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# **Nourishing the Learning Spirit: Dialogue on Learning through *Spirit* May 23-26, 2008, Wanuskewin Heritage Park**

Mary Jeanne (M.J.) Barrett  
Comprehending and Nourishing the Learning Spirit  
Animation Theme Bundle



## Disclaimer

This report has been prepared for the Canadian Council on Learning's Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre by Mary Jeanne (M. J.) Barrett. It is issued by the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre as a basis for further knowledge exchange. The opinions and conclusions expressed in the document, however, are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre members.

## Acknowledgements and Copyright

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

The AbLKC is guided in its work by a Consortium of over 100 organizations and institutions, a steering committee, and six Animation Theme Bundles (Bundles) led by members of the Consortium. The Bundles are:

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

From the start, the AbLKC recognized that the reporting and monitoring function of the Canadian Council on Learning required a dialogue with Aboriginal people to define successful learning from Aboriginal Peoples' perspectives. Together with CCL, the national Aboriginal organizations and interested individuals who have taken up this work in communities and institutions across the country were invited to share their philosophies and understandings of successful learning. The result was three holistic learning models with shared philosophical values and principles. It is the view of the AbLKC that the iterative models which can be found at [www.ccl-cca.ca/aboriginallearning](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/aboriginallearning) will serve as a framework for development of indicators to report and monitor successful learning, as a framework in planning for successful learning for individuals and communities, and in discerning what is, indeed, 'a promising practice'. We believe there are many other potential applications of these models.

In working toward addressing gaps in understanding what constitutes successful learning and what Aboriginal Peoples aspire to and need to succeed in their learning endeavours, AbLKC wishes to acknowledge that what is available as evidence of success in the existing literature is often unclear and undefined, and perhaps not representative of Aboriginal Peoples' perspectives. Responding to the aspirations and needs of Aboriginal learners means valuing their collective intellectual traditions and identities as Aboriginal peoples.

This publication, *Nourishing the Learning Spirit: Dialogue on Learning through Spirit*<sup>1</sup> is available electronically on CCL's Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre website at [www.ccl-cca.ca/aboriginallearning](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/aboriginallearning).

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Cite this document in the following format:

Barrett, Mary Jeanne (2010). *Nourishing the Learning Spirit: Dialogue on Learning through Spirit*. University of Saskatchewan, Aboriginal Education Research Centre, Saskatoon, Sask. and First Nations and Adult Higher Education Consortium, Calgary, Alta. Retrieved (day/month/year) from (website address).

ISBN 978-1-926612-24-9

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<sup>1</sup> The word spirit as used in this document has many meanings and connotations, many of which are illustrated in the words of the participants included herein. Spirit is a mystery; it is Creator, it is energy.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Opening the Dialogue .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Aim of the Dialogue.....	6
Context for the Dialogue.....	6
Participants.....	6
Researcher.....	7
Methodology and Methods .....	7
Research Ethics and Cultural Respect .....	8
Supporting Organizations .....	8
The Report .....	8
<b>Participant Closing Remarks.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Policy Statement re: Learning through Spirit.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Implications for the Academy and Teaching Profession in Saskatchewan .....</b>	<b>25</b>
a. <i>For Curriculum and Pedagogy</i> .....	25
b. <i>For Faculty Professional Development</i> .....	26
<b>References.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>29</b>
Appendix 1: Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Center – Canadian Council on Learning.....	30
Appendix 2: Letter of invitation .....	33
Appendix 3: Participant consent forms.....	35
Appendix 4: Schedule .....	40
Appendix 5: Overview of dialogue process.....	41
Appendix 6: Background Paper .....	42
Appendix 7: References.....	48

## Opening the Dialogue

“ It seems that in our contemporary world, our kids, if that’s who we are trying to teach, their minds are so full of trivia, you know with all the modern tech, modern technology, whether it’s TV, iPods, movies, games, etc. Their minds are so full. They are so preoccupied so that if we’re going to learn with Spirit it means...we have to find a way to empty some of their minds out.” (Leroy Little Bear)

“I was thinking about the many ways that Creator comes in for me and it is through suspending, quieting the mind there are multiple ways that that happens. And sometimes that happens in ceremony, in prayer, in meditation, and sometimes it happens when, you know, just before I go to sleep.” (Marie Battiste)

“I think we have to decurricularize the curriculum and develop it in such a way that the Spirit is the center of that curriculum, and not have Spirit as a piggy-back to what is already there.” (Delvin Kanewiyakiho)

“This is a profound moment in the continuum of spirit talk. It moves the dialogue into a ‘not-just-yet’ space. It allows for spirit talk in all forms and essences, showing the way it comes through. (Barb Frazer, reflecting on the draft report)

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**Summative Action:** Given that the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education mandate (released April 1, 2009) to include First Nations, Métis and Inuit content, perspectives and ways of knowing in all curriculum for all students, the following policy is put forward for discussion:

**Policy statement:** *In order to meet the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education Mandate to infuse Aboriginal content, perspectives and ways of knowing in the curriculum for all students, it will be important to engage students in course activities and/or discussion that supports an awareness of the multiple manifestations of spirit in self, nature, and beyond.*

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I wonder if I can ask you to imagine what it might look like to help students learn or to be a teacher in a school, where we're trying to open spaces or create assess points, or find portals to help us find those openings to spirit. What would that look like? What could you imagine? (MJ)

### **Aim of the Dialogue**

This study aimed to provide the beginnings of a discussion about how educators might understand and engage with spiritual knowing in a wide variety of learning settings where students might be immersed in a range of Aboriginal, Western and occasionally, Eastern worldviews. In other words, the project provides a small sampling of what it might mean to engage spirit in learning. The project was deemed of importance to the Aboriginal Community through the work led by Dr. Marie Battiste in the context of the Animation Theme Bundle “Nourishing the Learning Spirit.” This work was supported by the Canadian Council on Learning through funding from Human Resources and Skills Development (see below, Supporting Organizations, and appendix 1).

### **Context for the Dialogue**

In Saskatchewan, it is mandated that Aboriginal content, perspectives and ways of knowing be included for *all* students in the K-12 curriculum. To do so requires finding ways to address issues of spirit. While our discussions were not restricted to engagement with spirit this context alone, the provincial mandate was very present in our minds.

### **Participants**

The majority of participants in this project (10 out of 12) were First Nations or Métis, including Blackfoot, Dakota, Saulteaux, Cree and Mi'kmaq. There were three Elders and one oskapewis (Elder's helper, or Pipe Carrier). Two participants were of European heritage and engaged with spirit in some way in both personal and professional practice. Together the group brought expertise in Indigenous science and quantum theory, traditional ceremony, Aboriginal literature and drama, law, plant healing, energy psychology, physiology and bodywork, educational

administration, nursing and traditional healing practices, and education. There were six male and seven female participants, plus the two female researchers.

### **Researcher**

M.J. Barrett is an assistant professor in the College of Education. She is an experienced educator whose doctoral research has examined, both theoretically and experientially, ways of learning, teaching, reading and researching with spirit. She is female, Caucasian. Research assistant Malvina Iron is also an experienced educator with training and experience utilizing both cultural and contemporary teaching methods. She is First Nations Cree and a Master's student in the College of Education. Development of the research questions was completed in consultation with Dr. Marie Battiste, Mi'kmaq educator and Director, Aboriginal Research Center (AERC), College of Education, University of Saskatchewan. Malvina Iron, Marie Battiste and Yvonne Vizina (AERC) provided guidance with respect to cultural protocols.

### **Methodology and Methods**

In the context of the questions being asked we felt that it was important to engage in decolonizing research methods which disrupt the dominance of Western Eurocentric assumptions and attend to the culture, beliefs and worldviews held by the participants in the research process (see Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). A dialogic methodology and methods (Barrett,2009; see also [www.porosity.ca](http://www.porosity.ca)) was used in order to be congruent with the topic explored. Methods included meditation, attention to dreams, engagement with prayer (at the opening and closing of each of the dialogue days) and simple, quiet awareness. These methods opened up possibilities for knowledge-making to be collaborative and inclusive of insights offered by animals, plants and spirit(s) as we developed the research plan, finalized our list of participants, facilitated the dialogue itself, and completed this report. The decision to host the dialogue at Wanuskewin Heritage Park, the site of First Nations summer and winter camps and buffalo hunting grounds, also supported this work. Details of the program outline are provided in appendix 4.

## **Research Ethics and Cultural Respect**

This project was conducted in accordance with the guidelines for the Tri-Council Research Ethics and received approval of the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board (Appendix A). Protocols of Place and cultural protocols were respected, including the offering of tobacco to the Elder, gifts and a place of respect for Elders who participated. Each day opened and closed with prayer. Participants chose to be identified by name.

## **Supporting Organizations**

This work was financially supported by the Canadian Council on Learning's Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre. The Center is led by two key institutions—the Aboriginal Education Research Centre (AERC), University of Saskatchewan and the First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium (FNAHEC). The center is an unprecedented working group with a growing membership of more than 100 organizations from across Canada—directly involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis people and identifying ways to strengthen learning outcomes among Aboriginal peoples. Its three foundational functions are 1) Research and Knowledge Mobilization; 2) Monitoring and Reporting; and 3) Knowledge Exchange and Information Sharing. This particular project is part of the Animation Theme Bundle, “Nourishing the Learning Spirit”, one of six priority theme areas of AbLKC. This study is part of a larger collection of dialogues, literature reviews, and knowledge-sharing events. See Appendix 2 for more details.

## **The Report**

“Worldviews are not innocent” claims Dillard (2006, p. 62), in her article entitled “When the music changes, so should the dance: Cultural and spiritual considerations in paradigm proliferation”. Yet while at least some of the music has changed, the dance threatens to remain the same. Caught in two worlds, Aboriginal peoples (and others) are required to speak the language of the colonizer if they are to succeed in the academy, and in schools. Report-writers are also compelled to structure their summaries in the logical linear, nicely synthesized form demanded by conceptions of Western rationality as well. Yet to fully engage with spirit, as many of the participants in this study reiterated time and again, means leaving spaces, not filling the mind with “trivia” (Leroy Little Bear), or in the case of this report, over-analyzing the data. Thus this report includes data summarized during the event itself, as well as excerpts of transcripts

selected through a series of conversations with spirit guides, my intellect, and the pragmatics of available transcriptions. Interpretation occurred mostly in the translation from spoken word to the page, and in the process of selection using the dialogic methodology and methods described above.

The intent of this report is to offer an overview of emergent ideas, as well as to provide, through longer transcript segments, elaborations of participants' engagement with and understandings of spirit. The hope is that at least some of these ideas may be woven into our teaching practices in ways that support and nurture the learning spirit of all.

The following questions guided our two-and-a-half days of conversation:

- 1. What does it mean to teach and learn through spirit?**
- 2. How do we teach/share this in schools?**

During the dialogue, a third question was added:

- 3. What haven't we talked about yet?**

### **What does it mean to teach and learn through spirit?**

We returned, again and again, to this question. The following encapsulates much of the small group dialogues on the first (Sunday) evening. Using flip charts, participants reported points that emerged during the small group conversations. Participants were invited to put stars beside those which resonated with them; only those points with 3 or more stars are recorded first:

- Spirit is an energy wave, combination of energy waves (7 stars).
- Spirit is the heart (thought, feelings acknowledged) (6 stars).
- Experiential learning which is holistic (4 stars).
- An experiential process rather intellectual (4 stars).
- What invites spirit? Being present (4 stars).
- When you sit with spirit you are in spirit (4 stars).
- Learning from within and associating to the world around you (3 stars).
- Submerged into the environment without the direction of anyone.....you learn from being in the environment-hear-listen to sound-learn to trust (3 stars).
- Knowing self and connecting to everything around you...you are specific being of creation (3 stars).

- When you let go of ego you find spirit and values (3 stars).
- Being (3 stars).
- Being is now (3 stars).

Other points made, but not starred were: Spirit is timeless; has no ego. (addition from a participant who was not able to attend the first night's discussion); Self is being equal to everything around you – you are a specific being of creation.

There were also several more points specifically related to learning: Acknowledging the uniqueness of all individuals; You learn implicitly when someone cares about your learning; Positive reinforcement, support and caring/fulfillment in learning; Students need grounding (i.e. connected using energy through dance, music or being outside); Creating a safe space where students can feel safe to open up; Engage to creation – a curiosity or quest for knowledge and learning.

The next morning (Monday) opened with a prayer followed by a whole group discussion during which participants were asked to offer “any insights, dreamings, thoughts, imaginings that came overnight to come forward.” The following was reported, as summarized in researcher's notes from the event:

There is a discipline of coming to know through spirit. In part it is coming to know, to develop a relationship with the unknown, and recognizing that mystery is not the same as fear. Sometimes trauma is a portal to spirit. Engaging with spirit is experiential, rather than rational, and involves listening and hearing what others may not see or hear, and then beginning to trust that hearing. It is listening for and to the inner ear (clairaudience). It means involving more than what the five senses have to offer. It also involves the wonderment of healing and the power of the psychic self. One can engage in a ‘supra state’ of learning invigorated by spirit. It is a sense of something more.

Norma's story encapsulates the nature of this discussion:

Norma: Yesterday, it was a humbling experience to listen to everyone's insight and learn what the meaning of Spirit means. Every one of us has a different way of expressing how spirit touches us. My belief is that we are guided with Spirit first. Based on the teaching that we were Spirit first prior to being born onto this world. So my connection to Creator is foremost first and how I express my spirit is based on this notion of being connected and grounded with the teachings. How one expresses spirit naturally depends on how you connect, experience, are taught, and shown how to achieve and communicate with spirit. I believe our first connection is with Creator, so how I express Spirit comes naturally. For instance, yesterday on our drive home, I asked these questions to my kids (ages varied from

7 to 14) Can you explain what spirit is? How do you feel Spirit? My Son, who's the youngest replied, "Spirit lives in your heart". Which I wasn't surprised based on many teachings from Elders of our culture; the children are closest to Creator and are taught to follow the path of the heart, as this is where our true spirit lies. Our understanding varies at each stage of our life whether you are a child, youth, adult and Elder stage on the circle of life. Each one of my daughter's answers was different, and varied how they understood spirit to be. I believe it's crucial to explain, role model, and show what Spirit is at early ages and to continue to nurture the teachings as they progress through the stages of life. So it was really enlightening to have that conversation with my kids and also to be given that opportunity to nurture the teachings. These are my thoughts from yesterday.

Posted at the side of the room was a chart paper which collected words for spirit: mystery, Creator, energy waves, experiential, relationship, four-legged winged, achak, swimmers, crawlers, silence, role model, portal, I'm home.

This first question was followed by a query put forward by one of the participants: *What invites spirit?* The following summarizes the responses:

Rhythm, renewal; sometimes clearing is needed as preparation for spirit. Creativity and the arts. Prayer. Meditation. A talking circle where students can come to see each other as spirit. A pedagogy of the imagination. Grounding through dance, music, being outside. Doing energy work to create the atmosphere. Parenting. Sounding your voice as children. Silence. Being aware of animal helpers (e.g. mouse). Engaging in a mystical process of 'reasoning'. Being present in the moment. Ceremony.

Later in the morning, the group divided up to share stories of personal experiences with spirit in order to deepen our individual and collective sense of what it meant to be engaged in spirit and to begin to move us toward the second question: *How do we teach/share this in schools?* The following is a summary of major ideas that emerged.

### **How do we teach/share this in schools?**

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Learning from spirit is clearly experiential and involves trusting one's intuition, as well as recognition that culture is the filtering system (Leroy Little Bear). For many, it involves not thinking; for another, it requires acknowledging the fragility and arrogance of Western consciousness (Sa'ke'j Henderson). For several participants, it was intimately linked to a need to heal. How for example, does hurting affect one's ability to be connected to spirit? (Brian Kuss). Given the trauma people live with, is there room for the unconscious? (Sa'ke'j Henderson). These insights are more appropriately encapsulated through longer storied answers, which provide instances of some of the ideas listed above.

## **What does it mean to teach and learn through spirit?**

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Over and over again, participants talked about engaging with spirit requiring a practice of creating space, which required letting go of the thinking mind. A longer instance of this phenomenon follows:

Marie Battiste: ...I was thinking about the many ways that Creator comes in for me and it is through suspending, quieting the mind that there are multiple ways that that happens. Sometimes that happens in ceremony, in prayer, in meditation, and sometimes it happens just before I go to sleep, when I wake up in the morning, when I'm driving on the road. Sometimes you get on the road and all of a sudden you arrive at a place and you say, how did I get here? I didn't remember from here to there and yet my mind is operating and working and thinking that it had let go at the moment to let other things happen. Questions and problems might arise and answers and problems are solved. So, anyway, that's sort of what I use to begin this discussion about Spirit entry points. ...I know I'm connected to Spirit when everything is coming through me and the juices are going, and I'm able to keep at it and all of a sudden, I get to the end of the day and I'm still at it. I have difficulties to get to that place of being connected to Spirit, I find it so hard to sometimes to get there, and the way I have to do it for myself to get into a writing mode, letting the Spirit actually run through me. I go through a whole lot of mindless activities, like matching socks [Laughter]. Sometimes every sock in the house has to be matched and put together in order for me to rid my mind of the little tasks so that I can get to the big things. And you know sometimes it might be washing the windows, or doing the dishes, but it sort of like I'm doing a number of mindless tasks getting ready to open up, to let that Spirit begin to flow through me, to pick up and start to say, okay, now, I'm connected.

Brian: Can I ask what you experience in those mindless tasks?

Marie: Actually, I think that what I'm doing is dropping everything else off the plate, I am trying to get rid of the garbage, I'm trying to clear the table and when my table is cleared, when mindless things, like oh gee, I should, you know, check the mailbox and do all this silly stuff that doesn't need to be done, it allows then a clear slate to open up so that I can be more receptive to what is coming in. And then when the receptivity opens then I feel like I'm connected, and I begin. And those are really precious moments because I know that's my job, and the work I do, that's what I have, that's when I'm actually doing my purpose in life and I know then that I will be sufficiently fed what I need to know to do the job I have to do. Sometimes that happens when I prepare for a speech, I might have all my notes laid out, I might have all of this put together and I get up there, and all of a sudden, you know, after my prayer, I just say, okay, help me to say what I am to say. And then things just begin and it isn't like, it isn't me that is talking, it isn't me that said this, it isn't me that had the insight, it's sort of like I've been fed to hear, to say what I'm supposed to say at a certain time. And I get that same experience when sometimes I'm counseling somebody, or it isn't a counseling per se, but when somebody is troubled and they come and sit and they share their troubles

with me, and all of a sudden, it's like Spirit takes over, it says this is what you need to say and then I just let myself be a conduit then, and I just say, okay, what is it that I have to do to help, how do I help this person? And they feel like something has been lifted off them and they feel, you know, like they got something great at the moment, and they always will remember that moment, in which they had some part of their burden lifted. And I say, that wasn't me that did that, that was Spirit that led me to me say that, that helped me in that moment.

Brian: It's about getting out of the way.

Marie: Yes, yes, getting out of the way.

Brian Kuss described the experience as follows:

Brian: For myself, I believe one of the things that are important is to take the discipline to actually reconnect to something that is always here. So part of my discipline is a daily practice of waking very early, and in that "wakingness" there is something majestic about the light of the day, about the quiet and stillness of the day. I actually see that is the whole purpose of life, that constant portal to that connection of Spirit whether that is just observing and seeing this bird that flies across the valley. These are constantly ways of connecting, they are always there. I don't think we truly understand that, I think that is one of the biggest purposes of life. To teach us that that portal is always available for us, but it takes a discipline to actually spend your life from a place of feel, rather than an intellectual place for me.....

Creating spaces for this emptying often contradicts the current processes of schooling, as identified by Leroy Little Bear:

Leroy: It seems that in our contemporary world, our kids, if that's who we are trying to teach, their minds are so full of trivia, you know with all the modern tech, modern technology, whether it's TV, iPods, movies, games, etc. Their minds are so full. They are so preoccupied, so that if we're going to learn with Spirit it means...we have to find a way to empty some of their minds out."

A tension between 'assigned roles' and experiencing one's spirit was also identified by Marie Battiste, as this conversation continued:

Marie: Is it emptying or refocusing? I would say we all have a lot of stuff we share, everything we carry becomes part of an awareness of experiences, some of which of we say, begin to say, this is who I am.

Leroy: Um hmm.

Marie: And yet that isn't who we are, it's what we selectively pick up in our lifetime...

Amethyst First Rider: And what is simplicity? I think that's when you sit with Spirit, you then are much more aware of Spirit, so Spirit then is manifested within you. And a big, long journey in a lot of ways is looking for Spirit, but you haven't found the ways to see a way to how it manifests itself. And then that's our identity, so a lot of our identity is looking for, I think, unknowingly that Spirit. But how we then have that Spirit sit with us.

I really think that when you are at the stage of letting go of the ego, then it's replaced with Spirit. So that, ego is finally sort of letting go and embracing I think, those values, in your value system. Letting go of the me, me, me and embracing value systems, cause values you know, as much as we pay lip service to the idea of values, you can't do them if you have ego.

And it's when you're able to let go of ego, then you can. So I mean it almost sounds like this is an old age awareness in us, in that we come in our older views and somehow in some of us, it makes us able to be much more grounded and all those words. What does it mean for young people to learn to Spirit, and is it possible for us to take this into younger ages? And look forward. I think if we quit, I mean I think the problem is we get really polluted, so we start polluting them with a lot of unnecessary knowledge, and so that's the emptying of the cup. If we get in already, begin to pollute their minds, then you leave that space open and begin to give them in the beginning, that sense of their identity, that sense of values, those sets of Spirit. .... Yes, yes, that's the thing that I think what happens, is that we're finding the self within gets so polluted with all the stuff that others are creating for themselves.

Marie: Yes

Amethyst : That you never get a sense who is inside of you...so that when we fail at a test [we fail] who you are. You know, when you have a traumatic moment it isn't going to define who you are ultimately. It's like a thing to work through. Some you ask the way and you recognize that everything has a teaching that comes from it. We just have to let the teaching emerge and not be taking that whole, and take your whole mind and go kill yourself. The most despairing moment in time, when people realize it is something to go through. And I think one of the most exciting things that I kind of clicked into, is which I think we hold on to until you realize you don't have to hold onto is this idea of roles. And assigned roles, parents, teachers, grandparents and those roles keep holding you from Spirit, because it is when you can learn or teach through Spirit, you're not holding on to it though, because that's not who you are. So many people's identity is around this idea of their role. Their role, but that's not really who they are, Spirit is who they are. And if we can let go of that role-playing, which all of us do, and we say I don't have to be mother twenty-four-seven, that's not, that doesn't define who I am. That doesn't define the Spirit of who I am. Then I think you come closer to really to feeling the Spirit. So we pile on a lot of, what [Leroy] is referring to as pollution, but they are also masks, roles, and then we start having to peel and let them go, and then we sort of get back to the idea of Spirit.

Nourishment was also a topic of conversation. The role of residential schools limited understandings of spirit as identified by one of the Elders in the latter part of this conversation:

MJ: ... I think I'd like to put it back to you for a moment, if there are things that came out of your conversations earlier today that would be worth following up on for this afternoon. And I know not all stories were told this morning, but I think what we might do is because we have a chance to have us all together here today is stay mostly in the large group and save more smaller group sharing for tomorrow. So if there are things that came up this morning that help us weave through those set of questions, we'll just let that sit and emerge. Are there any patterns that arise or any specifics?

Barb Frazer: Something I think I'd like to bring up what (Norma) said of 'feeding the spirit.' I've observed her children at mealtimes give a part of their food, whatever they have, and then it's put into the fire, and that is feeding of the spirit. You also feed the spirit good food from the land and with good thoughts as this becomes a way of life. That's what I worked my thesis around, my Masters project was on other ways of knowing and how knowledge like the process of going to pick berries is one way. Blueberries are what I offer to the spirit helpers. And that's on a different level, I don't know if it's a different way of approaching spirit. Anyway, feeding the spirit and thinking of giving that- a bit more thought. That's what I'm after.

Marie: Can I ask a question about that? I've always wondered about that, and if spirit is in another realm which is not a body realm, why would they need food?

Barb: It's by understanding. And please, those who have more knowledge can add to it. When the others leave to the other side, our loved ones, when they finally get on their life walk even in the afterlife, when they come to sit together they're waiting (not mating), and that food offering feeds and nourishes the learning spirit, it's not so much the food but perhaps it's that offering of food, I'm not too sure as to that but I know that we feed them and give them that life. And so our ancestors we remember them with our offerings when they are hungry. Like we're always told they're hungry when our deceased relatives come into your dreams and say, 'we're hungry', so then we feed them because they're doing spirit work for us on the other side. And so, it is that work you are acknowledging, when you go out picking berries, when you're on the land doing that work, that's hard work. So that's what is on my mind or in my heart and in my being when I am picking the berries. I think of how these berries will be used. When I'm making that offering and it's my most choice piece of whatever it is that I'm eating, the best, juiciest part, that's the one I give. So I think of all of those ancestors that have prayed way back, those that have walked in this Wanuskewin valley here, those are the ones that I'm feeding. So that physical offering of food also becomes and it turns into spirit food and when we smudge it, and we put it into the fire so that it becomes, we ask that fire to work for us to go and to feed. By smudging we are turning it into spirit. That's how I understand, as of last week.

Danny Musqua: What I understand, what Mushom told me about that is you feed those in need, you feed the poor, clothe the poor, look after the people that need special care, the handicapped, old people. In this way we make up the things they needed to do and couldn't do and plan to do. And Mushom would say 'make sure you reach out to those poor people around you, make sure you give'. And there are all kinds of opportunities for that to take place in everyday life, like going out there and participating in ceremonies is a way by which you can also help these people who need prayer. According to the grandfather they

can pray for you. They can pray for you but they can't pray for themselves. And so you can pray to them to help you to nurture them, at the same time through good deeds and good works. There's that place of peace that they, or that place of limbo in another state, I don't know what that state is, I've never been, I've never had the opportunity to understand these different states that the old people talked about. There's many different states of the seven levels of the spirits that come descending down to become human beings here and the seven levels of the spirit going back up. I've never had the opportunity to do that because residential school took that away from us and the old people died by the time I was sixteen, most of these old people. But that's basically that, the answer that my grandfather told me in you do good deeds, and when you feed the poor, this way you are feeding the people that they otherwise didn't finish their work. Some of them didn't do their work.

Recognition of the place of spirit, spiritual healing and plants was also recognized by Barb Frazer. She told a story of a young boy who, after seeing four doctors, was said to have 'lazy brain'. He went for traditional healing and it was discovered that his mother had been to a funeral four days before his birth and his spirit had left a void.

Barb: The reconnection ceremony was done and now it's like night and day for that little boy. And that little learning spirit is connected and no wonder he would get angry. Now, if I want any answers from the spirit world, I'll ask him and he'll think about it and go to bed. In the morning, he will tell me, tell me what it is that I'm supposed to be doing, and he brings that, he brings me that way of knowing.

Barb Frazer also talked at some length about the importance of plants in healing processes as well as the connection between the health of the spirit and that of the body, suggesting that "My ideal classroom would have drying racks and picking local medicinal plants of what is around to help detoxify the mind, body and spirit. It is a cleaning out."

She continued:

Barb: Part of what is fed cognitively to us, I believe must also, if we are to be healthy as learners, is to cleanse the body. If I am 99% water, that water needs to be healthy, my blood needs to be healthy, if I am going to be in any true state of healing and learning. So therefore these plants, those medicinal teas help to cleanse the 99% water I think is missing from the classroom.

To her, patterns were also important:

Barb: Finding the balance between rhythms and patterns, looking at patterns and finding those balances. Understanding the rhythms of those patterns that exist in energy and seeing all of those different rhythms. ... Understanding those patterns. That's family. That's when you go out on the land with family and see the bee doing its work, you see the water, you see the hydrology cycle, there's all those, the different sectors that come in. The northeast, and

between the directions, those points of knowledge too. Looking at the connectivity between all of those systems and how our health is so much a part of that in maintaining that knowledge base, in feeding that spirit, feeding your spirit could be knowledge based.

Earlier in the dialogue she also had spoken about the values of animals and many teachings that come from them. Sa'ke'j Henderson posed the question: "who is it that needs to ask this question?" which seemed to suggest that for those who live with spirit, the meaning of spirit need not be questioned so intently.

The connection to spirit was developed further in the following discussion that led into conversations about food and children's easy connection with spirit. This follows an earlier whole-group discussion about the importance of feeding spirits:

Amethyst: When Barb was asking about feeding it got me thinking about [my granddaughter]. [Grandfather] had named her [Apannisowaki], which means butterfly, because she has lots of energy and so we taught her, 'You know you have to feed your spirit. And she says, 'What do butterflies eat?' And 'Oh, you're very lucky because they go from flower to flower. 'I have to eat flowers?' 'Well, you can eat things made from flowers. And that's feeding your spirits. You can drink chamomile tea. There's lots of lavender, there's all these plants you can eat. It's that idea of connecting. Connecting to the plant life. And that she has a relationship to feed, and to connect with that.' And so she says, 'What's your spirit?' And I said, 'Bear.' And she said, 'I want to be a bear' 'Well then you've got to feed it berries. It *loves* all kinds of berries.' So now, every morning she eats blueberries. And she says every morning, 'I'm feeding Gaio.' And that's really the connections. They're so eager. Like we were saying, children are so open. They're not questioning why, they just say that feels good to do that, I'm going to do it. She's very proud when she thinks she's eating something that she things she is feeding that spirit. .... exactly what we were saying. They're the ones that have that knowledge and they remind you constantly. This is how we're supposed to connect. I'm connected, I'm connected. And that's the reward. We're reminded, there's that knowledge, we're opening these little bundles that we're hoping to nourish. .... So this idea of feeding spirit really has to do with that connection, with that relationship. In our tradition we also feed our relatives that have gone. Because, then we always maintain that relationship with those who have passed on. So we are reminded, don't forget them. They're part of the feast... and you are reconnecting with them even if they are not there.

I always get such a thrill when [name], and it wasn't really a matter of telling her, this is what it is, this is the definition of spirit, I just said, 'you're it, this is what you want'. And when you see, do you see that movement? This is your energy moving. That's all we had to

say. And then, you know, it was already there, they just show it to you more. And that's exciting. I keep thinking that she's growing up with spirit. I don't have to worry that she's going to have to look for it, because she already knows. She already feels it, she already knows what it is. I just hope nobody comes along and tries to impose something on top of that, you know. I'm really careful about what educational institution. I don't want her in no public school at this point because I don't want a certain curriculum forced on her. So that's sort of the process. It is feeding your spirit. Cleansing your spirit is really important. Renewal of that spirit is important.

Brian: So we don't necessarily need to teach that to them, they are accepting of it?

Amethyst: Yeah. They already know.

Brian: Even the curiosity. We don't necessarily need to arouse their curiosity. I think the key is that when kids come in this world, there is a natural curiosity to that. And this world is very curious to them. And so to me, it is more like keeping that alive, maintaining that. Allowing them the space for that throughout their entire life so that they always have that connection to spirit.

Amethyst: And not saying 'you can't say that, don't go do that, don't ask that question, or shoo.'

### **How do we teach/share this in schools?**

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With stories shared, the group moved on to address the second research question more explicitly: *How do we do this (engage with spirit) in schools?* Our desire was not to pin down a definitive answer, but use our own experiences of engagement as a jumping off point for ongoing discussion. In the context of the next two hours, we heard from five different participants.

MJ: [Leroy], I'm wondering if we could ask you to imagine for a little bit what it might look like to help students learn, or to be a teacher in a school where we are trying to open spaces, or create access points, or find portals, to help students find those openings. What might that look like. What could you imagine.

Leroy: give me a couple days [laughter].

MJ: Well, we've got an hour [laughter].

Amethyst: I had recently been involved in a discussion about developing a graduate school. The three main premises they made clear were as follows:

1. "One of the things we said the school would teach was spirit."
2. "Teach from the land."
3. "We would teach through dialogue so there's not this hierarchy, grade, marks, that kind of stuff."

She continued: “It was important that all had to come from that place. Education is terrible at wanting products. What is your product going to be? Our students. Just good human beings. That’s what.”

Another participant (Vicky Kelly) talked about the importance of development of the inner life of the teacher and attending to the inner life of the students. It was important to her that individual students really being fully seen, and known by both teachers and their parents, and that one “honour and make space for [the inner life of the teacher and of the child] in the classroom”. She also talked of the importance of nurturing our shared wish of becoming whole, and the value of experiential learning, as well as the value of art, creativity and the imagination fostered in particular by holistic programs like those of the Waldorf schools. *Really* watching and knowing the 'whole' child was central to her, by learning “to contemplate children well.” Also of significant importance was the notion of “the whole twelve senses, this whole is a wonderful thing that aids the educator, the physical senses, and the soul senses and the Spiritual senses.”

The following excerpt provides further elaboration:

Vicky: Now, and my question is what’s the mediums? If it’s outdoor education, experiential education, what does that really mean, what is that really as the methodology? I asked a very wonderful doctor, who is involved with this movement, called the Healing Education Movement. Within Waldorf Education, because part of addressing the Spirit is where teachers become somewhat healers to facilitate this becoming whole. That I think is our deepest longing. And we share that with children. So, I asked her what is in our modern times, with the modern children, what is the most important thing? And she said the senses are the most important thing, because the senses are so attacked in our times. And they are the thing, when you think of how you attend through your senses, and all of the disciplines around Spirituality, and the role of attention. This attending being, to call that attending being into its home, its body is the fundamental challenge in education today, because it is being shocked out all the time. And so I really ponder, what is it that we are supposed to be doing to call the spirit in, to bring the Spirit of children in and to nourish it? And you can see it when they are integrated and experiencing wholeness, you can see when their faces, you get that different kind of glow, you know when you are getting close to their learning spirit... I think it’s like tracking, to teach, to track you have to know, and you have to go through all that discipline to know and to so serve the tracking, that you could come close to the being, to their learning spirit. And I think education is like that. And we don’t read the phenomenology of children; we’re not really interested and therefore don't create spaces that invite their learning spirit in.

Another (Brenda Green) spoke optimistically about the importance of opening up “the boxes” at the upper administrative levels – a process that seems to be happening as new curricula are being

written. She also spoke of the importance of including curriculum writers in an open-minded, facilitated process, as opposed to “a disengaged process that doesn’t allow the other forces to come in to connect with the Spirit to talk about pedagogy, in the way we teach and how we engage with the land, and the sense of wonder and all the other living beings, and non living beings on this earth.” To her, it is important, “To begin to respect and understand what that [facilitated process] might look like,” as well as to keep seeking to find ways to “engage so that the Spirit can feel and find its place within each of our own areas, as educators and non-educators, too.” Together with one of the First Nations public school teachers in the group (Delvin), Brenda spoke of the importance of experiential learning and creativity. The importance of ceremony was also noted. As Delvin described, “Ceremony is like a signpost in the road. It tells you how to get to spirit... literally in ceremony you get to hear spirit, smell spirit, see spirit”.

### **What haven’t we talked about yet?**

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As we opened the day, I had posed the question, *What haven’t we talked about yet?* One Elder responded succinctly: What would the buffalo say? I have included the extended discussion that follows:

Leroy: [I will] ask you people, since I won’t be here tomorrow, the same question we asked these elders. And they gave us really colourful stories and so on. We asked these elders, if the buffalo was sitting amongst us as a participant, around this round table, what do you think the buffalo would tell us? And I guess part of the reason for asking the question, is in many ways when we are talking about education and the theoretical parts of, we’re coming at education very much from the theory part of it. And asking that question, what would the buffalo tell us, brings it home. As to what we need to do. And so, think of another Ojibwa brother, [name]. He was once asked by these students, I think at the University of Minnesota, if you are talking about traditional knowledge, how do we teach this traditional knowledge. And his response was, ‘tell them to go work and harvest some wild rice. And by doing that, doing the work, first a very simple act of harvesting wild rice, is going to bring on all this other knowledge you just have to know dealing with this wild rice’. So I guess it’s in that Spirit that I’m just throwing this out. So if the buffalo was sitting amongst us, what would the buffalo tell us?

This prompted a lengthy discussion about the role of the buffalo in the lives of Aboriginal Peoples, and ways in which people learn from and are nourished by the buffalo. One participant recounted a Blackfoot story about a young lover who followed the tracks of the buffalo to encounter the spirit world. He closed his comments with the following:

Delvin Kanewiyakiho: ...To me when you ask if the bison spirit is sitting here, what would the bison spirit tell us, Bison spirit is still around, just in a different place. And I don't know if he will come back through that conduit, to come back here. But certainly I believe that bison spirit still watches over us because he comes to visit us in his ceremonies, in our shaking tent. So to me paskwâwimostos, buffalo, says 'I'm here. I'm watching over you. I'm taking care of you.' So that's what I think Bison spirit would say.

Other excerpts from the conversation follow:

Brian: . . . of things that came to me was, when these questions come to me, I tend to ask how, what does the buffalo symbolize to me? And as soon as I pictured the buffalo, I see its tenacity, it has the ability to endure this place. The Prairies are very beautiful but yet, it is a very harsh place to live. It's a very, I believe if, that's the one thing that I've come to realize about the Aboriginal people, they had to be so integrated here, because if you didn't, you could not survive here. So, that ability to be connected is in your structures. It's there; it's in all of us. So, what the buffalo visual to me is that it's just letting you guys know it's time to lean into the wind. Keep leaning and don't let the wind blow you over. It's a matter of that tenacity, that knowing that you can overcome anything, the only reason it came to non-exist here is because we wiped it out. So there will still be in thousand, and tens of thousands, and hundreds of thousands of years out here, if it wasn't us. So the buffalo has an incredible tenacity, so if you're talking about a revolution, it's a great image of it, for it, because of that ability, well, really it's the natural cow of the Prairies. You never had to corral it, or water in the winter, never feed; it was made for a reason. And so I think it's trying to show you that this is the time for what you're doing. And an opportunity that you do have to be willing to do. And I've often heard that's what the buffalo will do; they will actually lean into the wind when it's coming up in the winters. They don't back away from it. So to me, that's what the image of buffalo is. Everything that comes to me, whether it be dreams or whatever. I don't look at the content or the actual visual aspect of it, it's what does it symbolize, it feel to me? And that's important I think, more than what is the content of it?

... later in the conversation

Leroy: I guess the reasons I kind of wanted to throw that out on the table is because sometimes, where do we begin, and I was seeing these buffalo over here, and so on. That's something that is very close to home, very much a part of us, lots of stories and so on. And as [name] would say, you start learning about that wild rice, you're going to learn lots of Science. I think same can be said about the buffalo, you learn lots of Science, if you studied with the buffalo, with that relationship, a large part of our relation to economy, if you want to put it in those words, material needs were met by the buffalo. And therefore all the stories, the songs, the ceremonies, so on, and back home, and I'm sure it's something similar, back home one of our most important societies, is the Horn Society, which is based on the buffalo. It's every year, there are ceremonies. It seemed like focusing on the buffalo would tell us a whole lot more.

Marie: Is that a bit because that time line, the ecology around the place where people live, and the spirits that were in place were the teachers. So the culture, language, and stories, all around us are within that web, within that, and so that place is learning from those Spirits. The culture and the concepts would be meaningful to those peoples, to those peoples who are always connected to that. You know we separate them now, the Science, and Art, and Spirituality, but they were together, not separated.

The discussion closed with an expressed concern from Leroy about the separation of subjects from each other, as well as students from teachers, in ways that limit creativity.

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The most consistent message that came through again and again was that we need to stop thinking. Clear our minds. Fill students with less information. We need to decolonize our minds, and education systems to allow for spirit to enter in its many different forms.

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Summary points include:

- Teach from the land; learning has to come from place.
- Teach through dialogue so there's no hierarchy, grade, marks.
- Attend to students being good human beings; see students for who they are.
- Acknowledge the multiple ways in which spirit can be engaged, and the multiple roles spirit can play in student learning.
- Include both explicit and implicit openings for engagement with spirit (e.g. art, story, songs, dances, drama, music, outdoor experiences, meaningful ceremony, reflective/meditative opportunities).
- Promote quiet non-thinking/non-cognitive spaces to learn through spirit.
- Engage, encourage, and make space for ceremony in meaningful ways so as to draw spirit into learning processes.
- Support explicit instruction on ways to engage one's intuitive knowing, one's learning spirit
- Include ideas from quantum physics and the notion that we are all energy.

Closing remarks: I try to write this closing section of the report, I keep stumbling, running up against dead ends, locks in my thoughts, and fingers. Time to go for a walk, where insights come. Two days later, my closing words became clear:

*An important aspect of decolonizing the academy requires opening spaces for students to engage with spirit.*

Now I turn the report over to the participants to finish, then close with a policy statement for consideration in the academy and the teaching profession in Saskatchewan.

## Participant Closing Remarks

Norma: First of all I want to Thank Creator for giving me the opportunity to live & share my daily life experience as a spirit on this Earth Walk. As well to be given the privilege to meet and listen for 3 days to such exceptional human beings who are my brothers and sisters. I am humbled to have been given the opportunity to share the little knowledge I gained, from living, learning from my parents, children, Elders, Teachers that have come to my circle.

My closing thoughts are that I believe in order to become whole again, we need to also address and integrate our spirit being as well with all the teachings that come with it, in the educational system. We can no longer pretend that spirit has nothing to do with the way we teach our children at school. Every one of us has the responsibility to instill the teaching, after all we are Spirit first living in a physical realm. We need to reconnect to the teachings of values, principles, natural laws that pertain to self, our environment, and universe. As the saying goes, “Elders open the door, but you enter by yourself. We may not always like the shape, color, or way the door opens and remember it is a door.”

Barb: Include land-based knowledge. Land-based knowledge is a heart and mind connection to all of the Mamawi-Askiy (all of the Earth) systems that flux and flow and it is this interconnected relationship we are to maintain. The plant world dialogues with the depths and folds of Mamawi-Askiy and I acknowledge this as a pure form of spirit-talk and that is the place I sit in contemplation when I am harvesting medicinal plants and foods. Spirit-talk is pure knowledge and how I connect to Mamawi-Askiy. I have come to this place of spirit talk through daily learning process of my senses and intuitively guided by the gift of knowledge that comes from the lodges, renewal ceremonies, dreams, ancestral teachings and from the silence. Creator is first in all that I do and this is a land-based way of being I have come to embody because it has a language that describes my purpose in this Earth-walk. Land-based thinking requires the holistic physicality of the mind, body and spirit that corresponds to the seasons and even the time of day of what my spirit is meant to do on this Earth-walk.

Marie: I acknowledge first MJ Barrett whose courage and tenacity in searching for ways to make Spirit more visible in our discourses, in our awarenesses, in our lives, and in our teaching and learning have enriched my thinking and being. I thank all the participants, many of whom continue to be my treasured teachers of Spirit, for their openness and generosity of Spirit, for which I am deeply grateful. This dialogue came at a right time for me as it has reinforced my own commitment to animate spirit in all my work and relationships. Sometimes we often forget about our need to engage Spirit in diverse processes of our lives. More importantly, in using this needed time, and sometimes intense consideration, in quiet reflection with my teachers about this topic, we are moving toward a decolonizing methodology, a form of theory and method which allows Spirit to help transform learning, teaching methods, classroom environments, and ultimately our relationships with each other, with the land, our cultural places and spaces, and to ceremony. Wela’liq. Thank you.

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## **Policy Statement re: Learning through Spirit Implications for the Academy and the Teaching Profession in Saskatchewan**

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### **Preamble & Context**

The Dialogue on Learning through Spirit aimed to provide the beginnings of a discussion about how educators might understand and engage with spiritual knowing in a wide variety of learning settings where students might be immersed in a range of Aboriginal, Western and occasionally, Eastern worldviews. In other words, the project provided a small sampling of what it might mean to engage spirit in learning. The project was deemed of importance to the Aboriginal Community through the work led by Dr. Marie Battiste in the context of the Animation Theme Bundle “Nourishing the Learning Spirit.” This work was supported by the Canadian Council on Learning through funding from Human Resources and Skills Development. The study concluded that nourishment and acknowledgment of, as well as engagement with spirit are critical to learning for both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Peoples. Furthermore, while there is a very wide range of ways in which spirit works, is accessed, talked about, and engaged with, the most common denominator for engagement with spirit is the opportunity to clear one’s mind and engage in a state of open, sometimes mindless, awareness.

It is engagement with spirit that is represented in the second of the “two ways of knowing” that First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples claim “will foster the necessary conditions for nurturing healthy sustainable communities” (CCL Aboriginal Success report, 2008, p. 3). These two ways of knowing have also been described as “two-eyed seeing” by Elder Albert Marshall (Eskasoni Mi’kmaq First Nation). The phrase “refers to learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing, and using both these eyes together, for the benefit of all.” Two-eyed seeing often involves “a weaving back and forth between the perspectives represented (Indigenous and Western) and not domination or assimilation.”<sup>2</sup> Fostering active engagement with and understanding of these two ways of seeing for students from all walks of life, supports a decolonized academy and a shared ethical space (Ermine et. al, 2004) that allows for conversation across epistemological and ontological difference.

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<sup>2</sup> Institute of Integrative Science and Health, ‘Untitled’, <http://www.integrativescience.ca/>.

## **Action**

Given that the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education mandate (to be released April 1, 2009) to include First Nations, Métis and Inuit content, perspectives and ways of knowing in all curriculum for all students, the following policy is put forward for discussion:

## **Policy Statement**

*In order to meet the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education Mandate to infuse Aboriginal content, perspectives and ways of knowing throughout provincial curricula for all students, it will be critical to engage students in course activities that support an awareness of the multiple manifestations of spirit in self, nature, and beyond. This means that:*

- Educators will need to acknowledge the multiple roles spirit can play in student learning.
- Causes(s) of the historical (socially constructed) split between humans and nature will need to be named and healed (Barrett, 2009; George, 2008; Rosak, 1995).
- Educational experiences will need to create both explicit and implicit openings for engagement with spirit.

## **Implications for the Academy and Teaching Profession in Saskatchewan**

### ***a. For curriculum and pedagogy:***

- Curricula must include opportunities to appreciate, engage in, and animate two-eyed seeing.
- Causes(s) of the split between humans and nature and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal epistemologies will need to be named and healed.
- Educational experiences will need to create both explicit and implicit openings for engagement with spirit.
- Acknowledge the value of two-eyed seeing<sup>3</sup>.
- Attend to students being good human beings; see students for who they are.

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<sup>3</sup> Offered to the Integrative Science program at the University of Cape Breton by Elder Albert Marshall (Eskasoni Mi'kmaq First Nation), two-eyed seeing "refers to learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing, and using both these eyes together, for the benefit of all." It often involves "a weaving back and forth between the perspectives represented (Indigenous and Western) and not domination or assimilation" ([www.integrativescience.ca](http://www.integrativescience.ca)).

- Acknowledge the multiple ways in which spirit can be engaged, and the multiple roles spirit can play in student learning.
- Promote quiet non-thinking/non-cognitive spaces to learn through spirit (e.g. art, story, songs, dance, drama, performance, poetry, music, outdoor experiences, meaningful ceremony, reflective/meditative opportunities, including formal forms such as yoga, Tai Chi, prayer, smudging, and religion, and non-formal forms such as quiet walks, exercise, directing intention, psychic connections, etc.).
- Engage, encourage, and make space for ceremony in meaningful ways so as to draw spirit into learning processes.
- Teach from the land; attend to learning from place.
- Teach through dialogue so there's no hierarchy, grade, marks.
- Support explicit instruction on ways to engage one's intuitive knowing, one's learning spirit.
- Include ideas from quantum physics and the notion that we are all energy.

***b. For faculty professional development:***

- Identification and acquisition of core knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples.
- Increased understanding of Indigenous worldviews (focus on community; relationality; holistic learning; everything is animate). These ideas are best understood via **both** experience and intellectual understanding.
- Increased understanding of Aboriginal pedagogies and androgies that nourish the learning spirit.
- Creation of an ethical space which enables cross-cultural conversations wherein Indigenous epistemologies are respectfully understood and supported.
- Engaging and extending theories of learning, growth and problem-solving beyond those associated with materialist understandings of the world (e.g. non-materialist neuroscience; energy healing processes; quantum theory). These theories provide conceptions of reality, which resonate with Indigenous world views.

- Development of trans-systemic theories, methodologies, approaches that go beyond Indigenous or Western forms of thinking and problem solving that offer new forms of knowing that bridge the gaps in forging Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing.

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## **Appendices:**

Appendix 1: Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Center – Canadian Council on Learning

Appendix 2: Letter of invitation

Appendix 3: Participant consent forms

Appendix 4: Schedule

Appendix 5: Overview of dialogue process

Appendix 6: Background Paper

Appendix 7: References

The Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre - Canadian Council on Learning

***Mandate of CCL and Purpose of ABLKC***

The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) is an independent, not-for-profit corporation funded through an agreement with Human Resources and Social Development Canada. Its mandate is to promote and support evidence-based decisions about learning throughout all stages of life, from early childhood through to the senior years. The Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (AbLKC) is one of five national centres of expertise established by CCL. The other centres are: Adult Learning, Early Childhood Learning, Health and Learning and Work and Learning.

The Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre has a Consortium of more than 100 organizations directly involved with Aboriginal people in identifying ways to strengthen learning outcomes among Aboriginal people. ABLKC's mission is to strive to understand learning processes, to identify effective and successful programs, processes, and outcomes that inform learning theory and practice, to identify barriers and gaps and to create a network and resource through collaboration with members on consortium (based in Nunavut, NWT and Prairies). It is led by two key institutions—the First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium, Calgary, Alberta and the Aboriginal Education Research Centre, University of Saskatchewan.

The Purpose of the ABLKC is to effect individual, community and institutional change in learning which recognizes Indigenous peoples' relationships to Canada, their relationships to place and which naturalizes Indigenous world view, experiences knowledge and perspectives.

***Cross Cutting Themes***

Cross cutting themes identified by the CCL add layers of complexity to increase the relevance of the foundational functions. ABLKC has added its own dimensions to acknowledge Indigenous traditions of knowing; the added points are italicized.

- Gender - male and female, *generational*, and how learning varies accordingly.
- Culturality - the context that culture provides for learning acknowledged.
- Literacy - the capacity that literacy (*Aboriginal languages and English language*) provides for learning acknowledged.
- E learning - the application and the appropriateness of E-learning for future capacity building among Indigenous people and communities acknowledged.
- French minorities - recognizing the French language influence among Aboriginal communities and understanding learning issues among them.

***Operational Principles of CCL -ABLKC***

- Focus on Research Priorities - relevant, evidence based, interdisciplinary.

- Striving for Excellence – innovative, exploratory, accessible data, meet Canadian Tri Council ethical guidelines and those developed by local Aboriginal entities.
- Respectful of Diversity – dignity of individuals and communities, inclusive and participatory, in partnerships with communities which respect cultural protocols, ethics and ways of knowing.
- Strategic Partnerships and Capacity Building – collaborative, bridge gaps between research and practice, use existing resources, focus on strengthening Aboriginal learning.
- Relevance- to place (relational).
- Consultation services – responsive, leadership on impact indicators and research directions, informative to the public.

### ***Principles (Beliefs, Values and Commitments) on Aboriginal Learning***

The following principles on Aboriginal Learning are a synthesis of commitments outlined in 06-07 ABLKC draft strategic work plan created from the approved business plan and the learning principles outlined in the foundational document entitled, CCL State of Aboriginal Learning Report 2005 (Battiste).

#### ***Holistic Approach***

- Aboriginal peoples view lifelong learning as holistic—based on spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical being—and vital to meeting their social, cultural, economic and political aspirations.
- Learning is a lifelong process that requires both formal and informal approaches.

#### ***Inclusive Approach***

- Land, the knowledge and skills in and from place, language and culture are all integral parts of the learning and education process among Aboriginal peoples.
- The work of the Knowledge Centre includes the perspectives of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis people regardless of where we live work and raise our children.
- Active involvement of Elders, parents and community is essential to building a successful learning continuum and healthy, resilient communities.
- Aboriginal people must actively participate in all aspects of education and curriculum development, including in what languages it is delivered.

#### ***Respectful Approach***

- The role of Aboriginal peoples across Canada in developing and controlling their own learning activities is recognized.
- The Knowledge Centre strives to identify evidence, knowledge gaps and inequalities for Aboriginal peoples in order to develop learning and research activities within ethical principles.
- The work of the Knowledge Centre is carried out with an emphasis on discourses of gifts, contributions, relationships, sustainability, drawing strength from,

honour, holism, balance and responsibility rather than the notion of difference, which perpetuates problems, pathologies and culturalism.

- Demonstrate respect for local community and cultural protocols on Inuit, First Nations and Métis lands and the intellectual property rights of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis people; respecting their diverse histories and contexts.
- Acknowledging that Aboriginal Peoples have their own definition and perspectives of what constitutes success.

### ***Themes - Animation Theme Bundles***

The Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre has identified the following six Animation Theme Bundles as the main areas of focus.

1. Learning from Place—explores issues around traditional knowledge, processes and practices drawn from diverse Aboriginal jurisdictions within Canada
2. Comprehending and Nourishing the Learning Spirit— explores the potential we have as human beings for learning and the impact culture and ‘location’ in life have on the capacity to learn as individuals and as groups.
3. Aboriginal Language Learning—explores the role of Aboriginal languages in learning and the impact of language on communities and cultures.
4. Diverse Educational Systems and Learning—explores how systems of learning can be adapted to diverse communities such as those in the far north, in rural areas, or urban settings, and the role of gender and generational learning.
5. Pedagogy of Professionals and Practitioners in Learning—explores pedagogical beliefs and practices of professionals and practitioners work with Aboriginal learners. How is Indigenous knowledge understood and delivered in curriculum and pedagogy? What constitutes successful pedagogy and practice to improve education for Aboriginal people?
6. Technology and Learning—explores how and when information technology and e-learning can be used to integrate cultural and language learning to ensure renewal of Indigenous cultures and language. How can e-learning embrace local community values? What are the limitations or barriers for e-learning among Aboriginal peoples?



Dear Colleague:

You are invited to join a *Dialogue on Teaching and Learning from Spirit*. The Dialogue will take place near Saskatoon, Saskatchewan from Sunday, May 25, 5pm to Tuesday, May 27<sup>th</sup> at 3:15pm. It is part of a research study intended to provide the beginnings of a discussion about how teachers might understand and engage with spiritual knowing within a variety of contexts where students may be immersed in Aboriginal, Western and occasionally, Eastern worldviews. The following questions will guide our conversation: 1) what does it mean to teach and learn through spirit/intuition? and, 2) what are some entry points that might assist in understanding what it means to learn and teach with or through spirit(s)?

Approximately 15 participants representing a wide diversity of perspectives (i.e. Indigenous, Western and Eastern worldviews; insights from the arts, quantum theory, psychology, education, physiology, traditional ceremony, traditional and other energy healing practices) will share and problem-solve with the intention of opening spaces for spirit to be part of student and teacher and student personal development and knowledge-making processes for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Among those involved will be individuals who can help make connections to and influence change in educational systems.

Your participation would include:

- Confirming your participation with Malvina Iron (research assistant).
- Travel to Saskatoon (if required). Expenses will be reimbursed.
- Reviewing the pre-Dialogue discussion paper in preparation for the event.
- Participation in the two-day Dialogue (see appended schedule).
- Reviewing and commenting on the draft report, including commenting on and editing sections of transcript specifically representing your input to the Dialogue.

Potential benefits of the study include opening space for spirit to be part of student and teacher personal development and knowledge-making processes, and supporting both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators to become more able to talk of and engage with spiritual knowing within K-12 and post-secondary school systems. The study may also provide

opportunities for developing deeper understandings, recognition for and validation of indigenous (and other non- or trans-rational ways of knowing) as well as creating more opportunities for students to develop deep connections to place and an associated respect for Earth. With your permission, we will be audio-taping the discussions to assist with writing the project report and follow-up papers, conference presentations, and to assist with influencing curriculum and policy decisions. Only M.J. Barrett, Malvina Iron and a transcriber will have access to the original audiotapes and your approval will be required for use of any direct quotations from the tape transcriptions.

This project is part of the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre's Animation Theme Bundle "Nourishing the Learning Spirit. The Centre's goals are to address information and knowledge gaps in Aboriginal learning; identify effective and successful programs, processes, and outcomes that inform learning theory and professional practice; identify barriers and gaps, and; create a network and resource foundation to improve Aboriginal learning. More detailed information on the Centre, its membership and activities may be found at [www.ccl-cca.ca](http://www.ccl-cca.ca).

We would be pleased if you can join us in this Dialogue and ask you to use the attached RSVP form to advise Malvina Iron of your interest and availability before April 7th, 2008. If you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact M.J. Barrett and more details will be provided.

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Science Research Ethics Board has approved this study on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the Behavioural Research Ethics Officer of the University of Saskatchewan, Curtis Chapman, [curtis.chapman@usask.ca](mailto:curtis.chapman@usask.ca) (306) 966-2084). Please feel free to email or make collect calls to the ethics office if you have any concerns.

Contact information:

**Researcher:** Mary Jeanne (M.J.) Barrett  
tel: 306-966-7633 fax: 306-966-7658  
email: [mj.barrett@usask.ca](mailto:mj.barrett@usask.ca)  
mail: Education – Curriculum, 28 Campus Dr.  
University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, S7N 0X1

**Research Assistant:** Malvina Iron  
tel: 306-975-0754 email: [malvinairon@hotmail.com](mailto:malvinairon@hotmail.com)  
mail: Education – Psychology, 28 Campus Dr.  
University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, S7N 0X1

Yours Sincerely,

M.J. Barrett

Malvina Iron

## CONSENT FORM: PARTICIPANTS

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You are invited to participate in a 2-day dialogue, which is part of a study entitled “**Dialogue on Learning and Teaching through Spirit**”. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

### **Researchers’ Contact Information:**

Mary Jeanne (M.J.) Barrett (assistant professor)  
tel: 306-966-7633  
fax: 306-966-7658  
email: [mj.barrett@usask.ca](mailto:mj.barrett@usask.ca)  
mail: Education – Curriculum, 28 Campus Dr.  
University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, S7N 0X1

Malvina Iron (Cree masters student)  
tel: 306-975-0754  
email: [malvinairon@hotmail.com](mailto:malvinairon@hotmail.com)  
mail: Apt. #1 424 10<sup>th</sup> St. E. Saskatoon, SK S7N 1G0

**Purpose and Procedures:** Your participation in the Dialogue would contribute to a research study intended to provide the beginnings of a discussion about how educators might understand and engage with spiritual knowing in diverse settings where learners may be immersed in Aboriginal, Western and occasionally, Eastern worldviews. The following questions will guide our conversation: 1) what does it mean to teach and learn through spirit/intuition? and, 2) what are some entry points that might assist in understanding what it means to learn and teach with/through spirit(s)/intuition?

Approximately 18 participants representing a wide diversity of perspectives (i.e. Indigenous, Western and Eastern worldviews; insights from the arts, quantum theory, psychology, physiology, traditional ceremony, traditional and other energy healing practices and educational leadership) will share and problem-solve with the intention of opening spaces for spirit to be part of student and teacher personal development and knowledge-making processes for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

With your permission, the conversation will be recorded and transcribed, and you will have an opportunity to edit or revise the transcript produced from these audio recordings as well as provide input into the draft report. Because of the size of communities involved in the study, there is a chance that the information the participant provides will identify them to others in the

community. However, you will be given a chance to revise (add, change or delete) your transcripts before any publications to ensure your anonymity, if desired. You may either choose to be anonymous and be identified by an alias, or use your own name in the research.

**Potential benefits** of the study include opening space for spirit to be part of student and teacher personal development and knowledge-making processes, and supporting both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators to become more able to talk of and engage with spiritual knowing within K-12 and post-secondary school systems. The study may also provide opportunities for developing deeper understandings, recognition for and validation of indigenous (and other non- or trans-rational ways of knowing) as well as create more opportunities for students to develop deep connections to place and an associated respect for Earth. There are minimal risks to participating in the study beyond disruption in daily routine and no negative consequence to participants for withdrawing from the research at any point during the research process.

**Risks:** The only known risks are minimal and *might* include disruption to my daily routine or loss of anonymity and confidentiality because of 1) the small community of participants – they may be able to be identified by their personal or professional community and 2) the fact that there is no way to control how other participants will use the information received and how much they share with others. The first risk is reduced by allowing for frequent breaks during the discussion and asking in advance about nutritional and any other special requirements; the second by replacing participants' names with pseudonyms (unless they request to be identified by name) as well as giving participants an opportunity to delete any information they would rather not have included and/or removing any identifying information from quotations. The third risk is reduced by creating an atmosphere of respect confidentiality and asking participants both on the consent form, at the beginning and again at the end of the dialogue to not share any information in any way that could put at risk the confidentiality of another participant.

**Storage of Data:** Unedited audio recordings and transcripts will be held in confidential locked cabinets of the primary researcher and in password guarded computers. Only the primary researcher, research assistant and transcriber will have access to the original transcripts. The information will be kept for a period of at least five years.

**Confidentiality.** Every attempt will be made to maintain the confidentiality of participants. Some loss of confidentiality may occur, however, because of 1) the small community of participants – they may be able to be identified by their personal or professional community and 2) the fact that there is no way to control how other participants will use the information received and how much they share with others. The first risk is reduced by replacing participants' names with pseudonyms (unless they request to be identified by name) as well as giving participants an opportunity to delete any information they would rather not have included and/or removing any identifying information from quotations and descriptions within the report. In the draft report and transcripts, all participants will be identified by pseudonyms. After participants have reviewed the draft report and transcripts, they may then decide to remain using a pseudonym, or be identified by name. This choice is made on an individual basis. The second risk is reduced by creating an atmosphere of respect confidentiality and asking participants both on the consent form, and at the beginning and again at the end of the dialogue to not share any information in any way that could put at risk the confidentiality of another participant. The researcher will inform the participants verbally and in written forms (on the consent letter) that while the importance of maintaining this confidentiality will be stressed, it is not possible to control the

actions of others in the group. Data will be reported in narrative form, through descriptive examples, quotations and notations of general trends. The invitation and consent letter clearly indicate the purpose of the study and make-up of the group.

**Right To Withdraw:** As a participant you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and any record of the information given during the dialogue sessions will be destroyed and deleted. This will not affect the relationship with the researchers, Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, nor with the University of Saskatchewan and their services.

**Questions:** If you have any concerns or questions at any time concerning this study, the primary researcher, M. J. Barrett, assistant researcher, Malvina Iron, or the ethic's office at the University of Saskatchewan can be contacted at the numbers provided.

I have read and understand the information above and I agree to participate in the focus group for the *Dialogue on Teaching and Learning from Spirit* conducted by M.J. Barrett and Malvina Iron. I understand the purpose of the project as stated and I understand that:

- a. I will need to review the pre-Dialogue discussion paper in preparation for the event
- b. I will participate in the two-day Dialogue in Saskatoon (see appended schedule)
- c. Transportation to the event, and food and lodging expenses during the Dialogue will be covered
- d. I do not have to respond to any questions I would prefer not to
- e. I will review and comment on the draft report, including commenting on and editing sections of transcript specifically representing my input to the Dialogue
- f. The information that I share during the dialogue will remain anonymous unless I choose to be identified.
- g. I understand that mutual confidentiality among the participants must follow to ensure confidentiality of all participants.
- h. The focus group will be recorded. The tape recorder may be turned off at any time I request it.
- i. The discussions will take place in English
- j. Unedited audio recordings and transcripts will be held in confidential locked cabinets of the primary researcher and in password guarded computers. Only the primary researcher, research assistant and transcriber will have access to the original transcripts. The information will be kept for a period of at least five years.
- k. A final copy of the report will be given to me upon its completion.

- l. I understand that there is minimal risk to my wellbeing through my participation, except for the disruption to my daily routine. I understand the level of sharing is completely up to me and my personal comfort level.
- m. I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and any record of my information will not be included in any reports, publications or presentations. This will not affect my relationship with the researchers, Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, nor with the University of Saskatchewan and their services.
- n. I have received two copies of this consent form, one for myself and one for the primary researcher records.
- o. *I understand* that if I have any concerns or questions at any time concerning this study, I can contact the primary researcher, M. J. Barrett, assistant researcher, Malvina Iron, or the ethic's office at the University of Saskatchewan at the numbers provided.
- p. *I agree* to have the interview recorded. \_\_\_\_\_(*initial*).

I, \_\_\_\_\_, from \_\_\_\_\_ have read and understand the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any times. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

If you have any concerns or questions at any time concerning this study, please feel free to ask at any point: you are also free to contact the primary researcher, Mary Jeanne Barrett at the numbers provided. University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board approved this study on March 13, 2008. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the Behavioural Research Ethics Officer of the University of Saskatchewan, Curtis Chapman, [curtis.chapman@usask.ca](mailto:curtis.chapman@usask.ca) (306-966-2084). Out of town participants are welcome to free to make a collect calls to the Ethic's office if you have any concerns.

Participant - Print Name	Signature	Date
Researcher (M.J. Barrett)	Date	
Research Assistant (Malvina Iron)	Date	



## Direct Quote & Potentially Identifying Data Release Form

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**Project Title:** Dialogue on Teaching and Learning through Spirit

To be signed after you have had the opportunity to review direct quotes or other data from your participation in the study that may reveal your identity, and is planned for inclusion in the final report, publications, conference or other presentations.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed my direct quotes, and any paraphrased portions of my contributions to this study that may reveal my identity. I hereby authorize the release of these specific materials, as edited by me. Please indicate your choices below by initialing in the space before each statement that applies, and filling in either your name or preferred pseudonym.

**Name or pseudonym (initial one):**

\_\_\_ I would like to change any identifying details (see attached edits) and would like to have my name replaced by a pseudonym. My preferred pseudonym is \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_ I would like to be identified by name (Print name here \_\_\_\_\_)

**Future transcript sections (initial one):**

\_\_\_ Not all of the dialogue was transcribed at this time. I am willing to have additional transcribed segments of the audio recordings included in future research papers and presentations without reviewing them in advance. In these additional segments, your choices above regarding anonymity will be respected.

\_\_\_ Not all of the dialogue was transcribed at this time. I would like to review any new quotations before submission to any future publication or use in presentations.

I understand that I may withdraw my responses at any time up until the report or papers are published, or presentations completed. I have received two copies of this direct quote/ potentially identifying data release form – one for myself and one for the primary researcher records.

Please return the form by \_\_21/03/2009\_\_\_\_\_ (day/month/year). After that time we will be incorporating your contributions in the final report.

\_\_\_\_\_  
YOUR SIGNATURE

\_\_\_\_\_  
YOUR NAME PRINTED  
DATE (DATE/MONTH/YEAR)

## Schedule

Theme: *Dialogue on Learning and Teaching through Spirit*

Dates: May 25 (Sunday) - May 27, 2008 (Tuesday)

Tentative Location: *Wanuskewin (pending completion of renovations)*

**Participants:** *First Nations and Métis and Non-Aboriginal educators, scholars, educational leaders and Elders – those who desire to continue to learn from holistic ways of teaching and learning. Those who wish to learn to develop and expand these insights.*

**Program Format:** *Both in the preparation and the unfolding, this event will be guided by spirit – thus exemplifying the pedagogy it is attempting to explore. As such, while the schedule and general program will be set in advance to provide a focus for the event, it may shift somewhat as the event unfolds.*

### **Sunday:**

**5 pm** - Opening, light supper, introductions.

**Monday:** *(there will be a mid-morning and mid-afternoon stretch and refreshment breaks)*

**9 am - Opening discussion:** *What does it mean to teach (and learn) with/through spirit(s)?*

### **Lunch**

**Monday Afternoon - Storytelling:** Openings to spirit. Sharing stories of individual experiences and understandings of spirit, focusing in particular on entry points which might be able to be shared in a variety of contexts (e.g. health care, K-12 and post-secondary education). (End – 4:15pm – time to relax, visit, and explore the trails)

**Monday evening:** supper                      5:30 pm

**Tuesday:** *(there will be a mid-morning stretch and refreshment break)*

**9 am - Teaching and learning through spirit.** Sharing points of connection or resonance that might open up the possibility of nourishing students' learning spirits. How might these entry points and ways of knowing be shared? (open discussion). Blocks for school systems. Openings in school systems. Appropriateness for school systems?

### **Lunch**

**Tuesday afternoon: Loose threads:** What further clarification would be helpful? What questions have emerged? Where to go next? What needs to happen? Suggest next steps beyond the report. Mentoring needs and possibilities; other loose threads....

**3 pm** - Thank you and closing.

*The Wanuskewin Heritage Park is on the west bank of the South Saskatchewan River. You may want to bring layered clothing and comfortable walking shoes.*

### **Establishing a Spirit of Community – A Place to Start**

Rita Bouvier

A dialogue is a way of talking which reveals, reflects, transforms and creates a web of relationships between the participants and the conversation. Through dialogue, participants explore what each knows and what they can teach each other. It is a process built on *trust* and *respect*, and promotes the group's ability to think together about a specific issue or topic. The conversation is inclusive. Assumptions are suspended (made explicit) to build common ground and understanding. It is not debate (competitive) or discussion (which often involves advocacy for particular results).

The purpose of dialogue is to achieve understanding and to go beyond any one person's understanding of a situation (and it does not necessarily have to end with consensus or an agreement).

The paradox is that dialogue is a quality of being and not a method.

The guidelines include:

1. Suspending judgment
2. Deep listening
3. Seeing others as colleagues
4. Placing the focus on the conversation, not on an individual's opinion or position.

Sources: ASCD, 1997. Diane Heacox, *Building Community Through Dialogue*; Peter Senge (1990). *The Fifth Discipline*. New York: Doubleday Currency; Paulo Friere. (1998). *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.; William Isaacs. (1999). *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*. New York: Doubleday.

## **Dialogue on Learning and Teaching through Spirit**

### **Background Paper**

#### ***Context Setting:***

*The Dialogue on Learning and Teaching through Spirit is a project funded through the Animation theme bundle activities of Nourishing the Learning Spirit Bundle under the lead of Dr. Marie Battiste, professor at the University of Saskatchewan. The Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (ABLKC) is a national centre under the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) funded by Human Resources and Social Development. CCL has a five-year mandate to examine learning across Canada, to identify promising practices and evidence-based life long learning, and report to Canadians on the state of learning in Canada. Following CCL's vision to be a catalyst for lifelong learning across Canada, ABLKC is one of CCL's five national centres in its third year of operation and has six thematic areas of work: Learning from Place, Nourishing the Learning Spirit, Aboriginal Languages and Learning, Diverse Educational Systems and Learning, Pedagogy of Professions, and Technology and Learning. This dialogue is a knowledge-sharing gathering event focusing on the role of spirit in a variety of learning contexts. Some of the anticipated results of our efforts will be a report which will be distributed to all participants and posted on the Canadian Council on Learning website, together with subsequent articles and conference presentations. I also anticipate that some of the information gathered will influence undergraduate teacher education at the University of Saskatchewan, and hopefully, on-going discussions at the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. At this point in time, the Ministry is committed to increasing First Nations and Métis ways of knowing in Saskatchewan Public School Curricula, and to having articulated a desire to move towards making them more central.*

#### **Coming to the project:**

Originally from Nova Scotia, I come to this work as a white woman who has always been in love with Land. In 1991, I attended a session at the ECO-Education conference in downtown Toronto. At that time I was a new teacher working in outdoor education, and although I had a sense that at least some of my teaching had to do with spirit, it was not clear to me what role spirit had in my life, and even less so in my teaching or in students' learning. In the 16 years since that time, I occasionally return to ponder one of the notes from my conference journal. Quoting a workshop participant, I scribbled: "is it our task to bring spirituality into the classroom, or more simply to let it out?" The assumption behind this statement suggests that humans are inherently spiritual beings, yet there are few instances of learning through spirit in public educational settings. I now have no doubt that spirit(s) can play a critical part in teaching and learning, and the educator's job is to find ways to nourish its presence in students' lives. This is particularly significant for many Aboriginal students where absence of attention to spirit in learning is not congruent with their traditional cultural practices and can create blocks to learning and success (George, 2008). The frequent focus on the intellect and the fears educators and other public service providers seem to have regarding teaching about spirit or religion in public institutions such as schools and social service agencies make it difficult to support learning through spirit(s). In the more holistic educational models of First Nations, Métis and Inuit learning, mind, body, heart and spirit are inherently assumed to be critical aspects of learning and learners, yet the secularization of North American culture has meant that educators are often unskilled in and uncomfortable with engaging spirit in most learning contexts.

As a new faculty member of the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan, I have been fortunate to bring my own interests in spirit(ual) education together with the work of the Animation Theme Bundle Nourishing the Learning Spirit. Together with Malvina Iron, Research Assistant, and Dr. Marie Battiste, Bundle Lead, we raise the following questions: 1) what does it mean to learn through spirit (e.g. intuition, instincts, received messages ) 2) what are some entry points that might assist in understanding what it means to learn and teach with/through spirit(s)/intuition?

As a result, this dialogue is intended to provide a venue and safe spaces for discussion that will help create opportunities for educators in a variety of contexts to consider how they engage spirit in learning, regardless of the worldview the educators and learners bring to the learning (e.g. Aboriginal, Western and other worldviews). We hope to find some shared understandings that can support our individual growth as well as to enlarge our discourses, tools, and approaches for engaging the learning spirit in our work. Our purpose is to find entry points for the participants of the dialogue to become more comfortable and skilled in letting spirit live in their own and learners' lives. The intent is not to push any particular religion, but rather to acknowledge the existence of spirit(s) and find ways to support the learning spirit for many.

Thank you for being with us in this journey.

To help facilitate the exploration of what it might mean to teach and learn through spirit(s), we have invited participants from a wide variety of traditions, with a number of different ways of working with and understanding spirit. These include First Nations Elders, yoga practitioners, plant healers, art therapists, students of science, quantum theory, spirit in human psychology and physiology, energy healing practices and educational leadership. The two-day format will allow time to develop some shared language about what each of us means by learning through and with spirit through our own particular paradigms and disciplines, as well as to imagine:

- 1) How educators (of various kinds) might learn to work through spirit,
- 2) How educators might speak about spirit in their classrooms or other learning context and in particular subject areas,
- 3) How students could engage spirit in their learning, and
- 4) How we might support increasing the possibility of using the word spirit and explain its meaning to learners in non-school based learning settings.

One of my imaginings is that we will develop a wide range of 'discourses' through which we can speak of spirit in order to reach "places of resonance" where the language makes sense to the learners we are speaking with. This means that educators in a wide variety of subject areas such as science, physical education, art or social studies can more comfortably talk about and engage spirit in their teaching and student learning processes. I imagine our conversation to be both philosophical and practical – to work towards ways in which we can 'let spirit' move in our bodies, hearts and minds as we move through ways to support learners of all kinds to connect with their own learning spirits. I imagine these different languages as "entry points" to engaging spirit in teaching and learning endeavours.

Some of the entry points could include: ceremony, prayer, visual art, dance, music, vibrational or transpersonal psychology, animal/plant/earth communication; energy healing practices, pendulum dowsing; herbalism, or animating quantum theory.

To guide our conversation, we have already, and will continue to ask for spirit guidance in structuring our conversations. We thus embrace a mix between structure and openness to what unfolds during our time at Wanuskewin Heritage Park, a special First Nations heritage site that animates the spirit energy from its historical and contemporary relevance and connections to those who visit this area. This may mean that the proposed schedule will shift somewhat as the two days unfold. We appreciate your flexibility in this.

The bundle work of Nourishing the Learning Spirit is seeking to develop evidence based learning and knowledge exchange with wide dissemination of its work through print, web, conferences, and other sharing events, and as a result, we are seeking to develop a product from this event that could be used to share knowledge in an aggregate form. To achieve this and other products from this event, we have sought your permission to use tape recorders throughout the dialogue process. These recorders serve as tools for capturing the conversations and enable the administrators of the dialogue to remain focused and in the moment rather than on notetaking. We hope that you will find this acceptable and at the session, we will have extra copies of the Ethics consent forms for you to consider and sign if you agree to the recorders (you may keep the copy sent with the invitation for your own records. Should you not want any portion of your contributions recorded or shared, we will respect your wishes in this regard and will offer ways to achieve this.

Over the two day period, we will include whole group conversations and also anticipate smaller groups or pairs taking a tape recorder off to a corner of Wanuskewin Centre, or out to the Teepee, to engage in conversation. Your words as recorded on tape will be our primary record of the event after everyone has gone home so please test the recorders before you begin! (We will help out if you have any questions).

Some of the following questions might further assist in your thinking as you prepare:

1. What are some experiences and stories that might assist us to understanding what it means for you to learn and teach with/through spirit(s)?
2. How do we “let spirit(uality) out”?
3. What discourses or language might be helpful to understand these processes? How do you understand or define these words?
4. What activities might be worth sharing either together or with students to demonstrate how spirit works?
5. And what are some of the words, the bodily movements, the activities that might be appropriate to let spirit be acknowledged and animated?
6. What entry points might assist in learning and teaching with/through spirit(s) in educators’ specific contexts?
7. How can Aboriginal peoples support others in accessing spirit in educational contexts?
8. By what means and with what resources can these teachings be animated?
9. Where and in what ways have spirit enhancing educational activities been found?
10. OTHER QUESTIONS??

### **Review of Current Research:**

Discussions about spirituality in education are not new, yet actual engagement with spirit within public educational settings in Canada (other than Catholic and other specifically denominational designated schools) has been limited. In particular, there has been little space for conversation about what it means, and how one might teach and learn through spirit. There is also (as far as I know) little opportunity to speak of animism as a world view in which anyone could engage. During the period of our Dialogue, our conversations will cross (and perhaps sometimes bump into) diverse beliefs, understandings and practices as we try to make some meaning of what it might look like to support teaching and learning through spirit where students and teachers may be coming from diverse worldviews.

The following “snapshots” may offer some entry points to catalyze your pre-Dialogue pondering. We welcome your contributions.

- Within many cultures, *music, visual art, dance* and other forms of creative expression have long been known to help provide access to spirit(s).
- Educational scholar Alexander Astin (2002) speaks of knowledge that comes through intuition or the mystical as *trans-rational knowing*, indicating that it is neither rational nor irrational, but transcends Western notions of rationality.
- Indigenous peoples around the world have a long tradition of coming to know through *received knowledge* acquired by individuals for the purpose of supporting individual and/or community well-being (Castellano, 2002). This communication with the Creator, ancestors, animals and/or plant spirits occurs through ceremonies, dreams, vision quests, and other community practices and protocols.
- *Black scholars*, led in part by Cynthia Dillard are beginning to place spirituality at the front of both their teaching and research efforts. To do so, Dillard (2003a, 2003b, 2006) calls for an “endarkened feminist epistemology” to be acknowledged as a legitimate way of knowing within academic teaching, learning and research contexts. To her this means speaking and writing from a worldview and paradigm where “one’s selfhood is understood and constituted as body, mind and spirit and affirmed in relation both to one’s group and to one’s Creator” (2006, p. 61).
- Spirit is often closest when *in nature*, and individuals of many different ethnic and racial backgrounds engaged in animism, shamanism and other nature-centred worldviews are contributing examples of how one might engage in communication across socially constructed human-nature divides. While she does not talk directly about spirit, educational philosopher Heesoon Bai (in press) argues that we need to re-animate our normally disembodied perception; this may require changes to “the very modality of perception” (np). Eco-theologian Thomas Berry (writing with Mary Tucker, 2006) suggests that in order to respond to ongoing issues of consumption and destruction of the Earth, there needs to be a recognition of the universe as both “psychic-spiritual” and “physical-material” (p. 57). Ecopsychologists (e.g. Roszak, Gomes, Kanner, 1995)

suggest many different ways to eliminate the disconnection from Earth which Glendinning (1995) refers to as the “original trauma’ that has been interwoven with subsequent traumas, such as child abuse or the genocide of indigenous peoples” (p. 41). From the standpoint of an anthropologist and pagan, Graham Harvey (2006) suggests that reconfiguring academic protocols to support conversations among academics, animists and animals might enable contributions of “non-human persons” to increase understanding of the world we share (?).

- *Outdoor experiences* in natural settings are often considered a place of spiritual insight (Astin et al, 2004) Yet in the context of increasing urbanization and elimination (or non-existence) of outdoor education experiences, students are seldom provided with opportunities to learn in or even become comfortable in natural settings. Louv (200?) speaks of this as “nature deficit disorder”.
- Deliberately speaking about *engaging spirit(s) in (academic) research methods* is another area of relative silence. The understanding that important knowledge comes from the world of spirit(s) is not new to Aboriginal peoples, but the idea is considered rather radical if actually employed by researchers in the context of academic research (see Jordan, in press; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Including received knowledge in research texts has been the subject of much ethical discussion among indigenous communities. At the same time, there is both increasing demand for (Dillard, 2006; Rendon, 2000; Shahjahan, 2005), and some explicit acknowledgement of (e.g. Barnard, 2007; Barrett, in progress; Cole, 2002), the important role spirit(s) can play in the construction of knowledge for both indigenous and non-indigenous scholars.
- The notion of *energy* being central to all things is an idea that is closely related to, and often conflated with spirit. Mark (2002) puts it this way:
  - “Einstein, while passionately studying physics, discovered what sages have been saying for thousands of years: that everything in our material world, animate and inanimate, is made of energy. We have come to learn that from galaxies to atoms, from bodies to thoughts, all things are energy fields of varying degrees of permanence, power, and clarity” (cited in George, 2008, p. 5).
- *Energetic healing* practices such as Reiki and therapeutic touch live at the border between science and spirit. Kam Yuen (developer of the Yuen Energetics) talks about this energy, and the shifts that can be initiated through his method, as being quantum level shifts. Others are more deliberate about assuming the role of spirit in healing.
- In Western contexts, work with *plant and other nature spirits* (M. Hepburn, personal communication, at the Sanctuary for All Species; D. McLean at Findhorn; P. Montgomery, Partner Earth Education Centre) as well as animal communication (e.g. Smith, 2004; Williams, 2005; Jensen, 2002) exists, but is frequently kept on the margins

in much of Western culture, and even moreso, in public educational settings. Perhaps it is because as ecofeminists and those in animal studies point out, acknowledging the possibility of animals and plants as having communicative intelligence would mean disturbing the dominance of Western science, rationality and knowledge systems as the primary ways of knowing. It might also disrupt the dominant position of both humans and Western culture(s).

The field of *transpersonal psychology* (e.g. Hunt, 1995) supports the achievement of knowledge acquired through mystical or other kinds of experiences that access levels of consciousness other than that with which we usually create and obtain knowledge. Some time ago, psychologist Carl Jung pointed to the intersection of spirit and the unconscious, yet it is at “this juncture that many colleagues of orthodox psychiatry and academic psychology part company with Jung, considering his taste for the spiritual and mystical to be unscientific, misleading, and even dangerous” (O’Murchu, 2004, p. 147).

**How then, do we nourish the learning spirits of indigenous and non-indigenous students?**

**We welcome your contributions of music, prayer, poetry or other practices that might support our own engagement with spirit throughout the Dialogue.**

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