal Literacy Programs”.

A consistent theme in the program interviews was the need to develop a national network of Aboriginal literacy practitioners, and to have a National Aboriginal Literacy Gathering (NALG).

In 1998, BASA established a National Aboriginal Design Committee (NADC) of seven Aboriginal literacy practitioners who had responsibility for designing and overseeing the NALG. In 1999, the NADC assumed responsibility for the project.

The NALG took place at Nakoda Lodge in Morley, Alberta from April 26-29, 2000. 129 (one hundred and twenty-nine)

people with a vested interest in Aboriginal literacy (with representation from every province and territory in Canada) came together to participate in workshops/discussions on topics which had been identified in the Phase I survey. Consistently, those present called for:

1. more NALGs;
2. a national Aboriginal literacy organization (NALO); and,
3. consultative support for their work.

An overarching theme in all of the above, and repeatedly suggested by the NALG participants is the need for, and the recognition of, distinct Aboriginal approaches to literacy/education.



The NALG Follow-Up Strategy (NALGFUS) incorporated those very requests. The NADC expanded its numbers to 18 (eighteen) to be more representative of those

involved in Aboriginal literacy, and included Learners and Elders, as well as practitioners. In addition, the expanded NADC sought to include membership by those with expertise/experience in the various areas of Aboriginal literacy – Science, Aboriginal languages, a provincial Aboriginal literacy network already in existence (the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition – ONLC), and successful models.

The following key informants in Aboriginal literacy/education in Ontario participated on the NADC:

- ★ Dawn Antone, President, ONLC, and Literacy Coordinator, Council Fire Cultural Centre, Toronto (Dawn has since moved to Manitoba. She is now the Literacy Coordinator, The Aboriginal Centre, Winnipeg – a move facilitated by her participation on the NADC)
  - ★ Rita Buffalo, former Learner, Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre, now Literacy Coordinator, Anishnawbe Skills Development Program, Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre, thus an excellent role model for Aboriginal literacy Learners;
  - ★ Bernice Ireland, Literacy Coordinator, Nokee Kwe, London, Ontario – a practitioner who, in the opinion of the NADC Coordinator, has exhibited her Heart and Spirit in her work, and who has used various culture-based ways of engaging the learners. In addition to being an ONLC Board Member, Bernice is also an Onyata:aka Elder;
  - ★ Michael Johnny, independent Aboriginal literacy consultant, with ten years' experience in Aboriginal literacy at both the local and provincial levels, author of the Native Literacy Planning Process Report, former President of the ONLC, now Executive Director for the Peel-Halton-Dufferin Adult Learning Network Michael is doing his Master's Thesis through Trent University on "Provincial Policy Implications for Native Literacy in Ontario";
  - ★ Janice Brant, First Nations Technical Institute, Mohawks of Tyendinaga Territory – a non-ONLC program that completed a two-year Prior Learning Assessment Pilot Project. Janice is doing her Masters in Adult Education, with a focus on Aboriginal adult literacy, Saint Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia;
  - ★ Nancy Cooper, on leave from her position as Field Consultant to the Native Stream, The AlphaPlus Centre, to pursue a Masters' Degree in Adult Literacy, with a focus on Aboriginal literacy, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), Toronto, Ontario; and,
  - ★ Jacquie Labonte, Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Coordinator, Niagara Regional Native Centre, St. Catharines, Ontario
- While it was not in the NADC selection criteria, it was a "synchronicity" that half of the Ontario participants are working on the Masters Degrees in issues pertaining to Aboriginal literacy.
- The NADC proposed three main objectives for incorporating the wealth of Aboriginal literacy/education experiences in Ontario into its national Aboriginal literacy goals and strategies. The seven NADC Ontario members were involved in research, the purpose of which was:
- a. To prepare a report on key findings from research on Aboriginal literacy initiatives in other provinces/territories, which will include recommendations on how those findings may be incorporated into

Aboriginal literacy programming in Ontario;

- b. To provide input into the NADC Position Paper on Aboriginal literacy; and,
- c. To participate in the development of the NADC Business Plan for a fully-resourced National Aboriginal Literacy Office.

It is important to note that two of the NADC Ontario members – Michael Johnny and Nancy Cooper – have participated in the Research Circles, which are part of the Festival of

Literacies project through OISE. In addition, Nancy Cooper has taken the following course, also a part of the Festival of Literacies, “An Introduction to Social Practice Theories in Adult Literacy” by Dr. Mary Hamilton, Professor of Adult Learning and Literacy in the Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University, UK.

All of this experience is integral to the NADC’s building a foundation for an Aboriginal literacy/education research/project strategy.

## II. A. POSITION PAPER

This report begins with a description of the process for both the “Position Paper on Aboriginal Literacy” and the NADC Business Plan. These are the two overarching documents with which the NADC has been concerned during most of 2002-2003.

### A. **The Position Paper**

The following is the Executive Summary from the Position Paper, which can be accessed in PDF at

[www.nald.ca/fulltext/position/position/pdf](http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/position/position/pdf)

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#### **Executive Summary**

*A group of 7 (seven) Aboriginal literacy practitioners that formed the first National Aboriginal Design Committee (NADC) met in October 1998, in Toronto. Their task was to organize and oversee the first ever in Canada National Aboriginal Literacy Gathering (NALG). This was in response to a survey of over 90 (ninety) Aboriginal literacy programs across Canada that were Aboriginal-controlled.*

*In early 2001, the initial group of 7 (seven) expanded to 18 (eighteen), and included Elders and Learners, as well as practitioners. The NADC is an inclusive model of Aboriginal Peoples from all sectors of Canada working together. It is a balance to the current political, sector-specific Aboriginal organizations that often have gaps, perceived or otherwise; that is, many Aboriginal Peoples fall through the*

*cracks of such an infrastructure. The NADC is also a model of a group working on a specific – and foundational - issue that often gets overlooked in the larger agenda of such political, sector-specific organizations.*

*In the aforementioned survey, at the NALG, and in the NALG Follow-up Strategy, Aboriginal literacy practitioners have consistently asked for:*

- a. *consultative support in all areas of Aboriginal literacy program delivery and administration – support that has a solid working knowledge of the many issues impacting on Aboriginal Learners, organizations and communities;*
- b. *information about resources and methodologies found to be effective with Aboriginal literacy Learners, and that best addresses the social, economic, political, educational and spiritual realities of those Learners; that is, culture-based and/or from a holistic approach.*
- c. *a means of networking and sharing experiences, particularly their successes and challenges.*

*Time and again in the last four years, as the NADC Coordinator speaks to Aboriginal literacy practitioners and/or Learners at workshops and conferences in almost every province and territory across Canada, they seek support for culture-based/culturally-relevant information and approaches. While some of these practitioners may be members of the provincial or territorial*



non-Aboriginal literacy network in their particular area, they feel that mainstream responses to their concerns are not relevant to an Aboriginal context.

In the meantime, the federal government announced "Canada's Innovation Strategy", which is presented in two papers which

"provide a blueprint for action so that, by the end of this decade, Canada is known throughout the world for its culture of excellence, learning and innovation."

Those papers are:

1. Achieving Excellence: Investing in People, Knowledge and Opportunity, which focuses on how to strengthen Canada's science and research capacity, and on how to ensure that this knowledge contributes to building an innovative economy that benefits **all** Canadians; and,
2. Knowledge Matters: Skills and Learning for Canadians, which looks at what can be done to strengthen learning in Canada, to develop people's talent and to provide opportunity for **all** to contribute to and benefit from the new economy.<sup>1</sup> (both highlights by the NADC).

The assembly at the NALG mandated the NADC to move forward with establishing a national Aboriginal literacy organization. The NADC is planning such an organization, based on Aboriginal principles and processes. This organization would address the stated needs of Aboriginal literacy practitioners and Learners, AND would also meet all the criteria of government and corporate funding. In addition, the proposed

institute would assist the non-Aboriginal literacy movement in two ways:

1. many non-Aboriginal literacy programs serve Aboriginal Learners, often because it is the only program in the Learner's area. Practitioners in these programs often come to the NADC for assistance; and,
2. Aboriginal holistic approaches to literacy encompass both quantitative and qualitative outcomes in Learners; that is, they address the "whole person". Many non-Aboriginal practitioners are already doing the holistic approach, and would like more help in doing so.

The goal of the NADC in establishing a national Aboriginal literacy organization specifically addresses the issues raised in "Knowledge Matters". The message from the Honourable Jane Stewart, Minister of Human Resources Development, that accompanies "Knowledge Matters", states that:

"We also want to work closely with business, labour, educators, Aboriginal leaders, community groups, and all interested Canadians to develop a national approach."

The NADC's Position Paper on Aboriginal Literacy is an opportunity for the Government of Canada to work with the NADC in working towards "The Canada We Want". The proposed national Aboriginal literacy organization can be a means of ensuring literacy as a foundation for the entrepreneurial skills promotion, job creation and training programs targeted at Aboriginal Peoples as promised in The Speech From the Throne to Open the Second Session of the Thirty-Seventh Parliament of Canada, September 30, 2002.

*The NADC suggests that the Early Childhood Development initiative is a model of a national strategy in which stakeholders and the three levels of government worked toward a common cause.*

*The NADC further recommends the following:*

- 1. That the Government of Canada develop a national comprehensive whole-of-government Aboriginal adult literacy, numeracy and life skills policy.*
- 2. That there be a coordinated Aboriginal literacy strategy, separate from the national literacy strategy suggested at the Best Practices National Workshop on Literacy, October 3-4, 2002.*
- 3. That further discussion with funders in the various levels of government is needed as to what constitutes the holistic approach to Aboriginal literacy, which includes literacy in Aboriginal languages.*
- 4. That overall funding levels and policies for Aboriginal literacy be commensurate with the reality that Aboriginal Peoples have been among the most disadvantaged groups in Canada.*

*The NADC believes that the national Aboriginal literacy organization and the aforementioned four recommendations will help the Government of Canada to fulfill one of the objectives in Knowledge Matters:*

*“Clearly, concerted efforts are required to help improve the overall levels of educational attainment of Aboriginal people.”*

*We thank you for your time and consideration of the matters we raise in this Position Paper, and we look forward to a mutually beneficial working relationship.*

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The Position Paper has the following sections:

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Introduction
- III. Methodology
- IV. NADC Guiding Principles
- V. The Learner
- VI. The Holistic Approach
- VII. Language and Culture
- VIII. Aboriginal Types of Literacies
- IX. Inclusivity
- X. Aboriginal Control of Aboriginal Literacy/Education
- XI. Long-Term and Adequate Funding
- XII. Supports for Culture-Based/Holistic Approaches to Aboriginal Literacy
- XIII. Recommendations
- XIV. Conclusion

In Spring 2003, the NADC Coordinator provided the NADC, including the Ontario members, with an outline of what constitutes a Position Paper, and asked

for their comments. She then proceeded with the first draft. This draft was provided to the NADC in early September 2002. They were asked to have comments to the Coordinator by the first week of October 2002.

The Coordinator then incorporated their comments, and sent the final draft to the NADC a week prior to Literacy Action Day. Members were provided with copies to present to the Members of Parliament and Senators with whom we had meetings.

The Position Paper was distributed widely to both literacy and Aboriginal organizations. In addition, the NADC Coordinator did a presentation, along with representatives from the Canadian Learning Disabilities Association and the Canadian Public Health Association, to the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities on Tuesday, February 4, 2003 (hereinafter referred to as the Standing Committee).

On Monday, February 10, 2003, Chantal Collin, one of the Standing Committee's researchers, asked for an electronic version of the NADC Position Paper, citing that it is "very good", and that she wanted to have it translated into French for the Francophone members of the Standing Committee. It was her hope that the Standing Committee would then do a Roundtable on Aboriginal Literacy. Until that date, such a Roundtable had not been planned. The Roundtable on Aboriginal Literacy happened in March 2003. It was one of fifteen (15) roundtables around this time from January to May, 2003. The Standing Committee also received eighteen 18 written submissions.

From all of this input, plus their own research, the Standing Committee produced a report entitled, "Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need for a Pan-Canadian Response" (hereinafter referred to as the Parliamentary Report). This report is available at: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/InfoComDoc/37/2/HUMA/Studies/Reports/humarp03-e.htm> It has an Aboriginal-specific section, and was tabled in the House of Commons in June 2003. The Standing Committee requested

*"that the government table a comprehensive response to the report within one hundred and fifty (150) days."*

The Aboriginal-specific recommendations from the Standing Committee, in the view of the NADC, are a first in that they specifically name an organization to receive funding. Some of the wording from these recommendations closely resemble the recommendations in the NADC Position Paper.

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### **Standing Committee Recommendations**

#### **Recommendation 7**

*The Committee recommends that the federal government immediately begin consultations with the Aboriginal communities, and provincial and territorial governments, to develop an Aboriginal Literacy Strategy that: incorporates a holistic approach; respects Aboriginal languages, traditions and values; and is funded at a level commensurate with the seriousness of the problem of low literacy among Aboriginal peoples.*

## Recommendation 8

The Committee anticipates that the implementation of an Aboriginal Literacy Strategy will take some time. In the interim, the Committee recommends that a new National Literacy Secretariat funding stream be created – the Aboriginal Funding Stream. In addition to the amount currently being spent (approximately \$2 million) through the National Literacy Secretariat on Aboriginal literacy projects, the government should allocate \$5 million to this new funding stream, of which one-half should be delivered through the national Aboriginal literacy organization that is currently being established by the National Aboriginal Design Committee, while the remainder should be delivered via the existing funding streams, as is currently being done.

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### **NADC Recommendations (Excerpt from the Position Paper on Aboriginal Literacy)**

*“The right to be Indigenous is the most fundamental and important of all Human Rights.”<sup>2</sup>*

The NADC therefore recommends:

#### **1. That there be support for a National Aboriginal Literacy Organization.**

We request that the SSCAP assist the NADC in securing the assistance of the Government of Canada in establishing a national Aboriginal literacy organization. Such an office will require coordinated cooperation and support from those federal, provincial and territorial governments that have a

vested interest in Aboriginal literacy. [In the past, attempts to secure funding from other federal departments (INAC), and other provinces and territories for NADC activities that serve their jurisdictions have been unsuccessful. In addition to the National Literacy Secretariat, only the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities has been forthcoming.]

A Draft Business Plan has been prepared and awaits input by the NADC. A breakdown of the budget will follow when the NADC ratifies its Business Plan in the Spring of 2003. Please see Appendix F for the draft Mission and Goals of the proposed National Aboriginal Literacy Organization

Support from the Government of Canada to the NALO would address HRDC’s commitment in Knowledge Matters:

“Clearly, **concerted** efforts are required to help improve the overall levels of educational attainment of Aboriginal people...”

#### **2. That the Government of Canada develop a national comprehensive whole-of-government Aboriginal adult literacy, numeracy and lifeskills policy.**

International research draws a direct line of cause and effect between government policy and a nation’s literacy capabilities. Evidence is emerging that **the co-ordination of policies over a range of different policy domains can have significant impact, directly and indirectly, over a nation’s adult literacy and numeracy levels.**<sup>3</sup>

*In addition, the Australian Council on Adult Literacy (ACAL) Position Paper, Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society (OECD – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2000), suggests that:*

*“...a broad range of policy areas such as those related to **youth, seniors, employment, human resource development, health, social welfare and crime prevention are involved when considering how to address adult literacy needs.**”*

*Further:*

*“Encouraging results are beginning to emerge from some OECD countries of whole of government approaches to these issues, although their policies and programs may well still need closer investigation to see whether they are offering much to low income people with limited literacy skills.”*

### **3. That there be a separate and coordinated Aboriginal literacy strategy.**

*The NADC recognizes that the aforementioned policy would require long-term and comprehensive consultation with the field. However, a national Aboriginal Literacy and Numeracy Strategy such as the one in Australia would be an interim measure. The proposed national Aboriginal literacy organization can be instrumental in coordinating this work with the non-governmental organizations. (The NADC Coordinator has already provided the National Literacy Secretariat with a copy of Australia’s National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy: 2000-2004.) That strategy:*

*“...is aimed at improving education outcomes for Indigenous people. The objective is clear: Indigenous people can reach comparable levels of literacy and numeracy to other Australians and should be given every opportunity to do so.”*

*The NADC believes that funding for the NALO and a National Aboriginal Literacy Strategy MUST be coordinated across the various national, provincial and territorial government departments that pertain to literacy.*

### **4. That further discussion with various funders is needed as to what constitutes Aboriginal literacy activities, including Aboriginal languages.**

*As recent as the Best Practices National Workshop on Literacy, October 3-4, 2002, Toronto, participants from every province and territory in Canada resoundingly identified the need to “Define literacy and deepen the understanding.”*

*As a field of inquiry, Aboriginal literacy has a unique and important contribution to make to literacy research and theory. It must be linked to curricular and andragogical applications. Aboriginal literacy is interdisciplinary, combining print-based text with many sub-fields. Aboriginal literacy requires:*

*a. Development of more holistic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms – “Success” must balance qualitative/quantitative, process/product. First and foremost, evaluation must recognize that*

*Learners are moving towards an inner locus of control, rather than relying on predetermined charts, matrices, etc. to determine progress.*

*b. Strategic thinking and planning, and for the definition of long, medium and short-term objectives and goals, based on the question,*

*“What are the skills needed and valued in Aboriginal culture, rather than focussing on what mainstream culture deems is most important?”  
(UN Decade for Literacy)*

**5. That overall funding levels and policies for Aboriginal literacy be commensurate with the reality that Aboriginal Peoples have been among the most disadvantaged groups in Canada.**

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The NADC eagerly awaits the federal government's response to the Parliamentary Report.

## II. B. BUSINESS PLAN

### **B. The NADC Business Plan**

The process for the Business Plan is described in each of the NADC Meetings in the next section. It is available in PDF from [douganderson@sympatico.ca](mailto:douganderson@sympatico.ca)

### **I. Executive Summary**

#### **Concept**

The founders of the National Indigenous Literacy Association (NILA) have done extensive research and networking around Aboriginal literacy and identified significant gaps and issues in strategy, service provision, and research and development for Aboriginal literacy in Canada. NILA has been established to address these issues by facilitating a strong network focused on development and support services for Aboriginal literacy. These services, as well as the organization itself, will be grounded in a traditional Aboriginal cultural base combined with an emerging wealth of Indigenous expertise and professionalism in modern education. NILA will grow quickly, but carefully, by strategically accessing funds from government and philanthropic agencies and corporate donors. The organization will begin to practically and effectively address some of the key outstanding issues in Aboriginal literacy by the year 2005. By 2009, NILA will be nationally and internationally known for providing excellent strategic literacy development services for Indigenous peoples.

#### **Organizational Description**

In February 2002 the National Aboriginal Design Committee (NADC) founded NILA, a national nonprofit corporation based in Canada. NILA provides Aboriginal culture-based services addressing strategic and developmental gaps in Aboriginal literacy. It is the only national organization that addresses this unique area of need and, as such, provides leadership in the area of Aboriginal literacy development. NILA will undergo a transition period (2003-04) in preparation for opening a fully operational office in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 2004. Members of the founding committee (NADC) include Aboriginal Elders, Learners, and practitioners from across Canada, and have agreed on a Board of Directors for the transition period that reflects their diverse interests. The organization is expected to grow steadily, quickly gaining a reputation for excellence. During the transition, NILA will be overseen by its volunteer board and managed on a day-to-day basis by a contracted transition team accountable to the Board. During the transition and first year of full operations, NILA will evolve a structure that reflects Aboriginal values, with advisory and Elders committees and a unique Aboriginal approach to attracting membership that will help ensure organizational quality.



## **Mission Statement**

The National Indigenous Literacy Association (NILA) is the eyes, ears and voice of Aboriginal literacy in Canada, and reflects the spirit and values of Aboriginal peoples and nations in all of its work. We emphasize Aboriginal culture-based quality in our services and respect in all our relationships. NILA supports the development of holistic approaches to literacy education and partnerships and links with quality Indigenous education initiatives wherever they are found.

## **Background/ Field Analysis**

Aboriginal literacy programs are delivered in dozens of Aboriginal communities across Canada, and non-Aboriginal agencies are delivering or partnering in many more. However, most of these programs are struggling for survival, and barely scratch the surface of the need. The increasing literacy requirements of the modern world, and the rising Aboriginal population point to a worsening crisis in literacy for our communities if a coordinated approach is not taken to address the need. NILA board and staff recognize this high level of unmet need in Aboriginal literacy service provision in Canada, and that this need is both qualitative and quantitative.

In spite of the need, our analysis of trends and issues in literacy education and Aboriginal communities tells us that literacy is still not a priority among Aboriginal stakeholders, and that many Aboriginal people are unlikely to take full advantage of literacy services as they are currently set up. Our experience tells us that Aboriginal communities are much more likely to develop and make effective use of literacy programs if there are strategic partnerships ensuring

Aboriginal control and culture-based approaches, as well as quality cross-cultural and cross-sectoral programming. Aboriginal cultures have great potential to contribute to literacy education in all communities, nationally and internationally; however, this potential remains largely untapped, undeveloped and uncoordinated. In order to tap this potential, it is vital to have cross-cultural understanding (of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community contexts and challenges), and to bring these perspectives together using an Aboriginal culture-based model. Until now, no agency has existed to facilitate, coordinate, network or strategize around Aboriginal literacy service development on a national scale.

## **Key Services Strategy**

NILA's main service functions fall into two broad areas:

- Provide a strategic networking and advocacy forum for Aboriginal literacy stakeholders;
- Facilitate research & development projects and other supports for Aboriginal literacy.

NILA services are unique in that they move away from a "deficit model" (which focuses on the troubles in our communities) to a perspective that emphasizes our strengths, which are grounded in Aboriginal cultures. NILA is also developing a distinct culture-based approach to collaborative models and partnerships, and a cutting edge strategy for entering the era of globalization.

Many NILA services, such as networking and training, will be designed so that they can be translated to local contexts and meet a wide variety of stakeholder needs,

even internationally. NILA also provides its services at different levels depending on the needs of its stakeholders, who range from Learners to post-secondary academic institutions and governments.

NADC has already attended and presented at numerous conferences on education and literacy, as well as coordinating the National Aboriginal Literacy Gathering in 2000. NILA will continue to network extensively to maintain a high profile in the realm of Aboriginal education and literacy, including the hosting of further National Aboriginal Literacy Gatherings. In the next 3 years, NILA will be established as an innovative leader in Aboriginal education. Initially (years 1 and 2 in this business plan), NILA will establish strong relationships with leaders in Aboriginal literacy and education across Canada. By 2005, we will be in a position to provide significant and effective services to our network of partners and clients. We will also research and consider implementing the following activities between 2004 and 2009:

- The development of distinct Indigenous approaches to literacy training provision based on partnerships with Aboriginal teacher training programs;
- International partnerships in advocacy, cross-cultural training, and other areas with Indigenous educational organizations and leaders; and
- In the longer term, an expansion of our head office, featuring a model culture-based “learning lab” environment, or “Centre of Excellence” for literacy learning.

## **Clients (Population Served)**

NILA's main clients are Aboriginal literacy Learners, practitioners and delivery agencies. Our clients demand alternative educational choices that are not readily available right now, and which continue to be largely neglected by existing education systems. Aboriginal people are concerned about the effects of mainstream education systems on the health of our communities and the survival of our cultures. At the same time, the clients still require literacy training services that prepare them for survival in the modern economy. This means that cross-cultural approaches are required in order to meet the needs of our clients. NILA will address these needs through its services, and will contribute to greater success for Aboriginal people in education, employment, and cultural revitalization.

## **Partnerships**

NILA must work closely with many community partners who specialize in a variety of services, including Aboriginal Educational Institutes, Federal and Provincial governments, and many others. These stakeholders are also clients in that they stand to benefit from the kinds of partnerships that NILA offers. However, their main role in relation to NILA is as partners in the development, coordination and delivery of our services to our main clients: the Learners and direct providers of literacy training. NILA will distinguish itself to its partners through its strong Aboriginal culture base, collaborative approach, and efficient operations.

## **Communication Strategy**

NILA's communication strategy is to present its services as the best solution to the most pressing needs of its stakeholders – our clients and partners. In our transition year, we will develop detailed communication strategies for both of these categories of stakeholders. Since many of our stakeholders are struggling with limited resources, NILA will be positioned as a collaborative provider of Aboriginal literacy development services that provide high value for time invested. NILA will use a variety of marketing approaches and media, including brochures, papers, conferences, seminars, and internet technology and, above all, traditional means of communication grounded in our ceremonies and cultures. We will focus on inviting collaboration with key stakeholders who share our commitment to culture-based approaches and high quality standards.

Starting in Year 1, outreach and networking for NILA will be handled by a committee led by the Executive Director and including Elders, members, and directors. In Year 2 (2005-06) we will consider hiring a Communications & Partnership Officer to assist with building awareness and generating contacts as our services and partnerships grow.

## **Management and Staffing**

The NILA management team currently consists of the transition board and two contract staff. The current NILA board, members and contract staff include representation from Aboriginal Elders, Learners, practitioners and executives with extensive and successful backgrounds in literacy and education. The transition team has many years of

experience with large-scale startup operations and organizational management in training and education. Maintaining and improving on this high level of expertise, professionalism, and integrity is top priority for NILA.

During the Transition Phase (spring/03 – fall/04), the board will oversee the hiring of a transition team (contracted project staff). Towards the end of this phase, a committee from the Board will hire a permanent Executive Director, who will assist in the hiring of an executive assistant and project staff for Year 1 (fall/04). There will be a gradual expansion of staff in years 2 through 4, as funding permits. During this time, NILA will consider hiring or contracting a Finance & Fundraising Officer, a Training Specialist, and a Communications & Partnership Officer. Addition of staff must always be in keeping with both successful fundraising and practical and improved service levels to stakeholders.

For biographies of current contract staff, see section II and Appendix 1 (Human Resources). For a list of NADC committee and NILA board members, as well as job descriptions for staff, see Appendix 1.

## **Operations**

Phase 1: Transition (2003/04). Operate from offices of contract staff in preparation for year 1. Focus on Communication Strategy (networking and strategic capacity development). NILA managed by project staff and board, which meets quarterly and communicates through email. Establish links and foundation supporting a culture-based organization and project strategy.

Phase 2: Years 1 – 3 of full operations (2004-07). Implement culture-based Elders, learners, and other member committees. Rent Winnipeg office and facilities, and further develop capacity for service provision, technology plan, and holistic infrastructure. Develop and implement project strategy, prioritizing and beginning to effectively address outstanding issues and gaps in Aboriginal Literacy through project activity by the year 2005.

Phase 3: Years 4 – 5 (2007-09). Increase funding significantly and establish reputation as a centre of excellence in the provision of services for Indigenous literacy development, research, partnerships, training and networking. Expand to include international partners. Begin planning to develop and move into an expanded facility designed to reflect the holistic philosophy of the organization and house the Indigenous Learning Laboratory.

### **Financial Strategy**

NILA will access funds for the transition phase from government funding designated for projects that address strategic issues and gaps in literacy (NLS), as well as through innovative partnerships with other agencies that are not literacy specific, but are related to Aboriginal employment, heritage and health. During the transition phase, we will begin to establish relationships with corporate donors and foundations. Over the 5 year plan, we will reduce our exclusive dependence on government

funds until we have accessed a matching or greater amount of funds from philanthropic agencies and corporate donors, and to a lesser extent, by providing services to our growing network of stakeholders. By achieving its fundraising targets, NILA will position itself for financial sustainability and some self-funded growth.

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The NADC Business Plan has the following sections:

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Agency/Description
- III. Field Overview
- IV. Client Analysis
- V. Partnerships
- VI. Strategic Position and Risks
- VII. Communication Strategy
- VIII. Operational Plan
- IX. Technology Plan
- X. Human Resources
- XI. Wider Responsibilities
- XII. Implementation Plan
- XIII. Financial Plan
- XIV. Appendices

It is important to note that the NADC Business Plan was ratified by the NADC at its March 2003 Meeting. That is, it has not had as much distribution and use as the NADC Position Paper, which was completed in October 2002. However, the NADC anticipates that, as the Business Plan gets discussed with the clients and partners with whom we will be consulting during the Communications Strategy, it will serve as a template for getting key stakeholders on-side, and for establishing a culture-based organization.

# III. CHRONOLOGY OF ACTIVITIES

## A. The NADC Meetings

During the 15-month time period, the NADC had three face-to-face meetings as follows:

1. Echo Valley Conference Centre, Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan, May 12-13, 2002;
2. Aristocrat Suites Hotel, Ottawa, Ontario, October 25, 2002;
3. Aboriginal Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba, March 12-14, 2003.

The NADC incorporates as much of the Aboriginal spiritual traditions into its operations as possible, including Committee meetings. Each meeting began with a prayer, usually done by a person from the area where the meeting was held. Often, the NADC Coordinator or one of the Committee Members sang a song, in the language wherever possible, and using either a shaker or a drum. At times, we did an Aboriginal traditional dance to renew our energies after a discussion.

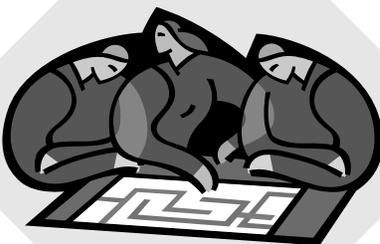
When the NADC discussed an item of business, everyone was given an opportunity to speak, or to pass if that was their wish. In most cases, this was done in the Talking Circle manner; however, sometimes members spoke up whenever they had something they wanted to share. The Coordinator kept track of who had spoken, and would remind people who had already spoken

several times that we needed to hear from those who had not yet made their contribution.

### 1- Echo Valley Conference Centre

This time and site of this meeting were chosen to coincide with Mamawenig, "Sharing and Celebrating our Learning", the first Provincial Aboriginal Literacy Gathering in Saskatchewan. Two NADC members, Don Pinay and Elder Irene Jacques, were on the Planning Committee for Mamawenig. The NADC felt it important to support the development of the second provincial Aboriginal literacy network in Canada, the now incorporated Saskatchewan Aboriginal Literacy Network. (The first provincial Aboriginal literacy network is the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition.)

The purpose of the NADC meeting was to introduce the NADC Business Planner, Doug Anderson, hereinafter referred to as the NADCBP. The NADC Coordinator introduced the NADCBP, citing his professional credentials, and his experiences as they relate to Business Planning. (The NADCBP has thirteen years experience in Aboriginal literacy at the local and provincial levels, negotiating for funding with his national counterparts. In addition, the NADCBP wrote a business plan for a colleague who was starting her own business. This business plan received an honourable mention from the funder.



Elder Irene Jacques, Dakota, Standing Buffalo First Nation, did the Opening as we were in her traditional territory. The NADC members did a go-around to express how they could support the NADCBP.

Mamawenig Coordinator, Byron Langan, and Mamawenig Cultural Coordinator, Larry Asapace, also participated in the meeting.

The NADCBP presented an overview of the general direction he would be taking with the Business Plan, and gave a timeline.

2 - Aristocrat Suites Hotel, Ottawa, October, 2002.

The time was chosen to coincide with:

- the Movement for Canadian Literacy's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner;
- the NADC's meeting with Senator Thelma Chalifoux, Chair, Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples (SSCAP); and,
- Literacy Action Day.

The site was chosen because it was within walking distance from all of the above. The purpose of the NADC meeting was to discuss the draft Business Plan, which the NADCBP had made available to members a week previous to the meeting.

The discussion was facilitated by Dr. Laara Fitznor, Cree Nation and of German and Scottish ancestry, Aboriginal Education, Department. of Adult

Education, Community Development, and Counselling Psychology, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). Laara was accompanied by Jacquie Lovell from Guyana. Jacquie teaches at the University of Guyana, Teacher Education, and was training with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Jacquie's goal was to visit various sites where Aboriginal and Indigenous educational practices are happening.

The NADC did a traditional opening in which each member held tobacco in his/her hand, and concentrated on the success of the Business Plan, while the NADC Coordinator did a song in the Anishnawbe language. The tobacco was given to the NADCBP so that he could then offer the tobacco to the Spirit World, and ask for Their Guidance and Support.

During the go-around, which is standard practice at an NADC meeting, one of the members became quite emotional as he was undergoing a health crisis. Everybody present joined hands with each other so as to send him their Love and Support.

The NADC members were then assigned to working groups to provide further input into the business plan. The NADC Coordinator recorded the proceedings of the discussions. These proceedings and the flipchart papers from the working groups were provided to the NADCBP to further refine the Business Plan for a meeting tentatively scheduled for Winnipeg, March 2003.

### 3 - The Aboriginal Centre, Winnipeg

This site was chosen because the NADC is considering set up its head office in Winnipeg. The date was chosen to coincide with a workshop by Dr. Laara Fitznor, who had done some previous work with the NADC.

The purpose of the meeting was to ratify the NADC Business Plan. Prior to the Business Plan discussion, there were three guests:

1. Peter Globensky of Beverly Anne Sabourin and Associates (BASA), who updated us on "Strengthening the Learning Circles", a professional development training institute, June 20-25, 2004. Bernice Ireland is chairing the five-member Advisory/Reference Group for the institute. Subsequent to the Winnipeg meeting, BASA has also asked Rita Buffalo to represent Northern Ontario on the Reference/Advisory Group; and,
2. Marg Rose and Alanna Hillis, Literacy Partners of Manitoba (LPM), who welcomed the NADC to Winnipeg. They presented us with an update of LPM activities, with a view to possible partnerships between LPM and the NADC.. (Ms. Hillis has asked both Janice Brant and the NADC Coordinator to deliver e-modules on their work for LPM).

Just days prior to this meeting, the NADC received official notification from Industry Canada that we were now incorporated as the National Indigenous Literacy Association (NILA). NILA had its first Board Meeting, at which they elected their executive. They are:

- President – Elder Irene Jacques, Dakota, Member, Standing Buffalo First Nation, now a resident of Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan, Vice-President, Saskatchewan Aboriginal Literacy Network);
- Vice-President – Learner Representative, Rita Buffalo, Anishnawbe, Literacy Program Coordinator, Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre, Member, Ontario Native Literacy Coalition;
- Secretary – Rhonda McCorrison, Metis, former Director of Education, Aboriginal People's College, currently Organization and Staff Development, Civil Service Commission, Winnipeg, Manitoba;
- Treasurer – Nancy Cooper, Metis, of Anishnawbe and Irish ancestry, Student, Masters Program, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education;
- Member – Mary Koyina Richardson, Dogrib, Dogrib Language Curriculum Developer, Aurora College, Mowhi Community Learning Centre, Rae Edzo, Northwest Territories;
- Member – Darrell Gerrits, Cree, Manager, Curriculum Resource, Research and Development Centre, Bigstone Cree Education Authority, Bigstone Cree First Nation, Alberta
- Member – Edwina Wetzel, Mi'kmaq, Director of Education, Conne River First Nation, Newfoundland

What a beautiful message to send to the world that the Elder is the President, and that the Learner Representative is the Vice-President.

Because this would be the last meeting of the full NADC, the Aboriginal Centre hosted a feast for us on the evening of Friday, March 14, 2003. Riverside Dakota, a drum group from Sioux Valley, Manitoba, did a song for us at the feast.

They also provided some music for us to do a few dances after the Feast.

After the meeting was over on Saturday, March 15, the NADC did a Give-Away to honour each other for all of our hard work over the past two years. Riverside Dakota again provided us with a traveling song, and a healing song for our journeys back to our home territories, and our “journey” forward.

### **B – Literacy Events**

In addition to providing feedback on the NADC Position Paper on Aboriginal Literacy, and the Business Plan, various NADC Ontario members participated in the several events. In the case of conferences, the workshops are listed. While the NADC Ontario members did indeed attend many of the workshops, they also had the opportunity to network with the presenters in between formal sessions, as well as to speak with people who had attended the workshops.

Those events are:

1. – Mamawenig, Provincial Aboriginal Literacy Gathering, May 2002, Fort Qu’Appelle, Saskatchewan;
2. - Literacy Action Day; October 2002, Ottawa, Ontario;
- 3 - A workshop by Dr. Laara Fitznor, March 2003, Winnipeg, Manitoba;
- 4 - The 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Prior Learning Assessment Conference, May 2003, Belleville, Ontario;
- 5 - An Institute on Research in Practice in Adult Literacy, Extending Practices, Building Networks
- 6 - Visit to the Wikwemikong Literacy Program, July 2003;
- 7 - Research Synthesis Meeting, Mohawks of Tyendinaga Territory, July 2003..
- 8 - Meeting with Dr. Jean Searle.

Many of the presenters at the conferences were practitioners doing research. Some are academics. In each case, it has been integral to the success of the NADC to be in ongoing contact with practitioners, academics and researchers all across Canada, and in other countries.

### **1- Mamawenig**

Mamawenig took place at the Echo Valley Conference Centre in the scenic Qu’Appelle Valley, Saskatchewan.

The NADC was honoured to have been invited to Mamawenig. *“The dream of a Saskatchewan Aboriginal Literacy Gathering began to form when several Saskatchewan delegates attended the first ever National Aboriginal Literacy Gathering in Morley, Alberta in April 2000. At the National Gathering, a number of the Saskatchewan representatives decided to continue the discussions on how to keep the momentum going in our province once we returned home.”* (draft report on Mamawenig)”

The objectives of Mamawenig were:

- To share information on current Aboriginal literacy programs:
  - new models, programs, and resources;
  - strengths/challenges of current approaches;
  - gaps in programming and curriculum; and,
  - opportunities for enduring partnerships.

- To provide opportunities for Learners, Elders, practitioners, educators, community leaders, and government staff to share ideas and resources, and to learn from each other;
- To develop a strategic plan for Aboriginal literacy that will be an integral part of the Literacy Strategy being developed by Saskatchewan Learning;
- To identify mechanisms to assist and support the development of Aboriginal literacy programs in all areas of the province.

Over 250 participants attended Mamawenig, including 12 First Nation and Metis Elders and Veterans, 34 Learners, practitioners, government staff and community leaders from Saskatchewan. As well, there were participants from British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, the Yukon and Connecticut, U.S.A.

We were moved by the respect accorded Learners and Elders at this Gathering. They were definitely front and centre. Each day began with an Opening Ceremony in which First Nations Veterans carried in flags, as well as with an Elders Panel. Conference volunteers could be seen tending to the Elders, making sure they were comfortable, and bringing them drinks at regular intervals.

There was time scheduled each day for the Learners to get together to discuss what was happening for them at the Gathering. On both the first night and second nights, Learners either shared their stories of challenge and success, or were honoured for their journeys. It was

a living reminder that we are all in this for the Learners first and foremost.

At “Mamawenig”, Ontario participants to the NADC had the opportunity to attend a wide variety of workshops (Italics denote where NADC staff or members presented):

- Keynote Address – “What is Aboriginal Literacy?”, by Ningwakwe/Priscilla George (NADC Coordinator);*
- Self to Story ‘Creative Writing’ – Larry Loyie (NADC Member) and Constance Brissenden, Living Traditions Inc., Vancouver, B.C.;*
- Ontario Native Literacy Coalition – Dawn Antone (NADC Ontario Member and ONLC President);*
- The Medicine Wheel Approach to Learning/Life (specifically for Learners) – Ningwakwe/Priscilla George, NADC Coordinator, Toronto, Ontario;*
- Prior Learning Assessment – Janice Brant, Ohahase Learning Centre, First Nations Technical Institute, Deseronto, Ontario (NADC Ontario Member);*
- AlphaRoute – Nancy Cooper, NADC Ontario Member;*
- Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body (for practitioners only) – Ningwakwe/Priscilla George, NADC Coordinator;*
- Collaborative Songwriting – Don Freed, Metis Songwriter, Singer, Manitoba – participants composed an Aboriginal literacy song;*
- E-mail for Elders – Bebe Ivanochko and Fiona Janvier, Saskatchewan;*
- Seeking Glimpses of Who We Are – Barbara Lagrelle and Phyllis Steeves, The Learning Centre, Edmonton, Alberta;*
- Youth Literacy, Touches the Spirit – Mary LeRoy;*
- Little Books/Big Books for Little/Big People – Judy Bear;*

- m. St. Mary Community School – Dawn Gibbons;
- n. Resources for Teachers/Tutors and Learners – Charles Ramsey, National Adult Literacy Database, Fredericton, New Brunswick;
- o. Celebrating and Encouraging Learner Writing – Charles Ramsey;
- p. Story Sacks – Lynne Mouro, Saskatchewan Literacy Network;
- q. FAS/E – Heather Sinclair;
- r. Cree/English Adult Literacy – Lavonne Dubois;
- s. Libraries and Aboriginal People – Harriet Roy;
- t. Tools for Community Building – Lisa Campbell, N.W.T. Literacy Council and Cayla Chenier, Nunavut Literacy Council;
- u. Northern Libraries and Literacy – Bebe Ivanochko and Harriet Roy, Saskatchewan;
- v. Workplace Literacy – Ann Curry;
- w. The Gift of Reading – Jacqueline Guest;
- x. Metis Curriculum – Calvin Racette;
- y. Proposal Writing and Funding – Terri Peters, Saskatchewan Literacy Network;
- z. Report on Schooling, Workforce and Income – John Dorion and Danette Star;
- aa. Rising to the Challenge – Sheila Musqua-Keewatin
- bb. Cross Cultural Study of Memories – Angeline Weenie, Dr. O’Reilly & Dr. Watson
- cc. A Dinner during which Learners were honoured for their journeys
- dd. Metis Theme Night – “Riel Reelers” and Fiddlers
- ee. Banquet – Awards for Literacy Work
- ff. First Nations Theme Night – Mini Pow-wow
- gg. Recommendations Plenary

Conference attendees were invited to participate in a Working Group each day, based on a participatory planning method developed over the past 40 years in communities around the world by the Institute of Cultural Affairs. This process is based on the belief that most of the solutions to problems and most of the answers to questions can be found within an organization or community. In these planning workshops, all participants are the experts. Each group was a microcosm of the whole group at the conference. The questions posed to the Working Groups were:

- a. Practical Vision, in which participants focused on *“What do we want to see going on to support literacy needs of Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan in 2007?”*
- b. Underlying Obstacles or Contradictions – *“What is blocking us from achieving our vision of Aboriginal literacy?”*
- c. Strategic Directions – *“What can we do to deal with the obstacles and realize our vision?”*

The input from these Working Groups was used to develop an Action Plan for Aboriginal Literacy.

A direct result of this conference was that Janice Brant was asked to facilitate a workshop at the ONLC AGM in June 2002. Janice’s presentation was on the Prior Learning Assessment Pilot that she had been doing at the Mohawks of Bay of Quinte Mohawk Territory. (Later in the year, Janice traveled to South Africa to share some of her work there, as well as to learn about literacy/education approaches in South Africa.)

An unplanned benefit at Mamawenig was that several healers from Central America were in the area. They had heard of an Aboriginal event, and came to listen to the Opening Keynote, and to be available for healing/counseling sessions, should conference participants wish. Several NADC Ontario members took advantage of the opportunity to hear Mayan teachings, or to seek guidance and support for the journeys – be it in Aboriginal literacy, or in Life.

Further, a sweatlodge was scheduled for the first two nights. Again, the NADC staff and several NADC Ontario members participated. Such participation affirmed the need to have traditional spiritual/healing activities at Aboriginal literacy gatherings. Often, Aboriginal literacy practitioners give their Hearts and Souls to their work, and need a time just for their own healing.

## 2- Literacy Action Day

On Literacy Action Day (LAD), literacy representatives from across the country come to Parliament Hill to discuss literacy issues with Members of Parliament (MPs) and Senators. LAD has been held annually since 1993, except for 2000 when a federal election intervened. (MCL website)

Literacy Action Day was also attended by all the national literacy organizations and their Learner representatives. The NADC Ontario members participated in the following:

- Breakfast with Senator Joyce Fairbairn

- Meeting with Senator Thelma Chalifoux, Chair, SSCAP; Adam Thompson, Clerk, SSCAP; and, Karen Roberts, Administrative Assistant to discuss the NADC Position Paper, a copy of which had been e-mailed to Senator Chalifoux's office two weeks previous to the meeting
- Reception – Speeches by Representatives of the Federal Political Parties

The NADC had their own preparatory meeting on the morning of Wednesday, October 24<sup>th</sup>, then met with the other national literacy organizations for briefings, which included key messages and what to expect at Parliament Hill (security, MPs and Senators are real people who want to hear our concerns, so they know what issues to bring forward, etc.)

The Ontario NADC members met with various MPs and Senators, to whom they presented copies of the NADC Position Paper on Aboriginal literacy:

- a. Rita Buffalo (Learner Representative, Ontario) and Ningwakwe/Priscilla George (NADC Coordinator)
- ii. Tyance Fiddler, Executive Assistant to Robert Nault, M.P., Progressive Conservative, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Tyance welcomed the participation of Mary Ungalaq and Mary Koyina Richardson as they did not have meetings scheduled at that time);
- iii. Senator Aurelien Gill, Liberal/Wellington, Quebec, Member of the SSCAP, and Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration;

- iv. Judi Longfield, Liberal Ontario MP, Chair, Standing Committee on Human Resource Development and Persons with Disabilities;
- v. Ningwakwe was welcomed by the Manitoba MCL Members to participate in their meeting with Senator Sharon Carstairs, Leader of the Government in the Senate.
- b. Doug Anderson (NADCBP), Janice Brant, Michael Johnny
  - i. Liz Cheesbrough, Executive Assistant to Andrew Mitchell, Liberal Caucus – Parry Sound-Muskoka, Secretary of State (Rural Development);
  - ii. Senator Al Graham. Liberal/The Highlands, Nova Scotia/Northeast, Foreign Affairs, and Transport and Communication;
  - iii. Paddy Torsney, Liberal/Burlington/Ontario

In addition, the NADC Ontario members networked with literacy practitioners and Learners from every province and territory across Canada.

### 3- Workshop by Dr. Laara Fitznor

This one-day event was sponsored by the Aboriginal Circle of Educators (ACE) in Winnipeg, March 14, 2003. It was based on Dr. Fitznor's doctoral thesis entitled, "Aboriginal Educators Stories: Rekindling Aboriginal Worldview". Consensus of the NADC was to coincide our March meeting with this workshop, so as to hear Dr. Fitznor's findings. Further, the NADC thought it would be beneficial to our work to make connections with ACE.

The ACE includes all educators interested in supporting and networking with one another as they strive to include Aboriginal education across school curriculum. ACE's goals and objectives are:

- To foster the development of culturally appropriate curriculum;
- To advocate for the total integration of Aboriginal perspectives in all areas of the curriculum;
- To provide opportunities for personal and professional development in the area of Aboriginal education;
- To encourage and support Aboriginal educators towards leadership positions in the area of education;
- To provide opportunities to develop leadership skills of Aboriginal educators;
- To liaise and promote positive relations in community members and organizations who are involved in the education of Aboriginal children.

Dr. Fitznor discussed the trials and tribulations of conducting a research process that was grounded in Aboriginal philosophies and practices. She took participants through the major sections of her thesis, where particular attention was paid to what constitutes Aboriginal-based research processes. Dr. Fitznor shared highlights of her research. Using Sharing/Research Circles, participants discussed their own work of integrating and/or drawing from Aboriginal/Indigenous worldviews and practices. Participants then strategized how the learnings can be translated into their respective fields of work and/or study.

4 - 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Prior Learning Assessment Conference, “Sharing Diverse Approaches in a Multi-Cultural World – Lifting Up The Learner”, May 2003, Belleville, Ontario.

This was an international conference with delegates and speakers from all across Canada and Africa. The NADC’s participation in this event was timely given the following recommendations in the Parliamentary Report.

**Recommendation 5**

**The Committee recommends that funds be allocated through the National Literacy Secretariat to encourage greater use of prior learning assessments for low literacy learners.**

**Recommendation 6**

**The Committee recommends that the federal government work with provincial and territorial governments and the learning community to develop a format for a learning portfolio that records individuals’ formal and informal learning, and that respects the privacy of individuals. It is hoped that this document would identify learners’ strengths and knowledge gaps, and provide a basis on which to build for those who engage in further learning. Although this recommendations is primarily intended to encourage and facilitate training among individuals with low literacy credentials, there is no reason to limit the use of this credential recognition document to low literacy learners. In fact, an obvious extension of this approach could include the learning accomplishments, including language instruction, of newcomers to Canada.**

Further, one of the Priority Recommendations from the “National Summit on Innovation and Learning”, Westin Harbour Castle Hotel, Toronto, Ontario, November 18-19, 2002, under the “Building an Inclusive and Skilled Work Force” theme is:

**12. Increase participation levels of under-employed groups (including women, youth, people with disabilities, visible minorities and Aboriginal Peoples).**

· **Encourage the use of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) through occupation-based collaborative projects to include non-formal and informal learning and skills.**

The summit recommendations form an integral part of Canada’s Innovation Strategy.

For this occasion, we were joined by Nora MacDonald-Plourde, Mi’kmaq Elder, Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, and Mary Ungalaq, Inuktitut Language Teacher, Igloodik, Nunavut Territory.

The NADC Ontario members had the opportunity to participate in the following: (presentations by NADC Ontario members or staff are in italics):

a. Keynote – Professor David Newhouse, Chair of the Native Studies Department, Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario – “Defining Indigenous Knowledge Within a Multi-Cultural Context”

- b. Beginning with Creation: An Iroquoian Perspective on Knowledge Creation – Suzanne Brant and Diane Hill, FNTI;
- c. A Pilot Project of Prior Learning Assessment in Pharmacy – Artemis Diamantouros, BScPhm Med and Michael Galli, B.A, International Pharmacy Graduate Program, University of Toronto;
- d. Academic Study vs. Experiences Developed Through the Years of Political, Social and Economic Struggle – Kessie Moodley, Director, Worker’s College, Durban, South Africa;
- e. Can Prior Learning Experience Serve as a Catalyst in the Paradigm Shift from Traditional Teaching Methodology to Outcomes-Based Educational Practice? – P.A. Padmanabhan Nair, Head, Department of Physics Technikon Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa
- f. Retention of Learning: A Powerful Link to PLAR – Dr. Ingrid C. Crowther, Primary Investigator, Effective Practices Project, Athabasca University, Athabasca, Alberta
- g. Using the Canadian Language Benchmarks as the National Standard for Describing Language Proficiency Appropriate for the Workplace – Pauline McNaughton, Executive Director, Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, Ottawa, Ontario;
- h. *Portfolio Assisted Prior Learning Assessment for Empowerment in the Aboriginal Literacy Community* – Janice Brant, Education Consultant, NADC Ontario Member, Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory, Ontario;
- i. *The Rainbow/Holistic Approach to Aboriginal Literacy – Ningwakwe/ Priscilla George, NADC Coordinator;*
- j. Tools and Resources for Assisting Learners in PLAR – Lauren Waples, PLAR Advisor, Red River College, Winnipeg, Manitoba;
- k. CAPLA, an ON-Line Community of Practice (OCoP) and PLAR – Sandra Aarts, Secretary/Treasurer of CAPLA and OCoP Project Coordinator;
- l. Skills Development in the Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector (MERSETA) in South Africa – Mokiti Letsoalo, Regional Manager, Gauteng & Northwest Regional Office, South Africa;
- m. Investigation into the Process of Preparing RPL Candidates for Assessment – Manoko Seerane, Department of Teaching and Learning Development, Technikon Northern Gauteng, Pretoria North, South Africa;
- n. Plenary by Janet Lopes, Head, Skills Development Services, Steel and Engineering Federation, Johannesburg, South Africa (SEIPSA) – “Training, What’s That? The Challenge of Human Resource Development in Small, Micro and Medium-Sized Organizations in the Steel Industry in South Africa”
- o. Four Directional Learning – Banakonda Kennedy-Kish-Ball, Faculty, First Nations Technical Institute;
- p. PLAR as a Workforce Diversity Tool – Louise Nichol, President, OARS Training Inc., Winnipeg Manitoba;
- q. Unlocking Barriers to Learning Through Anti-Bias Practice – A South African Perspective – Fathima B. Osman, Adaptable Learning Services, Durban, South Africa;
- r. World Wide Access for Nurses – Rob Higgins, Associate Professor, Ryerson

University, School of Nursing, Toronto, Ontario and Ruth Wotjiuk, Nursing Program Manager, Continuing Education Ryerson University, School of Nursing, Toronto, Ontario;

- s. Empowering the Rainbow Nation Through Diverse Learning Approaches: Its Implications for the Global Market – Justice L. Makete, Director, Academic Development Centre, Technikon North West, South Africa;
- t. A Model for Assessment of PLA – Ruth Peterson, Manager, Centre for Assessment of Prior Learning, Manukau Institute of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand;
- u. PLAR Training for Human Services Workers – Mark Gallupe and Rose Reid, Faculty, Loyalist College, Belleville, Ontario;
- v. Developing a Strategy for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): A Case Study – Ngabomzi Gawe, Assistant to the Vice Chancellor, Change Management, Durban Institute of Technology, South Africa and Malcolm Day, Senior Nursing Lecturer, University of Sheffield, England;
- w. Reading, Writing and Text: Thoughts on Archiving (and Accrediting) the Oral Tradition - Dr. Joan Conolly, Associate-Director, Centre for Higher Education Development and Leader; Conceptualising Indigenous Knowledge Project, Durban Institute of Technology, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

As a special surprise, one of the Ontario NADC members, Janice Brant, invited us to her home on the nearby Mohawks of Tyendinaga territory for a sumptuous feast “Haudenosaunee style”. We dined on corn soup, venison, corn bread, salads, and various desserts. We were also given traditional gifts, such as corn brooches or

pendants. Elder Leo Ireland, Onyata:ka Nation, did the Blessing.

The Prior Learning Assessment conference was truly a sharing of cultures and experiences. As a direct result of this conference, the NADC Coordinator and Janice Brant have been asked to do a workshop at the national Indigenous Knowledge Conference in Winnipeg, October 18, 2003, being held just before the Fifth International Forum on Prior Learning Assessment and Qualification Recognition, “Recognizing Learning: Building Capacity in a Knowledge Economy”, October 19-22, 2003. As well, Janice Brant has been asked to present at this conference.

#### 5- An Institute on Research in Practice in Adult Literacy, Extending Practices, Building Networks

This event was sponsored by the Brother T.I. Murphy Centre, Memorial University, St. John’s, Newfoundland, June 2003. Three (3) NADC members had applied to attend, only to be told that the institute was full. Four (4) days before the event, one of the conference organizers called the NADC Coordinator to say that they wanted somebody from the NADC to attend, and to do an Aboriginal Traditional Opening. Nancy Cooper was the only one who was available on such short notice, and who could do an opening. The NADC and the Brother T.I. Murphy Centre cost-shared the expenses for Nancy’s participation.

Nancy was able to network with literacy practitioners, academics and researchers from all across Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom. Nancy had an opportunity to participate in the following, or to network with people who had:

- a. Launch of *Literacies*, the new Canadian journal on the research in practice field – in fact, Nancy was asked to write an article for the next edition;.
- b. Arts-Based Research with Joe Norris, Director of Education, Washington State University, Vancouver, Washington Campus – this workshop was most closely linked to Nancy’s Masters thesis at OISE;
- c. Violence and Learning: Taking Action (VALTA) – Learnings from the Changing Practices Project, Alberta – Fay Begg, Heather Ward, Janet Bauer and Mary Norton;
- d. The Voice Activated Computer Literacy Project – Bill Day, Balmoral Centre, Thunder Bay – Mr. Day was particularly interested in meeting the needs of the many Aboriginal Learners who study at Balmoral;
- e. Practical Research Approaches for Communities – Dr. Barbara Burnaby, Faculty of Education, Memorial University, St. Johns, Newfoundland;
- f. Reading Policy, Zoe Fowler;
- g. What Makes Literacy/ABE Instructors Effective in Their Practice – Evelyn Battell, Diana Twiss, Judy Rose, Betsy Alkenbrack, Marina Niks, Bonnie Soroke, Vancouver, British Columbia;
- h. The Role of Academically Trained Researchers in Research in Practice – Anneke von Enk and Marina Niks, Vancouver, British Columbia;
- i. Student Participation in the Research Process – Nora Randell;
- j. Understanding Learning and Literacy in a School Board Employment Program – Christine Johnson-Pinsent, Masters Program, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa;
- k. Sharing Research and Reflections: The Journal Needs You – Tannis Atkinson, Brantford, Ontario;
- l. Is Literacy Viewed as an Accessibility Issue Among Community Services That do not Have a Literacy Program? – Audrey Gardner, Literacy Specialist, Bow Valley College, Alberta;
- m. Reading Our Work: Implications for Practices from Researching Literacies as Social Practice – Tracy Defoe, Ontario;
- n. Process of Empowerment: A Struggle of Strategy – Dr. Bill Fagan, Newfoundland;
- o. Letters Home from South Africa – Betsy Alkenbrack, Vancouver, B.C.;
- p. Doing Freedom: Ethnography of an Adult Literacy Centre – Bonnie Soroke, Vancouver, B.C.;
- q. The Myth of Objectivity: Whose Knowledge is it? – Nancy Jackson, OISE, Toronto;
- r. Ethics in Practitioner Research – Nancy Jackson, OISE, Toronto;
- s. Supporting Inquiry Work: What Do We Know? What Do We Do? – Janet Isserlis, Brown University, Rhode Island;
- t. Blurring the Lines Between Research, Teaching and Action – Dr. Elsa Auerbach, University of Massachusetts, Boston;
- u. Staying Connected: Canadian Researchers in Practice – Bonnie Soroke, Vancouver, B.C.; and,
- v. Electronic Conferencing as a Tool for Research: Youth Literacy – What Works – Dianna Twiss and Sandy Middleton, Literacy B.C. (The NADC participated in a focus group for this project).

A direct result of this conference is that Nancy has been invited to do a workshop

on photo-based curriculum development in the Yukon.

#### 6- Wikwemikong Ontario Works Literacy Program,

This program is geographically not in another province. However, in a sense, it is in another province, in that it is a non-LBS funded program. The funding for this program comes indirectly through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) dollars. INAC funds the WPL, which provided a rationale to INAC for why it should pilot an adult literacy program this fiscal year. Their focus is Ontario Works clients.

Christianna Jones, former Literacy Coordinator of the M'Chigeeng Adult Literacy Program, was the successful applicant.

NADC's particular interest in the WPL literacy program was in light of the January 16, 2003, letter to us from Robert Nault, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Prime Minister Chretien had provided Mr. Nault's office with a copy of the NADC Position Paper. Mr. Nault directed NADC to HRDC, citing:

*"Given HRDC's lead on both the literacy strategy and on the Skills and Learning Strategy, I would suggest that this would be an excellent focal point exploring the development of a National Aboriginal Literacy Strategy. Unfortunately, such an endeavour falls outside the authorities of INAC."*

Ms. Jones has been in the position since April 7, 2003. She states that most of the first months will be recruitment, assessment and development. While it is too soon to do an extensive comparative analysis, Ms. Jones was able to share some insights. WBE uses a collaborative approach. The following programs meet regularly to share information that may impact on their work, and their clients:

- a. Wii-nin'Guch Tood Local Delivery Mechanism
- b. Wikwemikong Development Commission
- c. Wikwemikong Board of Education
- d. Wikwemikong Ontario Works Office
- e. Waasa Naabin Youth Centre

In addition, the Wikwemikong Chief and some counselors participated in the strategic planning session for the WLP.

In Wikwemikong, many of the Band staff and residents know each other. The Ontario Works Coordinator is able to assist with recruitment. Ms. Jones commented that she does use parts of Program Reform. She finds it a much more relaxed pace, as there is not the heavy administrative burden of training plans and monthly stats. Ms. Jones is able to spend more time with the Learners. It will be interesting to do a follow-up with this program toward fiscal year-end.

## 7- Literacy Research Synthesis Meeting

At the project-end, the NADC staff met with the three NADC Ontario members who are doing post-graduate research in Aboriginal literacy for a Research Synthesis Meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the activities we had completed in this phase, especially in light of the Parliamentary Report.

Given the following two recommendations, the NADC recognizes the need to have a clear research-based strategy to augment the Communications Strategy and Focus Groups that we are implementing in the next phase.

### **Recommendation 4**

**The Committee recommends that the federal government include literacy research in the mandate of the Canadian Learning Institute. It is the committee's view that the assignment of literacy research activities to the Canadian Literacy Institute should not reduce that National Literacy Secretariat's annual budget for grants and contribution programs.**

### **Recommendation 7**

**The Committee recommends that the federal government immediately begin consultations with the Aboriginal communities, and provincial and territorial governments, to develop an Aboriginal Literacy Strategy that: incorporates a holistic approach; respects Aboriginal languages, traditions and values; and is funded at a level commensurate with the seriousness of the problem of low literacy among Aboriginal peoples.**

## **Recommendation 8**

**The Committee anticipates that the implementation of an Aboriginal Literacy Strategy will take some time. In the interim, the Committee recommends that a new National Literacy Secretariat funding stream be created – the Aboriginal Funding Stream. In addition to the amount currently being spent (approximately \$2 million) through the National Literacy Secretariat on Aboriginal literacy projects, the government should allocate \$5 million to this new funding stream, of which one-half should be delivered through the national Aboriginal literacy organization that is currently being established by the National Aboriginal Design Committee, while the remainder should be delivered via the existing funding streams, as is currently being done.**

Further, another of the recommendations from the aforementioned National Summit under the "Strengthening Communities" theme is:

### **16. Support the growth of clusters by fostering the development of local "kernel"**

**research institutions and schools, facilitating cross-community, partnerships, providing information on best practices for building clusters and creating entrepreneurial networks; and capitalizing on the benefits and synergies of geography to encourage spinoffs, innovation, and the dissemination of ideas.**

The NADC recognizes the need for a strong research-based foundation for its work. While, to some extent, the NADC has been doing research, the time has come to be more strategic.

## 8. Meeting with Dr. Jean Searle

Dr. Searle is on sabbatical from her position as the Deputy Head of Schools of Education, Brisbane/Logan, and Director, Queensland Centre of ALNARC (Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australia Research Consortium), School of Vocational, Technology & Arts Education, Faculty of Education, Griffith University, Nathan, Queensland, Australia. She was in Canada to connect with OISE faculty involved in literacy research. She was interested in the Festival of Literacies project, specifically the Literacy Research Circles. The NADC Coordinator was in Australia in September 2000, where she

was hosted by Dr. Searle. Dr. Searle asked to meet with members of the NADC. We presented her with a copy of our Position Paper, and updated her on NADC activities. Dr. Searle has promised to pass on this information to Dr. Barry Malezer, Coordinator, Gumurri Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research, Education and Student Support based at Griffith University, Mt. Gravatt Campus.

This meeting is an excellent example of the kind of sharing that is possible amongst indigenous educators around the world.

## IV. FINDINGS/OBSERVATIONS

### What We Researched

The NADC has chosen to list the comments from the Ontario NADC members, without identifiers:

#### Mamawenig

- An excellent opportunity to network with other literacy practitioners
- Gave me a sense of appreciation for the support and infrastructure that Native literacy has within Ontario. While many of us look with a critical eye to changes in provincial policy that impact the development and delivery of Native literacy programming, it is easy to forget that our colleagues throughout Canada do not have such support as we have in Ontario (core funding, and support systems like the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition and the Ningwakwe Learning Press).
- I was able to share my experiences in Ontario with a couple of people who were keen to hear both the pros and cons of Ontario experiences. I feel that Ontario can serve as a template, or model for other provinces that are considering a provincial literacy system. While I say this, I reiterate the notion that there are some aspects of Ontario's 'system' that I would not transplant.
- I appreciated hearing discussions on the delivery of services and the creative means applied to helping Aboriginal Learners develop and acquire literacy skills

- Learners that shared their stories were the most impacting.
- Workshops and resource displays gave me a broader sense of the tools available for the delivery of literacy services to Aboriginal Learners, many of which I could integrate into my own practice or, at minimum, present to the Learners for consideration.

#### Position Paper

- The position paper is and has been an important document guiding the future of Aboriginal Literacy in Canada
  - It identifies and presents major factors that need to be addressed in Aboriginal literacy, as well as outlines best practices, "What is working for Aboriginal Peoples across Canada".
  - This document, I believe, has been a positive step in bring about awareness to federal and provincial governments and agencies.
- It also recognizes the broadness of literacies within the Aboriginal community, and offers a greater awareness into the spiritual, mental, physical and emotional expression of Aboriginal Peoples.
- To see a document such as this created was very exciting and hopeful.
- This document demonstrated to me that the Ontario Native literacy experience is not about reacting to provincial policy, but that there is a strong sense of vision. This vision holds the partnership that has developed with Ontario in high esteem. Ontario has much to offer a



national Native literacy organization. There are many strong leaders within the province that have experience and a willingness to share on a national level.

- Quality research and a clear request are necessary when communicating with government leaders to request change(s).

### Literacy Action Day

- When (name deleted) and I spoke with (name deleted), I felt I was able to get my point across about the Learner is the most important person in the program, and some of the struggles that they go through in trying to obtain their educational goals.
- LAD was an excellent opportunity to advocate for Aboriginal literacy and issues around funding and support.
- Meeting with Senators and MPs gave frontline workers in Aboriginal literacy the opportunity to present not only the Position Paper, but to share on a more personal note the struggles we encounter in the field.
- Participating in LAD was truly an exercise in strengthening Spirit.
- A large contingent from Ontario was good to see. The leadership that has emerged from this province (learners and practitioners alike) give the future of Native literacy a strong foundation to build upon.
- I was impressed with the messages that were conveyed to federal leaders, and it is a process that can be relatively easily transplanted to provincial actions.
- In talking to Senator Chalifoux as a group, I felt that we had a stronger case because all of us have some concerns when it comes to bettering the literacy programs being run now. Senator Chalifoux was welcoming and

very understanding about what we had to say about literacy programs today, and what we would like to see happen in the future. Hats off to her. I really feel talking to her was the best thing we could have done to promote our plans of action.

- Luckily, the Senator Aurelien Gill met with us and listened to our concerns also.
- I feel we made good points with all we met at the Literacy Action Day meetings.

### Business Plan

- Because the plan written was written by a former Native literacy practitioner, the experiences of this work served to strengthen the document. The Business Plan is a blueprint for future development. I was pleased to see a strong, comprehensive and quality piece of work developed. I feel this because I sense literacy in Ontario is a crossroads. While greater professionalism is being asked and demanded from government and community alike, literacy is still based on a philosophy and funded on “soup kitchen ideals”. This gap is ever-growing, and this places a strain on development. This Business plan ensures that organizational development is placed on a professional footing.
- It was good to learn about all the different aspects that needed to be addressed and covered in order to make the National Indigenous Literacy Association a reality.
- Areas that were of particular interest to me were the Operational Plan, an Aboriginal Approach and the Client Analysis.
- Naturally, our Aboriginal literacy Learners, practitioners and delivery

agencies would be our main concern. After all, they are the ones who need the most help in securing links to other programs, resources, and advocating for them. In addressing the needs of these clients, we are hoping that it will lead to higher rates of success for our Learners, and for our Aboriginal programs who have service delivery issues.

- Reintroducing culture back into our programs would be a huge step in putting back together our people...individual curriculum based on the Learner's needs, educationally, spiritually, and mentally.
- In working with the Learners' strengths, and not their weakness, and using transferable skills, such as past educational experiences, employment skills, life experience/skills, we feel that these are just some of the skills that are needed to help the Learner figure out what she/he needs from the program. Introducing back to the Learner their culture would give the Learner a sense of belonging and acceptance into these programs, therefore setting the stage for success.
- Through personal experience and as an Aboriginal Learner, I can tell you that, from my perspective, without being reintroduced to my culture, and my roots, I could not have ever succeeded in becoming who I am today. Today, I have the experiences of being a Literacy Coordinator, a Community Support Worker, a Family Support Worker, an Administrative Assistant, an Alcohol and Drug Counsellor, a mother and a friend. All of this was brought about from being reintroduced to my culture and my roots. In learning of my roots through teachings, sharing circles, Elders stories, traditions, ways of life, it gave to me what I had been lacking all

these years in a mainstream classroom. It gave to me a solid foundation in which I could build upon and get my educational and personal goals met...It taught me to trust again, it showed me a respect for all things, and to expect respect in all that I accomplished, also because I'm a human being, not a savage as we were treated in the other schools. It showed me that I had the right to get that education and to live comfortably, within a white society. It also gave me a strong sense finally "belonging" somewhere. It taught me how to look at mistakes and wrongdoings, not as failures in my life, but as stepping stones to where I wanted to be, and to new growth. Culture gave me back my pride and confidence in myself, the self-esteem it would take to believe that I was worthwhile, and that I, too, could succeed at anything I wanted. Mainstream educational programs could not do this for me, these schools to me were almost in a sense like a factory line, get them in, get them out, if there is a flaw, pass them through anyways, not our program, and maybe no one will notice.

- I firmly believe that the bottom line in all of this is that without culture being placed in Aboriginal literacy programs, the chances of our people succeeding are or will be practically non-existent. Our culture being placed back into Aboriginal literacy programs will not only instill in our peoples a real sense of finally belonging someplace, but it will also give incentive to want to make us a better person, to stay in school and get the education we need. It will also give them back their identities, which were lost in mainstream schools, colleges, residential schools and other overcrowded schools.

- When I first started attending NADC meetings, I just listened, because I did not have a national perspective on things. I understood what was going on in my program, and I was trying to make the links. When Doug presented the Business Plan, I totally got it about the need for a Project Strategy, rather than going for what the funders identify as their priorities. This showed me just how much I learned in the past couple of years.

#### Dr. Fitznor's Workshop

- What I got out of this was more personal.
- This workshop made me realize that even Aboriginal mainstream educators have barriers when it comes to educational needs. Laara spoke of her role as an Aboriginal teacher, and some of the problems she faced in trying to give her students the best she could. She spoke of her long road to get where she is today, and some of the setbacks and triumphs she experienced. She also touched on the barriers for gainful employment by Aboriginal Peoples, and the methods that worked for her. Through research, she was able to finally assert Aboriginal education through core Aboriginal knowings and processes. She made clear the point that an Aboriginal educator's work in mainstream schools is challenging and oppressive.

#### PLA Conference

- The recognition of Aboriginal approaches to knowledge and learning are becoming widely recognized and respected. Even within MTCU, the influence of its Native stream can be realized. One example is the addition

of the Self-Management and Self-Direction domain to the Learning Outcomes Matrix, based on input from the Native Stream.

- The PLA conference was once again an excellent opportunity for networking and sharing ideas.
- I appreciated hearing more about holistic learning that was grounded in Aboriginal cultural philosophies, as well as how many other communities are using PLA to strengthen the learning environment

#### Wikwemikong Literacy Program

- I feel strongly that practitioners are a vital component to a literacy program's success. The energy, experience and expertise that practitioners have are often ignored, until they move on. With a large turnover in the Native stream over the past couple of years, it was a valuable opportunity to speak to one practitioner that moved from an MTCU-funded program to a non-MTCU-funded program. Communication centred around the facets of LBS programming that both hinders and supports Native programs. Constructively critical, this discussion found there were many systemic barriers in place that inhibited successful programming. Without the administrative load that existed in LBS-supported programming, new development can occur at a rate that is more consistent with the needs of the Learners, while also respecting the realities of the new funder. Administrative tools were adapted to support successful program development and delivery. And with these barriers removed, an environment for greater success seems apparent.

### Research Synthesis Meeting

- Concern around limited project support for the Native literacy field, and the reduced capacity of the ONLC and NLP to do this work was discussed.
- The day gave researchers and professionals a chance to share their work-to-date, including resources, ask questions, and build up a strong support system.
- There remain challenges in how to maintain an ongoing network of support – people can easily fall into a sense of isolation – but with the collective experience around the table, and the need to support the field, this discussion was of tremendous long-term value to the Native literacy field.
- Ontario and national development work remains a priority, with the two interconnected. Ongoing meetings, with a focus on Ontario development is needed.
- The research meeting gave me the opportunity to hear about other research projects in Aboriginal literacy, and to share resource materials. It helped me to clarify my direction, as well as to identify aspects/elements that I have overlooked as playing a significant role in Aboriginal literacy
- Issues of how to support each other, but also how to provide support to the field were shared.

### What I Learned

- Perhaps what is most significant in my learning is the recognition of Spirit in all things, and that belief in the potential is everything.
- This experience has enriched my life.
- I have developed friendships and identified support groups in the Aboriginal literacy community.

- I have been provided with opportunities to share my learning formally with others and collect feedback to continuing building on the (name deleted) process.
- I have had the unique opportunity to contribute to a National Position Paper and Business Plan.
- In being a part of the evolution of NILA, I was struck by the governance process. All members hold a responsibility for accountability to their constituents. All members are given a voice at the table, and all listen and offer constructive support to the development of the organization. This model of organizational governance is one that can be an interesting and useful research project; especially given the success of the organization to date. Ontario, please know that your investment in this organization will be well worth it!
- As a Learner on the NADC, I was not quite sure how my role would fit into the big picture. I now understand that a Learner's opinion is very important in helping us to get to the point we need to be.
- In coming through the LBS Program myself, I felt I had a good reason to request some of the changes in the programs all across the nation in order for our peoples to achieve their goals, get on with their educational lives, and to grow mentally/spiritually. I feel that looking at the whole person, rather than just the educational side of a Learner, we will better enable them to want to achieve their goals.
- I learned the vast potential of Native people, once we/they get through the clutter and with positive support and tools, the truly amazing things we can accomplish. And THEN, what can be contributed/shared with other people.

- I learned that “networking” or sharing is the ultimate. Rather, this was once again confirmed (I already knew that) – e.g. – my connection with Larry Loyie – and his connection-sharing and support with a circle of adults (in an anger management circle) was truly awesome!
- Hearing people from other provinces, territories and countries who work with indigenous populations cite the same issues as we have gave me the confidence that we are on the right track. Because we are in a minority here in Canada, our issues often get subsumed under a larger agenda.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

- My recommendation is simple – facilitate Love and Spirit in all aspects of literacy, give the Learners choices, and provide them with opportunities to practice their learning (skills and knowledge). Friends and colleagues of one mind or like minds can generate strength and manifest potential.
- Literacy needs an much more holistic definition. Aboriginal literacy is, in fact, Aboriginal literacies. Current research corroborates this, e.g., “Powerful Literacies”, edited by Jim Crowther, Mary Hamilton and Lynn Tett, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (England and Wales), Leicester, England. 2001.
- The Ontario Native literacy field has developed several documents that may serve as supports to Native literacy practitioners in other provinces/territories, including, but not limited to:
  1. Position Paper on Program Reform;
  2. Ontario Native Literacy Field Development Report of 2002
- There is a great need for Native literacy in Ontario to establish stronger political relations – both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.
- Prior Learning Assessment remains an area that adult literacy can explore in supporting a shift in thought around what Learners already bring into their learning program. The work of Janice Brant, while at FNTI, can serve as a catalyst to make other Native literacy programs aware of



differing approaches to knowledge and learning than are commonly accepted and understood through MTCU, and within their own communities.

- There remains much opportunity for the Native literacy field in Ontario to share its knowledge – both within its stream, and to others in other cultural streams.
- Wikwemikong – There remains an excellent opportunity for a cross-program study. – Research could demonstrate where LBS is successful in supporting Native literacy programming, but also and more importantly, where it could be improved upon.
  - Present success stories – show our regional and national similarities and barriers for Aboriginal literacy, what works for programs with less struggle to justify the “life skills” aspects of programs.
  - Aboriginal priorities should not be lumped in with the priorities of the other streams. They get lost. We need for our priorities to remain separate.
- There is a large amount of reading to be done on top of all the delivery and administrative aspects of programming. This reading needs to cover literacy issues, and Aboriginal issues, to see where they intersect. Native literacy needs a person dedicated to just reading all the reports and research, and to translate the government documentation to the field, as well as the work done in the field to government types.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The NADC has had several successes this year:

- a. We are now officially incorporated as the National Indigenous Literacy Association (NILA).
- b. We have been able to distribute the NADC Position Paper on Aboriginal Literacy all across Canada, to both the Aboriginal community and the literacy community. In addition, copies of this paper have been given to the UNESCO Institute for Education, and to practitioners/researchers working with indigenous peoples in Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Africa, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Mexico, AND the United States.
- c. We have been officially endorsed by a Standing Committee, as well as having verbal support from several Members of Parliament and Senators, including Senator Thelma Chalifoux, Chair, Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples.
- d. This year's funding application, which came out of the NADC Business Plan, resulted in a significant increase in funding for the NADC, now NILA.
- e. Several NADC Ontario members presented at each of a provincial, national and international literacy/education conference during 2002-2003.
- f. Several NADC Ontario members have been asked to present at various upcoming territorial, national and international conferences in other provinces/territories.
- g. Two NADC Ontario members are on the Advisory Committee for the Advisory/Reference Group for the "Strengthening the Learning Circles" Aboriginal literacy professional development training institute scheduled for June 2004.
- h. CESO Aboriginal Services (Canadian Executive Services Organization) approached NILA to form a partnership around Aboriginal literacy curriculum development. Based on the Position Paper on Aboriginal Literacy, NILA will provide guidance and direction to CESO volunteers on this project. In turn, NILA has asked CESO to provide NILA with volunteers who will assist with organizational development.
- i. The NILA Coordinator has been selected to present at the International Conference on Language, Education and Diversity, November 26-29, 2003, University of Waikato, School of Education, Hamilton, New Zealand, where she will share the Position Paper on Aboriginal Literacy. This conference focuses on the impact of increased cultural and linguistic diversity at both national and supranational levels, and its consequences for the theory, policy and practices of language education. As such, the conference will provide an international forum that brings together the latest academic and policy discussions, and promotes critical debate, on the often complex interconnection between diversity and language education (<http://www.led2003.ac.nz/>)

Thank you very much Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. NILA is confident that you have received a good return on your investment in the NADC project this year. Certainly, the NADC Ontario members felt that they were able to share their own expertise/experiences, as well as to learn from literacy practitioners in other jurisdictions. All of this has contributed to solidifying the Aboriginal literacy movement in Canada. Gichi Miigwech to the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition for being NADC's financial sponsor for the MTCU monies.

**(Footnotes)**

1

Government of Canada web-site  
<http://www.innovationstrategy.gc.ca/cmb/innovation.nsf/pages/Menu-e>

2

Tebtebba web-site,  
The Coolangatta Statement

[http://www.tebtebba.org/tebtebba\\_files/susdev/collangatta.html](http://www.tebtebba.org/tebtebba_files/susdev/collangatta.html)

3

Australian Council for Adult Literacy.  
A Literate Australia  
- National Position Paper on the Future Adult Literacy and Numeracy Needs of Australia 2001