Synthesis Report of the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre's Literature Reviews: Responsive Educational Systems

ABORIGINAL LEARNING

Knowledge Centre

June 2009

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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), Calgary and the Aboriginal Education Research Centre (AERC) College of Education, University of Saskatchewan.

The AbLKC is guided in its work by a consortium of more than 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 Lethbridge, AB*
2. *Nourishing the Learning Spirit – Dr. Marie Battiste, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan*
3. *Aboriginal Languages and Learning – Dr. Leona Makokis, Blue Quills Community College, St. Paul's, AB*
4. *Diverse Educational Systems and Learning – Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (Ted Amendt)*
5. *Pedagogy of Professionals and Practitioners – Dr. J. Youngblood (Sa'ke'j) Henderson, Native Law Centre, University of Saskatchewan.*
6. *Information Technology and Learning- Genesis Group, John and Debbie Simpson, Yelllowknife, NWT*

From the start, the AbLKC recognized that the reporting and monitoring function of the Canadian Council on Learning required a dialogue with Aboriginal Peoples 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 the three Holistic Learning Models (herewith Models) with shared philosophical values and principles. It is the view of the AbLKC that the iterative Models which can be found at our website 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 an understanding of 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 fragmented and partial, often unclear and largely undefined, and may not always be 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, *Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre: Synthesis Report on Responsive Education Systems:* (English only) is available electronically on CCL's Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre website at www.ccl-cca.ca/aboriginallearning and the AERC website

http://aerc.usask.ca and at the FNAHEC website http://www.fnahec.org/ . An executive summary is available in both English and French Languages.

Cite this document in the following format:

Kovacs Patricia Author (2009). *Synthesis Report of the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre's Literature Reviews: Responsive Educational Systems*. 978-1-926612-33-1. University of Saskatchewan, Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, Saskatoon, SK and First Nations and Adult Higher Education Consortium, Calgary, AB. Retrieved day/month/year from (give website address of http://aerc.usask.ca or fnahec@fnahec.org).

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The focus of the work of the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) through the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (AbLKC) has been on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis life-long learning. According to Elder Danny Musqua, the foundation for Anishenabe teachings on learning is built on the notion of life as learning. As he aptly notes, learning is the purpose of the life journey that begins at birth and continues throughout one's lifetime. In that lifetime, before and beyond, spirits join in the learning journey, providing inspiration, guidance and nourishment to fulfill the purpose of the life journey (Battiste, 2007). Lifelong learning unlike formal education experienced through a structured educational setting, does not have a time span attached to it.

The AbLKC organized its work undertaken by its six animation theme bundles: *Learning from Place; Nourishing the Learning Spirit; Aboriginal Languages and Learning;*
Diverse Educational Systems and Learning; Pedagogy of Professionals and Practitioners; Information Technology and Learning into three macro intersecting emerging thematic areas; *Naturalizing Indigenous Knowledge, Responsive Learning Systems*, and *Reclaiming the Learning Spirit*. Three synthesis reports have been commissioned for each of the thematic areas drawing on the bundles' written submissions and literature reviews that represent a culmination of their work over a three year period (2006-2009). The purpose of this synthesis report on Responsive Learning Systems is to present key emerging principles and values, promising practices, models and programs within the educational systems across the country, which support Aboriginal lifelong learning. The report is an integral and complementing part of the other two synthesis reports on Naturalizing Aboriginal Knowledge and Reclaiming the Learning Spirit.

A limitation of the literature reviews conducted by the theme bundles was the omission of the important work occurring through community based institutions of adult and higher learning; thus this synthesis paper makes only a few references to the work of these indigenous institutions. It would be important in future works to review the impacts of these institutions and to learn from their promising practices.

The report is intended to support the work that strengthens Aboriginal lifelong learning for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) learners. The identified promising practices presented help to identify what some responsive educational systems have contributed to Aboriginal learning and provide foundations for recommendations for action to effect change to governments, institutions communities, and individual learners.

INTRODUCTION

First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI), in all colonized territories, share common experiences that are often very different from other student populations struggling in educational systems. The legacy of Aboriginal historical experience is least understood in Canada, yet this history is a critically important foundation for all Canadians to accept and value Aboriginal principles of lifelong learning. The history shares how First Nations and Canada's first settlers entered into treaties from which Canada was imagined into reality. It also offers the colonial history that disenfranchised Aboriginal peoples and created conditions, hierarchies, and powers that served some, while leaving First Nations, Inuit and Métis with little. Today it is critical to understand this to fully realize what barriers that hinder opportunities for FNMI learning. The denial of Aboriginal distinctiveness, the removal of children from families, the severed links between culture and spirituality, the erosion of languages, the undermining of traditional leadership, the denial of political rights and the right to self-determination are all factors that contribute to low educational achievement (Cappon, 2008). Along with low educational achievement, the results of this historical experience are reported in statistics and documents that further highlight among Aboriginal communities poor economic and living conditions, high suicide, unemployment and incarceration rates, and poor health (Berger and Epp, 2006). However, these statistics and reports often do not offer the contexts under which these conditions evolve, the diminished resources communities and schools receive that are part of the Canadian governmental policy and practice, and the strengths and assets of these communities that can be sources of their future growth and enhancements.

While the social and political history of Canada is evolving, curriculum, teacher training and system practices continue to operate from Eurocentric foundations (Anuik, Battiste, and George, 2008). The work of the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (AbLKC) through the support of the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), seeks to contribute to the understanding of Aboriginal learning, systems of learning, and promising practices that contribute to improving learning. A partnership with Aboriginal people and organizations, CCL, and the AbLKC has resulted in the development of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit holistic *Lifelong Learning Models* that illustrate the priorities and foundations for learning from an Aboriginal paradigm. The *Learning Models* can be used to monitor successful learning, as a framework to plan for successful learning, and in discerning what is, indeed, a promising practice. The *Learning Models*, along with current research conducted by the AbLKC, are used within this report to identify key emerging principles and values of promising practices within responsive learning systems. They are discussed from an early learning, K-12, and post -secondary education perspective and include examples of models and programs that support lifelong learning as examples. These principles and promising practices supporting Aboriginal learning and learners include:

- **Nourishing the Learning Spirit**
- **Culture/Language Programming**

- **Indigenous Knowledge as a Part of the Curriculum**
- **Holistic View of Measurement and Success**

- **Engagement of Community, Parent, and Youth through Relationships**
  - **Mentorship Programs/Transition Supports**
  - **Role of the Professional**
  - **Partnerships as a part of Governance / Policy Development**

EMERGING PRINCIPLES AND PROMISING PRACTICES SUPPORTING ABORIGINAL LIFELONG LEARNING AND LEARNERS

NOURISHING THE LEARNING SPIRT

The silence on spirituality in the classroom has left a gap in learning which reduces education to the mind and skills and removes the factor that fuels our passion for our work, love and meaning making (Battiste, 2007). Attending to spirituality is not about discussing spirituality explicitly or pushing a religious agenda; it is about the awareness of one's wholeness and interconnectedness. It is about creating an environment or space where people bring their whole selves, their stories, their voice, and their culture to their learning (Battiste, 2007). Attracting the learning spirit comes from interaction within place, from the community, from experience, from interaction with the natural world, from ceremonies, relationships with Elders, stories, and learning through the physical, spiritual, and Indigenous creativities (Sterzuk, 2006).

Everyone is made up of four distinct parts—heart, mind, spirit, and body. Spirit-gravitating experiences contribute to learning in significant ways and they have a place in formal educational systems and life-long learning. George (2007) references Orr (2000) who acknowledges Indigenous icons such as the medicine wheel noting "the medicine wheel places the spirit at the center of the knowledge process and seeks balance between its four dimensions rather than privileging any one form of knowing…." To focus only on the academic mind neglects to account for diverse epistemologies and exhibits a bias toward western ways of knowing (Anuik, Battiste, and George, 2008). We need to balance the cognitive and physical world in which we live to the inner spiritual and emotional journey of our lives.

Learning from place is an important source of knowing and being human. It feeds us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Certain events, patterns, cycles, and happenings occur at certain locations and are readily observable including animal migrations, cycles of plant life, seasons, and so on. The understanding that spiritual presence(s) can occupy a particular place provides learning which is qualitatively different from learning as it is currently conceived in most Canadian classrooms. One of the misconceptions we often

encounter is the notion that sacred places are few and far between. In actuality, anywhere we happen to be in spirit is sacred (Heavy Head and Blood, 2009). Learning connects learners to place. "Pedagogy of place demonstrates respect for diversity of cultures and provides a focus on common human needs and aspirations." (Battiste and Henderson 2008)

Nourishing the Learning Spirit within an **Early Learning and K-12** context builds self-confidence, self concept, and self esteem, while teaching early learners about a sense of belonging, pride, respect and responsibilit**y.** Nourishing the learning spirit also involves an appreciation of everyone's ways of communicating which results in students and instructors teaching and learning as equal partners (Ball and Pence, 2006). **Nourishing the Learning Spirit** from a **Post -Secondary** perspective respects learners as whole people, paying attention to spirit, heart, mind, and body, and can help learners cope/heal/accept/move on from multiple forms of trauma, violence, oppression, and addictions**.** The migration of FNMI students to urban areas often brings a number of challenges including housing shortages, lack of quality childcare, and transportation issues (Friesen and Friesen, 2005; Prokop and MacDonald, 2004). In addition students experience the new stress caused by the loss of family ties and community support. A responsive post secondary educational system recognizes and works in ways to support students in all areas.

CULTURE/LANGUAGE/PROGRAMMING

Culture in its most fundamental form and structure is a collective agreement of the members of a society, linguistic group, and/or nation regarding it's value system and the nature of reality. It includes prescriptions and circumscriptions about what is and is not acceptable (First Rider, 1994). The bundles' literature reviews discuss the importance of including cultures/languages as an honoured and celebrated foundation for learning; "our languages guide us in our relationships…" (Makokis, unpublished). In order to fully understand and participate in FNMI culture, the language of that culture must be understood and utilized by its people (Battiste, 2002). Henderson (2000) adds that Indigenous languages open the gate to Indigenous knowledge and heritage, the context for the sprouting of the spirit and its release into the learning journey. Individual learning spirits thrive in environments where they have the opportunity to engage in ceremony and language teachings (Goulet 2001; Tunison 2007; Preston 2007; Fulford, 2007).

Promising practices regarding culture/language programming within **Early Learning, K-12 and Post Secondary** educational systems often include Elders as instructors within regular programming, as well as within the specific cultural programming relevant to the local FNMI community. The Government of Nunavut's 2002 Bilingual Education Strategy is one example of a response to the call from community members for instruction in traditional languages in the formal education system. They recognize Inuit

languages and their use as more than "a 'transition' language utilized until English competency is achieved." (Alyward, 2007)

Each of the aforementioned *Holistic Lifelong Learning Models* share concepts of learning that are characterized as holistic, lifelong, experiential in nature, rooted in Aboriginal languages and cultures, spiritually oriented, communal activity, integration of Aboriginal and Western knowledge (Cappon, 2007). Each of the *Models* illustrates a fundamental relationship among the self, family, community and nature that guides learning and protects communal values, structures and foundations leading to optimal condition for learning. The *First Nations Learning Model* is characterized by a tree that describes how learning is derived from and through the natural world, language, traditions and ceremonies. A cross-sectional view of the living tree within both the *First Nations Learning Model* and *Métis Learning Model* are used to represent the learning rings of the individual. At the ring's core of the *First Nations Model* are the four dimensions of personal development (spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental) through which learning is experienced holistically. The *Métis Model* represents conditions that nurture lifelong learning in the roots of the tree as including social, physical, economic, and spiritual well-being. At the trunk's core are the spiritual, emotional, physical and mental dimensions of the Métis self and identity. The *Inuit Model* describes the "Sources and Domains of Knowledge": culture, people, and *sila* (life force or essential energy), as well as their sub-domains including languages, traditions, family, community, Elders, land, aninmals and the environment. The *Learning Models* can be accessed at: http://www.ccl-cca.ca.

INDIGENOUS KNOWLDEGE AS A PART OF THE CURRICULUM

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) represents the accumulated experience, wisdom and know-how unique to nations, societies, and or communities of people. It represents both a theory of being and a methodology (Atleo, 2004), a validation process that speaks to how we validate sensory intake so that a person can claim, "I know." (Battiste and Henderson, 2008) Systemic and holistic inclusion of IK in practice and curriculum is a recommendation that appears consistently in literature, not just for Aboriginal learners. The Saskatchewan provincial First Nations and Métis Education Policy Framework states:

> Integrating First Nations and Métis ways of knowing and traditional pedagogy into the Saskatchewan education system benefits both students and teachers by engaging participants in a relational understanding about the similarities and differences between First Nations and Métis and non-Aboriginal worldviews. Learners may deepen their understanding that worldviews are integral to the ways all learners experience, engage, participate in, and contribute to society.
> (*Inspiring Success*, 2009, p. 8)

It is significant that when IK was systemically and holistically included into school's practices and programs (Cadwallader 2004), student achievement improved (Snively and Williams, 2008; Banhardt and Kawagley, 2005; Kanu, 2005; and Pattniak, 2005). While improvement in student outcomes is an important feature of why one would include IK, it is not the only important consideration for individuals, families, communities and their social identity, political and community self-determination, and their survival on the land are also critical to their future successes. In order to support IK, one needs to attend to Indigenous foundations of learning which include: a holistic worldview (Hill, 1999); a recognition that we are each part of Creation (Suzuki, 1999); an understanding that we each have a purpose for being here and the Gifts given to us from the Creator are to be used for fulfilling that purpose (Battiste, 2007); an appreciation that everything is/has Spirit/Energy and that we need to be mindful of how this energy influences ourselves and learners; (Hill, 1999) and an acknowledgement that the learning spirit is nourished by engaging the learner in relevant, cultural programming (Cajete, 2000). Attending to the individual learning spirit then is building a strong foundation for the other aspects of learning.

Curriculum that includes Indigenous Knowledge also strengthens cultural identity and self-esteem and demonstrates to students that what they are learning at school is part of their lives. By learning from both Western and Indigenous ways, students are not required to change their cultural identity (Aikenhead, 2002) or leave their identities at the door as they have had to do in the past. **Indigenous Knowledge as a Part of the Curriculum** from an **Early Learning** perspective focuses on identity through curriculum that is centered on the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual development of the child. This holistic perspective of learning is supported with the inclusion of Elders who offer attention to spiritual traditions that help children appreciate their own individual growth. Elders also provide guidance in effective childrearing practices (Eni, 1998). **Indigenous Knowledge as a part of the curriculum** from a **K-12** perspective includes integrating Aboriginal content, perspectives, and ways of knowing into the curriculum to provide opportunities for all children to learn about lands, tradition, history, worldviews, and different value and belief systems. Students engage with the content of their courses by seeing subject matter from their own point of view (Nunavut Sivuniksavut, 2001), while for others it is about acknowledging the knowledge that comes from the land where they live and the people who have cultivated that knowledge of respect for all things. Exclusion of cultural knowledge and teaching from only a Western perspective continues the assimilation of Aboriginal people (Kanu, 2005). Systemic initiatives that seek to integrate IK into school curriculum and educational systems play a key role in contributing to and maintaining equitable educational opportunities for FNMI students in Canada.

An integrated curriculum also provides a venue to increase student understanding of racism. "…most Canadians believe that colonization and racism are issues of the past when, in fact, they have become the biggest challenges within the system of education today." (Battiste and McLean, 2005). Racism limits the possibility for individual and

collective action to benefit all students. Acknowledging the role and history of racism and the inequities in Canadian society and the way these affect relationships between communities is critical to cross-cultural work (Seidl, 2007). A full discussion on racism exists in the AbLKC synthesis report *Reclaiming the Learning Spirit* (Ireland, 2009).

Indigenous Knowledge as a Part of the Curriculum as a promising practice for **Post-Secondary** systems includes IK as the basis for the development and design of courses, along with the provision of resources that contain FNMI perspectives. The inclusion of FNMI culture, values, and educational pedagogy into content delivery is fundamental to the program's success. Responsive systems are those which build upon the needs of Aboriginal Peoples and their communities. Therefore, whenever possible, course content should be connected to relevant issues reflected within local Aboriginal communities (Friesen and Friesen, 2005)

The *Learning Models* can be used as a starting point or template for curriculum development and the inclusion of IK. It should be noted that the *First Nations Learning Model* reveals both Western and Indigenous Knowledge as complementary and a needed source of learning. The tree's extended branches depict the development of these experiences, giving equal importance to formal and to informal and experiential learning. The *Inuit Learning Model* also shows the importance of students being exposed to both Indigenous and Western Knowledge and learning practices, as depicted by the two colours of stitching along the rim of the blanket.

HOLISTIC VIEW OF MEASUREMENT AND SUCCESS

Responsive education systems adopt a holistic view of measurement and success. Classrooms are not viewed as the only site where cognitive and intellectual development occur (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007), and standard assessments are not the only way to measure achievement. A holistic view of assessment recognizes that success is more than a measure of quantitative indicators on standardized assessments, or retention and completion rates, but includes learning that engages the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional dimensions (Cappon, 2008). When students are faced with only a Western world view of learning and success, many FNMI students find themselves forced to choose between three problematic strategies for coping: (1) students can adopt a western world view and abandon their Aboriginal values and ways of knowing (Jegede, 1995; Maclvor, 1995); (2) students can acquire enough surface knowledge of the material presented to achieve a passing grade without acquiring a meaningful understanding of the concepts, thus avoiding potential threats to their Aboriginal identity (Larson, 1995; West and Pines, 1985) or; (3) students can avoid learning and accept the consequent failing grades. Ideally, all valued goals of schooling should be measured and monitored. When educational systems measure only a narrow range of school subjects, excessive emphasis is placed on those few school subjects. A result is that other valued outcomes from the physical, emotional and spiritual domains are given lower priority (CCL, 2005).

No holistic framework exists for measuring progress in Aboriginal learning across Canada. The *Lifelong Learning Models* provide the basis for this national framework (Cappon, 2008). The *Learning Models* shift the focus from learning deficits relative to non-Aboriginal standards to a holistic approach that recognizes and builds on strengths and assets of Aboriginal communities on which to build success in local terms (Cappon, 2008). Each of the *Learning Models* describes learning opportunities in both formal and informal settings such as in the home, on the land, or in the school. The *Learning Models* identify the relationships that contribute to Aboriginal learning, which is seen as a first step towards the identification of indicators needed to measure progress.

Holistic view of Measurement and Success from an **Early Learning** perspective revealed that both the academic/cognitive and the social/behavioural skills that children bring into the classroom affect learning outcomes subsequently assessed during the early years of schooling. Academic/cognitive skills include general knowledge, intellectual development, language development and skills, literacy, numeracy, perceptual motor skills, attention and work habits, social/behavioural skills include assertiveness, leadership, independence, problem behaviour, peer relations and social competence (Paro and Pinta, 2000). **Holistic view of Measurement and Success** from a K-12 perspective asserts that learners must be given the opportunity to contribute to their own definition of what constitutes success. Chandler and Lalonde (2004; 2005) and Zacharias (2006) argue that "learners must be valued as equal partners in a process" (p.26). As explained by Louise Legare, an instructor at the Indian Teacher Education Program at the University of Saskatchewan, the assessment of Aboriginal students incorporates a dimension of self-reflection and self-growth, which is an extremely personalized process, manifested within the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical realms of each student (L. Legare, personal communication, February 4, 2008). A **Holistic View of Measurement and Success** from a **Post-Secondary** perspective is explained by Hill, (1999) "the Aboriginal concept of accountability in education is much broader than simply meeting the needs of the adult learner, the institution, and society as a whole. It includes learning to be accountable for the impact that our human activity has on the earth and beyond" (p. 123).

ENGAGEMENT OF COMMUNITY, PARENTS AND YOUTH THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS

Literature stresses the importance of building respectful and inclusive relationships with communities and parents as a part of responsive education systems and practices that encourage student achievement and positive learning outcomes (Goulet, 2001; Cadwallader, 2004; Smith, 1999). As Ignas (2004) explains, "…Educational research is clear: improvements in educational outcomes are connected to valuing Indigenous and

minority students' cultural context and their communities' local level knowledge" (p. 49). Our relations, including our families, Elders, and communities need to participate as teachers to impart their lessons across the curriculum and outside of the classroom George, 2007). Relationships need to be developed to ensure all are able to contribute to the organization and implementation of initiatives that seek to address the needs of FNMI students within an educational system.

Each of the *Learning Models* discusses the importance of the engagement of community through relationship showing a clear connection between community well-being and individual learning. The roots of the living tree illustrated in the *First Nations Model* emphasize the importance of relationships with the land, family, community, ancestors, nation and one's language, traditions and ceremonies. The community's well-being is represented by the growing, falling, decaying and growing cyclical leaf cycle. A community's well-being nourishes its roots and, in turn, the individual's learning cycle. The *Métis Learning Model* represents the intergenerational knowledge and values that are transmitted through the family and learning community by two rings surrounding the core of the tree. Extending from the trunk are the branches-"Sources of Knowledge and Knowing" such as self, people, land and language and traditions. The *Inuit Learning Model* also depicts the linkage between Inuit lifelong learning and community well-being. The model uses a stylistic graphic of an Inuit blanket toss and a circular path to portray the Inuk's learning journey and its connection to community well-being.

The AbLKC's literature reviews affirm that relationships with parents and community members need to be developed to engage the community's resources, meet community needs, and incorporate their visions. Engaging Elders and traditional knowledge keepers supports both programming and students while acting as cultural anchors and guides. In order to encourage parental engagement, educational systems need to demonstrate a desire to listen to and put in place recommendations made by parents. **Engagement of Community, Parent, and Youth through Relationships** within an **Early Learning** context includes networking among immediate family, extended family and community members as an integrated part of a child's life. A strength based approach provides an inventory of the strengths the entire family brings to support the child's learning environment. Programs directed at supporting parents to achieve better outcomes for their children provide significant opportunity to increase positive parenting skills. As The National Indian Brotherhood (now called Assembly of First Nations), (1989) stated, "An Aboriginal child's sense of security and belonging is based on cooperation and harmony within the extended family" (p.9).

Engagement of Community, Parent, and Youth through Relationships within the **K-12** system urge schools to discard the deficit model of Aboriginal education, in which Aboriginal students and communities are often blamed for educational failure. Rather, Riecken, Tanaka, and Scott (2006) state schools must value students through incorporating the "holistic values of balance and respect as taught by their community and Elders" to improve Aboriginal student achievement rates (p. 29).   Friedel points out that unlike the majority of mainstream parents, Aboriginal parents often spend time and

energy ensuring the school reflects their culture. **Engagement of Community, Parent, and Youth through Relationships** within a **Post Secondary** context supports the development of occupational skills that can be acquired through direct experience in the workplace. This type of experiential learning helps post secondary students gain work-related social skills, maturity, and increases their confidence about the future (Cook, Parker, and Pettijohn, 2004). The benefits of these types of programs are not limited to students; academic intuitions benefit by attracting and retaining good students, by increasing the employment rates of their graduates, and by enhancing their relationships with business, government and community organizations. Post secondary promising practices identify the development of community programs based on the economic imperatives of the community. Importance is placed on ensuring the focus of the programming does not become segregated from the current needs of the community (Preston, 2008). The Yukon can be used as an example of a jurisdiction that has several well-developed experiential education programs. These programs are designed to increase student engagement in school and to improve learning outcomes.

MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS/TRANSITION SUPPORTS

Providing mentorship programs and transition supports within educational systems support families, communities, and students. Mentorship programs and transition supports are promising practices that support FNMI to find their purpose and support healthy, proactive decision making for future planning. These types of supports help to narrow the gap between the type of skills, abilities, or knowledge an individual brings to a learning context, and the type of skills, abilities, or knowledge that is valued within the educational system.

Mentorship Programs and Transition Supports within an **Early Learning** context are often demonstrated through family supports including information on child development, parenting skills, nutrition/health information, and supports for overall community well-being. These supports recognize that the needs of children and the needs of families cannot be separated. **Mentorship Programs and Transition Supports** within the **K-12** system are often described as supports to encourage student engagement. An important factor in the promotion of resilience in youth is identified as the presence of a positive relationship with a caring and nurturing adult within an educational setting. Initiatives that foster positive relationships with strong role models are described as promising practices (CCL, 2009). The use of a success coach within schools is modeled on mentorship programs. The City Centre Education Project Junior High School Success Coach Program in Edmonton is an example (Costas, 2006). The project is a joint effort between the schools, the students' group homes, and social services. The success coach spends time with students outside of school as well as during school and develops authentic relationships. Transition supports for students and families who move frequently is a promising practicing expressed by fostering positive attitudes towards

student mobility, developing strategies for successful enrolment, transition and induction, transferring student information, and building flexibility to meet learning needs. These types of programs help to create a school climate in which all students feel welcomed and valued and reduce the existence of discrimination.

Mentorship Programs and Transition supports are often necessary within a **Post Secondary** context as research indicates the education FNMI students received in elementary and high schools has not always adequately prepared them for a future in post secondary education (Hull, Phillips, Polyzoi, 1995; Hull, 2000; Nora and Cabera, 1996; Wells, 1997). Academic supports, the provision of tutors and supplementary workshops are promising practices within a post secondary program that support student success. Transition programs also support the learning spirits of Aboriginal students who experience a loss of connection with family and culture when they leave their homes to pursue educational opportunities in urban areas. MARS (Mentoring At Risk Student) is an example of a mentoring program developed by researchers in the College of Education at the University of Winnipeg and the Winnipeg Native Alliance. Mentors are pre-service teachers at the university who work with a student for four hours per week throughout one school term. As a result of the program's success, a mentor coordinator was hired by the college to facilitate ongoing mentoring

ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL

Teachers often hold assumptions about Aboriginal people that place blame on families, communities, and students for low student academic achievement levels (Piquemal and Kouritzin, 2003). Anti-racist researchers argue that teacher candidates or teachers' feelings of guilt and anger when exposed to the history of Aboriginal people are important to working through societal and family racist attitudes about Aboriginal peoples (Schick and St. Denis, 2005). They suggest that without working through these feelings, racist ideas about FNMI cannot be addressed. Without addressing racism, it is difficult to transform attitudes and power relations that systemically categorize Aboriginal students as inferior in schools. Professionals need to understand systemic barriers within their own context and identify the effects of these barriers on the success of FNMI learners. This understanding needs to continue to develop into culture awareness and a cultural competency that is witnessed through action.

To be able to respond to FNMI in an educational system, numerous studies (Ignas 2004; Riecken et al 2006; Kanu 2005) emphasize the importance of teachers understanding FNMI ways of knowing. The role of the professional within responsive educational settings needs to be expanded to include methodologies for working with the whole learner including spirit, heart, mind, and body. This awareness will enable instructors to utilize a variety of student-focused, cooperative teaching methods such as experiential learning, and practicum placements. Promising practices pertaining to the role of the teacher also include the recognition and promotion of diverse learning styles, while

working with students to develop their own learning plans (Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, and Archibald, 1997). Instructors listen to the learner with ears, eyes and heart, which helps the learner to share a wealth of information that sheds light on life experiences in the learner's past (Battiste et al, 2008). After ascertaining the learner's aspirations and strengths, the instructor then considers how these can be best utilized to address the learner's needs/goals.

The Role of the Professional as a promising practice within an **Early Learning** context recognizes the developmental stage of the child and the importance of the cultural consistency between the early learning center and the child's home life. The employment of FNMI within early learning programs is imperative as unique orientations, concerns, and predispositions reflected within individual communities can only adequately be represented by the community members, themselves (Schissel and Wotherspoon, 2003). The **Role of the Professional** within the **K-12** system stresses the importance of the teacher's ability to include FNMI ways of knowing into the learning program. Successful teachers share power with students (Goulet, 2001; Bazylak, 2002). Practices that contribute to sharing power include respecting and developing student autonomy, challenging discriminatory practices and stereotypes in and out of schools, encouraging student ownership of activities, and using cultural sensitivity to deal with effects of colonization such as poverty and social problems (Goulet, 2001). Teachers that learn from those around them, recognizing that learning occurs 'everywhere and always', are said to nurture the learning spirit. The employment of FNMI within the K-12 education system is a promising practice that is supported through FNMI post secondary teacher education programs, and representative workforce strategies. The **Role of the Professional** from a **Post Secondary** perspective involves the teacher accounting for the learners' distance from educational institutions as well as family and community responsibilities when planning for the delivery of learning programs. The employment of FNMI within a post secondary context is a promising practice due to the staff members' ability to act as a positive role model, and mentor to support students with post secondary educational transition (Hardes, 2006).

PARTNERSHIPS AS A PART OF GOVERNANCE / POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Partnership agreements create opportunities for shared decision-making. They are mutually beneficial to both parties. When FNMI partner with provincial and territorial education systems, FNMI have opportunities for shared decision-making to define or contribute to the systems' goal setting, problem solving, accountability frameworks and educational outcomes. When provincial and territorial systems partner with FNMI, FNMI systems benefit from third level services that do not typically exist within these systems. Partnerships also support locally developed curriculum, with the inclusion of FNMI content, perspectives and ways of knowing, and language/culture programming. Partnerships as a part of governance/policy development have the possibility of resulting

in changes in system operations, administrative procedures, and representative workforce initiatives.

MODELS AND PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT RESPONSIVE SYSTEMS

Promising practices are identified by programs, practices, models, and initiatives which have conscientiously responded to the challenges and barriers FNMI encounter within educational systems. Responsive educational systems and programs provide opportunities that empower FNMI in ways that reflect an Aboriginal world view. These models and programs counter the marginalization of Indigenous history, knowledge, values, and experiences, making education more culturally relevant. They provide traditional teachings offered by Elders, and develop theoretical approaches, methodologies, and paradigms based on FNMI perspectives (Stonechild, Asikinack, and Miller, 2002). FNMI have been realistic about the needs of Aboriginal people in the creation of these models and systems and they have integrity in their own right.

EARLY LEARNING SYSTEMS

The **Step by Step Child and Family Center** in Kahnawake, Quebec is a locally controlled, developmentally and culturally appropriate preschool program. Six components are offered as the core of early learning for FNMI children: language and culture, education, health promotion, nutrition, social support, and parent involvement.

Kapachee Training Centre's Little Tots Program in Southern Saskatchewan is governed by a local Board of Directors. The program uses holistic approaches to early childhood education, supporting the development of Métis cultural understandings.

Aboriginal Head Start in urban and rural communities and on-reserve concentrates on the health of the entire family while focusing on the language/culture, school readiness, and health and wellness of its pre-kindergarten children.

First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative and the **Brighter Futures Campaign** are programs that devolve authority in two significant realms: the development of culturally-relevant early childhood programming and the control over the enumeration of the qualifiers for healthy and able children, families, and communities.

KINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 12

The **Okicīyapi Partnership** in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, includes Saskatoon Public School Division, Saskatoon Tribal Council and the Central Urban Métis Federation Inc. These organizations work in partnership to promote, strengthen and facilitate First Nations and Métis education through projects, such as the inclusion of FNMI content, perspectives, and ways of knowing into the learning program, representative workforce initiatives, language/culture programs, research on FNMI education, anti-racist education, and shared governance.

Seven Generations Education Institute Culture Camps, Fort Francis, Ontario. The Anishinaabe camps include the presence of Elders and traditional teachers. They are founded on traditional teachings that stress connection to land, languages and traditional ways of hunting, gathering and preparing medicine.

Forest for the Future, Tsimshian territory of British Columbia, is a social studies and science curriculum project designed for high school students.   The curriculum focuses on four unit plans that incorporate Indigenous and western scientific knowledge to meet the ecological needs of the local community.

POST SECONDARY LEARNING SYSTEMS

Teacher Education Programs across Canada offer programs in local communities and account for community needs in learning when contemplating courses and delivering instruction.

Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program is a transition program for Inuit high school graduates. It is a locally-owned program that takes a holistic approach to meeting the needs of learners. It recognizes the historical legacy of colonialism and the contemporary situation of Inuit in Canada.

Nunavut Arctic College provides community centered education and training characterized by a culture of openness, inclusiveness and tolerance and respect for Inuit knowledge and values. The College has three campuses and 24 Community Learning Centers in 26 of Nunavut's communities. Contact: http://nac.nu.ca

Toqwa'tu'kl Kjijitaqnn/Integrative Science Program and Mi'kmaq Studies at Cape Breton University, Nova Scotia, reconciles Mi'kmaz knowledge frameworks with western science in a four-year Bachelor of Science in Community Studies degree. The program involves community members and Elders, creates opportunities for out-of-doors learning experiences, and employs project-based learning with topics of interest to the students and community.

Red Crow Community College is an entity of Kainai, or the Blood Tribe and it is allied with First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium (FNAHEC). The Red Crow

Community College launched a school of Kainai Studies in 2002, offering a series of undergraduate-level courses based on a curriculum that is anchored in the philosophies, theories and methodologies of Blackfoot knowledge systems.

Blue Quills First Nations College St. Paul, Alberta is mandated by the seven member/ owner First Nations through their Chiefs and Board of Governors to advance and protect iyiniw pimâtisiwin ekwa iyiniw mâmitoneyicikan (indigenous forms of life and thinking) through teaching, research, and community service, guided by the natural laws of the nehiyawak (Cree people), and grounded in nehiyawewin (Cree language), and aligning with the Blue Quills philosophy, vision, and mission statements.

The Genesis Group, Yellowknife, is a Division of the Northern Learning Institute NWT Inc. The Genesis Group has expertise in the development and delivery of training programs, research, evaluation and assessment, writing and curriculum development. A key corporate objective is to assist Aboriginal Northerners enhance their lives through education and training advancement. **The Interactive Apprenticeship Study Project** is an innovative online interactive learning and support system that improves educational opportunities for Aboriginal Canadians and assists with successful transitions into careers in the trades.

Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research (GDI) was established in 1980 in Saskatchewan with a mandate to promote Métis culture through development and distribution of relevant materials and collections, and to deliver Métis-specific educational programs and services. This was followed later by the establishment of Dumont Technical Institute (1992) to deliver ABE and Skills Training to Métis students across the province. GDI is the only Métis owned and directed educational institution in Canada.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESPONSIVE LIFELONG LEARNING SYSTEMS

This section of the synthesis report provides recommendations to support lifelong learning through responsive systems. Canada's current context of healing and reconciliation supports the recommendations that are focused on the systems ability to change. The onus for improved outcomes must not be placed on the individual student alone; it must also be placed on the structural and systemic barriers that exist within educational systems (Kirkness and Bernhardt, 1995). Only after systems allow change to happen can we begin to look at improvements for students. Solutions for improving the dire situation in FNMI learning have been discussed in numerous other reports, analyses, as well as at significant events. The recommendations below may sound familiar and simplistic. It is in this familiarity and simplicity that lies the essence of the ongoing issue of mainstream educational systems to become more responsive to the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal learners. Recommendations for responsive education systems include:

- Seek direction from landmark policies on First Nations, Métis and Inuit education such as: *Indian Control of Indian Education,* (1973); *Tradition and Education: A Vision of Our Future,* (1988); *The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996).
- Seek direction from and gain from the experience of indigenous institutions on the successes of their initiatives.
- Develop policy that includes FNMI world view as a part of the conceptual framework, goals, indicators, and measures for all learners.
- Enable Elders and parents/community members to define or contribute to goal setting, problem solving and educational outcomes of the system.
- Include partners in building community, sharing the vision of human services supports that are linked to the school setting.
- Understand the learning spirit as a concept rather than a concrete entity that emerges from the exploration of the complex interrelationships that exist between the learner and the learning journey.
- Naturalize Indigenous epistemologies as foundational components in all parts of curricula.
- Provide students with culture/language programming.
- Include parents, community, and teachers in the formalization of standards for the recognition and accreditation of language teachers.
- Assist learners with transitioning within formal learning contexts and into the workplace.
- Act on the vision of the community, which may result in a change in system operations, administrative procedures and/or the development of new policy.
- Require individuals working within the system to have knowledge and understanding of FNMI world views and ways of knowing (histories, cultures, identities, and experience) so all are able to respond to the needs of all learners.
- Create an accountability framework that supports a holistic view of measurement and success and develop policy based on this holistic view.
- Explore alternative measures for effectively measuring holistic learning for social, cultural, spiritual, and physical well-being.
- Be aware of and accountable to the disparity gap in outcomes for FNMI learners.
- Effectively utilize data, assessment, and evaluation as tools to ensure continuous program and service improvement.
- Create a representative workforce.
- Demonstrate cultural competencies and address systemic barriers that exist within all systems.
- Actualize research that identifies promising practices and system gaps in FNMI education.
- Engage in partnerships to create opportunities for shared governance leading to high quality learning programs and supports for *all* learners.

CONCLUSION

The Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, the Canadian Council on Learning and the First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities have been working to develop a new vision for learning and measuring progress through the development of three *Holistic Lifelong Learning Models*. The models are proving to be powerful resources that enable Aboriginal communities to visualize successful learning and set out actions to achieve that vision (Cappon, 2008). These holistic learning perspectives, along with the work that has been completed by the AbLKC's six animation theme bundles have been identified through promising practices for responsive education systems. Much work has been done, not only through the completion of literature reviews, but also through many knowledge exchange venues and conference reports. The work accomplished by the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre has only begun to address the issues surrounding Aboriginal education in Canada. This work needs to continue beyond the closure of the AbLKC through ongoing research, development of responsive policies, curricula, programs, holding of events where Aboriginal educators and learners can voice their hopes and concerns and share promising practices. We have a lifelong journey ahead of us.

Systemic racism continues to exist within learning systems. Aboriginal people continue to experience discrimination against their constitutional rights, with constitutional obligations that are still unmet by the federal government. This systemic racism operates through inaction, silence, neglect, and indifference to the Aboriginal, human and treaty rights (Battiste, 2008). Aboriginal peoples' enthusiasm for learning is revealed in the many treaties negotiated with European Crowns for schooling and teachers. Canadian educational systems however, have not been able to implement either the Indigenous vision of education nor the treaty commitments due to systemic discrimination of the federal government and provinces and territories that have instead chosen to use education as a tool for forced assimilation (RCAP, 1996). A constitutional reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples' constitutional rights to education supported by constitutional power from federal, territorial, and provincial education systems is a next step towards the elimination of systemic discrimination (Battiste, 2008).

Jurisdictions across Canada are at various stages of policy development for FNMI education. Each new initiative moves closer to addressing the needs of FNMI learners. On a macro level, the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (CMEC) have issued a priority setting agenda that includes Aboriginal education and more recently have participated in an Aboriginal Education summit on February 24-25, 2009 in Saskatoon, SK to continue to implement that priority setting agenda. The Summit on Aboriginal Education facilitated a pan-Canadian dialogue on eliminating the achievement gaps between FNMI learners and non-Aboriginal learners. Ministers have been advised to take information from the Summit back to their home provinces and territories to move the Aboriginal education agenda forward. The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the national Inuit organization, held the Inuit Education Summit in April 2008 which brought territorial and provincial jurisdictions and regional organizations together with the purpose of signing

the National Accord and developing a national strategy on Inuit Education to improve the learning outcomes for Inuit across the country. On a micro level, Saskatchewan's Ministry of Education has recently released a new Aboriginal education policy: *Inspiring success: Building towards student achievement: First Nations and Métis education policy framework*, 2009. The Ministry's renewed First Nations and Métis Education policy provides the vision, principles and goals to guide strategic actions across all levels of the provincial education system. Some jurisdictions across Canada have emerging systems of education that are not derived from the *Indian Act*, but are based on their own legislation, evolving into different educational systems entirely. Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK) in Nova Scotia is the only First Nations authority with their own Education Act that articulates their choice for their own educational system. They represent a new era of politics in Canada that is seeing the dismantling of an Indian Affairs' approach to education and new political and legislative action that is meant to ensure that First Nations can enter into their own agreements to implement their own educational choices in concert with provincial and federal partnerships. These new relations are significant in Canada and one that is yet to unfold fully; nonetheless, MK is an inspiration for First Nations to develop their own legislation. Each of these examples demonstrates movement by Canadian politicians and policy makers to be responsive to Aboriginal peoples in diverse educational systems across Canada.

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