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**‘Reclaiming the Learning Spirit’
Overview of Project and Results**

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Overview of Session

- **Introduction of the AbLKC & AdLKC**
 - ✓ **Emerging Principles and Themes: Aboriginal Learning**
- **Background on the Joint Project**
 - ✓ **Purposes and Outcomes**
 - ✓ **Adult Learning Contexts**
 - ✓ **Understanding the Nature of the Systemic Issues Affecting Learning**
- **What We Learned from Keynotes and Conversation Starters**
 - ✓ **Promising Practices and Lessons Learned**
- **Towards An Action Plan for Institutions, Leaders and Professionals**
 - ✓ **Negotiating Multiple Levels of Needs and Changes**
 - ✓ **Effective Approaches to Aboriginal Learning**
- **Principles of (Adult) Aboriginal Learning**

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Purpose

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 while recognizing Indigenous peoples' relationships to Canada, their relationships to place and which naturalizes Indigenous world views, knowledge, experiences and perspectives.





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(Re)defining Success In Aboriginal Learning

**Joint Project with CCL, National Aboriginal Organizations
and Interested People**

How do First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples Define Success in Learning?

- Despite diverse cultures, histories and geographies, First Nations, Inuit and Métis people share a vision of learning as a *purposeful, holistic, lifelong process*.
- To compartmentalize Aboriginal holistic lifelong learning may contradict its integrative nature, however, such a compartmentalization is useful to help explain the perspective's essential qualities.

Key attributes of Aboriginal learning

- *Learning is holistic [self, community and all life];*
- *Learning is lifelong;*
- *Learning is experiential [all senses or ways of perceiving];*
- *Learning is rooted in Aboriginal languages and cultures;*
- *Learning is a communal activity;*
- *Learning is 'place based' and spiritually oriented;*
- *Learning integrates Aboriginal and Western knowledge [traditions of many peoples]*

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Aboriginal Learning Some Emerging Principles and Themes



- ✓ The reconciliation of educational rights and privileges protected in the federal Crown (s. 91(24) and the provincial Crown (s. 93) and Aboriginal peoples (s. 35) are central to responsive education.
- ✓ *Responsive systems draw on Indigenous knowledge (place and language based), Elders, and cultural experience to unlock the potential and enhance the capacity of Indigenous learners.*
- ✓ Success is 'redefined' (Holistic Models and Indicators of Success) - "a cultural reintegration (fluency of Aboriginal languages and place) in and through educational and collective self-actualization".
- ✓ Learning is gift -strength based , relationship based and community based
- ✓ Transformative curriculum and practice are employed in tandem with anti-racism and anti-oppressive strategies (breaking the silence...)

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■ **Adult Learning Knowledge Centre**

- ❑ Based in Fredericton, NB
- ❑ Pan-Canadian, bilingual mandate to advance adult learning
- ❑ Links learning to community development, social justice, and human rights

■ **AdLKC's primary objectives**

- ❑ To foster a culture and infrastructure of adult learning
- ❑ To improve learning and living for ALL Canadians
- ❑ To remove systemic barriers to learning

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■ **What is 'adult learning'?**

- ❑ Community-based initiatives
- ❑ Civic engagement
- ❑ Informal learning
- ❑ Late-entry learning
- ❑ Lifelong learning
- ❑ Creativity and personal development

■ **Examples of AdLKC's work**

- ❑ Sponsor community-based knowledge exchange events and speaker events
- ❑ Undertake research
- ❑ Organize roundtables
- ❑ Share promising practices across boundaries
- ❑ Develop innovative partnerships

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Reclaiming the Learning Spirit



Learning from Our Experience

A Joint Project of the AbLKC and AdLKC

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Background on the Project – Purposes and Outcomes

Background

- A response to RCAP (1990) vision of a new relationship between Aboriginal people and the citizens of the Canada based on principles of **mutual respect, equity and shared responsibility** that would enable Aboriginal people to share in the full benefits of society.
- Hosting a joint invitational roundtable, **Reclaiming the Learning Spirit: Learning from Our Experience**

Purposes and Outcome

- **to share stories of transformation, hope and success to inform institutions and organizations serving Aboriginal adult learners.**
- **to develop an action plan identifying successful and affirming practices and approaches for adult learning programs for Aboriginal Peoples, and**
- **to identify gaps where more information may be needed.**

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Reclaiming the Learning Spirit Roundtable
March 2008
Saskatoon

- Collaboration between AbLKC and AdLKC
- Based on a shared understanding of transformative power of learning
- Brought together 50 experts from across Canada
- Purpose: to share stories of success, to inform educational institutes of effective strategies, and to develop an action plan to improve access to learning for Aboriginal adult learners.

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Successful strategies share common features.

- Community-based
- Holistic
- Strength-based
- Visionary
- Can build sustained relationships founded on respect and equality

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Understanding the Systemic Issues

- Government policies prior to 1960s created deep barriers to higher education. The policies include: assimilation, residential schools, prohibition of language and culture, loss of Indian status.
- The legacy was: serious damage to Aboriginal culture of learning, distrust of educational institutes, lack of role models, no basis for partnerships, lack of preparation for advanced learning.
- The systemic issues are apparent in every region of Canada.

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Atlantic Canada

- 67,000 Aboriginals in four provinces (Newfoundland & Labrador, NS, PEI, and NB).
- Aboriginal people are 3% of the Atlantic Canadian population (compared with 15% in Saskatchewan).
- Rate of education attainment for Aboriginal Atlantic Canadians (while lower than the overall Canadian rate) is higher than the national Aboriginal rate.
- For example 22% of all Canadians have a university education, compared with 8% of Aboriginal Canadians and 9%-13% of Aboriginal Atlantic Canadians.

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Promising Programs in Atlantic Canada

- Mi'kmaq College Institute at Cape Breton University
- Mi'kmaq-Maliseet Institute at the University of New Brunswick
- Mi'kmaq-Maliseet Bachelor of Social Work Program, a joint program offered by Saint Thomas University in Fredericton and Dalhousie University in Halifax

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Proven strategies

- Community delivery of courses and programs
- Aboriginal faculty and staff
- Better policies for credit transfer and learning recognition
- Flexible admission policies
- Culturally relevant student support services
- Aboriginal input in program and curriculum development
- Long-term partnerships between schools and communities are essential.

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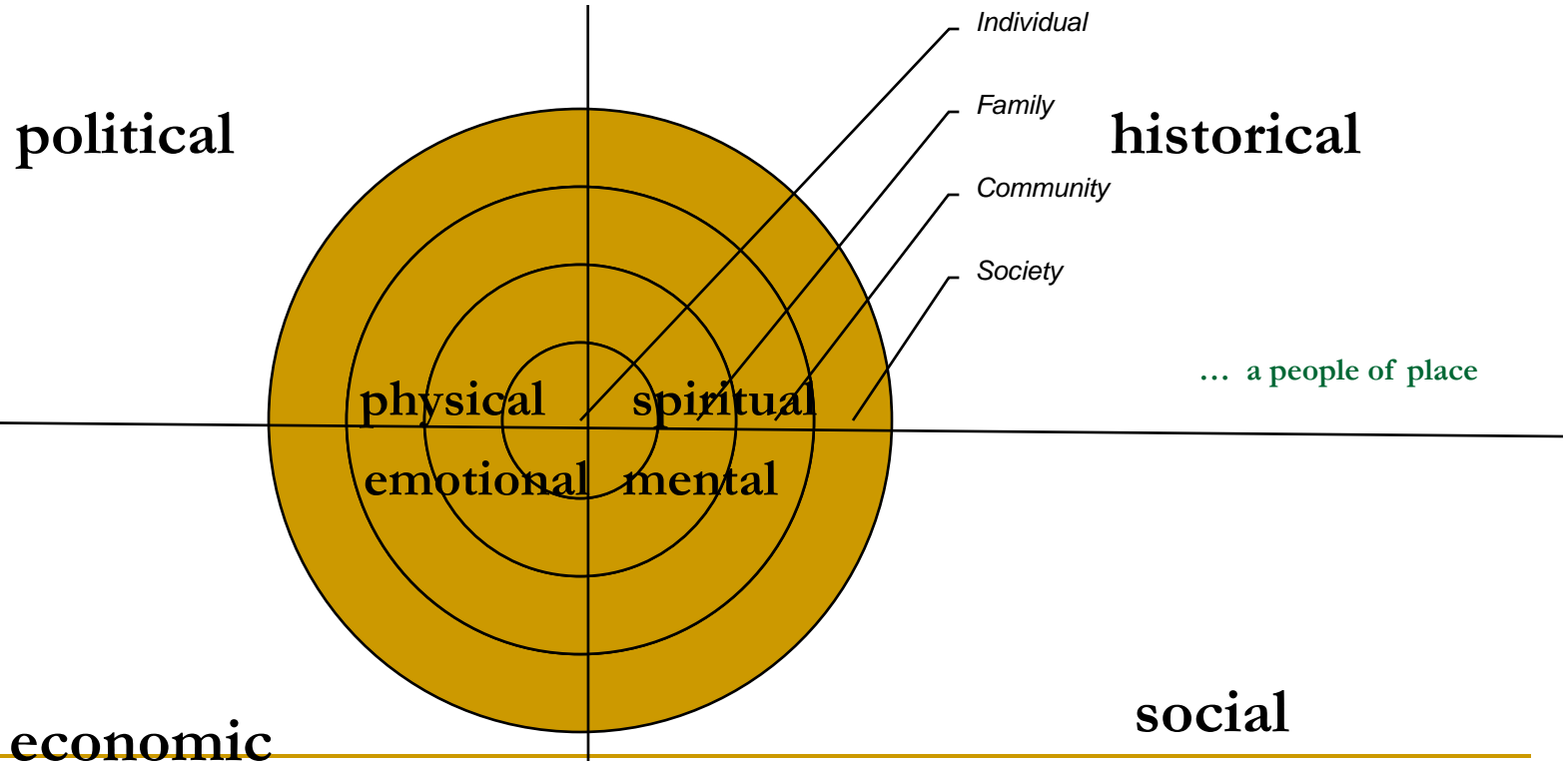
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Understanding the Nature of the Systemic Issues and Learning



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Adult Learning Contexts for Aboriginal Peoples



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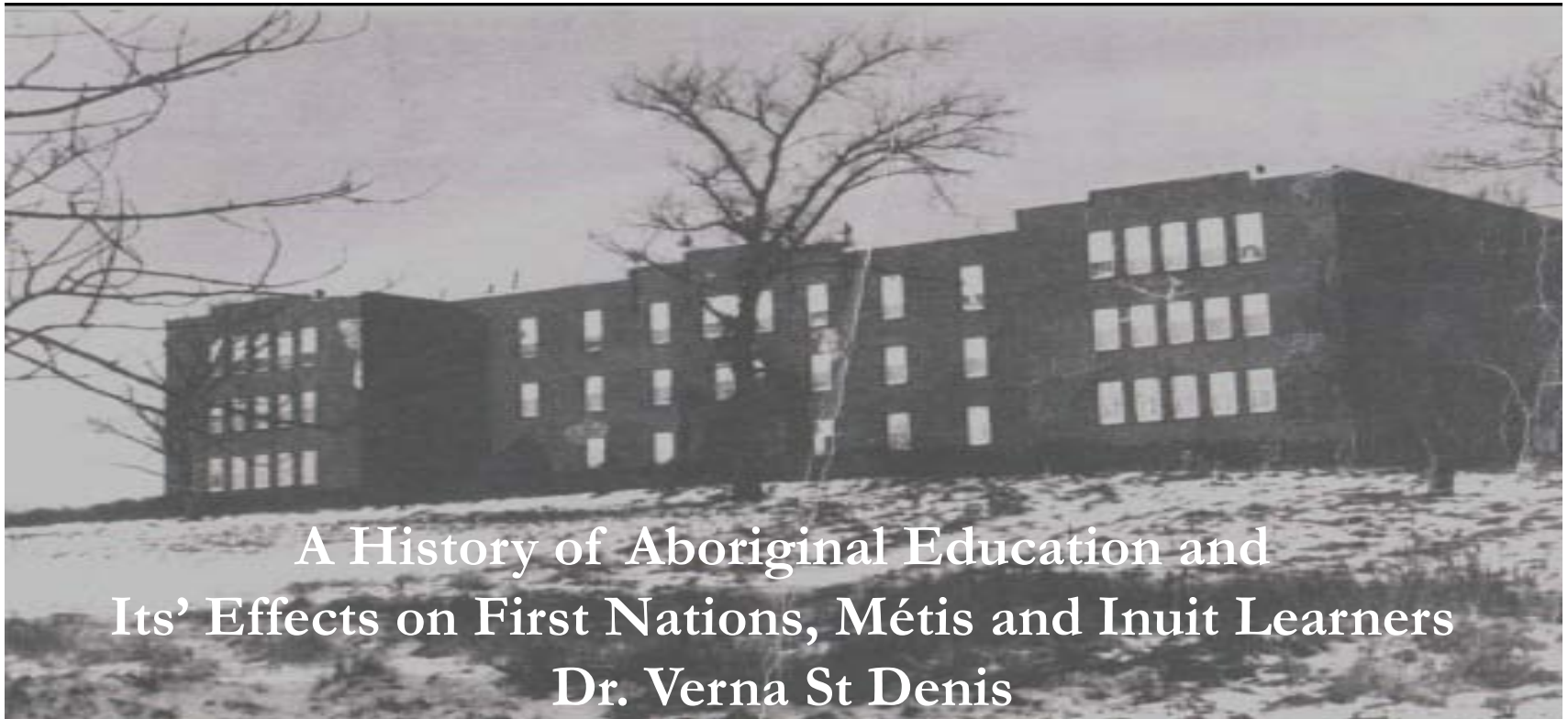
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What We Learned from Our Keynotes and Conversation Starters
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE PAST AND THE PRESENT



**A History of Aboriginal Education and
Its' Effects on First Nations, Métis and Inuit Learners**
Dr. Verna St Denis

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What We Learned from Our Keynotes and Conversation Starters

Vision and Possibility: Adult Aboriginal Education and Inner-City Community Development
Dr. Jim Silver, University of Winnipeg



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**Acting on the Vision: Aboriginal Adult Learners
in Post-Secondary Education: Rekindling the
Learning Spirit.**

Brenda Ireland

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What We Learned from Our Keynotes and Conversation Starters



Reclaiming the Learning Spirit
Ningwakwe George

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Meet our keynote speakers and conversation starters



Dr. Verna St Denis



Dr. Jim Silver



Brenda Ireland M.A



*Ningwakwe/E.
Priscilla George*

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What We Learned From Our Keynotes and Presenters Promising Practices and Lessons Learned

- ❖ *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.*
- ❖ ***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**.*



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What We Learned From Our Keynotes and Presenters Promising Practices and Lessons Learned

- ❖ 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 *environments 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.



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What We Learned From Our Keynotes and Presenters Promising Practices and Lessons Learned

- ❖ *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 programs include 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 learning has political allies in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities*



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Towards an Action Plan for Governments, Institutions, Leaders and Professionals

Negotiating Multiple Levels of Supports and Needs for Changes

- 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.

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Towards an Action Plan for Governments, Institutions, Leaders and Professionals

Negotiating Multiple Levels of Needs and Changes in Institutions

- ❑ *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**

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Towards an Action Plan for Governments, Institutions, Leaders and Professionals

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*
- ❑ ***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***

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'Reclaiming the Learning Spirit'

Principles of Aboriginal (Adult) Learning

We are Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body. What are we doing to recognize and nurture Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body in educational programming, in every aspect, not just in the curriculum? Do we know what is going on with the Learners that may be affecting them such that they are not present physically or emotionally?

We are one with Creation; what affects one element of Creation affects all the rest. Are we using opportunities to teach the Learners what happens with our every feeling, thought, word and action goes out into the Universe?

We all have a purpose for being here, and that Creator has given us gifts for fulfilling that purpose. How can we support learners to recognize and nurture their Gifts?

If everything is energy, we need to be mindful that every feeling, thought, word, action puts an energy out there, and that it comes back to us. What kind of energy are we putting out there through feeling, thought, word, and action?

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Fundamental Values of Adult Learning

- Learner-centred
- Holistic and integrated learning
- Grounded in real-life experiences
- Inclusive and diverse
- Collaborative
- Work with allies
- 'Long-term' and 'global'
- Social justice and equity
- Self-determination
- Strength-based approach
- Based on the common good

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Discussion Guide

- What learning philosophies and theories (anti-oppressive etc.) can we draw upon to produce positive results?*
- What practices produce positive learning outcomes?*
- What strategies (policies , processes and procedures) would have to be implemented to address the challenges of (adult) learners and to ensure that the educational and cultural needs of learners and their communities are nurtured?*