

ABORIGINAL LEARNING

Knowledge Centre

APPRENTISSAGE CHEZ LES AUTOCHTONES

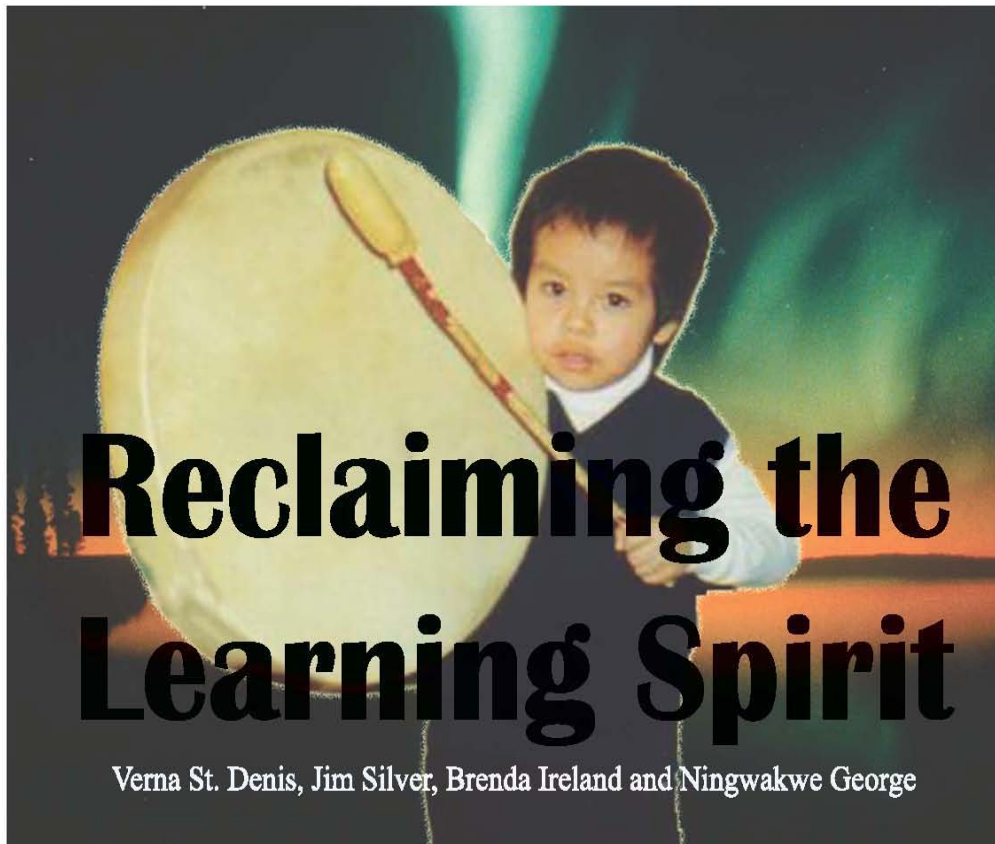
Centre du savoir

ADULT LEARNING

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APPRENTISSAGE CHEZ LES ADULTES

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Roundtable Report 2008

March 12 - 14, 2008

Saskatoon Inn

Saskatoon, SK

**Overview of *Reclaiming the Learning Spirit* Project
and a Snapshot of Results**

Reclaiming the Learning Spirit

Background

The *Reclaiming the Learning Spirit* roundtable, which took place in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan March 12-14, 2008, was a collaboration between the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre and the Adult Learning Knowledge Centre. The two knowledge centres – both initiatives of the Canadian Council on Learning – share a common understanding of the transformative power of learning for individuals and communities. The idea of a jointly sponsored roundtable that could improve learning environments for Aboriginal adult learners was wholeheartedly embraced by both knowledge centres.

The 1996 Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal People provided the philosophical underpinnings of the roundtable. This much-cherished report envisions a new relationship between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people, a relationship based on mutual respect, equality, and responsibility.

The *Reclaiming the Learning Spirit* invitational roundtable brought together more than 50 experts, including adult learners and practitioners from across the country. The focus of the event was on strategies for success. Instead of using a deficit model which would emphasize the challenges faced by Aboriginal communities who record disturbingly low educational levels and economic status, the roundtable highlighted successful learning strategies for Aboriginal adult learners. Successful learning strategies consistently share common key features: they are community-based, holistic, strength-based, transformative, and anti-colonization. Effective efforts to improve learning invariably focus on developing anti-racism strategies, formulating an anti-colonization curriculum, and eliminating poverty.

Purpose

The overarching purpose of the roundtable was to share stories of transformation, hope, and success in order to better inform educational institutions serving Aboriginal adult learners. The intended outcome is an action plan that identifies affirming practices and approaches for adult learning programs aimed at Aboriginal learners.

Roundtable Program

The roundtable program was crafted to elicit discussion around four presentations. The presentations consisted of the following:

- *Acknowledging the Past and Present - Aboriginal Education: Redefining Educational Problems and Solutions*, by Dr. Verna St. Denis, University of Saskatchewan. Dr. St. Denis is a Cree/Métis scholar who specializes in anti-racist approaches in education. Her presentation provided an examination of the history of Eurocentric education for Aboriginal Peoples, its effects, and the legacy of this history.
- *Vision and Possibility: Adult Aboriginal Education and Inner-City Community Development*, by Dr. Jim Silver, University of Manitoba. Dr. Silver is chair of the Department of Politics, and co-director of Urban and Inner-city Studies program at the University of Winnipeg. His area of interest is inner-city, poverty-related, community

development issues. His work has involved collaborative research with communities to create solutions for overcoming racism, poverty, and disenfranchisement.

- *Acting on the Vision: Aboriginal Adult Learners in Post-Secondary Education* by Brenda Ireland. Ms. Ireland is an intercultural educator and project manager with extensive experience in social, community, and education development with an emphasis on Aboriginal communities and organizations. Her presentation offered a real-life, on-the-ground glimpse into programs offered to Aboriginal learners. Her presentation provided stories of the challenges faced by Aboriginal learners and their teachers.
- *Reclaiming the Learning Spirit* by Ningwakwe Priscilla George. Ningwakwe is a former teacher in the educational system in Toronto, as well as community-based programs. She is a Deer Clan Anishnawbe Kwe from the Chippewas of Saugeen First Nation in Southern Ontario. She helped to start provincial and national Aboriginal literacy associations. Her address traced her own learning as an adult educator.

Discussions

Throughout the roundtable event, participants were invited to build on the presentations by reflecting on the following questions:

- What learning philosophies and theories (anti-oppressive etc.) can we draw upon to produce positive results?
- What practices produce positive learning outcomes?
- What are the key systemic challenges/barriers facing institutions and training programs serving Aboriginal adult learners?
- What are the key challenges/barriers facing adult learners?
- What strategies (policies and procedures) would have to be implemented to address the challenges of adult learners and to ensure that the educational and cultural needs of these learners and their communities are nurtured?

In an effort to capture the diversity and complexity of the participants' perspectives, the report presents a synthesis of the discussions (pp 96-118). The discussions have been organized thematically around two major themes:

Negotiating Multiple Levels of Supports and Need for Changes
Effective Approaches to Aboriginal Adult Education

An Action Plan

The Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre and the Adult Learning Knowledge Centre are extremely pleased with the *Reclaiming the Learning Spirit* roundtable. The roundtable effectively laid the groundwork for an action plan to develop adult learning programs aimed at Aboriginal learners, based on effective strategies that are affirming and transformative. By standing shoulder to shoulder, the two knowledge centres created a knowledge exchange event that was grounded in real-life and was inspired by a vision to see the learning spirit of Aboriginal Peoples reclaimed.

A Snapshot of the Results¹

From Keynotes and Conversation Starters

- Shifting teaching practices focusing on ‘cultural differences’ of Aboriginal students to exploring the social, political and historical dynamics of racism in Canada and how these processes impact on Aboriginal people is challenging work.
- Racism is a serious concern and limiting factor for Aboriginal students. Denying racism and racialization has negative impact on young and adult learners.
- A critical anti-racist education provides a foundation to support the success of all learners.
- Educators must be examples of collaboration and cooperation, across diversity, in spite of the challenges faced.
- There are no quick fixes in dealing with ‘spatially concentrated racialized’ poverty; it is fraught with many challenges.
- Transformational and holistic learning require a focus on individuals as well as a focus on community development.
- A philosophy of education based on traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophies support a transformative process of education.
- Successful learning programs take place ‘in community’ where people live.
- Learning environment should be safe, accepting, and have a relationship building context for students and staff.
- Learning for each individual is gift and strength based.
- Structures and programming includes Aboriginal knowledge, content and perspectives.
- The leadership and teachers recognize the complexities of Aboriginal people’s lives and thereby are flexible, adaptable, mentoring, healing, counseling, and make use of Aboriginal ceremonies and traditions.
- Institutions create learning opportunities which are *laddered* for incremental credentialing.
- Critical supports for students are built into the program’s mode of delivery (transportation and childcare).
- Successful learning program includes Elders/cultural advisors and resources.
- The most effective teachers are from the communities and/or trained in antiracist anti-oppressive pedagogies.
- The most successful efforts to support Aboriginal learners have political allies in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities

¹ Based on *Reclaiming the Learning Spirit* by Dr. Verna St. Denis, Dr. Jim Silver, Brenda Ireland and Ningwakwe George, a joint initiative of the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (AbLKC) and the Adult Learning Knowledge Centre (AdLKC), forthcoming, 2009

From the Roundtable's Small Groups Dialogues

Negotiating Multiple Levels of Needs and Changes in Systems

- Systems provide a supportive/nurturing institutional climate.
- Mainstream institutions/programs/personnel need to be proactive in response to environments which are racist and to assumptions that programs for First Nations students are “watered down.”
- Systems need to pay attention to learning needs of non-Aboriginal personnel in regards to Aboriginal education.
- Systems need to pay attention to policy development needs such as being proactive and collaborative in creating their own measurements, standards and indicators of success.
- Systems need to be open to an examination of policies and procedures which are counterproductive to learners and their communities.
- Governments have a responsibility to provide adequate funding and resources to Aboriginal students and institutions respectively to ensure sustainability in efforts to become educated and to provide an education.
- Mainstream systems and institutions need to ensure there is authentic consultation and collaboration with Aboriginal peoples
- Political and educational leaders needs to value and support Indigenous/Aboriginal institutions/programs.
- Aboriginal controlled institutions need to be recognized as legitimate structures of their respective communities in the delivery of education and need to be recognized as significant contributors to Aboriginal learning.
- Need to acknowledge the special value and contributions of Aboriginal scholars and teachers, and increase their numbers so as to help change the institutions
- Program development should address needs of Aboriginal students/communities in the following areas
 - Content/curriculum
 - Pedagogy/process
 - Student supports and services

Effective approaches to Aboriginal adult education

- Guided by principles of respect, acceptance for diversity, gifts based, interconnectedness and context based of realities faced by Aboriginal peoples.
- Dreams and visions based to encourage the learning spirit, to support the relationships between students and between teachers and to connect learners and learning to 'place'.
- Supportive of general goals of (Aboriginal) adult education – self-determining and resourceful individuals
- Qualities of empowering institutions and programs
 - Involves community
 - Innovative programming
 - Support for students at the core
- Effective teaching approaches
 - Teaching as human relations – in relationship
 - Effective learning and teaching strategies/techniques are employed
 - Teaching as cultural practice
 - Attention given to social and teaching climate
- Effective adult curriculum includes:
 - Critical theory (anti-racist, anti-oppressive) content
 - AND... transformative cultural curriculum content

The final report will be posted at Canadian Council on Learning website www.ccl-cca.ca by May15, 2009. Check either the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre or Adult Learning Knowledge Centre's section of the CCL homepage.

Additional Resources

Canadian Race Relations Foundations, December 2008, *Directions* Vol.5 No.1 on ***Systemic Discrimination Against Aboriginal Peoples***, guest editor, Dr. Marie Battiste, University of Saskatchewan. Information to order this resource can be found on the same page. Many of the articles are provided in both English and French

<http://www.crr.ca/content/view/491/378/lang,english/>

UNESCO Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination. For more information visit www.unesco.org/shs/citiesagainstracism

Verna St Denis, *Aboriginal Education and Anti-Racist Education: Building Alliances Across Cultural and Racial Identity*, Canadian Journal of Education 30, 4(2007); 1068-1092