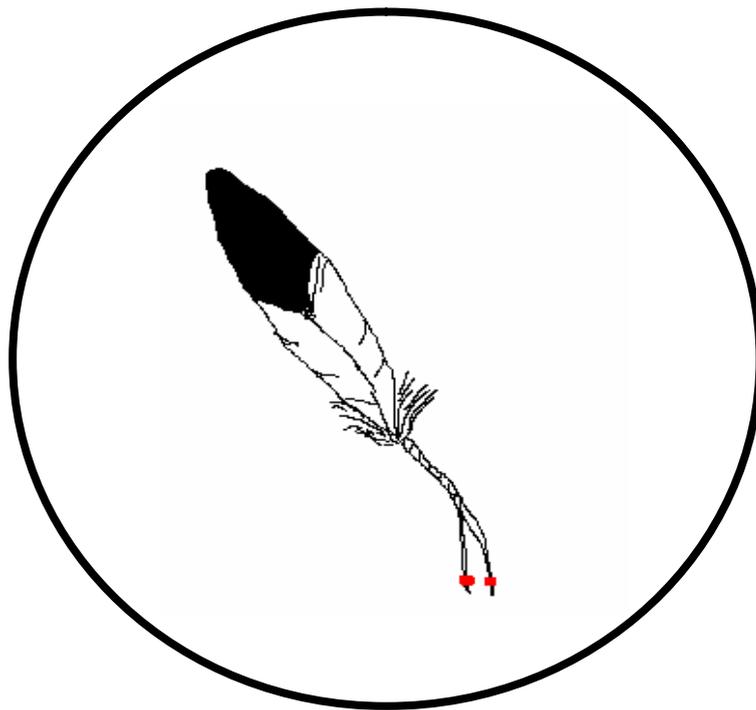


Symposium on

**LITERACY AND ABORIGINAL PEOPLES**

**‘BEST PRACTICES’ NATIVE  
‘LITERACY’ AND LEARNING**



**PROCEEDINGS**

**Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University  
of Toronto**

**TORONTO, ONTARIO**

**CANADA**

**MAY 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, 2002**

Symposium on  
LITERACY AND ABORIGINAL PEOPLES  
'BEST PRACTICES' NATIVE 'LITERACY' AND LEARNING  
PROCEEDINGS

Editors:  
Eileen Antone, Heather McRae,  
Lois Provost-Turchetti and Moneca Sinclair

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**proudly hosted the**

**‘Best Practices’ Native ‘Literacy’ and Learning  
Aboriginal Perspectives  
Symposium 2002**

**Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University  
of Toronto  
12<sup>th</sup> Floor-252 Bloor Street West  
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M5S 1V6  
May 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, 2002**

The logo is composed of an Eagle feather, symbolic of honour, respect and strength. The circle is symbolic of equality, unity courage and positive relationships. The Eagle flies high above the world and has the closest connection to the Creator, possessing a broad perspective of all life. The Eagle feather therefore represents a person’s thoughts rising as high as the Eagle. The Eagle feather is honoured in Aboriginal communities across North America, as is the circle. This circle represents the equality of all people involved in the life-long process of Aboriginal literacy and learning.

The Core Research Team/Committee also acknowledges and expresses appreciation to those who gave of their time and effort before and during the symposium and throughout the research project as a whole.

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### **Editing**

Many hours of editing and formatting of MSWord were contributed by Eileen Antone, Heather McRae who joined the Research Team beginning with the symposium, Lois Provost Turchetti and Moneca Sinclaire, for the Proceedings and the Journal submissions.

Finally, if we have forgotten someone, or an area, we apologize for the oversight.

*Again, Everyone, thank you so much*

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## FOREWORD

On May 3 and 4, nearly eighty practitioners came together for the first Native Literacy and Learning, Aboriginal Perspectives Symposium held at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto (OISE/UT). Elders Lillian McGregor and Grafton Antone provided the opening and closing for each day, respectively. Ningwakwe Priscilla George and Sally Gaikhezheyongai gave keynote presentations. Lillian McGregor, Jacqui LaValley, Grafton Antone and Joe Paquette provided an Elders and Teachers Roundtable. There were fourteen presenters on a broad range of topics on the barriers and supports in literacy, ranging from "Healing the Spirit" to "Deaf Literacy."

In keep with Aboriginal ways of teaching and speaking when speech is transliterated to writing, informal grammar is retained rather than replaced with standard-English. Similarly differences in spelling reflect a non-standard orthography.

The presentations offer insights into understanding what is meant by "Best Practices" and Learning from Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> perspectives. Some of the text represents papers provided by the speakers. Others have been compiled from notes of the event in order to honour the request of some speakers that audio- and video-taping not be done.

The proceedings and updates on the on-going aspects of Aboriginal literacy research are also to be found on the webpage at [www.oise.utoronto.ca/~NLS](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/~NLS).

Research Group:

Dr. Eileen Antone  
Dr. Peter Gamlin  
Heather McRae  
Rhonda Paulsen  
Lois Provost-Turchetti  
Julian Robbins  
Moneca Sinclair

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<sup>1</sup> For the proceedings and symposium the term Native and Aboriginal were used interchangeably. It is recognized that the term Aboriginal is the more acceptable term. However both Native and Aboriginal include Métis, Inuit, Status and Non-status groups.

## **ACKNOWLEDGING ABORIGINAL WHOLISTIC LEARNING**

### **Background:**

In reviewing the historical pattern of education for the Aboriginal people it is noted that the education system was built on the goal of assimilation and was designed for individual economic improvement. According to Imel (2001), Aboriginal adult education programs in the 1950s were designed to improve adult English proficiency and provide adult vocational training. In more recent years, Aboriginal literacy programs have built in broader goals that are concerned with safeguarding Aboriginal language and culture rather than with promoting assimilation.

The Aboriginal people have experienced great trauma in their educational journey, especially from the residential school approach where the children were removed from the home, community and nation and placed in a foreign environment governed by Eurocentric rules and expectations. The situation was not much better for the children who attended schools in their home community. They were also exposed to the Eurocentric values of corporal punishment in the learning situation and many were strapped for speaking their own language. Therefore, factors such as healing, reclamation of identity, language, cultures and self-determination, play a major role in the complex issue of Aboriginal literacy and learning.

The Ontario Native Literacy Coalition states, "Native literacy is a tool which empowers the spirit of Native people. Native literacy services recognize and affirm the unique cultures of Native Peoples and the interconnectedness of all aspects of creation. As part of a life-long path of learning, Native literacy contributes to the development of self-knowledge and critical thinking. It is a continuum of skills that encompasses reading, writing, numeracy, speaking, good study habits and communication in other forms of language as needed. Based on the experience, abilities and goals of learners, Native literacy fosters and promotes achievement and a sense of purpose, which are both central to self-determination (George, ND:6)."

### **Goals:**

Is there a distinctively Aboriginal approach to literacy learning? For many years Aboriginal people have experienced barriers in respect to accessing and completing Euro-Western literacy training programs. In attempting to describe a culture- appropriate way of 'literacy' for Aboriginal peoples, holistic approaches to learning will be utilized to give an understanding of this perspective. This symposium has examined Aboriginal literacy from various perspectives taking into consideration the various factors impacting Aboriginal adult education practice.

**Objectives:**

The research is intended to help us better:

- Understand the barriers and supports experienced by Aboriginal Peoples in respect to accessing and completing training programs.
- Understand Aboriginal learning styles and how they relate to succeeding in literacy training programs; and, examine ‘best practices’ in respect to the above 2 items.

**Evaluations:**

“The gathering was a moving experience,” says one of the facilitators, “It showed we are not invisible. Studies and literature are helpful, but talking and listening to the people shows how statistical decisions relate to the true circumstances.”

## MAY 3, 2002 - WELCOME

### Summary of Dr. Antone's Remarks

In keeping with Aboriginal perspectives and philosophies, the meeting place for the symposium was arranged so that the chairs were in a circle. Grafton Antone smudged the symposium, resource and refreshment rooms with Sweet Grass and offered a prayer of peace and thanksgiving that all would go well over the next two days.

People began arriving at 7:30 a.m., and soon the buzz of voices began to bring the symposium to life. At 9:10 a.m. Eileen M. Antone gathered the people together and welcomed everyone to the symposium and introduced Elder Lillian McGregor.

Shekoli swa kwe k^ . Ukwehonwe ne i. Onyota' a: ka tsi twa ka tuh ti. Tsyot s^ nit ne Hotinishoni ne yu kyats. Khale s^ Ka li wi suks ne tsi kyatuhe' yu kyats. Eileen Antone ne ah slon ni kek ne yu kyats. A no wal ni wa ki ta lo t^ .

Greetings everyone. I am one of the Original people of North America. I come from Onyota'a: ka. (Oneida Nation of the Thames located in Southwestern Ontario). "Tsyot s? nit" is my Longhouse name and `Ka li wi saks' is my research name, meaning `She Who Gathers Information'. Eileen Antone is my English name. I belong to the Turtle clan of the Oneida Nation.

**Welcome** to each and every one of you. It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the first Aboriginal Literacy Symposium here at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. It is so important to acknowledge Aboriginal perspectives on 'Literacy'. So as we gather for today and tomorrow we will be hearing about the many different factors that affect Aboriginal literacy. Some of these factors are language, culture, and reclamation of identity, healing, and self-determination. We will be looking at both the barriers and supports for Aboriginal literacy.

I want to thank the speakers who have come to share the work they are doing in Aboriginal literacy in their particular field. We have people here from various programs within the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition and also some presenters from stand-alone programs, as well as, Deaf Literacy and Home Schooling. I do hope that we will be able to have much discussion on the issues that are brought to the circle during this gathering.

It is also a great honour to welcome our keynote speakers 'Ningwakwe' Priscilla George and Sally Gaikhezhyongai. Both of these women have been in the field of literacy for many years and we appreciate the opportunity to have them here with us.

We are also pleased that the Grandmothers and Grandfathers (Elders) have agreed to sit with us throughout this symposium to share their knowledge and reflections on the issues raised.

So once again welcome to our space here in OISE/UT."

## Introduction of Lillian McGregor

Let me now introduce our Grandmother who will do the opening words for this symposium. It is my greatest pleasure to introduce Grandmother Lillian McGregor. I have known Lillian for a number of years and it is always a heart-warming experience listening to the teachings she shares in her opening prayers. The many students and faculty at the University of Toronto affectionately know Lillian as the Elder-in-Residence. She tells us that she does not like to be called “Elder” as that is not part of our language and understanding. Her preference is to be called “Grandmother.” She tells us that “Grandparents carry on the traditions, the knowledge of our ancestors, our background.” She says, “That knowledge must be preserved.”

Grandmother Lillian McGregor retired from the nursing profession in 1989 and has been busier then ever since her retirement. She is well known throughout both the Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal community for her dedication and commitment to bringing people together in a good way. Lillian was born in the Whitefish River First Nation community located on Birch Island in Northern Ontario. She lived in her home community until she was fifteen. At the age of fifteen she moved to Toronto and began her career as a nanny. In this position she took advantage of the opportunity to continue high school and attend nurse’s training.

Since her retirement she has stayed actively involved in the Toronto Aboriginal Community. Over the years she has been on the Board of Directors of the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, Anduhyaun Inc., Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, and Anishnawbe Homes Inc. She is also a member of the Elder and Traditional Teachers’ Advisory Council of the Native Canadian Centre. She is presently on the board of Ningkwakwe Press. In 1995, Lillian was honoured with an eagle feather from the Toronto Native community. In 1996, she was awarded an Outstanding Achievement Award by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation for her efforts in volunteering in the Native community. She was also presented with an Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of U of T Distinguished Educators Award in 1997.

In 1996 a scholarship was established in her name. Each year the Lillian McGregor Award of Excellence at the University of Toronto is awarded to a Native woman studying at U of T who has demonstrated academic excellence, community service and financial need. The award recognizes her “commitment to Native education, the spirit of Excellence that characterizes her activities, her love of the youth and her abiding faith in the community she serves so actively.”

Grandmother Lillian McGregor is truly an inspiration for Aboriginal people throughout Turtle Island. She will be the first Aboriginal woman in Canada to receive a Doctor of Laws degree, *honoris causa*, from the University of Toronto. It will be presented to her at a convocation ceremony on Wednesday, June 19, 2002.

We are pleased that Lillian could join us today for this symposium. So it is my pleasure to call on Grandmother Lillian McGregor.

## OPENING CEREMONY AND THANKSGIVING PRAYER

Elder Lillian McGregor



Photo Courtesy Dawn Antone

Lillian McGregor our leading Elder started by acknowledging that a smudge had already been conducted earlier and that the room was ready for the gathering, therefore she would not smudge again. She began by speaking in her own Ojibway language to the Creator. In her language, she explained who she is and where she is from. She said she was from Birch Island, Whitefish River First Nations in Northern Ontario. She explained that her traditional Ojibway name is Shkebuk and she belongs to the Crane clan. In her opening she acknowledged the eagle feather that was given to her by the Aboriginal community for the work that she does. She gave respect to the ancestors in all of the directions and asked the Creator's forgiveness for having to speak in the English language.

In the English language, she gave thanks for the gathering event and the people gathered. She gave thanks to Mother Earth and all of the things that grow on Mother Earth. She gave thanks for the relationships that we have with all of life. She gave thanks for the sun, moon, and stars. She gave thanks for her family, and the experience and teachings she received from them. She gave thanks that these early teachings carried her through her educational journey, which allowed her to enter the nursing field where she worked as a nurse until her retirement in 1989. She gave thanks for the many Aboriginal organizations here in Toronto that she has been able to be a part of.

She gave thanks that she can still be involved in the Aboriginal community and especially for today. She gave thanks for this Aboriginal gathering and asked the Creator for a special blessing upon the presenters and the participants. She gave thanks and encouraged the assembly to continue to revive the language and culture of the Aboriginal peoples.

Again she spoke in the Ojibway language and gave thanks to the grandfathers and grandmothers in the four directions.

“Chi Miigwetch, Chi Miigwetch, Chi Miigwetch, Chi Miigwetch.”

## **DEAN'S WELCOME**

**Cecilia Reynolds**  
**Acting Dean, OISE/UT**



Photo Courtesy, Dawn Antone

I would like to bring two messages to you in my remarks. First of all, I would like my remarks to be a form of welcoming and I also want my remarks to be a form of acknowledgement. Those are the two purposes that I hope will be reached in the few moments that I have to speak with you this morning.

I want to welcome you on behalf of Michael Fullan, the Dean. He is on study leave at the moment and I am accepting his duties for the month of May. It is a big responsibility. There are many duties. Many of them are less than pleasurable and some of them are very pleasurable. And this certainly fits into the pleasurable category. So I am very happy to take on this duty this morning.

I want to welcome you to our building. It is not the most wonderful building in the world. We who live and study and work in this building acknowledge that and we have tried to adorn some of the rooms and hallways with some beautiful works of art. Many of them are works of art done by Aboriginal peoples. We value those works of art tremendously and we are actually working right now to increase our collection and to make our building more beautiful. We have a large project underway to enhance our lobby in the next little while, with some very wonderful Aboriginal art that will be installed in there, hopefully by this coming autumn.

So I wish to welcome you to the building, but more importantly I wish to welcome you to the OISE/UT community. Our building is less wonderful than our people. Our people are wonderful. We have a coming together in this building of people who live and study and work here. We are very proud of the work that is done here. We are very proud of the people who do that work. We are also very blessed in many ways to be a centre where a lot of the kinds of events such as this one, happen. So it is also a location and a community, which reaches out to a number of different groups and asks them to come and spend time with us. And that is very much what is happening over your conference. We are very pleased that you are here.

We are very proud of the diversity of our community. We are doing a lot of things to proactively increase the diversity of our community here. I think in many ways many of the things that you are going to be talking about in your conference may be helping us with that agenda and moving forward.

At OISE/UT, our community stands for a number of things and we stand with a number of people. We forward a lot of agendas, both political and social, that I think are very much in concert with the kinds of things that you are going to be talking about. We are very proud of the work of the people who have put this conference together. I want to acknowledge Dr. Eileen Antone, she certainly has done a lot of work, as has Dr. Peter Gamlin who is here also. According to the materials that I was given, I would like to thank and acknowledge the work that a number of graduate students have done – Rhonda Paulsen, Julian Robbins, Moneca Sinclaire, Lois Provost-Turchetti. As many of us around the circle will know, none of these events happen without a lot of hard work by the people who take on the duty of organizing. So we are very happy that they have taken that duty on and it has resulted in the events that we will enjoy.

As I understand from the materials I was given, the purposes of this project are very much purposes that the OISE/UT community is involved in. The aspects of understanding, the aspects of opening our ears and listening to one another, of dialogue – a kind of talking with one another, not a talking at people, would be a very important outcome for our discussions - that it really be a true dialogue, which means going back and forth.

I think another goal that I saw in the materials was this idea of networks and connections. Again, this resonates with the OISE/UT community because we try very hard as a community to connect within our community but also to reach out from that strong community to connect with other communities and to bring new-comers into the community. As I understand it that may be a goal in many ways that you are fostering. So I think this idea of talking with people, building sustaining connections, and inviting, is hard work, but important and valuable work.

I also read about assisting work in the field. This is perhaps where we resonate most strongly with the OISE/UT community because the field can mean a lot of things. It can mean the field of our families, the field of our schools and the field of our communities. And schools and families and communities are all of the things that OISE/UT is about. We stand with those three aspects, we stand for those three aspects, and we are very proud and happy to have all of you here with us in our building and with our community, with some of the goals that you have set forward.

I understand that you are raising questions as you meet together: Questions about oral literacy; questions about holistic approaches to learning; questions about the various aspects of literacy and literacy programs and Aboriginal learning styles. These are questions that have been raised in other venues at other times. They have perhaps not been raised in the ways that they will be raised here. And I think that perhaps this is a beginning spot. It is a continuation of some work that has been done, but it could also be an important beginning of some new directions and some new work that might lead to some very valuable outcomes.

I congratulate the people who have organized it. I welcome all of you. I acknowledge the importance of the work that you will be doing over the next few days together and I wish you well. I hope that all of this feeds into our families, our schools and our communities in very positive ways for all of us. Welcome.

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

“The Rainbow/Holistic Approach to Aboriginal Literacy”

**Ningwakwe Priscilla George**



Photo Courtesy, Dawn Antone

Ahneen! Tansi! Sego! Sekoli! It is indeed an honour to have been asked to do the Opening Keynote Address at this historical event. This is the first time in the evolution of Aboriginal literacy programming in Ontario that OISE has hosted an Aboriginal literacy initiative.

I congratulate the forward-thinking planners of this event who chose the topic of best practices. With such a theme, this symposium is in alignment with the Call to Action section of Knowledge Matters – a discussion paper on skills and learning that could re-shape the way the federal government works independently, and with the provinces and territories, to define, fund, and set policy for literacy in Canada. Specifically, Knowledge Matters says that

*“...the Government will sponsor a series of workshops on “best practise” in areas such as workplace-based skills development, literacy, skilled trades and e-learning”.*

I believe that the Native AlphaRoute provides a good model for the last category.

In addition, the General Assembly of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in its fifty-fourth session, January 2000, adopted a resolution to begin discussion around a United Nations Literacy Decade. Their Discussion Paper suggests that

*“...renewed commitments...must be based on lessons learnt from both mistakes and best practices”.*

This Discussion Paper recognizes that a holistic, life-long **and life-wide** approach (highlights mine) to literacy is needed. So, in some ways, the conference organizers are ahead of the game, which I’ve always thought Native Peoples tend to be.

I extend kudos to the planning team as well for having the Elders involved in the meaningful way of participating in recommendations from this symposium.

I see a good mixture of Native Peoples on the agenda presenting on a variety of topics all related to literacy. Thank you, conference organizers, for this celebration of the contributions and “gifts” of Native Peoples.

I thank the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (ONLC) for suggesting my name to be on the agenda. When I got the e-mails and the telephone call from Lois Provost-Turchetti earlier this year to be keynote speaker, the request came as a total surprise to me. I asked around as to who had put my name forward, and I was told that it was the ONLC. Thank you, OISE and ONLC, for honouring me in this way.

## **Introduction and Background**

I have been so truly blessed in the past fifteen years that I’ve worked with Aboriginal Literacy Practitioners and Learners. It is through their sharing from their Hearts and Spirits with me that I have been able to make a few observations as to best practices. It is my sincere desire that I do their words justice in what I am about to share.

I have come to understand literacy as being more than the written word in the two official languages of this country – English and French. I have been encouraged in this understanding through my frequent interaction with Elders, Practitioners and Learners.

The framework that I am about to present to you is really a story of a number of different literacies coming together.

In 1996, I was asked by the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU) to write a second book on Aboriginal literacy. My first one, Empowering the Spirit, written in 1991, described what programs in Ontario were doing. MTCU suggested that it was time for an update, and that this second booklet look at programming outside of Ontario.

I found out that Parkland Regional College, Yorkton, Saskatchewan, had put together an advisory committee of Native literacy practitioners from across Canada that was overseeing the development of a video. I realized that they were just about to have a meeting in Saskatoon. I invited myself to their meeting, because I felt these people could give me some good insights as to which programs to visit for inclusion in the booklet. I requested a half-hour on the agenda. They invited me to participate in the whole meeting, feeling that I might have some good input into their video.

We viewed the draft video and provided comments. I was starting to feel a bit nervous, as I was going to be next on the agenda. I was glancing through my papers to refresh my memory about certain points in my own presentation, when I realized that the people in the room had gone silent. As happens sometimes when we’re distracted, I heard the words that had just been spoken a couple of seconds after the fact. The facilitator had just said that the next step would be to find an author to do the written portion of this multi-media kit. She said that they would need somebody Aboriginal, and somebody who knew literacy. Everybody turned to look at me. Then the facilitator asked if I could step out of the room for just a few minutes. I did. When they called me back into the room, they offered me the contract. Things like this have been happening to me since I have consciously involved Creator in my work.

The best is yet to come. Not only did they offer me the contract, but they wanted me to approach the work in a specific way. This committee had been meeting for a few months, and had agreed that, for Native Peoples, there were many types of literacy – not just the written word. They asked that I use the rainbow as a symbol, that I research each colour of the rainbow, and assign a type of literacy for each colour. They had absolutely no way of knowing that my Anishnawbe Spirit Name translated into English is Rainbow Woman. Synchronicity! This was my sign that I was meant to be there, that I was meant to do this work.

Two years later, I was offered yet another contract. Beverly Sabourin and Associates asked me to help compile a directory of Aboriginal literacy programs across Canada. These programs had to be Aboriginal-controlled, so they do not include programs that run out of community colleges or school boards. A team of us interviewed practitioners, mostly on-site. A common denominator in our interviews was that practitioners felt isolated, and that they would like to have a national conference so as to meet and discuss with others of like mind. In order to organize that conference, we put together a national committee. We started out with a core group of seven. We identified people who demonstrated their Hearts and Spirits in their work. We called ourselves the National Aboriginal Design Committee (NADC)

At our second meeting in December, 1998, I showed this second national committee the work I had done for Parkland Regional College, which I had now come to call The Rainbow/Holistic Approach to Aboriginal Literacy.

Another synchronicity happened. Derek Payne, NADC Treasurer, from the Sto:lo Nation in British Columbia, gasped. He shared that, on his way to the meeting, he had a window seat over the wing of the airplane. He said that, for about half an hour, he saw a circular rainbow on the wing of the airplane. The committee and I discussed the Rainbow Approach, and they endorsed it.

That night, I had a dream about an owl. I shared this dream with the committee during our meeting the next day. As we were from various Aboriginal cultures, Mi'kmaq, Anishnawbe, Sto:lo, Cree, we discussed our various understandings of the owl. Our common understanding was that the owl signified wisdom, which is what the various types of literacy meant to us – the acquisition of wisdom, rather than being limited to cognitive outcomes. Thus was born the logo of the NADC – an owl inside a circular rainbow.

Also in 1996, I was contracted to do some work with the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities had just come out with a document entitled Program Reform. This document basically defined literacy, who and what was eligible and who and what was not, and what the measurable performance indicators would be. Aboriginal language literacy had a narrow and restrictive definition. It was eligible only if the Learner was already fluent in his/her Aboriginal language and was coming to the program to become literate in that language, with a view to this being a bridge to literacy in one of the official languages of this country. My contract called for an ONLC Position Paper on Program Reform.

The piece of Program Reform that impacted on Aboriginal literacy in the biggest way was Working with Learning Outcomes, also referred to as “*the Matrix*”. The main focus of the matrix is cognitive outcomes in three domains – Communications (Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening), Numeracy, Self-Management and Self-Direction.

Some of you here will recall the Buff document that came out first. All of the streams – Anglophone, Francophone, Deaf and Native - were to review and provide their comments as to its applicability in programming. This document focussed only on the first two domains.

Over a period of several months, while listening to practitioners, I put together the Aboriginal stream's response. Basically, practitioners said there were qualitative outcomes in the learners that needed to be solidified first, and that were not even addressed in the Matrix. The Native stream gave the consultant, Adam Lodzinski a list of the qualitative outcomes that we saw.

Anything that has gone into the Matrix has been cross-referenced to the Ontario government's Common Curriculum, Human Resource Development Canada's Essential Skills and the Canadian Language Benchmarks. So, what actually appeared in the validation draft of the Matrix is a considerably watered-down version of our input. Mr. Lodzinski had re-worked our qualitative outcomes so that they would be "*measurable*".

However, the Native Stream was successful in getting a third domain added, based on our reaction to the Buff document: in addition to Communications and Numeracy, there is now Self-Management and Self-Direction. In addition, the Ontario Literacy Coalition has initiated a project to look at this domain. B.C. has produced a document entitled, Naming the Magic: Non-Academic Outcomes in Basic Literacy. Some of those outcomes resemble what the Native Stream said before Adam Lodzinski re-worded our input.

I must admit that, initially, my energy around this Position Paper was somewhat defensive and adversarial. I felt that, yet again, the government was deciding what was best for us, and was imposing a "*one-size-fits-all*" model that didn't account for the various situations and factors in the Aboriginal literacy community.

Then I realized that I needed to live the teachings I had been given since I began exploring our traditions in a concerted way some eighteen years ago. I've come to understand that, whenever we harbour any feelings that are less than loving, we are harming ourselves. This is a part of what we have termed in Aboriginal circles as "*bad medicine*".

In modern scientific terms, such feelings set a whole neurochemical reaction in the body that is analogous to ingesting poison. Many such neurochemical reactions over a long period of time contribute to dis-ease. Did I want to be doing that to myself? Certainly not!

In addition, I've come to understand that such negative feelings leave what Rupert Sheldrake, an English biologist, has come to call a morphogenic field – energy fields that are connected to behaviour and thoughts (Hunt, 1996). Our Medicine People can pick up on these morphogenic fields. That's how they detect illnesses before they occur, and why we smudge places before we move in or if there's been negative energy. In effect, for me to be thinking adversarial thoughts was affecting my "*inner environment*" and the actual "*outer*" physical environment. I could not in all good consciousness do this. So, I had turned over to the matter to the Creator and asked,

*"What do we wish to achieve with this Position Paper?"*

It was about that time that I had learned to start all of my work with ceremony and prayer. I would invite the Creator to guide me and direct me. I was given the teaching that, in this way, I was inviting Creator to be an active partner in whatever I was doing. I would then put my

thoughts and intentions into a tobacco tie, inviting Creator to show me what I needed to include to make this the best project possible for the people. I would put the tobacco tie under my pillow when I was sleeping, or on my computer whenever I was working. The energy of the Position Paper changed to that of,

*“What’s the best way to educate decision-makers at MTCU so that we get at least discussion around the elements of Program Reform that, in our view, need expanding?”*

In compiling the research for the Position Paper, I postulated a possible solution. A long-time friend, Diane Hill, Mohawk, Six Nations of the Grand River Territory had been part of a teaching team with the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI). This teaching team had been using the Medicine Wheel. In fact, Diane and I team-taught the Learning Styles Workshop for the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition using the Medicine Wheel to show the stages of learning, as well as the styles of learning. Through this work, I developed an appreciation for some further work that the FNTI teaching team had done with learning outcomes for each of:

Spirit – an attitude or insight;  
Heart – a feeling about oneself or others;  
Mind – knowledge; and,  
Body – a skill.

I felt inspired to suggest a learning outcome for Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body for each of the types of literacy.

I decided to suggest that MTCU consider the Medicine Wheel model of learning. Knowing the mindset of those with access to authority and decision-making in government (I had worked there for 7 years), I knew that I would have to find scientific and educational research that corroborated this Medicine Wheel Approach.

In the meantime, as a result of the National Aboriginal Literacy Gathering, we had expanded the NADC to eighteen people – including Elders and Learners. When I presented the “*blended*” Rainbow Approach/Medicine Wheel to this committee last year, they felt it had merit. Edwina Wetzel, Conne River First Nation, sent me a 3-page letter outlining how their community is committed to nurturing Spirit first in their educational programming. Such a commitment has paid off in a comment that I have long wanted to hear. Edwina says that they have almost worked themselves out of a job in literacy in their community.

To date, I have done 21 presentations on parts or all of the Rainbow/Holistic Approach – to approximately 700 learners and practitioners, in most provinces and territories, as well as in Atlanta, Georgia and Australia. Today’s presentation makes it 22. Eighteen of those have been by invitation because people have heard about the work. Another ten speaking engagements by invitation are lined up in the Yukon, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick and Paris, France.

I say this only to make two points. The first is that, when you sincerely involve Creator in your work – as traditional Native Peoples always have - another force comes in to help. As Native Peoples, we’ve always believed that the Spirit World is there ready and willing to help. Our only responsibility is to ensure that the work is in alignment with the principles of Life and Love. The second point is that people WANT to hear about this work – in effect, it’s a validation of what

they're already doing. It's the highest honour that I've ever been given to be the one to carry this framework forward.

## **The Medicine Wheel**

Our traditional teachings tell us that we are Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body (Hill, 1995). To have a life of balance, we must recognize and nurture all four parts of ourselves. Institutional educational systems have tended to focus on Mind – through cognitive outcomes, and possibly Body – through physical education, and subjects that teach a physical skill, such as woodworking. That is, 50% of a learner is not being recognized and nurtured in that system.

I believe that a lot of this reductionistic, compartmentalized approach stems from the seventeenth century Cartesian era, which is dominated by reductionistic methodology, which attempts to understand life by examining the tiniest pieces of it, and then extrapolating from these pieces to overarching surmises about the whole (Pert, 1997). Native Peoples on this continent did not know about Cartesian thought and still saw the four parts as an inseparable whole.

In my quest to find educational and scientific research that corroborated the Medicine Wheel, I found the work of The HeartMath Institute, which asserts that the electromagnetic frequencies of the heart are 5,000 times greater than that of the brain (Childre, Martin & Beech, 1999). That is, it's the heart that entrains the brain, not the other way around as we've been socialized to believe. The people at the HeartMath Institute have been teaching students techniques such as Freeze-Frame or Heart Lock-in, which have been shown to reduce factors that impact negatively on learning – anxiety, stress, depression, etc.

My next question was, “*So what entrains or motivates the heart?*” Native Peoples believe that it is the Spirit. In Spiritual Intelligence, The Ultimate Intelligence, Zohar and Mitchell (1999) postulate Spiritual Intelligence (SQ), asserting that it has a neurological basis and that it *integrates* all our intelligences. That is, science is just now discovering what Native Peoples have said all along about the holistic approach, or the teachings of the Medicine Wheel.

The Medicine Wheel has many layers of teachings, one of which is learning styles. Diane Hill and associates at FNTI have postulated spiritual, emotional, mental and physical learning styles. An assessment tool determines in which learning style we are dominant, with the understanding that we have elements of all the rest in us, and that we can be taught to strengthen those (Michael, 2002).

On a similar note, Howard Gardner of Harvard University has put forward a theory on Multiple Intelligences, or different ways of exploring a subject. Gardner says that human intelligence consists of three components:

- a. a set of skills that enables an individual to resolve genuine problems encountered in one's life
- b. the ability to create an effective product or offer a service that is of value in one's culture
- c. the potential for finding or creating problems – thereby laying the groundwork for the acquisition of new knowledge.

Gardner suggests eight intelligences, which must meet stringent criteria to be admitted to the list:

1. potential isolation by brain damage
2. existence of idiots savants, prodigies, and other exceptional individuals
3. an identifiable core operation or set of operations
4. a distinctive developmental history, along with a definable set of expert “end-state” performances
5. an evolutionary history and evolutionary plausibility
6. support from experimental psychological tasks
7. support from psychometric findings
8. susceptibility to encoding a symbol system (McArthur, 1998).

The intelligences are:

- i) linguistic – the ability to read, write, communicate with words
- ii) logical-mathematical – the ability to reason and calculate, to think things through in a logical, systematic manner
- iii) visual-spatial – the ability to think in pictures, visualize a final result
- iv) musical – the ability to make or compose music, to sing well, or understand and appreciate music
- v) bodily-kinesthetic – the ability to use your body skilfully to solve problems, create products, or present ideas and emotions
- vi) interpersonal – the ability to work effectively with others, to relate to other people and display empathy and understanding, to notice their motivations and goals
- vii) intrapersonal – the ability for self-analysis and reflection – to be able to quietly contemplate and assess one’s accomplishments, to review one’s behaviour and innermost feelings, to make plans and set goals, to know oneself
- viii) naturalist – the ability to recognize flora and fauna, to make other consequential distinctions in the natural world and to use this ability productively (Rose & Nicholl, 1997).

Gardner’s work goes beyond cognitive skills and outcomes only. In fact, only two of the intelligences – linguistic and logical-mathematical - can be considered to be cognitive in nature. I find his work an affirmation of the Anishnawbe Life Road Teachings that we all have “gifts” that we need to recognize and nurture.

I admire the work of Daniel Goleman (1997) who postulates that a person’s academic and technical skills only provide them with a foot in the door – at school and at work. What makes the difference once they are in is their “emotional intelligence” – which includes factors such as self-awareness, self-discipline and empathy. In other words, many people are also saying what we’re saying as Native Peoples: there is more to life than the acquisition of cognitive outcomes.

## **The Rainbow**

**? Red**– the first colour of the rainbow, and the colour understood by some Aboriginal cultures to mean confidence, which has within it the knowing, the ability to plan, to start a process. Red represents **the language of origin of First Nations individuals and/or communities.**

Since time immemorial, Aboriginal Peoples have lived on this land. We believe that the Creator put us here. Our ancestors did NOT cross the Bering Strait. We had our own Aboriginal

languages. Today, there are approximately 50 languages, belonging to 11 major language families. In the past 100 years or more, nearly ten once flourishing languages have become extinct. At least a dozen are on the brink of extinction.

There are special initiatives in the Aboriginal community to keep our languages alive. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommends granting special status to Aboriginal languages, providing formal education in the language, and conducting research (Norris, 1998). The First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres (FNECC) is in the initial stages of developing protective legislation for the preservation, maintenance, promotion and use of Aboriginal languages in Canada (Protective Legislation for Aboriginal Languages in Canada, 1997 ). We need to pool our energies to help each other save our languages.

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) did a study a few years ago, and grouped our languages into five categories:

- Flourishing;
- Enduring;
- Declining;
- Endangered; and,
- Extinct.

As quoted in Ignace (1998), in 1992, they summarized the importance of Aboriginal languages as follows:

*The Aboriginal Languages were given by the Creator as an integral part of life. Embodied in Aboriginal languages is our unique relationship to the Creator, our attitudes, beliefs, values, and the fundamental notion of what is truth. Aboriginal language is an asset to one's own education, formal and informal. Aboriginal language contributes to greater pride in the history and culture of the community; greater involvement and interest of parents in the education of their children, and greater respect for Elders. Language is the principal means by which culture is accumulated, shared and transmitted from generation to generation. The key to identity and retention of culture is one's ancestral language.*

We are most fortunate in that 2 of the 3 languages considered to be flourishing – Ojibway, Cree and Inuktitut - are here in Ontario

A policy or structure that does not recognize and affirm our language serves only to erode our culture, our worldview of interconnectedness. Only two languages have the status of being official in Canada and in Ontario. They are NOT the languages of the first peoples of this land. MTCU has stringent criteria for what constitutes Aboriginal language literacy. That is, the classes are not for language acquisition. Literacy programs offering Aboriginal language literacy will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Ontario has set a precedent of adopting policies and practices from the institutional educational system. An example is the Learning Outcomes Matrix, which is a permutation of the Common Curriculum.

The institutional education system has a policy that states,

*“Where the parents of ten students request Aboriginal languages, the school MAY provide a class, pending the availability of a qualified instructor.”*

What permutation of this policy is MTCU willing to consider?

A question of personal interest to me is:

*“How much of a stretch is it to question the degree of fluency a learner must have in his/her Aboriginal language?”*

Many of us are “passively bilingual” because federal and provincial government policies and practices forbade us to speak our languages in their institutions. We understand the spoken language because the words are in our memory banks; however, we have difficulty participating in an Aboriginal language conversation. Acquisition is not the issue with us, retrieval is. We just need practise in retrieving those words faster, and brushing up on the pronunciation.

Program Reform looks at three goals for literacy: - (1) for employment; (2) for continued education and training; and, (3) for the improvement of the quality of life. There is a market for translators/interpreters in our Aboriginal languages. In addition, many of us use our own Aboriginal languages in ceremony, including prayer, which is at the foundation for an improved quality of life.

**? Orange** – the second colour of the rainbow and the colour understood by some Aboriginal cultures to mean balance, the place of choice where we are taught to exercise self-confidence, self-assuredness, self-control and self-esteem, in order to keep emotions, such as fear, in balance. Orange is often used to denote fire. The first source of fire is the Sun, which is the centre of the universe. People are like the universe in that they also have a centre, a fire within. For Aboriginal Peoples, that centre is the teachings. Aboriginal teachings have been passed from generation to generation orally. Orange symbolizes **the skills required for oral literacy (speaking, listening) ...**

Since time immemorial, our culture has been an oral one. Many of our people have been known for their skills in oratory in both their own language of origin AND in English. Many of our teachings have been passed down orally – either in ceremony, or through storytelling. As I understand it, many skills are required for oral literacy – outstanding listening skills, sometimes referred to as “*wholly*” listening, critical and reflective thinking, excellent memory and the ability to get one’s point across in a way that can be understood. In a sense, our stories and our teachings are like learning spirals – we can hear the same story or teaching a number of times, but get a different “lesson” out of it each time, depending on where we are on our own “journeys”.

Literacy programs are inviting Elders in to share the teachings and to conduct Talking Circles, either on specific topics, or on something that is important to the Learners that occasion. In this way, the Learners can identify common issues and set up a support system for themselves within the group.

? **Yellow** – the third colour of the rainbow, and the colour often used in reference to the moon and the gathering of food. In Aboriginal tradition, crops are planted and harvested according to the phases of the moon. Some Aboriginal cultures understand yellow to mean creativity. Yellow refers to the **creative means by which Aboriginal Peoples had to learn to communicate with others who spoke another language or through other than the written word, by using symbols (pictographs, and in contemporary times, artwork, music) and/or sign language.**

Since time immemorial, because of our different languages and linguistic groups, Native Peoples have had to be creative in the ways in which we communicated – about how to interact/trade with each other, about events that have transpired, and about prophecies. We developed a kind of sign language. We used various art forms for our clothing, lodgings and surroundings. In fact, today we can often tell from a person's regalia what kind of dancer he/she is, what his/her clan is or even where he/she is from. One of our longest standing and best known art forms is the petroglyphs, which date back thousands of years. Petroglyphs record events, visions and storytelling. Pictures or images convey ideas or meaning without the use of words or sounds, but in a much more powerful way such that Literacy Practitioners are using crafts as a way of helping Learners to get in touch with their creativity.

? **Green** – the fourth colour of the rainbow is often interpreted to mean growth, going beyond what is familiar, yet remaining true to the teachings. This allows us to live with respect and humbleness. It is used to represent grass and growing things on Mother Earth. Treaties and understandings with the newcomers often included the phrase, "*as long as the grasses grow and the rivers flow*". Green refers to **literacy in the languages of the European newcomers to this land a little over 500 years ago, English and/or French, and which have been given the status of official languages.** They are considered 'the language of instruction,' except in the territories where some of the Aboriginal languages are official in that particular territory.

When I was doing a workshop on The Rainbow/Holistic Approach in Yellowknife earlier this year, there was an older gentleman in the learners' group. He seemed quite agitated a couple of times. When I assigned the small group exercise, he walked out. However, he came back. During the afternoon, he put up his hand, and I thought to myself, "*Well, I'm going to get it now.*" In his Aboriginal English, he talked about how difficult it is for him as a man from the Dene language and culture sitting through a presentation in English. He said that many of his classes are hard and boring. He liked that I had pointed out the different learning styles and the different types of literacy. He said that he could see himself in some of what I shared. This was not the norm.

Aboriginal English is a term I learned in Western Australia, which even has an Aboriginal English policy. It is considered a language in its own right, different from Standard Australian English. That is, Aboriginal English is not considered "*Broken English*", something to be fixed.

? **Blue** – the fifth colour of the rainbow, which some Aboriginal cultures understand to mean truth. Knowing the truth means staying true to your vision, where commitment is most important. Blue is also used to symbolize the colour of the sky. With the coming of the Europeans, the skyline changed and now contains the tools of technology, such as towers and satellite dishes that send and receive signals. Blue refers to **the skills required to communicate using technology.**

I recall the advent of computers in the classroom when I was teaching at Wanepuhnud in 1985-86. I left anything to do with computers to the computer instructor. However, in 1988, when I got the job as Native Literacy Coordinator with the Ontario Ministry of Education, we HAD to use computers. It was sink or swim for me. Now, many isolated communities keep in touch with the rest of the world through technology. Sometimes this is a good thing; sometimes it is not.

- In Australia, students at the Aboriginal and Islander Community School in Brisbane learn about digital literacies. They are taught to develop web-sites as a way of keeping the culture alive, through depicting various aspects of it.
- Currently, The AlphaPlus Centre is piloting the Native AlphaRoute in three Native communities. Bernice Ireland of Nokee Kwe says that the learners are so excited to learn some of their culture in a computer program.
- Charles Ramsey, Executive Director, National Adult Literacy Database (NALD), shared with me an incident in which he posted a poem by a Native man on the NALD web-site. That posting has resulted in several requests for this man's work – an opportunity he would never have had if it were not for technology.

? **Indigo** – the sixth colour of the rainbow, is often referred to as the colour of the night-time sky, the dream time when Aboriginal Peoples are more open to receiving messages from the Spirit World. This colour also refers to the Hindu and Buddhist “*third eye chakra*”, which signifies “*spiritual seeing*”. Indigo refers to **the skills required for spiritual or cultural literacy – the ability to interpret dreams, visions or natural events, which are seen to be messages from the Spirit World – the sighting of an animal, the shape of a cloud, seeing a certain person at a particular point in time, etc.**

Since time immemorial, Native Peoples have believed in a Spirit World, what we often refer to as our “*unseen helpers*” – unseen with the naked eye that is, but most certainly seen with the Spirit Eye. We believe that Spirit speaks to us in imagery, thoughts, sounds and feelings. Some cultures call this clairvoyance, claircognizance, clairaudience, and clairsentience. The effects of the Cartesian Era and a system that focuses only on that which can be validated by science has socialized this way of knowing out of a lot of Native people. Literacy programs, however, are using ceremony, including Talking Circles, to encourage Learners to talk about their dreams, synchronicities, visions and understandings of natural events.

? **Violet** – the seventh colour of the rainbow, is often thought to be a healing colour. Some Aboriginal cultures understand violet to mean wisdom, the ability to understand things, to have true power (inner and spiritual), to respect, and to know in a holistic way. Violet refers to **the holistic base of Aboriginal literacy – facilitating spiritual, emotional, mental and physical learning outcomes – striving for balance.**

Since time immemorial, Native Peoples have recognized the importance of nurturing Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body. There are many ways in which practitioners do that in literacy programs – from the way we treat Learners when they first walk in our doors, to the way we listen to what is affecting them, to the way we facilitate their becoming a part of the group, such that they sometimes call it their family. We treat them like a whole person. Often it's the first time that somebody has treated them like that. They're so used to getting shuffled from one program to

another, each with its stringent criteria, which often serves as a barrier. I have heard Learners say things like, *"I matter here."* In fact, research shows that students rate the quality of their relationship with their instructor as the number one factor in whether or not they enjoy learning (Rose & Nicholl, 1997). Time spent establishing mutual respect is crucial.

From my research on the impacts on trauma on learning, I have found that such instances can cause blockages to learning. An emotion-filled incident can be encoded in the part of the brain known as the amygdala. The amygdala's job is to protect us. It scans every experience to ascertain if there is any resemblance to an earlier traumatic experience. Its association is sloppy. When it recognizes two or three factors similar to that earlier traumatic experience, it can command us to react to the present in a way that we learned a long time ago. This is known as an emotional hijacking (Goleman, 1997). Learners freeze, or dissociate. Instructors who don't realize this will think the learner is just not interested or, worse yet, not trying hard enough – daydreaming.

Candace Pert, a neuroscientist, who discovered the opiate receptor, has coined the phrase *"body-mind"*. She says that the body is the unconscious mind. Repressed traumas caused by overwhelming emotion can be stored in a body part (Pert, 1997). I believe that there are literacy-based and literacy-related ways in which we can help Learners deal with such issues. One way to get at the picture frozen in the amygdala is through art (Rose & Nicholl, 1997). The Learners can then talk about their picture, or write about it. Alternately, they can write about the incident, and give it a different, happier ending.

Literacy practitioners have long understood that we need to recognize the Spirit first. Much of our history, and many of the socio-economic realities of our communities, have impacted on the Learners such that they come to us feeling inferior and substandard. We teach them that they have not failed. In fact, it's the system that has failed them. The system did not recognize their realities, did not recognize their learning styles, and did not make room for them as a whole person. A young man in the Anishnawbe Health Community Worker Program was very intrigued when I shared this information with his class. Previously, he had been measuring his self-worth by his literacy levels. He came to recognize that the ability to read and write in English is only one type of literacy, and that he was literate in many other ways.

## Conclusion

My Heart and Spirit go out to you as Native literacy practitioners. You see beyond cognitive outcomes. You help Learners to recognize their "gifts", only one of which is the ability to read and write in English. You go that extra mile to provide an atmosphere that makes space for each Learner to grow as a whole person. In addition, you do that balancing act of meeting the administrative responsibilities of a system that requires a paper-trail for everything. That's a huge demand on your time and energy. In my experience, it's hard to juggle effective programming and the mountain of paperwork. I believe you owe yourselves a pat on the back.

In the words of Vicki Lucier, former Coordinator of the Timmins Friendship Centre at the Native Aboriginal Literacy Gathering, April 2002, Nakoda Lodge, Morley, Alberta,

*"We think we're instructors. We're really healers."*

I add to that,

*“You’re administrators, you’re advocates, you’re confidantes, you’re role models – you inspire people, you teach them to believe in themselves.”*

If I were to put all that into a job classification chart, you’re worth considerably more than you’re getting paid! Each and every day, you’re making a difference in someone’s life. Remember to balance all those demands with your own needs. Often, we forget to see ourselves as Spirit – every bit as important as all those other factors that require our attention. Keep up the good work.

There’s one little piece of advice that I would like to leave with you. Teach yourself to view everything that the Learners in your program do through pages 12 and 13 of Working with Learning Outcomes (MTCU\_ 1998). Start in the left-hand column. Choose which domain(s) apply, go to the next column and choose the Component Outcome(s), then the Skills Sets. I’m sure you’ll find your covering a lot of the Matrix and then some.

Finally, I have a request. I am working on a follow-up strategy to the National Aboriginal Literacy Gathering. The NADC and I are in the initial stages of setting up a National Aboriginal Literacy Office. We have been asked by Senator Thelma Chalifoux, Chair, Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples (SSCAP) to prepare a Position Paper on Aboriginal Literacy. We plan to present this paper around Literacy Action Day in Ottawa, October 25, 2002. I am viewing all of my interactions with literacy types through the lens of what to include in this document. This is your opportunity to have a say in how the national group will best serve you. Please feel free to chat with me and to share your views on this work.

I started out my talk acknowledging many people. I would now like to acknowledge the Spirit World. Life has taken on a different tone for me when I learned to put my trust in Creator to guide and direct my work, my life. It’s a privilege to walk with Creator and with all of you on this journey.

Gichi Miigwech!

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## ROUNDTABLE ONE - LEARNING BY CHOICE

AlphaRoute for the Native Stream: Creating a Culture-based,  
On-line Literacy Environment for the Native Community

### Nancy Cooper and Pat Powell



Photo Courtesy, Dawn Antone

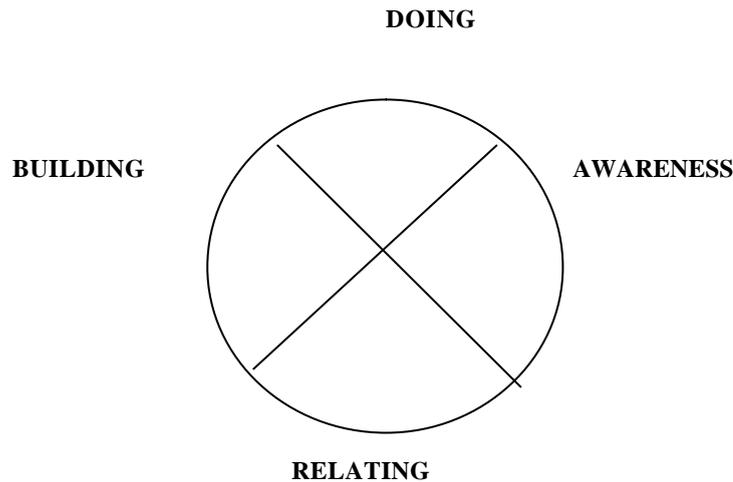
Nancy Cooper:

Hi. I am from Mnjikaning (Rama) First Nations in Ontario. My spirit name is *Enibwitang debwewin Kwe* means, “One who stands up for the truth”. I am employed as the Field Consultant for the Native Stream at Centre AlphaPlus Centre in Toronto.

First Nations communities are enjoying a cultural and educational revitalization. The Native literacy community in Ontario, in particular, is strong and vibrant. However, it also struggles with issues such as isolation, few tutors, and lack of access to child-care resources and libraries. Native AlphaRoute project is being used to address and alleviate some of these issues. It is an on-line learning environment that helps learners increase their computer and literacy skills while learning more about Native cultural and traditional teachings.

I would like to give the historical background to the inception of AlphaRoute curriculum. The initial inception of web-based learning was established as a result of a pilot project directed by Pat Powell, who will talk a bit about her experience with the pilot project later. Three years ago, this project was established with a Native focus with an on-line Native language environment. An advisory committee was comprised of Native practitioners. An example of traditional teachings and technology coming together was when Ningwakwe did the ceremony using a feather and a smudge. Here the smoke enveloped the technology being used to develop the program. These cultural ceremonies reflect the teachings of First Nations.

An example of one of the teachings is the Medicine Wheel explanation of how curriculum is viewed from a First Nations perspective:



In 1996, the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) and the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) initiated Phase 1 of AlphaRoute to gain knowledge of what learners experienced when they completed learning activities on the Web. This phase convinced the partners that a web-based environment had much to offer literacy learners. In the fall of 2001, a Native-specific site was launched at a provincial Native Literacy Gathering in Keene, Ontario. All aspects of the design, from curriculum content to visual layout and technical readiness, have been developed with a vision toward meeting the needs of Native literacy Learners.

AlphaRoute complements Native literacy programming by offering on-line content for adult Learners enrolled in Native literacy programs. What makes AlphaRoute relevant is that it has been developed entirely by Native literacy professionals. AlphaRoute is visual, interactive and offers a choice of learning processes.

Learners who have participated in a research pilot for the Native stream have enjoyed using the site, increasing their literacy skills, and learning more about various Native cultural teachings, such as the teachings of the Medicine Wheel and the Seven Grandfathers. As the learners go through the games, they learn. It suddenly dawned on me that as people are doing the exercises they are actually integrating the knowledge into their everyday lives. They weren't just learning a new skill but new knowledge that can be used to improve their own life.

Here was an opportunity to conduct formal research with the AlphaRoute program. In the program, people have a choice as to where they want to start within the four topics. The topics cover such areas as the Seven Grandfathers, Emotions, and Recycling. Here was a learning environment where learners could use not only the written word but also art in their responses. This was something new in Canada. Web-based learning was not only a way to learn what learners were learning, it was a new way to understand more ideas from the people, thus "Nishnawbe connections" was established.

Plans for AlphaRoute for the Native stream include the development of more skills-based, culturally-relevant curriculum in all of the Literacy Basic Skills learning outcome levels from 1 through to 5. There are also plans to include various Native cultural teachings to reflect the diversity of Native culture in the province of Ontario.

The latest Pilot Project has 3 literacy programs involved, these are the Peterborough Native Literacy program, the Sioux Look Out program, and Nokeekwe program located in London Ontario. There is also a plan to have a mentor available for each learner if they need to have someone to talk to via the web.

Pat Powell:

Initially, when I began with the pilot phase of AlphaPlus, it seemed I spent much of my time in administration because I spent most of my time writing proposals for funding. I also had to research the requirements for examinations for literacy Learners, in addition to hiring three people to provide a profile of the program. While working in the pilot project I moved to a new location and decided to do math upgrading. I decided to go to college and do some upgrading. While I was a student I learned much from this experience... I already had much to contribute to the work I was learning.

As I was a student, I suddenly realized that the vision of AlphaRoute and how I was learning in school were interconnected. Here I was in school doing assignments according to what my life experiences were and how AlphaRoute was being set up to acknowledge how Native people learned, it was student-centred even though it used a computer/technology method.

I decided one day that I wanted to try and talk about the Medicine Wheel using the technology available. So I made a medicine wheel on a 48" diameter tabletop and gathered pictures to symbolize the four directions. I wrote up the experience and wrote about the challenges of touch, coordination and how they related to literacy. For me these are the relationships that I see that will last forever in my heart.

Miigwetch.

Nancy Cooper:

Through AlphaRoute, learners with little computer skills can gain more skills. Nishnawbe reading thus far has been very successful. Some examples of successful projects are: a Medicine Wheel project and a huge collage. Some learners feel they are able to learn more because they are able to write paragraphs as events happen and so they can integrate new things they have learned into their daily physical lives and vice-versa. These, put together, create emotional stability thus the body, mind and spirit are being developed through this process.

Miigwetch.

## Self-*Management* and Self-Direction in the Success of Native Literacy Learners

**Christianna Jones**



Photo Courtesy, Dawn Antone

I'm from Wikwemikong First Nations, Manitoulin Island. I would like to say that in working in Literacy I have found that self-management and self-direction are the skills necessary for any Native individual to achieve the best possible success in their personal relationships and life choices. This is probably what every individual needs to achieve their goal of finding what it is they want in their life.

The M'Chigeeng Literacy and Basic Skills full-time program began in February of 1994. It was determined and agreed that this was not just an academic program; the purpose of this program was to help learners become more aware of themselves, their skills, family dynamics and community involvement. Literacy in this program is learner-centered and community-based. Learning comes about by experience as opposed to simply by virtue of one side offering and the other side participating in a course on life-skills or life-management. Academics brought the learners to the door, but learning was based on personal skills. Initially, the program began in order to teach math and English, which brought them into the program but the goal of the program was to work with the whole person. The goal is to improve personal, numeracy and communication skills.

“Community within a Community” is what the M'Chigeeng Adult and Continuing Education is about. One person would come in and then eventually their families would join them. Instructors, Coordinators and learners are equal and meet as equals inside and outside the school. The design and teaching of the courses are as requested by the students therefore, students participate in planning and coordinating activities. A support system is developed. Learners stay in touch even after completing the program. Counselling became a large part of the program and the program became the first step towards Learners' self-affirmation.

Literacy tends to focus on the acquisition of proficiency in numeracy and communication. However, early in my work with Native learners I realized that there were other skills that were important. These were the life-skills necessary for an individual to make the choices required to succeed. In literacy and in the Learning Outcomes Matrix, the term 'self-direction and management' is used to describe these areas of self-growth.

M'Chigeeng Literacy and Basic Skills program recognized and was instrumental in having this domain included in the Learning Outcomes Matrix that was developed in 1997/98. This domain was addressed by only one two-sided page at the end of the 139-page document, but at least it

was included, and we could begin formally identifying learners in this domain. It provided some guidelines for determining progress in the goal of 'independence'.

Building around the 'Seven Grandfathers Teachings' of the Ojibway helped us to identify the philosophy we used to run our program. This presentation will further discuss these teachings and how we incorporate them into our program. We did not so much make a 'conscious' choice to use the 'Seven Grandfathers' teachings in the running of our program; it was rather a matter of 'conscience'. The Seven Grandfathers taught respect, honesty, truth, love, wisdom, bravery and humility. The Medicine Wheel balances spiritual, mental, physical and emotional. The main thing is balance. For measurements and assessment, practical 're-life-learning', such as writing letters for housing and ordering at restaurants, these are items that cannot be measured for the government statistics required by HRDC or MTCU. These are daily life skills that need to be incorporated into the knowledge and skill-building statistics. Success must be measured in terms of building the whole person - mind, body, spirit and emotions.

## Healing the Spirit

Elva Lickers

The presentation will address ways of overcoming barriers from one's own life history; skills required completing literacy-training programs; and, finally, the benefits of a Life Skills program combined with a literacy program.

The Six Nations Literacy Achievement Centre has combined these programs with great success. The presentation will describe the types of lessons presented and how this has increased the success of the literacy program participants to a 90% success level.

### **Barriers and Supports**

The first part of this discussion will focus on barriers experienced by the learner. The word 'barrier' means something that obstructs passage or retards progress. The learners experience many barriers but, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) only fund tangible barriers such as language barriers, lack of transportation, need for babysitting services and lack of money. These are the barriers they are willing and even eager to provide support for in the Literacy Field. Then they wonder, with all this support they are giving, why we are still experiencing such low success rates in our literacy programs. They do not recognize the greatest barriers of all: mental, emotional and spiritual dysfunction. These intangible barriers are the greatest hindrance to the success of Native students. The effect, of these barriers, is common knowledge: Native peoples have the highest school drop-out rate, alcoholism rate, drug addiction rate, suicide rate and the highest percentage of people in jails. Much of this dysfunction is the result of Residential Schools.

Learners continue to experience low-self esteem. They never quite belong. In the Residential Schools, teachers used to beat the children as a form of discipline... the students learned and learned well the Residential form of discipline and abuse and passed it on to their children.

The cycle of shame, blame and self-loathing must stop. These are the most devastating barriers that our people must overcome. A lack of self-esteem, self-confidence and a confused cultural

identity impede our students as no physical barriers can. We can teach people to read and write, but without the self-esteem and self-confidence to utilize these skills, they are no better off than they were before. When they don't feel they are 'as good as', 'as smart as', or 'as deserving of good things as' other ethnic groups in our society; they do not utilize their talents and skills to improve their lifestyle. These are the intangible barriers, but MTCU is not willing to fund intangibles.

### **Supports**

Literacy practitioners need to address these barriers and to unite in their efforts to obtain funding for this purpose. Hopefully, the success of the Six Nations Literacy Achievement Centre's method of incorporating Life Skills into the program will inspire other literacy practitioners to set up a similar format in their literacy centres.

### **“Insights” Pre-employment Training**

The overall objective of the course is to help an individual develop a repertoire of problem-solving behaviours and skills. The lessons will enhance and enrich the participant's sense of self-worth and remove the destructive barriers of low self-esteem and self-confidence. Members of the class participate in exercises that provide opportunities for learning, practicing and re-enforcing the lessons presented. The participants are encouraged to expand their educational achievements and/or enter the workforce in a field of their choice.

## **On Motivating Learners in Northern Communities**

### **Sharon Swanson**

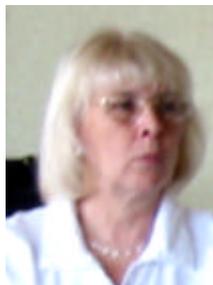


Photo Courtesy Dawn Antone

Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, particularly those residing in remote northern communities, when compared to opportunities and lifestyle afforded the average Canadian, live and function under a substantially different set of circumstances. Of particular note are those factors influencing the motivation for Aboriginal literacy learners to improve upon their present skill level. Motivation is the most critical ingredient in a literacy learner's success. I am referring to the forces influencing individuals to control their success. Success is the definition of success held individually by each learner.

The key factors that contribute to motivation in a Northern Ontario Aboriginal community are cultural awareness, culturally-sensitive teaching processes, and a sense of community. Culturally-sensitive teaching uses instructional methods that conform to the Aboriginal literacy learners' ideas, customs and traditions in terms of being a whole person. It is essential for the Ministry of Education to be more positive and more respectful of Native culture and not always

to expect learning to be based on their own preconceived terms.

One of the main differences between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal culture that has affects the learner is the concept of family. Learners put the needs of their family first and so sometimes it seems learners are not motivated. A person may feel it is more important to take care of his/her particular ailment than to attend work or school. This attitude extends to family members. The immediate welfare of a learner's child has priority over attendance or completion of an assignment. There needs to be a way to help them work around that. If the learner falls behind, they tend to leave the program instead of pressing on. Learners are also more comfortable learning from someone who is just like themselves. After learners are aware that I am of Native origin, that learner/teacher barrier is removed and they are more comfortable and more interested in learning. This difference in their attitude indicates the continued resistance to Western influences.

Sometimes, although I included cultural aspects in the program, to increase motivation, I found that some members of small communities are uncomfortable with this approach. They identified strongly with the values of Western culture in many small communities, while others were still strong in their own Aboriginal cultural beliefs and practises. It is important to overcome this conflict in the literacy group. Understanding and acceptance of cultural differences will develop learners' confidence and self-respect and this is self-motivating.

Recognizing students' strengths and abilities encourages them to participate. Increased participation and interest intensifies their need and desire to succeed and this motivates them to continue attending and to achieve success. A sense of community has a strong influence as a motivational factor.

Some other things that are central when talking about motivation are:

- whether there are substantial differences between what motivates the average Canadian to begin educational upgrading in comparison to Aboriginal Peoples of remote communities and what those might be.
- to what extent tradition, culture, history, poverty, health, exposure, opportunity, or language, directly influences the personal motivation of Aboriginal individuals.
- the distinctly different set of intangibles that are associated with getting started and achieving success.

These are some of the things I have encountered and considered while teaching Aboriginal adults. As a teacher, through discussions with course participants, Elders, managers and peers, I myself was also gaining many insights and understandings regarding these questions, for each learner is unique and has a different response to similar situations. What we had in common was the particular experience of rural Northern community.

## ROUND TABLE TWO: FREEDOM TO LEARN

Making the Kinnection from Cradleboard to Talking Sticks: Past and Future Presence - What's in it for the Learners?

**Joanne Boyer**



Photo Courtesy, Dawn Antone

What is 'Native Literacy' and how does it make us different than other literacy programs?" Five years ago I recognized the importance of First Nations Language Literacy by incorporating traditional teachings and values in Blind River's programs. This includes the Intergenerational Language program of the Summer Immersion Language Camp which is held in partnership with Sault College of Applied Arts and Technology.

For years we have debated "What is Native Literacy?" and how does it fit into language literacy. Literacy is more than reading and writing. Much change has taken place in the last four years, now we in the community are making changes to bring learning to ourselves. In essence, skills gained can assist learners in developing and become self-sufficient, to move forward from the past by creating a sense of pride and worth. We need to start looking at having programs be community-based as well as including Native peoples' first languages. First teach in first languages, then in English. We need instructors who can do this. We need people in government who can do this so that Native people can feel pride.

"Making the Kinnection" is a process of internalizing knowledge such as the learning 'tools' of our natural habitat while learning to improve literacy skills. This can be rewarding when "Connection" becomes "Kin-nection" such as when the change in their experience gets translated to into meaningful culturally relevant information. This would include integrating cradleboards, maple syrup harvesting, quill box making, repairing nets and talking sticks, to name a few of these 'tools'. For Aboriginals, the place of learning is the natural habitat. When students were "day-dreaming" they were working through traumatic events they had experienced on the reserve. They were streamed into Special Education and now in adult education are unsure as to where they fit. In our program, we let the students decide where they feel comfortable starting.

Many Aboriginal individuals grew up with the oral traditions and values that acknowledged and respected our culture via hunting, fishing, trapping and other practices. The natural environment was their classroom. Upon 'going to school', they became 'schooled' and their natural environment was lost from their learning process. Unable to make that "kinnection", they experienced a sense of failure.

Today we see many of these learners returning to the mainstream where educators provide them with the same materials that once failed them on account of irrelevant content. This time, instead of trying to engage them in 'schooling' which is alien to their culture, we need to enable learners to relive their early successful experiences so they can remember the strength(s) that can help them in the learning process. This will demonstrate a movement towards a cultural curriculum that is capable of utilizing the natural environment a classroom instead of making the classroom the natural environment.

Some ways in which we help learners make the kinnection are, for example, using the talking stick, adults show their children how to listen and to talk; in the fall people will learn to tan hides – they are using the environment. We will take students outside and strip birch bark to make picture frames and the students will write a story about themselves on the bark in their own language. They will then teach this story to others.

No matter what the activity students are involved in it. How can learners contribute to the learning? By sharing their own skills, such as basket making, quill work and so on. In the process of teaching others, the students are learning about the environment, sharing, English, storytelling, learning how to start their own business. The learners become the teachers.

We need to make that distinctive "Kinnection". Through storytelling, the program uses old words in the language. The classroom is not four walls, the bush is the classroom.

All My Relations.

#### Learners' Best Practices

##### **Dawn Antone**



Photo Courtesy, Dawn Antone

Hi, my name is Dawn Antone, Coordinator from Toronto Council Fire Literacy Program. During the time I have been with Council Fire I learned much of my understanding of Literacy from meetings I attended with Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (ONLC). One lesson I learned from ONLC was, “with the program of literacy this is where the learners are my teachers not just me being the teacher”.

There is a great amount of pressure from MTCU for students to learn the Ministry's requirements and meet the standards, but at the same time, I ask, “what is it that the learners need”? We have heard there are many definitions of Native Literacy. Ours is to learn from individuals so I say let us learn from the learners. At the ONLC meetings, I also learned that the many things in life must begin with an open mind. As I have sat with the ONLC meetings I have come to understand how similar the teachings of the Nishnawbe are similar to the Oneida

teachings, these being: love, respect, knowledge, and community. In that way, we listen to the learners, understand and support them, and gather knowledge from the learners. I have sat in these meetings and have felt these teachings in my heart and mind as the conversation is shared around the circle.

I want to share a story with you about two male learners, a Nishnawbe and a Cree. Both of these men were labelled 'learning-disabled.' I would listen to them talk and listen to them tell their stories and what it was that interested them. They talked about their expectations but these were not really their expectations; rather these were other peoples expectations that they retold as they spoke with me. Eventually, they could articulate what it was they wanted to accomplish in their lives. As they spoke, they also talked about how the roles of women had changed and how they could not find strong Native women out there. I let them both know there were many strong Native women out in the community and it was up to them to find them. They also mentioned they wanted to try and get their status card. So we went on-line to the Department of Indian Affairs and found out what were the requirements for a status card. I encouraged them to get the forms fill them out and file for a card. Eventually they received their status cards. They learned through this process how to articulate what their goals were for their life. They also learned that the roles of Native women have changed but the women were still strong in their own way and, finally, they learned that they could accomplish some of their goals if they understood what the rules and regulations were. They learned that many goals and expectations required literacy skills.

We see the person and their interest in learning. Learners have to learn the difference between their expectations and the expectations of others. As practitioners, we give the learners guidance, to let them know where they can find their own answers. Taking control of their own learning and participating in their own learning raises their self-esteem. There are no 'best' learning practices, just different ways. Practitioners have to be open and flexible in order to also learn.

In order to articulate what it means to live literacy, it is important to actually participate in literacy. I will first sing the Unity Stomp. Then I would like you to sing it in addition to actually dancing the Unity Stomp. This Unity Stomp will get you to understand what it means to live life and what it means to practice what you talk about. It will also get everyone's blood circulating since we have been sitting all morning.

Yahwa.

## The Development of Language Materials

**Shirley Williams**

Technical Support: **Tessa Reed**

In 1974, while living in Wekwemikong, at a meeting I heard an Elder say, "No longer are our children speaking their own Native language." He went on to say, "Those of you who can understand me," I ask, "What are you doing about it?"

I thought about what this Elder said, and I was thinking of going back to school to become a nurse. Then my father said to me, “Don’t forget your language (Nishinaabemwin), don’t forget who you are.” I remember my father asked me, “What do you want to learn?” I had replied, “A nurse.” My father said, “You must teach the language”. Before I went to school I went to a retreat and learned that I could “nurse the language”. So I went to school and learned to write my language.

Eventually, I got a job teaching the language at Trent University. There is a lot of controversy surrounding language learning or what the university calls language orthography. In 1996, I attended a conference on writing systems and learned to use the Double Vowel writing system. This is the system that I use and teach to students.

For the 16 past years, there has been lack of ready-made language materials for Aboriginal language teachers for their students. There has been a lack of funding to purchase or make teaching resources available. Most teachers are expected to make the resources for their own classrooms. They have been struggling to make these themselves and one of their biggest problems is the lack of time to do this.

I too have been struggling to have ready-made materials and this was the motivation for me to develop them myself, as much as I could. What I usually do is show a picture of a person, for example, standing by a chair. We say the phrase in Nishinnaabemwin. Then I show a picture of the person sitting in the chair. We ‘sat’ the phrase in Nishinnaabemwin. And so on. I will emphasize the consonants and the vowels in each picture. While I show the pictures, the students refer to a vowel chart. Sometimes I will have someone sing the vowel song to the students. I try and integrate different learning styles in the lessons. I don’t just use words.

As you will note in this presentation it is important to try and incorporate pictures, sounds, and stories into the lessons. In “Revitalizing the Language,” I have learned to use the double vowel system and to use the Medicine Wheel as the basis for lessons. I have also used songs to emphasize the language. Before doing this one has to think and the thinking should be based on the Medicine Wheel.

I would like to talk about how traditionally, body parts were used for measuring, such as in cooking you use your hands and touch the food. You measured the food using your body parts as measuring cups. This whole idea of using body parts for lessons was also what the youth asked for. They wanted to have lessons where they could actually touch what it was they were learning. They like the ‘hands-on’ type of lessons. They wanted to have input in the lessons. The youth liked hockey and they liked computers. Therefore the current work in this project is a CD-ROM on hockey using words in Ojibway. Everything from colours, to measurements, to values (rules and ethics of the game) is covered. The CD-ROM is interactive so the learner participates in a game and scores points.

For the future of learning the language, there is a need to make ready-to-use materials for teachers and classroom that make the students proud of their language.

**Jen St. Germain**

Hi, my name is Jen St. Germain and I am Irish and I am Métis. I was working as a front-line counsellor and I now am at the starting point of Literacy, I do not consider myself an expert, instead I believe I work to help others help themselves. My work is community based, working from the bottom up.

This presentation will assess past practices, current developments, and future directions that will have a direct impact on Métis communities, families and individual learners. There will also be a discussion around what the Métis National Organization (MNO) has found through our delivery of employment and training programs and the reality of what exists in communities across the Province. An example of literacy training requirements occurs for instances when Métis clients coming forward to be re-trained after years of working in an area that did not have any demands for certain levels of literacy. Reference will be made to a personal journey in relation to my father and myself. The challenges identified will include difficulties faced in traditional classroom settings: Feelings of being left behind, or being lost, and being afraid to draw too much attention to oneself. Issues raised will also include: how this relates in the larger context of addressing Métis Literacy and the issues of language and culture taking a closer look at what literacy means to Métis people; what is our definition of literacy; and how that may or may not meet mainstream standards; determining what role Métis culture plays in the development and delivery of an effective Literacy strategy; current realities of how far along we are in developing a workable strategy; a look at how we are responding to individual needs as they arise; and, a look at where we plan to go next and how to bring the discussions and research into action.

Before I begin this talk, I think it is important to know that historically Métis have mixed blood from many different peoples across the world. In some instances, some Métis people have been assimilated into the western ways and do not have an understanding of what it means to be Métis. There are a lot of issues to be dealt within the Métis community regarding culture and language. For instance the language that Métis people speak is called Michif, which is a mixture of Cree, Ojibway and French. In my family my father didn't learn the Michif language but my dad's mother, my grandmother, speaks Michif fluently. I would like to learn the language and one day teach the language. Right now there are few places teaching the Michif language. We would like to be able to learn our language and not sacrifice it because of the current demand of policies regarding literacy.

In the current education system, we are not given the opportunity to learn the Michif language. What we learn is that Louis Riel was a traitor. We don't learn that there is a Métis approach to understanding the world. As mentioned above because of historical circumstances I acknowledge in the current year of 2002, there are tremendous barriers within the Métis community but there are also wonderful people in the community. My father is a wonderful man who tried his best to promote Métis culture and understanding to non-Métis people despite not knowing the Michif language. There are other people in the Métis community that are trying to continue to build bridges for Métis people and non-Métis people to work together.

In the Métis community we have nine offices across the province. We obtain our limited funding from Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) with a lot of stipulations as to how the

funding can be used. When planning literacy programming, I try and work around the tight restrictions because I find the HRDC policy does not recognize how literacy is viewed from a Métis perspective. When I heard about this symposium I knew I needed to be here to let other people know that Literacy from a Métis perspective needs to be presented to people in this audience so that we can each understand where we can work together in programming. Generally, we approach programming using the 'long-lens' philosophy where we are looking beyond the numbers and statistics. In other words we do not have a narrow vision of literacy. We understand that we need to teach literacy by having people first and foremost be proud of their culture.

In Métis literacy, we work in developing a lot of client skills such as basic reading and writing so people are able to fill out employment applications. We try and create a safe environment for the Métis people who use our services. We also refer people to other programs if we are not able to offer them assistance. We have found the materials from the Gabriel Dumont centre, which is out west, work best for the Métis peoples in Ontario. We need more of this type of material produced here in Ontario by Métis people for Métis people. This will not be an easy job nor will it be a quick job to create such materials.

The Métis community and their respective representative bodies all recognize the need for a Métis-specific Literacy strategy and effective literacy programs. The Métis National Council and Gabriel Dumont Institute produced a study entitled, "Literacy for Métis People: A National Strategy". This was a valuable starting point. This collaboration led to the development of recommendations for action in the areas of policies, programs and strategies to meet the literacy needs of Métis people. Since that time, there continue to be challenges that slow the progress and implementation of specific strategies. Within Ontario, the focus is on charting our own course through identifying the needs at the grassroots level and building upwards.

## **CLOSING REFLECTIONS**

### **Elder Grafton Antone**

First Nations House/University of Toronto



Photo Courtesy, Dawn Antone

Grafton Antone was asked by Grandmother Lillian McGregor to reflect on the day and do the closing.

Grafton Antone felt the Symposium was important and the words spoken would help lift the spirits of people working in literacy. He also felt that these words need to be published to ensure a 'touchstone' to help guide Native Literacy programs, locally on reserves, and in urban centres,

in addition to the ONLC (Ontario Native Literacy Coalition), MTCU (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities), and Universities.

Grafton indicated that he was very, “excited about the literacy event”. He told us that he saw and heard many excellent literacy practitioners working hard, doing their best to teach the learners. He said he was glad that all of the participants could gather together at OISE/UT and join in the literacy symposium. As he listened to people telling their stories it brought to mind a story he had once heard....

Every year when we look up to the sky and see a V-shaped formation of geese flying either south or north, several things happen to us. It causes us to think about their journey. The lesson for us in this symposium might be the understanding that everyone in our circle of learning today can find himself or herself flying in a formation. From the different stories that have been shared, most have come to the realization that their students are in very much need of literacy. The question is how are we as teachers, coordinators, most effective? As the geese fly along, the leader breaks the wind. Every downward sweep of the leader’s wings begins a ripple of change in the aerodynamics. As they follow, the geese all fly within the wave and downward sweep of their wings, adding to the geese-stream and subsequently, as each following goose flies, he benefits from the up-draft of the leaders and so they can fly faster on less effort. So in turn the geese following in the formation send along honks of encouragement to the leaders as they knife through the wind, giving it their best efforts. So you have geese flying, all working together, each supportive of the direction in which they are going, knowing full well that they will arrive at their destination as long as they participate in the formation. When one leader becomes exhausted from leading he drops back in the formation to rest in the updraft of the flight. The new leader takes over the charge full speed ahead. This constant change within maintains unity. Sometimes hunters from below shoot at a flight and some geese are wounded and have to drop out of the flight pattern. Storytellers tell us that another goose accompanies the wounded one down to the ground and stays with the other until the wounded one either dies or gets well enough to fly again. The healthy one doesn’t worry about being lost, because he/she will wait for the next geese V-flight to fly up and join that group to continue on to their destination....

So, the meeting of the front-line workers gives us all an opportunity to honk and honk along encouragement to each other in our search for the right words to teach our people. Teaching from within our language and culture is an effective way to connect or ground our teachings.

So as we come to the close of this day we give thanks for the people who have come to share with us the work that they do in their literacy programs. We give thanks for all of our relationships with each other and all of creation.

Y? wa ko

## **MAY 4, 2002 - WELCOME**

### **Summary of Dr. Gamlin’s Remarks**

This is a historic moment - the first time Aboriginal Education and Native Literacy has been given this kind of attention at the University of Toronto. The words spoken here are from people who are making a difference in their communities. These differences that they make entail the

survival of the culture. Literacy practitioners can be compared to cultural philosophers.

In the words of Joe Couture, with oral tradition, Elders provide the precepts, creativity and innovations for the younger generations. In turn, the younger generations adapt these precepts into workable knowledge for the present and the future. Hence the integrity of these original precepts and teachings are maintained.

## **OPENING CEREMONY**

### **Elder Grafton Antone**

Grafton Antone opened with words of gathering and thanksgiving for this Literacy Symposium. Then he proceeded to talk about the smudge, the ingredients of medicines: sweet grass, cedar, tobacco, and sage. They are all mixed together to bring a cleansing of the energy that is present in this gathering and to bring us all to a 'good mind understanding' of our participation here. The circle smudge was conducted for all the participants who wished to participate.

Grafton then opened with the Thanksgiving Address using both the Onkwehonwe language and the English language.

We give thanks for the people and Mother Earth.  
We give thanks for all the plant life of Mother Earth.  
We give thanks for all the animal life on Mother Earth.  
We give thanks for all the water and water life on Mother Earth.  
We give thanks for all the flying life on Mother Earth.  
We give thanks for the Thunders from the West,  
the rain and warm wind that come with it.  
We give thanks for the sun, moon, and the stars.  
as they continue to follow their duties and responsibilities.  
We give thanks for the four guardians and the prophets  
who brought the good messages from the Creator.  
And, finally we give thanks to the Creator for us having the ability  
to have a good mind so, that we could do the work that is before us this day.

## **KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

Aboriginal Literacy: Raising the Stake, Stabilizing our Standards

Sally Gaikezheyongai

Good morning, everyone. I am honoured to be in the presence of so many good beings. The knowledge shared yesterday and what we will hear today as well, I'm sure, fills my heart with good energy. It seems a rare opportunity that we take time out from our work to share the best of what we have learned so far with each other. I am inspired. I feel honoured to have the task of being a keynote speaker at this esteemed conference.

It has been difficult for me to gather my experiences in the field of Native Literacy and select some insights to share with you. After all, they're not much different than what I have heard so far. A lot of important things have been shared regarding the "best practices" we have identified from actual teaching and learning experiences and we are likely to hear more today. We seem to be travelling the same long and challenging road. I, for one, never realized what I was getting into when I started out on this journey. And to think that all I wanted to do was find some answers to a few questions my children raised. Of course, since then, even more questions have come up of my own and still, I am in pursuit of answers.

I believe that learning, literacy, and education are fuelled by a desire for transformation. If nothing changes, then nothing has been learned. Fortunately, we have many people here in this room and many more out there in various Native Literacy Programs who are bringing about changes. Aboriginal practitioners and learners are involved in creating possibilities for change and not just for themselves. As we move through what has been articulated as one way of describing the cycle of learning - increasing our awareness, understanding, knowledge, and wisdom - we are, in fact, shifting the shape of the future. In the quest to make some meaning of our past experiences and present lives, we are achieving more than we know at this moment.

Let us not underestimate what we are doing together. Let us perhaps, try to see what is happening more clearly, commit ourselves more wholly to building a relationship to the process under way, know more intimately the how and why of our reasons, and move more certainly towards our goals. I try not to grow too impatient at the rate with which things are changing; understanding that I can only hope to be in the right place at the right time to do my part. Prayers and ceremonies keep me mindful of the need to let seeds grow naturally.

As First Nation's people, one of the gifts we have been given is that of vision; the need to see the bigger picture. It certainly helps me to stay centered and not get overwhelmed by oppressive forces. Our Elders and Teachers remind us of our relationship to, and instill us with a sense of accountability to, all our relations, the next seven generations, and the Creator. That is a great deal of responsibility already; besides ourselves, our families, clans, and communities. With the weight of all that, I hesitate to mention the significant role we are also to play, in assisting with the spiritual transformation of humanity.

In the early part of my own learning journey some fourteen years ago, while searching for tools to assist in my own healing, I came across a number of prophecies that gave me hope and inspiration. It began quite innocently with using my listening and reading skills. Some friends of mine, shared a tablet foretelling a time to come when on this continent, 'its original inhabitants would become so educated, as to become so radiant they would illumine the world. Indeed, because of them, the future of this land from a material or a spiritual standpoint would be very great.' What a contrast that was to all I'd ever heard growing up here!

I began exploring that possibility by seeking whatever opportunities of confirmation I could from among the traditional teachers, Elders, and Healers from the Aboriginal community themselves. Well, you know... I didn't dare ask such questions so directly. After all, who am I? It takes time to build relationships, purify motives, demonstrate trustworthiness, be of service to the community, and so on. As I undertook these tasks at ground level, I did start not only hearing confirmations of this prophecy but learned of other similar prophecies. By then, with the help of the Aboriginal cultural and spiritual teachings I'd received - also BELIEVED in the possibility.

Then I started figuring out how I could be part of the action. After I listened to the Ojibway Prophecy of the Seven Fires from Jim Dumont several times over a few years, the story grew to be a part of me. Following his varied examples, I let it blossom outward and have adopted it as a framework for understanding the transformative learning aspects of Aboriginality.

Since the imposition of colonization on our Nations a little over 500 years ago, we have experienced a great deal of traumatic, repetitive, hostile and varied forms of abuse and attacks. To this day, we bear witness to the Western dominant society clinging tenaciously to its claims that they have “the only worthwhile standards by which progress can be measured<sup>2</sup>.” The Western promise offered of ‘liberty, justice, and freedom for all’ meant to attract everyone else to this land, still burns. I can recall thinking and feeling at eight years old that I was basically born at the bottom rung of the ladder of this society. By the time I was fourteen, such thoughts and feelings remained internalized while enough of my peers killed themselves so that our reserve wound up with the highest rate of suicide and violent deaths among teens. My Catholic beliefs were too strong to permit me such an option. I did trash a high school classroom once and ran away from home at least five times. And of course, from the recent suicide of my youngest daughter, I know that our young people today are not immune to despairing at the slow rate of change.

As community workers, part of what we do is to keep hope alive. Into our programs and classrooms, come those few who dare to hope for change. We cannot promise that the changes they hope for will come about as quickly as tomorrow but we can do our best to fan the flame with the medicines we’ve been given. The fire is lit within all of us. It is that vitality of Aboriginal resurgence we must fan. We do it with the best methods and practices we have discovered: offering life skills, sharing circles, language classes, access to traditional teachings and ceremonies, reflective learning experiences, social and recreational activities, along with classes in literacy and numeracy. We address as many aspects of being human there are, by designing and delivering wholistic teaching processes and creating or adapting curriculum so that it is relevant to each learner. We foster safe learning environments for the learner. We incorporate the principles and values of our best teachings into what we offer. We forge tools and create paths that have not been used before. All on limited or decreasing financial budgets! Usually with a staff of one! And increasing administrative accountability! Not to mention trying to find time to come to conferences and attend training sessions. It takes a lot of commitment. I am proud of us!

When do we have time to articulate the standards we strive for? Who will document the learning outcomes we aim for the learners to demonstrate? Where is the time to champion our cause? There are but a few of us in the field of Native Literacy and Learning who have blazed some trails in these areas. I am grateful for the efforts made so far; but there always seems so much more to do.

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<sup>2</sup> Hampton, Eber, “Towards a Redefinition of American Indian/Alaska Native Education,” Canadian Journal of Native Education, Volume 20, 1993, Number 2

## ROUND TABLE THREE: SOUND APPROACHES

### Visual Minorities: Deaf, Blind and Special Needs Adult Native Literacy Access

**Charles Miller and Helper, Ernestine Lacroix**



Photo Courtesy, Dawn Antone

Charles Miller:

I would like to introduce Ernestine Lacroix who will be helping me with this presentation. Ernestine is from Moosonee and she is able to do sign language for the deaf. Ernestine works for the Bank of Nova Scotia. I am Charles Miller and I am from Parry Sound and I work with the translators at Anishnawbe Health Toronto.

We would like to first begin by giving you a demonstration of how we work together. Remember when you see two people walking, as we have done here even if it seems they are not talking they may, in fact, be communicating through sign language just as Ernestine and I have demonstrated.

I came here to Toronto in 1971, and I started working in the basement of OISE. Now today by my being here you can see I've worked my way to the 12<sup>th</sup> floor, the top floor of OISE. And, I met Ernestine at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (NCCT). I was involved in a career-planning workshop since I had been looking for other work over the past five years. Ernestine and I would meet off and on at the NCCT and we would never say goodbye because we knew we would keep running into each other.

Although the millennium year has come and gone, from the point of view of many Aboriginal peoples with disabilities, we are still here, unable to access many services that have a wholistic perspective. Thus the whole idea of 'best practices' for Aboriginal peoples with disabilities is still questionable since we do not even have basic communication resolved.

I was thinking that, historically, Aboriginal peoples knew sign language way before it became known as a way for disabled people to communicate. The barriers for adequate education and literacy in a wholistic perspective for the deaf, blind or special needs are accessibility, isolation and acceptance. "The intent of 'Access to the Sweet Grass Trail' is to bridge the gap between the Aboriginal movement and the disabled people's movement" (Demas<sup>3</sup>, 1993). Seven years ago I started on the red-path way of life. I went to Anishnawbe Health Toronto (AHT) to learn

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<sup>3</sup> Demas, D. (1993) 'Triple Jeopardy: Native women with disabilities' Canadian Woman's Studies 13, 4, pp. 53 -55

about my culture and I was challenged by Elders to really understand the culture before I actually started to talk to others.

While learning my culture at AHT a call was made to me from Canadian Hearing Society looking for a Native translator. Thus began my journey working with various health centres and many of the people I worked with and for were deaf. Some I had met previously at residential school I attended when I was a young man. Yes, I am a survivor of residential school.

It's been like this ever since I was born with dual disabilities (visual- and hearing-impairment) . . . accessibility to services with a wholistic Aboriginal perspective was limited for the families and individuals of this population. The foremost society's concept of this sector was negative, restricted by a narrow perception of people with special needs. Therefore, a quality education and literacy programs were limiting or nonexistent for the Aboriginal Native in Ontario.

For example, I was not able to enter a public school until I was eight years old because I was visually-impaired as well as hearing-impaired and Native. My opportunity to access any formal form of services came when the Canadian Constitution in respect of education equity stated that all children must be in attendance of a formal school at the age of six. Accessibility to any form of services for the Deaf, Blind, or Special Needs for the Native was initiated and made meaningful by the Disabled Peoples movement. By the time I was fifteen years of age, I was on my way to Residential School for the Deaf, Sir James Whitney School in Belleville, Ontario. When I finally graduated in 1971, I was happy to leave the residential school. I received my academic and vocational training background in the Graphic Arts. Upon graduation, I moved to Toronto and I was employed in the printing industry for twenty-five years. I moved to Toronto from Parry Sound, I was a bush boy moving to the big city. It was the only place where I could get work. When I first moved here, I knew nothing about the city. I never even saw a subway until I moved to Toronto. It was an experience for me not only because I was from the bush but because I was considered handicapped on top of that. It took me almost one year to learn to live in the city. So many people took advantage of me since I didn't know the rules or regulations. But I learned to survive. My career ended in 1993, when the company I worked for moved down south when the government under Brian Mulroney set up the Free Trade deal.

Since 1971, there really has been very little work done with literacy and Aboriginal peoples in general, never mind Aboriginal peoples with disabilities. However, recently I have seen good things happening in literacy such as pictures on OHP, on posters, various literacy displays from Native Friendship Centres and myself learning sign language. Myself, I have been a visual minority and if they build special needs into Native literacy I would help in this area.

As I work in the Aboriginal community, I witness a lot of things. I see and hear people talking about the isolation they feel, about how they would like to feel accepted by other Aboriginal peoples. I don't see myself with shortcomings, I always say I was not born deaf, but with a disability. I think it is important as Aboriginal people to know what our hurts are and how we can begin to go on the healing path. For 27 years, alcohol was in my path and I have had to do a lot of healing from that part of my life. I have been free of alcohol for 10 years now. Last year I had coronary by-pass surgery and a lot of people visited me. I had a lot of people praying for me.

Until the establishment of the Manitoba Aboriginal Network on Disability (MAND), Aboriginal peoples with disabilities who wanted wholistic healing had no family or individual representation. Since 1993, I have acquired retraining through Aboriginal community training programs with a wholistic perspective and with formal post-secondary education I have a new

career working with the Special Needs Aboriginal population with disabilities, regarding their health issues.

Presently, I am contracted as a Peer Worker with Anishnawbe Health of Toronto as an American Sign Language Interpreter. Finally, I am a freelance American Sign Language Interpreter. My education continues as a learner as I walk in this healing path.

In closing, I realize that there are more questions than answers in my mind. Last March, I gave a talk about the history of deaf culture. I asked if there are two parents who have a child that is deaf what do they do? Or if you have two parents that are deaf and have children who are not deaf, what do they do? Or if you have two parents that are deaf and their children are deaf, what do they do? Which is their first language in each of these scenarios? How does a deaf Aboriginal learn about his or her culture?

## Of Hating, Hurting and Coming to Terms With: Barriers and Supports Experienced by Aboriginal Peoples

**Lenore Keeshig-Tobias**



Photo Courtesy, Maria Morrison

This presentation will attempt to illustrate, through oral narrative, some of the barriers Aboriginal Peoples face in Native literacy. It will look at trauma concerning language and language acquisition, and attempt to describe a culturally-appropriate way of framing 'literacy' for Aboriginal Peoples. When I wrote these ideas for this paper, I was feeling anxious since the directions said to write in APA format, with references and here I was thinking about the Elders and what they have taught me. How do I do this and still write a good paper for the symposium. I had to think that there are many ways to COMMUNICATE.

It will begin with a story about the social and economic conditions and the thinking that led to my conception. This is the story of my father's response to the myth of the "vanishing Indian." I remember my family read out loud because it was the closest to oral traditions. Elder's teachings are within me, so when giving presentations or writing I cannot give formal references to them because their words are within me.

My father grew up on a reserve and he went to Day School. He was punished for speaking Ojibway or French, he was to speak English. And when gave the wrong answers in English he was punished. He was confused by the words, especially the YES and NO words. He had been in school just long enough to learn how to read, to write, and to do basic arithmetic before going off, at the age of 16 or 17, to work in lumber camps in North Ontario. He made good money working with the lumber companies. Unfortunately the lumber camps were close to town and most weekends my father would drink his hard earned money.

In later years, he would visits the town library to find books about Aboriginal culture and history which led him to the grim prediction that the Indian would vanish from the face of the earth

within 50 years, within his lifetime. With this prediction rearing its ugly head in each book that he touched, he decided he would do something about it. So he decided to find himself a nice wife and procreate with her and make sure there were more Indians, so we would not vanish. I'm the oldest of ten children. I myself have four children and my parents have many grandchildren from ages 11 to 31.

When I was old enough to go to school, I learned that we were 'Indians' and we were also 'savages.' For my brother and I, we didn't know we were Indians until we went into school. Poverty, media, cowboys and Indians all reminded me that I was just a step away from being a savage. I remember Mother Superior saying, "Your ancestors killed the Missionaries". I remember as a child I didn't speak the Anishnawbe language. My parents decided not teach us the language because they didn't want us to be punished like the way they were when they spoke Anishnawbe. My mother to this day prides herself for not speaking the Anishnawbe language.

Although my mother did not teach us the language she did read to us every night. She taught us beauty, landscape, quillwork, about deer, birds, bears, dreams. Later on, my father did try and teach me the Anishnawbe language but I was too far along to learn.

Today, I consider myself a storyteller because this is what I learned from my father who liked to tell stories. I also went out to fast to be a storyteller. For me learning the stories was a way that I became literate. My dad can find the kernels in activity around him to tell a good story. Each family member has a story and only they can tell the story.

I would like to talk about a number of insights and incidents highlighting cultural differences. One incident described here will be that of working with a television story editor who wanted me to remove one of four porcelain bunnies from the story. Three bunnies were reasonable, but "four" was pushing it — three acts in a play, three strikes and you're out. My to response to this suggestion was to ask, "How can anyone take away the west wind?" Besides storytelling I do other things. For example I teach at George Brown College. I work as a Cultural and Naturalist interpreter of the Anishnawbe history of certain areas.

Having outlined my recognition as a culture worker, my achievements as an author, and my acceptance as a traditional storyteller, I will describe what I feel is a barrier to literacy, and something that I, personally, have had to work through and overcome. It is from this part of my presentation that the title comes - Of hating, hurting and coming to terms. It begins like this - how it was that I hated the English language even though it was the only language in which I could effectively communicate. Here, I will explore the power of language and the perception of language as a "weapon" and language as a "tool." This will touch on the physical and psychological abuse experienced by our Elders in residential and mission schools because of language. I will also address issues of "mother tongue" and some of the barriers to learning the "mother tongue" languages, particularly for those of us who were denied access to our "mother tongue" – 'You're not a real Indian if you don't speak the language.' 'It is one of the hardest languages in the world to learn.' 'English is the only language you speak, therefore it is your mother tongue.'

I will conclude with a storytelling circle or wheel, borrowed from Jeannette Armstrong, as a model for Native Literacy. This storytelling wheel is divided into quadrants, each occupying one of the four directions (north, east, south, west). Each direction represents one facet of storytelling. Beginning in the east, these facets are: Oral History, Oratory, Reportage, and Storytelling. Each facet represents a genre of storytelling and is comprised of both the spoken

word and the written word. For example, storytelling includes myth and legend, and song, but also poetry, novel, short-fiction and drama.

## Unschooling

**Mary Lynn Wilson**



Photo Courtesy, Dawn Antone

Hello I am from Owen Sound. I want to tell you how thrilled I am to be here. I want to talk about how as parents we can become involved in our children's education. I believe in "Unschooling," where there are no walls, no curriculum. I want to talk about the factors that led to my and Peter's decision to pursue home-based learning.

First of all I am a first generation Canadian. How come I am here? I met an Ojibway man, married him and had a child. As I was having our child I started to think about how we learn. During my first and second pregnancies I would talk to my children through my belly. I also stayed at home with them, I was a full-time parent. I attended a breast feeding session, "Attachment Parenting." I learned that all children flourish with tactile experience, being carried, and because I knew this I breastfed both children for years not months. With our third and fourth child, it was decided we would deliver them at home.

When we had our children at home full-time we started to think how stressful it would be for them to be placed in a box to learn. In fact we were thinking of school as a dis-ease as we would be putting our children into a situation where they would have to leave the home and go into a separate building that is organized by age segregating and is separated from the community and the family. If schooling is a social building process, it is a false one. Grouping 30 eight-year olds together does not provide a realistic world. I have 80-year-old friends and 6-year-old friends. If the goal of educating children is for them to reach adulthood, then associating with adults is necessary, not being locked into a vacuum.

Our daughters since age 3 to 13 have done Home Education. Each one has a different outlook than my own outlook around education. As home schooling parents, you need to be a teacher of all subjects; we learned how to be facilitators. In my own childhood, I was in advanced classes, and I soon became bored with school. I was later rescued by self-directed classes. I think it was this experience that made us decide that home schooling was the best alternative. With home schooling, children internalize learning by choice; it is self-initiated. As facilitators, we help them search for the answers and make connections with human resources. We form mentorships in the community for real-life learning.

In home schooling, children's interest are valued and they learn to make choices. They can decide if they want to take music lessons, or plan their own field trips. Home schooling for us has been more of a lifestyle choice that was congruent with our philosophies on life-long, self-

directed learning: how we view the difference between "teaching" and "facilitating"; how we access community resources and a social circle for our family; the importance of volunteering and community involvement; how having children prompted Peter's search for cultural understanding; our own adult interests and learning; gaining recognition of the benefits of mentorship and apprenticeships; and, the struggle of promoting learning for the sake of interest and cultural awareness, as opposed to personal career advancement and financial gain.

Defining literacy is defining communication. Transmitting culture through media, art, and sculpture are the means of communicating meaning to our senses. Literacy is not limited to reading and writing, but seeing patterns of communication between people through many media.

## **Transference of Concepts from Ojibway into English Contexts**

### **Isadore Toulouse**

In the schools, prayer should be in Ojibwe and English to reflect the Anishnabe and Christian ways since many Native people are Christians and many follow the Anishnabe way of life. As I work in this area, I have begun to understand that Native Literacy should not be connected, to or perceived, as the inability to understand, because there are a great deal of Aboriginal people who speak their language and they do understand how to do many things in the English language.

I think it is important to understand that language immersion is necessary in order to become a fluent speaker in an Anishnabe language. In the past, there was punishment for speaking the Anishnabe language, which in turn did hinder or block the learning ability because part of a person is missing without their language. This "blocking" also facilitates blocks within and hinders the healing process. Some factors that contribute to the success of First Nations students include: flexible programs tailored to the needs of individual children/students; and, a curriculum development and methodology that are made for and by First Nations people.

A critical question lies in addressing the issue of how we can genuinely bring First Nations literacy into the classroom setting. The evaluation methods of the Ministry of Education (Formative and Summative) require feedback from the students to be implemented into the program. It is a "band-aid" solution. This entails that the individual teacher must be able to create an instance for the child to learn. Teachers need to be sharp, aware and have the ability to knowingly adapt First Nations literacy into a classroom setting. For instance, an Arapaho colleague is busy translating the story of Bambi into the Arapaho language.

## PRESENTATION FROM THE RESEARCH TEAM



Photo Courtesy, Dawn Antone

Team Members from left to right: Dr. Eileen Antone, Dr. Peter Gamlin, Dr. Rhonda Paulsen, Lois Provost Turchetti, Julian Robbins and Moneca Sinclair.

### “Aboriginal Literacy in Adult Education Practices”

The historical pattern of education for Aboriginal people has been inundated with an educational system built on the goal of assimilation and designed for foreign economics. According to Imel (2001), Aboriginal adult education programs in the 1950's were designed to improve English proficiency and provide vocational training. In more recent years, in resistance to such history, the goals of Aboriginal literacy programs are concerned with securing and revitalizing Aboriginal language and culture.

Aboriginal people have experienced great trauma in their educational journey, especially from the residential schools when children were removed from their homes, communities and nations and placed in a foreign environment with Eurocentric rules and expectations. The situation was not much better for the children who attended schools in their home community. These children were also exposed to the Eurocentric values of violence in the learning environment; many were strapped for speaking their own language. Therefore, factors such as healing, self-determination, and reclamation of identity, language, and cultures play a major role in the complex issue of Aboriginal literacy.

The Ontario Native Literacy Coalition states: “Native literacy is a tool which empowers the spirit of Native people... Native literacy fosters and promotes achievement and a sense of purpose, which are both central to self-determination” (George, ND: 6).

The authors for this paper examine Aboriginal literacy from various perspectives, focussing on factors impacting Aboriginal literacy in adult education practice.

## **Framing Aboriginal Literacy in a Culturally-Appropriate Way**

Eileen Antone

Historically the education of the Aboriginal people of Canada has been based on the governmental policy of assimilation. The assimilation process was implemented in both the residential and community day school systems. These systems were established to inculcate Aboriginal students with Euro western doctrine. The results of this situation was that Aboriginal people were not prepared with skills necessary to enter the mainstream workforce nor were they prepared with the skills necessary for life in the traditional Aboriginal community.

Ball (1996) quotes the 1992 National Anti-Poverty Organization:

"...Residential schools are gone now, but the legacy lives on among many Native people in the form of self-hatred, substance abuse and child abuse. The damage cannot be overstated. People lost their pride, their hope, and the chance to learn from the Elders. An entire generation of adults experienced the pain of losing their children to residential schools. Those who grew up in the schools often have frightful memories which may prevent them from getting involved today in their own [and their] children's schooling."

According to Scollon (ND) a new focus in literacy called 'New Literacy Studies' began in the late 70s and early 80s. This contemporary view indicates that there has been a paradigm shift in the focus of "literacy as deficit or lack... to the many different ways that people engage with literacy, recognizing difference and diversity and challenging how these differences are valued with our society" (Hamilton 2000). Hamilton contends that when we move away from seeing literacy as simply a set of skills we can recognize that there are many different literacies and that people continue to develop new literacies all the time. As the New Literacy Studies developed in the non-Aboriginal society there were also changes taking place in various Aboriginal communities regarding literacy for Aboriginal learners.

Gaikezhoyongai (2000:6) reports that, in 1987, members of the Aboriginal community in Toronto began a literacy movement to improve the quality of education for their learners. They began to explore and build connections between Aboriginal literacy, healing, community development, and self-determination. Other Aboriginal groups have also been developing ways of incorporating traditional Aboriginal knowledge and methodologies into the learning situations of Aboriginal learners. First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI) developed a Medicine Wheel Model of learning based on four stages: Awareness; Struggle; Building; and Preservation. This wholistic approach to learning centres on spiritual, emotional, mental and physical attributes.

In 1996, Pricilla George also developed a wholistic approach to literacy based on the Medicine Wheel. She called her wholistic theory the Rainbow Approach to Literacy. This approach incorporates the four stages of learning from the FNTI Medicine Wheel Model with the literacies of various colours. In this model red is the literacy of Aboriginal languages, orange-oral tradition, yellow-communication, green-multicultural multilingual society, blue-technology, indigo-"spiritual seeing" or intuition and violet-holistic base of Aboriginal literacy (spirit, heart, mind and body). These models developed by the Aboriginal scholars are raised up to combat the assimilation process that continues to be detrimental to Aboriginal societies.

This combative process involves a transformation from oppression to revitalization. Such transformation takes the form of revitalizing and sustaining Native spirituality, worldview, culture and literacy.

## Transformation and Aboriginal Literacy

Peter Gamlin

Literacy is presented in the broadest sense in this paper. Being literate is about sustaining a particular worldview and about the survival of a distinct and vital culture. Being literate is about resymbolizing and reinterpreting past experience, while at the same time honouring traditional values. Being literate is about *living* these values in contemporary times. Being literate is about *visioning* a future in which an Aboriginal *way of being* will continue to thrive. Meaningful Aboriginal literacy will develop and find expression in everything that you do.

The Elders tell us that creativity is an intrinsic aspect of survival. Creativity leads to new thinking and new behaviour. New thinking, new behaviour and survival all follow from listening to traditional values and then finding ways to practice them. So we see that literacy begins with orality and the traditional values found in stories. When we follow these values, we are practicing Aboriginal ways in literacy and more generally, in every aspect of our lives. In these words I am guided by Joe Couture (1987). Joe points out that: "Indian identity is redefined in terms of 20<sup>th</sup>-century conditions. And with this, **fundamental traditional elements are re-expressed and presented as fresh inspiration for a renewed action**" (p.5).

In these words Joe is making a declaration for transformational practice and transformational attitudes. The key to creativity and transformational practice is found in taking a holistic perspective, which is a manifestation of traditional Aboriginal values. From Joe's perspective and in his concluding statement he says: "***It seems clear to me that a holistic philosophy and psychology of education rooted in traditional native values can improve the educational opportunities for native children.***" (p.12)

Transformative Aboriginal literacy development is always about being creative (resymbolizing and reinterpreting past experience in our everyday activities), as we find ways to practice traditional values (presented as fresh inspiration for a renewed action).

Transformative Aboriginal literacy development is about listening to the Elders who are experts on survival. "They will interpret for their own people the current meaning and direction of their history. It is the responsibility of younger generations to interpret and apply these directives as fundamental traditional elements ---and expressed and presented as fresh inspirations for a renewed action" (Couture, 1987:5).

When teachings are passed from the Elders to the younger generations, literacy (orality) takes on the traditional form and is being lived out in contemporary society. Literacy is part of everyday lives of Native Peoples - reconnecting intergenerational ties and being infused into life-long learning.

## **Aboriginal Literacy**

**Moneca Sinclair**

Aboriginal literacy is more than reading, numeracy, and writing to gain access into mainstream employment. It is the beginning of life long process to affirm the worldview held by Aboriginal peoples and thus empowers the spirit of Aboriginal peoples. It is a tool that begins the process of critical thinking and the need to regain their languages. It is the understanding that their language holds the key to maintaining their culture. Aboriginal literacy is a tool that begins the process of self-achievement and sense of purpose.

Aboriginal people who attend literacy programs on reserve or rural/semi-urban areas are four times more likely to have been learners in residential school according to George (2000). The focus in residential schools was the assimilation of Aboriginal students into mainstream society, rather than on academics. Thus many Aboriginal people did not have the basic skills of reading and writing. In fact many attendees of residential schools have painful memories of abuse (verbal, physical and sexual), that can be a severe block to learning and attaining/maintaining a good quality of life. Their experiences in residential school have turned them off institutions and/or Education as a whole according to George, 2000. Thus Aboriginal literacy is more than reading and writing. It is a tool that gives Aboriginal peoples skills to live in a harmonious way within mainstream society of North America.

Part of the process of revitalizing Aboriginal literacy not only involves transformation from subjugation to empowerment but also reaching an harmonious relationship between Native and non-Native cultures, who live side-by-side and interact in reciprocal relationships. Culture, tradition, language and ways of knowing are all interconnected in Aboriginal literacy and, as represented on the medicine wheel, these aspects become balanced in a person's life when there is harmony.

### **Indigenous "Ecologies for Learning": a Strategy for Literacy**

**M. C. Lois Provost-Turchetti**

Emerging approaches to literacy, as a relational way of learning, can be understood as a return to Indigenous 'Ecologies for Learning' or 'ways of knowing' where it has historically been described in the Lakota phrase "*Mitakuye Oyasin . . . We are all related.*" Cajete (1994) renders this as "mutual, reciprocal relationships between one's social group and the natural world" (p.26). Erdoes and Ortiz (1984) characterize it as a "communal universe" (p.xi). Xaymacan Ras Tafari teachings reflect it as "I-and-I," an expression of at-onement with the world as a whole. Popular Caribbean sentiment refers to it as, "Allawe awanfambli"

"Ecologies for Learning" is the spectrum of patterning of "Aural-Oral/Kinetic" (AK) Indigenous learning. It involves centering, decentering and recentering<sup>4</sup> between diverse multivalent imageries and words. It is alternate to and covalent with "Visual-Written/Kinetic" (VK) Non-

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<sup>4</sup> "Put together, geocentric and heliocentric views of life's patterns reflect the need to continually centre, decentre and recentre between self and the environment so as to keep an even footing in the dance/journey/search/hunt of existence" (Provost Turchetti, 2001, 28)

Indigenous binary patterning<sup>5</sup>. The main difference between the two is relational. VK learning is focused on ‘separation *from*’ or ‘individuation’. AK learning is focused on ‘combination *with*’ or ‘participation’ which, in turn, is only possible because we are aware that we are individuals.

Metaphorically speaking, AK knowers tend to be ‘blind’ hearers; focussed on the aural, they listen for similar sounds then for differences in relation to different objects. VK knowers tend to be ‘deaf’ seers; focussed on the visual, they look for differences in objects and then for similarities in relation to others. Whether they are aware of it or not, AK and VK knowers in both camps have four things in common. First, they are human; secondly, earth and the ‘myth that there is, the myth that is there’ is their shared ‘ancestor;’ third, sound and light, their respective primary ways of receiving knowledge/information are both types of energy in the spectrum of electromagnetic radiation; and fourth, ‘linguaging’ *Karádahu Iatábe/Global Indigenous StoryingArts* (KI’GISA) in many diverse genres is instinctual.

If the reader and the writer were sitting here in a circle with others, all of us looking at a music-box on a small table in the centre, and if we all had equal capabilities of seeing and hearing, each of us would see a DIFFERENT aspect of the music-box in reflected light. If we were all listening to the same music-box playing, we would all hear the SAME reflection of sound. . . . Whether hearing or seeing, we would encounter the music box through accumulated knowledge of ‘MythStorical memory’ - according to human binary patterning. This points up the differences between sound and light in learning. In other words, these ‘learned’ styles function in concert with our own genetic inheritance. These are ‘linguaging-culture’ patterns.

AK and VK have a parallel with the two basic patterns of Storying, respectively, as follows: by *mythos* reasoning, we bring the meaning of a story into our own experience. By *logos* reasoning, we interpret the story from the outside as a ‘closed pattern’ as in school tests and reading comprehension’. AK/mythos has a *stable flexibility* that seems ‘never-changing’ and VK/logos has a *flexible stability* that seems ‘ever-changing.’

If we return to the teaching patterns of our ancient civilizations, we will find many types of KI’GISA recorded by chroniclers or WisdomKeepers: for example, song, music, dance, story, poetry, rupestrian art on stone, cave walls, engraving, sculpture, horticulture, basketry, beading, canoe-making, hunting, fishing, and the like. What Descartes advocated was true for our ancestors: learning begins with the “book of the world” (Britannica 1978, 5:598). Unfortunately, Descartes was excommunicated on account of this belief and the ideas that ensued. This provides an indication of the great gulf between AK and VK. The land and the stars were a source of teaching. Everything was known to be alive with knowledge. In this way, the earth, the imageries of dreaming, and the movement of the stars were each a record of what could be heard, seen, felt, tasted, smelled and known.

Four of the bodies the ancients saw ‘daily’ in the sky reflected the basic pattern of the cosmos and of the seasons. These are Sun, Moon, Venus and the Great Bear/Little Bear constellation. And so, Xaymaca Taino built their settlements around places where the sacred tree grew, with

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<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, I have done a detailed comparison of Aural-Oral/Kinetic and Visual-Written/Kinetic ways of knowing. Though genetically determined abilities may limit learning capacities, these patterns are rather ‘learned styles’ dependent on the abilities, propensities, circumstances and environments in which we grow up. Furthermore, AK patterns for learning, though found primarily amongst Indigenous and Aboriginal peoples are also found in other communities of knowers for whom the certainty of unknowing and the unknown are a given.

one at the centre and one at each of the four directions. Brazilian Bororo also built their villages in a similar pattern. In this way, the pattern of the cosmos was 'present' in their landscape and also in the patterns of their society.

As they pursued the spirit through the seasons<sup>6</sup> and encountered other peoples, they learned together that the same star patterns reflected different pictures of other peoples in diverse places at diverse times. 'Ecologies for Learning' or 'mythographies,' as a whole, are still seen and heard today reflected in Indigenous calendrical-mathematical systems. They reflect variations on many ways of AK/Multiple-Relation knowing versus one way of VK/Paired-Relations (binary) knowing. Although binary or symmetric patterns are found in Multiple-Relations combinations, Paired-Relations (VK) knowing in isolation from mythographies is reductionist.

Storying empowers and enables a learner in re-covering and restoring private mythographical 'maps' of self as a sacred site. It does so person-to-person, in low-tech/no-tech ways. As well as the self (body and soul, heart and mind), there are at least four geographical types of sacred sites of MythStorical memory: (a) where the land speaks; (b) where talking stones, trees or other relatives speak; (c) where some profound past event has created a powerful memory; and, (d) where some recent catastrophic event has left a powerful memory. To convey the healing value of reclaiming MythStorical resonances, a sense of self and place as sacred sites, we can combine aural storying with landscape photographs, 're-visioning storying-in-the-round,' an approach I have used with children and at the college level.

Here, then, is a Storying 'Ecology for Learning.' In Toronto, the ancestral home of Mississauga and Hodenesonee Peoples, one time I was out driving when I 'recognized' a particular place. It is a valley with a highway nearby. . . . As I walk through the coomb<sup>7</sup> of the valley there was only the awesome silence and the awareness of every being who had ever walked there. From the crests roundabout, the voice of the wind muffled the roar of distant traffic. Looking down from the east, I saw a pattern of three 'Eagles' and from the north, a pattern of a man and a woman, 'Proud-Nose, Keel-Nose' and Peacemaker's mother birthing him and more unspeakably wondrous things, echoing the Storying of my own childhood.

As we acknowledge the patterns of the cosmos, we recall Creator and learn from seeing the wor(l)d in ourselves, ways of seeing ourselves in the wor(l)d. Through patterning our Storying in KI'GISA we return to our beginning, *timahu* (swimming) like the scaled, *lebesahu* (crawling) like the furred, *konau* (walking) like the two-foot, and *amorodahu* (flying) like the feathered re-evolving by moving in the world in new ways. Being rooted in our Ecologies for Learning in this way, we also begin to recognize others in our own self. This is *tolahu*<sup>8</sup>, the 'deepening' of life. This is 'native' 'literacy' in which, as we have heard, "if we keep silent, the rocks will speak."

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<sup>6</sup> VK mistakenly refers to this as 'migration'.

<sup>7</sup> The bowl of the valley.

<sup>8</sup> Jamaican, *talawa*

### **Three Aspects of Native Literacy: Recognition of Native Languages, Helping Others through Community-Based Programs, and Maintaining Healthy Native Communities**

**Julian Robbins**

Initially Native Literacy was much more focused on allowing Native people to find gainful employment through improving their English reading and writing skills. However, over time, Native Literacy has evolved to directly include Native cultural components and language retention (Williams, 1989).

Language and culture are inseparable. The struggle to keep Native [sic] languages alive is synonymous with the struggle to keep Native[sic] cultures alive (Hutchinson, 2002). Enmeshed within the medium of Native languages are the cultural tools and teachings necessary to move Native [sic] people forward in a positive way. Native Literacy is a unique phenomenon and it should be recognized that government means of evaluation which concentrate on “literacy” without the inclusion of Native languages will likely fall short of meeting their objectives. The subtleties of language beyond the mere translation of words encompass expressions of concepts, feelings and even body language. Native languages hold the potential of providing the bridge between the oral tradition and English literacy (Leavitt, 1995).

With regard to helping others, Native literacy is primarily about the people who use these services. There is a balance that needs to be arrived at between what a Native literacy practitioner can do to help a client and what the clients themselves feel is beneficial for them to learn (Akiwenzi-Damm and Halonen, 1997). At least partially, the students should be given individual time and attention so that they can learn at their own pace. There are many different possibilities with regard to how one learns. These needs seem to be addressed best with community based programs and research because Native culture is not a generic entity that can be fully accounted for by an “overall plan”.

Lastly, Native literacy is holistic. It is connected to many other aspects of the health and well-being of Native [sic] communities (Hill, 2001). Knowing the complex natures of natural forces and how they relate to one another is an important context for the expression of Indigenous knowledges. There is not the same separation between science, medicine, art, religion, philosophy etc. that exists in the Euro-centric view and this needs to be acknowledged. For example if a Native herbal remedy is “extracted” by a Western trained botanist out of context (e.g., without the inclusion of ceremonies, chants, relationships) the same effect will not be achieved (Battiste, Henderson, 2000).

One of the objectives of Native literacy should be to create awareness that allows Native peoples to gain an understanding and perhaps even some knowledge of how to improve their employability skills through means which reinforce the use of their own Native culture and/or language. Thus, formal Eurocentric standards should be enmeshed with the way that a community decides to design their program.

## Summary

**Rhonda L. Paulsen**

Literacy has been explained as being synonymous with culture, tradition, worldview, languages, and ways of knowing. In the perspective of Aboriginal Peoples, literacy is not restricted to the written word; the true meaning of literacy is not confined to the page. Rather, it is evident when one looks beyond the page and outside the limitations of words to see the holistic vision of ways of knowing and becoming in the life-long process of learning.

Slowly, non-Native people are realizing the concept of life-long learning being a process through which one takes the learning outside the walls of the school and into everyday life. Although Collins (in Scott, 1998) and Niemi (1998) find that while significant learning occurs beyond the school walls and is lifelong, the education system still promote an obsession with finishing. However, in the traditional Aboriginal perspective, learning is never finished, it is a treasured part of every-day living and a life-long process.

In traditional education, learning is passed down from generation to generation orally and through sharing experiences, thereby literacy becomes the active form of learning, evident in a person's development of knowledge, their values, and way of being. This transformative process of learning and literacy continues through our life journey with no ending or "finish". For example, one Ojibway Elder explains the intergenerational connection in traditional education and the participatory and experiential components of learning for Medicine people. *"You know when they're born that that's their role, their function in life. Medicine people nurture. You start teaching them at a young age what the different barks and plants will do for them. The white doctors go to school for 8 or 9 years, but our People go to school their whole lives for it. That's traditional"* (Paulsen, 1998). Peltier, Director of Education for Aboriginal alternative schooling, describes how these components of traditional education *"begin in the home, it is mostly observational. Young children look at adults and learn about things through observation and doing things with adults...there are some things in life you don't need a lesson plan for"* (Paulsen, 1998). It is these components of education and methodologies that cannot be confined to an institutionalized system; it is these values that encompass Native literacy.

Battiste (1995) promotes the ideology of meanings and experiences as being connected to one's thoughts and communicated through dialogue, or through what she refers to for her People, the Mi'kmaq, as "symbolic literacy". Symbolic literacy is defined as a unity of consciousness that bonded the People together in epistemology and worldview. The written form of communication for the traditional Mi'kmaq took shape in pictographs, petroglyphs, and notched sticks, which recorded and described the social, political, cultural and spiritual needs of the society. Battiste maintains that in this way, symbolic literacy incorporated oral and written narratives, and created a sharing of common ideals and a collective cognitive experience.

The means through which people articulate the expression of their experience, in either written or oral form, is the place for literacy within the context of language and culture. Kirkness (1992) supports the need to maintain one's language in order to secure the definition of one's culture – for without it, the strength of a defined identity and community weakens. Further, as Battiste (1995) cautions, when one culture's form of literacy is forced upon another, the result is cultural and cognitive assimilation. Literacy in this framework, as we can see in contemporary mainstream society, becomes a constructed measurement tool by which one examines and

analyzes the level at which another is educated and can read and write. Such a framework illustrates the positioning of Native Peoples in a dominant-to-oppressed social order when Aboriginal perspectives of literacy are not recognized or valued. This is the position that the People are moving out of and one of the principal means of doing so is through the revitalization of culture, tradition and language/literacy.

In multi-cultural and multi-lingual societies, there are representations of people from several cultures contributing their unique identities that are defined by worldview, values and language, into the public mosaic of the learning environment. Identity, culture, tradition, and worldview are factors that, for Aboriginal Peoples, permeate the use and form of language and literacy contributing to harmonious living within a pluralistic society. It is in this process of revitalization, life-long learning and engaging Aboriginal perspectives of literacy that the People are charting their own path for their own People.

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## **ELDERS' ROUND TABLE**

### **Lillian McGregor**

There is a need to bring others to the table that are of like mind to create a good and working environment. Also having an Elder's council is a good idea but it should be stressed that each Elder be given the time and space to talk and contribute individually. One needs to step back and listen to the older people.

This symposium should be seen as an effort to plant seeds that need to be implemented and harvested. This will lead to kinship and identity.

Every person at the symposium should have been taped and then the tapes transcribed. Otherwise, it ends up that some of the data has been missed. This is something that should be done in future gatherings.

Work needs to be done towards coming back together and implementing and harvesting some of the useful comments and ideas made here today as we don't want the people two generations from now sitting here and discussing the same issues.

## Symbolic Literacy

**Janice Longboat**

“The words I speak come as a result of listening to the old people”. Being an oral people from time immemorial, sharing our voice, means sharing as a people. There are distinct ways in which literacy should be done within Aboriginal communities. I want to talk with you about “symbolic literacy.” It entailed people all over Turtle Island understanding each other because it is a universal language. Native people were able to understand each other using that symbolic language. An instance of symbolic literacy occurs when nature speaks. It follows a pattern of thought, image and symbol. For example a turtle symbolises earth, long life and relationship (because of the inter-relationship of Creation).

When I was growing up, I was able to ask whatever questions I wanted. I also had a schoolteacher who regularly took the class outside and spent all day in the bush. Looking back, there seemed to be a great deal of positive reinforcement from kin and from a good teacher towards living through some of the key components of an Aboriginal lifestyle. An excellent example of Native literacy is Tom Porter's community of Kanajoarege, a Haudonashone traditional community in New York State on Haudonashone traditional lands. This program has a language immersion program and as a teacher Tom Porter interjects the culture into the language program.

Looking at a snake, people (mainly because of the influence of Christian doctrines) tell us that it is evil. However, it actually symbolises justice and birth as we all start out that way . . . as an embryo. Seeing, feeling and understanding the language of Native petroglyphs is also symbolic literacy. Another part of symbolic language is dreaming. Dreaming is the birth of the healing and wellness process. Dreaming is the path to literacy and health. Ceremony (purification lodges which promote kinship and identity) are also part of literacy and health. A major part of symbolic literacy is synchronicity. We may not be aware of these synchronic happenings all the time but this is the way it is and the way we are. Experiential learning is the best way to learn. If you do something in at least four ways you will never forget it. Elders say we have five plus two gifts. We have our five senses plus intuition and telepathy (these are the ones that can be felt). If you want to know who you are, you have to try and understand the language of the universe - symbolic literacy - not just English, French, Ojibwe, Mohawk etc. In the universe, everything has a language, power and a balance. For example, the symbolism of water belongs to women and the symbolism of fire belongs to men. One needs to understand the literacy of this as well as their responsibility of holding these in balance. In the creation story, what social science labels “mythology” implies that it is static and unmoving. This is not true because things are moving.

Symbolic literacy is also medicine. Everything is medicine and therefore symbolic literacy allows us to heal and allows us to live. Symbolic literacy is also the constant movement of life and death. The language of the cycles tells us what to do. Nature tells us what to do. Learning by doing and observation, experiential learning, is the beginning of science. Our whole body is Indigenous literacy. This can be easily observed from talking to an Elder. The knowledge of an Elder, while they often claim they only know a little bit in the grand scheme of things is like a library of information. Time plays a factor in Aboriginal literacy but time needs to be perceived as a spiral rather than in a linear fashion.

With regard to symbolic literacy and Aboriginal peoples, there is currently a need to go back and pick up the traditions for the benefit of the next seven generations. Indigenous cultures have resilience because they enjoyed long periods of peace. This peace was because men knew how to take care of women and women knew how to take care of men. Both knew how to take care of children. People were the healthiest in remote areas. Isolation has always been a part of the healing and wellness of Indigenous peoples because isolation involves coming to terms with one's own being.

I was offered a job in Indian education which entailed travelling across the country. When I told my father the news, he asked, "How are you going to make any changes doing that?" He also said "You have to live it in order to know what it means." What the old people are saying today is "revive, relearn and relive".

### **Joe Paquette**



Photo Courtesy, Dawn Antone

I do not call myself an Elder, although some people in the community have from time-to-time bestowed that title onto me. I do follow Anishinabae Teachings and my Teachers have been many. From New Credit to Serpent River, they have come to me. I feel very honoured that some people look at me in that way.

My family tree is a diverse tree: French and some Ojibway; an Anishinabae mix. I'm very proud of my tree, for that is the tree Creator gave me. I cannot remove any of the limbs in the tree just because I may not like them. If I do that, in the end I will have nothing. So, I must honour all of the branches and every leaf is important. I work a lot with children and many of the topics discussed at the symposium apply to the Youth.

We can never stop saying to them that we believe in them, we have faith in them and that we know they will succeed. But, they must believe in themselves.

From the time my Brother and I were little, my Mother use to say:  
Love each other

Share and care for each other  
Respect each other  
Be honest with each other  
And, Be gentle with each other.

It took me over 40 years to understand what she was talking about. We all know that within our own homes, we do those things. What she was saying was, take those teachings out the front door and go live them with others. That's the difficult part. Many years later, Grandfather Sagutch, repeated some of those same teachings. Then, I began to understand.

Bah Mah miin naw

Jake Thomas said, "It's okay to give in from time to time, but never give up. We will win". We should continue in the struggle to give Aboriginal learners the best possible learning situations that would enable our people to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to ensure for them a good quality of life.

### **Grafton Antone**

It is important to have gatherings such as this symposium. Now that the words have been lifted up, the research team can pull it all together and have it published so that we may have a touchstone to guide the Native Literacy programs, locally on reserves, and in urban centres, and in the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition, and Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the Universities themselves.

Speaking in a First Nations language creates a different picture. These languages can be the doorways to First Nations' consciousness and perceptions of reality that are connected to Earth and the Creator.

### **Jacqui LaValley**

Jacqui LaValley is a culture and Ojibwe language teacher at First Nations School located on Dundas Street in Toronto. Jacqui spoke about people working from the knowledge of their language and resources as human-beings. She reminded people to sing as they work in the field of literacy. She commented on Charles Miller and Ernestine LaCroix' presentation she drew a parallel between the isolation and language challenges of deaf culture and Aboriginal culture in general, for she notices the same thing with her sister who is deaf. Yet her sister challenged herself to learn to play the guitar and to sing and today she can do both. Jacqui offered an honour song in the Ojibwe language to affirm the voice of the people.

## **PRACTITIONERS' COMMENTS AND CONCERNS**

Some practitioners feel that the way they teach Native literacy is holistic. There is a great deal of stress generated from the host organizations (MTCU) to conform to their guidelines. The requirement of examining the over 100-page learning matrix for each student takes away from time with the students, especially in First Nations community literacy programs that are already understaffed. If Native literacy is to be true to Native models such as the medicine wheel, the practitioners also need time to recuperate and heal. The conclusion is that the guiding and

evaluative documents of the MTCU are not relevant to First Nations cultural context and need to be reviewed.

Another issue that arose out of this discussion is that the best support mechanisms in holistic programs need to be identified because the Practitioners are burning out.

It was suggested that counselling be implemented (preferably by Elders) and job descriptions be re-evaluated because currently the demands placed on practitioners are disproportionate with the time available. As well, the cultural philosophy and value systems of the MTCU are out of synch with those of Aboriginal practitioners and learners. Some program leaders are getting warning letters from MTCU regarding not conforming to the Ministry guidelines. A distributive/arithmetical way of life is in conflict with a relational/reciprocal way of life.

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

**Lillian McGregor**

We offer thanks to those who brought us together.  
We offer thanks to the presenters who came together.  
We offer thanks to the Elders.  
We pray that this work  
Will lead us on the good path into the centre.  
We pray that this circle remains strong  
And that the tobacco carries the truth  
Of this gathering  
To the Creator  
In this way we become one.

Miigwetch

## **ELDERS' BIOGRAPHIES**

**Grafton Antone**, Wolf Clan, was born in 1942 on the Oneida of the Thames Indian Reserve. He learned the Oneida language as a first language and then learned English prior to going to Indian Day School. Grafton worked in Construction Engineering for 12 years. He holds a B.A. from the University of Western Ontario and a Masters of Divinity from Victoria University, University of Toronto. Grafton's ministry with the Council Fire Native Cultural Centre and the Toronto Urban Native Ministries of the United Church of Canada includes the singing tradition of Water Drum social song. These songs reinvigorate the spirit of all who listen and dance to the sound of the Drum, the Heart Beat of the Nations. Grafton also teaches an Oneida language class in the Aboriginal Studies Program at the University of Toronto. He is also an Elder in residence at First Nations House at the University of Toronto.

**Jacqui LaValley** is a member of the Ojibwe Nation. She teaches Ojibwe culture and language from kindergarten to grade eight at the First Nations School in Toronto. She is the President of the Association for Native Development in the Visual and Performing Arts. She also does Elder Teachings, as well as performing traditional and contemporary Ojibwe music. Jacqui's role in the Aboriginal community includes being a mother and grandmother.

**Lillian McGregor** is originally from Birch Island, Whitefish River First Nation in Northern Ontario. Her Spiritual name is Shkebuk and she is of the Crane Clan. Lillian speaks her Ojibwe language. She retired from the nursing profession in 1989 and now lives at Wigwamen Terrace, a Native Senior's complex, in Toronto, Ontario. Over the years, Lillian has been on a number of different boards in the Toronto urban community. She has been on the Board of Directors of the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, Anduhyaun Inc., Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, and Anishnawbe Homes Inc. She is also a member of the Elder and Traditional Teachers' Advisory Council of the Native Canadian Centre. She is presently on the board of Ningkwakwe Press. The Native community of Toronto honoured Lillian with an Eagle feather in 1995. In 1996, she was awarded an Outstanding Achievement Award by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation for her efforts in volunteering in the Native community. She was also presented with an Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of U of T Distinguished Educators Award in 1997. In 2002, June 19<sup>th</sup>. Lillian received an honorary doctorate of Laws from the University of Toronto. Lillian continues to be the Elder-in-Residence at First Nations House, University of Toronto.

**Joseph Paquette** was born in 1950 in Kapuskasing, located in Northern Ontario. In the mid-60's, Joe joined the Queen's Own Rifles Of Canada. He served with them for three and one-half years and was stationed in Victoria, BC. Joe's parent's are from the East. His Father, Gerard Paquet/Paquette (an orphan?), was born in Lareine, Abitibi, whilst his Mother, Dolorese Begin, was born in Trois Riviere, Quebec. The Begin Family immigrated to Turtle Island in 1654, whilst the Paquet Family immigrated to Turtle Island in around 1659. Joe traces his ancestry not only to the French but also to the Anishinabae, Ojibway around Lake Nipissing. Joe is a Storyteller, Artificer, Facilitator and Entertainer. With great enthusiasm, he humbles himself to live every story and delivers the subtle meanings to teach all the children and adults alike. Joe has great respect for and honours all his ancestors. He is of the Turtle Clan and follows the Teachings of the First Nations Peoples. In 1995, he started a company called OUTDOOR IN OVATIONS, which brings awareness of these Teachings to various groups. The programs he offers are educational, interactive and leave a positive experience for all who care to interact.

## PRESENTERS' BIOGRAPHIES

**Dawn Antone** is a member of the Oneida of the Thames First Nation near London, Ontario. She has been involved in Native Literacy for the past 3 years. Dawn is the Coordinator of the Native Literacy Program located at the Council Fire Cultural Centre of Toronto. She is presently the President of the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition. Before she began her work as a Literacy Coordinator, Dawn managed an Aboriginal community radio station where the programming was centered on the Aboriginal language of community members. Aboriginal music was also a major component of the radio station program. Traditional Onkwehonwe music is a big part of Dawn's life. She enjoys sharing the teachings of the Iroquois music to demonstrate the importance of music as literacy.

**Joanne Boyer** is an Ojibway from the Serpent River First Nation. She has been involved in Native Literacy for the past 14 years and has been the Coordinator of Enjikendaasang Learning Centre, Blind River, for 13 years, serving four First Nations' communities along the North Channel: Mississauga First Nation, Serpent River, Sagamok Anishnabek and Whitefish Lake First Nation. Joanne is always enquiring "What is 'Native Literacy' and how does it make us different than other literacy programs?" Five years ago, in recognition of the importance of First Nations Language Literacy, she incorporated the traditional teachings and values in Blind River's programs and in the Intergenerational Language program of the Summer Immersion Language Camp, held in partnership with Sault College of Applied Arts and Technology.

**Nancy Cooper** is a member of the Chippewas of Mnjikaning First Nation in Ontario. For the past decade she has worked in the Native literacy field on a local (Toronto), provincial (Ontario), and national level. She is currently the Field Consultant for the Native Stream at AlphaPlus Centre, a provincial literacy library. In this role, Nancy works with 27 MTCU-funded Native Literacy programs as a trainer, resource person and main contact person. Nancy is also a photographer whose work has been shown in Red Ink, a Native student magazine from the University of Arizona. Her poems have been published in three Native women writer's anthologies.

**Sally Gaikhezheyongai** is Wolf Clan, Ojibway. She has worked for the past twelve years in the literacy field in Toronto, both within and outside of the urban Aboriginal community. Her involvement included many different aspects of literacy: storytelling for social change, an anti-oppression activism; advising/consulting for non-Aboriginal groups; facilitating workshops and healing/teaching circles; Board Member/volunteering with a variety of agencies; adult literacy instruction; and Aboriginal Literacy Program Coordination. She is the writer of several short stories as well as of the findings related to two literacy projects.

**Priscilla George** is a Deer Clan Anishnawbe from the Chippewas of Saugeen First Nation. Her Spirit Name is Ningwakwe, Rainbow Woman. Ningwakwe began teaching in 1965 with the Toronto Board of Education. She has been a Native Literacy Coordinator with the Ontario Ministry of Education and a Trainer/Consultant with the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition. She was Coordinator of the first National Aboriginal Literacy Gathering and is currently working on the Follow-up Strategy, which includes a national literacy organization. "The Rainbow Approach to Aboriginal Literacy," her thesis-in-progress, was originally developed at the request of the

Parkland Regional College. This holistic approach and was adapted by the National Aboriginal Design Committee. She is the mother of two grown children.

**Christianna Jones** has been working with literacy learners at M'Chigeeng First Nation for 9 years. Her experience in the Native Literacy field includes the Learning Outcomes Pilot Project (1998/99) which focused on identifying the importance of self-direction and management skills in literacy and which was added to the MTCU's Learning Outcomes matrix. She was the Content Developer for the Native AlphaRoute Project (1999/2001) which focuses on helping learners improve their self-direction and management skills. Christianna brings her background as a life-skills coach and counsellor to her present responsibility as the Vice-President of the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition.

**Lenore Keeshig-Tobias** is an author and storyteller from the Chippewas of Nawash First Nation. She teaches at George Brown College, Toronto. Lenore works as a naturalist and cultural interpreter for Parks Canada and has conducted workshops in storytelling, writing, land claims, Aboriginal rights and other aspects of Native culture and history. As a storyteller, she has visited universities as well as cultural and education centres across Canada, U.S.A. and Scandinavia. Lenore has worked on issues of racism in the arts, specifically "cultural appropriation." A member of The Writers' Union of Canada, she was the founding-chair of the Racial Minority Writers' Committee. Lenore shares, the 1993 'Living the Dream Book Award' with her daughter, Polly, and a 1987 'Author's Award' with her husband, David McLaren.

**Elva Lickers** a life-long resident of the Six Nations Reserve, is of Mohawk ancestry and is a member of the Wolf Clan. A 1989 graduate from McMaster University with a B.A. in Sociology, Elva has certification in Small Business Management, Life Skills Coach Training, Reality Therapy/Choice Theory, and Advanced Critical Incident Stress Debriefing. Elva's background includes twelve years as a Literacy Coordinator and Life Skills facilitator. Through her own agency, "Life Is Simple," she provides personal enhancement seminars, and full- and part-time life skills courses.

**Janice Longboat** Mohawk, Turtle Clan of Six Nations of the Grand River is a Traditional Herbalist, Healer and Elder. Jan works with a very wholistic concept of healing - the need for us to become whole, to connect and heal the physical body as well as the emotional, mental and spiritual part of us. She believes that the strength of healing is within that spiritual part of us. Jan began studying traditional Native healing at a young age. For the past 20 years, she has worked with many Native communities, agencies and academic institutions to share teachings about traditional healing and medicines.

**Charles Miller** is a Bear Clan Ojibway of the Wasauksing First Nation. He is also a Visual Minority (Hearing-Impaired) FAS learner. He gained his primary education in Special Needs classes and graduated from a Graphics Arts Printing program at Residential School. Charles went on to earn his Grade 12 equivalency at George Brown College. After working in the Printing Industry for 25 years, he entered the health care field. His background and experience includes facilitating workshops in Crisis Intervention, American Sign Language (ASL) and Residential School Survivorship. He is currently an ASL Interpreter and a member of the Language Translator Committee with Anishnawbe Health of Toronto. Charles is a Traditional Male Dancer and a family man who has been married for 30 years.

**Jen St. Germain** is a Métis originally from Owen Sound, Ontario. While her ancestry stems from the Manitoba area, her roots are firmly planted in Ontario. Jen is currently Manager of the Training Initiatives Branch for the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) and is responsible for overseeing regional operations and developing new programs as well as identifying and addressing gaps in program delivery. Jen brings four years of front-line experience as a Community Development Officer for the MNO to her role as well as experience in a small public relations firm. This latter position provided her with excellent experience in and understanding of for-profit and not-for-profit work environments, communications, fundraising and special-event planning. Jen holds degrees in History and Political Science from McMaster University.

**Sharon Swanson** is a member of Michipicoten First Nation. In July 2000, she came to Moose Factory to deliver Continuing Education courses for Northern College and was invited to set up and deliver a Literacy and Basic Skills program for the Moose Cree Education Authority. The program, which has been running for 2 years with some success, is unique in that it is not funded by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities and is delivered on the Reserve. Sharon is retired from Northern College where she was a Special Support Technician responsible for training for all levels of staff and administering the computer systems for 5 campuses including all software and hardware purchases and maintenance. After her retirement, the Continuing Education Department of Northern College hired her as a part-time teacher of computer software and accounting systems.

**Isadore BebamikaweToulouse** is a member of the turtle Clan from the Wikwemikong Unceded First Nation, Manitoulin Island. Recognizing the absence of Aboriginal languages and cultures within the existing education system, Isadore determined to pursue a career in Aboriginal Education. He received his B. A. from Trent University in 1979 and graduated from Lakehead University's Native language Instructors Program. Over 20 years of teaching, Isadore became familiar with the need for Ojibwe language material prepared for and by Ojibwe people. He currently teaches Ojibwe language and culture at Sutton District High School (York Region), Georgian College, McMaster University and Scugog First nation; during the summer he returns to Lake Head University's Native language Instructors program. He volunteers as Treasurer to the Board of Directors of Anishnabwe Health of Toronto and as president to Anishnabemowin-Teg Inc.

**Shirley Pheasant-Williams** is a member of the Bird Clan of the Ojibway and Odawa First Nations of Canada. Her Aboriginal name is "Migizi ow Kwe" meaning "That Eagle Woman". She was born and raised at Wikwemikong, Manitoulin Island and attended St. Joseph's Residential School in Spanish, Ontario. Now living in Peterborough, Shirley has lectured across Ontario promoting Language and Culture. She holds a B.A. in Native Studies from Trent University, a diploma in the Native Language Instructors Program from Lakehead University, and a Masters degree in Environmental Studies from York University. Shirley is currently an Associate Professor at Trent University, teaching language and culture, as well as other related courses in the Department of Native Studies. She dances as a traditional woman dancer following the powwow trails in the summertime.

**Mary Lynn (Houston) Wilson** is the home-educating mother of four Ojibway/Irish children. As well as facilitating her children's learning, she is involved in the conscious birthing and breastfeeding movement through her work as Doula – a professional childbirth attendant – with Doulas of North America, as a nutrition worker with the Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program, and a Breastfeeding counsellor at a Native Cultural Resource Centre. Mary Lynn is a

representative for the Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents and edits a newsletter for home-educating parents in her area. Her training includes Registration with the Ontario College of Nurses as a Registered Practical Nurse, accreditation as a breastfeeding counsellor with La Leche League Canada.

## RESEARCHERS BIOGRAPHIES

Core Research Team

**Eileen Antone** is a graduate of OISE/UT, an adjunct faculty member in the department of Adult Education, Community Development, and Counselling Psychology. Dr. Antone is a faculty member in the Transitional Year Program of the University of Toronto, with a cross appointment to University College, where the primary focus of her work is with Aboriginal students achieving university studies. Dr. Antone has many years of experience with Aboriginal communities and organizations, both as a committee member and a concerned individual advocating for Aboriginal perspectives. Dr. Antone is a member of the Oneida of the Thames First Nation.

**Peter Gamlin** is a professor in the Department of Adult Education, Community Development and Counselling Psychology, at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. His work spans 30 years of specialization in educational psychology, child development and adult education. Dr. Gamlin is actively working with Aboriginal colleagues in the Department of Adult Education to establish an Aboriginal education research centre. Projects underway inquire into Aboriginal literacy programs to determine to what extent they are culturally appropriate. Dr. Gamlin is currently working closely with Aboriginal communities, to help deliver culturally-appropriate services to families and children. Dr. Gamlin is a Registered Psychologist with the Ontario College of Psychologists.

**Heather McRae** is the newest member of the research group. She is pursuing her Master's degree in Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at OISE/UT in the specialization area of "Social Justice and Cultural Studies". She is from a small rural community in Manitoba and would like to return home to work in the area of Community Development and Popular Education. Her ancestry is Scottish, French and Métis.

**Rhonda L. Paulsen** is an educational consultant actively working with Aboriginal colleagues and members of the community to define and implement Best Practices in education. Her academic background is supported by over twenty years of teaching, researching and administration in both business and educational institutions and environments of diversity. Recently, Dr. Paulsen has taught and developed courses in Native Studies at Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, has participated in the efforts of the Hopi in Arizona to re-claim their lands, and is currently involved in the efforts of the Kanaka (Hawaiian People) toward the revitalization of language in education. Further, she continues to serve as a guest speaker at provincial and international educational conferences, focusing on issues of multiculturalism/multilingualism, policy in education, and equity of diversity. Rhonda has since received her Dr. of Education degree from OISE/UofT in June, 2002.

**Lois Provost Turchetti**, an artist-mythteller-educator writer is of Xaymaca-Maroon-Taino ancestry and heritage. She has shared "Mythstories" in Public, Catholic and Associated Hebrew schools, taught at the college level and presented at professional conferences. As the result of a

car accident, Lois had to relearn many things. In the 'Storying' process, she began re-covering, re-claiming, illustrating and writing up the 'alternate ways of seeing and knowing' of 'Global Indigenous StoryArts' through what she calls 'mythographical patterning' touching on ways of learning wholeness as wellness, in relation to sacred sites and sounds. Her background includes 11 years of Storying in the Schools and 15 years of brand identity design/development project management with Procter & Gamble Inc. Lois will receive her Masters of Education in Philosophy degree in November, 2002. Her focus is ways of seeing, knowing and telling in terms of Indigenous Philosophy for Aural-Oral/Kinetic Learning.

**Julian Robbins** is a graduate student in the Ph.D. program, Natives Studies, Trent University. Julian's area of study is Sacred Sites and Holistic Health. Julian worked at the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris, France and participated in an International Conference which intended to examine the relationship between Sacred Sites, Biological Diversity and Cultural Integrity. Julian is from the Mi'kmaq Nation.

**Moneca Sinclair** is a graduate student in the Ed. D. program, Department of Adult Education, Community Development and Counselling Psychology, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. Moneca is Cree from Northern Manitoba. She is actively involved in the Toronto Aboriginal community.

Meegwetch, Kita'tamihin, Yaw^, Welalin, Pilama.

### **Editors**

This volume was edited in collaboration by

Dr. Eileen Antone

Heather McRae

Lois Provost-Turchetti

Moneca Sinclair

The Editors extend their sincere thanks and appreciation to all participants at the Symposium.