

# ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE



Prepared for the Calgary Regional Consortium

by

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## ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Introduction

*We are still not having [Aboriginal] people succeed in the mainstream education system; that's still not happening, the numbers have not changed, so something is not right (Participant, Antone & Cordoba, 2005, p. 5).*

Aboriginal peoples are an important part of the historical and social fabric of Canada. Canada would not be what it is today without the contributions and support of Canada's First Peoples. With the diversity of approximately 72 languages and 614 First Nations reserve communities, there is a richness of knowledge, tradition and customs, and depth in epistemological and ontological understanding that can add to the overall wealth of this country. However, with so much potential for reciprocal learning, why is "something not right" in education for so many Aboriginal students? This literature review will explore this question in relation to Aboriginal perspectives; more specifically, it will address the question: "To what extent do teacher attitudes, norms, values, basic assumptions and behaviour influence authentic inclusion, infusion and embedding of Aboriginal perspectives in the Social Studies program?" The knowledge and skills preparation of a teacher directly influences the quality of teaching and impacts student learning, but how do teacher attitudes influence learning?

### **Perspectives and Alberta Education: The Social Studies Curriculum**

The purpose of conducting this particular literature review addresses the new, Alberta Social Studies curriculum: one that recognizes Indigenous people and embeds Aboriginal perspectives into the heart of the new program. In addition to incorporating concepts of globalism, the new curriculum emphasizes the understanding of 'multiple perspectives', which includes the learning of Aboriginal perspectives, and highlights three main elements: knowledge and understanding, values and attitudes, and skills and processes (i.e. inquiry-based learning, historical thinking skills, critical thinking skills, etc.). The new Social Studies K-12 Program of Studies is designed to help students develop knowledge and attitudinal understanding of multiple perspectives. More specifically, the students will:

- recognize how stories of people and events provide multiple perspectives on past and present events
- recognize the effects of Confederation on citizenship and identity from multiple perspectives
- ask, "What are the Métis, First Nations, French and British perspectives on the events that led to the establishment of Manitoba?" and "to what extent do perspectives regarding consumerism, economic growth and quality of life differ regionally in North America?"
- "acknowledge and appreciate the existence of multiple perspectives in a globalizing world (10-2)
- recognize and appreciate various perspectives regarding the prevalence and impacts of "Eurocentrism"
- examine multiple perspectives on the political, economic and social impacts of historical globalization and imperialism

- recognize and appreciate multiple perspectives that exist with respect to the relationships among politics, economics, the environment and globalization
- explore multiple perspectives regarding the relationship among people, the land and globalization (spirituality, stewardship, sustainability, resource development)
- analyze multiple perspectives on sustainability and prosperity in a globalizing world
- explore multiple perspectives regarding the civic responsibilities that individuals, governments, organizations and businesses in Canada may have in addressing opportunities and challenges presented by globalization
- recognize and appreciate multiple perspectives that exist with respect to the relationships among economics, politics, the environment and globalization
- explore multiple perspectives on relationships among people, the land and globalization (spirituality, stewardship, sustainability, resource development)
- examine multiple perspectives on sustainability and prosperity in a globalizing world
- analyze nationalism as an identity, internalized feeling and/or collective consciousness shared by a people (French Revolution and Napoleonic era, Canadian nationalism, Québécois nationalism, American nationalism, First Nations and Métis nationalism, Inuit perspectives)
- evaluate the importance of reconciling contending nationalist loyalties (Canadian nationalism, First Nations and Métis nationalism, ethnic nationalism in Canada, civic nationalism in Canada, Québécois nationalism, Inuit perspectives on nationalism)
- evaluate the importance of reconciling nationalism with contending non-nationalist loyalties (religion, region, culture, race, ideology, class, other contending loyalties)
- examine nationalism as an identity, internalized feeling and/or collective consciousness shared by a people (French Revolution, Canadian nationalism, Québécois nationalism, First Nations and Métis nationalism, Inuit perspectives)
- explore the origins and complexities of ideologies and examine multiple perspectives regarding the principles of classical and modern liberalism.
- appreciate various perspectives regarding identity and ideology
- appreciate various perspectives regarding the relationship between individualism and common good
- analyze perspectives on the imposition of the principles of liberalism (Aboriginal experiences, contemporary events). (Alberta Education, Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2005-2007)

There are numerous references to ‘perspective’ in the new Alberta Social Studies curriculum, and the goal is for students to develop an understanding, at a deeper level, the influence that individual and collective perspective has on micro and macro landscapes, including the quality of relationships, the environment, the economy, all in the historical and current national, global ideological context(s). The new program has a strong focus on “multiple” perspectives; and, it is important to note that this is the first time that this concept has been embedded in an Alberta Program of Studies. But, what is/are perspective(s) and how can educators teach perspectives, perspectives they do not deeply understand?

The Social Studies Program Vision provides some insight into concept of perspective. It states:  
 The Alberta Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12 Program of Studies meets the needs and reflects the nature of 21st century learners. It has, at its heart, the concepts of citizenship and identity in the Canadian context. The program reflects multiple perspectives, including Aboriginal and Francophone that contribute to Canada’s evolving realities. It fosters the building of a society that is pluralistic, bilingual, multicultural,

inclusive and democratic. The program emphasizes the importance of diversity and respect for differences as well as the need for social cohesion and the effective functioning of society. It promotes a sense of belonging and acceptance in students as they engage in active and responsible citizenship at the local, community, provincial, national and global level.

Central to the vision of the Alberta Social Studies Program is the recognition of the diversity of experiences and perspectives and the pluralistic nature of Canadian society. **Pluralism** builds upon Canada's historical and constitutional foundations, which reflect the country's Aboriginal heritage, bilingual nature and multicultural realities. A **pluralistic** view recognizes that citizenship and identity are shaped by multiple factors such as culture, language, environment, gender, ideology, religion, spirituality and philosophy. (Alberta Education, Alberta Authorized Resource List and Annotated Bibliography, 2007, p. 8)

As indicated, pluralism, unlike perspective, is clearly defined in the Program of Studies vision statement.

Additional local resources that refer to perspectives include, but are not limited to Alberta Education's *Our Words, Our Ways* and the Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education, *The Common Curriculum Framework for Social Studies Grades K to 9*. Alberta Education encourages teachers to be engaged in internal and external exploration. It states:

An effective way of learning about students' Aboriginal cultures is for teachers to become aware of their own perspectives, for example, to reflect on what they know about Aboriginal cultures and how they have learned what they know. (Alberta Education, *Our Words, Our Ways*, 2005, p. 33)

The Western Canadian Protocol encourages a similar discovery process:

Positive values and attitudes with respect to others are grounded in respect for the value and dignity of all human beings. This is reflected in a concern for quality of life and a willingness to understand and respect diversity in individuals, groups, cultures, communities, and societies. Appreciating human diversity implies a critical consideration of one's own and others' perspectives. Such a consideration involves acknowledging the limitations of personal perspectives in understanding the world, and enables students to identify and speak out against intolerance, prejudice, racism, and other forms of discrimination. (Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education, *The Common Curriculum Framework for Social Studies Grades K to 9*, 2002, p. 11)

In the glossary of the Western Canadian Protocol, 'perspectives' is directly linked to the concept of worldview:

**worldview:** the overall perspective from which one sees, interprets, and makes sense of the world; a comprehensive collection of beliefs and values about life and the universe held by an individual or group. (Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education, *The Common Curriculum Framework for Social Studies Grades K to 9*, 2002, p. 106)

From this definition, 'perspectives' is a progressive and perpetual process of interpretation and sense-making of one's immediate and distant surroundings in relation to individual and collective, but not limited to, metaphysical beliefs and values.

Since the teaching of perspectives is a significant and important part of the Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies, it is important to have a sound understanding of what ‘perspectives’ is in order to effectively teach it to students.

### ***Perspectives and Literature***

The Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary (2009) defines ‘perspective’ as:

*1 a: the technique or process of representing on a plane or curved surface the spatial relation of objects as they might appear to the eye ; specifically : representation in a drawing or painting of parallel lines as converging in order to give the illusion of depth and distance b: a picture in perspective 2 a: the interrelation in which a subject or its parts are mentally viewed <places the issues in proper perspective> ; also : POINT OF VIEW b: the capacity to view things in their true relations or relative importance <urge you to maintain your perspective and to view your own task in a larger framework — W. J. Cohen>3 a: a visible scene ; especially : one giving a distinctive impression of distance : VISTA b: a mental view or prospect <gain a broader perspective on the situation>4: the appearance to the eye of objects in respect to their relative distance and positions*

‘Point of view’ is defined as,

*a position or perspective from which something is considered or evaluated : STANDPOINT*

Then, ‘standpoint’ as,

*a position from which objects or principles are viewed and according to which they are compared and judged*

From these definitions, perspective incorporates a broader and collective process of investigation than point of view or standpoint. Although it is difficult to separate perspective from point of view and/or standpoint, the point of view and standpoint position of investigation is a more personal and individual process.

Achieving “perspective” is a deliberate and intentional act where one seeks to understand the environment in relation to oneself; it is a search for truth and the search for the point of freedom (Cajete, 2000), it involves, as Donald Schön describes, deep reflection, reflection-on-action alongside reflection-in-action (Infed, 2009). Perspective is learning and being keenly aware of what one sees, what is right in front of them from a broad, general stance. Gaining perspective requires an unveiling of obstructions (e.g. misconceptions, stereotypes etc.) to gain a clear view of the landscape. Ultimately, perspective is influenced by the values, beliefs, and experience that also determine worldview and culture.

### **The Context: The Aboriginal Experience**

*Canada’s demographic continues to dramatically change as a result of, among other things, globalization, technology, and decreasing mortality rates. In January, 2008 Statistics Canada released a report that announced that Aboriginal people in Canada (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) had surpassed the one-million mark, reaching 1,172,790. The report indicated that “between 1996 and 2006, the Aboriginal population grew by 45%, compared with 8% for the non-Aboriginal population”. Overall, Canada’s First Nation population is continuing to grow at an annual rate of approximately 4%, whereas the national birth rate is 3% (Statistics Canada, 2005). With the substantial change in*

*demographics, comes the inevitable need for change on many levels, this including cultural change at individual, organizational, and societal levels.*

*An examination of Indian and Northern Affairs (INAC, 2003, 2004) and Statistics Canada Census (2001 and 2006) census data indicate that school experiences for Aboriginal students vary in relation to the general population. According to both statistical sources, on and off reserve Aboriginal population is increasing, subsequently, enrolment of Aboriginal students in First Nations and Provincial schools are steadily increasing. INAC (2003, 2004) recorded a decrease in both First Nations and Provincial school enrolment of First Nations students from kindergarten to grade 12 (Basic Departmental Data, 2003). This decrease of enrolment has resulted in a 29.6 % high school graduation rate among First Nations students for the 2001-2002 school year (INAC, 2003, p. 40). In the 1995-1996 school year, 33.9 % of enrolled First Nations students graduated. (Ottmann, 2009)*

There continues to be slight fluctuations, rather than dramatic increases, in the graduation rates of Aboriginal students. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (2006) reported that between 1996 and 2001, the high school completion rate for students 15 years and older rose by:

- 4.8 per cent for First Nations on reserve (from 36.6 per cent to 41.4 per cent)
- 6 per cent for Métis (from 52 per cent to 58 per cent)
- 5 per cent for Inuit (from 37 per cent to 42 per cent),

compared to 3.5 per cent for the general Canadian population (from 65.2 per cent to 68.7 per cent). Despite the improvements, there remains a 10% gap in educational attainment between Aboriginal and other Canadian youth (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2006). In 2001, 42% of the Aboriginal population 15 years of age and over was without a high school diploma; whereas 31% of the non-Aboriginal population within the same age range did not have a high school diploma (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2009). These statistics signify a need to examine and change schooling, teaching and learning practices for Aboriginal students.

*In 2004-2005 there were 9,046 Aboriginal children and youth attending schools in Grades 1 to 12 in Alberta. This was 1.5 % of the total number of students in Alberta (Statistics Canada, 2006). The number of Aboriginal students, who graduated from high school, however was disproportional when compared to the number of non-Aboriginal students graduating. The number of students who are identified as requiring special education programs and services is also disproportionate in that Aboriginal students are significantly overrepresented (Jeary & Ottmann, 2007). Further, Aboriginal students are underrepresented as identified Gifted and Talented (Ottmann & Jeary, 2007). The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) Final Report (1996) in Gathering Strength (Volume 3) documented Aboriginal students' feelings related to schooling. The report summarized:*

*Aboriginal adolescents straddle two worlds - one where Aboriginal values and beliefs prevail, and another where television, popular culture and peer pressure offer competing values and priorities.*

*Aboriginal teenagers need a secure sense of self-worth to keep their balance in the storm of conflicting messages and demands. Many have not found that balance.*



*Their confusion and distress are evident in high drop-out rates, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, defiance of the law and suicidal behaviour.*

*Aboriginal youth who spoke to the Commission said that they felt marginalized - unable to make their voices heard at school or in their home communities.*

*With the need to affect change for Aboriginal students, the RCAP Commissioners recommended that all Aboriginal children, regardless of status or location, have access to dynamic, culture-based early childhood education”, and for elementary education they proposed following:*

- *all schools, whether or not they serve mainly Aboriginal students, adopt curriculums that reflect Aboriginal cultures and realities*
- *governments allocate resources such that Aboriginal language instruction can be given high priority, where numbers warrant*
- *provincial and territorial schools make greater efforts to involve Aboriginal parents in decision making.*

*The issue of Aboriginal student achievement is multidimensional and complex and the context needs to be understood by program directors, policy makers, school administration, and teachers if they are to make systemic, sustained difference for Aboriginal students in terms of educational and holistic well being. (Ottmann, 2009)*

### **Aboriginal Perspectives**

‘Aboriginal perspectives’ is not easily defined because it cannot be fragmented from culture, language, and philosophy that are influenced by ancient epistemology and ontology. Furthermore, in teaching Aboriginal perspectives, Butler (2000) contends that “the diversity of Aboriginal experience provides an ideological minefield for many teaching professionals” (p. 97). She also contends that “the recognition of Aboriginal diversity must be a fundamental aspect of Aboriginal perspectives” (p. 99). Although Aboriginal perspectives are multi-layered and diverse, there are some common threads in Aboriginal philosophy (this including spirituality) and practice that contribute to a broad definition of Aboriginal perspectives. In this section, the concept and practice of ‘Aboriginal perspectives’ will be explored from the point-of-view of culture, language and storytelling, spirituality, and foundational practices as presented by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal authors. The intent will be to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of educators.

#### ***Jagged Worldviews Colliding: Making Essential Connections***

*When we don't know each other's stories, we substitute our own myth about who that person is. When we are operating with only a myth, none of that person's truth will ever be known to us, and we will injure them – mostly without ever meaning to (Wherner & Smith, 1992, p. 380).*

Ermine (1995) describes the initial meeting of two worlds, two peoples, two cultures, two very different ways of knowing and ways of being:

The year 1492 marked the first meeting of two disparate world-views, each on its own uncharted course of exploration and discovery for purposeful knowledge. The encounter featured two diametric trajectories into the realm of knowledge. One was bound for an

uncharted destination in outer space, the physical, and the other was on a delicate path into inner space, the metaphysical. (p. 101)

It appears that since 1492, the year Christopher Columbus landed on this continent, “the new world”, the First Peoples of this land and the ‘newcomers’ (Miller, 2000) have been on “two diametric trajectories”. Consequently, there have been misinterpretations of words and actions, misconceptions and, sadly, stereotypes that have led to acts of discrimination and racism in every realm of association, including in the field of education. Stiffarm (1998) explains, “For many years, Aboriginal knowledge was invalidated by Western ways of knowing, this unconscious, subconscious, and conscious means of invalidating Aboriginal knowledge served to perpetuate a superior/inferior relationship around knowledge and how this knowledge is passed on” (p. xi). Nguyen et al. (2006) further explains that a “complex web of cultural conflicts and mismatches that are likely to happen when a Western educational methodology is applied in another context without rigorous adaptation to improve compatibility with the host culture” (p. 1). The complexity in disparity arises when people are marginalized and when they are taken out of decision-making processes that affect and determine their destiny.

Over the years, Aboriginal peoples have consistently asked and demanded to be a part of policy and decision-making deliberations, and more and more, they are stepping into those circles. The inclusion of Aboriginal people in these discussions is critical because Aboriginal perspectives “can only be fully learned or understood by means of the pedagogy traditionally employed by the peoples themselves” (Daes, 1994, as cited in Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p.41). Battiste and Henderson (2000) explain that there are three significant problems in interpreting the Indigenous knowledge perspective from a Eurocentric point-of-view. Firstly, Indigenous knowledge does not fit the cultural constructs of the Eurocentric perspective. Next, “Indigenous knowledge is not a uniform concept across all Indigenous peoples; it is a diverse knowledge that is spread throughout different peoples in many layers” (p. 35). Finally, individual, clan, and community significance permeates Indigenous knowledge; therefore, in-depth understanding of Aboriginal perspectives is achieved within the context, making it difficult to categorize and transfer generalizations to different Aboriginal cultures and peoples. With this in mind, for educational policy and curriculum to be sustainable and meaningful, Aboriginal peoples have to be involved in the decision-making process from the very beginning; otherwise, programs and incentives will continue to fail and the clash of “jagged worldviews colliding” will continue.

### ***Indigenous Epistemology and Ontology***

Indigenous ways of knowing (epistemology) and ways of being (ontology) differ in many ways with Western ways of knowing and being. Hernandez and Thorton (1998) explain the importance of understanding the foundational distinctions in orientation and perspective:

Indigenous constructions of reality and their accompanying epistemologies contrast dramatically with those of western cultures. Improved understanding of epistemologies is important since the conflicting underlying philosophies that exist in every subject area at every level of native people’s schooling experiences become obvious. Traditional indigenous beliefs, values, pedagogies, methodologies, and epistemologies form perspectives about schooling that exemplify native people’s alternatives to western religion, economic and political beliefs, and cultural values. (p. 23)

Epistemological and ontological understandings are increasingly being expressed and described outside the oral traditions of teaching to written forms of communication by Indigenous peoples. Synott (1996) described Australian *Tjukurrpa* Aboriginal ontology as being informed by relatedness, holistic paradigm, interdependence, and process. Synott explains:

The Aboriginal world is a systematic one, where the central notes of the physical, human and sacred worlds are mutually connected and sustained. Even these categories are heuristic rather than actual for ... there are very flexible boundaries between the physical, human, and sacred worlds. They interpenetrate and identify with each other. The features of nature, such as landscape, do not represent but are spiritual phenomena, just as the people's sense of self is formed by the forces nature and the spiritual realm. In the Aboriginal worldview, for instance, the land can be literally addressed as "mother" – from whom the people come and by whom their lives are sustained. This is not just an ecological recognition of the "mother earth" variety, but goes beyond that, to a profound understanding of the sacred character of the land and one's kinship with it, entailing both rights and responsibilities. (p. 88)

In relation to people, Synott writes:

In turning to the human world, we need, again, to suspend our learned notions of what a person is, and of how individual and group identity are formed and expressed. In the *Tjukurrpa*, each person is established in an identity that centrally locates them within the system of reality. Alienation is impossible except through ritual exile ... (p. 90)

Although this is an Australian Aboriginal interpretation of worldview, it is synonymous with North American perspective. This ontological perspective translates to deep respect for all of creation, an understanding of the mutual relationship in all things and the important responsibility that humanity has to sustaining the well-being everything in the world; maintenance and sustainability "is a dynamic process of response and creativity, conducted by all forms of life from each generation to the next" (Synott, pp. 89-90).

Leroy Little Bear offers an insightful point-of-view on Aboriginal, specifically Blackfoot, ontology and epistemology that emphasizes balance, renewal and sustainability of life in the midst of the constant motion and 'flux' that perpetuates in creation and in the cosmos. He states:

Aboriginal philosophy incorporates the idea renewal. There is a tacit assumption that in the cosmic flux, there exists a particular combination of energy waves that allow for our continuing existence. If those particular combinations of energy waves dissolve, this particular reality we are in will disappear in the flux. Consequently, Aboriginal people have a large number of ceremonies revolving around renewal. Renewal ceremonies, songs, and stories are human's part in the maintenance and renewal of creation. (2008, University of Calgary, Faculty of Education, Aboriginal Perspectives Summer Institute Keynote Presentation Notes)

Leroy Little Bear also summarized Indigenous thought or Native American paradigm in six points:

1. Change: In the Native view, everything is in constant flux, impermanent, always moving. Everything changes, breaks down, transforms and comes back in a different shape.
2. Spirituality: Everything is about energy and waves. In contrast with Western science, which is focused more on matter, the spirituality suggested by an energy view is closely associated with Native Americans.
3. Everything is alive: In the indigenous view, everything is animate. There is no such thing as inanimate. That's why the earth must be treated as a living mother.

4. Everything is interrelated: There is no such thing as something happening in isolation. It's not accurate to look at just one thing in a vacuum.
5. Renewal and Repetition: Things take place in an endless repetition that is most accurately described by cycles and seasons, rather than by a straight line.
6. Holistic thought: Western thought is often polarized thinking. It's either-or so much of the time. But, the Native thought process is holistic, inclusive, embracing, relational. (2008, University of Calgary, Faculty of Education, Aboriginal Perspectives Summer Institute Keynote Presentation Notes)

Innes (1999) and Auger (1998) echo Synott and Little Bear's message that the land, stories, Elders, and spirit are essential elements that integrate holistically to form Indigenous epistemology, ontology and perspective. Beynon (2008) states, "The importance of language, narratives, and the Elders in Indigenous pedagogy accounts, in large part, for the personal, oral, and experiential dimensions of Canadian Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning" (p.46). From this perspective, knowledge is contextual, experiential, holistic and personal in nature. Along with developing an intimate understanding of, and perhaps relationship with, creation and the cosmos, Indigenous peoples are encouraged to seek inward for knowledge. Ermine (1995) elaborates:

Those people who seek knowledge on the physical plane objectively find their answers through exploration of the outer space, solely on the corporeal level. Those who seek to understand the reality of existence and harmony with the environment by turning inward have a different, incorporeal knowledge paradigm that might be termed Aboriginal epistemology. (p. 103)

Indigenous epistemology, ontology, and perspective can only be learned from an Indigenous person, and learning of this depth and realm takes a lot of time and patience.

### ***Education and Schooling: The Perceptions***

Since schooling was a formal, structured experience that came after European contact for First Nations and Inuit people, it is important to understand how Aboriginal people perceive and define education and learning so meaningful classroom applications can be made and so practice can be made even more effective.

Gregory Cajete, a Pueblo scholar, eloquently differentiates education and learning: "Education is an art of process, participation, and making connections. Learning is growth and life process; and Life and Nature are always relationships in process ... Learning is always a creative act" (1994, pp. 24-25). He further elaborates:

Education historically occurred in a holistic social context that developed the importance of each individual as a contributing member of the social group ... It was an educational process that unfolded mutual, reciprocal relationships between one's social group and the natural world ... It was essentially a communally integrated expression of environmental education. (1994, p. 26)

The expectation and the responsibility for an individual and for the community to take an active and engaging role in life and with nature on varying levels is captured in Cajete's description of the education and learning process. The idea that "learning is always a creative act" translates to involvement and thinking that is at a higher level.

Historian, J. R. Miller, describes the traditional approach to instruction in a generalized sense: "Instruction was suffused with their deeply ingrained spirituality, an invariable tendency to relate the material and personal in their lives to the spirits and the unseen. Moreover, they all emphasized an approach to instruction that relied on looking, listening, and learning – 'the three Ls.'" (2000, p. 16). Learning was a process that was achieved from active, attuned, and intentional observation and listening of the visible environment and of the spiritual dimension. In this perspective, learning is a multidimensional process and it required knowing the visible (physical) and invisible (spiritual) aspects of oneself and of creation.

*"Mitakye Oyasin, we are all related, we are all Of Community. In engendering an understanding of this fact in the educational structures and processes that we create, we honor what is truly human in each of us"* (Cajete, 1994, p. 165). Cajete's quote epitomizes the purpose of learning about oneself and one's environment – we are all related, we are all connected, we are bound by our existence and by our world.

### ***Spirituality and Education: First Nations and Western Perspectives***

*To achieve an understanding of the importance of spirituality one has to examine the common values that First Nations peoples share and how these differ from Western culture. Hanohano (1999) believes that studies examining Western education and culture are not meant to "denigrate" or pass "judgment", but to "point out that even its ardent supporters denote a crisis" (p. 206). Purel (as cited in Hanohano, 1999) "describes the crisis in education as a moral and spiritual crisis, preferring the word crisis to problem or issue or concern" (p. 206). The process of examining and contrasting First Nations and Western views on leadership may seem critical, but inspection and analysis of the two perspectives can provide insight that can then lead to first-order changes that are healthy, positive, and lasting. It is, after all, important to confront problems head on, rather than avoid or mask them.*

*When contemplating Native spirituality one has to view all aspects of Native life because they are interconnected. Examining the epistemology of Western and Aboriginal cultures may provide insight into the elements of First Nations spirituality. Hanohano (1999) describes the epistemology as the "branch of philosophy that deals with the nature and attainment of knowledge" (p. 6). Education is central to epistemology because it involves the transmission of knowledge. Hernandez (1999) states that "knowledge of Native epistemologies would allow educators to move beyond the "what" to the "why" Native students leave school. Increased knowledge of the philosophies that underpin Native students' perceptions and actions in school is necessary if research is to move beyond the level of description and ascription to a more accurate representation of Indigenous students and the role culture plays in their schooling experiences" (p. 3).*

*It is becoming more apparent that Western and First Nations attainment of knowledge differ greatly. Ermine (as cited in Hanohano, 1999) believes that the prime difference lies in First Nations and Western views of the universe. Western science perceives the universe through "atomism" - viewing and measuring the universe objectively and fragmentally (Cajete, 1999). Fragmentation leads to appearances and feelings of isolation, and the belief that the universe is separate and disconnected from humanity. It is not surprising that this view of the universe invades other aspects of Western culture.*

*Relationships are disconnected and self-centred as people entertain the thoughts of “what’s best for me?” rather than “what is best for us all?” Consequently, there is also a desire to own and accumulate as many fragmented pieces of the universe as possible, and like the universe this outward quest is infinite and unquenchable.*

*First Nations people view the universe ... from a global perspective. Generally, they sought their purpose in relation to the whole of existence. Hence, their sense of place and power is derived from the total environment. Nature and the universe are connected and giving entities, so man should be. Therefore, there is no desire to accumulate material riches, but to share and give. Malloch (as cited in Irwin, 1992) explains:*

*In the traditional way of life, people governed themselves largely in accordance with the laws of nature, which had been made known to them as a result of living on the land for generations. At the same time, social order and the survival of the people were ensured through harmony and order not only in the relationships amongst [themselves] but also in relationships between the [people] but also in relationships between the [people] and the land and the spiritual world. (p. 9)*

*The view of interconnectedness and harmony lends itself to valuing community. Jules (1999) lists values significant to First Nations communities as “cooperative behaviour and the greater good of the tribe over individual wants” (p.7). (Ottmann, 2002, pp. 26-28)*

## **The Spirit**

It can be said that, collectively, Aboriginal people have a strong spiritual orientation.

*Most First Nations children were taught to be keenly aware of their surroundings (seen and unseen), to be grateful for all life, and to rely on the Creator. Garrett (1996) notes that “Native American children develop a heightened level of sensitivity for all the relationships of which they are a part and which are a part of them, for the circular (cyclical) motion of life, and for the customs and traditions of their people” (as cited in Hanohano, 1999, p. 216). For First Nations parents, grandparents, and ancestors spirituality was, and is, a way of life. Hanohano remarks, “The spiritual permeates all aspects of Native life” (p. 210), and that “the most distinguishing feature of Native culture and language is its spirituality” (p. 211). Garrett (1996) comments, “for many Native American people, spirituality is not a part of life, it is life” (p. 29). Begay (1997) explains that spirituality involves work, vision, and commitment if “Indian philosophy and traditional way” (p. 137) are to be maintained.*

*First Nations people viewed spirituality as the essence of living and of life. Spiritual living promotes balance and harmony. Saulis (as cited in Hernandez, 1999), a Mali sleet educator, explains:*

*A universal sense among native people exists in regard to spirituality and that it coexists in all aspects of life. It is not separate but integral, it is not immutable, it is not replaceable, it resides in the essence of a person, and it is not always definable. It is in the community and among the people; it needs to be expressed among the people. (p. 40)*

*Whitt (1995) shares a similar view with Saulis. She states that “since the human, natural, and spiritual worlds are tightly interwoven within indigenous cultures, spirituality is a pervasive dimension of natural existence” (p. 241). Whitt then elaborates with a quote from Andrew Grey:*

*[For indigenous peoples] knowledge of the environment depends on contacts with the invisible spirit world which plays its own crucial part in ensuring the reproduction of society, culture, and the environment ... Among many indigenous people, particularly of the rain forest, specialists establish a technical prowess in production activities and curing illness from their relationship with the spirit worlds. (p. 241)*

*Traditionally, First Nations people viewed the natural and spirit world as one. They sought knowledge from both dimensions.*

*Hanohano (1999) feels that “spirituality is the fundamental principle that Natives have been searching for in their university [and schooling] experience. It is a search from within that will give Aboriginal and other students the harmony and balance that is needed to meet the demands and rigors of [life] and lead them to discover their true selves. And it is this search for truth that leads us to consider Native education” (p. 211). Hanohano believes that restoring essential spiritual knowledge into First Nations education will bring “harmony and balance back into Native people – thus education for meaning” (p. 211). Jules (1999) believes that the growth of First Nations education is “accompanied by the surge to maintain our Native Indian identity and spirituality” (p. 6). Jules (1999) believes that First Nations peoples have fought to maintain both identity and spirituality despite efforts of assimilation (p. 6). Spirituality for First Nations people would be, as Battiste (1999) would phrase it, an “autumn seed” that longs for re-birth, for revitalization.*

*The Assembly of First Nations 1988 Report on Education states the importance of the “well-being” of students, and their desire for a “holistic” style of education that would prepare them for “total living.” The question now is, “how are educators going to achieve holistic education?” Hanohano (1999) believes that this could be achieved by integrating spirituality, culture and education (p. 207). Hanohano emphasizes that “the spiritual is prevalent in Native cultures” (p. 207). He stresses that “the quest now becomes one of finding how faculties and institutions can incorporate the wisdom and spirituality of our communities and Elders to increase and enhance the harmony and balance that is so essential to fulfillment on their educational missions” (p. 218). (Ottmann, 2002, pp. 31-36)*

Is there a relationship, a bridge that educators can build to incorporate the spiritual dimension? Doige (2003) posits that “[f]ocus on the students’ spirituality as the missing ingredient that makes traditional Aboriginal education and the Western system of education compatible. 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). Humanity has a longing to develop spiritually.

## ***Elders: Teaching and Language***

Elders continue to be a positive force in Aboriginal communities. A sense of urgency is being experienced by many Aboriginal peoples because each time an Elder leaves this world, invaluable knowledge goes with them.

*Elders were a valuable, essential, and integral part of the community. They were viewed as the “keepers of the world for the unborn” (Jules, 1999, p. 11). In Native communities, elders were valued because of their wisdom and perceived closeness to the Creator. Archibald (as cited in Irwin, 1992) reports:*

*The elders were the most respected teachers; important things such as values and higher levels of knowledge about history and environment were told through their stories and private conversations with children. The elders also undertook a major responsibility in preparing the younger generation for specialized roles. (p. 9)*

*Berger (as cited in Jules, 1999) notes that young leaders today still seek guidance and knowledge from their elders in their “contemporary struggle for survival” (p. 11). Jules comments, “Elders traditionally were the teachers in our communities (1999, p. 11). Elders kept certain values alive through stories and by ensuring that certain ceremonies were kept alive (Hanohano, 1999; Garrett, 1996).*

*Today, elders from T’suu T’ina First Nation urge young people to utilize their intelligence, gifts, and talents by “staying in school” (Elofson & Feldberg, 1990) and keeping healthy in mind, body, and soul. They scold the young for their lack of ambition and for succumbing to abuses, and they are concerned for their future and health. The elders interviewed from T’suu T’ina believe that education is one step in improving conditions and regaining the hope of a people. Jules suggests that First Nations communities resist the temptation to isolate elders in institutions, but to bring them to the forefront of community building and decision-making. (Ottmann, 2002, pp. 28-29)*

The Elders in Aboriginal communities are a source of knowledge and strength for the people in their communities. Heavy Runner and Morris (1997) remind us of the timelessness in learning and of value of Elders:

*The elders teach us that our children are gifts from the Creator and it is the family, community, school, and tribe’s responsibility to nurture, protect and guide them. We have long recognized how important it is for children to have people in their lives that nurture their spirit, stand by them, encourage and support them. This traditional process is what contemporary researchers, educators and social service providers are now calling fostering resilience. This resilience is not a new concept to our people; it is a concept that has been taught for centuries. The word is new, the concept is old. (p.1)*

Knowledge does transcend culture and time; it can be a bridge that brings people from different cultures together.

There is a strong link between culture, language and identity. For this reason and because numerous words and concepts cannot be interpreted into English, many Elders have been encouraging the learning and acquisition of one’s native language, and as Battiste (2000) shares, “Elders are the critical link to Aboriginal epistemology through the Aboriginal languages. The last vestiges of Aboriginal languages exist in pockets of the Aboriginal population” (p. 201).



Elders have a vital role in communicating important messages, such as the need to revitalize language, within the Aboriginal community.

Knowledge, culture and a sense of identity resides within Indigenous languages. Battiste (2000) stresses that language “transmission is intimate and oral; it is not distant or literate. Indigenous peoples view their languages as forms of spiritual identity. In them are the lessons and knowledge that are the cognitive – spiritual power of a certain group of people in a specific place, passed on through the elders for their survival” (pp. 49-50). Fillerup contends, “Ultimately, it is through language that we not only preserve what we have but create and re-create that which is to come. And if we can ignite the fire of everyday life back into the language, we will no longer be racing against the clock, but instead trying to outrun the sun: the former quest is finite, the later eternal” (2000, p. 34).

Elders are the conduits of knowledge, of language, and of the evolving Aboriginal identity, but the intent, as Dawn Brown expresses, is to pass the message and the stories onto the children: “Success is the understanding in keeping one’s spirit alive and well. Following a path of their Dreams, for each dream that is, will be. In that if one follows the teaching of the Elders, the Circle will withstand all that crosses one’s path. Our Children are the Keepers of our stories, our Lives, and Dreams...” (Coquitlam Education Enhancement Agreement, 2007, p. 17).

### ***Storytelling***

Although it is evolving, Aboriginal people continue to have a strong oral tradition. Leroy Little Bear (2002) states that, for Aboriginal people, “Storytelling is a very important part of the educational process. It is through stories that customs and values are taught and shared” (p. 81). In their study, Antone and Cordoba interviewed Aboriginal people about their perceptions of storytelling. One participant explained:

That’s how we do the teachings through storytelling and legends, and that was our way our kids learned; that was teaching. The right way and the wrong way, you could learn through the legends for thousands of years, you didn’t have to have degrees or anything. So we learned a whole lot about life through storytelling and it’s important that we still continue that process because more so now kids are having tremendous difficulties in school. (2005, pp. 5-6)

In their stories, and in their telling of story, many Aboriginal people share common themes (e.g. creation stories) and a common character – the Trickster. Depending on the people, this character takes on various names (i.e. Coyote, Raven, Wisakedjak, Nanabozho, or Nannabush). The trickster stories teach important life lessons to children and to adults, oftentimes through humour, and they transfer ancient cultural knowledge to the audience. Ermine shares:

The old ones knew of this character who directs us around the inner space and saw in him the potential for much deeper exploration into and knowledge from the very self. ... The fact that this trickster-transformer continues to intrigue us speaks of our unfinished exploration of the inner space. (1995, p. 105)

The tricksters were also “regarded as transformers or ‘tricksters of learning’ through which children learned traditional values such as humility, honesty, courage, kindness, and respect” (Kirkness, 1998, p.10). What can the trickster add to the discussion on Aboriginal perspectives?

The learning that happens through storytelling is indirect, as the lessons and the questions that emerge from the story are left for the listener to discover. It is an approach that requires active listening, an engaged mind, and higher-order thinking skills.

### The Affective Domain

*Social studies provides opportunities for students to develop attitudes, skills and knowledge that will enable them to become engaged, active, informed and responsible citizens (Alberta Education, Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2005-2007, p. 1).*

In a survey conducted by Griffith and Nguyen (2006), a majority of pre-service teachers indicated that their aspiration to teach was strongly aligned with their “desire to positively affect children” (p. 1). In a similar study involving two teacher education methods classes, Fragnoli (2005) determined “it was evident that many students enter teaching in hopes of ‘making a difference’ and described the difference as having an ‘impact on children and/or impact on changing society’” (p. 247). This expressed desire to potentially influence the attitudes of students and our larger society, can be located within the affective domain of learning. In this section, literature on the affective domain of learning and its relevance to teaching Aboriginal perspectives will be explored.

*Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning Domains* developed by Benjamin Bloom and colleagues includes three distinct spheres of influence on educational efforts: cognitive, affective and psychomotor. These domains “have been used for decades as frameworks for instructional objectives, curriculum design, and assessments of achievement” (Dettmer, 2006, p. 70), and account for the “attitudes, skills and knowledge” found at the core of the Alberta Education Social Studies Program. While the cognitive and psychomotor domains of learning represent the knowledge and skills taught and achieved in the classroom, the affective domain represents aspects such as feelings, attitudes, and values.

As proposed by Krathwohl (1964, as cited in McNabb & Mills, 1995, p. 589), affective behaviours can be classified,

along a continuum of internalization representing a continuous modification of behavior from an individual being aware of a phenomenon to a pervasive outlook on life that influenced all of one’s actions. Krathwohl’s taxonomy was based on a concern with the degree of internalization (i.e., degree to which an attitude, value, or interest had been incorporated into the personality).

The following is a description of Krathwohl’s affective domain classification system in order of most straightforward to most complex:

1. **Receiving** is being aware of or sensitive to the existence of certain ideas, material, or phenomena and being willing to tolerate them. Examples include: to differentiate, to accept, to listen (for), to respond to.
2. **Responding** is committed in some small measure to the ideas, materials, or phenomena involved by actively responding to them. Examples are: to comply with, to follow, to commend, to volunteer, to spend leisure time in, to acclaim.

3. **Valuing** is willing to be perceived by others as valuing certain ideas, materials, or phenomena. Examples include: to increase measured proficiency in, to relinquish, to subsidize, to support, to debate.
4. **Organization** is to relate the value to those already held and bring it into a harmonious and internally consistent philosophy. Examples are: to discuss, to theorize, to formulate, to balance, to examine.
5. **Characterization** by value or value set is to act consistently in accordance with the values he or she has internalized. Examples include: to revise, to require, to be rated high in the value, to avoid, to resist, to manage, to resolve. (Carleton College, n.d., p. 6)

With this classification system in mind, Bolin, Khramtsova and Saarnio (2005, p. 154) offer that “... affective objectives are satisfied when students obtain an appropriate level of internalization or value for the content”, which would indicate that students have reached a level of characterization.

Returning to previous discussions of Indigenous epistemology and ontology, Krathwohl’s “continuum of internalization” (as cited in McNabb & Mills, 1995, p. 589) corresponds with what Ermine (1995) refers to as “self-actualization”:

As with many other cultures around the world, the holy people and philosophers among Aboriginal people have explored and analyzed the process of self-actualization. The being in relation to the cosmos possessed intriguing and mysterious qualities that provided insights into existence. In their quest to find meaning in the outer space, Aboriginal people turned to the inner space. The inner space is that universe of being within each person that is synonymous with the soul, the spirit, the self, or the being. The priceless core within each one of us and the process of touching that essence is what Kierkegaard called “inwardness” ((1846), 1965, 24). Aboriginal people found a wholeness that permeated inwardness and that also extended to the outer space (p. 103)

Prior to the intrusive influence of European worldviews, this process of “self-actualization” required that Aboriginal peoples participated in a process of knowledge transmission, critical to understanding both their “inner and outer space”. Once a profound level of internalization has been reached (self-actualization), individuals would obtain an intimate and “pervasive outlook on life that influences all of one’s actions” (Krathwohl, 1964 as cited in McNabb & Mills, 1995, p. 589). This internalization/actualization process further describes the affective aspect of human development.

*The goal of Social Studies is to foster the development of values and attitudes that enable students to participate actively and responsibly as citizens in a changing and pluralistic society. Attitudes are an expression of values and beliefs about an issue or topic (Alberta Education, Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2005-2007, p. 8).*

The affective learning domain “describes learning objectives that emphasize a feeling tone, an emotion, or a degree of acceptance or rejection” (Krathwohl et al. as cited in Carleton College, n.d., p. 5). According to Bloom, “the taxonomy of the affective domain included objectives which described changes in interest, attitude and values, and the development of appreciation and adequate adjustments” (as cited in McNabb & Mills, 1995, p. 589).

The new Social Studies Program in Alberta expresses the importance of the affective domain through its goal of promoting “the development of values and attitudes” (Alberta Education, Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2005-2007, p. 8) and its provision of learning opportunities for all students to:

- value the diversity, respect the dignity and support the equality of all human beings
- demonstrate social compassion, fairness and justice
- appreciate and respect how multiple perspectives, including Aboriginal and Francophone, shape Canada’s political, socioeconomic, linguistic and cultural realities
- honour and value the traditions, concepts and symbols that are the expression of Canadian identity
- thrive in their evolving identity with a legitimate sense of belonging to their communities, Canada and the world
- demonstrate a global consciousness with respect to humanity and world issues
- demonstrate a consciousness for the limits of the natural environment, stewardship for the land and an understanding of the principles of sustainability
- value lifelong learning and opportunities for careers in the areas of social studies and the social sciences. (p. 2)

According to Orr (2004), Social Studies programs that are inclusive of Aboriginal perspectives provide teachers with the opportunity to “teach *for*” Aboriginal issues rather than simply “*about*” Aboriginal histories, cultures and knowledge. According to Orr, “teaching *for*” Aboriginal issues,

has as its central curricular goal that students will arrive at a deeper understanding of Aboriginal social issues. It is based on the premise that a main focus of teaching Canadian social studies is to develop students’ ability and commitment to serve as citizen advocates for greater social justice and equity for Aboriginal peoples. Teaching *about* ... [Aboriginal] peoples takes the position that as social studies teachers we teach about Aboriginal peoples, with no emphasis on social justice and equity. It assumes that in a democracy competing perspectives should and will be brought forward and it is the individual’s responsibility to sort through these competing perspectives. (pp. 165-166)

As a Social Studies educator, Orr,

subscribe[s] to the view that working for greater equity and support for diversity for Aboriginal peoples in our society should be inherent in teaching Canadian social studies. There is overwhelming evidence that we have not yet solved the problems of racism and inequity facing Canadian Aboriginal peoples. Nor have our curricula consistently represented Aboriginal knowledge with accuracy. (2004, p. 166)

To evidence this statement, Orr refers to a recent student survey conducted by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, which showed that almost 80 percent of the students surveyed “disagreed or strongly disagreed that their schooling provided them with the opportunity to learn and understand Aboriginal issues” (2004, p. 166).

While we need to remain open to ways of addressing social issues facing Aboriginal peoples, my approach to teaching social studies in relation to Aboriginal issues is focused on achieving a greater understanding of and respect for Aboriginal knowledge. I believe that the teaching of Aboriginal social studies issues can and should help students see that part of their roles as citizens is to redress social inequities. (Orr, 2004, p. 166)

'Teaching *for*' Aboriginal issues in Social Studies is likely to encourage affective learning opportunities for all students to develop the attitudes and values that will ultimately contribute to student demonstrations of 'social compassion, fairness' and social justice for Aboriginal peoples.

Farley (2001) suggests strongly that Social Studies classrooms are "particularly suited ... to focus on affective content" (p. 181) based on the "philosophical" (p. 180) relationship to the principles of humanism. According to Combs (1979), the notion of humanism is expressed "as a personal frame of reference for education made necessary" (as cited in Farley, 2001, p. 180) by the following realities:

1. *The greatest problems of humanity now and in the foreseeable future are primarily human ones.* We have conquered space, reclaimed wastelands, and cured disease, but we seem unable to effectively nurture and develop the human spirit.
2. *Behavior is only a symptom.* We seem preoccupied with the observable, the measurable, and the testable aspects of human behavior, while often ignoring the significance of feelings, aspirations, hopes, fears, beliefs, values, and perceptions.
3. *Learning, itself, is a personal human process.* Learning experiences for youth will be shallow and ineffectual unless attention is given to the importance of personal meaning in the shape and design of the curriculum. (Combs, 1979, as cited in Farley, 2001, p. 180)

As will be discussed in the approaching section on culture and cultural competency, the inclusion of humanism and "personal frames of reference" are critical in support of the cultural identities of all learners.

As a key component of the new Program of Study in Alberta, "Social Studies provides learning opportunities for students to ... appreciate and respect how multiple perspectives, including Aboriginal ... shape Canada's political, socioeconomic, linguistic and cultural realities" (Alberta Education, Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2005-2007, p. 2). As such, the Social Studies Program calls for what Farley refers to as "affectively-orientated strategies" (2001, p. 181) that can be applied through humanistic "personal frames of reference". Farley adds that:

The case for affectively-oriented strategies is not one for adding on to the existing curriculum. It is not a fad, frill, or trend. On the contrary, it lies at the very heart of what it is that the schools have always attempted to do – to allow youth the opportunity to become more human by providing an environment where they have the opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to find fulfillment in a human society. (2001, p. 181)

Ultimately, the inclusion of Aboriginal and multiple perspectives in the Social Studies Program is intent on the very same humanistic outcomes.

Farley (2001) concludes with recommending "four ways in which teachers can enrich the social studies by focusing on the affective development" (p. 181) of young people, which will facilitate their discovery of "the humanity in their own nature and to see themselves as unique, yet part of the time line in human history" (p. 181). Farley suggests the following:

**Teacher Expectation: Knowing Students**

Because of the nature of the content of social studies, a knowledge of the student's background and experience is of special significance. Such knowledge can include but need not be limited to mere statistical data – name, address,

phone number, and parents' occupations. It entails an awareness of a student's beliefs, values, perceptions, and feelings. Such information can help teachers in planning the kinds of experiences they wish students to have in interacting with each other and with the content of the course.

#### **Enhancing Student Self-Concept**

Concern with the self-concept forms the core of any attempt to enrich the social studies by focusing on the affective domain ... Combs [1978] outlines the importance of the self-concept to the teaching-learning process: "The self-concept, we now know, is the most important aspect of any human interaction, a major determiner of every behavior. It is a vital determinant of intelligence, human adjustment and success, and self-realization in any aspect of life...The self-concept is every person's most precious possession ... Self-concept is a vital part of the learning process and truly effective education must be humanistically oriented toward student self-concept or education will defeat its own purpose".

#### **Facilitating Positive Interpersonal Communications**

One of the most important skills students should acquire is the ability to communicate effectively with one another ... The quality of life is, to a large degree, dependent upon and enriched by one's ability to engage in meaningful interpersonal communications...Effective communications are more than a set of skills. They also encompass attitudes, including a willingness to share with others ... and a sensitivity to both the medium and the message of another.

#### **Humanizing Social Studies**

The important point [with regard to enriching social studies through the affective domain] is that the teacher be committed to the tenets of humanism and make a conscious effort to create a positive classroom climate. Fred T. Wilhelms commented upon the adaptability of humanistic strategies: "If we think of the side effects we want, we can choose any body of subject matter or another almost without any difference on the academic side. But what difference on the human side?" (2001, pp. 181-185)

These four recommendations, with regard to affective development and Aboriginal perspectives, are discussed in more detail at various points within this literature review.

The successful employ of Farley's "affectively-orientated strategies" (2001, p. 181) in Social Studies, relies heavily on the classroom teacher. According to Neumann and Forsyth (2008):

The affective domain of learning, which encompasses attitudes, beliefs, values, feelings, and emotions (Billings & Halstead, 2009), relies on instructor creativity to stimulate those elements because teaching learners in the affective domain is more complex than teaching in the cognitive (facts, concepts, and principles) or psychomotor (motor skills) domains. Altering feelings and values in a brief class requires higher level teaching strategies from the instructor. (p. 248)

In this realm, teachers have to be confident in their teaching and they should be aware of their own basic and tacit assumptions, values and beliefs system – and they have to be prepared for anything (i.e. the student responses that also come from different values and cultural perspectives).

### ***Teacher Attitudes and Beliefs***

*It is what teachers think, what teachers believe, and what teachers do at the level of the classroom that ultimately shapes the kind of learning that young people get (Hargreaves & Fullan as cited in Yero 2002b, p. 4).*

Teacher attitudes and beliefs as they relate to ‘affectively-orientated strategies’ can be discussed through what Leonard and Leonard refer to as dispositions:

Broadly defined, a disposition is “a prevailing tendency, mood, or inclination...to act in a certain manner under given circumstances” (Webster’s New College Dictionary, 1980, p. 327). Dispositions are affective dimensions of human personality that have a “consistency about them...are characterized, exemplified or typified in human behavior” (Mullin, 2003, p. 5) and include “attitudes, values, interests, self-concept, and motivation” (Stiggins, 2001, p. 101). (2006, p. 32)

In education, each teacher comes to the classroom with dispositions that are inclusive of a “unique mental representation of the world of education and the roles her or she plays in that world” (Yero, 2002a, p. 4). Given this reality, all individual teachers will: “define the purposes of education as he or she sees fit...modify the official curriculum according to personal preferences, interests, and teaching strengths and weaknesses...[and] teach his or her personal beliefs and values” (Yero, 2002b, p. 2). As such, Costa (1977, p. 2) contends that “all school education depends totally upon the views...of teachers”. In addition, Clark and Peterson (as cited in Cochran-Smith 1997, p. 32) state that “teachers’ beliefs, attitudes...and images are...profoundly connected to the ways teachers teach” in their classrooms. Furthermore, Marcello (1992, as cited in Costa, 1977, p. 8) expresses that student teachers also have preconceived “concepts and beliefs in relation to many...cultural problems” found in society, where it is likely that these preconceived ideas will be reflected in the classroom. Therefore, and in attempt to determine the impact of teacher attitudes on culturally diverse students, Cochran-Smith (1997) asserts that the following questions must be considered in the pursuit of understanding the “contexts in which...teachers interpret and shape their work” (p. 28) based on their own ‘political’ attitudes: “What assumptions do teachers and students of all ages bring to school with them about ‘the self’ and ‘the other’? What understandings do they have about meanings, cultures, and families that are not like their own?” (pp. 28-29).

According to Yero (2002b), the beliefs, values, and actions that teachers bring to the classroom “generally exist outside of conscious awareness” (p. 6) and “are largely unexamined” (Yero, 2002a, p. 12) by both the teacher and the educational system. What this means is that teacher behaviours often result more from “habit” than “from higher-level thinking processes” (Yero, 2002b, p. 6), which can be detrimental to educational reform efforts that may or may not rely on teacher leadership. Yero continues:

Many studies have shown that the individual beliefs and values of teachers play a vital role in shaping the objectives, goals, curriculum, and instructional methods of schools. Those same beliefs and values can spell success or failure for any reform efforts imposed by a school or district. Even when there is surface agreement on what *should* be done, variations in the way teachers perceive the task create huge differences in implementation. Any teacher who has taken part in attempts to develop a “common” curriculum has experienced the kind of disagreement that can occur over what aspects of a subject *should* be included and how the subject *should* be taught. (2002a, p. 7)

In Alberta, the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in the Social Studies Program plays a large part in the educational reform efforts designed to narrow the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners in the province, while increasing the level of knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of Aboriginal histories, cultures and contributions among all students. Therefore, it is critical to consider the influence of teachers’ prior knowledge, attitudes, values and beliefs as they relate to being educational leaders and advocates in the efforts to improve Aboriginal education.

The research on teacher attitudes, values and beliefs and the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum is extremely limited. One particularly relevant study conducted by Kanu (2005), which included the perceptions of ten high school teachers on the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives into the teaching of curriculum is highlighted in this report. Kanu’s (2005) study shows that all of the teachers “in the study believed that the integration of Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives into the school curriculum was absolutely crucial” (p. 54) on the grounds that,

[a] rich body of Aboriginal cultural knowledge, values, and contributions needed to be learned and understood by others; curriculum and learning have to be culturally relevant for all students, not only students from the dominant cultures; the integration of Aboriginal perspectives would greatly improve how Aboriginal students felt about themselves and their backgrounds (e.g., Doug observed, “Aboriginal students are the only cultural group in my class who hide their identity”); integration may lead to school success and school retention among Aboriginal students; Canada is a multicultural democracy where everyone should be fully included and represented; a good number of students, including a high proportion of Aboriginal students, do not have adequate knowledge of the issues affecting Aboriginal lives: the school would provide the opportunity for complex analyses of these issues, compared with the so-called authentic and accurate representations of Aboriginal peoples that students heard at home or on the media. (p. 54)

In a Master’s project titled, *Integrating Aboriginal Content and Perspectives: The Experience of Four Elementary School Teachers*, Gilchrist (2005) supports Kanu’s study in that most respondents acknowledged the importance of having Aboriginal perspectives and experiences as part of the curriculum:

One felt that it would help to eradicate racism...Another teacher felt that it was important for students to understand the treaties and the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada...One teacher felt that integration would bring an awareness of another culture and promote multiculturalism in her students...One teacher noted that she felt



she needed to include the perspectives of other cultures in her classroom. (2005, pp. 29-30)

In the case of Kanu's study, "although the teachers generally supported the integration of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and perspectives into the school curriculum, clear differences emerged among them in how they understood and approached integration" (2005, p. 55). For example:

Ann ... understood integration as the infusion of Aboriginal content/perspectives into every aspect of the school curriculum and teaching one's subject from several perspectives ... Ann's approach was ...exemplified by several behavior's, attitudes and activities observed in the classroom. There were prominent displays of Aboriginal cultural artifacts, posters and flyers about Aboriginal events ... vibrant discussions ... the use of sharing circles, Aboriginal guest speakers [etc.] ...By contrast ... [other] teachers ... although ... unanimous in their agreement that the social studies curriculum was assimilating Aboriginal students through omission or token additions of Aboriginal perspectives, they unwittingly contributed to this process of assimilation by allowing the curriculum topics, not Aboriginal issues / perspectives, to remain at the center of their teaching. The teachers perceived integration as occasionally adding Aboriginal perspectives, where convenient, to a curriculum that remained largely Eurocentric. On average, each teacher [with the exception of Ann] had integrated Aboriginal perspectives into the social studies curriculum only six times over the entire academic year. (pp. 55-56)

Kanu's examples of teachers' perceptions of including and teaching Aboriginal perspectives are a clear reflection of early conversations regarding Orr's (2004) 'teaching for' Aboriginal issues versus 'teaching about' Aboriginal histories and cultures. Furthermore, these two contrasting styles are illustrations of "Banks' (1989) typology of teachers' engagement of inclusion of multicultural perspectives in the classroom" (Kanu, 2005), which include "contributions, additive, and transformational" (p. 55) approaches. Banks' work will be discussed in further detail in the forthcoming section on Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT).

Unfortunately, many teachers have not had the appropriate educational background to prepare them for diverse classrooms; therefore, school leaders need to make sure that most importantly "educators of all racial and cultural groups develop new competencies and pedagogies to successfully engage our changing populations" (Howard, 2007, p. 17). Research has shown that other factors have a great effect on student motivation, such as sense of belonging, trust in the people around them and the belief that teachers value their intellectual competence (Howard, 2007, p.19). In addition, Clarke and Drudy (2006) observed that teachers were not likely to use methods most suitable for teaching diverse populations. In conclusion, Clarke and Drudy share, "Teacher educators need to be aware of the values that student teachers hold, the manner in which they express those values and the way in which they respect views that are different from their own" (2006, p. 383). This awareness is possible through cultural understanding and competency.

## ***Culture and Cultural Competency***

*If I were to describe or define Aboriginal pedagogy, it would be imperative that I speak to the philosophical and epistemological beliefs that inform and guide cultural practice (Hodgson-Smith, 2000, p. 158).*

Heavy Runner and Morris (1997) inform educators that culture has a “valid and positive role in supporting youth and tapping [into] their resilience” (p. 1). They explain, “A culture’s world view is grounded in fundamental beliefs which guide and shape the life experiences of young people ...and those who work with young people and demonstrate respect for these fundamental values, beliefs and behaviours, foster the natural resilience of children” (1997, p. 1). An educator’s understanding and knowledge of culture directly influences teaching practices.

Cochran-Smith (1997) comments:

[T]eachers’ conceptions of culture, their knowledge of cultures different from their own, and their images of schools and classrooms as social and cultural contexts ... have enormous influences on the ways teachers construct and act upon “difference” in schooling – differences between and among teachers, their students, and their families and communities (Cazden & Mehan 1989; Erickson 1986; Erickson & Mohatt 1982; Heath 1995; Hilliard 1992; Mehan, Lintz, Okamoto & Wills 1995; Villegas 1991). Foremost is the concept that culture is not captured in lists of “the characteristics” of groups of “others” (Florio-Ruane 1994; Zeichner 1993) – a practice that may in and of itself bolster rather than interrupt stereotypes (Cazden & Mehan 1989; Popkewitz 1991). Rather, it encompasses a broad array of the expected norms, values, attitudes, and modes of knowing, behaving, interacting, and interpreting daily life in social and cultural groups (Cazden & Mehan 1989; Heath 1983; King 1994; Mehan, Lintz, Okamoto, & Wills 1995). (pp. 39-40)

As these authors imply, culture encompasses the whole of an individual, and group’s, ‘being’ and ‘doing’.

Walker et al. (n.d.) propose a significant shift in the way that educational institutions view cultural diversity. They state: “Cultural deficit is the notion that students from diverse cultural backgrounds fail in school because of the culture in which they grow up...the student is the problem, not the culture of the school....Cultural difference, on the other hand, assumes that minority ethnic students often fail because they have different values than those of the school”. In contrast, Lumby with Coleman (2007) point out that diversity “did not start from a deficit model, but an assumption that the differences between people were to be celebrated and integrated, not in the sense of all becoming the same, but all working together harmoniously, making positive use of different life experience, perceptions, attitudes and skills” (p. 23). Isolating a certain culture to specific celebration days and events leans more toward cultural defiant model of practice as it contributes to the freezing of “culture in time and perpetuates stereotypes” (Doige, 2003, p. 150). Doige believes that schools need to embrace Aboriginal people, their knowledge and history, as an integral part of the overall school culture and learning of Aboriginal peoples should be integrated throughout the whole curriculum. An integrated curriculum of diversity is also supported by Dimmock and Walker (2005) when they comment: “If, however, the aim is to go beyond tolerance of cultural differences and towards understanding of, and respect for, other races and cultures, then themes and ideas of a multicultural nature need to be embedded in subjects across the whole curriculum, in an

integrated way” (p. 103). This philosophy and practice of teaching and learning becomes much more effective when the whole school community becomes involved.

Where can schools and educators begin developing relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal people and in initiating positive change? Agbo (2007) asserts, “The fate of a school is increasingly tied to, and powerfully influenced by, its relationships with the community” (p. 13). In many cases, quality relationships and partnerships are strategically and deliberately initiated for a specific purpose. Cadwallader (2004) further informs that “[t]he process involved in changing the culture of an organization to become more receptive and aware of the needs of Aboriginal students [involves] including Aboriginal people more fully in the decision-making process” (p. 92). Aboriginal people have to be included in processes (decision-making or otherwise) that affect their learning and their future from the outset rather than mid-way or at the end; they have to help build the foundation. Cadwallader (2004) explains “the groundwork that is done at the beginning” (p. 100) and that “trust and honesty, friendship and collaboration” (p. 100) are a necessary part of the process.

Having these meaningful interactions in an Aboriginal setting affords teachers the possibility “to retain a full grasp of the First Nations culture and the myriad of ways First Nations live their lives from day to day” (Agbo, 2004, p. 30). In a broader sense, school leaders and teachers have the responsibility of staying informed of promising educational practices. Dimmock and Walker (2005) posit, “Both teaching and instructional leadership are culturally related phenomena. The nurturing of informed and culturally appropriate teaching is part of instructional leadership” (p. 116). In terms of culture, Cartledge and Loe (2001) remind us that it is learned, shared, dynamic in nature, and that “it incorporates values that dictate behavior” (p. 34); therefore, when educators have students from different cultural groups they “must treat culture not as a rigidly prescribed set of behaviors or traits but as a general framework through which actions are filtered or checked as people negotiate their daily lives” (p. 34). Cartledge and Loe further note, “All behavior is culturally based. Children who come from and identify with culturally diverse groups are likely to engage in behaviors that are at variance with the culture of the school. The success of these students is predicted in their abilities to transverse these environments with minimal dissonance” (p. 33).

Teachers should be aware that they are also filtering their own actions through a specific cultural lens, and that their success depends on how well they interpret and transverse the cultural diversity in their classroom. Misinterpretation and misconceptions by teachers, and also by students, can result in negative experiences, a breakdown of relationships at multiple levels, and a disruption of learning, or refusal to learn, and disengagement by students. Cartledge and Loe label these undermining and potentially frustrating situations as “cultural discontinuities” (p. 35). For this reason, Cartledge and Loe, along with other prominent authors (Pewewardy, 1998; Dimmock & Walker, 2005) promote cultural competency and cultural sensitivity for educators and school leaders. According to Cartledge and Loe (2001), cultural competency means that teachers “will become skilled in their perceptions of the culturally specific behaviors of their students and will be able to distinguish these actions from problem behaviors or behavior disorders” (p. 38). They advise that “cultural sensitivity can be expressed through our unprovoked emotional reactions to people” (p. 38). Cartledge and Loe warn that a teacher’s effectiveness and awareness can be reduced by reactions (e.g. fear, mistrust, pity) that are “based solely on the ethnic or racial characteristics of an individual” (p. 38). This is also an

indication of reduced cultural sensitivity. Dimmock and Walker (2005) suggest that “transfer and mobility of theory, policy, and practice between systems needs to be more ‘culturally sensitive’” (p. 18). They further explain that cultural sensitivity “needs to begin at the formulation rather than at the implementation stage” and that this “approach requires a better understanding of culture and cross-cultural similarity and difference” (p. 18).

For culturally responsive philosophy and practice to become established in school culture and for it to positively impact student learning, both affective and cognitive aspects of learning need to be embraced throughout the school in various forms (e.g. policy, curriculum etc.) and become consistently evident in teacher behaviour.

### ***The Reflective Practitioner: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Teachers’ Belief Systems***

Richards, Brown and Forde (2007) posit that culturally responsive pedagogy focuses on individual and collective strengths, and because it “facilitates and supports the achievement of all students” (p. 64), it is learner-centered. Richards, Brown and Forde identify three dimensions of culturally responsive pedagogy: (a) *institutional*, (b) *personal*, and (c) *instructional*. The institutional dimension comprises of the values and policies upheld by the school administration. The cognitive and emotional processes that teachers intentionally experience to become culturally responsive is representative of the personal dimension. The instructional dimension refers to the materials, activities and strategies used to support culturally responsive pedagogy and instruction. As in the Medicine Wheel, educators should strive for synergy, and the balance of the three dimensions. However, the authors note, “While all three dimensions are important ... the two most relevant for teachers’ work: the personal and instructional dimensions” (p. 64).

As teachers prepare for teaching that is more culturally sensitive, they are encouraged to deeply reflect and explore their own history, and their own feelings, beliefs and values toward differences in culture and differences in people. Richards, Brown and Forde (2007) explain:

Teacher self-reflection is an important part of the personal dimension. By honestly examining their attitudes and beliefs about themselves and others, teachers begin to discover why they are who they are, and can confront biases that have influenced their values system (Villegas & Lucas 2002). Because teachers’ values impact relationships with students and their families, teachers must reconcile negative feelings towards any cultural, language, or ethnic group. Often teachers are resistant to the notion that their values might reflect prejudices or even racism towards certain groups. When teachers are able to rid themselves of such biases, they help to create an atmosphere of trust and acceptance for students and their families, resulting in greater opportunity for students success ... Another important aspect of the personal dimension is exploration. It is crucial that teachers explore their personal histories and experiences, as well as the history and current experiences of their students and families. With knowledge comes understanding of self and others, and greater appreciation of differences. When teachers are unbiased in their instruction and knowledgeable about themselves and their students, they can better respond to the needs of all their students. (p. 65)

The intent of this introspective exercise is to understand and, in some instances, challenge barriers (e.g. stereotypes, etc.) that inhibit learning and healthy relationships, to strengthen a

teacher's overall identity, and to establish a commitment to creating a culturally sensitive classroom. Donald Schön further explains:

*[C]ompetent practitioners usually know more than they can say. They exhibit a kind of knowing in practice, most of which is tacit ... Indeed practitioners themselves often reveal a capacity for reflection on their intuitive knowing in the midst of action and sometimes use this capacity to cope with the unique, uncertain, and conflicted situations of practice. (1983, p. 8-9)*

Schön encourages educators to bring to surface, for the purpose of examination, tacit and basic assumptions that are normally taken for granted in daily routine. Once evaluated, values and beliefs can be affirmed, or challenged and changed. Schön identifies two types of reflective thinking: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. He also differentiates the two forms of reflection:

*A practitioner who reflects-in-action tends to question the definition of his task, the theories-in-action that he brings to it, and the measures of performance by which he is controlled. And as he questions these things, he also questions elements of the organizational knowledge structure in which his functions are embedded.*

*The act of reflecting-on-action enables us to spend time exploring why we acted as we did, what was happening in a group and so on. In so doing we develop sets of questions and ideas about our activities and practice ... The notion of repertoire is a key aspect of this approach. Practitioners build up a collection of images, ideas, examples and actions that they can draw upon. (1983, p. 337)*

Reflection-in-action can be viewed as an 'action-present' (Schön) exercise in thought; reflective thinking happens while a problem is being addressed, when the outcome is outside of one's "knowing-in-action". On the other hand, reflection-on-action happens after decisions have been made. In this conscious exercise, decisions and practice are deeply evaluated to promote effectiveness of future actions, and actions and decisions that address anticipated issues are determined. Donald Schön, like John Dewey (1933, p. 123), view the reflective thought process as an essential exercise for educators because it helps to clarify and strengthen educational philosophy and it promotes improvement in practice. This personal journey, one that includes an evaluation of thought and practice can have profound professional implications and positive influences on student learning.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)**

From cultural competency, teachers are encouraged to practice culturally responsive teaching (CRT). Culturally responsive teaching involves: using resources, teaching material and instructional strategies that respect the culture, life experience, and the learning needs of each student; acknowledging the contribution that each student has made to the culture and learning dynamic of the classroom; consistently maintaining high expectations for all learners; the formation of relationships with students that are genuine and caring (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000; McKinley, 2005; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997 as cited in Howard, 2007). "For indigenous learners, being 'culturally responsive' means being sensitive, aware, and capable of employing cultural learning patterns, perspectives, family structure, multiple world views, and tribal languages in the teaching, learning and mental ecology of the classroom" (Pewewardy, 1998, p. 31). In this respect, Pewewardy also encourages a transformational and holistic approach to education, and the need to acknowledge "the organic, subconscious, subjective,

intuitive, artistic, mythological, and spiritual dimension of our lives” (1998, p. 33). Insight, depth and creativity are required in this approach to learning.

Cartledge and Loe (2001) summarize culturally responsive and culturally relevant teaching to be inclusive of four principles. They state, “Educators must become cross-culturally competent and skilled in the basic principles of culturally relevant teaching. Among other things, teachers must learn ways to discern behavior problems from cultural differences, create positive and affirming environments, communicate and foster desired classroom behaviors, and use the child’s culture as the basis for critical social learning” (p. 44). CRT requires teachers to be aware and responsive at multiple levels – extrinsically and intrinsically.

In creating supportive, positive and affirming environments, teachers work toward developing a community of learners that fosters a sense of belonging, and emphasizes “the responsibility that students have for each other” in a place that honors and sustains the students’ “sense of humanity and dignity, self-worth and self-concept” (Cartledge & Loe, 2001, p. 39). Managing disruptive behaviours requires teachers to assess and interpret the behaviour of students from multiple perspectives. Cartledge and Loe suggest that “teachers need to maximize instructionally relevant behaviours” (p. 40) in a proactive rather than reactive manner. They recommend using process approaches, child-centered instruction and by asking questions rather than explicit directions (p. 40-41). In terms of teaching culturally relevant social behaviours, Cartledge and Loe explain:

The critical issue here is not conformity to some set standard set by dominant members of this society, but helping students define themselves and their ethnic identity according to the positive, orderly elements that constitute the basis and aspirations of all groups ... Culturally relevant social skill instruction is intended to affirm students and empower them to achieve maximally within their own subculture as well as the mainstreamed school environment. (p. 41)

Teachers are encouraged to model behaviour that is respectful and to use language that maintains a student’s dignity and builds confidence. As a result of culturally responsive teaching, students are likely to experience consistent and meaningful affirmations of their cultural identities. The National Aboriginal Education Committee from Australia highlighted the importance of identity formation: “Identity needs to be securely founded and maintained in their own cultural frame of reference. For it is only when a person’s identity is firmly established and stable that they can attempt to cross into other different cultural frames of reference without becoming lost or confused” (1989, p. 10, as cited in Children’s Service Office, 1993, p. 14). Students who have an understanding and a secure sense of their own identities are likely to have the confidence and curiosity to ask critical cultural questions, and to be open to learning about people outside of their own cultural communities.

To get behaviours to persist, Cartledge and Loe (2001) suggested that teachers model positive and affirming behaviour, intriguing and stimulating classroom supports need to support growth, and to seek creative ways of sustaining learning and maintaining a safe and caring classroom. The authors conclude that “the commonalities among our children are greater than their differences”; however; “behaviors rooted in this diversity portend to undermine the child’s school success and overall social adjustment” (p. 44). Again, through this process of learning and maturing for the student, it is important for the teacher to be open to learning and maturing in a similar way.

Gay (2000) suggests that after educators consider the direct association between their attitudes, values, and beliefs to their actions, and once they reflect on the multicultural classroom, the next step may be becoming knowledgeable about the concept and the responsibilities of a culturally responsive teacher.

Gay summarizes cultural responsiveness into three categories: cultural organizers, cultural mediators and orchestrators of social contexts for learning (pp. 130-144). As “cultural organizers”, teachers work at understanding the culture of their classroom and how it influences learning and relationships. Gay also encourages teachers to become culturally centered (contemplating all the senses) when planning lessons and making accommodations for students. Along with creating a caring classroom, where all students feel safe to express themselves on a personal and cultural basis, it is important for teachers to maintain high academic expectations for all students. As “cultural mediators”, when opportunities arise, teachers engage students in critical dialogue about cultures (e.g. differences, stereotypes, misconceptions, conflict) and facilitate analysis of inconsistencies between mainstream cultural values and marginalized cultures. These learning experiences help students “clarify their ethnic identities, honor other cultures, develop positive cross-ethnic and cross-cultural relationships, and avoid perpetuating prejudices, stereotypes, and racism” (pp. 130-144). Through these exercises, students learn to celebrate, affirm, and work collaboratively at creating a community of culturally diverse learners striving for mutual success. The end result is to replace powerlessness and oppression with empowerment (pp. 130-144). As “orchestrators of social contexts for learning”, to benefit everyone’s learning, teachers strategically make teaching and learning compatible with socio-cultural contexts and the frames of reference represented in the classroom. The teacher’s role includes assisting students in the translation of their cultural competencies into what they are learning in school. For this to effectively occur, educators have to understand the generalizations and subtleties of their own culture and be open to learning other cultures. Overall, the CRT process is extensive, therefore, it requires dedication.

For CRT, Gay (2002) emphasizes that teachers become skilled at cultural scaffolding; a process where teachers use “their own cultures and experiences to expand their intellectual horizons and academic achievement” (p. 109). Cultural scaffolding also “begins by demonstrating culturally sensitive caring and building culturally responsive learning communities” (p. 109). Gay explains:

Teachers have to care so much about ethnically diverse students and their achievement that they accept nothing less than high-level success from them and work diligently to accomplish it (Foster, 1997; Kleinfeld, 1974, 1975). This is a very different conception of caring than the often-cited notion of “gentle nurturing and altruistic concern,” which can lead to benign neglect under the guise of letting students of color make their own way and move at their own pace.

Culturally responsive caring also places “teachers in an ethical, emotional, and academic partnership with ethnically diverse students, a partnership that is anchored in respect, honor, integrity, resource sharing, and a deep belief in the possibility of transcendence” (Gay, 2000, p. 52). Caring is a moral imperative, a social responsibility, and a pedagogical necessity. It requires that teachers use “knowledge and strategic thinking to decide how to act in the best interests of others ... [and] binds individuals to their society, to their

communities, and to each other” (Webb, Wilson, Corbett, & Mordecai, 1993, pp. 33-34). In culturally responsive teaching, the "knowledge" of interest is information about ethnically diverse groups; the “strategic thinking” is how this cultural knowledge is used to redesign teaching and learning; and the “bounds” are the reciprocity involved in students working with each other and with teachers as partners to improve their achievement.

Thus, teachers need to understand that culturally responsive caring is action oriented in that it demonstrates high expectations and uses imaginative strategies to ensure academic success for ethnically diverse students. Teachers genuinely believe in the intellectual potential of these students and accept, unequivocally, their responsibility to facilitate its realization without ignoring, demeaning, or neglecting their ethnic and cultural identities. They build toward academic success from a basis of cultural validation and strength. (pp. 109-110)

This approach to teaching raises the social consciousness of everyone in the classroom, acknowledges the students’ whole self, emphasizes the beauty of humanity, it facilitates relationships based on respect and dignity, and it utilizes the strength of diverse cultures in the classroom to enhance learning. It demands the best from everyone. In the process, higher learning is achieved as curriculum content is enriched by the cultural experiences of ethnically diverse students.

Valuable research and literature is available for teachers that are searching for information on creating a culturally sensitive classroom. For integrating culturally diverse content in the classroom, Leiding (2007) recommends:

- Being aware of racism in curricular materials and student behaviours.
- Selecting resources and materials carefully to ensure they do not contain stereotypes; if so, being prepared to teach about stereotyping.
- Being prepared with the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills conducive to teaching in culturally diverse groups.
- Acknowledging and challenging attitudes and behaviour that may be harmful to others.
- Discovering one’s cultural heritage and sharing it with your students.
- Ensuring there are positive images of all cultural groups in the classroom.

To promote relationships and integration in the classroom, and the use of cooperative learning techniques and group work, Chou (2007) contends that teachers in diverse classrooms should:

- Learn about and utilize the cultural values, learning styles, historical legacies, and contribution of different ethnic groups.
- Have the courage (if necessary) to move from blaming the victims of school failure to realizing that the existing educational systems may not support marginalized students.
- Be willing to confront dominant educational assumptions that do not support learning and wellbeing of diverse students, and to seek positive change and effective pedagogical strategies and practices.
- Develop skills to bridge knowledge and sensitivity about cultural diversity to practice (as cited in Leiding, 2007, p. 25); this is praxis.

Furthermore, Villegas and Lucas (2007) encourage culturally responsive teachers to: understand how learners construct knowledge; learn about students’ lives; be socio-culturally conscious;



hold affirming views; use appropriate instructional strategies; and, advocate for all students. Finally, Howard (2007) explains that the process for culturally responsive teaching is transformative and that it requires trust, an engagement in personal culture, the confrontation of social dominance and application of social justice, the transformation of instructional practices, and it needs the support of entire school community to be sustaining (p. 17).

From the review of literature, recurring themes of culturally responsive teaching are evident. Collectively, the whole school community can learn more about the concept and practices of culturally responsive teaching by establishing research and leadership teams, and creating professional development communities based on the topic. These collective staff opportunities also offer support for those teachers practicing culturally responsive teaching. However, in an individual and collective perspective on cultural relevance, passion for learning is vital (Ladson-Billings, 1994, as cited in Cochran-Smith, 1997, p. 38). Educators need to have the desire and the passion, to teach in a culturally responsive manner if it is to gain hold and momentum in the classroom. Passion is very evident and can be seen by students; it has a way of being infectious and can be used to transfer important lessons to students about humanity.

On an organizational level, Banks (1994, as cited in Dimmock & Walker, 2005, p.183) outlines four stages of approach to curriculum reform in multicultural education:

Level 1 – The Contributions approach

- A focus on heroes, holidays and discrete cultural elements

Level 2 – The Additive approach

- Content, concepts, themes and perspectives are added to teaching with no structural change to the curriculum

Level 3 – The Transformation approach

- The curriculum is changed to include diverse perspectives

Level 4 – The Social Action approach

- Students are encouraged to understand and question social issues, and also be involved in action and developing solutions.

Schools and teachers desiring change should identify where they are in this four-stage continuum, what their goals are in relation to Aboriginal perspectives, where they would like to be on the continuum, and how they are going to achieve their goals.

### ***Teacher Preparation Programs and Professional Development***

With the advent of globalization and significant population shifts and migration, there is a need for teacher preparation programs and professional development initiatives to address cultural diversity, specifically Aboriginal diversity. Gilchrist (2005) explains, “In a study on teacher education, Johnston and Carson (2000) found that the curriculum of teacher education focused theories on learning, evaluation, normal child development, curriculum, and unit and lesson planning. There was very little in the curriculum that prepared teachers to teach in a multicultural setting” (p. 25). Leonard and Leonard (2006) support Johnston and Carson, while specifically identifying the affective dimension when they write, “[E]vidence is steadily growing of the need for preservice and inservice teachers to acquire the attitudes, values, and beliefs that will enable them to better serve the needs of increasingly diverse student population” (p.

32). These authors encourage educational organizations to address both the cognitive and affective aspects of learning to better prepare teachers for diverse and multicultural settings.

Gilchrist (2005) also comments on the preparation of teachers in Aboriginal Education, discovering that three of the four teachers interviewed, “shared the opinion that their pre-service education programs did not prepare them to integrate Aboriginal and culture and perspectives” (p. 34) effectively.

The teachers went on to say that they had taken courses on Aboriginal history but that none of their teacher methods classes had any content on infusing Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum. In this respect, Craven (2005), commenting from an Australian perspective, contends that “All teacher education institutions need to ensure the next generation of teachers are adequately prepared to teach both Aboriginal students and Aboriginal Studies” (p. 25). Craven supports this statement with evidence: “Our study found that teachers who had studied Aboriginal Studies perceived themselves to be more competent in the area. Teachers who had not studied Aboriginal Studies reported a lack in self-confidence in teaching either Aboriginal Studies or Aboriginal students” (2005, p. 25). Ultimately, “Teaching teachers Aboriginal Studies makes a real difference to their attitudes and practices in the classroom” (Craven, 2005, p. 25). An Aboriginal Studies program or course is important, however, learning of Aboriginal peoples and their perspectives should not be isolated to an event of a course, but it should be interactive, engaging, continuous, and institutionally infused as a value.

### **Foundational Educational Principles on Aboriginal Perspectives**

In *Towards a Redefinition of Indian Education* (1995), Hampton outlines the purpose of Indian education and identifies the five stages of education for Aboriginal peoples:

- Traditional Indian education (prior to contact);
- Education for self determination (test schools);
- Education for assimilation (residential schools);
- Education by Indians (Native educators administering an Anglo curriculum, employing Anglo methods and values); and,
- Indian education sui generis: education that is based on the learning styles and teaching methods employed by Native people in historic and contemporary times.

King and Schliemann (2004) identify characteristics of quality Indigenous Education and what characteristics educators would need to be effective:

- Familiar with Indigenous culture and language as well as the national culture and language
- Respectful to Indigenous concepts and values regarding education, and who engage in an interactive process with Indigenous communities and students
- Using and creating responsive and experiential teaching methods and material in cooperation and consultation with the Indigenous community
- Trained in bilingual teaching methods and language-training methodologies
- Open to continuous assessment of their work and teaching practices
- Trained in teacher-training programmes and facilities organized in cooperation with Indigenous peoples’ organizations and communities
- Selected in consultation with Indigenous communities. (p. 46)

Dr. Marie Battiste, the Director of the Aboriginal Education Research Centre, in the background paper, *State of Aboriginal Learning* (2005) (prepared for the Canadian Council on Learning), summarized the themes that arose from literature and research reports in the following core principles of learning and education for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students:

- Aboriginal peoples view education as a vital area for holistic and lifelong learning and for transformation of their economic livelihood.
- Learning is acknowledged as a lifelong process that requires both formal and informal opportunities for learning for all ages.
- Land, the knowledge and skills in and from place, language and culture are integral parts of the learning and education process among Aboriginal people.
- Aboriginal learning must be integrally linked to elders and community and opportunities realized to build upon these connections and their language, knowledge and culture.
- Learning development must focus on Aboriginal individuals in a holistic manner based on their spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical selves and acknowledge and foster their gifts and abilities.
- Selecting and legitimizing curricular knowledge are issues based on power, voice, and agency that require Aboriginal people to be participating in all aspects of curriculum development, deciding on the knowledge to be included in the curriculum, and in what languages the curriculum is to be delivered. This requires new skills and knowledge to bring Aboriginal people into these participatory realms as well as power changes to systems in policy making.
- The participation and involvement of parents and community is essential to building a successful learning continuum and healthy resilient communities.
- The legitimate right of Aboriginal peoples across Canada to develop and control all aspects of their own education must be recognized, resourced, and realized.
- Inequities in educational funding create uneven capacities for Aboriginal people and require immediate fiscal and applied solutions.
- The development of any learning and research activities with and for Aboriginal peoples must be developed within ethical principles of research involving Aboriginal communities and leadership. These are to ensure that Aboriginal peoples are invited as participants and owners of research, as well as researchers, who are involved in all aspects of the research, the analysis and conclusions, identifying the solutions and recommendations that they will benefit their nations and communities. (pp. 4-5)

Later, the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) 2007 report, *Redefining how Success is Measured in First Nations, Inuit and Métis Learning*, summarized Aboriginal learning perspectives into the following key attributes:

- Learning is holistic.
- Learning is a lifelong process.
- Learning is experiential in nature.
- Learning is rooted in Aboriginal languages and cultures.
- Learning is spiritually oriented.
- Learning is a communal activity, involving family, community and Elders.
- Learning is an integration of Aboriginal and Western knowledge. (p. 5)

In an earlier report, Battiste (2005, p. 8) provided additional recommendations: a priority to draw early leavers back to school; provide strategies to decrease the drop-out rate; develop transitions from one institution to another; address racism in schools and society; create bridge

and access programs; train and develop counselors and mentors; address ignorance of First Nations; create new curricula; share curricula and resources; increase training for teachers and administrators; improve infrastructures for learning opportunities; and, a holistic approach.

In spite of this knowledge, the predominant and current approaches to measuring Aboriginal learning often:

- are orientated toward measuring learning deficits,
- do not account for social, economic and political factors,
- do not monitor progress across the full spectrum of lifelong learning,
- do not reflect the holistic nature of First Nations, Inuit and Métis learning, and
- do not reflect the importance of experiential learning. (CCL, 2007, p. 8)

The challenge for teachers becomes breaking free from traditional approaches, approaches that did not consider Aboriginal perspectives or included Aboriginal participation in curriculum development, to teaching Aboriginal perspectives from an inclusive and meaning orientation. Increasingly, there are resources from a balanced perspective as Aboriginal scholars, educators, parents and community members contribute to the creation of quality materials. Aboriginal peoples are also active in guiding the knowledge and learning process for policy makers, school leadership, and for teachers.

The authors of the 2007 CCL report stressed that “any process to redefine how success is measured in First Nations, Inuit and Métis learning should”:

***Identify the partners needed to address data gaps and challenges.***

First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, organizations and institutions, the federal government, provincial and territorial governments, educational authorities, academics, professionals and researchers, parents and Aboriginal students themselves all have a vested interest in Aboriginal learning. While each partner has an important role to play in measuring the progress of First Nations, Inuit and Métis learning, the sheer number of stakeholders illustrates how difficult it is to address the chronic data gaps and challenges identified in this report.

***Foster a dialogue on data gaps and challenges in measuring Aboriginal learning.***

Critical to this process is the need to address the capacity of government reporting frameworks to reflect Aboriginal perspectives on holistic, lifelong learning and community well-being. The multiple responsibilities and scope of activities that organizations must deal with need to be clarified. For example, federal governments require data that can inform national-level policy and programs, whereas community members and local program requirements tend to shape the information needs of communities.

***Develop comprehensive information and data strategies to fill the data gaps on Aboriginal learning.***

Strategies are needed at the community, regional and national levels to address existing data gaps on Aboriginal learning. In all situations, the process to develop these strategies must directly involve and take leadership from First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. (p. 30)

There are strong suggestions for partnerships, collaboration, and continuous communication to gather quality and relevant data and information on Aboriginal learning.

One strategic, comprehensive, and collaborative effort to gather information was initiated by CCL's Aboriginal Knowledge Network Centre in early 2007. Through a series of national workshops with First Nations, Inuit and Métis representatives, not one but three "holistic lifelong learning models" emerged. The three comprehensive models reflected First Nations, Inuit and Métis perspectives on learning and success.

The models are "intended to be living documents, serving as a template for communities, researchers, governments and others who are exploring their use as tools for assessment, curriculum development and teacher training. They also offer an important focal point for discussions about community planning and development ... [can may] contribute to renewed cultural connections and intergenerational bonds" (Cappon, 2008, p. 63). The models serve as a valuable tool for teachers in the classroom.

Cappon (2008) described the metaphors of learning that emerged from the CCL Canadian gatherings of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples that focused on perspectives on learning and success. For First Nations people, a 'living tree' was the metaphor chosen to depict the cyclical process of learning during the life of an individual (Appendix A). Cappon explains:

*The tree links the sources of knowledge and cultural continuity with successful individual learning and community well-being.*

*The model has four main components:*

- *The sources and domains of knowledge (the roots): Representing from whom First Nations people learn and what they learn about, the roots emphasize the importance of relationships with the land, family, community, ancestors, nation and one's language, traditions and ceremonies. This highlights the potential damage that cultural discontinuity (from family breakdown or loss of language, for example) can have on a learner and his or her community. Indigenous and Western learning coexist as sources and are integrated in the trunk of the tree, where individual development and lifelong learning are situated.*
- *The individual's lifelong learning cycle (the rings): A cross-section of the tree trunk reveals Western and indigenous knowledge as complementary, informing the individual's spiritual, physical, emotional and mental growth. This integrative process takes place from birth through childhood, youth and adulthood. The rings give equal importance to formal and to informal and experiential learning. The outer ring portrays intergenerational learning. Its seven segments reflect the responsibility of each new generation for the survival of the seventh generation.*
- *The individual's personal development (the branches): Each branch represents a different dimension of personal development. Personal harmony comes when an individual learns to balance the spiritual, physical, mental (includes critical thinking and analytical skills, the practice of visioning or dreaming and First Nations language ability) and emotional (such as self esteem, awareness of personal gifts) aspects of their being.*
- *The community's well-being (the leaves): On each branch, clusters of leaves represent aspects of four dimensions of community wellbeing: spiritual/cultural, social, political and economic. The more vibrant a leaf's colour, the better developed that aspect of the dimension. The fact that leaves grow, fall, decay and grow again reflects the cyclical, regenerative learning process that influences*

*community well-being. A community's well-being nourishes its roots and, in turn, the individual's learning cycle.*

*The circularity of the model is fundamental, underlining the all-encompassing, non-linear interconnectedness of the relationships that govern individual learning and community well-being. (2008, pp. 63-64)*

The Inuit and Métis holistic learning models ([www.ccl-cca.ca](http://www.ccl-cca.ca)) are visually different – an Inuit ‘blanket toss’ and another ‘living tree’ for Métis; however, there are similarities: circularity, the learning sources, and the interconnectedness of relationships (Cappon, 2008, p. 63).

Since the inception of the three models, the applications for the models have been numerous and they have proven valuable for informing the planning and implementation process related to Aboriginal Education. The CCL website offers more information in the form of charts and suggestions for planning.

### **Aboriginal Perspectives: Bridging Theory to Promising Practice**

Cochran-Smith (1997) cautions:

Knowledge and interpretive frameworks, as well as ideologies and political frameworks, guide and are guided by the practices that teachers develop and alter over time to meet the current and future intellectual ... social, and emotional needs of culturally diverse learners in specific school and classroom sites. Because teachers' practices are not discrete from, but profoundly interdependent with, their knowledge and interpretations, these practices cannot be understood, as “models” of effective teaching or, as is sometimes referred to in the current reform literature, “best practices.” Given all that we know about the diversity of teachers' and students' cultures, experiences, and ways of knowing, and all that we know about the diversity of classrooms themselves as cultures, it is extremely unlikely that there will ever be specific effective practices that are transportable – full-blown and whole – from one classroom and school site to another. (pp. 47-48)

Best and/or promising practices are contextual and directed by student needs; however, increasingly, there are exemplars of Aboriginal perspectives in practice. There is more critiquing and examination of the quality and authenticity of Aboriginal educational resources by Aboriginal educators and scholars. This somewhat newly directed focus should generate quality resources that will lead to providing support for both teachers and students. This section will provide a brief overview of approaches and strategies that benefit, and identify those that may not benefit the delivery of Aboriginal perspectives.

For a teacher, the confidence and comfort level decreases when there is an expectation to teach an unfamiliar concept, topic or subject (Butler, 2000). Butler cites Groome (1994), “Many teachers comment that they feel more comfortable engaging in Aboriginal content of the form, most commonly referred to as ‘traditional’ culture, rather than what are regarded as politically laden contemporary cultures” (p. 98). The perception is that pre-contact and traditional forms of Aboriginal history are fixed, therefore, more teachable. Butler also adds that the complexity of the topic for many teachers is increased with the language, traditions, customs, language diversity, and the contemporary urban-rural differences and challenges. Consequently, “in the search for the definitive [and fixed Aboriginal perspective] ... teachers often fall into the trap of

synthesizing Aboriginal cultural traits to form a generic Aboriginal culture in which central ... [Aboriginal] cultural traits are seen as desirable and appropriate for all Aboriginal people” (p. 98). A danger in teaching Aboriginal perspectives in this manner is that Aboriginal people are presented as “static, apolitical, ahistorical constructs” (p. 98). The evolution and adaptive nature of a culture and a people is ignored.

Butler (2000) identifies three ways in which teachers implement Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum and classroom programming: teacher use of Aboriginal life histories, Aboriginal speakers and Aboriginal education professionals, and the use of Aboriginal students. Each of these approaches can have issues. With Aboriginal life histories, teachers have to discern the quality of resource material and know how to interpret the readings and/or audio-visual material. Butler suggests using material that has been approved by credible educational and Aboriginal organizations. Bringing in Aboriginal peoples to share experiences and teach Aboriginal perspectives and content is perceived as most credible and is most accepted by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (p. 97). Through this approach, teachers are also learning; however, Butler cautions the transfer of teaching responsibility in relation of Aboriginal perspectives to the Aboriginal presenter. She warns, “Some teachers fail to engage with the spirit of policy requirements, consigning some Aboriginal aspects of education as outside their understanding or effort” (p. 97). In many cases, the already under-funded, understaffed, under-resourced and sometimes unrecognized Aboriginal support becomes ‘over-taxed’. The final approach, the utilization of Aboriginal students, is most problematic. This may be the only time that a student gets “singled-out” and perceived as the pseudo-expert, and they many not be comfortable with presenting personal experiences with their classmates. The degree of cultural and historical knowledge that students process vary, and this information may not meet the expectations of the teacher and the students – further increasing the risk of failure in the eyes of the student. The goal and major responsibility of educators is to make education responsive (Sapre, 2000, p. 304) and, in this case, culturally responsive.

From a review of research and literature, Cochran-Smith (1997) discovered that urban teachers who were ‘successful’ in a cross-cultural classroom:

1. enabled significant work and rigorous academic learning within groups of students who function as communities of learners;
2. constructed new knowledge with students by building on the knowledge, interests, cultural resources, and linguistic abilities students bring to school with them; and
3. made activism, power, and inequity explicit parts of the curriculum for students of all ages. (p. 49)

This approach to teaching demands that a teacher push both personal and professional boundaries.

Cochran-Smith (1997) highlighted that cross-cultural practice that promotes a community of learning is “closely linked with teachers’ high expectations for students and to teachers’ sense of personal and collective efficacy” (p. 49). Teachers’ expectations for learning and discovery are high for both themselves and for their students. In relation to the second point, “building the knowledge, interests, cultural resources, and linguistic abilities” that students bring to the classroom, Cochran-Smith notes that “...successful teaching of culturally diverse populations is supported when teachers acknowledge, value, and build on the cultural and linguistic resources as well as the interests and knowledge that students bring to school with them (Au & Jordan,

1982; Cazden & Mehan, 1989; Gay, 1995; Hollins, 1994; Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Mehan, Lintz, Okamoto, & Wills, 1995; Villegas, 1991; Zeichner, 1993)" (p. 52). On the contrary, "cross-cultural miscommunication is commonplace when teachers and students do not share the same language or cultural backgrounds (Health, 1983; Irvine, 1990; Michaels, 1981; Phillips, 1972) and that culturally congruent instruction and interactional styles have the potential to improve students' opportunities to learn and achieve (Au & Jordan, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Foster, 1994; Hollins, 1982; Moll & Diaz, 1987)" (Cochran-Smith, 1997, p. 52). In this respect, teaching is a continuous challenge because "teachers continually invent and reinvent both pedagogy and curriculum, co-constructing knowledge with students based on the cultural and linguistic resources students bring to school with them and on students' varying transactions with complex subject matter (Erickson 1986; Lieberman & Miller 1991; Lytle & Cochran-Smith 1992)" (Cochran-Smith, 1997). The challenge for educators continues as the author encourages them to "make activism, power and inequity explicit parts of the curriculum" (p. 37). Cochran-Smith states:

In the literature on teaching diverse populations, there is a strong, although not universal, argument for making issues of power and language, equity and inequity, access and learning opportunity, and race and racism explicit parts of the curriculum – part of what is "discussable" in schools and classrooms and part of what is modelled or demonstrated in teachers' work lives. Teaching that fosters critique of this kind is akin to "critical pedagogy" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Shor, 1980), "anti-racist" education (Sleeter, 1992; Tatum, 1992), and "multicultural and socially reconstructionist" teaching (Sleeter & Grant, 1987; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Although not synonymous, each of these approaches assumes that teachers themselves must work to challenge inequities (Giroux, 1985; Ladson-Billings, 1995) by teaching against the grain of what is taken for granted in school and classroom practice and in society as a whole (Cochran-Smith 1991). (1997, p. 55)

As in their personal and professional educational journeys, many teachers guide students beyond rote learning to realms of critical thinking that involves continuous learning, inquisitive inquiry and the courage to question, and when necessary, challenge traditional societal values and beliefs. This approach advocates for a theory-practice connection, a values-action relationship, a "walk the talk" stance, and as Fullan (as cited in Sparks) describes 'concepts and techniques' that utilize reflection:

[C]onceptions can be fostered, but they must be fostered through a socialization process that develops leaders as reflective practitioners. If leaders are taught techniques without conceptions, the techniques will fail. Techniques are tools that must serve a set of conceptual understandings. When conceptions and techniques go hand-in-hand, we create breakthroughs. (2003, p. 26)

When breakthroughs happen for teachers and for students, it is motivating and memorable.

Gilchrist (2005) discovered that the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives and content in classrooms varied, indicating that there are numerous approaches to infusing FNMI perspectives. Gilchrist noted:

One teacher was informal in her approach and she shared different perspectives...another teacher stated that the level and depth of integration changed with teaching experience. (2006, p. 32)



Whatever the teaching and learning strategy may be Kanu (2005) supports systematic and an integrated approach. Kanu insists:

Inclusion, however, has been interpreted and practiced by teachers as occasionally adding non-dominant cultural perspectives to the school curriculum, leading radical multicultural theorists to advocate for full integration (meaning infusion throughout the school curriculum) to support more fully the learning of non-dominant culture students and maximize their chances of school success (Banks, 1994; Gay, 2000). (p. 51)

Inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives should permeate the school culture and contribute to the positive climate that the school community feels on a daily basis. In this case, inclusion is a lifestyle, a way of being and doing in the classroom and throughout the school.

In their Australian study on programming aimed at engaging Aboriginal students, Lowe and Tassone (2001) identified three critical issues to success: greater understanding and recognition of the issues faced by Aboriginal students and communities is necessary; greater attention in curriculum development initiatives and in school programs for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students; and, successful implementation of programs is largely dependent on 'ownership' by school staff (pp. 12-13). As Fullan (1991) and this study supports, ultimately, the success of school change is dependent on the buy-in, implementation, and evaluation exercises of school staff and teachers. Patterson and Rolheiser (2004) also state, "When groups of teachers, working hand-in-hand with school administrators, commit to changing the culture in their schools, they get results" (p. 1).

The success of Aboriginal Perspectives in the Alberta Social Studies curriculum depends on the willingness of teachers, grades K-12, to develop and prepare their knowledge, skills and attitudes for the purpose of positively impacting their students. Although there are basic principles of Aboriginal perspectives, conceptual and themes of strategy, success also largely depends on 'praxis'; knowing how to bridge theory to practice which begins with "[g]oing public with questions, seeking help from colleagues, and opening up one's classroom to others to go against the norms of appropriate teaching behaviour" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 87, as cited in Cochran-Smith 1997, p. 37).

## **Conclusion**

When understanding Aboriginal Perspectives in relation to the new Social Studies curriculum in Alberta, it is important to gain understanding of the curriculum purposes, goals and objectives. In the beginning of this paper, an outline of statements related to Aboriginal/Indigenous Perspectives was provided, in order to emphasize the significant and pervasive scope of the topic. From here, the question became, "What is/are Aboriginal Perspective(s)?" To answer this question, the primary sources were Aboriginal authors. As some Indigenous authors stated, the philosophy and practice of Aboriginal Perspectives becomes challenging and somewhat destructive when another worldview is transfixed over top of it, when it is seen through another cultural lens. This experience becomes what Leroy Little Bear describes as "Jagged Worldviews Colliding". Ultimately, Aboriginal Perspectives are best understood and expressed by Aboriginal peoples themselves; therefore, efforts need to be made by educators to become increasingly inclusive, to incorporate authentic material on Aboriginal history and perspective, and to establish relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal leaders, educators, parents and

community members with the goal of enriching teacher and student learning on Aboriginal Perspectives.

Although there is no definitive definition of Aboriginal Perspectives, the concept embraces Indigenous epistemology and ontology – unique views on doing and being. Indigenous peoples have a different history and experience with learning and education.

Unlike Western perspectives, Indigenous educational and learning practices have a significant experiential and spiritual orientation, and Elders have a critical role in transferring vital cultural values predominantly through storytelling. Learning in this context is non-linear, individualized, and engaging as the student takes on an active role in determining the themes and life lessons from the stories that are told. Formal schooling was a more recent experience that was introduced by early missionaries and Europeans.

Along with the teaching of Aboriginal Perspectives came the importance of not only the knowledge and skill set of the teacher, but the attitude and the attribute development of the educator. The message that is highlighted in this section is: the manner and with what attitudes (directly or indirectly communicated to the students) that Aboriginal Perspectives are taught in the Social Studies curriculum does matter. More often, the cognitive rather than the affective domain is emphasized in the classroom. An element that resides in the affective domain is communication, where non-verbal communication is more dominant and just as ‘heard’ by students. Therefore, what are educators teaching and communicating explicitly and implicitly about Aboriginal peoples and their perspectives? As the literature in this report indicated, the basic assumptions, values and beliefs that are espoused by individuals determine action and behaviour. With this in mind, in teaching Aboriginal Perspectives, introspective personal and professional reflection is necessary to determine individual and societal beliefs about Aboriginal peoples, to determine the source of these beliefs and values, and to determine which beliefs need to be affirmed and which need to be challenged.

From the affective domain, the individual and collective reflection on Aboriginal Perspectives, the literature review shifted to emerging educational philosophies and strategies. The focus in this section was on culture, cultural sensitivity, cultural competency and culturally responsive teaching. The educational literature and quality research on diversity and Aboriginal education and leadership is increasing. The classroom and school practices and strategies that were suggested for teachers were valuable and numerous. Again, recurring themes emerged; some including: being intentional and strategic about change, learning and growth; being open to new learning and seeking credible Aboriginal resources, teachers and speakers; and being self-aware and culturally aware as a teacher. Overall, lifelong learning is encouraged for continued growth and understanding of authentic Aboriginal Perspectives.

The last two sections of this literature review delved into the foundational educational principles of Aboriginal Perspectives and the bridging of theory/concept to practice. In other words, how does one do what one knows? The educational principles are changing in Aboriginal education; through the insistence of Aboriginal peoples, there is a more inclusive approach to the planning, research, and implementation of policies that affect Aboriginal students. Aboriginal peoples are stepping into leadership roles and taking on decision-making responsibilities from the beginning rather than at the end of the processes. One such example

is the work being done by the Aboriginal Knowledge Network and the Canadian Council on Learning. This partnership has led to meaningful theoretical and practical work. The three Aboriginal models that have been created through strong national Aboriginal consultation can be utilized within and outside the classroom and in many different ways.

Finally, classroom practice is contextual, so there is no correct prescriptive method to teaching Aboriginal Perspectives. Meaningful learning happens when a teacher intimately knows himself/herself, and knows his/her students; where they come from and from what worldview they interpret their environment. Reaching this state of intimate understanding may require deep, second-order change processes. In this respect, second-order change constitutes the seeking of personal understanding in relation to the environment. This process of discovery is a courageous movement, a shift to a place below the surface, to a more protective place, a place where the affective domain resides, a place where values and beliefs evolve. It is in a sense, a vision quest. If conscious, deliberate changes happen for an educator at this level, the chances of sustainability for those changes increase; the desired changes are captured for the future. As the literature throughout this document supports, second-order, deep seated changes in both the cognitive (the way Aboriginal peoples are known) and affective (the beliefs and feelings towards Aboriginal peoples) domains are needed for meaningful and 'effective' teaching of Aboriginal Perspectives in the Alberta Social Studies curriculum; they are needed to perhaps address what the Elder indicated in the beginning of the document, to move towards "something more right" for Aboriginal students, for all students.

To what extent do teacher attitudes, norms, values, basic assumptions and behaviour influence authentic inclusion, infusion and embedding of Aboriginal perspectives in the Social Studies program? As the findings from this literature review reveal, the affective domain (i.e. teacher attitudes, norms, values, basic assumptions) directly influences the quality and degree of inclusion, infusion and embedding of Aboriginal perspectives in the Social Studies Program. This knowledge increases the importance for a balanced approach to the teaching and learning of Aboriginal Perspectives.

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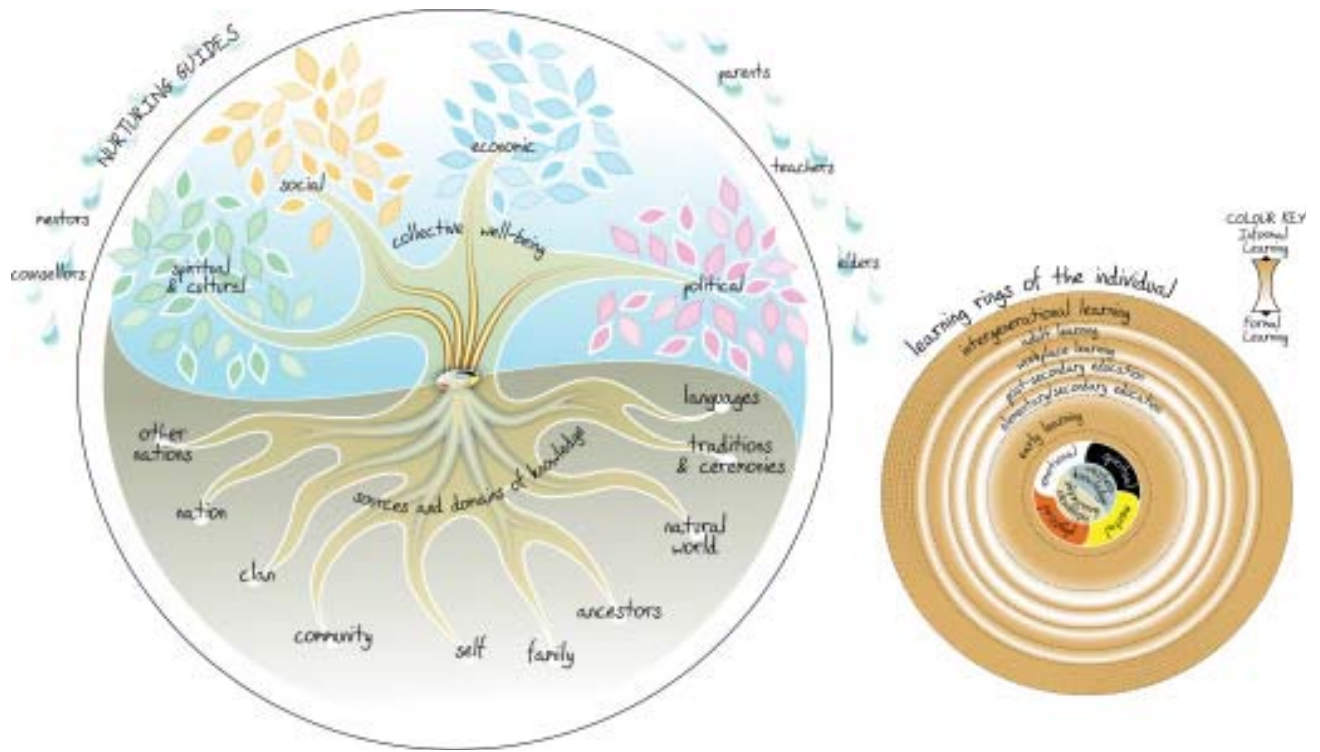
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# APPENDIX A

## First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model



(Capon, 2008, p. 63;

[http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/RedefiningSuccess/CCL\\_Learning\\_Model\\_FN.pdf](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/RedefiningSuccess/CCL_Learning_Model_FN.pdf))