

## *Comprehending and Nourishing the Learning Spirit*

This research explores the potential we have as human beings for learning, as individuals and as groups. Little is known about the learning journey that each person travels to arrive comfortably at their own awareness of their gifts, capacities, strengths, which broadly can be seen as their learning spirit. How that learning spirit evolves in a lifetime to create a learning journey is also less well known. What is better known is how many Aboriginal people venture off conventional learning paths of high schools and universities and colleges. This theme explores the nature of Comprehending and Nourishing the Learning Spirit in Aboriginal learning, the literature, issues, and promising practices, and considers how learning can be enriched lifelong to nourish the learning spirit.

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<http://aerc.usask.ca/projects/learningspirit.html>

<http://www.usask.ca/education/people/battistem.htm>

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## *K-12 Education and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in Canada*

*“What counts as success is when students aspire to and reach their full potential” and “the compassion and heart that students bring to their practice. Encouraging students to take risks in learning and developing their unique gifts is a constructive way to support students”<sup>i</sup>*

- According to the 2006 Census:
  - “60% of First Nations on-reserve residents aged 20 to 24 have not completed high school or obtained an alternative diploma or certificate”<sup>ii</sup>
  - Off-reserve Status First Nations and Métis fair better with a high school completion rate of 60% and nearly 75%, respectively<sup>iii</sup>
  - However, in the north, the educational attainment of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners resembles on-reserve First Nations:
    - In the 1950s “less than 15% of young people in the north had any formal schooling”<sup>iv</sup>
    - Despite the availability of formal schools, the gap in high-school attainment is “the highest for Inuit people, at 3.6 times higher”<sup>v</sup> than non-Aboriginals in 2001 and in the same year “58% of Inuit had not graduated from high school”<sup>vi</sup>
- In British Columbia Status First Nations who have none of what psychologists Michael Chandler and Chris Lalonde (1998) call “the requisite cultural continuity factors [self-government, land claims, control of education, control of health care, cultural facilities, and police and fire services] had a drop-out rate of 73%” with some as high as 90%, but the drop-out rate declines as communities gain more control over their educational and social service facilities, to a drop-out as low as 45%<sup>vii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> A. Weenie, L. Goulet, M. Sasakamoose, & B. Schenstead, Self-study and report: Aboriginal ways of knowing in teacher education, in Niessen, S. (Ed.), *Aboriginal knowledge exchange project self-study and compilation and report: Aboriginal ways of knowing in teacher education* (Regina: Saskatchewan Instructional Development Unit in partnership with the Canadian Council on Learning, 2008) 38.

<sup>ii</sup> M. Mendelson, Improving education on reserves: A First Nations Education Authority Act (Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, 2008) 1.

<sup>iii</sup> J. Richards, Closing the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal education gaps: C.D. Howe Institute backgrounder: Social policy, no. 116, 2008, retrieved 1 November 2008 from [http://www.cdhowe.org/pdf/Backgrounder\\_116.pdf](http://www.cdhowe.org/pdf/Backgrounder_116.pdf), 3.

<sup>iv</sup> C.D. James Paci, Decolonizing Athabaskan education: Aboriginal and treaty rights in Denendeh, in Abu-Saad, I. & Champagne, D. (Eds.), *Indigenous education and empowerment: International perspectives* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2006) 85.

<sup>v</sup> J. Ball, Promoting equity and dignity for Aboriginal children in Canada, *IRPP Choices* 14.7 (2008): 9.

<sup>vi</sup> Government of Canada, Executive Services and Government Relations, Saskatchewan Region, *Registered Indian Population, Household and Family Projects* (Regina: Author, 2007) 48.

<sup>vii</sup> D. Hallett, Aboriginal identity development, language knowledge, and school attrition: An examination of cultural continuity. Ph.D. Diss., UBC, 2005. Retrieved 25 June 2008 from <http://proquest.umi.com.cyber.usask.ca/pqdweb?index=1&sid=1&srchmode=1&vinst=PROD&fmt=6&startpage=-1&clientid=12306&vname=PQD&did=1037884871&scaling=FULL&ts=1162917377&vtype=PQD&rqt=309&TS=1214432669&clientId=12306>.

## *First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Learners in Care of Social Services*

*[There is] growing recognition of the importance of community in the learning experience of young Aboriginal people. Consequently, there is a move toward a more holistic perspective on learning, in which parents, families, and Elders are extensions of the local school”<sup>i</sup>*

- By 1982, “the rate of Aboriginal children in the care of provincial social services departments ranged from 2.6 percent in Quebec to a high of sixty-three percent in Saskatchewan”<sup>ii</sup>
  - In 2007, 55% of children in care in British Columbia were Aboriginal, and 1 in 7 Aboriginal children aged 6 to 18 have been in care at some point in their life
    - In 1955, less than 1% of Aboriginal children were in care but by 1964, the rate had risen to 34%.<sup>iii</sup>
  - In 2008, Aboriginal children made up 9% of Alberta’s children but 59% of children in care<sup>iv</sup>
- In British Columbia:
  - It is “estimated that 21% of children in care graduate from high school within six years from enrolment in Grade 8, compared with 78% of the general population ... 12% of children in care with special needs graduate from high school as opposed to 34% of children in care without special needs”
  - Girls in care have a teen pregnancy rate that is 4 times the general population<sup>v</sup>
- “[L]arger proportions of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal offenders had been placed in foster care (49% versus 24%) or placed for adoption (16% versus 6%)”<sup>vi</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Canadian Council on Learning, *State of learning in Canada: No time for complacency*. Ottawa, 2007, 80.

<sup>ii</sup> M.B. Castellano, Contemporary family trends: Aboriginal family trends: Extended families, nuclear families, families of the heart, The Vanier Institute of the Family, 2002, 19, retrieved 27 January 2008 from <http://www.vifamily.ca/library/cft/aboriginal.pdf>.

<sup>iii</sup> British Columbia, Office of the Provincial Health Officer, *Joint special report: Health and well-being of Children in Care in British Columbia: Educational experience and outcomes*. Victoria, 2007.

<sup>iv</sup> A. Hanon, British study shows new generation of residential schools emerging *Native Journal* (Spring, 2008), retrieved 18 April 2008 from <http://www.nativejournal.ca/pages/frameset.html>.

<sup>v</sup> British Columbia, Office of the Provincial Health Officer, 2007, 25.

<sup>vi</sup> S. Trevelyan, J.-P. Moore, S. Auger, M. MacDonald, & J. Sinclair, Childhood experiences affect Aboriginal offenders *Forum on Corrections Research* 14.3 (2002): 2, retrieved 19 December 2008 from <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/pblct/forum/e143/e143ind-eng.shtml>.

## *First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Learners and Gender*

*Saulteaux Elder Danny Musqua tells us that “The foundation of our people is the heart of a woman.*

*When they are strong, we are strong. We survive because our women are strong.*

*The day we begin to recognize this is the day we will become great again”<sup>i</sup>*

- Aboriginal women and men have made great strides in terms of the acquisition of skills and participation in the workforce:
  - “The skill rate among Aboriginal men is 51%, and 52% among Aboriginal women. This means that there is no male-female skill gap among Aboriginal workers. By contrast, the male-female skill gap among non-Aboriginal workers is 6 percentage points (64% male vs. 58% female)”
  - Aboriginal women achieve university degrees at twice the rate of their male counterparts
  - Public sector employment has enabled Aboriginal women to stand equal with their professional male counterparts but without it the skill gap increases to 20% for women and 37% for men<sup>ii</sup>
- Aboriginal girls and women face challenges distinct from Aboriginal men:
  - The number of children born to Status First Nations teenagers in the past twenty-five years has been 100 births per 1000 women, and this rate is 7 times higher than for non-Aboriginal teenagers
  - Almost all fathers of First Nations and Métis children interviewed for a forthcoming study reported mental health illnesses such as addictions and difficulty securing meaningful and long-term employment and housing. Consequently, substantial numbers of First Nations and Métis children in Canada do not have active fathers in their lives<sup>iii</sup>
  - 60% of Aboriginal girls who responded to the 1998 Adolescent Health Survey reported at least one incident of verbal harassment, 31% had experienced physical abuse, and 29% had been in a physical fight
  - In some urban neighbourhoods in western Canada (BC, MB, & SK), more than 20% of Aboriginal girls belong to gangs<sup>iv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Dr. Danny Musqua, quoted in D. Knight, *The seven fires: Teachings of The Bear Clan as told by Dr. Danny Musqua: Knowledge of human growth and learning practiced in the old world of the Nacowaninawuk (Saulteaux): A guide to health and wellbeing in the new world* (Prince Albert: Many Worlds Publishing, 2007) 36.

<sup>ii</sup> C. Kapasalis, Aboriginal occupational gap: Causes and consequences, in J.P. White, J.P. Wingert, S. Beavon, & P. Maxim (Eds.), *Aboriginal policy research: Moving forward, making a difference* (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 2006) 90, 93-94.

<sup>iii</sup> J. Ball, Promoting equity and dignity for Aboriginal children in Canada *IRPP Choices* 14.7 (2008): 8.

<sup>iv</sup> H. McPhaden & J. Sarson, Violence in the lives of girls in the Kainai First Nation (Calgary: Stardale Women's Group, 2008) 10.



## *Indigenous Heritage Languages and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Learners*

*“There is clear and convincing evidence that student achievement and performance in school and pride in Aboriginal communities and heritages are directly tied to respect for and support of the students’ Aboriginal languages”<sup>i</sup>*

- Census data over 15 years (1986-2001) highlights the sharp decline in the number of proficient Indigenous language speakers:
  - In 2001, 235,000 or 24% of those who self-identified as Aboriginal reported that they could talk in their Indigenous language, a steep drop from 29% in 1996
  - In 1986, 41% of Aboriginal children had an Indigenous language as their first language, but this percentage fell to 32% in 2001
  - In 2001 only 18% of self-identifying Aboriginals spoke an Indigenous language regularly
- The ability of some First Nations to speak their Indigenous languages is on the rise in Canada, based on data from 1996-2001:
  - Attikamek: Increase of 21%
  - Dene: Increase of 11%<sup>ii</sup>
- The data from the 2002-2003 *First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey* show that “children of survivors (22.6%) are more likely than children whose parents did not attend residential school (16.4%) to speak one or more First Nations languages fluently...parents of survivors are more likely to attribute a high level of importance to their children’s learning a First Nations language, and to the importance of traditional/cultural events”<sup>iii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Marie Battiste, Maintaining Aboriginal identity, language and culture in modern society, in Battiste, M. (Ed.), *Reclaiming indigenous voice and vision* (Vancouver, Toronto: UBC Press, 2000) 199.

<sup>ii</sup> M.J. Norris, M. J., Aboriginal languages in Canada: Emerging trends and perspectives on second language acquisition *Canadian Social Trends* (n.d.): 19, 22.

<sup>iii</sup> Assembly of First Nations, *First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS) 2002/03, 2<sup>nd</sup>*. Ed. Ottawa, 2007, 297.

## *The Learning Spirit*

*Saulteaux Elder Danny Musqua tells us that “knowledge is held by the spirits, shared by the spirits and comes from the spirits. Our body then can be seen as carrier of the learning spirit”<sup>i</sup>*

*In terms of learning, Anishinaabe literacy practitioner Ningwakwe George says that “we chose the circumstances; we have gifts that are going to help us fulfill our purpose but because of the circumstances, we haven’t been able to actualize those gifts”*

*Mi’kmaq education scholar Marie Battiste teaches that “we have a purpose and a plan that tells us and lets us know that we are on the right path; when we are not on that path, we feel it, and we try to pull ourselves back on that path”*

*Through ceremony, knowledge of the places of our ancestors, and the cementing of kinship ties we may restore an “individual’s self-respect and an awareness of their roots. Through ceremonies individuals come to understand that they are connected not only to each other, but to their past, and to the present. They have a place and responsibility in their communities. The ceremonies nurture the spirit, thus strengthening both the individual and the community”<sup>ii</sup>*

*Restoring an individual’s awareness of their learning spirit and the emotions that drive their purpose is of paramount importance in literacy, lifelong learning, and social justice for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners. At the Seven Generations Education Institute in Fort Frances, Ontario, Laura Horton has said the following: “As we look at our youth, we still see many in pain, suffering with their parents whose spirit has been beaten. Many youth struggle and their spirit is also dimming. And so, we organize teaching events where elders and youth come together”*



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<sup>i</sup> Elder Musqua in D. Knight, *The seven fires: Teachings of The Bear Clan as told by Dr. Danny Musqua: Knowledge of human growth and learning practiced in the old world of the Nacowaninawuk (Saulteaux): A guide to health and wellbeing in the new world* (Prince Albert: Many Worlds Publishing, 2007).

<sup>ii</sup> A.W. Blue & M.A. Rogers Blue, "The case for Aboriginal justice and healing: The self perceived through a broken mirror," in Hadley, M.L. (Ed.), *The spiritual roots of restorative justice* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001) 69.

## *Holistic Health and Wellness and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Learners*

*“A whole person denotes a human being who is capable of balancing his/her mental, emotional, physical and spiritual human capabilities both internally within oneself and externally in societal interaction with all life forms present throughout Creation”<sup>i</sup>*

- The contemporary health status of many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners based on data gathered and analyzed between 1995 and 2003:
  - 23% of off-reserve Aboriginal people report their health as poor or fair as opposed to 12% of non-Aboriginals<sup>ii</sup>
  - Status First Nations adolescents (aged 10-19) are 8 times more likely than non-Status First Nations to commit suicide;<sup>iii</sup> “youth whose parents attended residential schools are more likely than youth of non-survivors to contemplate suicide at 26.3% and 18.0% respectively”<sup>iv</sup>
  - 54.1% of Status First Nations families report one or more health conditions that affect their children’s learning at school and 40.3% of families report that their children are in fair or poor health<sup>v</sup>
- The Labrador Inuit Health Commission’s 1999 Regional Health survey found that “86% of adults [thought] that a return to traditional ways [was] a good idea for promoting community wellness”<sup>vi</sup>

*“Healing restores our rootedness in who we are as Indigenous Peoples, and this rootedness in our own ways empowers us to heal from harms and to survive”<sup>vii</sup>*



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<sup>i</sup> D.L. Hill, *Holistic learning: A model of education based on Aboriginal cultural philosophy*, M.A. Thesis, Adult Education, Saint Francis Xavier University, 1999, 18.

<sup>ii</sup> Statistics Canada in D. Hay, J. Varga-Toth, & J. Hines, *Frontline health care in Canada: Innovations in delivering services to vulnerable populations*, Research Report Fl63 Family Network, Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Network, 2006, retrieved 19 April 2008 from [http://www.cprn.org/documents/45652\\_en.pdf](http://www.cprn.org/documents/45652_en.pdf).

<sup>iii</sup> Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Choosing life: Special report on suicide among Aboriginal people* (Ottawa: Canadian Communications Group Publishing, 1995) note 22.

<sup>iv</sup> Assembly of First Nations, *First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS) 2002/03*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed. (Ottawa: 2007) 217, Table 3.

<sup>v</sup> Assembly of First Nations 161, Figures 4 and 6.

<sup>vi</sup> Labrador Inuit Health Commission, quoted in University of Saskatchewan, Aboriginal Education Research Centre, *Preparing a holistic approach for a Virtual Aboriginal Health Training Centre of Excellence within Saskatchewan: Literature Review* (Saskatoon: 2007) 15.

<sup>vii</sup> J.S.Y. Henderson & W.D. McCaslin, Introduction: Exploring justice as healing, In McCaslin, W.D. (Ed.), *Justice as healing: Aboriginal ways* (St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 2005) 8.

## *Post-Secondary Education, Lifelong Learning, and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Learners*

*“Learning success happens when people are drawn to learning environments like magnets; this process creates cognitive gravity; the learning environments talk to your whole body and find expression in your voice”<sup>i</sup>*

- 8% of Aboriginal workers have completed a university degree, substantially less than non-Aboriginal workers at 21%<sup>ii</sup>
- However, the University of Saskatchewan has the highest percentage of graduate students – 4.9% of a sample of 36 000 graduate students at 28 universities in Canada<sup>iii</sup>
- In 2001, 37% of status First Nations, 30% of Métis, and 23% of off-reserve First Nations had post-secondary qualifications<sup>iv</sup>
- Aboriginal peoples are under-represented in applied science training and practice:
  - In 2003, only 150 of 150,000 Engineers self-identified as Aboriginal<sup>v</sup>
  - In 2001, 0.7% of first-year medical school classes had Aboriginal students<sup>vi</sup>
- Many Aboriginal learners intend to return to their home communities to practice. For example, 94% of Inuit health-care students surveyed in one study plan to return home upon completion of their studies<sup>vii</sup>



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- <sup>i</sup> Sakej Henderson, quoted in Jonathan Anuik, *Animating the Spirit in Aboriginal Lifelong Learning: Report of the May, 2007 Banff Dialogue For Animation Theme Bundle 2: Comprehending and Nourishing the Learning Spirit*, unpublished report for the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, in partnership with the Canadian Council on Learning, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008, 31.
- <sup>ii</sup> C. Kapasalis, Aboriginal occupational gap: Causes and consequences, In J.P. White, J.P. Wingert, S. Beavon, and P. Maxim, eds., *Aboriginal policy research: Moving forward, making a difference* (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 2006) 93.
- <sup>iii</sup> Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey, University of Saskatchewan Results, January, 2008 in University of Saskatchewan, College of Graduate Studies and Research – March newsletter.
- <sup>iv</sup> E. Bougie, Literacy profile of off-reserve First Nations and Métis people living in urban Manitoba and Saskatchewan: Results from the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, n.d.), retrieved 30 April 2008 from <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/81-004-BXIE/2007005/article/10500-en.htm>.
- <sup>v</sup> CBC Manitoba – Features – Hard Lessons. Why we need to fix Aboriginal education – Now, retrieved 24 October 2008 from <http://www.cbc.ca/manitoba/features/hardlessons/>.
- <sup>vi</sup> Canadian Council on Learning, Aboriginal and rural under-representation in Canada’s medical schools, *Lessons in Learning*, 2008, retrieved 29 October 2008 from <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL20080417AboriginalRuralUnder-representationMedicalSchools.htm>.
- <sup>vii</sup> Canadian Council on Learning



## *First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Learners with (Dis)abilities*

*“The old man said, to have been born imperfect was a sign of specialness [and] that in the old days, if a child came with a hare-shorn lip, it wasn’t a terrible thing or a hurtful thing; it meant the child’s soul was still in touch with the Spirit World”<sup>i</sup>*

- Disability amongst Aboriginal learners is not widely discussed. Some references point to a lack of federal funds for disabled students in reserve schools<sup>ii</sup> while others concentrate on learning of traditional perspectives on disability and ability<sup>iii</sup>
- In Alberta, the “Aboriginal disability rate is nearly double the rate of other Albertans. 1 in 5 (20%) of Aboriginal peoples aged 15 years and older have a disability” yet out of 131 service agencies for people with disabilities, only “42% were aware of programs/services supporting Aboriginal peoples with disabilities”<sup>iv</sup>
- Some additional facts that we have learned include:
  - 50% of Aboriginal students in the Northwest Territories identified as having “intellectual disabilities” have been the result of being born with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum/Fetal Alcohol Effect<sup>v</sup>
  - 33% of Aboriginal male youth offenders indicated that a parent, teacher, counsellor, psychologist, or psychiatrist identified them as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; 20% of these youth believe that they suffer from this disorder. For girls, the rates were 18% and 16%, respectively<sup>vi</sup>
- Some important questions to ask include how disability is diagnosed, what the implications are for learners, and if treatments are inclusive of Indigenous ways of knowing

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<sup>i</sup> Yvonne Johnson and Rudy Wiebe, *Stolen life: The journey of a Cree woman* (Toronto: Jackpine House, 1998).

<sup>ii</sup> See D. Bell (Ed.), *Sharing our success: Ten case studies in Aboriginal schooling* (Kelowna: Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, 2004); G. Fulford (Ed.), *Sharing our success: More case studies in Aboriginal schooling* (Kelowna: Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, 2007).

<sup>iii</sup> See R. Jenkins, EADA: The 1<sup>st</sup> Aboriginal Abilities Forum report (Edmonton: EADA, c/o Canadian Native Friendship Centre, 2007).

<sup>iv</sup> Jenkins 17.

<sup>v</sup> M. Bennett, C. Blackstock, & R. De La Ronde, A literature review and annotated bibliography on aspects of Aboriginal child welfare in Canada, First Nations Research Site of the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare and The First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, 2005, retrieved 4 May 2008 from <http://www.accel-capea.ca/pdf/childwelfarelitreview.pdf>.

<sup>vi</sup> R. R. Corrado & I.M. Cohen, A needs profile of serious and/or violent Aboriginal youth in prison *Forum on Corrections Research* 14.3 (2002): 7, retrieved 19 December 2008 from [http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/pblct/forum/e143/143g\\_e.pdf](http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/pblct/forum/e143/143g_e.pdf).

## *First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Early Childhood Learning*

*“Little people need validation. We do need a sense of nurture; for somebody to let us know that we are cared for”<sup>i</sup>*

- 7% of young Aboriginal children live with their grandparents – 7 times the number of non-Aboriginal children
  - Living with grandparents can provide children with an opportunity to learn from living on the land, their indigenous languages, and participating in ceremonies<sup>ii</sup>
- Since the mid-1990s, Aboriginal Head Start programs, funded by the Canadian federal government, have prepared children for K-12 schooling in culturally respectful and validating spaces
  - Children in Head Start programs may attain above-average school readiness: 29% in 2001 and 47% in 2004
  - Aboriginal Head Start serves only 12% of on-reserve children and 7.6% of those who live off-reserve<sup>iii</sup>
  - In 2001-2002, 66% of child care centres funded by the federal government and First Nations and Inuit had long waiting lists. It is imperative that the number of spaces in Aboriginal Head Start increase to include at least 25% of Aboriginal children in order to combat the long waiting lists many Head Start programs have<sup>iv</sup>
- There is a need for training programs for Early Childhood First Nations, Métis and Inuit educators and administrators. Over 80% of graduates of a child care training program partnership between several First Nations and the University of Victoria School of Child & Youth Care “reported that their parenting and grand-parenting skills and confidence had improved significantly” as a result of the training<sup>v</sup>

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- <sup>i</sup> Leroy Little Bear, quoted in Jonathan Anuik, *Animating the Spirit in Aboriginal Lifelong Learning: Report of the May, 2007 Banff Dialogue For Animation Theme Bundle 2: Comprehending and Nourishing the Learning Spirit*, unpublished report for the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, in partnership with the Canadian Council on Learning, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008, 12.
- <sup>ii</sup> J. Ball, The quality of life of Aboriginal children: Indicators and cultural issues, In *Institute of Research in Public Policy report: Education of on-reserve children robs a generation of its future* (Montreal: IRPP, 2007) 4.
- <sup>iii</sup> Government of Canada, Executive Services and Government Relations, Saskatchewan Region, *Registered Indian population, household and family projects* (Regina: Author, 2007) 46.
- <sup>iv</sup> J. Ball, Promoting equity and dignity for Aboriginal children in Canada, *IRPP Choices* 14.7 (2008): 14, 16, 17.
- <sup>v</sup> J. Ball & A. Pence, *Supporting Indigenous children's development* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006) 98.

## *First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Learners: Thoughts on Holistic Lifelong Learning*

*“Life is comprised of relationships: everything is connected in a circular, holistic, and cumulative way; learners are part of these processes and cycles”<sup>i</sup>*

*“All humans are part of the land and the land is a part of us because the Creator’s spirit flows through all things – everything in creation has a role and responsibility to play. It is by understanding these roles and responsibilities that we come to understand who we are and our Place in the universe”<sup>ii</sup>*

*Saulteaux Elder Danny Musqua teaches, “[T]he learning process is a personal journey, and requires not only the use of the mind, but also the use of the heart, body, and spirit of the individual”<sup>iii</sup>*

*“Certain situations enable the heart and the brain to collaborate but where there is a disturbance between the two, learning cannot happen”<sup>iv</sup>*

*It is important to teach students as whole learners because “we have emotional drop-out from the institutions before physical drop-out.” Ningwakwe George explains further: “When we listen with our eyes, we watch the Learners’ body language, to see what engages them and what causes anxiety. When we listen with our Hearts, we associate what the Learners are sharing with similar experiences in our lives”<sup>v</sup>*



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<sup>i</sup> H. Michell, Y. Vizina, C. Augustus, & J. Sawyer, Learning indigenous science from place: Research study examining indigenous-based science perspectives in Saskatchewan First Nations and Métis community contexts (Saskatoon: Aboriginal Education Research Centre, 2008) 61.

<sup>ii</sup> Michell, Vizina, Augustus, & Sawyer 62.

<sup>iii</sup> D. Knight, *The seven fires: Teachings of the Bear Clan as told by Dr. Danny Musqua: Knowledge of human growth and learning practiced in the old world of the Nacowaninawuk (Saulteaux): A guide to health and wellbeing in the new world* (Prince Albert: Many Worlds Publishing, 2007) 9.

<sup>iv</sup> Vicky Kelly, quoted in Jonathan Anuik, Animating the Spirit in Aboriginal Lifelong Learning: Report of the May, 2007 Banff Dialogue For Animation Theme Bundle 2: Comprehending and Nourishing the Learning Spirit, unpublished report for the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, in partnership with the Canadian Council on Learning, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008, 14.

<sup>v</sup> N. George, The learner – A whole person. Discussion Paper # 1, 1, available at <http://www.learningandviolence.net/lrnteach/reflprac/paper1.pdf>.