

POSITION PAPER ON ABORIGINAL LITERACY

Prepared by

The National Aboriginal Design Committee

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Learners

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Rita Buffalo, Anishnawbe, recently hired as the Assistant Coordinator, Thunder Bay Friendship Centre, Thunder Bay, Ontario (therefore, also a practitioner)

Annette Odjick-Decontie, Algonquin, Maniwaki First Nation, Quebec

Elders

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Irene Jacques, Dakota, Standing Buffalo First Nation, Saskatchewan (on the Advisory Committee for the Saskatchewan Literacy Network; therefore, also a practitioner)

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Executive Summary

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

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

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

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

Time and again in the last four years, as the NADC Coordinator speaks to Aboriginal literacy practitioners and/or Learners at workshops and conferences in almost every province and territory across Canada, they seek support for culture-based/culturally-relevant information and approaches. While some of these practitioners may be members of the provincial or territorial non-Aboriginal literacy network in their particular area, they feel that mainstream responses to their concerns are not relevant to an Aboriginal context.

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

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

Those papers are:

1. Achieving Excellence: Investing in People, Knowledge and Opportunity, which focuses on how to strengthen Canada's science and research capacity, and on how to ensure that

this knowledge contributes to building an innovative economy that benefits all Canadians; and,

2. Knowledge Matters: Skills and Learning for Canadians, which looks at what can be done to strengthen learning in Canada, to develop people's talent and to provide opportunity for all to contribute to and benefit from the new economy⁽¹⁾. (both highlights by the NADC).

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

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

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

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

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

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

The NADC further recommends the following:

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

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

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

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

I. Introduction

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

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

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

A consistent theme in the program interviews was the need to develop a national network of Aboriginal literacy practitioners, and to have a National Aboriginal Literacy Gathering (NALG). In 1998, BASA established a National Aboriginal Design Committee (NADC) of seven Aboriginal literacy practitioners who had responsibility for designing and overseeing the NALG. In 1999, the NADC assumed responsibility for the project.

The NALG took place at Nakoda Lodge in Morley, Alberta from April 26-29, 2000. 129 (one hundred and twenty-nine) people with a vested interest in Aboriginal literacy (with representation from every province and territory in Canada) came together to participate in workshops/discussions on topics which had been identified in the Phase I survey. Consistently, those present called for:

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

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

The NALG Follow-Up Strategy (NALGFUS) incorporated those very requests. The NADC expanded its numbers to 18 (eighteen) to be more representative of those involved in Aboriginal literacy, and included Learners and Elders, as well as practitioners. In addition, the expanded NADC sought to include membership by those with expertise/experience in the various areas of Aboriginal literacy - Science, Aboriginal languages, a provincial Aboriginal literacy network already in existence (the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition - ONLC) and successful models.

The NADC members are listed in the acknowledgements section.

Major initiatives in the NALGFUS to date include:

1. hiring staff to prepare a Business Plan for the NALO - a first draft of this Business Plan is under review by the NADC, with the facilitation of discussion by Dr. Laara Fitznor, Cree, Doctor of Education, Department of Adult Education, Community Development, and Counselling Psychology, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.
2. Three face-to-face meetings of the expanded committee to prepare for:
 - a. the Literacy Roundtable, Ottawa, June 22, 2001, hosted by Senator Joyce Fairbairn
 - b. a meeting with Senator Thelma Chalifoux, Chair, Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples (SSCAP), October 24, 2001
 - c. meetings with Inuit Tapirisat Canada and the Metis National Council, October 26, 2001 (last minute cancellations by the Assembly of First Nations because of staff layoffs, and the Native Women's Association of Canada, because their Executive Director, Pam Paul, had left)
 - d. participation in Literacy Action Day, Parliament Hill, Ottawa, October 25, 2001
3. A fourth face-to-face meeting to discuss the process for the NADC Position Paper on Aboriginal Literacy, and the Business Plan for a national Aboriginal literacy organization. This meeting coincided with "Mamawenig", Provincial Aboriginal Literacy Gathering, Fort Qu'Appelle Saskatchewan. Two NADC members were on the planning committee for "Mamawenig". In addition, five NADC members presented at this event, which included the keynote address by the NADC Coordinator. Finally, the NADC

participated in the discussions which resulted in the "Aboriginal Literacy Strategic Plan Report", a product of "Mamawenig".

Senator Chalifoux extended an invitation to the NADC to do a presentation to the full SSCAP. Senator Chalifoux has requested that the NADC provide her with a Position Paper on Aboriginal Literacy.

(The SSCAP was first created in December 1989 and has a mandate to examine legislation and matters relating to the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada (Rule 86(1)(q). In March 1990 the Committee received an order of reference to study the relations between the Aboriginal Peoples and the Government of Canada.) (1)

In all of these initiatives, the NADC is bringing forward the concerns of Learners, Elders and practitioners from across Canada as they call consistently for supports for an Aboriginal culture-specific approach to literacy. This would best be handled by a national Aboriginal literacy organization, one that is based on Aboriginal cultural principles. To date, no organization in Canada, or in the world that the NADC knows of, has undertaken such groundbreaking work. It is imperative that the Government of Canada assist the NADC in this pioneering initiative. In this way, the Government of Canada fulfills the promise in the Address by Prime Minister Jean Chretien in Reply to the Speech from the Throne, October 1, 2002:

*"Mr. Speaker, early in our mandate, I asked my Cabinet to find new and better ways to close the gap in life chances between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. To turn the corner in this partnership. We will take important new steps in this direction with an ambitious legislative agenda **to create new institutions (highlights by the NADC)** and investments to build individual and community capacity: investments in children, education and health care, investments in social, cultural and economic development."*

II. Methodology

While this Position Paper incorporates the work of noted Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academics, as well as Position Papers by people in other jurisdictions who are dealing with similar issues, it draws primarily on the experiences of the people most directly involved in literacy programs: Learners, practitioners and Elders.

Information for this Position Paper has been gleaned from:

1. a summary of common themes that emerged from documents produced by national Aboriginal organizations during 1990 International Literacy Year (ILY). Those themes are:

1 Government of Canada Web-site, <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rma/communic/prr98/mfr98/sen-1-e.doc>

- a. ensuring that programs are community-based and Learner-centred;
 - b. using the holistic approach (through assisting Learners to seek balance within their spiritual, emotional, mental and physical selves)
 - c. placing literacy into culture, rather than fitting culture into literacy;
 - d. using the dual forces of language and culture to help Aboriginal communities sustain and maintain a positive cultural identity (offering literacy in the Aboriginal language of origin and the official language in use in that area)
 - e. developing and using materials and methodologies that are relevant to the Learners' lives (they reflect the experiences, needs and aspirations of the Aboriginal Learner, and maximize Aboriginal learning styles)
 - f. empowering the individual in his/her relationship to self, family, community and nation;
 - g. contributing to community development (economic, social, educational, political and spiritual) (2)
2. The Language of Literacy, A National Resource Directory of Literacy Programs, Beverly Anne Sabourin and Associates (BASA), Winnipeg, Manitoba, December, 1998.
 3. The Ontario Native Literacy Coalition Position Paper on Program Reform, Ningwakwe Clearing House, Owen Sound, Ontario, June 1998
 4. The findings of the NALG 2000 - including workshop evaluations, the conference evaluation, and the closing plenary
 5. The National Roundtable with National Literacy Organizations and Provincial/Territorial Coalitions hosted by Senator Joyce Fairbairn, June 22, 2001, Ottawa, at which the following top challenges were identified:
 - a. Funding (including stable multi-year funding and infrastructure support)
 - b. Literacy as a community development issue
 - c. Importance of an inclusive multi stakeholder process - mobilization of all sectors in support of a national literacy initiative
 - d. Family literacy
 - e. Overcoming barriers to Learners' participation
 - f. Basing or embedding literacy in culture
 - g. Developing a learning culture/society
 - h. Culture and language
 - i. Reallocation of resources to support infrastructure
 - j. Working towards an intergovernmental accord
 - k. Infrastructure

6. The Best Practices National Workshop on Literacy, October 3-4, 2002, Toronto
7. Contact with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal literacy practitioners by the NADC Coordinator (e-mail, phone and face-to-face), including speaking engagements at various literacy conferences across Canada, many of which included both Learners and Elders, and with some workshops specifically for Learners (Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, Ontario), and providing consultative support to various provincial/national literacy initiatives, such as the "Foundational Training in Family Literacy" by the Centre for Family Literacy, Edmonton, and "Literacy, Museums, and the Arts, An Invitational Symposium" organized by The Canadian Museums Association and The Centre for Literacy of Quebec.
8. Proceedings from the NADC meetings, where the NADC uses mostly the Circle Approach to discussion, thus making possible input from ALL members.
9. Position Papers from other jurisdictions, most notably Australia
10. Post-graduate theses by Aboriginal academics, details of which are provided in the footnotes at the appropriate places.

This is the first time in the history of the literacy movement in Canada that such a comprehensive of Aboriginal literacy issues has been done.

III. NADC Guiding Principles

The following principles constitute the foundation of the work of the NADC, and are expanded upon in the sections that follow:

1. The Learner is the most important person in the program.
2. The holistic approach to Aboriginal literacy is effective, therefore, crucial.
3. Language and culture are inextricable; therefore, literacy in our own Aboriginal languages is paramount.
4. As Aboriginal Peoples, we had, and continue to have, many of our own types of literacies. Print-based literacy is recent in our history, and only one type of literacy in the Aboriginal view.
5. Inclusivity - literacy affects us all; therefore, literacy needs to be the purview of an inclusive organization. Many Aboriginal initiatives have a focus only on their membership, and too many Aboriginal Peoples fall between the cracks of such a structure.
6. Aboriginal Control of Aboriginal Literacy/Education
7. Adequate long-term funding.

IV. The Learner

The Learner is the most important person in the program. As such, Aboriginal literacy programs do not replicate the mainstream institutional educational system that failed Learners in the first place. The Learner's strengths, experiences and aspirations determine program philosophies, teaching approaches, Learner activities and (curriculum) materials - NOT the funding with its attendant criteria.

For Aboriginal Peoples, literacy is about true empowerment, whereby Learners actively participate in determining their goals, materials/activities used, and what constitutes success.

Barriers to Literacy Learning in Aboriginal Communities

Learners have often had less than satisfactory experiences within the institutional educational system. Several reasons account for this:

1. The intergenerational effects of the residential school system (first, second and third generations), which contribute to several factors that often impact negatively on education/learning -
 1. Denial of First Nations identity
 2. Shame
 3. Poor self-esteem
 4. Communication difficulties
 5. Expectation to be judged negatively
 6. Experience of racism
 7. Violence and physical abuse in family
 8. Sexual abuse
 9. Alcoholism (3)
2. The impact of socio-economic inequities -

"Aboriginal peoples are among the most disadvantaged groups in Canada. The 1991 Post-censal Aboriginal Peoples Survey indicates that (we) experience poorer health, lower levels of education, lower average incomes, and higher rates of unemployment, compared with the non-Aboriginal population. High incarceration levels and increasing youth suicide rates indicate the presence of serious social difficulties as well. **How Canadian society addresses these inequities and assists in the social and cultural healing processes will be a priority issue for governments.**"⁽⁴⁾ (highlights by the NADC)

3 Ing, Rosalyn N. Dealing with Shame and Unresolved Trauma: Residential School and Its Impact on the 2nd and 3rd Generation Adults, a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Graduate Studies (Department of Educational Studies), The University of British Columbia. December 2000

4 Statistics Canada Web-site, 2001 Census Consultation Guide,
<http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/92-125-GIE/html/abo.htm>

3. The failure of the institutional educational system to recognize the effects of the aforementioned factors on a person's ability to concentrate, to learn and to retain - Rather, in that system, Aboriginal Peoples are streamed into classes for "slower" Learners, or into the trades, in effect, "labelled". Institutional educational systems have tended to focus on Learners' "needs"; that is, they have used a deficit model. They have not focussed on Learners' strengths. Research has shown that teachers' expectations of Learners can impact their ability to learn

Aboriginal Pedagogy/Andragogy

In recent years, much has been written about Aboriginal pedagogy (the art of instruction, especially teaching methods). In As We See...Aboriginal Pedagogy, edited by Lenore Stiffarm, there are several references made to the Medicine Wheel as a model for Aboriginal educational programming. Further, Aboriginal Education, Fulfilling the Promise, edited by Marlene Brant Castellano, Lynne Davis, and Louise Lahache mentions the dimensions of Aboriginal Education, which include spiritual, emotional intellectual and physical.

First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI) differentiates between Aboriginal pedagogy and andragogy, a term introduced to FNTI by Malcolm Knowles, Professor Emeritus of Adult and Community College Education at North Carolina State University. This is a term developed by European adult educators, and was derived from the Greek word 'aner' and the stem 'andr-' meaning 'man, not boy' or adult and was combined with 'agogus' meaning 'leading' (5)

FNTI advocates aligning the four aspects of self - Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body - as well as examining the Learners' relationship to Self, Family, Community and Nation. All of this is done within the context of Aboriginal teachings. In fact, FNTI believes:

"Within traditional Aboriginal circles of knowledge, the whole person is defined as a human being, who has a physical body, endowed with mind, and heart (emotions or feelings), and is empowered by spirit."(6) (highlights by the NADC).

Please see Appendix A for a description of the Ohahase Adult Education Program, affiliated with the FNTI, which shows a practical application of Aboriginal andragogy, in which **process** is as important, if not more so, as **product** in a learning environment.

V. The Holistic Approach

As the original peoples of this country, we have our own distinct cultures. We must base our models and methodologies in Aboriginal culture. That is, we use the holistic approach, often referred to as the Medicine Wheel, or the Wheel of Life. Such an approach recognizes that each individual is Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body. While these are seen to be equal in importance, Aboriginal Peoples believe that we MUST start with Spirit first.

5 Hill, Diane. Aboriginal Access to Post-Secondary Education - Prior Learning Assessment and its Use within Aboriginal Programs of Learning. First Nations Technical Institute, Deseronto, Ontario. March 1995

6 ibid

It is not in the scope of this Position Paper to define the holistic approach. However, the NADC believes that a thumbnail sketch will enlighten readers of this paper as to the consequences of not using the holistic approach.

Since time immemorial, Aboriginal Peoples have believed that we are Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body. That is, in order for programming (including but not limited to literacy) to be effective for Aboriginal Peoples, it must recognize and nurture all four parts.

Historically, the institutional educational has focussed on the acquisition of facts, knowledge, or cognitive skills - Mind - and perhaps Body with physical education. Typically, Spirit and Heart were not addressed. That is, the institutional educational system has ignored 50% of who we are. Aboriginal Peoples believe that this is the reason for a significant portion of the social ills seen in many communities, including non-Aboriginal.

The NADC has discussed how they are implementing the holistic approach in their programs and communities, almost instinctively.

Please see Appendix B-1 for a letter from Conne River First Nation on how putting Spirit first has impacted the Learners, and the community.

Upon hearing about the holistic approach, non-Aboriginal literacy practitioners respond with comments that fall into two main categories.

1. "I resonate with this.⁽⁷⁾" Many are already doing it without even realizing that this is what Aboriginal Peoples mean by the holistic approach. The non-Aboriginal Peoples instinctively knew they had to focus on more than just cognitive skills. In fact, documents are now being produced by non-Aboriginal practitioners on qualitative changes in learners, often referred to as non-academic outcomes, unplanned outcomes, etc.
2. "This sounds good in principle. I like it, but, how do you operationalize this?⁽⁸⁾"

The discussions then focus on Aboriginal literacy as a process (rather than a product) in which Learners are equal partners, developing the curriculum and activities, in conjunction with the practitioner, as, together, they identify the issues, rather than merely working through a prepackaged curriculum.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal literacy practitioners have much to share about the innovative teaching methodologies that have been found to be effective with the adult Learner.

Researchers at prestigious non-Aboriginal academic institutions are beginning to corroborate the holistic approach. Case in point is the work of Howard Gardner of Harvard University as he expounds on Multiple Intelligences. Gardner says that an intelligence is:

7 Anonymous participant. The National Literacy Roundtable hosted by Senator Joyce Fairbairn June 22, 2002, Ottawa, Ontario

8 Another anonymous participant. National Literacy Roundtable hosted by Senator Joyce Fairbairn, June 22, 2001, Ottawa, Ontario.

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

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

1. linguistic - the ability to read, write, communicate with words;
2. logical-mathematical - the ability to reason and calculate, to think things through in a logical, systematic manner;
3. visual-spatial - the ability to think in pictures, visualize a final result - recognizes our creative people, such as artists, as well as our dreams and visions;
4. musical - the ability to make or compose music, to sing well, or understand and appreciate music - recognizes our traditional singers;
5. bodily-kinesthetic - the ability to use your body skilfully to solve problems, create products, or present ideas and emotions - recognizes our traditional dancers;
6. interpersonal - the ability to work effectively with others, to relate to other people and display empathy and understanding, to notice their motivations and goals; (the NADC believes this intelligence comes the closest to recognizing Heart)
7. intrapersonal - the ability for self-analysis and reflection - to be able to quietly contemplate and assess one's accomplishments, to review one's behaviour and innermost feelings, to make plans and set goals, to know oneself; (The NADC believes this one comes the closest to recognizing both Heart and Spirit)
8. naturalist - the ability to recognize flora and fauna, to make other consequential distinctions in the natural world and to use this ability productively.⁽⁹⁾ - recognizes Aboriginal Medicine People.

⁹ Rose, Colin and Nicholl, Malcolm J. Accelerated Learning for the 21st Century: The Six-Step Plan to Unlock Your Master Mind. Dell Publishing, New York, 1997.

Gardner believes that everybody is a reader - it's just a matter of what we read - text, people, situations.⁽¹⁰⁾ , much as in Paulo Freire's often repeated phrase, "*reading the word and reading the world*". Aboriginal Peoples would expand that phrase to include "*reading the universe*". Much of the success of Gardner's work with adult literacy Learners can be attributed to the fact that it focuses on people's strengths.⁽¹¹⁾

In recent times (within the past year), Gardner has added existential intelligence, and is considering spiritual intelligence.

Clearly, there is much that can be learned by doing an assessment of what works in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal literacy programs in terms of the holistic approach. Currently, practitioners just know that their varied methodologies work and that the Learners are having fun.

Aboriginal literacy practitioners have found that it is imperative to address the whole person in literacy learning - Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body. As mentioned earlier, many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal literacy practitioners have been doing that all along. For this reason, Aboriginal literacy programs MUST continue to develop learning outcomes that address the whole person. Over the years, practitioners have found that there are print-based ways to address the whole person, thus making the curriculum, learning activities and outcomes more relevant to the Learners' realities, thereby ensuring their success.

See Appendix B-2 for a description of findings of a case study of an Aboriginal holistic basic education environment.

Practitioners need a more cohesive way to share their experiences and successes in this regard. A national Aboriginal literacy organization would ensure that sharing, through assisting in developing systematic training to blend print-based literacy with the whole person approach, and through working partnerships with other agencies doing related work, such as the Seven Generations Education Institute (SGEI) , Fort Frances, Ontario. Please see Appendix B-3 for a description of the SGEI.

10 Notes from the Metropolitan Toronto Movement for Literacy workshop on Multiple Intelligences, facilitated by Leslie Shelton.

11 ibid

VI Language and Culture

"Aboriginal languages reveal a very high level of rationality, which can only come from an earlier insight into power. Aboriginal languages suggest inwardness, where real power lies. The last great frontier and the most challenging one of all is this inner space of the individual (Ermine 1995, 108) and it may well constitute the very essence of Aboriginal education." (12)

Since time immemorial, Aboriginal Peoples have lived on this land now referred to as Canada. We believe that the Creator put us here. Our ancestors did NOT cross the Bering Strait. Further, we had our own Aboriginal languages.

A December 14, 1998, press release from Statistics Canada entitled, The Daily says that, as of 1996, Canada has 50 (fifty) Aboriginal languages, belonging to 11 (eleven) major language families. In the past 100 (hundred) years or more, nearly 10 (ten) once flourishing languages have become extinct. At least a dozen are on the brink of extinction. For example, the Metis believe that their language, Michif, so critical to their identity and culture, is the most severely endangered Aboriginal language in Canada. (13)

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

1. Flourishing;
2. Enduring;
3. Declining;
4. Endangered; and,
5. Extinct.

Of the 50 (fifty) or so Aboriginal languages still alive in Canada, only 3 (three) are flourishing - Cree, Inuktitut and Ojibway (in order of number of speakers). [Statistics Canada 1996 found that 29% (twenty-nine) of the Aboriginal population reported that they were able to carry on a conversation in an Aboriginal language. This was more common among older Aboriginal people, and was most widespread on Indian reserves and settlements and lowest in urban areas. The largest group was Cree with 10% (ten), second was Inuktitut with 3.4% (three point four) and third was Ojibway with 2.8% (two point eight). In the APS I, 38% (thirty-eight) said they could speak an Aboriginal language well enough to carry on a conversation. That is, approximately 1/3 (one third) of Aboriginal peoples have conversational abilities in an Aboriginal language.]

12 Castellano, Brant; Davis, Lynne; and, Lahache, Louise, Editors. Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise. UBC Press, Vancouver 2000

13 Metis National Council. "Taanishi Kiya" Michif Revival Strategy, 2000-2002 and Beyond. April 2000. <http://www.metisnation.ca/ARTS/michif1.html>

In 1992, the AFN summarized the importance of Aboriginal languages as follows:

The Aboriginal Languages were given by the Creator as an integral part of life. Embodied in Aboriginal languages is our unique relationship to the Creator, our attitudes, beliefs, values, and the fundamental notion of what is truth. Aboriginal language is an asset to one's own education, formal and informal. Aboriginal language contributes to greater pride in the history and culture of the community; greater involvement and interest of parents in the education of their children, and greater respect for Elders. Language is the principal means by which culture is accumulated, shared and transmitted from generation to generation. The key to identity and retention of culture is one's ancestral language.⁽¹⁴⁾

There are special initiatives in the Aboriginal community to keep our languages alive. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended granting special status to Aboriginal languages, providing formal education in the language, and conducting research.⁽¹⁵⁾ The First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres (FNCECC) is in the initial stages of developing protective legislation for the preservation, maintenance, promotion and use of Aboriginal languages in Canada.⁽¹⁶⁾ We need to pool our energies to help each other save our Aboriginal languages.

Only two languages have the status of being official in Canada. They are NOT the languages of the first peoples of this land. Even though the English and French languages came to this continent only a little over five hundred years ago, they enjoy the status of official languages. This status means that English and French are considered to be the language of instruction (except in the Province of Quebec and the Territories, where legislation has been enacted that directly relates to Aboriginal languages⁽¹⁷⁾).

Aboriginal literacy programs in all of the provinces have to jump through various jurisdictional hoops - that vary with each province - in order to have initiatives in their Aboriginal languages recognized as a bona fide literacy activity. For example, in Ontario, Learners must already be fluent in the Aboriginal language, and must be participating in an Aboriginal language literacy activity only to learn to read and/or write that language. Programs cannot count the contact hours for those who are learning the language, even though policy and practice in various federal/provincial/territorial initiatives in the past (residential schools) was to eradicate Aboriginal languages.

14 Ignace, Marianne B. Handbook for Aboriginal Language Programming, A Report Prepared for the First Nations Education Steering Committee, Aboriginal Languages Sub-Committee. North Vancouver, B.C., April, 1998.

15 Norris, Mary Jane. Canada's Aboriginal Languages - Canadian Social Trends. Statistics Canada, Catalogue No. 11-008. Winter 1998.

16 Protective Legislation for Aboriginal Languages in Canada, First Nations Education Cultural Centres

17 Fettes, Mark and Norton, Ruth. Chapter 2: Voices of Winter: Aboriginal Languages and Public Policy in Canada (in Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise). UBC Press, Vancouver, 2000.

Many issues warrant further discussion. Two prominent examples are:

1. the degree of fluency in the Aboriginal Learner must have in order to be eligible for Aboriginal language literacy programming;
2. the incidence of "passively bilingual" speakers. That is, we understand the Aboriginal language when we hear it spoken, but we are unable to participate in the conversation because the words are in our long-term memory banks, but we need a refresher course to put these words into our short-term memory banks, and to practice the pronunciation.

A policy or structure that does not recognize and affirm Aboriginal languages serves only to further erode Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal worldview of interconnectedness.

Ruth Norton and Mark Fettes have this to say about revitalization of Aboriginal languages,

Conversely, a linguistic renaissance must be an integral part of the evolution towards local self-government and the restoration of spiritual and physical health to Aboriginal communities (Crawford 1996; Fishman 1996; Norton and Fettes 1997)⁽¹⁸⁾

Aboriginal literacy programs are part of this linguistic renaissance through the holistic approach Aboriginal language literacy. The NADC believes that the proposed national Aboriginal literacy organization will assist the Government of Canada in fulfilling its promise in the Throne Speech:

"The government will also work with Aboriginal people to preserve and enhance Aboriginal languages and cultures." ⁽¹⁹⁾

Please see Appendix C for a description of the Enjikendaasang Learning Centre, Mississauga # 8 First Nation, Ontario in which Aboriginal literacy practitioners are using an Aboriginal language as a means of supporting a holistic learning environment that is more effective with, and relevant to, Aboriginal Learners.

VII. Aboriginal Types of Literacies

Since time immemorial, as Aboriginal Peoples, we had many of their own kinds of literacies. Print-based literacy, which is the focus of federal and provincial government is only recent to us. Aboriginal Peoples do need and value western notions of literacy for participation in mainstream society. However, we are "...borrowing this cultural product...". It does not replace or negate our own literacies. Further, in the spirit of reciprocity, we give something back - knowledge of our types of literacies.⁽²⁰⁾

18 Brant Castellano, Marlene; Davis, Lynne; and, Lahache, Louise (editors). Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise. UBC Press, Vancouver 2000.

19 The Canada We Want - Speech from the Throne to Open the Second Session of the Thirty-Seventh Parliament of Canada. http://www.sft-ddt.gc.ca/vnav/07_e.htm

20 Hare, Jan. Paper presented at Talkin' Back, Talkin' Indigenous Literacy Panel Presentation. University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. July 09, 2002.

Aboriginal Peoples have had many types of "texts". Marie Battiste, a Mi'kmaq educator from Potlo'tek First Nation in Nova Scotia, and a professor in the Indian and Northern Education Program at the University of Saskatchewan, says:

"Through the use of pictographs, petroglyphs, notched sticks, and wampum, early North American Indians achieved a form of written communication and recording which served the social, political, cultural, and spiritual needs of the early period, fully describing the ideal and material world. Aboriginal literacy embodied tribal epistemology in Native texts, which interacted with and depended upon the oral tradition." (Battiste, 1986, p.25)
(21)

Aboriginal epistemology in this later period includes detailed and sophisticated Aboriginal teachings on what we now call Mathematics, Science, History and other subjects. These teachings, along with our languages, are in danger of being lost. Fortunately, there are several initiatives to resurface the teachings, such as the Indigenous Knowledge conferences by the University of Manitoba in 2000, and the efforts of the First Nations Technical Institute, Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte Territory, Ontario, which is the initial stages of planning an indigenous knowledge conference, as well. Indigenous knowledge can strengthen existing curricula for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learning environments. For example, the Ningwakwe Learning Press (NLP), Owen Sound, Ontario recently contracted Robin King-Stonefish to complete an Aboriginal Numeracy Booklet. Ms. King-Stonefish carries teachings that were oral only, and were passed on to her by her now deceased aunt.

The Parkland Regional College, Yorkton, Saskatchewan initiated a national Aboriginal literacy project in which they suggested a type of literacy for each colour of the rainbow. The NADC Coordinator was contracted to develop what is now known as the Rainbow Approach. The types of literacy that correspond to each colour of the rainbow are::

1. Red - Aboriginal Languages
2. Orange - The Skills Required for Oral Literacy
3. Yellow - Means of Expressing Oneself Other than the Written Word - art, dance, music, etc.
4. Green - English and French
5. Blue - The Skills Required to Use Technology
6. Indigo - The Skills Required to Interpret Events Symbolically or Archetypally - such as in dreams, visions, synchronicity
7. Violet - The Skills Required to Recognize and Nurture Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body - the holistic base to literacy in which practitioners model and teach these skills to Learners

Only one colour focuses on written communication in the official languages of Canada. The NADC has adapted this Rainbow Approach, proposing a learning outcome for each component of the Medicine Wheel for each type of literacy.

21 Hare, Jan. Land and Family as Text. A paper presented at "Talkin' Back, Talkin' Indigenous Literacy Panel Presentation, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., July 9, 2002.

To date, the NADC Coordinator has done 30 (thirty) presentations on this Rainbow Approach to hundreds of Learners, practitioners and Elders, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, mainly in Canada, but in other countries, including the United States, Australia and Brazil, with another 5 (five) lined up in the Yukon, Manitoba, Ontario and France. The presentation cites educational, medical and scientific research that is now beginning to confirm what Aboriginal Peoples have believed since time immemorial. Presentation participants have said that this blended approach has merit, and that it affirms the work that they have been doing all along.

Aboriginal literacy practitioners need a way to access these kinds of initiatives in a more concerted way. Experience has shown that many such works exist, but that practitioners do NOT have the time to find them, then to read them and to incorporate them into programming. A national Aboriginal literacy organization would provide a means of doing this.

VIII. Inclusivity

The NADC is inclusive and provides a model of how various constituencies can work together - Learners, Elders, practitioners, on- and off-reserve, Metis, Francophone, youth, etc.

While this initiative began with a survey of literacy programs that were sponsored and/or initiated by Aboriginal Peoples with Aboriginal Learners as clients (i.e., mostly community-based programs), the NADC has not excluded those from institutional educational programs who have requested assistance. In addition, we are getting requests for input from non-Aboriginal practitioners working with Aboriginal Learners.

Accordingly, the NADC involves all segments of the Aboriginal population, regardless of place of residence - on- or off-reserve - or regardless of funding criteria. We particularly include "the forgotten people" - youth, Metis, two-spirited.

The NADC membership is a unique model of Aboriginal programming. It includes different nations (see the NADC membership list in the Acknowledgements Section for a listing of the nations), races and belief systems, while ensuring that Aboriginal control of Aboriginal literacy programming is maintained.

The NADC believes in modelling inclusivity in its processes as well. The values embodied in the Medicine Wheel - Honesty, Kindness, Sharing and Strength - permeate all of our activities. To reiterate Aboriginal Teachings, Honesty is important. However, Kindness must accompany that Honesty. In this way, as we Share Honesty, we Strengthen each other. We must LIVE these teachings.

Most of the NADC agenda follows the Talking Circle approach, whereby each member gets a chance to speak and to be heard.

IX. Aboriginal Control of Aboriginal Literacy/Education

The NADC strongly supports the philosophy:

"Aboriginal Control of Aboriginal literacy is foremost"(22) .

As Aboriginal Peoples, we have the knowledge of what hasn't worked for the Learners and what has worked. Further, we have developed several of our own successful models of programs, and funding mechanisms. In keeping with the SSCAP's focus on "solutions", we present some of those successful models for the SSCAP's perusal.

The NADC believes so strongly in Aboriginal control of Aboriginal literacy, that it merits stating as a stand-alone principle, even though it permeates all of the preceding ones. We believe that Aboriginal literacy IS its own foundation, which requires its own infrastructure and its own processes.

Too often, Aboriginal literacy has been part of a "comprehensive" national, provincial or territorial agenda and it gets subsumed; that is, it is seen to be of lesser importance, and Aboriginal input into these initiatives is often not recognized in the final document/product. For example, the recognition and nurturing of Spirit in educational/literacy programming was mentioned at both the Literacy Roundtable and the Best Practices events (to a round of applause from workshop attendees at the latter); yet, Spirit was never mentioned in the final proceedings.

The Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Education (WIPCE, Hilo, Hawai'i, 1999) represents a collective voice of Indigenous peoples from around the world who support fundamental principles considered vital to achieving reform and transformation of education for Indigenous peoples.

In Section 1.3.1, The Coolangatta Statement makes a strong case for Indigenous control of Indigenous education; thus, in the context of this Position Paper, Aboriginal control of Aboriginal literacy:

*"Historically, Indigenous peoples have insisted upon the right of access to education. Invariably the nature, and consequently the outcome, of this education has been constructed through and **measured by non-Indigenous standards, values and philosophies**. Ultimately the purpose of this education has been to assimilate Indigenous peoples into non-indigenous cultures and societies..."*

*"....research shows that failure is indeed present, but that this failure is that of the system, not of Indigenous peoples. In this context the so-called "dropout rates and failures" of Indigenous peoples within non-indigenous educational systems must be viewed for what they really are - **rejection rates**. (23)*

22 Proceedings of NADC Meeting, June 15-16, 2002, Anishnawbe Health Toronto

23 Tebtebba Foundation web-site, http://www.tebtebba.org/tebtebba_files/susdev/ik/coolangatta.html

Hence, it is critical that Aboriginal Peoples (Learners, Elders and practitioners) determine the scope of Aboriginal literacy programming. Such a strategy would not only ensure culture-based or culturally-relevant programming, but would also provide role modelling for the Learners coming through the program.

Please see Appendix D for a description for the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD), Winnipeg, Manitoba, which exemplifies the type of comprehensive supports that are available when there is Aboriginal control of Aboriginal literacy.

X. Long-Term and Adequate Funding

"What is abundantly clear is that sufficient resources must be made available if quality education, created, developed and delivered on First Nations terms, is to become a reality." (24)

That is, adequate long-term and multi-year funding is CRITICAL.

"Aboriginal literacy organizations throughout Canada...are existing 'hand to mouth.'...But clearly, the most pressing issue remains one of the adequacy of resources available to the movement in order to fund the operations of literacy programmes, professional and curriculum development, networking opportunities and curriculum resources."(25) (highlights by the NADC)

The NADC agrees with the proceedings of Roundtable with National Literacy Organizations and Provincial/Territorial Coalitions that:

*"drive-by" project-based funding should be replaced by **long-term, multi-year funding** and infrastructure support.* (highlights by the NADC)

Such a strategy would be in line with Aboriginal teachings which require us to think seven generations ahead. Aboriginal literacy practitioners have jumped through hoops to access one-time-only project funding, which produces positive results for the Learners and communities. However, at the end of the project, the government funding priorities are placed elsewhere. Two cases in point are the family literacy dollars through the Social Assistance Recipients dollars, and the Literacy for Offenders initiatives in Ontario. More than one community has carried on programming on a volunteer basis because Learners came to count on the program, and the funding has been discontinued.

24 Matthew, Marie. The Cost of Quality First Nations Education, prepared for the First Nations Education Steering Committee, Vancouver, B.C., June 2000.

25 Beverly Anne Sabourin & Associates. Resources for Learning: Aboriginal Literacy, Creating Ideas - Supporting Opportunities. Sponsored by Nokee Kwe Occupational Skill Development Inc., London, Ontario, November 2000.

Only Ontario and Manitoba provide core funding. Ontario is the only province with a specific "Aboriginal envelope". This is a dubious advantage in that Ontario's Aboriginal literacy practitioners must meet stringent funding requirements to maintain their funding. They struggle with the administrative requirements of the Literacy and Basic Skills system that uses a Learning Outcomes Matrix, with success and transition markers, to determine a Learner's progress. The markers are mainly cognitive.

In 1998, the Aboriginal stream made history in influencing the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to add a third domain - Self-Management and Self-Direction. While the success indicators that actually made it into the Validation Draft of the Matrix scarcely resemble those suggested by the Aboriginal stream, practitioners are hopeful that the Ontario Literacy Coalition's current research project on this very domain will add weight to their assertion that literacy is more than cognitive outcomes.

In the meantime, stress and turnover is high because of the heavy administrative load that comes with the funding. The result is this - the people who fill out the forms (and often have to sacrifice time with the Learners) get rewarded; those who prioritize their time with the Learners get penalized.⁽²⁶⁾ Still others try to do it all, at the expense of their health.

There is very little time, if any, to explore other avenues of funding. Even then, those other avenues carry with them criteria that may require the practitioner to tailor the activities of the literacy program to the funding criteria - at the expense of the Learners. These avenues also require their own "lingo", which may or may not be in support of the holistic approach to literacy.

"As for the funding, most literacy and ABE programs across America now have registered charity numbers Who would have thought the adult literacy system would come to this within 30 (thirty) years? Golf tournaments and fund-raising projects and reliance on the good-will of volunteers, God love them." .⁽²⁷⁾

Currently, many Aboriginal literacy programs receive \$40-\$50K per year. These dollars MUST cover both administration and delivery. This means that practitioners' salaries are often less than \$30K annually. Depending on the size of the practitioners' families (including extended family), wages are either at or slightly above poverty level wages - the 1997 Low Income Cut-offs for the Capital region as defined by Statistics Canada for a family of 4 (four) in 1997 used a gross monthly income of \$2,342 - \$28,112 annually. Yet, these very same practitioners work with the casualties of the institutional educational system where teachers and administrators often make over \$50K or \$60K - the entire budget for an Aboriginal literacy program that is expected to succeed where the education system has failed. (Overall, Aboriginal literacy practitioners carry the burden of being instructors/facilitators/teachers, as well as administrators.)

26 Anonymous participant. [National Adult Literacy Database](#) post Annual General Meeting, June 15, 2002, Fredericton, New Brunswick.

27 Quigley, Dr. B. Allan. From Possibilities to Platitudes: and Why We Love the NLS. Paper delivered during a Panel Presentation, Portraits of Literacy Conference, UBC, July 2002.

Funding for Aboriginal language literacy is not widely available. The Aboriginal Languages Literacy Fund - available through the Canada-NWT Cooperative Agreement on Aboriginal Languages - provides funding to organizations who wish to deliver projects that will help people improve their reading and writing skills in their Aboriginal language of origin. This fund has also provided support to Aboriginal languages publishing projects, so as to increase the availability of written materials in the Aboriginal languages of the NWT. However, this fund is only a drop in the bucket to meet the demand.

The NADC believes that a National Aboriginal Literacy Organization (NALO) would be instrumental in finding and sharing information about funding sources. The NALO would also provide other valuable services, such as providing links to the proposed Aboriginal Literacy Foundation which is in its initial stages.

Please see Appendix E for a description of the First Nations Education Steering Committee as a model of an Aboriginal organization involved in assisting with funding decisions.

XI. Supports for Culture-Based/Holistic Approaches to Aboriginal Literacy

(all highlights in this section are by the NADC)

A. In Canada

Since time immemorial, Aboriginal teachings, values, philosophies and ideologies shaped, nurtured and sustained Aboriginal Peoples. Various political, economic and social realities have affected some, so that they question their Aboriginal identity. Those realities include, but are not limited to The Indian Act, with its reserve system, and residential schools in which Aboriginal students were not allowed to speak their languages. Aboriginal Peoples whose identity has been adversely affected often look to the ways of the mainstream educational system as being better. Still others recognize those realities as having been foretold in Aboriginal prophecies, and have viewed them as a means to strengthen themselves. The NADC asserts that it is time to return to Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning.

1. The Constitution of Canada

According to Marie Battiste,

"Sections 35 and 25 of the Constitution of Canada - "Restoring rights to the diverse worldviews, languages, identities, and treaty orders of Indigenous peoples in the supreme law of Canada is not just a dream. It has been achieved in the Constitution of Canada in sections 35 and 25, which affirm and protect the rights of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal orders, visions, and dreams are entrenched in the Constitution. (28)"

28 Battiste, Marie. Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision. - Introduction, p xxviii. UBC Press 2000. Vancouver, B.C.

The Federal Policy Guide, Aboriginal Self-Government, The Government of Canada's Approach to Implementation of the Inherent Right and the Negotiation of Aboriginal Self-Government adds:

*"Recognition of the inherent right (of self-government) is based on the view that the Aboriginal peoples of Canada have the right to govern themselves in relation to matters that are internal to their communities, **integral to their unique cultures, identities, traditions, languages and institutions, and with respect to their special relationships to their land and their resources.**" (29)*

2. Knowledge Matters (HRDC's Discussion Paper on skills and learning)

"...all Canadians should be afforded the means and the chance to fulfill their individual potential..."

...

"Children who participate in community sports and arts programs are less likely to have emotional or behavioural problems, to experience impaired social relationships, or to repeat a grade...."

....

"...Teamwork is an essential part of the production process, and interpersonal skills are becoming key determinants of business success. For this reason the arts, humanities and social sciences are increasingly valued as preparation for employment. Also important are multidisciplinary learning and teaching techniques that develop an ability to think creatively and work collaboratively.

B. Internationally

1. The Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Education (WIPCE, Hilo, Hawai'i, 1999) asserts that:

*Over the last 30 years, Indigenous peoples throughout the world have argued that they have been denied equity in **non-Indigenous education systems which has failed to provide educational services that nurture the whole Indigenous person inclusive of scholarship, culture and spirituality...**"*

The Coolangatta Statement further speaks to:

*"...the inherent right of Indigenous peoples as declared in Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right in community with the other members of their group, **to enjoy their own culture, and to profess and practice their own religion and to use their own language...**".*

The Coolangatta Statement goes on to list various international charters, conventions and other instruments that recognize the basic human rights of all peoples, amongst which is the right to education. One that is particularly pertinent to Aboriginal literacy:

1.2.1. Article 26 of the United Nations Declaration of Human rights states:

ii Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

2. The United Nations Literacy Decade 2003-2112 Draft Resolution has this to say:

*"...also appeals to all Governments to reinforce political will and develop **more inclusive policy-making environments and devise innovative strategies for reaching the poorest and most marginalized groups...**" (30)*

3. The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning (Fifth International Conference on Adult Education) suggests:

*"It is essential that approaches to adult learning **be based on people's own heritage, culture, values and prior experiences...**"*

...

*"Adult learning should **reflect the richness of cultural diversity and respect traditional and indigenous peoples' knowledge and systems of learning; the right to learn in the mother tongue should be respected and implemented...**"*

*"Education for indigenous peoples and nomadic peoples should be **linguistically and culturally appropriate to their needs.**"*

"A renewed and expanded vision of literacy is essential for success..."

*"...it is **related to various dimensions of personal and social life and development...**"*

*"...acknowledges **the importance of a holistic, life-long and life-wide approach to literacy**" (31)*

30 UNESCO web-site, (PDF) <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001222/122204e.pdf>

31 UNESCO web-site, <http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/confintea/declaeng.htm>

4. The Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALL) indirectly measures teamwork .

*"Teamwork is of worldwide importance; individuals who wish to **participate fully in community** and professional life must increasingly possess the skills necessary to work in teams."*

*"...three primary skills required for effective teamwork - Group Decision Making/Planning, Adaptability/Flexibility, and **Interpersonal Relations** (32)*

XII. Recommendations

*"The right to be Indigenous is **the most fundamental and important of all Human Rights.**" (33)*

The NADC therefore recommends:

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

We request that the SSCAP assist the NADC in securing the assistance of the Government of Canada in establishing a national Aboriginal literacy organization. Such an office will require coordinated cooperation and support from those federal, provincial and territorial governments that have a vested interest in Aboriginal literacy. [In the past, attempts to secure funding from other federal departments (INAC), and other provinces and territories for NADC activities that serve their jurisdictions has been unsuccessful. In addition to the National Literacy Secretariat, only the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities has been forthcoming.]

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

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

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

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

32 Educational Testing Service web-site, <http://www.ets.org/all/>

33 Tebtebba web-site, The Coolangatta Statement

http://www.tebtebba.org/tebtebba_files/susdev/ik/coolangatta.html

*International research draws a direct line of cause and effect between government policy and a nation's literacy capabilities. Evidence is emerging that **the co-ordination of policies over a range of different policy domains can have significant impact, directly and indirectly, over a nation's adult literacy and numeracy levels.*** (34)

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

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

Further:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- a. Development of more holistic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms - "Success" must balance qualitative/quantitative, process/product. First and foremost, evaluation must recognize that Learners are moving towards an inner locus of control, rather than relying on predetermined charts, matrices, etc. to determine progress.
- b. Strategic thinking and planning, and for the definition of long, medium and short-term objectives and goals, based on the question,

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

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

XIII Conclusion

The NADC presents this Position Paper on Aboriginal Literacy to the Government of Canada in the Spirit of optimism, dignity, co-operation and strength. We look forward to working with the Government of Canada in demonstrating its leadership to the world in both the areas of literacy and Aboriginal Peoples. To reiterate the words of Prime Minister Jean Chretien:

"We have learned that partnership must start at home. That all departments must work as one if we are to be successful. We have also learned that there is no single recipe. No one size fits all. Our approach will be unified and tailored to the diverse needs and aspirations of Aboriginal Peoples. And it will be in partnership." (35)

The Ohahase Adult Education Program

The Ohahase Adult Education Program, affiliated with the First Nations Technical Institute, Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, Tyendinaga, Ontario, is an excellent example of what can be accomplished when programming starts with the Learners' strengths and interests first. Such an approach is in direct contrast to the deficit model of most institutional educational systems which test for Learners' needs (read weaknesses).

Ohahase has piloted two Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Portfolio Development programs with Learners in Tyendinaga, as well as a third with Learners from Nokee Kwe Occupational Skill Development Inc., London, Ontario. Janice Brant, Haudenosaunee Instructor, Ohahase, and Bernice Ireland, Haudenosaunee Instructor, Nokee Kwe, London, Ontario, both exude positive and loving energy. From the time Learners come into the programs, throughout their various activities, to the time they leave, Janice and Bernice treats them as equals. Janice and Bernice constantly encourage the Learners to see their own strengths.

The Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) provided a two-day PLA training to the facilitators and selected staff of both Ohahase and Nokee Kwe. As well, there was ongoing consultation throughout the pilots with the Director of CAPLA. In addition, Janice explored Haudenosaunee traditional teachings around the human development cycle, in particular, those most relevant to Haudenosaunee adult Learners.

Learners documented their life experiences; that is, they examined learning that took place outside of the classroom - through volunteer and employment activities, life roles, etc. They gathered evidence in the form of reference and confirmation letters, certificates, as well as samples of work to support and/or demonstrate their learning and ability to perform. Learners were able to articulate their competencies, and to recognize transferable skills and knowledge that could be applied in employment-related training and/or learning plan development. This enabled them to set realistic and attainable goals in the program.

Learners explored their relationship to self, family, clan, community, nation, confederacy, Creation and universe. Such an exploration provided a forum where cultural knowledge and practices were shared and valued, sometimes for the first time. Occasionally, both Learners and facilitators shared very personal and emotional incidents in their lives in order to reflect on the learning that resulted from those incidents. Such a process showed that Learners and facilitators are equals, and it encouraged Learner empowerment, personal growth and an improved self-image. In addition, Learners established ownership and control over their own learning.

All of these activities stimulated reflective thinking and self-assessment, which are necessary for creating self-directed Learners, as well as enhancing their self-esteem. It created an environment where multiple barriers to learning were identified. Ohahase and Nokee Kwe could then address these barriers through program design and delivery.

Learners did the following for inclusion in their PLA Portfolio:

1. a resume and cover letter;
2. chronology of life experiences;
3. a learning styles document;
4. strengths inventory;
5. an experience, skills and knowledge chart;
6. employability skills document; and,
7. a goals paper.

As part of the overall evaluation, Learners completed questionnaires, self-evaluations and program evaluations. They were required to participate in on-going consultation with the program facilitator in both oral and written form. The daily journal requirement was instrumental in collecting the written feedback.

Janice developed a manual for this PLA pilot. The manual is modularized and outcomes-based. There are eight modules, and each module is divided into three sections:

1. Activities - to build cohesion, to encourage sharing, to display abilities, to identify interests and strengths, as well as to provide opportunities for Learner empowerment.
2. Portfolio Activities - to document life experiences and learning, goal-setting, skills/knowledge identification, employability-specific transferable skills, as well as inspirational and cultural items that support a healthy sense of identity, purpose and feeling of empowerment/belonging.
3. Strategies for Reflective Thinking - self-assessment inventories or checklists, program evaluations, group brainstorming activities, and, in some instances, traditional teachings.

Learners were awarded certificates for their participation in the PLA pilot, and for completion of a Master Portfolio. Ohahase recommends that, for those interested in replicating this PLA Pilot, a training package be developed to ensure that facilitation and delivery of this process is consistent, as well as to ensure that facilitators are prepared to facilitate the PLA Portfolio process in a safe and supportive environment.

The facilitator(s) noted the following signs of empowered Learners:

1. Learners participate in on-going consultation with the facilitator and offer constructive/reflective feedback on the process

2. Learners participate in group decision-making and problem-solving
3. Learners identify and respect diversity (multiculturalism)
4. Learners are experiencing skills development (i.e., communications, leadership, decision-making, problem-solving, group dynamics, etc.)
5. Learners demonstrate an understanding of self and others
6. Learners have an awareness of community resources and can access these resources
7. Learners demonstrate enthusiasm, and a belief in their own potential
8. Learners celebrate their identity as Aboriginal people.

Facilitators also watched for physical changes or signs of empowerment - learners may take more care of their personal appearance, or walk more confidently. (1)

This Prior Learning Assessment pilot is in line with Knowledge Matters, HRDC's discussion paper on skills and learning which states that,

"Recognition of informal and non-credit learning would motivate more adults to build on their skills and would remove a significant barrier to full participation and mobility in the labour market economy for many Canadians." (Section 3, page 7)

1 Brant, Janice. Final Report to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. June 2002

Conne River First Nation, Newfoundland

In response to the discussion, Edwina Wetzel, Director of Education, Conne River First Nation, Newfoundland wrote a 3-page letter outlining how their community is committed to nurturing Spirit first in their educational programming. Part of that letter states:

"In a community of 700 people...There is 100% employment, either full-time or seasonal. Few people leave the reserve. All our directors are Band members...We have four nurses, three lawyers, 20 educators...You name it, we have it. We own hunting lodges, a garage, hardware store, grocery stores, construction co., etc.

We have done all this in 20 years...I still believe we must heal the Spirit first. If your Spirit is dead, how can you get on with life or care?

Heal Spirit first - Build self-confidence, self-esteem.

People's minds can dwell on knowledge and skills once Soul is quiet and they can see the connection of education with everything else, especially benefits.

Once they have calm and a sense of identity, direction, they have the tools to live in modern world & take advantage of what it has to offer.

With education skills and learning, they can improve their health and physical world."

A Case Study by Dr. Paulette C. Tremblay
and Dr. Maurice C. Taylor

Dr. Paulette C. Tremblay, Director of Education, Assembly of First Nations, Ottawa, Ontario, and Dr. Maurice C. Taylor, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa conducted a qualitative study to determine the dimensions of educational climate that would provide optimal learning conditions for Native adult learners. They found that:

"The cultural environment emerged as the most influential factor contributing to a quality learning environment: the values, cooperation and supportiveness components were found influential in providing effective learning conditions.

Student outcomes that were affected by climate included cognitive behaviour, affective behaviour, values, personal growth, and learner satisfaction.

*Findings from the study showed that learner outcomes were not limited to academic achievement or general skill development. **The major component of the learner outcomes that emerged as most influential for all learners was that of personal growth. Practitioners, stakeholders, and funding agencies involved with literacy programs need to clearly define the criteria for learner and program success in broad terms which encompass a multitude of learner outcomes and impacts.*** (1)

1 Tremblay, Paulette C. and Taylor, Maurice C. Native Learners' Perceptions of Educational Climate in a Native Employment Preparation Program. Ottawa, Ontario. Spring, 1988.

Seven Generations Education Institute (SGEI)

Mission Statement

The Seven Generations Education Institute is dedicated to excellence in lifelong learning and empowerment through Anishnaabemowin, by providing community-based and student-centred learning opportunities for Anishinaabeg

Description

Situated in Fort Frances, the SGEI began in 1985 as the Rainy Lake Ojibway Education Authority. It started out in an advisory capacity, and is now an institution providing educational instruction at the secondary, post-secondary and vocational levels.

SGEI encompasses the traditional education process by blending culture, tradition, information and technology. Their goal is to continue developing and implementing an education system that always takes into account the next Seven Generations. They endeavour to meet the needs of the present without compromising future generations, and educate Anishinaabeg so they will succeed in the modern world.

SGEI's activities include:

1. A Research Department that provides a means through which the cultural and ecological knowledge of the community can be meaningfully shared and extended through educational programming and development. They work with both the Elders in area First Nations and the development teams of the SGEI. They interview Elders about central themes and subject areas that the local Educators, community members and students have identified as important. Further, the Elders are provided with an opportunity to share the teachings and information which they feel all community members should know. Project work is usually done in the Native language, and all support documents are produced in bilingual format. This allows curriculum development to extend far beyond English language programming.
2. Fall Harvest - Fall is the time the First Nations Peoples prepared for the long winter ahead. The different techniques used have been developed and passed down from one generation to the next for thousands of years. Elders have maintained this tradition, and they offer it to interested people. Projects offered include but are not limited to: tanning hides and preparing wild plants, wild meat, fish, wild rice, ducks and geese; building traditional dwellings, preparing traditional foods.
3. Curriculum Enhancement - SGEI offers a range of culture-based print and audio-visual materials geared towards primary, junior and intermediate levels. There are also materials for instructors.
4. A Secondary School - This is based on independent studies, through which the student can earn his/her High School Diploma. The school offers Ontario Credited Courses from Grades 9 thru 12. Day and Evening classes are available. Satellite locations have been set

up at various First Nations locations to ensure that the students have local access to the school programs.

SGEI offers support to elementary and secondary school students, through visits, student and parent orientation (course selections), advising and creating new partnerships to increase resources and professional created materials for students.

A resource library with a wide variety of books, videos, audiotapes and CD-ROM programs on topics such as Business Administration, History, Stories, Culture and Traditions are available to anyone. The content of these resources is mainly Aboriginal, and Aboriginal people author most of the books.

SGEI hosts a summer camp each year for children aged 10-15, at which they learn such skills as starting a campfire without matches, paddling or sailing a canoe through an obstacle course, and processing wild rice then cooking it over an open fire.⁽¹⁾

SGEI provides excellent culture-based supports for education.

1 Seven Generations Education Institute web-site, <http://www.7generations.org>

Language as a Means of Building Positive Cultural Identity

Aboriginal Language

Joanne Boyer, Literacy Coordinator, Enjikendaasang Learning Centre, Mississauga # 8 First Nation, recently had Learners involved in making medicine pouches. One of the Learners knew how to tan deer-hides and offered to teach that skill to the rest of the class. Learners received the relevant teachings, then went through the various steps of making their own medicine pouches - from tanning the deerhide to cutting and assembling the pouch. Learners had to calculate the costs of materials, as well as the time spent in making the pouch, to arrive at a price that would honour their time and energy, yet be attractive to potential buyers.

Initially, the Learners flipcharted the words they would need in English and Anishnawbemowin. They practised the words, then made a decision as to when they would no longer speak English as they continued the project. The Learners then write about their experiences in Anishnawbemowin. Other exciting projects that this program has done include making cradleboards and quilts.

English

In addition, literacy practitioners are using literacy in the official languages as a way of reclaiming voice. Larry Loyie, a former Learner with the Carnegie Centre in Vancouver, noticed that a lot of books on Aboriginal Peoples were written by non-Aboriginal Peoples. He then vowed to be a vehicle for getting Aboriginal Learners to write their own stories. Larry Loyie and Constance Brissenden have done workshops across Canada to accomplish just. Acimowina is an anthology of the writings of Learners in a workshop that Larry and Constance did in Wabasca-Desmerais, Alberta.

Larry has also written a play, Ora Pro Nobis, about his experiences in residential school. This play was featured in some First Nations communities and organizations across Canada. Another book, As Long as the Rivers Flow by Larry, with Constance, has just been published earlier this year.

The Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development

The Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD), located within the historic Aboriginal Centre building at 181 Higgins Avenue in the heart of Winnipeg, is a case in point for the types of programming and supports that can be achieved when there is Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education.. CAHRD is a community-driven, non-profit human resource development organization serving Winnipeg's Aboriginal community.

CAHRD's vision is:

"...to share the responsibility of self-determination for all Aboriginal people in Winnipeg by providing quality education, training and employment opportunities through partnerships with community, educational institutions, business/industry and government."

CAHRD provides numerous programs and services to Aboriginal clients. These programs and services are designed to meet the need for growing labour demands, while at the same time allowing students the flexibility to grown and learn as individuals.

CAHRD's Employment Department has a Central Employment Service which offers assessment, employment counselling, career exploration, resume and cover letter preparation, interview techniques, building confidence, and job search strategies and referrals. The Staffing Solutions office provides individualized employment services to recent graduates of high school, university, and training or vocational programs, so that they make a successful transition into the workforce. CAHRD's Special Services for Aboriginal People with Disabilities makes available in-house counselling and referral to employment and training services, as well as referrals to other programs and services for people with disabilities.

CAHRD's Aboriginal Community Campus, in partnership with the Department of Education and Morris Macdonald School Division, provides education to adult learners from literacy to accredited Grade 12. This program works with approximately 500 (five hundred) adult Learners a year, and employs at least 13 (thirteen) teachers.

In addition, CAHRD provides in-house training programs, or refers clients to external training opportunities. Some of CAHRD's training programs include

1. 5th Class Power Engineering & Building Operations Program, to which women are encouraged to apply;
2. Special Education Teacher Assistant Program, graduates of which will provide assistance to Elementary and/or Secondary School Teachers in special programs designed for students who are physically, mentally and/or emotionally challenged.
3. Engineer Technology (Computer & Electronics Repair) - in partnership with Red River College.

4. Early Childhood Training Program (Day Care Worker Training - designed to provide certification in Early Child Education.
5. Learn With Me - a program for Parent and Child (must be a single parent), which combines Parenting Skills with accredited Grade 11 & 12 High School.
6. Cabinet Making Apprenticeship Program - participants learn to produce furniture, cabinets and architectural millwork. Hours for apprenticeship are provided through the CAHRD Woodwork Shop. Successful completion of this program, with a minimum of 70 per cent on the final examination, results in an Inter-provincial Certificate of Qualification.
7. Vocational Program - a two-year program, in which participants spend half their time doing trade training, and the other half accredited Grade 11 & 12 High School. Components include: electrical, welding, machining, carpentry, sheet metal, industrial spray painting, and health care aides. Intake is continuous.
8. Women in Trades - a one-year program which includes the adult Grade 12 program and training for women in welding and machining.
9. Adult literacy - The Aboriginal Literacy Foundation works closely with the CAHRD to access employment, training, and post-secondary opportunities for Learners. They cover a range of instruction from beginning levels of reading and writing to preparation for post-secondary education. Intake is continuous, and Learners stay until they have reached their goals. (1)

CAHRD's location in the Aboriginal Centre is ideal in that Learners have access to a wide range of services - an on-site daycare; a computer lab; an Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre; and, a law office. CAHRD's hallways abound with pictures of Aboriginal role models.(2)

CAHRD services several hundred Aboriginal clients a year, and is the winner of the 2002 Canada Post Literacy Award in the Community Leadership category for Manitoba.) All of these accomplishments were possible because CAHRD had control over its own programming and services.

1 CAHRD web-site. http://www.cahrd.org/programs_education.html

2 Site visit by the NADC Coordinator, May 31, 2002.

First Nations Education Steering Committee

The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) provides an excellent funding model. FNESC is now in its tenth year of operation, and its membership is comprised of 34 (thirty-four) representatives of First Nations communities, Tribal/Village Councils and a First Nations Education authority. It has the following sub-committees:

1. Aboriginal Language;
2. Adult Education;
3. Post-Secondary Education;
4. Special Needs; and,
5. Strategic Action.

FNESC was mandated to:

"facilitate discussion about education matters affecting First Nations in B.C. by disseminating information and soliciting input from First Nations."

FNESC'S activities include:

1. Facilitate communication (newsletter, policy updates, etc.);
2. Provide liaison for First Nations with government and other agencies;
3. Coordinate **information sharing**, to enable First Nations to do more with less money for education, as education demands increase while funding diminishes;
4. Coordinate **Provincial Conferences, Regional Workshops and Information workshops** to increase communication and support amongst First Nations communities;
5. Conduct **research** on broad topics to support First Nations education initiatives (Aboriginal Language programs, legal aspects of control and jurisdiction, Best Practices in First Nations education, gathering data regarding First Nations education for use by First Nations educators).
6. Undertake some **policy discussions**, with explicit direction from, consultation and communication with First Nations communities themselves;
7. Provide a forum for **a united First Nations voice**;

8. Serve as a clearinghouse for information, resources and models for First nations education activities; and,
9. Provide administrative and technical support to ensure First Nations control and administration of First Nations education programs such as the youth initiatives.

FNESC works with the First Nations Schools Association to administer funding for a number of different programs, including:

1. Youth Programs;
2. Gathering Strength; and,
3. First Nations School Assessment.

In addition, FNESC provides administrative support to the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) Committee through a fee-for-service arrangement. The ISSP makes recommendations to the DIA regarding funding for accredited, First Nations controlled post-secondary education programs.⁽¹⁾

These activities serve to support First nations in ensuring that their Learners are provided with educational opportunities of the highest quality. FNESC is an excellent example of the types of partnerships and the range of activities that are required to ensure high quality educational programming for First Nations.

¹ FNESC web-site, <http://www.fnesc.bc.ca>

DRAFT

National Aboriginal Literacy Association

MISSION

The National Aboriginal Literacy Association will be the eyes, ears, and voice of Aboriginal literacy in Canada, and will reflect the Spirit and values of Aboriginal Peoples and nations in all of its work.

GOALS

The goals of the National Aboriginal Literacy Association are:

a) to provide a forum on Aboriginal literacy:

NALA will facilitate networking, communications and liaison for stakeholders in Aboriginal literacy; thereby supporting the development of a strong movement of Aboriginal Peoples and organizations involved with Aboriginal literacy education.

b) to be the voice of Aboriginal literacy;

NALA will provide leadership for, and speak on behalf of, the Aboriginal literacy community to inform governments and the general public about issues related to Aboriginal literacy in Canada, and will establish a presence in the wider national and international community.

c) to facilitate Aboriginal literacy development initiatives;

NALA will manage, coordinate and partner in research and development initiatives addressing Aboriginal learning environments and approaches to literacy education.

d) to promote autonomous Aboriginal learning environments;

NALA supports literacy education developed by Aboriginal Peoples for Aboriginal Peoples, and will work with the broader Aboriginal community to advance the development and operation of autonomous Indigenous-controlled literacy learning environments.

e) to nourish and develop strong partnerships;

NALA will develop partnerships with, and remain inclusive of, others, regardless of nation or race, who want to work and learn in Aboriginal environments, or who wish to partner in Aboriginal literacy development initiatives.

f) to support quality in Aboriginal literacy education;

NALA will support the work of Aboriginal education agencies in developing and implementing quality programs. NALA will assist stakeholders in developing culturally appropriate and culture-based programming, achieving accreditation status, and attaining the necessary resources to deliver Aboriginal literacy programs with pride.

g) to support Aboriginal cultural revitalization;

NALA will support the nourishment and revitalization of Aboriginal societies, economies, languages and cultures through literacy education.

h) to advocate for holistic approaches to learning;

NALA promotes holistic learning at every step of the learning process, thereby contributing to a foundation for the balanced physical, mental, emotional and spiritual development of Aboriginal Peoples.

i) to respect and involve Learners;

NALA will work to strengthen the Aboriginal literacy Student/Learner voice in Canada, and to involve Learners in the work of the organization.

j) to maintain the highest organizational standards.

NALA will maintain high standards in organizational and financial management, and promote an atmosphere of respect among its board, staff, contract employees and partners, in an environment that is grounded in Aboriginal values. NALA will receive and manage funds and assets, and maximize the use of all resources for the attainment of its goals and to do all things incidental or conducive to the attainment of its goals.