

# **Nourishing the Learning Spirit: Coming To Know and Validating Knowledge: Foundational Insights on *Indian Control of Indian Education in Canada***

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In 1972 the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) issued a policy statement titled *Indian Control of Indian Education* to the Canadian government, proposing a change in the relationship of Status First Nation children and families with educational systems. The government accepted the policy in principle in 1973, and it may be understood as a tool to address the shortcomings of existing school systems. However, the practices of teachers in schools continue to focus on curriculum that reflects Canadian educational laws and norms. The focus on instruction in English and French literacy, numeracy, and citizenship contained in ideals of western economic and social development persists even though research shows that First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learners come to know and validate knowledge through nourishing the learning spirit. In this essay, I share foundational knowledge gleaned from one of the knowledge exchange, monitoring and reporting, and applied research activities of the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre: the Banff Dialogue, shedding light on the pedagogical and curricular goals outlined in the NIB's policy statement.

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## *Honoring Our Children*

In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB), now the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), issued a policy statement titled *Indian Control of Indian education* (hereafter ICIE), touted as “a blueprint for local control of education” (Grant, 1995, p. 209), partially in response to the Canadian government’s 1969 White Paper on Indian policy issued by federal Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Jean Chrétien. The White Paper proposed disestablishment of the Department of Indian Affairs and abolishment of all federal responsibilities, including education, and was in response to the agenda of integration in the education of First Nation children since the 1951 revisions to the Indian Act (Government of Canada, 1969; Miller, 2000; Haig-Brown, 2006). Chrétien accepted ICIE on behalf of the federal government in principle in 1973, which became “a major turning point in Native education in Canada” since “both governments and Native people themselves” gained control “on some issues of fundamental importance to Native students,” enabling the development of learning spaces in “a self-defined Native context” (Haig-Brown, 2006, pp. 131-132 & 160). This new policy enabled Status First Nation and Inuit to consider “alternatives to residential schools, federally administered day schools, and the public school system” (Haig-Brown, 2006, p. 136).

Since 1973, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit scholars and their allies have critiqued the existing systems of K-12 education while at the same time attempting to achieve the goals enumerated by the policy statement (Beaudin, 1994; Carr-Stewart, 2006; Charters-Voght, 1999; Haig-Brown, 1995; Ireland, 2009; Kirkness, 1999; Taylor, Crago, & McAlpine, 2001). Even though “since the early 1970s ... policy, practice, and funding changes to support the principles of Indian Control of Indian Education ... [have] been ... [discussed] in multiple forums, conferences, books, research, and dialogues ... [among] policy makers, stakeholders, professionals, and educators,” bands and provincially run schools that educate First Nation students continue to use provincially prescribed curricula (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2008, p. 2). Consequently, schools often “fail to empower the Native peoples in the education field” (Burns, 2000, p. 163). This shortcoming occurs even though for band schools, their “actual administration ... including ... curricular choices” is “the responsibility of the band concerned” (Haig-Brown, 2006, p. 133).

In this essay, I isolate the themes from the ICIE policy that deal with the foundational principles and practices of First Nation education and highlight the absence of discussion of foundations in literature on the policy. My focus then shifts to an investigation of spirituality within western and Indigenous contexts, privileging the paradigms of teaching and learning from Indigenous scholars. I then discuss the data generated at the 2007 Banff Dialogue: one of the knowledge exchange, applied research, and monitoring and reporting activities of the three year Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (AbLKC) project. I find that nourishing the learning spirit is the outcome of coming to know and validating knowledge and is foundational for First Nation education.

Although my paper is focused on the ICIE policy as it affects the learning of Status First Nation children, the foundations and practices shared at the Dialogue

are from First Nation, Métis, and Inuit scholars. Therefore, to be inclusive of all perspectives shared I refer to First Nations only when speaking directly on band-controlled and reserve schools, and schools attended off reserve by Status First Nation children and youth. However, when speaking on the learning processes of coming to know and validating knowledge as they affect nourishing the learning spirit, I refer to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit, the three peoples recognized in the 1982 Canadian Constitution as the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

### ***Indian Control of Indian Education***

Although a substantial body of literature on First Nation education policy has emerged since the achievement of ICIE (AFN, 1988, 2010; Beaudin, 1994; Binda, 1995; Binda & Nicol, 1999; Cannon, 1994; Carr-Stewart, 2006; Charters-Voght, 1999; Haig-Brown, 1995, 2006; Kirkness, 1985, 1999; Longboat, 1999; Paquette & Fallon, 2010), less is known of foundations of First Nation education, even though the ICIE policy mandates “a suitable philosophy of education based on Indian values” (NIB, 1972, p. 3). The Indian values are the means to enable “a child [to] ... learn ... the forces which shape him: the history of his people, their values and customs, their language” (NIB, 1972, p. 9). The result is a child who “know[s] himself or his potential as a human being” (NIB, 1972, p. 9).

ICIE was reaffirmed as a policy directive by the NIB’s successor organization, the AFN, in 1988 and 2010. In 2011, Deborah Jeffrey, head of British Columbia’s First Nations Education Steering Committee, “believes band-run schools are key to revitalizing aboriginal language and culture, and with them aboriginal aspirations” (as quoted in Moore, 2011, para. 29), and the policy “is [now] accepted as the norm” (Grant, 1995, p. 209) of Indigenous education. Since 1973, “locally controlled schools evolved ... rapidly and ... successfully” (Grant, 1995, p. 209). By 1984, “there were 187 [band] schools enrolling twenty-three percent of Native students” (Haig-Brown, 2006, p. 134) and in 2011, there were 520 schools under the jurisdiction of First Nation education authorities, with 5,000 students attending 130 schools in British Columbia (Moore, 2011). In 2010, the AFN reminded the Canadian government that it must “provid[e] ... education in a manner that affirms First Nations cultural identities, languages and values” (p. 9). However, despite almost 40 years of band-controlled schools in Canada, “the substance of Indian education remains in its formative stages” (Cannon, 1994, p. i) and therefore, there is a need “for a critical analysis of the ideas the phrase holds,” recognizing that “Indian ... education ... encompass[es] ... a realm of meanings and intents” (Haig-Brown, 2006, p. 136).

Kathleen Absolon (2011, p. 84) guides my understanding of ICIE, “A determination ... to stay congruent with culture, traditions, historicity, world-views, family and community ... that reflect an expression of self.” This essay departs from Absolon’s conceptualization of Indigenous research to examine foundational and practical knowledge of learning from mid-career and senior Aboriginal scholars in conversation who see practice through the theoretical lenses of nourishing the learning spirit. Nourishing the learning spirit is done through coming to know and validating knowledge processes.

## *Honoring Our Children*

### **Nourishing the learning spirit**

Within Indigenous conceptions of spirituality reside learners and teachers who are integrated people in “heart, mind, soul and body” (Kramer-Hamstra & Mitchell, 2012, p. 26). Spirit is also taken up in western education. In the United Kingdom (UK) context, reference is made to spiritual development within primary and secondary schools’ curricula (Adams, 2009). From curricular focus on spiritual development comes attention to relationships and belief, which are seen as cross-curricular (Barker & Floersch, 2010).

Cognate topics infused across the UK curriculum connected to spirituality and mentioned by the Office for Standards in Education and the Education (Schools) Act of 1992 include “identity, self-worth, personal insight, meaning, and purpose” (Adams, 2009, pp. 810-811). In the global north, there is mention of “wonderment” (Trousdaie, as quoted in Baumgartner & Buchanan, 2010, p. 90) along with “appreciation of the unknown ... [and] inquiry” (Baumgartner & Buchanan, 2010, p. 92). In Canada, scholars refer to “caring” (Rostant, 2012, p. 44) and “how one ought to live” (Keeney, 2012, p. 22). Christou (2012), speaking from “classical philosophy and early Christianity,” conceives of spirituality as a bridge “to liv[ing] ... well” (p. 55). The spiral through the above inventory of phenomena attached to spirituality is pupils’ ability to express such feelings.

Yet explicit discussion of spirituality as a foundation of teaching and learning is absent within western literature on spirit. Similarly, conversations on spirit neglect consideration of individuals’ inherent capacity to learn (Anuik & Gillies, 2012; Harri-Augstein, 1985). Barker and Floersch (2010) come close, identifying “spirituality as a way of knowing” (p. 357). Barlex (2007) suggests that knowing is powered by emotional commitment. Spontaneity ignites spirit in class. Rostant (2012, p. 44) believes that “whenever a lesson in any subject area drifts beyond content to questions about the meaning and purpose of life, that lesson has become spiritual” (see Aktamis & Ergin, 2008, esp. para. 47). Learners then participate “in the life of the subject” (Jonker, 2012, p. 16). For Adams (2009, p. 817), a spiritual moment occurs when children break into “a spontaneous silence” while learning. Anishinaabe Literacy Teacher Ningwakwe George (2010) identifies this occurrence as learning in the moment, as a being with one’s whole body, using the senses (see also Anuik & Battiste, 2008; Anuik & Gillies, 2012). For Baumgartner and Buchanan (2010), “Practices that address spirituality should be grounded in learning opportunities that arise naturally during the children’s day” (p. 91) and be done through exploration. Working definitions of spirituality require explicit attention to learning guided by spirit, which is the space that this investigation opens.

Indigenous and western concepts of spirituality deal with the role of teachers in nourishing the learning spirit. According to Peterson (2012, p. 37), citing Montessori Schools’ practices, teachers nourish learners in what is called the “second womb’ ... the immediate natural environment,” and children awake from there “contented, more social, more loving.” Rostant (2012, p. 43) advises that “the implementation of spirituality in the classroom is still being explored.” How spirituality may be a conduit for practice is dealt with in this essay through

the reflections of senior and mid-career Indigenous scholars in dialogue. The challenge now involves connecting ICIE to practice by infusing theory of spirit within literature and through dialogue.

### **The May 2007 Banff dialogue**

The Dialogue occurred on May 14-16, 2007 in Banff, Alberta, Canada, on Blackfoot Territory. Marie Battiste, Mi'kmaw educational scholar, then academic director of the Aboriginal Education Research Centre, co-director of the AblKC, and bundle lead of the AblKC's Animation Theme Bundle 2 (ATB 2), *Comprehending and Nourishing the Learning Spirit*, invited 15 First Nation, Métis, and Inuit scholars and practitioners involved in teaching and learning guided by spirit to this Dialogue on Aboriginal learning in Canada. The participants were mainly senior and mid-career scholars and practitioners who were invited by Battiste. Leroy Little Bear, Blackfoot professor of Native American Studies at the University of Lethbridge, moderated the discussion, which was as a large group and over three days. Little Bear encouraged the participants to let the dialogue be generative (see Ball & Pence, 2006), meaning that the themes emerged from the participants, and he synthesized the discussions at the end of each session. This way, there was no set agenda; participants were free to share their thoughts without being restricted by a preconceived agenda. The conversations were tape recorded, and I transcribed them. I wrote a report on the Dialogue (Anuik & Battiste, 2008), which is unpublished, and some quotations from the transcripts are cited as part of it. This chapter draws on passages from the unpublished report and from the original transcripts. It also builds on my prior scholarly work that investigates infusion of spirituality in university and college classes (Anuik & Gillies, 2012).

Spirituality emerged as a dominant theme and an ongoing and "all ways" process of coming to know and validating knowledge (Ball & Pence, 2006, p. 83). Collectively, the participants recognized that the most important theme in First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education was spirituality. The knowledge shared at Banff promised to push First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education in schools past the formative stages of ICIE by affirming spirit in students and teachers in K-12 schools. The contributions of the participants inform the policy's implementation in the domains of teaching and learning within First Nation, Métis, and Inuit schools in Canada.

The Dialogue unpacked the knowing and validating of spirit as it takes shape within First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities and tested how Indigenous scholars recognize spirit in learners (Adams, 2009) and animate it in schools' practices. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) and Kramer-Hamstra and Mitchell (2012) ask "where knowledge originates" (p. 27), and the scholars at the Dialogue addressed this question. They articulated "the spaces where voices and knowing reside but were never allowed to be heard" and by doing so, they are "creating space on how [to] come to know" and "searching for ways of knowing that wholistically include the spirit, heart, mind and body" (Absolon, 2011, p. 10). The participants share the "many pathways to knowledge" and draw on "Indigenous ways of searching for knowledge" (Absolon, 2011, p. 32).

## *Honoring Our Children*

The following is my attempt as a non-Aboriginal historian and former ATB 2 research assistant who worked under Battiste to shed light on how knowledge of the learning spirit may be gleaned to support the substance of ICIE. I seek to establish meaning from the practices shared by the participants. Following are promising practices to demonstrate how coming to know and validating knowledge happens and why it is crucial to nourishing the learning spirit.

### **Coming to know**

For learners, coming to know is lifelong and ongoing. The question, then, is, according to George, “How do we, as beings, come to know?” George suggested that knowing is always in “the present,” and Laara Fitznor, of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, adds that coming to know is “the gift of the moment” and is accomplished by assessing oneself “in a holistic fashion,” according to Rita Bouvier, Métis. Coming to know for Battiste involves “habitual thinking and being.” It is often an indication of “something that is already in us” (S’ak’ej Henderson, Bear Clan of the Chickasaw Nation and Cheyenne Tribe).

Little Bear referred to the tacit infrastructure, a term coined by physicist David Bohm (1987)—it is like an ozone layer surrounding humans and governing humans’ conduct. Little Bear went on to suggest that children are born into a tacit infrastructure, and schools reinforce it. Since the tacit infrastructure is carried through language, it can restrain learners because it takes the form of a set of ideas and traditions that hold people in a society together, usually cognitively (see also Battiste, 1986). And the provincially prescribed curricula ensure its stability. For Little Bear, “In many ways those tacit infrastructures that we carry around many times end up limiting and in some ways prohibiting us from exploring ideas.” Thus participants in the Dialogue agreed that there are few spaces in modern educational systems where First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learners come “thinking of themselves as beings.” The challenge in modern education is that teachers are less interested in helping students come to know and more interested in “teaching them that the only things worth knowing are inherited from somewhere else” (George, as quoted in Anuik & Gillies, 2012, p. 65) because knowledge is only information that can “be separated from the norm” (unidentified participant). Therefore, what “you know” is not worth understanding (unidentified participant), and learners do not often have the chance “to take ideas ... and play around with them ... turn them around and see how they look from different perspectives, from different angles” (Little Bear).

The consensus reached among participants was that to connect successfully with learners, teachers have to form relationships with community members and must come to know and respect the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit tacit infrastructures that learners access prior to and during their participation in school. For Janet Smylie, Métis, “[T]he tacit” infrastructures exist but must be identified by “local understandings ... essential to Indigenous peoples ... language carries tacit infrastructure.” There is a system where learners come to know prior to coming into their physical bodies. There was agreement among Dialogue participants

who identified the systems in First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities and how they operate to guide learners.

Battiste, referring to Sauleaux Elder Dr. Danny Musqua's teachings (see Knight, 2007), proposed that "we come into this world ... through six stages and then on the seventh stage we enter this body. Those spirits that travelled with us through those other six stages continue on with us into this world." At birth, the families in the community "start attaching meaning" (Smylie, as quoted in Anuik & Battiste, 2008, p. 12) to connect babies "to other people around" (Little Bear, as quoted in Anuik & Battiste, 2008, p. 13). Therefore, how do community members facilitate the process of learners coming to know?

Following the birth of a child, it is the responsibility of community members who train learners "in the phenomenology to see the gifts... [T]he capacity to recognize ... gift[s]" (Little Bear) that enable children and youth in coming to know. Gifts are seen through stories, songs, and ceremonies (Keith Goulet, Cree Métis), infused with a consciousness that enables "knowing" to drop "into us at different times of our lives" (Vicki Kelly, as quoted in Anuik & Gillies, 2012, p. 74). Thus community members and learners are in relationships, sharing stories that enable learners to come to know lessons, and Bouvier demonstrated how the senses are put into operation to facilitate the process of coming to know,

Being taught patience (i.e., not to speak when the Elders were visiting), listening, learning; learning from listening, learning to observe very carefully, and new experiences. I was a helper, building nets and making soap, doing as a means to learn skills (i.e., checking on snares in the winter and watching for wolves) and so there were all of these disciplines that one was taught.

Therefore, learners, upon birth, are drawn into relationships that enable them to come to know the tacit infrastructures or societal structures that contribute to their stability as individuals.

Learners address questions and problems through consultation in talking circles:

[E]veryone speaks to the concern, and the talk goes round and round until everybody has had their say, and there is no more. At the end of those rounds, however many rounds there may be, the spokesperson eventually comes out and says, 'Okay,' and basically tells the person with the concern, 'Okay, you have heard the people speak, here is what they said, now take what they have said to resolve your problem, your concern.' ... [T]he person with the concern will just sit there and listen, he never talks. (Little Bear, as quoted in Anuik & Gillies, 2012, p. 70)

In Cree, it is "teach[ing] interactively ... to help and support somebody" (Little Bear).

In their early lives, learners become part of a rich tacit infrastructure that has been designed to facilitate their coming to know as beings. The challenge for

## *Honoring Our Children*

teachers in modern schools is to connect the wisdom of communities with the modern curriculum that is designed currently to train learners to become citizens of 21st-century Canada. How do they join “relationship and community ... with the vowel and the fraction” (Nancy Cooper, as quoted in Anuik & Battiste, 2008, p. 14) and continue to facilitate learners’ coming to know themselves as First Nation, Métis, and Inuit and Canadian? George believes that teachers “are trying to draw out or ... honour that which is already there.” Teachers must be mindful that the process to drawing out learners’ gifts is already happening in the community, and Fitznor sees the gifts as “bundles inside of us.” Ideally, for Fitznor, teachers are “unfolding the layers ... to get to the learning bundles.”

Vicki Kelly believes that space must be opened in K-12 schools to explore coming to know which is, for her, “attempting to know beyond the forms to that which sounds in the knowing.” However, she notes, “It is hard to give the attention ... to things that are invisible in ourselves and know them as they take shape.” The form is the actual curriculum and the schoolwork that is expected of students. First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learners’ languages represent worldviews and epistemologies, a process of coming to know through moving “between forms of [knowledge],” trying “to hear that which is beyond the form.” Therefore, in the classroom, teachers come to know by appreciating “the knowing before it takes shape.... We know the sense of thought before we can actually articulate what we know” in a classroom assignment and on a test (Kelly). The shape is the product, the sharing of knowledge, and its packaging in the curriculum. Consequently, before knowledge may be shared, teachers need to examine critically the process of coming to know because “knowledge is an experience ... [and is] very, very different” from knowledge as a product (Kelly). There is a need to move emphasis away from the product, the words on the page, for example. Coming to know “is behind the form or within the form” (Kelly), and the form is the knowledge as it is constructed in the curriculum and the assignments that students produce to meet the standards of the school system. This space preceding the shape is a “whirlwind,” and there is a need to “connect with that whirlwind ... connect with that energy” (Henderson). And then, “People [must] learn to trust themselves as the carriers of knowledge and the producers of knowledge” (Fitznor) and give themselves credit for holding this knowledge.

A series of practice-based anecdotes illustrate the philosophy that sustains learning about the “whirlwind” behind the shaping of knowledge. One participant recalls being,

in one of the first high schools to have an Elders program ... We went on canoe trips; we had a three-day alone period; and every student in that school took that course as an option, along with ... 40 hours of community service. When I meet people from my past, the most central topic that we discuss is Elders: our experiences with working in a group; helping each other out; navigating hardship; coming to our limits; and finding a way to dig deep enough so that we can still go on.

The challenge for educators is to build an atmosphere that joins learners with knowledge, a connection that links humans and knowing together. Like Bouvier, the following participant draws on her practice to illustrate how the senses enable coming to know,

When I facilitate camps, and we go on canoe trips, there is a point when the students are canoeing and they stop and look and recognize that they are in control of their own direction.... [T]hey are out in the boat by themselves, and my job is to get students out on the boat by themselves.

Like the adults in communities, teachers “facilitate coming to know” (Vivian Ayoungman, Siksika Nation). For Little Bear, teachers are “catalyst[s] ... stimulating ... students.”

### **Validating knowledge**

[I]n each of us there is a foundational base that we use to relate to other people, to relate to the world out there, to relate to the environment.... [F]rom a Blackfoot point of view. If I said something and the other person that I am talking to asks me: ‘how do you know?’ In my Blackfoot worldview what criteria do I use to say what I said is true and that this is something that I can move forward with? (Leroy Little Bear)

Little Bear captures the substantial questions that concern this section, asking how traditionally and in modern society people validate what they know? He goes on to ask: “how do we validate that intake,” or coming to know, as “knowledge to the point where we can say, ‘I know ... it’s true.’” The experience and validation of knowing are interlinked, braided because traditionally “people relied on experiential validation, so experience was important” (Smylie).

In communities, validation occurs at the beginning of life on Earth. Around babies, people “would make ... noises ... they would spontaneously or very consciously start singing lullabies. The lullabies were always about the baby. It was a validation process ... for the babies” (Little Bear), becoming the touchstone to knowing to whom one belongs: the parents, family, community, and nation. The validation undertaken as a child was, for Little Bear, part of instruction in “how to stand with people.” Among Inuit, it began with naming, “[T]he very first ... literacy,” and the “way in which people were recognized in terms of being human.” Then, Inuit babies learned “place names,” because “knowing the place names and these places knowing you” was the second most important literacy (Cooper, as quoted in Anuik & Battiste, 2008, p. 12).

After recognition of their places in communities, learners set out on their own experiences of coming to know and validating the knowledge so that “it is important” (Fitznor). Validating as an experience occurs as a,

## *Honoring Our Children*

child sets out to walk ... test[ing] various feelings of walking, holding on to things, crawling and crawling with one leg up and various things until eventually they get to ... walking.... Experiences are repeating themselves and when you hear the repetitions; you are hearing the reality of the patterns that learning creates. (Marie Battiste)

Each time learners search for truth in their minds, uncovering “what it is that you could sort of call on to assist you” (Bouvier, as quoted in Anuik & Battiste, 2008, p. 17) to find validation and make meaning and then storing the information as truth to draw on in later experiences. The experience itself is the validation of memory, and the memory is preserved, through repetition, on what George calls the Tree of Knowledge, the point where knowledge is accessed. And coming to know and validating knowledge nourish the tree.

For S’ak’ej Henderson, member of the Bear Clan of the Chickasaw Nation and Cheyenne Tribe, teachings from a vision quest enable learners to contribute knowledge for communities to validate. Among Cheyenne and Dakota, “a vision” from a vision quest,

does not have any power until ... perform[ed] ceremonially for all the people ... [prior to that] it is just a personal force of relationship with the creation ... you put it out there for the entire community to enjoy, to witness, and that’s a nourishing form of validation. (Henderson, as quoted in Anuik & Battiste, 2008, p. 28)

Therefore, coming to know is validated through an appreciation of knowledge working and helping the community. Parents, families, and community support learners to engage new situations while also contributing to the shared collective consciousness.

Processes of validation operate in K-12 schools, but the format does not complement validation processes for learners coming to know, partly because of a shift in focus, from the individual as responsible for collective well-being through the pursuit of knowledge to the individual as isolated from the family and community, accumulating others’ knowledge that is not always for the benefit of the community,

[T]hey [teachers] are always testing you to see if you have done what they have told you.... [K]nowledge [becomes] punishment or benefit. If I get a real good grade, they expect me to get a real good grade the next time, the next time, the next time. If I do not get a good grade then their expectations keep dropping till I drop out of school.... If you do as they say, they will give you benefits. If you start resisting and saying, ‘[W]ell, I am different,’ then they will start punishing, and that is ... formal education. (Henderson)

Testing in modern schools is training “people to attach a patterned meaning ... [a] validation of others within one worldview” (Smylie). The objective of testing in schools then deviates from coming to know, where people accept knowledge as “a gift.... [B]ut do not ask proof of what people experience” (Little Bear). For George, testing takes away the opportunity for learners “to be able to learn in the moment, be there with ... [the] whole body.... [L]earn as a being, rather than ... learning as a practice of inheriting something, and [the] language to talk about it” (as quoted in Anuik & Battiste, 2008, p. 16). As a literacy teacher in adult basic education classes, George requires learners in her classes to stop measuring themselves against the standards of others, especially the chapters of the textbook, and to consider instead “the changes in their lives, their awareness of themselves” (as quoted in Anuik & Battiste, 2008, p. 24). For George, coming to know and validating knowledge is achieved by getting “learners to realize their purpose for being here; their gifts; and how they can recognize and nurture those gifts and go on and live those gifts.”

First Nation, Métis, and Inuit educators seek to “validate that which is human” in the learner (Little Bear, as quoted in Anuik & Gillies, 2012, p. 73). However, the differences between Aboriginal education and modern schooling may be reconciled. Bouvier suggests that schools “strengthen ... the community” and validate “needs and aspirations of ... communities.” As a teacher educator, Bouvier asks teacher candidates “to assess themselves” as beings, “in a holistic fashion,” rating themselves, “their well-being,” for example: “on a scale of one to ten ... on every quadrant of the Medicine Wheel.” Goulet agrees, recommending that educators “identify their [communities’] scientific knowledge and its effect in the community (wind, water, moons).” Infusing community knowledge in school helps learners to check “credibility” and validate their communities’ knowledge (Little Bear). Such a promising practice also helps teachers to inspire students to connect with the collective consciousness that is shared among their families and communities and to judge what is true in the modern curriculum.

Teachers may consider validation of knowledge as “an experience” or a learning in the moment, when an “a-ha” moment comes. It is the “a-ha” moment that brings the product, the knowledge, to the knower, the human (Kelly). It is the recognition that “hey! This is something that I can base my thoughts on, my actions on, and so on.” It is saying, “I know, and it went to the word experience.... I know it because I experienced it.” Knowing is in the curriculum guide and the community, “[B]ut the knowing is so different” as “you listen to the story again” and again because you experience it (Kelly).

However, coming to know and validating knowledge as First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people in concert with communities has been disrupted by colonization. Fitznor says that in Cree territory in northern Manitoba, the Anglican Church, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, heavily influenced Cree spirituality. Therefore, for teachers to validate learners’ knowledge requires recognition not only of the history of colonization but also to “understand that so many ... people are displaced” and need to be reconnected to the traditional ways of coming to know and validating knowledge.

## *Honoring Our Children*

### **Discussion**

The ICIE policy builds on communities and teachers providing the opportunity for children “to learn the forces which shape” them: “the history ... values and customs ... [and] language”; and learners knowing themselves and their “potential as ... human being[s]” (NIB, 1972, p. 9). The capacity to learn, understood as nourishing the learning spirit, exists among First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learners in multiple contexts in communities and schools. The forces that shape learners are coming to know and validating knowledge.

Nourishing the learning spirit may be thought of as awakening to coming to know and validating knowledge or “to awaken ([become] aware) to ... meaning,” according to Smylie. Battiste teaches,

Our learning comes from experience, stories, relationships, what others have told us. We have to, in our pedagogy ... use those tools to help others ... see that their experiences are things from which they can learn from as well as learn from others who told them. (as quoted in Anuik & Battiste, 2008, p. 15)

She argues that coming to know is “valuation ... together with validation,” acceptance that translates into wisdom, resulting in a profound connection of “words and thoughts.” There is “an infusion” and as learners come to know and validate knowledge, they are “constantly being infused.” There is “coherence” because there is a capacity to learn, and coming to know; validating knowledge; forming wisdom; and honing intuition are parts of the infusion that keeps coming to know and validating knowledge going and nourishes the learning spirit, often through states of consciousness and unconsciousness.

Fitznor suggests that nurturing may be better than validating to describe how learners make meaning in the moment. She sees her practice as a post-secondary educator as “nurturing ... learning ... nurturing children... Nurturing interdependence so that you will know how to look after your needs and relate to people.” Referring again to a Dialogue participant’s practice on student canoe trips, teachers “are creating ... circumstances in the communities so that ... children may nourish their learning spirits.”

The consensus reached among Dialogue participants was that learners come to know as whole beings in the present, and validation is ongoing. The challenge is to reconcile modern schools with the foundational knowledge of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learners and teachers. To recognize that nourishing the learning spirit is the result of a lifelong process of coming to know and validating knowledge. First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learners “walk in two worlds,” the modern schools and the traditional ways of knowing, but often do not have a choice and chance to reconcile the two worlds in the formal system of education, despite the acceptance by the Canadian government of the ICIE policy (Kelly). This contradiction happens because “the state interferes” as learners are coming to know and validating knowledge by imposing in schools its “own cultural construction of childhood” (Fitznor).

Coming to know and validating knowledge inform nourishing the learning spirit. The thread sewing the Dialogue together is learning in the moment, coming to know and validating knowledge being the parts.

More explicitly, it is employing all the senses (at the moment), being in relationship to place (natural surroundings and ‘life’ around), and being in relationship with family and community—ultimately to all life that you can see (touch, feel, or imagine) and can’t see (touch, feel, imagine), yet. (R. Bouvier, personal communication, September 18, 2011)

For Kelly, nurturing the capacities of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students to learn is literacy on the same standing as English and French literacy and it “depends on experience (i.e., speaking, listening, hearing). This way of nurturing these capacities in the human being so that they are able to make meaning... [H]onouring people observing, doing, thinking, reflecting.” For Henderson, education is “therapeutic ... [because it is dedicated to] finding those gifts.” Nourishing the learning spirit is the theory to animate ICIE in practice.

The AFN’s 2010 renewal of ICIE is a commitment to recognizing the directive to institutions “to create grounded cultural constructions” (Fitznor). Space needs also to continue to be opened in all schools to recognize the “living process of knowing” and “honour this process in learning,” the process before the shape or the product and the process behind the products (Kelly). The objective continues: the modern and First Nation, Métis, and Inuit processes of coming to know and validating knowledge in nourishing the learning spirit may be joined, and children may come to understand “the forces which shape [them] ... the history of ... [their] people, their values and customs, their language ... [and] potential as ... human being[s]” (NIB, 1972, p. 9).

## **Conclusion**

The 1973 acceptance of the NIB’s ICIE policy by the Canadian government restored control of First Nation education to First Nation people in principle. In the years that followed, Indigenous scholars and their allies dedicated their investigations to understanding the policy’s implementation in First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education in Canada. The participants in the Banff Dialogue recognized that administrative advances in First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education must be accompanied by changes to the foundations that support the delivery of education. They suggested that to come to know and validate the foundational principle of holism in which spirituality is the bedrock nourishes the learning spirit. Learners come to know their gifts and abilities. Teachers are responsible for validation of emerging knowledge, the outcome of interaction with families, communities, and places. Nourishing the learning spirit is the power behind a journey of lifelong learning. Children’s education must be shaped by teachers who guide learners to come to know and validate the values, languages, and principles shared by communities.

## *Honoring Our Children*

It is in the early spirit journey when the spirit, embodied with knowledge of its purpose and gifts from the Creator, joins with the body, mind, and emotions to become one on an Earthwalk (George, 2010). First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities and families support nourishment of the learning spirit by emphasis on community knowledge to strengthen the spirit's integrity and purpose. The practitioners at the Banff Dialogue spoke of the trauma that has been the outcome of colonization and its effect on the learning spirit. Therefore, control of education means understanding how trauma stymies learning and how learners may peel away the layers of oppression; let their spirits out to shine; and reconnect to the gifts bestowed upon them by the Creator. This way, learning environments empower First Nation, Métis, and Inuit and facilitate education that meets the standards set by ICIE.

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