

JUST IN TIME

News from the Diversity, Equity and Human Rights (DEHR) Committee

“Fantastic!” That was the comment a friend recently made about the protest movement originating among First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, Idle No More, which is currently sweeping the country. Idle No More was founded by four women from Saskatchewan—Nina Wilson, Sheelah McLean, Sylvia McAdam and Jessica Gordon—as a response to the Harper government’s omnibus legislation, Bill C-45, a massive tome in which the government made draconian changes to such legislation as the *Navigable Waters Protection Act*, thus affecting almost all waterways that flow through Aboriginal land. Bill C-45 also makes changes to property ownership that First Nations groups interpret as an attack on their land base.

Great things grow from small beginnings, and for the last month or so Idle No More rallies have been held across the country. Idle No More held a National Day of Solidarity and Resurgence on December 10, 2012, and thousands of people came together across the country to show solidarity. Idle No More is not just for First Nations people—it is for anyone who is interested in environmental preservation and supporting long-standing treaty

rights, and it calls on all people to join in a revolution that honours Indigenous sovereignty and protects the land and water. And indeed, Canadians of all stripes and from all classes have expressed their support for the movement, which has now spread into the US and the UK. Idle No More has also been inspired in part by the hunger strike of Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence, who vows to keep her strike going until Prime Minister Harper agrees to meet with her.

It was a bit of serendipity that this issue of *Just in Time* came out just as the Idle No More train was gaining speed, for the topic of this edition is First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) education. We will focus specifically on the work of the ATA’s own ad hoc Committee on First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy and Action Plan, which engaged in a period of concentrated and fruitful labour. What is so heartening and inspiring about the work of the committee is that instead of trotting out gloomy statistics, they decided to work from a position of strength and to build on the wonderful things about traditional Aboriginal culture, from which mainstream society could learn so much.



The issue also contains an article that first appeared in the journal of the Alberta School Library Council, *Literacies, Learning and Libraries*, by Carol Wilkinson, an Aboriginal educator and former teacher-librarian who is currently completing a master's degree in education. Wilkinson provides useful information for teachers on validating the culture of Aboriginal students in school libraries. We also profile a recent issue of *One World in Dialogue*, the journal of the ATA's Social Studies Council, which centres on various aspects of FNMI education. As usual we have a list of useful resources and notices and events as well.

—Karen Virag

The ATA's First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy and Action Plan

In June of 2011 the ATA's Provincial Executive Council established the Committee on First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Education Policy and Action Plan and tasked it with

- seeking input from Association members who work with FNMI students on how the Association could better serve the professional needs of these members,



Jamie Medicine Crane in Native Fancy Dance dress. Jamie is past president of the ATA's First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Council and the council's current communications director.

- examining what other provincial organizations have done to support teachers working with FNMI students,
- inviting input from education partners on initiatives to support FNMI education in Alberta,
- proposing Association policy on education needs of FNMI students and teachers and
- proposing an action plan to support members working with FNMI students that honours the unique cultural and linguistic needs of the students.

Members of this committee were Denis Espetveidt, who chaired the committee, Glenda Bristow, Marieka Cardinal, Lori Pritchard, Jacqueline Skytt and Patrick Loyer; Shelley Svidal was the administrative secretary of the committee.

Providing Advice and Support

Knowing the importance of respected elders in FNMI communities, the committee arranged meetings with elders to ask for their advice and support. Three First Nations elders attended the Calgary meeting; elders who attended the Edmonton meeting were First Nations and Métis.

The following people from other Alberta educational partners shared information with the committee:

- Terry Lakey, FNMI Professional Development Facilitator/Consultant, Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia
- Lorianne Tenove, FNMI Professional Development Facilitator/Consultant, Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia
- Jane Martin, Director, Aboriginal Policy Branch, Alberta Education
- Executive Committee, FNMI Education Council

The Committee Takes Action

In addition to an extensive literature review, the committee completed a review of the FNMI education policy of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation and the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation to help it shape its own policies. Later, the committee organized focus groups to gather input from Association members working with FNMI students to identify members' successes, difficulties and PD needs and to determine how the Association could assist them in their work. The focus groups, which were held in seven of ten teachers' conventions, were led by ATA Executive Staff Officer Patrick Loyer, with assistance from other committee members, and used a talking-circle protocol.

Summary of Focus Group Meetings

The following themes emerged from the focus groups:

- The history of residential schools has left a lasting impact on parents and communities. Public schools are organized and operated in a Eurocentric structure that does not fit with the home/community culture. FNMI parents/community must have a voice in the school, and there must be an acknowledgement of the past domination of European cultures.
- The FNMI student population is growing, but there has been limited support to enhance the success of FNMI students in public schools. Provincial achievement test results and high school completion data provide evidence that FNMI students are struggling.
- Many teachers have had little or no preparation to teach in FNMI communities, and there is limited access to appropriate professional development. Teachers need to help FNMI students walk in two worlds.

What Was Learned About Building Relationships to Support First Nations, Métis and Inuit Student Learning

- Teaching FNMI students is all about relationships and attending to human needs. Relationships with students and families are essential to address issues and support success. In FNMI cultures, the extended family is much more important than it is in mainstream society.
- Students off reserve are often subject to stereotyping/racism in public schools. To connect with parents and communities, teachers need to understand the histories and cultural heritage of Alberta, including residential schools, treaties, traditional knowledge and protocols.
- Schools need access to Aboriginal personnel/staff to help the school communicate with parents, families and communities; provide advice to teachers; and bridge the cultural divide.



*The median age of Aboriginal Edmontonians is more than 10 years younger than non-Aboriginal residents (27.5 versus 36.1 years, respectively).
—Aboriginal Edmonton: A Statistical Story*

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What Was Learned About Holistic Pedagogy for First Nations, Métis and Inuit Students

- Teachers need to incorporate culturally appropriate practices, knowledge and perspectives, such as inviting community members to share expertise and provide traditional guidance to both students and teachers.
- Teachers need to be aware of how important oral traditions are in Aboriginal cultures.
- Teachers need to use authentic and appropriate instruction and assessment pedagogy.
- Teachers need to take into account FNMI students' learning preferences, such as skill in nonverbal communication, skill in processing visual and spatial information, skill in holistic processing (more able to see the whole versus the parts), observation followed by practice, and an informal setting that allows for freedom of movement.
- There is no distinction between what is effective for FNMI students and for other students. Work on relationships, focus on effective pedagogy and develop an inclusive school, and motivation and engagement will follow.

What Was Learned About the Importance of Inclusive Schools

- Schools need to be inclusive and develop an atmosphere of equality, belonging and respect. Inclusive values should be part of the school's mission, vision and action plan.
- School administrators require professional development specific to FNMI context, cultural awareness, cultural protocols and communication, and problem-solving strategies. School administrators need to be aware that some FNMI teachers have complex lives not unlike those of their students. As well, administrators

should consider strategies to enhance FNMI student voice and parental involvement (eg, student leadership, parent councils).

What About Association Programs and Services?

- We must build community among teachers interested in FNMI education so that teachers can network and share strategies and resources.
- FNMI teacher leaders should be role models for students and other teachers. The Association should build a database of teachers who are willing to mentor other teachers. Non-FNMI teachers need personalized mentorship.
- FNMI teachers need allies to change the system and to advocate for and support FNMI students as described in the Canadian Teachers' Federation research report (2010).
- The FNMI Education Council needs support to provide leadership and professional development in this area. As well, even though the Association has professional development programs and resources on FNMI culture and teachings, they need to be updated.
- All teachers need to understand and connect with FNMI students.

Policy

After considering input from elders' meetings, focus groups and educational partners and after examining what other provincial organizations have done to support teachers working with FNMI students, the committee reviewed existing Association policy and proposed new policies for consideration at the Annual Representative Assembly, in May 2013. The proposal included policies on the educational needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and teachers related to funding, teacher preparation and professional development, inclusive and sensitive language, school-readiness programs, transition services, protocols for involving families, board employment practices and pedagogical practices. Stay tuned for more information after ARA as to the disposition of these important recommendations.

Action Plan

The committee also proposed an action plan to support members working with FNMI students that honours their unique cultural and linguistic needs. The blueprint for the action plan, entitled "Leading the Way and Walking the Talk," was approved in principle, with amendments, by Council in September 2012.

The following article first appeared in volume 5:1 of *Literacies, Learning and Libraries*, the journal of the Alberta School Library Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association.

Valuing and Validating the Culture of Aboriginal Students in School Libraries

by Carol Wilkinson

My Aboriginal ancestry and educational experiences and the educational needs of Aboriginal children have always been at the forefront of my thinking, planning and teaching. Throughout my university education I was encouraged, supported and motivated to become a teacher who strove to understand, value and validate the lives and experiences of Aboriginal children through cultural experiences and expressions in language, communication, understanding, arts and athletics.

Along with my interest in Aboriginal issues in education, I also developed a passion for school libraries and the opportunities and supports they can provide to learning. This passion followed me into the classroom. As a classroom teacher, my students and I took advantage of all services provided by the school library, and we were very fortunate to work with an effective teacher-librarian.

I then had the opportunity to move into the school library as teacher-librarian. This position gave me the opportunity to share my love for books and literature, reading, information, technology, libraries and learning with the entire school population—prekindergarten through Grade 8. Through my work in the library I hope to have given students opportunities for their lives and cultures to be mirrored visually, as well as throughout the collection and during meaningful, engaging learning activities.

From the school-based library, I moved to the division's central library, which is a library for all teachers in the school division, prekindergarten through Grade 12.

As the division teacher-librarian, I had the opportunity to influence teaching and learning throughout the division by recommending resources to enhance school library collections to all teachers and administrative personnel. At library staff meetings, I talked about curricular initiatives with all library staff; one such initiative was the incorporation and integration of First

Nations and Métis perspectives and knowledge in all subject areas.

To feel that their culture, lives and experiences are validated and valued in the school setting is vital to success for all students. Because teacher-librarians engage with all students in their school and have access to a wide variety of resources, they have the opportunity to give students culturally relevant learning opportunities that connect with classroom learning, through interacting with students or by providing classroom teachers with relevant, engaging, meaningful and supportive resources to use with students.

After working as lead teacher-librarian for the school division for a few years, I felt that it was important for me to further my education. I applied to the Teacher-Librarianship by Distance-Learning program at the University of Alberta, was accepted and began another educational journey, always keeping Aboriginal learning and students at the forefront.

This paper is a result of my personal connections to Aboriginal culture and libraries and the pursuit of a master's degree in education. Through it, I hope to address the recommendations made by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) (2009) and Saskatchewan's Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee (2005). By analyzing my own personal and professional experiences, and relevant scholarly and professional literature, I will attempt to answer the following question: What cultural values do Aboriginal people in Canada have, and how can teachers and teacher-librarians ensure that these values are integrated in the K–12 educational setting, particularly school libraries, to ensure success for Aboriginal students?

The focus of this paper is to discover ways in which our schools and school libraries can work toward valuing and validating the lives, cultures and experiences of our Aboriginal students. This will be done by reviewing scholarly and professional literature, focusing on material from

First Nations are the fastest-growing segment of our society, and over 50 per cent of that population is under the age of 23.

—*Globe and Mail*

Canada but also including some from the United States. I will address the topics of holism, lifelong learning, experiential learning, spiritualism, communal education, teacher–student relationship, and the integration of Aboriginal knowledge and Western knowledge as they relate to Aboriginal culture, education and success.

Aboriginal identities, like Aboriginal cultures, vary, as do those of any cultural group. Recognizing and respecting the great disparity among Aboriginal cultures, the term *Aboriginal*, as defined by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) (2009), is used to refer to Canada’s First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. Educators must be careful to recognize these differences, and to provide the necessary supports for understanding and recognition of individual and cultural differences. As Farrell-Racette et al (1996) state,

Even when students share a common culture and sense of identity, there are enormous differences within First Nations and Métis groups that need to be considered. Individuals within any one cultural group will vary widely in the degree to which they identify with and the attitudes they hold toward their own people. ... A key point for teachers to consider is that the First Nations and Métis students they have in their classroom will vary in the degree to which they identify with their people. (p 13)

This paper is not intended to create step-by-step guidelines for teachers of Aboriginal students or Aboriginal learners; rather, its goal is to provide teachers and teacher-librarians with suggestions about how to make school libraries more welcoming and inviting for our Aboriginal learners and, by doing so, extend a sense of value and validation of their cultures. In turn, students will begin to develop a sense of connection and belonging that will help them be successful at school.

What Does the Literature Say?

Schools that are welcoming and friendly invite the community to share in the experiences of its learners and to share their knowledge in a way that is ingrained as lifelong, holistic, experiential and communal. These are the values common to Aboriginal people and in the school setting described by Anuik, Battiste and George (2010): “From the time learners first walk through the door ... they are treated like a whole person—spirit, heart, mind, and body There is positive messaging throughout the building ...” (p 74).

For many Aboriginal learners, the scene has not always been so inviting, welcoming or friendly.

Historically, many were forced to leave their culture and walk in another world—a foreign world where they were forbidden to speak their language, practise their traditions, live their culture and learn their cultural ways from their family or elders. “In forcing assimilation and acculturation to Eurocentric knowledge, first in residential schools and later in public schools, governments and educational systems have displaced Indigenous knowledge and in so doing have failed First Nations children” (Ledoux 2006, 270). The time has come to re-establish those traditional Aboriginal cultural values and traditions in our schools, including our school libraries, to allow, encourage and support our Aboriginal students to reach their full potential.

Aesthetics, as mentioned above, are a great beginning, but in order to attain their goals, schools, educators and administrators must delve deeper into the heart of Aboriginal culture to gain true understanding and to be able to provide the environment necessary for success. “A major challenge in Aboriginal education is to help Aboriginal students retain their cultural identity, while at the same time preparing them for life in a complex, non-Aboriginal and homogenizing world” (Katz and McCluskey 2003, 131).

It is not enough to teach Aboriginal culture and values in isolation. To be truly effective and provide the means to value and validate that culture, Aboriginal perspectives must be integrated into all aspects of the school program and curriculum. Aboriginal culture must become an intrinsic part of everything that is school. That is, “the books, the pictures, the seating plan, the music, the announcements, the school staff, the extra-curricular activities such as clubs and sports, the food, and even the reception of parents in the office” (Ledoux 2006, 268) must reflect those Aboriginal perspectives, knowledge and culture.

The following quote from the CCL (2009) embodies the need for resurgence in an education system that appeals and extends an invitation to, and addresses the needs of, Canada’s Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal learning is a fully integrated and potentially all-encompassing process that permeates all aspects of the learner’s life and their community. However, over the course of time, external influences (such as the residential school system) have obstructed this process, leaving many First Nations, Inuit and Métis people alienated from their true learning heritage. Success for Aboriginal people requires the recognition – and more importantly the restoration – of this vision of lifelong learning. (p 11)

As outlined by the CCL's (2009) report, the following are seven key attributes of the Aboriginal perspective on learning.

1. Holistic—encompasses all parts: physical, emotional, spiritual and mental
2. Lifelong—begins at birth and continues through adulthood
3. Experiential—actively engaged in learning through participation
4. Rooted in Aboriginal languages and cultures
5. Spiritually oriented—explores the interconnectedness of all beings
6. Community based—includes family, elders and community
7. Integrates Aboriginal and Western knowledge (p 10)

Saskatchewan's Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee (AEPAC) (2005) has specified four areas of importance for Aboriginal education:

1. Cultural affirmation and school climate—including cultures, traditions, languages, spirituality and world view
2. Shared decision-making—involving elders, parents and community members
3. Core curriculum actualization and the integration of Aboriginal knowledge in an authentic and qualitative manner
4. Lifelong learning—beginning at birth and continuing throughout life

It is from these seven key attributes and four areas of importance that I will further explore Aboriginal cultural values, which I will expand to schools and school libraries.

Holistic

Researchers and academics agree that traditional Aboriginal culture is holistic (Chambers 2006; Anuik, Battiste and George 2010; Manitoba Education, Training and Youth 2003; Canadian Council on Learning 2009). Aboriginal culture focuses on and encompasses the entire person—body, intellect, emotion and spirit. Hill (as cited in Anuik, Battiste and George 2010) provides the following definition:

Holistic ... embraces the qualities and characteristics necessary "to become a whole person." A whole person denotes a human being who is capable of balancing his/her mental, emotional, physical and spiritual human capabilities both internally within oneself and externally in societal interaction with all life forms present throughout Creation. (p 67)

The holistic perspective may be likened to the circle. According to Manitoba Education, Training and Youth (2003), "the circle teaches that one must



understand the whole body and the interactions of the underlying components when seeking understanding and knowledge" (p 13). The "whole body" refers to the holistic perspective of including the physical, emotional, spiritual and mental aspects of the child and, in many Aboriginal cultures, is grounded in the medicine wheel. "While the medicine wheel is not part of the original spiritual practice of every aboriginal group in North America, it does embody principles common to most" (Gallagher-Hayashi 2004, 21). Traditional Aboriginal learning was based on the circle—cyclical, with no beginning and no end, and continuous. According to Chambers (2006), "Literacy is seen as multidimensional by the parents. Literacy incorporates singing, music, art, storytelling, emotions, speaking and a way of being. Literacy encompasses Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body in a holistic approach" (p 14). It is believed that when all aspects of the child are nurtured, the child will achieve to the best of his or her ability.

Learning Spirit

A substantial part of Aboriginal learning is the appeal to and nourishment of the learner's spirit. In reference to the medicine wheel or circle, the *spirit* is one-quarter and is an equal part of the holistic Aboriginal perspective. In order for the person to be balanced, the spirit must be nourished as well. Anuik, Battiste and George (2010) explain that "the learning spirit ... is the entity within each of us that guides our search for purpose and vision. The learning spirit knows its journey and finds itself attracted to certain learning experiences that will build those gifts. These gifts require a learning environment that will sustain and challenge learners" (p 67). Doige (2003) adds that "spirituality unites the human part of all of us and permits the differences to exist; through our spirituality we find our connectedness to one another" (p 144). She continues her discussion by

"Literacy is seen as multidimensional by the parents. Literacy incorporates singing, music, art, storytelling, emotions, speaking and a way of being. Literacy encompasses Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body in a holistic approach."

In Alberta there are 45 First Nations in three treaty areas, 140 reserves and approximately 812,771 hectares of reserve land

The most commonly spoken First Nations languages are Blackfoot, Cree, Chipewyan, Dene, Sarcee and Stoney (Nakoda Sioux).

stating that “education ... is more than merely acquiring skills and knowledge. ... The connections between morals, values, and learning are fundamental to Aboriginal identity” (p 146). And so it is that Aboriginal youth must learn how they connect with and belong in their environment, including nature, others and themselves. As children grow and change, so does their spirit; it is important to nourish that growth and change in positive ways.

“The Aboriginal process of knowing never leaves information as parts, but searches for the connections to meaning and holism as found at the points of togetherness” (Doige 2003, 147). In other words, Aboriginal people constantly strive to find and make connections between parts in order to make sense of their surroundings. “Aboriginal knowing is an expression of an individual’s spirituality in relationship[s], not an expression of an objectified system of beliefs or a religion” (Doige 2003, 147).

Lifelong

In traditional Aboriginal culture, education was a lifelong journey, beginning at birth and continuing throughout adulthood into old age. “The foundation of Aboriginal teachings on learning is built on a notion of a life as learning and learning as lifelong” (Anuik, Battiste and George 2010, 67). Parents, extended family and community members all played a part in a child’s education. “It was believed that all children came into the world with their own gifts and talents and it was the responsibility of adults to recognize and nurture those gifts” (Farrell-Racette et al 1996, 24). Lifelong learning is not specific to Aboriginal culture, and many throughout the world are acknowledging the significance of lifelong learning to individuals, communities and society.

Experiential

In traditional Aboriginal cultures, children learned by “... observation and imitation as ... [they] and

adults in the extended family participate[d] in everyday activities” (Kanu 2002), such as hunting, fishing, food preparation and storage, and cooking, to name just a few. “The goal of education in traditional Aboriginal societies was to prepare children for their lives” (Manitoba Education, Training and Youth 2003, 15). Children received guidance rather than direction, and caregivers believed that children would make the right choices for themselves. Aboriginal children were intrinsically rewarded for achieving the goal or task (Manitoba Education, Training and Youth 2003, 16).

Many of us have probably heard the famous quote from Confucius that attests to the power of experiential learning opportunities: “I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.” In order to develop understanding, it is important for all children, particularly Aboriginal children, to engage in experiential learning opportunities.

Grounded in Language and Culture

Aboriginal cultures have traditionally and historically been based on oral language. Storytelling is foremost in communication among family and community members. Kanu (2002) acknowledges that “in indigenous Aboriginal culture traditional stories, legends, songs, and many other forms of knowledge are passed on among generations by continual retelling (through stories) by elders and leaders who carry the knowledge of these spoken forms in their memories.” The printed version of Aboriginal stories and legends are relatively new, and through their translation to print, some meaning has been lost. It is only through traditional storytelling by Aboriginal elders that these stories will be carried on with all their intended meanings, lessons and learning intact.

Even though oral language is a tradition of Aboriginal culture, it has been noted by Kanu (2002) that “although oral instructional methods such as storytelling are an important cultural approach to learning for [Aboriginal] students, the verbal saturation that characterizes much of school instruction, especially when this instruction is fast-paced and delivered in a different language, is not conducive to academic success.” It seems as though a balance must be found for the amount of verbal communication that occurs in schools, especially for students whose first language is not the language most often used in the school—English. Kanu (2002) continues, “learning style differences have far-reaching consequences in the formal education of Aboriginal students,

particularly in view of the fact that the formal education system almost always favors those who are highly verbal.”

In contrast, some Aboriginal cultures value silence. It is believed that in order to understand, time is needed to reflect on an idea, concept or new learning. Charlie (nd) explains:

First Nations students unfamiliar with a subject feel stressed and in danger, and in keeping with their culture, retreat into positions of careful observation. The more unfamiliar the situation, the more you can expect the student to withdraw into physical immobility and silence. ... First Nations value silence as a skill and being silent is not an empty activity. (pp 29–30)

Communal

Traditional Aboriginal education began at home with parents, extended family, elders and community members. Children learned through experience and by watching and listening. Traditional Aboriginal cultures hold the utmost respect for the elders of the community. Elders in Aboriginal cultures are not necessarily the eldest in years; they are seen as wise and rich in experience. Those whose lives, experiences, personalities and manner of being gave them the knowledge, understandings and abilities to share their wisdom with others were, and continue to be, revered as elders. Aboriginal elders are regarded as keepers of knowledge, traditions and culture and are looked to for guidance on any number of issues.

Along with wisdom and elders comes the Aboriginal tradition of storytelling. Because Aboriginal cultures have traditionally been oral, they are rich in stories, and many lessons are taught through storytelling. Kanu (2002) supports this idea:

In Aboriginal culture narratives are often used for teaching about cultural norms ... traditional stories, legends, songs, and many other forms of knowledge are passed on among generations by continual retelling (through stories) by elders and leaders who carry the knowledge of these spoken forms in their memories.

Due to the variance between Aboriginal communities and cultures, sources of cultural knowledge should be parents, family and community, including elders, to ensure that the culture being represented is the one of the local community.

Relationship

Not only is it important to include the Aboriginal cultural values identified by the CCL’s report in schools and school libraries, but it is also

important to include the value of relationship—particularly the relationship between teacher and student. As mentioned by Saskatchewan’s AEPAC (2005) action plan, “in order for learning to take place, students must feel that the school reflects their cultural community” (p 6). This is reflected in the school climate, and a significant part of that climate is the relationships between students and teachers.

Many researchers (Goulet 2005; Kanu 2002; Sinoski 2008; Alberta Education 2005) have included this relationship as one of the keys to success and achievement for Aboriginal learners. Alberta Education (2005) recognizes this significance: “The relationship between student and teacher is the heart of Aboriginal education” (p v). This relationship is built on the traditional Aboriginal value of respect. Sinoski (2008) speaks of the relationship she develops with her students and the ways in which it empowers her students to succeed:

It is essential that my practice be influenced by my belief in the power of relationship. And each time these young people reach out to me or their peers and discover in these relationships their ability to achieve, to be self-sufficient and to be unselfish, I know that at the foundation of culturally relevant practice must be the relationships we cultivate in our classrooms and school communities. (pp 17–18)

The student–teacher relationship may be compared to that of parent–child, in that one is typically the defined authority and the other is not. A respectful release of this authority can transform into a positive relationship between student and teacher, in which authority is shared, rather than imposed. This type of relationship takes time to develop, and the qualities that must evolve in order for the relationship to be positive are mutual respect and trust.

Goulet (2005) also acknowledges the importance and significance of relationship building. She found that “in the classrooms ... relationship building created connections that developed a culturally meaningful learning environment” (p 213). She also recognizes that it is not only the teacher–student relationship that is important but also the relationship between the curriculum and the student. “Teachers ... built relationships between the student and the curriculum that connected the learner and the self, and the learner and his culture” (p 213). In order for connections to be made to the curriculum, students must be able to see their lives and experiences mirrored in that curriculum in some way.

In 2001, the number of Albertans reporting Aboriginal ancestry was 199,015, which represented 6.7 per cent of the total Alberta population. This consisted of Indians (84,990), Métis (66,060), Inuit (1,090), Aboriginal Not Specified (4,080) and people who reported Aboriginal ancestry but did not self-identify as Aboriginal in the census (42,795).

—Alberta Chamber of Resources

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Integration of Aboriginal and Western Knowledge

For many Aboriginal people, the traditional way of life is disappearing and the reality is that they must learn to live and succeed in what may be considered a more nontraditional society. In response, this has brought them to understand the value of such integration. This is not to say that they are going to abandon their traditional knowledge, values and beliefs, as many of these are the qualities ingrained in their spirit, but, rather, that they will find ways to integrate and connect their traditions with useful Western knowledge. Aboriginal people understand the value of integrating Western knowledge into their own traditional knowledge.

AEPAC (2005) recognizes the importance of Aboriginal knowledge in its first principle: "Aboriginal world view is a valid way of knowing and understanding the world. ... [It is] the key to cultural affirmation ... success for Aboriginal students, and harmonious relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples" (p 5).

Kanu (2002) points out that "curriculum should include Aboriginal perspectives, histories or traditions, and interests, all of which have foundations in their cultural heritage." In her research, Chambers (2006) made a similar discovery, in that "parents wanted to see a mix of culturally sensitive materials and EuroWestern activities" (p 11). Chambers recognized the need and desire for the integration of Aboriginal and Western knowledge. She states, "In this study parents clearly requested bi-cultural content. This linkage and integration of world views would serve to breathe life into current literacy practices" (p 15). Alberta Education (2005) acknowledges the significance of an integrative approach to perspectives:

Effective education that includes Aboriginal worldviews does not exclude or discredit other cultures but ensures that non-Aboriginal students and Aboriginal students alike are given the opportunity to see Aboriginal perspectives, and the strengths and gifts of Aboriginal people reflected in the schools they attend. (p 14)

Doige (2003) has indicated that there is a conflict between the holistic, subjective and spiritual nature of Aboriginal learning and the secular quality of Western knowledge, which is typically linear and objective. "Making education culturally appropriate for Aboriginal students does not mean that the Western knowledge paradigm has to change. It does mean that ... [both] must be incorporated into the teacher's pedagogy such that one is not regarded as superior to the other" (p 148).

In Summary

Throughout the literature review I have confirmed the Canadian Council on Learning's key attributes of Aboriginal education and the identified educational cultural values: holistic, lifelong learning, experiential, grounded in language and culture, spiritually oriented, integrated Aboriginal and Western knowledge, and the importance of community. I have also recognized and acknowledged the importance of the development of a mutually respectful relationship between teacher and student, and the importance of schools acknowledging and reflecting Aboriginal culture, as recommended by Saskatchewan's AEPA Committee.

How can these values be demonstrated in the school library in order to value and validate the lives and experiences of our Aboriginal students and to ensure they achieve to their potential?

Reflections and Implications

Based on the literature reviewed, it is apparent that in order to give Aboriginal students an inviting, welcoming and friendly learning environment and educational experience, the learning environment must represent those attributes valued by Aboriginal culture, as well as those that value and validate Aboriginal culture. The following suggestions for improving school environments are based on the preceding research, as well as personal and professional experiences.

Implications for School Libraries

The incorporation of teaching strategies and methods that appeal to a variety of multiple intelligences within the classroom and library would ensure that individual learners, including Aboriginal students, could and would make connections with concepts, theories and curriculum in their own way, thus enhancing and developing their inner spirit.

For learners to succeed on their journeys to find their academic, emotional, and spiritual gifts, teachers need to: facilitate collective community action; provide holistic approaches that emphasize the learners' bodies, emotions and spirits in addition to matters related to their minds ...; and respect community ownership over learning. Learners are on a lifelong journey. ... And it is our responsibility as teachers to provide, using community resources, the conditions needed to stimulate and continually nourish the learning spirit, the energy residing inside of everyone that defines and shapes the learning journey. (Doige 2003)

In our school libraries we can honour, value and validate the cultures of our Aboriginal students and nourish their spirits by providing meaningful, relevant learning experiences that include their families and are based in their community. We can integrate Aboriginal music and artwork (professional and student created), such as posters reflecting Aboriginal role models and cultural symbols, into the library environment, thus creating a welcoming and inviting atmosphere for Aboriginal students and their families.

The library's atmosphere can reflect the lives of our students, and the library's resources can mirror their lives. The library collection must include contemporary and historical Aboriginal culture, traditions and information that, in turn, reflect our respect for and understanding of Aboriginal people and their culture.

Slapin and Seale (1998) provide a guide for the selection of appropriate literature. Schools must be careful to include literature that accurately portrays Aboriginal people because

The ways in which Native people have been and are portrayed in writing for children contribute beyond the telling to the destruction of ... [Native] cultures and lifeways that ... [are] still experience[d] By and large one truth remains: the best writing about Native peoples is still done by the people themselves. (p 85)

By and large one truth remains: the best writing about Native peoples is still done by the people themselves.

And so it is that, whenever possible, literature that is written about Aboriginal people by Aboriginal people should be included in a school library collection.

As noted by Zmuda and Harada (2008), the changing demographics of our schools have created the need "for building resource collections that are culturally sensitive and culturally diverse" (p 105). In Saskatchewan, as in many Canadian provinces, there has been and will continue to be an increase in the population of Aboriginal students, and school library collections must reflect this increase by selecting acceptable and appropriate literature, as well as weeding out selections that do not fit the criteria.

As part of their lifelong educational experience, Aboriginal students should be given opportunities to practise their talents and gifts, and hone the skills necessary to reach their potential. In our libraries, students can work in collaborative groups and "writing ... and literature circles" (Gallagher-Hayashi 2004, 21) to complete assignments and use their talents and gifts to support the group



effort. This will give them experiences and skills that will last them a lifetime. Group projects can incorporate new literacies and Web 2.0 tools, such as wikis and fan fiction, that will nurture cooperative skills and provide experiences and skills students can use throughout their lives.

During class discussions, a talking stick, stone or feather, which was and continues to be customary in many Aboriginal cultures, may be used to signal whose turn it is to talk and to show respect for the speaker. Such a practice is another way to validate the traditions of many Aboriginal cultures. It should be expected that all students use the stick, stone or feather so as not to

single out an individual or a group of students.

In classroom and school libraries, teachers and teacher-librarians should strive to differentiate learning experiences in order to accommodate a variety of learning styles. This is important for all students, but may be particularly necessary for Aboriginal students because it incorporates the Aboriginal values of holism, language and culture, and experiential learning.

The inclusion of inquiry-based learning in curriculum has given teachers opportunities and direction to ensure that units and lessons are more student-centred. Teachers must understand the importance of inquiry and strive to incorporate it whenever and wherever possible.

It is possible to make connections with the community by inviting community members to share their knowledge with students, and also to take students to the community by taking learning outside the school. This coincides particularly well with environmental education in science; creative writing in language arts; drawing, sketching or painting in visual arts; and community care and

Education is a key determinant of social and economic health and is directly linked to goals of building strong governing capacity and sustainable economies. It has been an instrument of oppression against First Nations, with attempts to remove our identities, fracture our families and eliminate our languages, traditions, thinking and being. These attempts to oppress our cultures, languages and rights must end, and it starts with education.

—Shawn Atleo,
national chief of the
Assembly of First
Nations, October 1,
2012

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development in social studies and/or health. Teacher-librarians have the privilege of teaching all classes in a school and so can provide rich learning experiences for all—again ensuring that we are developing and nurturing that “learning spirit” (Anuik, Battiste and George 2010, 67) and that all-important teacher–student relationship. Most often, providing a different learning venue gives students an opportunity to showcase their skills, gifts and talents in a different way.

Many students are more receptive to the visual presentation of information and concepts; visual presentation often increases engagement, interest and motivation to learn. When possible, therefore, teachers should make learning opportunities more visual to appeal to a wider range of students, including those of Aboriginal ancestry. One way to do this is by using visual technologies, such as interactive whiteboards, that let students visualize and interact with concepts that would otherwise be static.

Whenever possible, school libraries should invite Aboriginal elders to share their knowledge with students at all levels through the oral tradition of storytelling. Primary students are most familiar with the practice of storytelling, whereas older students are often expected to experience stories through reading rather than listening, so it is important to include older students in storytelling



in our school libraries as well. The practice of inviting elders into the library validates Aboriginal students’ traditional oral culture and demonstrates that the same culture is valued in their school. The presence of elders in the school also connects the Aboriginal community with the school.

We must be cognizant of the need for our Aboriginal students to have time to think, process and decide, as is sometimes the custom of their cultures. As mentioned by Charlie (nd), teachers must appreciate this need, and teacher-librarians are no exception. By allowing our Aboriginal students this thinking time, we again acknowledge students’ need to develop and nurture their learning spirit and the student–teacher relationship.

Conclusion

Efforts to value and validate Aboriginal culture in schools and school libraries can help develop and maintain an inviting, friendly, welcoming and warm environment for our Aboriginal students, their families and community. Such an environment is grounded in Aboriginal culture and incorporates Aboriginal ways of knowing, and therefore is engaging and meaningful to Aboriginal students and supports their potential for learning and success. In this kind of classroom, Aboriginal students eagerly anticipate learning alongside staff and teachers with whom they have developed, or are beginning to develop, respectful and trusting relationships.

Asselin, Branch and Oberg (2003) relate the importance of culture to students, learning, schools and school libraries in the following statement:

Vision of a school library: a resource centre, filled with our literature and a wealth of national and international information resources, which acts as a national endowment for all our children and youth. If school libraries were to be fully developed, they could be the great cultural equalizer that would give children in every corner of the country access to resources that would enhance their learning, give great personal pleasure, and help them learn about themselves and each other. (p 3)

This vision reflects the importance of culture as part of a library’s required resources and highlights the importance of libraries in students’ being able to understand and appreciate the world’s cultures, including those of Canada’s Aboriginal people. It is through such value and validation that our Aboriginal students will reach their potential and succeed in our schools.

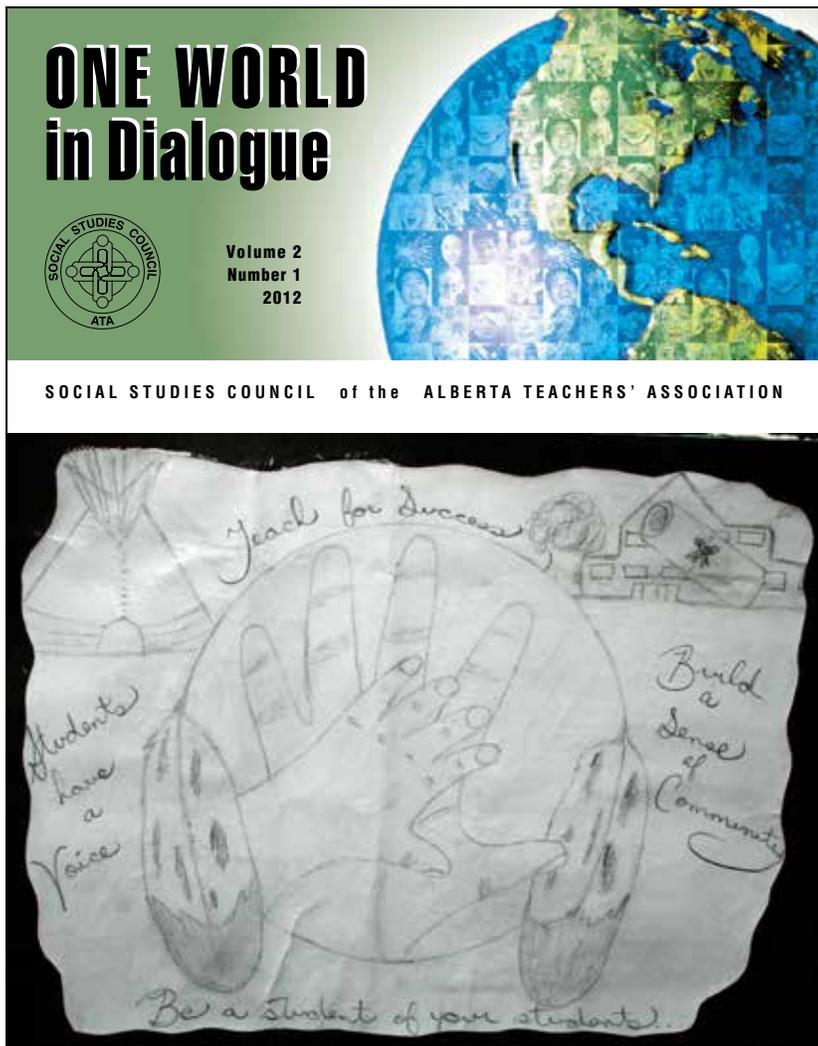
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One World in Dialogue

One World in Dialogue is the journal of the ATA's Social Studies Council. The latest issue contains the following articles about Aboriginal education:

- "Invoking Accountability and Documentation Through 'All My Relations,'" by Métis writer and educator Vicki Bouvier;
- "An Invitation to Explore the Roots of Current Aboriginal/ Non-Aboriginal Relations in Canada," by University of Calgary professor Gail Jardine, who is the editor of *One World in Dialogue*;
- "Love Thy Neighbour: Repatriating Precarious Blackfoot Sites," by Cynthia Chambers, a professor of education at the University of Lethbridge and a collaborator with Indigenous communities on literacies of place, human relations and the material world, and Narcisse Blood, a leader and elder in the Blood Nation, an award-winning filmmaker and an instructor at Red Crow College; and
- a review of the book *Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into the School Curriculum*.



The cover illustration is by Natasha Calf Robe Ayoungman, an elementary teacher at Chief Old Sun School, Siksika Nation.

For information on obtaining a copy of *One World in Dialogue*, contact Ian Campbell, in ATA Distribution, at ian.campbell@ata.ab.ca.

On May 23, 1996, the government of Canada declared that June 21, the first day of summer, would be henceforth National Aboriginal Day.

"Indians, Inuit, and Métis have made unparalleled contributions to the development of this country. To recognize these contributions, the Canadian government has designated June 21st as National Aboriginal Day so that all Canadians may share and experience the cultures of Indians, Inuit, and Métis in Canada. The designation of National Aboriginal Day also supports global initiatives to commemorate the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples."

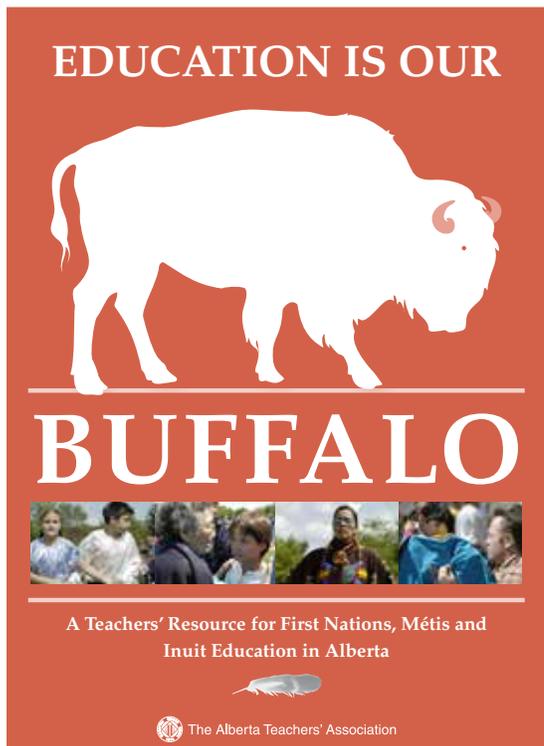
ATA Workshops—First Nations, Métis and Inuit Success Series

The ATA offers a comprehensive workshop series to provide teachers with a better understanding of First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures and world views to help ensure that Aboriginal students succeed in school and meet the prescribed learning outcomes. The series also focuses on ways to deal with prejudice and discrimination. It is strongly recommended that these workshops be taken over a period of several months to allow for the time necessary to change pedagogical practice.

Each workshop participant will receive

Education Is Our Buffalo: A Teachers' Resource for First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education in Alberta.

Written by a team of Aboriginal writers, this guide is intended to make teachers more aware of the history, culture, world views and present-day concerns of Alberta's First Nations, Métis and Inuit people.



The workshops are as follows:

[Addressing Prejudice and Discrimination Relating to First Nations, Métis and Inuit Students](#)

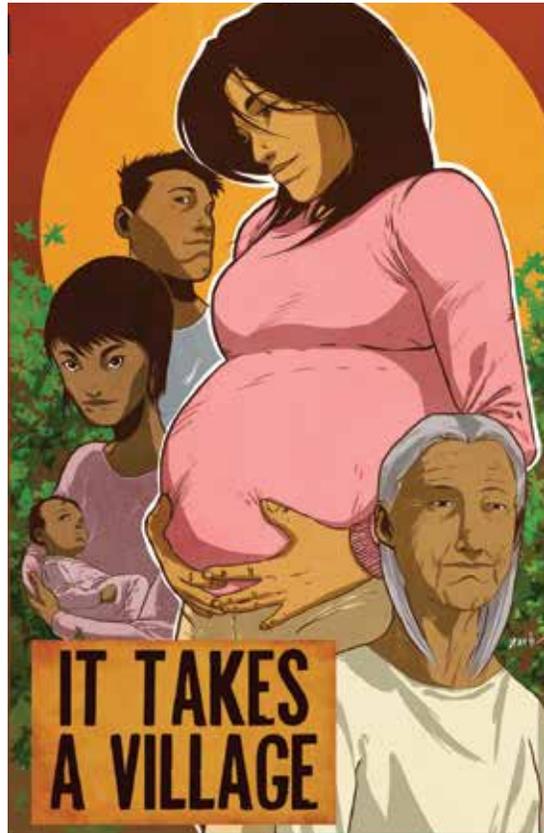
[Communicating with First Nations, Métis and Inuit Students, Parents and Caregivers](#)

[Effective Assessment Practices for First Nations, Métis and Inuit Students](#)

[Increasing Resiliency in First Nations, Métis and Inuit Students](#)

[Understanding Alberta's First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples](#)

The Healthy Aboriginal Network—Nonprofit Promotion of Health, Literacy and Wellness



The Healthy Aboriginal Network creates comic books on health and social issues for youth. Check out the free previews and pricing at www.thehealthyaboriginal.net on such topics as maternal child health, sexual health, integrating gang youth back into community, youth in care, living with FASD, smoking prevention, sports / gang awareness and mental health.

For more information, contact Sean Muir, executive director of the Healthy Aboriginal Network. Phone: 250-941-8881; e-mail: sean@thehealthyaboriginal.net

The Healthy Aboriginal Network is a BC incorporated nonprofit society.

The *Factivist*—the Newsletter of the Edmonton Social Planning Council

The most recent edition of the *Factivist* concerns a recent report by the City of Edmonton on discrimination. This edition includes articles on forms of discrimination; the history of hate groups and hate crimes in Alberta; how everyday language can prove to be hurtful to some groups; the concepts of multiculturalism and interculturalism; and the difficulties facing First Nations. This edition also highlights some of the excellent work and dialogue being conducted in Edmonton to combat racism and discrimination.

For more information on the Edmonton Social Planning Council and to download a free edition of the *Factivist*, go to

www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca/.

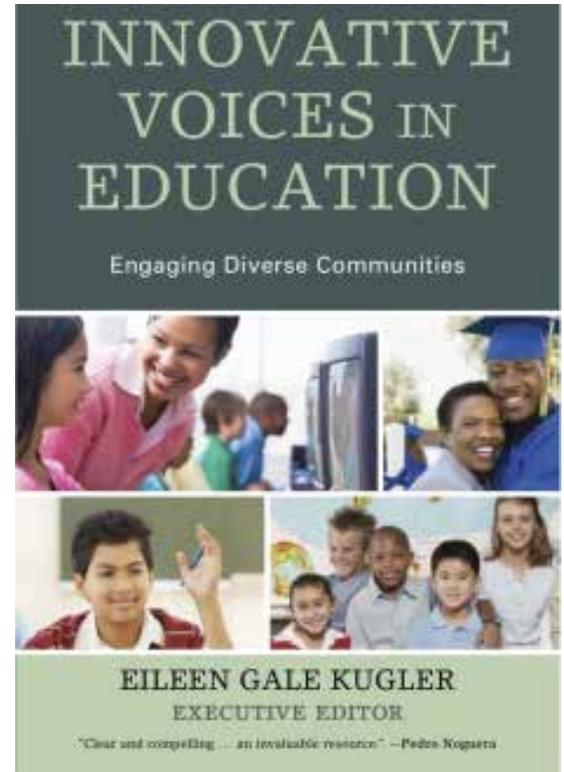


Photo by Anahi DeCanio

Innovative Voices in Education: Engaging Diverse Communities

This 2012 publication, from Rowman and Littlefield Education, offers insights, resources and strategies from teachers, educational leaders and community activists from around the world. “Whether you are seeking insights on classroom strategies, bullying prevention, parent engagement, leadership for equity, culturally responsive teaching, or just greater understanding of diversity, these words will engage you, challenge you, inform you, and most of all inspire you.”

The book’s final chapter, “Multicultural to Intercultural: Developing Interdependent Learners,” is by Sean Grainger, a teacher and administrator at Mattie McCullough Elementary School, in Red Deer, Alberta, and a former member of the ATA’s Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee.



Selected Bibliography of First Nations, Métis and Inuit Resources

The ATA library has a wealth of materials on FNMI education. Below is a selected bibliography from the collection. For more information, contact the library at library@teachers.ab.ca.

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French Language Resources

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Videos

- Club Native: How Thick Is Your Blood?* 2008. DVD. Montreal: National Film Board of Canada.
- Fill My Hollow Bones: The Voice of Youth*. 2010. DVD. Toronto: Kineticvideo.com.
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NOTICES AND EVENTS

January 24–25, 2013. Winnipeg, Manitoba: 10th Annual Aboriginal Circle of Educators Conference—“Sustaining Our Ways: Pimatisiwin—Living and Walking a Good Life.” The 10th annual ACE conference will be better than ever!

For details, visit the ACE website, www.aboriginalcircleofeducators.ca.

February 21–22, 2013. Vancouver, British Columbia: First Annual National Aboriginal Physical Activity Conference. The National Aboriginal Physical Activity Conference is an interactive experience designed for people involved in promoting physical activity. With presentations covering disease prevention, leadership, various educational “how-to” presentations, and material on prevention of various issues that affect our Aboriginal communities rural and urban, there’s sure to be something to learn. The call for papers provided the following guidelines:

- focus on original descriptive or analytic studies using quantitative or qualitative methods;
- relate to policy issues in the general field of health that affect Aboriginal populations or providers; or
- describe innovative practices, or training or teaching techniques.

For more information and to register, visit www.a-pacc.com/node/35.

March 8, 2013. Alberta Aboriginal Youth Achievement Awards (AAYAA). The AAYAA is an annual celebration of the many significant accomplishments of Métis, First Nations and Inuit youth from across Alberta. The recognition award winners receive encourages excellence and creates positive new role models for young people throughout the province. Originally developed in 2003, the annual awards gala is now directed and supported by the newly formed Rupertsland Institute, a Métis centre of excellence. Admission is free but one does need to obtain tickets. For more information, go to www.aayaa.ca/index.html.

March 19–21, 2013. Winnipeg, Manitoba: National Mental Health Conference: Challenges in the Criminal Justice System, Education System & Aboriginal Communities. This is the third national mental health disorders conference sponsored by the Mood Disorders Association of Manitoba, developed to help combat the challenges and reduce the stigma of mental health issues.

For more details, check the event website, www.2013mentalhealthconference.com.

April 18–20, 2013. Vancouver, British Columbia: First Nations Schools Association Conference and AGM. This conference will be held at the Marriott Pinnacle Downtown Hotel, 1128 West Hastings Street, Vancouver.



Check the website, www.fnsa.ca/upcoming-events/conference, for a call for workshops and exhibitor application. Online registration will open in February 2013. Check the website frequently for more information.

June 17–20, 2013. Melbourne, Australia: Broadening Restorative Perspective—An International Conference. Restorative processes are changing outcomes and experiences for people attending courts, schools and workplaces. This change process is only just beginning and this conference will bring together leaders to discuss how we can all be a part of it. This conference will appeal to people in schools, justice, family services and workplace relations.

- For those working in justice, this conference will explore restorative justice, therapeutic jurisprudence and similar philosophies that are applied in justice systems.
- For those working in schools, this conference will present and challenge best practice in engagement and the promotion of strong, healthy relationships across the school community.
- For those involved in workplace relations, this conference will be at the forefront of approaches to manage psychological risk, performance and employee relations.
- For those who provide support to families, this conference will examine practical programs to help people engage in making decisions about the key issues affecting their lives.

More information is available at <http://wired.ivvy.com/event/RJcon>.

June 26–28, 2013. Darwin, Australia: Thirteenth International Conference on Diversity in Organizations, Communities, and Nations. The topics of this conference, organized by Common Ground Publishing, range across all

the dimensions of diversity, including ethnicity, race, aboriginality, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic position, age and disability. The deadline for abstracts and proposals is April 19, 2013.

For more details, visit <http://ondiversity.com/the-conference>.

July 4–6, 2013. Scarborough, Yorkshire, UK: The Transformative Power of Cooperation in Education. Conference goals include deepening (a) the use of cooperative learning and (b) innovation and transformation based on cooperative values. This is an opportunity for teachers, academics and community organizers to engage in dialogue, reflection and intentional interaction. The conference is organized by the International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education. Strand 4 in the conference program, “Cooperative Dispositions: Transformative Solutions for Diversity and Inclusion (with IAIE),” is of particular interest. This strand, organized in conjunction with the International Association for Intercultural Education (IAIE), focuses on ways that cooperative learning supports and facilitates teaching and learning for diversity and inclusion at all levels of education. Proposals might address issues such as

- inter- and multicultural education (eg, curricula, language learning, identity development, school adjustment);
- populations that have historically been disenfranchised or challenged in mainstream education (eg, Indigenous, immigrant, socio-culturally different populations); and
- students with learning and behavioural differences and challenges.

For more information, consult the conference website, www.iasce.net/home/events/iasce-2013-conference.

The burden of this [residential school] experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The burden is properly ours as a Government, and as a country. There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian Residential Schools system to ever prevail again. You have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time and in a very real sense, we are now joining you on this journey. The Government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly.

Nous le regrettons
We are sorry
Nimitataynan
Niminchinowesamin
Mamiattugut

—Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Statement of Apology, June 11, 2008

Join the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Council <http://fnmiec.teachers.ab.ca/Pages/Home.aspx>

The primary purpose of the FNMI specialist council, open to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers alike, is to facilitate professional development related to First Nations, Métis and Inuit education. As well, the specialist council could advocate for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and their issues; add capacity to the Alberta Teachers' Association by providing Indigenous ways of knowing; and develop/connect teachers/educators to Aboriginal resources for teachers across Alberta to use in their classrooms. It is hoped that the FNMI council will also foster relationships with elders and spiritual advisors in each community to bridge the gap between the community and local schools.

Soaring with Knowledge—Conference 2013

March 14–16, 2013

For information about proposing a session or attending the Soaring with Knowledge conference, go to <http://fnmiec.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/call%20for%20proposal%202013.pdf>.



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