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NATURALIZING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Synthesis Paper

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JULY 2009



**First Nations Adult
& Higher Education Consortium**



Disclaimer

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

Acknowledgements and Copyright

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

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

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

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

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

This publication *Naturalizing Indigenous Knowledge, Synthesis Paper*, is available (English only) electronically on CCL's Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre website at www.ccl-cca.ca/aboriginallearning

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CCL SYNTHESIS REPORT

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NATURALIZATION OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE ¹

INTRODUCTION

A plethora of studies regarding Aboriginal education in Canada exists. These studies, more or less, come up with the same findings. These studies regularly point out what is now almost rhetorical: the existing education systems in Canada have largely failed the Aboriginal Peoples. From the Hawthorne Report in the 1960's to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in the mid 1990's, all point out the same findings: Aboriginal Peoples are not succeeding in the present education systems; Aboriginal students have the highest drop out rates; Aboriginal students consistently are at the bottom of performance scales. But the education systems in Canada have also consistently been reportedly unresponsive to the educational needs, wants, and weaknesses of Aboriginal Peoples. They have largely resisted making the infrastructure, curricular, and pedagogical changes required to effectively service Aboriginal students.

The Canadian Council on Learning, an independent, non-profit corporation that promotes and supports research to improve all aspects of learning across the country and across all walks of life, identified five key areas of learning that require urgent attention. To ensure that these areas are addressed from a pan-Canadian perspective, it created five region-based knowledge centres across Canada to support these themes. ² One of the five knowledge centres established is the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre. The AbLKC (from herein) was created to provide a collaborative national forum that supports the development of effective solutions for the challenges faced by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners. The ABLKC is co-led by the First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium (FNAHEC) and the Aboriginal Education Research Centre (AERC), College of Education, University of Saskatchewan. The ABLKC states its mandate as follows: “The purpose of the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre is to effect individual, community and institutional change in learning to advance the social, cultural, economic and political development of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples; recognizing Indigenous peoples’ relationships to Canada, their relationships to place and naturalizing Indigenous world views, knowledge, experiences and perspectives.”³

Pursuant to its mandate during the years 2006 – 2009, AbLKC undertook a pan-Canadian assessment of Aboriginal learning in Canada in literature reviews and program scans as well as public dissemination of this knowledge in various knowledge exchange events such as conferences, workshops, dialogues, and community events. AbLKC is guided in its work by a consortium of over 100 organizations, institutions, a steering committee, and six Animation Theme Bundles led by members of the Consortium. The Bundles represent priorities established in the AbLKC for identifying the key issues, barriers and institutional gaps in enhancing learning among First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples.

¹ In this paper, the word “Aboriginal” is used to include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada. The word “Indigenous” is used interchangeably with “Aboriginal” throughout the paper.

² Canadian Council on Learning: www.ccl-cca.ca

³ AbLKC: www.ccl-cca.ca/aboriginallearning

These include 1) learning from place, 2) nourishing the learning spirit, 3) Aboriginal languages, 4) diverse educational systems of learning, 5) pedagogy of professionals, and 6) learning with technology. This synthesis paper will address AbLKC's findings arising out of, but not limited to, Bundles 1, 2, and 3. This synthesis paper will utilize data from international standards respecting the rights of Aboriginal Peoples, existing literature on the topic, and data produced by ABLKC through its Animation Theme Bundles.

PART 1: NATURALIZING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE: THE CONCEPTUALS

WHAT IS INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE?

Knowledge can be variously defined as 'the state of knowing', 'cognition', 'understanding', or 'that which is known'.⁴ Generally, depending on the context, knowledge is usually understood to refer to the sum total of what is known by an individual, group, cultural and otherwise, community, society, nation, and humanity. "Indigenous knowledge (IK) is part of the collective genius of humanity. It represents the accumulated experience, wisdom and know-how unique to nations, societies, and or communities of people, living in specific ecosystems of America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. It represents the accumulated knowledge of the earth's people that represent over 5000 languages and cultures contained in more than 70 nation-states."⁵ However, this knowledge has to be understood from an Indigenous context. Knowledge is not a tangible thing, but its manifestations may be tangible. Knowledge is a methodology. A methodology is a validation process. It speaks to how we validate sensory intake so that a person can claim, "I know". Knowing is represented in the Aboriginal context as multiple and diverse processes from which a person can claim, "I know". Knowledge, gleaned from within these processes and within an Aboriginal context, includes other ways of knowing, i.e. dreams, visions, insights and teachings that validate one's sensory intake.

In the Indigenous world, knowledge is relationships. According to Bastien, "Knowledge is relational and dependent upon the relationships that are learned in childhood."⁶ Shawn Wilson speaking about the affirmation of one's reality states, "... reality is relationships or sets of relationships."⁷ Knowledge, accordingly, is not something contained in a book, a CD or other memory mechanisms. Knowledge, from an Indigenous perspective, is the relationships one has to "all my relations".⁸

⁴ Webster's Dictionary, *The New Lexicon of the English Language*, (New York: Lexicon Publications, Inc., 1988) 544

⁵ Marie Battiste and James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson, *Naturalizing Indigenous Knowledge in Education: A Synthesis Paper*, (unpublished, 2008) 4

⁶ Betty Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing, The Worldview of the Siksikaitstapi*, (University of Calgary Press, Calgary, Alberta, 2004) 77

⁷ Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, (Fernwood Publishing, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 2008) 73

⁸ In the Indigenous world, everything is animate and has spirit. "All my relations" refers to relationships with everything in creation.

CULTURE/COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT⁹

Culture plays a very important role in regards to knowledge, learning, and education. One must have a thorough understanding and appreciation of culture if he/she is going to educate or otherwise impart knowledge to another. One can safely say that culture is ‘the end and be all’ when it comes to knowledge, education, learning, and pedagogy. Culture in its most fundamental form and structure is a collective agreement of the members of a society, linguistic group, and/or nation regarding the nature of reality. It includes prescriptions and circumscriptions about what is and not is acceptable. It includes beliefs, customs, values, and sanction (both positive and negative). It can be said that a culture is a collective agreement between members of a group of human beings that basically says, “this is how we are going to run our society.” Clyde Kluckhohn defines culture as

Each different way of life makes its own assumptions about the end purposes of human existence, about ways by which human knowledge may be obtained, about the organization of the pigeon-holes in which each sense datum is filed, about human beings have a right to expect from each other and the gods, about what constitutes fulfillment and frustration. Some of these assumptions are made explicit in the lore of the folk; others are tacit premises, which the observer must infer by finding consistent trends in word and deed.¹⁰

Culture includes paradigms, customs, and values. The paradigms are, more or less, the theoretical or esoteric side of culture. Customs are the ways of doing things and are the functional and practical applications of the paradigms. Values are those mechanisms a society builds into its culture that, in essence, say to the members of a society “if you subscribe to and pursue these values, you will be rewarded, recognized, and given prestige. But, if you do not, you may be the object of criticism, ostracism, jokes, ridicule, and the like.”

ABORIGINAL PARADIGMS

Aboriginal paradigms include ideas of constant flux, all existence consisting of energy waves/spirit, all things being animate, all existence being interrelated, creation/existence having to be renewed, space/place as an important referent, and language, songs, stories, and ceremonies as repositories for the knowledge that arise out of these paradigms. Gary Witherspoon observes, “... the assumption that underlies the dualistic aspect of all being and existence is that the world is in motion, that things are constantly undergoing

⁹ Many of the ideas, concepts, and quotations in this section are paraphrases that are contained in a Master’s thesis by Amethyst First Rider, “*Sweet Grass Visions*”, (Univ. of Calgary, 1994)

¹⁰ Clyde Kluckhohn, “*The Philosophy of the Navaho*” in ‘*Ideological Differences and World Order*’, ed. F.S.C. Northrop (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949, p. 358

processes of transformation, deformation, and restoration, and that the essence of life and being is movement.”¹¹

Constant flux and motion generates concepts of energy waves/spirits. Movement and flux of energy waves, in turn, generates a perception that all is alive and animate. The constant transformation, deformation, and restoration results in a ‘spider web’ network of relations out of which arises the concepts of interrelationship which are summed up in the saying “all my relations”. In other words, if all are energy and spirit then one can relate to them, be they humans, animals, plants, rocks, the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, and so forth.

Space/place is a very important referent in the Aboriginal mind. Certain events, patterns, cycles, and happenings occur at certain locations and are readily observable including animal migrations, cycles of plant life, seasons, and so on. The cosmos is also observable and its patterns detected from certain spatial locations. Vine Deloria, in *God is Red*, states:

In shifting from temporal concepts to spatial terms, we find that a revelation is not so much the period of time in which it occurs as the place it may occur. Revelation becomes a particular experience at a particular place, no universal truth emerging but an awareness arising that certain places have a qualitative holiness over and above other places. The universality of truth then becomes the relevance of the experience for a community of people,.... Holy places are well known in what have been classified as primitive religions. The vast majority of Indian tribal religions have a center at a particular place, be it a river, mountain, plateau, valley, or other natural feature.¹²

Language, songs, stories, and ceremonies act as repositories of knowledge in the minds of Aboriginal peoples. Makokis observes, “Our languages guide us in our relationships, so we see that the chaos that is presently engulfing our communities is primarily due to the suppression of our language.”¹³ “The ability to speak an indigenous language is an indispensable part of our indigenous identity, as these languages convey a sense of identity, a sense of responsibility, and a sense of spiritual relationship to the universe: plants, animals, Mother Earth, rocks, and people.”¹⁴ Bastien notes that “Language carries our ways of knowing, and through *saitamsin* (the breath of speaking), life among *Siksikaitstapi* is informed and expressed.”¹⁵ Blackfoot scholar Don Pepion, interviewing Beverly Hungry Wolf makes the same observations. “According to Hungry Wolf the language has an influence on the learning process. She feels the learner doesn’t grasp the

¹¹ Gary Witherspoon, “*Language and Art in the Navajo Universe*” (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Univ. of Mich. Press, 1977, p. 48

¹² Vine Deloria, Jr., “*God is Red*” (New York: Dell) 80-81

¹³ Leona Makokis, “*Our Language Guides Us In Our Relationships*” (Unpublished: ATB 3-Aboriginal Languages) 3

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ See note 6, at p. 131

full implications of ceremonial knowledge without knowing the language.”¹⁶ Similar ideas and concepts revolve around songs, stories, and ceremonies serving in the capacity of repository for knowledge. Pepion, for instance, says “Reggie (one of Pepion’s interviewees) considers ceremony as the way of “documenting” oral tradition.”¹⁷ A synthesis of all of the above leads one to articulate the Aboriginal paradigms as being holistic and cyclical, linked to place, repetitive, generalist, and process oriented.

Culture, from a different but not unrelated perspective, is what structures how a person determines ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological aspects of his/her very life and being. Ontology, generally, speaks to the nature of reality. Blackfoot people, for instance, believe that reality is really about relationships. “The meaning of life is rooted in the experiences grounded in the sacred relationships of alliances.”¹⁸ For Wilson, “... there is no one definite reality but rather different sets of relationships that make up an Indigenous ontology.”¹⁹ Epistemology speaks to theories of knowledge: how we come to know. How we come to know, in essence, is a methodology or a validation process. For Aboriginal peoples knowledge is validated through actual experience, stories, songs, ceremonies, dreams, and observation. Axiology speaks to what knowledge is important and worthy of pursuit. As stated above by differing authorities, spirituality, relationships, language, songs, stories, ceremonies, and teachings learned through dreams form the axiology of Aboriginal knowledge.

WHAT IS LEARNING?

Learning is variously defined as acquisition of knowledge or a skill by study, instruction, practice or experience; to commit to memory; to come to know or be aware of.²⁰ The intent here is not to delve deep into the physiological aspects of the brain. One can safely assume that all humans are “hard wired” the same way. What makes for difference in learning is the culture with its paradigms, customs, and values and the resultant ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. One can readily find works online that speak to how people learn. For instance, Mike Walker has an outline of a course, HOW WE LEARN AND REMEMBER in which he lists theories of learning:

1. Four Developmental Stages by Jean Piaget are based on the idea that the developing child builds cognitive structures-in other words, mental “maps”, schemes, or networked concepts for understanding and responding to physical experiences within his or her environment.
2. Behaviorism, by B. F. Skinner, holds a theory of animal and human learning that only focuses on objectively observable behaviors and

¹⁶ Donald Duane Pepion, *Blackfoot Ceremony: A Qualitative Study of Learning*: (Doctoral Dissertation: Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana, 1999) 160

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 163. Parenthesis mine.

¹⁸ See note 6 at p. 84

¹⁹ See note 7

²⁰ See note 4, at p. 562

discounts mental activities. Behavior theorists define learning as nothing more than the acquisition of new behavior.

3. Control Theory, by William Glasser, which holds that behavior is never caused by a response to an outside stimulus. Instead, the control theory states that behavior is inspired by what a person wants most at any given time: survival, love, power, freedom, or any other basic human need.
4. Observational Learning, by Albert Bandura, a social learning theory which states that learning occurs when an observer changes after viewing the behavior of a model.
5. Social Cognition, by L. S. Vygotsky, which asserts that culture is the prime determinant of individual development. Humans are the only species to have created culture, and every human child develops in the context of a culture.
6. Brain-based Learning, which is based on the structure of the brain. As long as the brain is not prohibited from fulfilling its normal processes, learning will occur.
7. Neuroscience, states that the nervous system and brain are the physical foundation of the human learning process. It links our observations about cognitive behavior with the actual physical processes that support such behavior. This theory is still “young” and is undergoing rapid controversial development.
8. Right Brain vs. Left Brain, is a theory of the structure and functions of the mind that suggests the two different sides of the brain control two different “modes” of thinking. It also suggests that each of us prefers or use one mode more than the other.
9. Learning Styles is an approach to learning that emphasizes the fact that individuals perceive and process information in very different ways. The learning styles theory implies that how much individuals learn has more to do with whether the educational experience is geared toward their particular style of learning than whether or not they are “smart”.
10. Multiple Intelligences is a theory of human intelligence, developed by psychologist Howard Gardner, which suggests there are at least seven ways that people have of perceiving and understanding the world. Gardner labels each of these ways a distinct “intelligence” – in other words, a set of skills allowing individuals to find and resolve genuine problems they face.
11. Constructivism, a philosophy of learning founded on the premise that, by reflecting on our experiences, we construct our own understanding of the world we live in. Each of us generates our own “rules” and “mental models” which we use to make sense of our experiences. Learning, therefore, is simply a process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences.²¹

²¹ Mike Walker, *“How We Learn and Remember”* (course outline for Univ-1011: University Success, September 13, 2007)
www.nipissingu.ca/faculty/univ1011/modules/03_WeLearn/HWL&R_outline.doc

Some of these learning theories do compliment Aboriginal notions about learning. But Aboriginal views on learning, to a large extent, differ from the above although there may be some overlap. Pepion, in his study lists 17 ways of learning: (*see note 16 for references to interviewees)

1. **Learning from visions and dreams:** "The importance of dreams was addressed by Virgil Bullshoe, "Dreams are telling you something." He considers dreams a part of the learning process related to participation in ceremonies as it provides a way of "remembering".
2. **Learning from the Origin Stories:** "Allan Pard is adamant that the origin and creation stories are elemental to the process of learning in Blackfoot ceremonies. Without knowledge of the stories behind the ritual one will be lost in understanding the ways of the Blackfoot. Reggie Crowshoe believes that Blackfoot oral tradition and learning process is 'documented' through ceremony."
3. **Learning from the elders:** "Don Shade revealed that the elders were careful in the kinds of advances imposed upon the learner. "It seems like you not only had one main teacher but you had a lot of other teachers. Each teacher brought in a different perspective to the whole." He related that the "teachers" taught in both group and individual situations. Although the learner had one principal instructor, other teachers assisted in the learning process. Shade believes that the multiplicity of teachers added to a more "rounded out" understanding.
4. **Rite of transfer:** "In the learning process of Blackfoot ceremony one obtains knowledge through a "rite of passage." Ritual is used as a method to bestow the entitlement of the individual to obtain certain knowledge within distinct parameters. The qualification to begin learning within the select boundaries is commonly called the "right of transfer" by the Blackfoot."
5. **Experiential learning:** "According to Pard, the learning process of Blackfoot ceremony is a "hands on" approach. Since much of the learning process is experiential, the learner must gain sharp observational and listening skills."
6. **Developmental Learning:** ".... Ceremonial learning process is best achieved when the children are provided the opportunity to learn the traditional value system and ways of the Blackfeet." Beverly Hungry Wolf said infants are nurtured in a serene environment to insure the "spirit" of the baby is ensured. Taking care of the spirit is transmitted during the raising of the children."
7. **Holistic Concept:** "The concept of an integrated whole of ceremonies is expressed through the assertion that "everything is related. Acceptance of humanism as part of the learning process is expressed in the interviews. Intellectual and emotional aspects of being human are accepted in ceremonial learning and activity as part of the process. Although reverential spirituality is utmost in ceremony, contextual humanness is accepted to the point of mirth and jesting."
8. **Critical thinking:** "In the Blackfoot way, critical thinking is tied to story telling and metaphor used in the learning process. The elders' teaching

methodology causes the learner to analyze information for meaning. According to Smokey Rides At The Door, the elder is more of a helper in the learning process. "...the elder will help the learner find needed information by presenting a series of discussions on matters related to the situation. The learner must then draw their own conclusions from the information presented."

9. **Environmental Learning:** "The culture of the Blackfoot involved a communication with nature and the animals. "The environment is our classroom."
10. **Protocols and Taboos:** "Obtaining knowledge of protocol and taboos is important in the Blackfoot learning process. Protocol also involves the status of the learner being "eligible" to receive certain information. "...unless the individual has obtained the appropriate rite of transfer, the elder will probably not divulge certain kinds of things. The learner also finds that certain types of information can only be discussed in particular contexts with specific people. There are a multitude of taboos associated with individuals and the societies and ceremonies with which they are involved. The learner will usually be provided with the taboos related to their status in certain societies. The reason or the meaning of the taboo in most times is part of the learning process for the individual."
11. **Extended Family and Community:** 'The impact of extended families living apart from one another has an effect on learning culture and language. Living within close proximity of members of the extended family who spoke the Blackfoot language and lived the Blackfoot culture went a long way to teaching the youth.' (paraphrase mine)
12. **Learning from Symbolism:** "According to Pard, "Everything has a purpose, a meaning, every action reflects something." Pard said that very few Indians today understand the meaning of the existence of things in their life as an Native person. "It's like people who wear a cowboy hat but don't know what the life of a cowboy is about. It's like the floral designs; they represent your dreams. According to Crowshoe, the stone effigies found throughout the traditional Blackfoot territory are actually boundary markers. The effigies, especially those of the human figure, were a representation of foreign people who were being held back from entering Blackfoot territory.
13. **Effects of Oppression and Cultural Conflict:** "...the Blackfeet way of learning has been totally disregarded by contemporary society." "Some Pikunii people have been assimilated into the other culture to the point that they question their own traditional ways, asserted Pard." 'One of the difficulties encountered by learners is the dual role they play as practitioners of a tribal culture and their role as career persons engaged in employment' (paraphrase mine).
14. **Spirituality:** "There is a divine force present with the bundle keepers, disclosed Morris Little Wolf." "There is energy in those songs, meaning keeping up their spirit. They know that the spirits are living with them." "The concept of inherent sanctity within a person is a phenomenon accepted in native cultures as part a part of the way of knowledge.' (paraphrase mine)

15. **Revitalization:** “The positive thing in this situation, according to Smokey, is the fact that the middle-aged people are supporting revitalization of the language and the culture. “...this has caused some of the older people to come forth and support learning who heretofore withheld information. (Revitalization) has created a new group of people now willing to consider practicing the old ways.
16. **Language:** “According to Hungry Wolf, the language has influence on the learning process. “...the learner doesn’t grasp the full implications of ceremonial knowledge without knowing the language.
17. **Philosophy:** “Reggie considers ceremony as the way of “documenting” oral traditions. “...ceremony is a way of transmitting knowledge. In essence, Crowshoe believes that the symbolic concentric circle grid of teepees overlaid by social groupings represents the process of learning in the Blackfoot. Information is processed through the world view of the Blackfoot learner.”²²

The above ways of learning, although limited to the Blackfoot and ceremonial learning, for the purposes of the study, are very complimentary to other Aboriginal learning processes practiced in other cultural settings. Gregory Cajete, for instance, states, “This relationship is predicated on the fact that all Indigenous tribes—their philosophies, cultural ways of life, customs, language, all aspects of their cultural being in one way or another--- are ultimately tied to the relationships that they have established and applied during their history with regard to certain places and to the earth as a whole.”²³ In other words, there are commonalities amongst Aboriginal people based on the idea of relationships to place. The learning processes are also relevant in non-ceremonial situations because distinction between what is religion, education, social, government, politics and economics is not made in the Aboriginal world. Instead a holistic approach is utilized. From Pepion’s classification of the learning processes a number of aspects of the learning processes of Aboriginal people loom large including but not limited to spirituality, dreams, repetition, observation, language, experience, and protocol. AbLKC, in its research and educational activities discovered many, if not all, of the learning processes referred to by Pepion. But for purposes of being concise and to avoid multiple reference sources, Pepion’s work was cited.

WHAT IS EDUCATION?

Education can be defined a number of ways. For the purposes of this paper, education is defined from a dualistic perspective: content and process. The transference of existing

²² See note 16, p. 72-173. The author took liberty in the quotes used and some were paraphrased to eliminate long quotations of stories, examples, and experiences of the interviewees: Virgil Bullshoe, Allan Pard, Reggie Crowshoe, Don Shade, Smokey Rides At The Door, Morris Little Wolf, and Beverly Hungry Wolf.

²³ Gregory Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Clear Light Publishers, 2000) 4

knowledge from the older generation down to the younger generation, through formal and informal institutional structures, speaks to content. The preparation of the learner, generally, the young, to know, accept, believe, and apply the knowledge speaks to the process of education. The majority of AbLKC's work has addressed holistic lifelong learning that is inclusive of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Since much of the literature in the bundles has focused on education, the unbundling of the education process by AbLKC necessitates a brief overview of the goals of education

ABORIGINAL EDUCATION: THE END GOAL

John Burrows, talking about 'governance' but equally applicable to 'education', says, "If we are going to end the Indian Act I believe goodness must lie at the heart of our efforts...." "For example, the very word by which many Algonkian speaking people describe themselves is Anishinabe. Anishinabe quite literally means good man." "I find it extremely significant that teachings are implanted in our languages to tell us what we should be: good."²⁴ Goodness is an end goal, whether it in regards to education or governance. If good 'citizenship' were the end goal of western education, it would be very complimentary to the idea of 'goodness' but, unfortunately, that is not the case. Competition, rivalry, and survival of the fittest are part of the tacit infrastructures of the present education system, which are aimed at capitalistic materialism. This is at odds with the notions that the ABLKC kept hearing in its work: holistic approaches, community involvement, relationship building, and a cultural-based education

PART 2: AbLKC'S UNBUNDLING OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION: HINDRANCES TO LEARNING

AbLKC, in its unbundling of the present education system found or were directed to many factors that compromised the learning spirit of Aboriginal people. These factors include but not limited to poverty, social problems such as family violence, alcoholism, drugs, unemployment, low self-esteem, racism, irrelevant curricula, pedagogical problems, lack of knowledge on the part of teachers regarding culture, history, language, and social conditions of Aboriginal people, the unresponsiveness of the education establishment to the needs of Aboriginal people, high suicide rates, disproportionate incarceration rates, and low graduation rates from high school.

AbLKC will focus on racism, teachers, social conditions, and curriculum issues as examples of hindrances to the learning spirit of Aboriginal people.

RACISM

²⁴ John Burrows, *Seven Generations, Seven Teachings: Ending the Indian Act*, a research paper for the National Centre for First Nations Governance, (May 2008) 8-9.

Racism is, to a large extent, part of the education system though unstated. Verna St. Denis, et al. quoting Omi and Winant state, “Racial beliefs operate as an ‘amateur biology’, a way of explaining the variation in ‘human nature’. Differences in skin color and other obvious physical characteristics supposedly provide visual clues to differences lurking underneath.” Skin color differences are thought to explain perceived differences intellectual, physical and artistic temperaments, and to justify distinct treatment of racially identified individuals and groups.”²⁵ ABLKC, through its research, found that racism hampers learning while that public education denies or lacks ameliorative policies and practices to address its existence. “...any mention of the word ‘racism’ tends to generate a defensive response that effectively ends any meaningful discourse.”²⁶ In other words, for most Euro-Canadians, colonization and racism are things of the past. “When racism is not acknowledged as contributing to low self-esteem, the effect is to assume a failure on the part of Aboriginal students to develop a healthy sense of self.”²⁷ The assumption made by the education establishment is that there is nothing wrong with the system. If there is anything wrong, it is the student: his or her lack of skills, academic preparedness, motivation or drive to improve one’s situation. Racism, because it is so pervasive through the education systems in Canada, really needs a more in depth discourse, which is really outside the purview of this paper. But AbLKC would direct the reader to other works by AbLKC for other views on the issue of racism.

TEACHERS

If schools are going to respond to the needs of aboriginal students then teachers have to know something about the culture, history, and social situations of Aboriginal students. “...teacher educational programs have to address colonialism and racism as well as IK (Kanu, 2005). Kanu highlights the concerns of teachers who feel angry when asked to confront Canada’s historical and on-going complicity in racism and colonization.”²⁸ One may wonder why present education systems in Canada are so resistant to any change. Other institutions within Canada such as the courts have gone a long way to recognize colonization and racism in their past practices and have since begun to decolonize. For instance, in the Delgamuukw case of 1998, the Supreme Court of Canada made a major change in its approach to historical Indigenous knowledge. Lamer, C. J. states, “Notwithstanding the challenges created by the use of oral histories as proof of historical facts, the laws of evidence must be adapted in order that this type of evidence can be accommodated and placed on equal footing with the types of historical evidence that courts are familiar with, which largely consists of historical documents.”²⁹ Such inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge by the courts in their present practices is an example of the type of inclusion of Indigenous knowledge that needs to occur in teacher education programs.

²⁵ Verna St. Denis, Jim Silver, Brenda Ireland, Ningwakwe George “*Reclaiming the Learning Spirit*”, (Roundtable Report 2008) 16

²⁶ Brenda Ireland, “*Power of Place: A Literature Review*, (2007) 20

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ James Youngblood Henderson, Marie Battiste, Rita Bouvier “*Responsive Learning Systems in Aboriginal Learning: A Synthesis Paper*, (2008) 11.

²⁹ Delgamuukw v. B. C., [1998] 1 CNLR 14 (SCC), para. 87

SOCIAL CONDITIONS

It is well known that, just as in education, Aboriginal peoples are at the bottom of the economic and social scales. One need only examine any Statistics Canada Report for evidence of this fact. Learning is seriously compromised by one's economic and social status. If a student, youth or adult, does not have the economic means to avail themselves of educational opportunities to improve their status, one will find oneself in a vicious cycle of social dysfunctions. "In a report done in 2005 a community worker asked to identify the main problems in Lord Selkirk Park said: Poverty, poverty, poverty, poverty, and poverty, are the main problems. Racism, violence against women, violence against girls. Gangs. Drug dealers. Addiction. And poverty."³⁰ The report continued:

Two metaphors occur repeatedly in the comments of those we interviewed. One is the notion of a complex web---a web of poverty, racism, drugs, gangs, and violence. The other is the notion of a cycle---people caught in a cycle of interrelated problems. Both suggest the idea people who are caught, trapped, immobilized, unable to escape, destined to struggle with forces against which they cannot win, from which they cannot extricate themselves. The result is despair, resignation, anger, hopelessness, which then reinforces the cycle, and wrap them tighter in the web.³¹

These types of social dysfunctions do not make for a good learning environment. One may blame the individual as not having the drive to improve his or situation. On the other hand, these types of social conditions are largely brought about by government through policy and legislation such as assimilation and the Indian Act. The AbLKC says:

The research reviewed reveals disparities that reflect the unresolved legacy of a colonial past, a past that witnessed active and aggressive policies of oppression, segregation, and assimilation sanctioned by the federal government. Assimilative strategies have affected and continue to affect the social and cultural lives of FN [First Nations] peoples with trans-generational disruptions that do not build the needed capacity for individual and collective development and action but cause related problems, many of which have been found in the policy repercussions surrounding residential schools.³²

CURRICULUM ISSUES

³⁰ Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba. *The Promises of Investment in Community-Led Renewal: The State of the Inner City Report 2005 (Winnipeg: 2005)* p. 22, 24.

³¹ Ibid. p. 24.

³² Marie Battiste and Sheelagh McLean, "State of First Nations Learning", prepared for the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), Ottawa, On, (Sept. 2005) 1

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People found consistent criticism among Aboriginal people in the lack of curricula in schools that was complimentary to Aboriginal peoples.³³ Most public school curricula barely mention Aboriginal peoples, and when they do, it is usually offered in fragmented and partial way often omitting Aboriginal peoples entirely or minimizing their contributions. Little is ever mentioned of the contributions of Aboriginal peoples to the larger society, nor their part in the development of Canada as a nation-state, nor their histories and cultures. ABLKC, for instance found, “For FN [First Nations] people, colonization is not just a legacy of the past, but it continues to manifest itself in contemporary society everyday. The Eurocentric foundations of colonization are solidly entrenched in the political, social, economic, educational, and spiritual frameworks that continue to marginalize and encroach on FN [First Nations] knowledge, belief systems, and way of life.”³⁴ Citing the RCAP Report of 1996, ABLKC found that “... nearly 70% of FN [First Nations] education remains in the hands of provincial and territorial authorities, with few mechanisms for effective accountability to FN [First Nations] people and involvement of parents. It also contends that FN [First Nations] people have been restricted in their efforts to implement curricula that would transmit their linguistic and cultural heritage to the next generation.”³⁵ The Métis, for instance, say, “The government has two lenses for approaching Aboriginal education. These two lenses are off reserve and on reserve. For the Métis, these two lenses say nothing about the current educational environment.” “The Métis community does not want to be included as an educational “side show”. Currently, the approach to inclusion of the Métis community in education is “hero addictive” rather than meaningful integration of the knowledge, skills and values inherent in Métis Nation cultural traditions and ways of being into the pedagogy and curriculum.”³⁶ One of the reasons for a high dropout rate amongst Aboriginal students is the lack of a curriculum that is reflective of their culture, histories, and real life conditions.

If true life-long learning is to be a reality; if the education establishment is to become responsive to the needs of Aboriginal people, the schools, the teachers, school boards, and the government will have to address the hindrances to the learning spirit of Aboriginal people

PART 3: NATURALIZING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE: THE WAY IT SHOULD BE

INTRODUCTION: ABORIGINAL ROOTS OF CANADA

John Ralston Saul, in his book, ‘Fair Country, Telling Truths About Canada’ states, “We are a people of Aboriginal inspiration organized around a concept of peace, fairness and

³³ Royal Commission on Aboriginal People: Vol.3, Chp. 5

³⁴ See note 32 p.2

³⁵ Ibid. p.3

³⁶ Kathy Hodgson-Smith Infinity Research, Inc., “*State Of Métis Nation Learning*”, (September 2005) 5 and 22.

good government. That is what lies at the heart of our story, at the heart of Canadian mythology, whether francophone or anglophone. If we can embrace a language that expresses that story, we will feel a great release. We will discover a remarkable power to act and to do so in such a way that we will feel we are true to our selves.”³⁷ Ralston Saul goes on to state, “We (Canada) are a Métis civilization.” “When I dig around in the roots of how we imagine ourselves, how we govern, how we live together in communities--- how we treat one another when we are not being stupid---what I find is deeply Aboriginal. Whatever our family tree may look like, our intuitions and common sense as a civilization is more Aboriginal than European or African or Asian, even though we have created elaborate theatrical screens of language, reference and mythology to misrepresent ourselves to our selves.”³⁸ If the education establishment were to follow John Ralston Saul’s lead in the realization about the deep seated roots of Canada, then it would seem that the incorporation of the approaches and traditions of Aboriginal people regarding education are a ‘natural’ fit to Canadian education. Based on telling truths about the educational system, AbLKC suggests in the following ‘the way it should be’ when it comes to issues about education and learning processes of Aboriginal people.

EDUCATION PARADIGMS

Shawn Wilson points out four major paradigms when it comes to research. But those paradigms are equally applicable to education: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism. Positivism basically says there is only one reality and there is only one way to come to know that reality. Post-positivism, while it agrees there is only one reality says we can never really discover that reality. So objectivity is the only real tool to coming close to that reality. Critical theory follows the school of thought that there may be more than one reality; that reality is shaped by culture, social, gender, and other values. Lastly constructivism basically states reality is what you make it to be. In other words, there are many realities.³⁹ In one way or another, education systems adhere to one or more of these paradigms. However, positivism seems to be the most dominant and constructivism the least dominant. But on the basis of AbLKC’s work there is a general realization that Aboriginal people have different learning processes and styles. Aboriginal Elders and educators always point to the individual’s ‘gifts’ to learn. “It is my understanding that the learning spirit is a gift from the Creator, and is a part of one’s being. It is present from conception and birth and exists in an individual’s heart and soul. It is a holistic concept characterized by a combination of learning strengths, gifts, and capacities, which are supported through interrelationships with culture, language, traditions, community, self, and the natural world.” (Witness Participant B)⁴⁰ From these types of views, ABLKC concludes that a multiplicity of learning processes is the proper approach to teaching Aboriginal students. There is no one right way. Schools and teachers should be prepared to utilize a multiplicity of learning process such as the

³⁷ John Ralston Saul, *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada*, (Penquin Group, Toronto, Ont., 2008) xii.

³⁸ Ibid. Parenthesis mine. 1

³⁹ See note 7, p. 36-37

⁴⁰ AbLKC, *Nourishing the Learning Spirit: Elder’s Dialogue*, (March 26-29, 2008)

seventeen learning process suggested by Don Pepion above. Constructivism, as a paradigm, comes closest to meeting the learning processes and learning styles of Aboriginal students as opposed to the hegemonic approaches of the existing educational establishment.

PEDAGOGY

Pedagogy is generally understood as the art and science of teaching. It includes styles, manner of delivery, materials utilized, and the teacher's cultural background. The teaching approach of teachers is mirrored in their cultural background. In order for a teacher to be effective, he or she must know the students' background: their culture, their history, their social, economic, and political values and beliefs.. "It is important to acknowledge and validate the various types of learning and intelligence within each classroom. Most educational institutions continue to focus on academic ability, which cripples the self-esteem of students who are gifted in various other ways. Teachers must find creative ways to support academic ability, while giving value to other abilities that students display or they want to develop."⁴¹ "Using a variety of pedagogical approaches, or "holistic" approaches to teaching helps to engage students who have many different learning styles."⁴² For instance, "The integration of media literacy, visual arts, industrial arts, physical education, and music into all subjects enhances learning for students who have visual or oral learning styles."⁴³ In Canada, one will not find many classrooms that are uni-cultural. Most classrooms are multicultural demographically. Yet, teacher education programs in universities do not reflect this reality. The products of these programs are still steeped in Eurocentric teaching styles and practices in spite of the fact that most classrooms and schools in Canada are multicultural.

CURRICULUM

Aboriginal students do not see reflected in the curricula of most schools the history, traditions, customs, language, philosophy, beliefs, and ways of being of their people. For Aboriginal people, the school is not a place for cultural affirmation and empowerment. But instead "For most Indigenous students in Eurocentric education, realizing the invisibility is like looking into a still lake and not seeing their reflections. They become alien in their own eyes, unable to recognize themselves in the reflections and shadows of the world. In the same way that Eurocentric thought stripped their grandparents and parents of their wealth and dignity, this realization strips modern Indigenous students of their heritage and identity. It gives them an awareness of their annihilation."⁴⁴ Battiste refers to curriculum as infused with colonial interpretations of the past and attempts by the educational establishment to present this infusion in a positive light unclouded by "dispirited facts" of colonial history as sanitization.⁴⁵ In another instance, Battiste

⁴¹ See note 32, p.13

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ See note 25, p. 70

⁴⁵ Ibid. paraphrase

referring to the same issue frames it in terms of “contaminated historical contexts”.⁴⁶ One does not have to search long and hard to uncover a plethora of research that say the same things about curricula and Aboriginal students. ABLKC, as a result of their unbundling of the education system ABLKC has come up with a number of ways to naturalize/incorporate Aboriginal learning styles and processes, indigenous knowledge, and curriculum content into the education system.

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

As Henderson and Battiste state, “Indigenous knowledge (IK) is part of the collective genius of humanity. It represents the accumulated experience, wisdom and know-how unique to nations, societies, and or communities of people, living in specific ecosystems of America, Africa, Asia and Oceania.” “It represents diverse ways of learning and knowing.”⁴⁷ They indicate that it is a “life-giving” and “life-long” process absorbed, pondered, and shared.⁴⁸ “In IK, learning is viewed as sacred and holistic, as well as experiential, purposeful, relational, and life-long responsibility.”⁴⁹ The inclusion of IK in curricula will go a long way to restoring and maintaining the integrity of a people and its culture. It is. . . .”embodied in relationships, songs, ceremonies, symbols, dramatic representation and artworks that animate the complete and accurate transmission of IK and authority from generation to generation.”⁵⁰ Last, but not least, it “. . . .reflects an ecologically centered way of life. . . .”⁵¹

PLACE-BASED EDUCATION

The land, as opposed to time, is a major referent in the minds of Aboriginal people. For Aboriginal people, the land is a sacred trust from the Creator. The land is the giver of life like ‘mother’. The ecological aspect of Indigenous knowledge is all about the land. The land is a source of identity for Aboriginal people. As one elder said, “I am the environment”⁵² ABLKC holds to the view that “The surrounding environment can provide a rich laboratory for students to learn about the many interconnected forces that impact their lives and make a contribution to the well-being of their community. . . .”⁵³ According to ABLKC’s theme bundle #1-Learning From Place, place has an immediate effect on Aboriginal students. “Instead of merely looking at the places during the their visits, these students felt that they were conversing with the spirits of the land, an

⁴⁶ See note 32, p. 2

⁴⁷ James Youngblood and Marie Battiste, *Naturalizing Indigenous Knowledge in Education: A Synthesis Paper*, (2007) 4

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 5

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 7

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Personal communication.

⁵³ See note 26, p. 26

experience that transformed their entire perspective on the condition of being human.”⁵⁴ “Depending on their history and function, places are believed to be “very, very healing”. And the objects embedded into these places be they stones, rivers, hills, or thunders have a language that can be understood by those connected to those places. These objects are the products of the Sun and the Moon which speak to the people of the land.”⁵⁵

AbLKC truly believes in the power of place being a necessary aspect of any curriculum. “Memory, or remembrance...is the mark of success for Aboriginal peoples’ learning from place. That said, “the greatest gauge of this learning process is not strictly intellectual, but performative.” It is not enough to only know about places---its history or narrative---but a learner must experience them both physically and emotionally, achieved through rituals, and visitations. Just as human beings develop relationships through collaborative activity, and just as they suffer from disassociation or distance from such relationships, the emotional and physical exchanges that occur between places and Aboriginal people are social in nature.”⁵⁶ In other words, just as a person would suffer from absences from friends, parents, and other relatives, Aboriginal people suffer when absent from the land. Place must be an integral part of any curriculum.

LANGUAGE

One can say that the most important aspect of human learning is the language. It acts as a repository for all of the collective knowledge and experiences that a people, a society, or a nation has. Although it is not the only mode of communication, it is the primary mode. One of the most important tenets in the Aboriginal world is ‘relationships.’ “Our languages guide us in our relationships....”⁵⁷ “We understand the world in terms of relationships, so when others came to share our lands we treated them as we would treat our relatives: according to our respect, kindness, generosity and thoughtfulness.”⁵⁸ Regarding relationships, “Our elders repeatedly tell us that our language is a spiritual language. For example, “miskisik” means an eye. In this word, “mis” refers to a body part, and the root word, “kisik” means the heavens; it reminds us that our ability to see is a spiritual gift, that we are related to the Creator, and every relationship carries responsibilities.”⁵⁹ These sacred relationships and responsibilities are contained in the languages of Aboriginal peoples. “The primary source of IK is in Indigenous language and teachings...”⁶⁰ Because of colonization, a large number of Aboriginal languages have been lost. The number of Aboriginal people who speak their Aboriginal language is

⁵⁴ AbLKC, “A Report on the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre’s First National Conference”, Edmonton, Alberta, (March 7-9, 2007?) 15

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 16

⁵⁷ Leona Makokis, Diana Steinhauer, James Lamouche “Naturalizing Indigenous Knowledge, Our Languages Guide Us in our Relationships”, (Blue Quills FN College, St. Paul, Alberta, 2007?) 3

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 5

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 4

⁶⁰ See note 47, p. 5

dwindling. As a consequence, whole bundles of Aboriginal knowledge bypasses Aboriginal youth. "... colonization, coupled with the government's intent to assimilate the indigenous population contributed to the suppression of indigenous languages, hence, our inherent teachings of how to live in harmony with the universe. Loss of language is equivalent to the loss of spirit; without our sense of spirit we become vulnerable to the negatives such as the addiction and violence epidemics currently engulfing many Indigenous communities."⁶¹ For AbLKC, many of the social dysfunctions plaguing Aboriginal peoples and communities can be traced to the loss of language. Social healing and progress will occur only when Aboriginal people again think in sacred modes via their languages, hence the importance of Aboriginal languages as a major component of curricula.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The involvement of community is a key aspect in the education of Aboriginal peoples. Because of the fact that Aboriginal people understand the world in terms of relationships, the inclusion of community in the learning process of Aboriginal people is fundamental. In a series of community dialogues AbLKC held throughout Canada, community members repeatedly stressed the importance of community involvement in the education of children for purposes of exchange between the youth and community members.⁶² AbLKC, in fact, sees these types of exchanges as 'research'. "In a quest to heal their nations, and communities, Indigenous scholars and professionals have turned to IK and Elders to restore control over Indigenous development and capacity enhancement, using methods of 'visiting' as forms of their research."⁶³ Brenda Ireland stresses that "... rural communities are built on interpersonal relationships and educational changes will be more successful if they engage in an 'inside-out' approach which builds on these relationships."⁶⁴ She goes on to state, "... preconceived notions of the divide between home and school must be addressed recognizing that it takes more than 'talking' about the need and importance of parent and community involvement."⁶⁵

Community involvement can, in fact, be viewed as 'community development'. "We know also that these root problems are not solved if one or a few people in low-income neighborhoods achieve educational success, and then move out of the low-income neighborhood. When that happens educational success is 'exported'."⁶⁶ But the objective should be "... that whole communities, and not just selected individuals, benefit from education. Adult Aboriginal education can be a part of this process, aiming at building capacities not only of selected individuals, but also of whole communities and thus reducing the poverty that correlates so strongly with reduced educational outcomes. We

⁶¹ See note 57, p. 5

⁶² ABLKC, *Community Dialogues on First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning: Learning as a Community for Renewal and Growth*

⁶³ See note 47, p. 7

⁶⁴ See note 26, p. 25

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ See note 25, p. 36

might imagine this as a process of community learning, community transformation....⁶⁷
AbLKC, therefore, strongly adheres to the principle that educational success requires community involvements in all aspects of the learning process.

PART 4: CONCLUSION: TOWARDS NATURALIZATION OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE:

AbLKC, in its work, has formulated the following conclusions regarding the naturalization of Indigenous Knowledge into the education system:

1. IK is a necessary foundation for Aboriginal education.
2. Language is central to Indigenous knowledge.
3. Learning from place is a foundational aspect of IK.
4. Community involvement is necessary because IK is relationship based.
5. The Indigenous perspective is the internal perspective of IK developed from Indigenous languages and being in place.
6. Learning IK in schools must be consistent with customary protocols for learning and teaching.
7. Naturalizing IK can begin to neutralize racism, colonialism, and assumptions of the inferiority of Aboriginal peoples.
8. Aboriginal epistemology is found in theories, philosophies, histories, ceremonies, and stories as ways of knowing.
9. Teaching IK is a pressing issue for professionals in educational institutions: they need to decolonize their education practices.
10. Elders, knowledge keepers, and cultural workers are indispensable to the naturalization of IK.⁶⁸

AXIOLOGY OF IK

In the past, and still largely the case as of the present, Aboriginal people along with their knowledge, customs, and ways of being were pushed aside by the Euro-newcomers as meaningless, superstitious, and inapplicable. In other words, there was no value to IK. But the newcomers fail to realize that their early existence in North America was dependent on IK. They forget the contributions of Aboriginal people to agriculture and the many foodstuffs we take for granted today such as corn, maize, potatoes, and so on. The medical contributions of Aboriginal people are scarcely mentioned in schools or daily conversations. But according to John Ralston Saul our major contributions to Canada is our organizational and oral skills based on relationships. “The most obvious origins in Canada are Aboriginal.”⁶⁹ “What was it the newcomers experienced with the First Nations? A deeply rooted sense of egalitarianism that included a clearly defined sense of individualism....”⁷⁰ He points out that the courts have come to realize this fact. “As a

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ See note 47, p. 12-13. The list provided is a shortened version of the original.

⁶⁹ See note 37, p. 57

⁷⁰ Ibid.

result, what the judges have fixed upon are precisely the Aboriginal roots of Canadian civilization: egalitarianism, individual and group rights and obligations, balanced complexity, reconciliation, inclusion, continuing relationships, minority rights.”⁷¹ “In Indigenous terms, talking, negotiating, developing relationships, enlarging the circle was all about intellectual superiority....”⁷² Ralston Saul points out how through the Supreme Court case of *Delgamuukw Canada* described itself as ‘non-linear’ but capable of handling an asymmetrical approach to nationhood all because of its deeply seated Aboriginal roots. Telling truths about Canada including its Aboriginal roots will go a long way to naturalizing IK. It is the responsibility of the education establishment to bring out these truths.

RIGHTS AS A BASIS FOR NATURALIZATION OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

The Constitution of Canada, in section 35, recognizes the ‘aboriginal and treaty’ rights of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada as follows: “The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.”⁷³ In subsection 2 of s. 35 of the Constitution it states, “In this Act, “aboriginal peoples of Canada” includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.”⁷⁴ An aboriginal right is “an “element of a practice, custom or tradition integral to the distinctive culture of the Aboriginal group claiming the right.”⁷⁵ Treaty rights are those rights that arise out treaties negotiated between First Nations and Canada. These rights include a right to education. For example, Treaty No. 6 states, “And further, Her Majesty agrees to maintain schools for instruction...”⁷⁶ In view of the fact S. 52⁷⁷ of the Constitution Act, 1982 states that the Constitution is the supreme law of the land, the aboriginal and treaty rights are part of this legal supremacy. AbLKC strongly feels that legal rights are an excellent basis for the naturalization of Indigenous knowledge and that the education systems in Canada can take a leadership role in the recognition of aboriginal and treaty rights. Further, the United Nations on June 29, 2006 passed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Article 15 of the Declaration states:

“Indigenous children have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State. All indigenous peoples also have this right and the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. Indigenous children living outside their communities have the right to be provided access to education in their own culture and language. States shall take effective measures to

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 64

⁷² Ibid. p. 65

⁷³ Constitution Act, 1982, Section 35(1), Schedule B, Canada Act 1982 (U.K.)

⁷⁴ Ibid. Section 35(2)

⁷⁵ *R. v. Van der Peet*, [1996] 4 C. N. L.R. 177 (S. C. C.), para. 46.

⁷⁶ Treaty No. 6 – Between Her Majesty the Queen and the Plains and Wood Cree Indians and other tribes of Indians at Fort Carlton, Fort Pitt, and Battle River, 1876

⁷⁷ See note 73, section 52

provide appropriate resources for these purposes.”⁷⁸ Canada, along with the United States of America and New Zealand, has not adopted the Declaration. But in spite of the fact that Canada has not signed and agreed to the Declaration, AbLKC strongly feels that public schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutions can be major proponents in setting standards of education for Aboriginal peoples by naturalizing Indigenous knowledge pursuant to the Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

PART 5: PROMISING PRACTICES

AbLKC is not naïve to the fact that naturalization or valuing of IK cannot be accomplished ‘over-night’. There are many challenges that are formidable that IK would have to overcome before it can fully bloom. These challenges include but are not limited to resistance by professionals in educational institutions, usually based on fear of loss of their privileged positions; having to make major administrative reorganizations; people in educational institutions having to learn about IK; people in educational institutions having to shed their ‘colonial attire’ tainted by racism, contaminated histories, and false assumptions. But, in spite, of these formidable hurdles, there are isolated pockets within the educational establishment where progress has been made. There are a number of programs throughout Canada that one can point to as isolated attempts to naturalize IK. But, as exemplary as they may be, no government, no school board, no school, no post secondary institution has fully incorporated IK into their system. Many educational institutions, in their educational philosophies have many idealistic statements about education but what happens in classrooms is usually not reflected at all in the classroom. If these philosophies were reflected in the classroom, naturalization of IK would be greatly enhanced. (For examples of Promising Practices see www.ccl-cca.ca under Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre)

⁷⁸ U. N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Art. 15. The Declaration was passed by the U. N. General assembly through Resolution 61/295, Sept. 2007.

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