

# Nourishing the Learning Spirit: Elder's Dialogue

March 26 – 29, 2008



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***Nourishing the Learning Spirit: Elder's Dialogue  
is a collaborative effort of***

**The Office of the Treaty Commissioner**



**Ministry of  
Education**

**The Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre**



**Canadian Council on Learning  
Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre**



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**The Aboriginal Education Research Centre**



**First Nations and Adult Higher Education Consortium**



## Key Participants

- Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre
- Office of the Treaty Commissioner
- University of Saskatchewan / Aboriginal Education Research Centre
  - Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (ABLKC), Canadian Council on Learning
    - ABLKC Animation Theme Bundle - Nourishing the Learning Spirit Project Team: led by Dr. Marie Battiste, Nourishing the Learning Spirit is one of six thematic working groups operating within the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre. The current members include: Leroy Littlebear, Amethyst First Rider, Barbara Fraser, Helen McPhadden, Barbara Lavallee, Elder Danny Musqua, Sakej Henderson, Leona Makokis, Vince Steinhauer, Susan Yantz, and Harry Lafond.

### Principal Investigator:

**Dr. Marie Battiste**, Professor in Educational Foundations, College of Education, Academic Director of the Aboriginal Education Research Centre, U of S, and Co-Director of the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, U of S is the expert scholarly resource in the oversight and support in this research and writing of the final documents. She is acknowledged nationally and internationally as an expert in Aboriginal educational theory and has her doctorate degree focusing on Mi'kmaw literacy. Dr. Battiste has published numerous books and articles on traditional Indigenous education, and was recognized with the Distinguished Researcher Award for the University of Saskatchewan in 2004. In 2006, she was elected as a member of the Executive Committee of the Canadian Commission for the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In 2008, Dr. Battiste received the National Aboriginal Achievement Award in the field of education.

**Yvonne Vizina**, Associate Director, Aboriginal Education Research Centre, U of S, serves as project coordinator and research assistant for this project.

**Judy Bear**, Sweetgrass First Nation assisted with coordination and facilitation of the female Elders before and during the event. Judy is a respected member of the First Nations community and was recommended for this role by the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre.

**Winston Walkingbear**, Director of Cultural Resource Development, Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre assisted with project coordination and facilitation of the male Elders before and during the event. Winston also provided advice regarding traditional First Nation ethical protocols.

**Regina Shingoose** of the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, and **Vivian Stoney** assisted with Nakwe language translation. **Allan Adam**, audio visual technician was retained to audio record the event, manage a/v equipment and assist with D ne language translation. Winston Walkingbear and Judy Bear assisted with Cree language translation during the event. **Darryl Chamakese** served as video camera operator.

**Elders:**

Jerome Tootoosis, Poundmaker First Nation, Cree  
 Patrick Tootoosis, Poundmaker First Nation, Cree  
 Patrick Robillard, Prince Albert (Stoney Rapids / Fond du Lac), Dene  
 Albert Mooswa, Moosomin First Nation, Cree  
 Leon Moberly, Buffalo Narrows, D ne  
 Dolly Neapetung, Yellowquill First Nation, Nakwe  
 Mary Jane Stoney, Yellowquill First Nation, Nakwe  
 Cecile Albert, Sweetgrass First Nation, Cree  
 Nellie Squirrel, Yellowquill First Nation, Nakwe

**Ceremonial Assistance:** Glen Cantre, Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation assisted with the pipe ceremonies, feast and smudging. Wesley Thomas also assisted with the ceremonies.

**Witness Participants:** Susan Yantz, Malvina Iron, Wesley Thomas and Yvonne Vizina.

The full list of attendants was not established with finality until the event started. Tentative lists were created and honouraria were generated by SICC, however a number of factors contributed to uncertainty around planning. Some of the major factors included:

- U of S ethics approval had to be obtained before any formal information or invitations for *Nourishing the Learning Spirit: Elder's Dialogue* could be distributed. Providing the information only verbally to Elders was insufficient. Elders have become used to being provided with agendas and event details so they can decide whether or not they will participate.
- The Assembly of First Nations and INAC scheduled a conference on Treaties in Saskatoon on March 26 & 27 which meant that some Elders would be called by their Bands to attend that event and not be available for our event.
- Elder health must always be taken into account. Some Elders responded that they were uncertain if they would be feeling well enough to travel a long distance or attend a long event.
- Some Elders required helpers and drivers to attend. If they were unable to have someone help them in this regard they would be unable to attend. Car trouble also emerged as a factor, however in that case the Elders were picked up in time.
- The death of an Elder from Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation meant some of the participants did not attend. As well, the death of a member of the Sweetgrass First Nation, the home community of the facilitator and most senior woman elder, meant a hardship on them during the event.
- The Inn locked the door at 9pm and one Witness Participant was unable to get into the building & had to leave town to find other accommodations.

## Location of Event

Early in the project development, the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre representatives suggested that the event be held away from the city in a more traditional venue. SICC explored a variety of possibilities on reserve, taking time to approach Band Councils and explain the project. Ultimately, it was decided to host the event at the Loon Lake School to ensure some basic services for Elders. Accommodations were booked at the Lakeview Inn in Loon Lake.

Last minute changes in meeting plans redirected the group to the 'Elders Lodge' on the reserve. The change was necessitated by the need for the school for a wake following the death of Elder Simon Kytwayhat, a member of the Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation. It also meant that certain participants from Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation would not be attending with us, and welcoming remarks from the community were not possible as officials were tending to funeral arrangements.

An opening pipe ceremony and feast was hosted at the gym on the reserve. Women honoured the ceremony by wearing skirts. Some had blankets to sit on and chairs were also provided. Traditional food was served including fish, soup with dry meat, moosemeat, potatoes, sausage, bannock, rice, fruit, cookies, tea and juice. Everyone took home the food they could not finish eating. This is a good reminder to bring personal containers always when attending feasts. The feast ended after supper and it was decided to begin the discussions in the morning.

The Elder's Lodge was comfortable, set among the trees where it was peaceful. Tables were set up on either side of the room with women on one side and men on the other. The facilitators sat at one end of the room and the video camera was run from the other end of the room. The audio/visual technician had his equipment set up on tables behind the male Elders. Each table was equipped with microphones on stands and headsets for simultaneous translation. Facilitators also had a floor microphone. A 'fireplace' provided heat to the room which was quite warm. The final three pipe ceremonies were held in this building. Helpers brought water and a coffee machine. Coffee break supplies were brought from Saskatoon. Caterers brought hot food for lunches and supper. Helpers kept a fire burning outside the Lodge during the Elder's Dialogue session, which provided a gathering place when people wanted to go outside for awhile. Although end of March, the temperature outside was still quite chilly being just below freezing about -1 Celsius. Outhouses completed the rustic experience.

## Research Process

**Methodology and Methods:** This knowledge gathering project applied an Indigenous research methodology honouring traditional protocols of prayer, tobacco, food, relating, and gifting as ways to demonstrate intention and acceptance of the knowledge gathering and giving. The research method employed a roundtable discussion format with participants facilitated in a culturally sensitive manner. This included such things as respectful and attentive listening and sufficient time provided for the Elder to gather thoughts and express those thoughts. Culturally sensitive facilitation also included a men's discussion circle and a women's discussion circle, as well as whole group discussions. Witness participants were asked to write their reflective responses to the interview questions throughout the event and in the evenings. Elders and witness participants were available for interview for the video documentary utilizing the established research questions.

**Ethical Considerations:** The research project respected local community protocols of place as well as ethical advice from the Tri-Council Policy Statement section governing research involving Aboriginal Peoples. The U of S developed and submitted a research ethics proposal to the Ethics Office in this regard. A copy of the approved Consent Package is included in Appendix I. Participants provided written and witnessed consent for discussion text and audio-visual media. A number of Elders also conveyed in English and in their respective language that they trusted we (researcher team) would use the information they provided in a good way. This is a traditional form of consent and carries a significant responsibility in being answerable back to the individuals and communities involved in the research.

**Research Plan:** It was agreed by the research team that an individual(s) identified by the Aboriginal community would be appropriate to facilitate a dialogue session among male and female Elders using the established research questions. Researchers agreed to collect and analyze the 'witness participant' narratives, consider lessons learned from the event itself, and prepare a final report responding to the research questions of the study. A finished audio / visual recording would only be targeted for completion in 2008-2009 as it was recognized that significant time would be required for editing. This will require development of a new project proposal to continue this work. For the purpose of this research project with a target completion date of March 31, 2008, the research team collected raw video footage, and is working to produce a series of smaller vignettes (less than five minutes in length) for posting on the internet.



## Elder Research Questions (posed to Elders for roundtable discussion)

1. How do Elders understand a lifelong learning journey with learning spirit(s)?
2. What are the main influences in a person's learning path?
  - Who or what nourishes the learning spirit? (*teachers? Family members? Self? Others?*)
  - How does where and how you live influence or affect the learning spirit? (*School? Community? Making a living on the land?*)
  - How is the learning spirit nourished? (*family influence? Naming? Ceremonies?*)
  - Why is it important to nourish the learning spirit? (*what happens when we don't?*)
3. What are the greatest influences and processes for nourishing the learning spirit?
4. Where have you witnessed effective Aboriginal Learning (*programs / practices / learning events*)?
5. What makes you think this was effective/successful (evidence/outcomes)?
6. What do you think are the life-giving learning forces for the successes you have witnessed?

## Witness Participant Questions (responded to in written form)

1. Describe important stages in Elder's learning journey. What has inspired them?
2. How would you describe your understanding of the meaning of learning spirit?
3. How have these characterizations of a learning path resonated with you in terms of your own learning journey?
4. What do you think is needed to nourish your learning spirit? What was missing in your past journey? How could this be different for future generations?
5. What impact have the Elder's teachings had on your life path and your learning? If these teachings were more widely known, how might these teachings impact
  - Individuals?
  - Families?
  - Communities?
  - Nations?
  - Canada?
6. What other comments would you add about this experience?



## Event Timelines

The *Nourishing the Learning Spirit: Elder's Dialogue* was scheduled to take place **Wednesday, March 26, 2008 through Saturday March 29, 2008**. Ethics approval was received March 25, 2008. The feast was confirmed on Tuesday March 25, 2008 for 3pm on March 26, 2008. Since the venue was unknown it was decided to meet at the Lakeview Inn and proceed together from there. A message would be left for late arrivers. Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation is approximately 3 ½ hours northwest of Saskatoon so it was felt that participants would travel Wednesday. The passing of the local Elder occurred early Wednesday morning, so it was not known until participants arrived in Loon Lake. Winston Walkingbear had been at the hospital in Saskatoon the night before and spoke with the Elder's wife who conveyed that what we were doing was her husband's life work and that we should proceed until the burial day on Friday. She asked that we not work through the burial day. A death at Sweetgrass First Nation was learned of on Thursday afternoon. By late in the day, it was decided that we would bring the dialogue session to a conclusion on Friday with closing comments and pipe ceremony. This was complete about 2:30pm. People were able to return home or attend funerals.

Accommodations had not been planned for Elders for Friday night originally, but since some had travelled significant distances, they would have required hotel rooms if we had worked the whole day. The time set for witness participant and facilitator debriefing on Saturday morning was not able to be carried out. Instead that time was used for event report preparation. It became obvious that it was unreasonable to have witness participants complete their journals at the event as people were exhausted after the many hours of dialogue & ceremony. It was suggested that they provide their journals early in the week to the Research Assistant.

## Event Details

*Nourishing the Learning Spirit: Elder's Dialogue* provided an opportunity to gather together male and female Elders from diverse language groups to talk about the concepts of lifelong learning, the learning spirit and nourishing the learning spirit.

In the spirit of relationship-building, the University of Saskatchewan approached the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre about the opportunity to partner on the event. Over the next few weeks, meetings were held to discuss the concept of Nourishing the Learning Spirit and how a gathering for an event structured around this idea might be carried out. Proposals were drafted, discussed and redrafted. Technical details began to take shape and a basic budget was sketched out. An ethics proposal was prepared and submitted to the U of S Behavioural Research Ethics Board for consideration.

The technical details of this event may seem trivial or out of context in this report, but important lessons were learned and should be taken into consideration as part of the greater picture of this event. This became an opportunity for two quite different learning institutions to work together and contribute to the respective "institutional learning spirit" based on lessons learned about how each organization did business and managed relationships.

During the process of developing a proposal, discussions were also held with the Office of the Treaty Commissioner and the possibility of their partnership and collaboration on this event. The OTC indicated that a major part of their involvement was to gather information that would contribute to having a more traditional approach to their own administrative systems and strategic planning. The event now had three major organizations supporting its goals and outcomes: The University of Saskatchewan, The Office of the Treaty Commissioner and the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre.

**Vision:** To explore the impact of Elder's teachings on learners in a Nourishing the Learning Spirit dialogue session.

**Scope:** This project was designed to bring together a selected group of Aboriginal Elders, identified as having a willingness to discuss the concept of Nourishing the Learning Spirit. The dialogue session will contribute to national research conducted through the Canadian Council on Learning: Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre. A variety of individuals, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, from various walks of life, ages, male and female, were asked to attend as 'witness participants' to listen to the Elder's dialogue and respond to defined research questions in the form of a written personal narrative at the event. With Elder consent, the event was video and audio recorded and individual interviews conducted. With witness participant consent, interview reflections will constitute a conclusion to the video documentary. This event and research is about the experience of 'doing' and 'learning', rather than on what one 'knows'. It is about the learning process.



**Objectives:** This dialogue session was designed to:

1. Provide a forum for Aboriginal Elders to share their perspectives regarding the concept of Nourishing the Learning Spirit in order to understand learning from within cultural contexts that enable Aboriginal learners to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that improve their lifelong learning.
2. Investigate and analyze the impact of traditional Elder's teaching in nourishing the learning spirits of identified 'witness participants'.
3. Generate information that can be collected in written form, synthesized and contributed to a national body of research on Aboriginal Learning.
4. Provide a forum for audio/visual recording of proceedings that will be edited into a documentary format.

**Research Purpose and Outcomes:** The purpose of this research is to gain perspectives from Aboriginal Elders regarding holistic learning and strategies for Nourishing the Learning Spirit and to examine impacts on learners participating in the event.

- Office of the Treaty Commissioner – Practical realization of treaty purpose; education resource development; using the concept of Nourishing the Learning Spirit as 'corporate / administrative development' of OTC: observing how Elders teach; learning through observation as a means of informing OTC strategic planning processes through Indigenous ways of knowing;
- Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre –Protection of FN belief systems and ways of life; recording of Elders as education resource; contribution to historical record
- Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, U of S – Knowledge Exchange on Nourishing the Learning Spirit; educational resource development; anecdotal notes, photographs, newsletter article material and other things that will contribute to sharing outcomes and preparing media and promotional materials.
- Elder Participants – leaving a legacy of teachings; honouring their lives and knowledge systems

## Background to Event

**Project Abstract:** Little is known about the learning journey that each person travels to arrive comfortably at their own awareness of their gifts, capacities, strengths, which broadly can be seen as the actualization of their learning spirit. This learning journey is a holistic outcome of diverse conditions, contexts, relationships, education, training, and connections with a living universe. Yet, often success in life is narrowly measured by how many years of schooling one has or income one receives. This bundle is interested in how Aboriginal peoples understand the concept of learning and how a holistic learning path can be understood better for achieving full actualization of the learning spirit. This dialogue session is part of a knowledge gathering and sharing project which explores the nature of the Learning Spirit in Aboriginal learning, the literature, issues, and promising practices, and considers how learning can be enriched lifelong to nourish the learning spirit.

### **Research Rationale of the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre:**

The Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (ABLKC) is one of five national knowledge exchange centres, established by the Canadian Council on Learning, a non-profit independent organization, funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada. It is jointly managed by the First Nations Higher Education Consortium (FNAHEC), Calgary, AB, and the Aboriginal Education Research Centre (AERC) at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK.

The ABLKC mandate consists of identifying promising practices and engaging in knowledge sharing and knowledge exchange activities to improve lifelong learning among Aboriginal Peoples. We also serve a monitoring and reporting role in making contributions to the Canadian Council on Learning's State of Learning and to the Composite Learning Index. Our website provides a fuller picture of the work of the centre: [www.ccl-cca.ca/aboriginallearning](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/aboriginallearning).

Literature reviews conducted by researchers of the Canadian Council on Learning's Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre reveal a multitude of processes and programs, both formal and non-formal, designed to assist Aboriginal children, youth and adults to improve learning and promote successful outcomes. This work provides information, at one level, about the kinds of programs, practices, pedagogy and leadership necessary to improve delivery of programs to learners and at another, about the constraints and barriers, gaps and other important elements needed to be changed for successful Aboriginal learning and education.

However, several of the ABLKC Animation Theme Bundles' interests require understanding the nature of the learning process among First Nations, Inuit and Métis lifelong learners and seeking to identify what gives life to our learning. No Canadian-wide inventory of such learning has been accomplished yet. Therefore, the goal for this survey is to use an Appreciative Inquiry approach to identify and learn more about learning among Aboriginal children, youth, adults and the elderly that can inform and nourish their learning journey, as well as inform the practitioners, programmers, and policy-makers.

Many kinds of learning fall within this domain, if not all areas of learning, such as gender-based learning, literacy programs, adult education/learning opportunities, language and cultural

development, art, drama, writing and literature, transitional or bridging programs, gifted programs, prior learning assessments, parenting programs, programs for incarcerated youth or adults, antiracist programming, programs for the elderly or elders, programs for youth, as well as non-formal learning such as arts, crafts, and workplace learning. In fact, wherever learning is inspired is included.

Participants from the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre's national conference told us that First Nations, Inuit and Métis languages nourish the learning spirit, others reveal traditional parenting, Elders' teachings, identity development, connecting to community, traditional land pursuits, praise and support from our peers, mentors, dreams, and spirituality all contribute to the nourishing of the learning spirit.

The road to self-discovery is vitally important and is part of the understanding our personal location, our heritage, our gender, our gifts, our talents, and even our multiple and ongoing challenges form lessons for life. These become formative to our shaping values and attitudes along the learning path, important to the learning journey and are as important to learning as structured learning activity, such as are provided to learners in schools, training programs, colleges and universities. These help yield to inner growth, clarity, coherence, wisdom and strength over time, and become a source of inspiration and motivation throughout our lifetimes.

We are interested in learning how First Nations, Métis and Inuit conceive learning from within their languages and cultural foundations; what inspires or motivates learning within these contexts; where programs, schools, and other learning environments have used this foundation to improve their practice; and how this information can inform the processes of learning to assist educators, educational planners, policy makers or curriculum developers to create and maximize learning opportunities for Aboriginal people in Canada.

## Elder's Dialogue Selected Messages

***Report Note: The Nourishing the Learning Spirit: Elder's Dialogue was held with the intention of exploring the learning process of 'witness participants' in attendance at the event. In order to more effectively illustrate the responses of the participants, it is necessary to provide some context of the Elder's teachings in this report. At the outset, it should be noted that most of the Elder's spoke in their own first language. These languages included Cree, D  ne and Nakwe. Nakota and Dakota Elders were invited but unable to attend this event. Simultaneous translations were provided by participants from the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, the audio visual technician, and a guest accompanying one of the Elders. With this in mind, it is noted that the field notes used to summarize the Elder's comments are filtered through the translator and the field note recorder.***

***Learning by way of on-site translation presents a number of issues that are important to acknowledge. The translator may not have accurately captured the intent of the speaker, may have omitted important pieces of information or may have inadvertently added their own understanding of the message. Although sharing information among individuals with diverse linguistic backgrounds is inherently problematic, key messages were relayed in the best possible manner and with respectful intent by those individuals who volunteered their time and effort to help make this process possible.***

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***My parents were from different reserves, but both had their culture. So, I was raised with a traditional learning spirit. I was immersed in Plains Cree culture and language. The culture and language are interconnected and the worldview comes from the ancestors.***

(Elder F)

The learning spirit was discussed as a general concept in the context of the Elder's Dialogue session. It was described as something that was present during the extent of an individual's lifelong learning journey. The learning spirit was not described in detail, but in relation to one's lived experiences, responses to teachings, traditional values, use of original language and the need not only to survive, but to honour one's survival through the unchanged ceremonies passed from generation to generation. Some of the Elders spoke about the influence of bad spirit and good spirit in our lives. The Elders acknowledged the reality of positive and negative experiences that impact us along our learning journey. In the case of an individual acting in a negative way, living an angry life, making unhealthy choices or being disrespectful, the Elders spoke about these things also as learning experiences. While the idea of being influenced by forces beyond our understanding may be disturbing, there was no discussion of that concept during the Elder's Dialogue session. Instead, what the Elders focused on was the individual's ability to always make choices regardless of their age or stage of learning. The Elders always referred to the importance of an individual being grounded in culture and tradition as an anchor to a good life.



***We have to take care of ourselves and the Mother Earth. This is a sacred responsibility. We have to understand the link and how things are intertwined with the spirit world. When they do decide to walk the road, they will be seen by the Creator and the Creator's helpers that they are helping themselves and they will help them also.***

(Elder G)

Many of the Elders made references to the gifts of the earth, such as animals to hunt and berries to harvest for food, and the experiences of living in connection to the natural world that constitute a traditional curriculum. References to old people and traditional community life were talked about as a harmonious part of the natural world. It was only when the Elders spoke about troubled people that an implied disconnection between the individual and the natural world emerged. All of the Elders expressed their sadness for individuals who have lost their way from living a traditional life, and talked about the need for those individuals to 'come back'. As the Elders described the importance of sacred ceremony and language it provided more understanding of what is lost when an individual does not think or live in a sacred way.

***It is in ceremonies where I found good things and a good life.***

(Elder B)

Ceremonies were not described or discussed in detail during the Elder's Dialogue. Ceremonial acts were performed throughout the days of the gathering but were kept sacred and not used as subject matter for discussion. The ceremonies were performed in the language of the individual leading the ceremony. As the Elders talked about the importance of ceremony and the understanding of ceremony made possible only through the use of original language, they were able to demonstrate how it helped them cope with many hardships of life and live within a good space. This was not only important for them personally, but as a means of being able to help others.

***It is important to learn your language. Parents need to properly stand up and teach the ceremonies. It is probably the same in many communities. For example, with a feast, there are certain traditions which are respected and must be followed. This is honouring the 'learning spirit'.***

(Elder A)

The concept of respect was spoken about in many different ways by the Elders. They talked about the need for self-respect as a means of living an honourable life. Without self-respect there is an inability to respect the importance of language, ceremonies and traditions, relationships with other people or with other parts of Creation. Several of the Elders commented on the need to respect learning processes and knowledge that are passed on



intergenerationally by not changing or misinterpreting the processes and knowledge. The Elders spoke about individuals, families and Aboriginal communities having the responsibility for respecting and maintaining culture, language and traditions. School education was seen as something that is important to some extent, but of primary importance is the grounding in respectful behaviour toward oneself and one's culture. Comments offered about residential schools throughout the Elder's Dialogue showed that the speaker's parental and grandparental generation recognized the negative impact this form of education would have on the children and grandchildren and did their best to avoid being involved. The Elders described the contemporary separation of many youth and communities from traditional practices and understand the result has been loss of culture and language, sickness, associated destructive behaviour and in some cases higher than normal accidental deaths.

***When trappers walked the earth it was a good earth.***

(Elder I)

Throughout the Elder's Dialogue there were many comments made by the Elders that were left up to the listener to interpret the understanding in a way meaningful to them. The spaces of the 'unspoken' or 'unexplained' emerged as significant opportunities for self-guided learning. This was a pedagogical constant among speakers. The Elder's never interrupted other speakers with questions or comments. The Elders never asked another Elder for clarification of a comment. Everyone in the room respected this process, even though it was never explicitly explained or requested. The room was blanketed in a respect that could not be seen or heard but most certainly could be felt. Interrupting an Elder during the Dialogue process would have created a significant disruption of the powerful energy within the Elder's lodge. Between speakers, and at break times, voices and laughter generally remained soft. Individuals tended to their tasks or visited informally with other without breaking the sacred atmosphere which had been generated. The choice of hosting the Elder's Dialogue in a wooded area of northern Saskatchewan provided a reminder of the human connection to the earth and things of the natural world.

***I understand visions and dreams are part of the learning spirit. Under the guidance of Elders you can understand them and they can help in your lifelong learning.***

(Elder G)

Acknowledging the spirit world, and accepting gifts of dreams and visions are a natural part of traditional life. It is an integral part of an individual's learning journey that must be honoured through ceremony and supportive relationships with respected spiritual leaders of the community. Naming was mentioned throughout the Elder's Dialogue. Some individuals introduced themselves by their spirit name, although no one elaborated beyond that sharing. It was explained that spirit names are not 'granted' but are 'revealed' by special individuals with this responsibility. The revealed name allows recognition of an individual by the spirit world, but understanding the meaning of the name may take a lifetime of discovery by the name holder. Discussion of these topics is extremely sensitive and must be done in a respectful way.

***I want to see them use our culture and beliefs to survive, and, if they have their education that is another key for surviving.***

(Elder C)

The Elders generally separated culture, beliefs, ceremony and traditional practices from that which is considered 'formal education' or 'school education'. There were no direct references explaining this, but there was a clear distinction between what was talked about in terms of school and what was talked about in terms of learning in a cultural community. The Elders spoke about traditional forms of curriculum and learning from land-based activities. The Elders all spoke about their desire to have youth live a healthy fulfilled life based in culture and traditions in order that they will, in turn, pass the culture and traditions onto future generations. Within these relationships, it is not only individuals, who survive, but also the cultures, languages, and traditions.

## Witness Participant Responses

### 1. Describe important stages in Elder's learning journey. What has inspired them?

**Witness Participant A:** Many of the Elders commented that they did not attend residential schools. This was significant in that it was important to them that their learning was culturally intact within the scope of their lives. Some talked about being raised by grandparents and the influence of learning in that regard. There seemed to be an element of trust and high regard for that process that was unspoken or referred to within their stories.

Many of the Elders spoke about the importance of respect, but it was not spoken about in terms of 'activities' to learn this value, negative connotations or complex discussion. Rather, they seemed to try to convey their understanding of the value through story and reflection by way of coming to witness the way in which it was illustrated by their grandparents and other members of First Nations communities that they interacted with. I think this was one of the key elements in a successful learning journey. Soft voice and kindness were mentioned by some Elders at the event, as important qualities in teaching and learning. The Elders also demonstrated attentive listening and no interruptions throughout the event. I noticed that no one asked any questions. The Elders seemed content with general guidance and the latitude to share their understanding in the form that it emerged.

The importance of language was mentioned again and again by the Elders. Since very little English was used at the event itself, I think this in itself was a demonstration of how important their mother tongues were to each of them. The oldest woman Elder told the story that her husband spoke no Cree when she met him (he spoke Dene and English; she spoke no English). She said that over time he became fluent in Cree which meant that it was possible for others to become fluent also).

Some of the Elders commented on the fact that different people from different Nations were sitting together at that event. This seemed to be something that was not common for them to experience and I think that it became an important thing itself in their old age to be able to do this, to share common understandings and be respected among each other for their earned wisdom as invited participants.

Some of the Elders talked about rites of passage for young people as they reached puberty. However, there was no specific discussion about what that was for the different groups of people there. Translation was an issue in the women's circle, as it was not possible to translate Cree-Saulteaux-English simultaneously in these subgroups. Limited time was also a factor.

Some of the Elders talked about challenges they overcame in moving on with their learning journey and one individual commented that even the bad experiences they had were to be taken as important learning experiences.

One Elder shared a very personal story about a spiritual experience that profoundly impacted his life. This encouraged others to share some insights about coming into leadership roles which were all important stages in their learning journeys.

It seemed that the stages of learning are more based on achieving certain levels of maturity, understanding and behaviour rather than on pre-established milestones.

**Witness Participant B:** The Elders' described their learning journey as beginning at birth, and building through each life stage (childhood, puberty, adulthood, parenthood, grandparenthood, and old age). They explained that a child is born with the gift of a learning spirit, which is to be nourished throughout life. As well, the stages of puberty and beyond also carry the role of the teaching of knowledge.

Each life stage on their learning journey provided opportunities to learn differing types of knowledge. Childhood provided learning opportunities that focused on the child learning his or her value as a member of the natural world, about the natural world around them, and about the purpose and intent of ceremony and tradition. Puberty provided learning opportunities that focused learning about adult and parental roles and that role as part of that natural world. As well, all life stages provided learning opportunities to enrich and/or more fully understand previous learnings. Knowledge about culture, tradition, ceremony, and relationships continues to grow and be enriched throughout life's learning stages. The learning journey was described as the ongoing development of a living understanding of the connections between self and all aspects of the world around (world-view).

Some Elders spoke of a conscious 'knowledge' early in their life (childhood) that their role was to gain as much knowledge from their Elders as possible. They spoke of their commitment to living out this role from that young age, so that they might pass along their knowledge of history, tradition, culture, and language to the next generation. They were inspired to learn by Elders, parents, grandparents, and other community members, as well as by the Creator and Grandfathers in the spirit world watching over them. They spoke of their early understanding of this role as an understanding which brought with it a great reverence and respect for the role.

**Witness Participant C:** The Elders spoke of traditional knowledge passed down to them through oral tradition, and actual experience, hands on or guidance of an Elder or someone who had skill in the area of work that was being done. The way things were done a long time ago was beneficial to people. Everyone had to work. That was required for survival. Women and men had distinct roles. This was to do with family or clan survival. In the past, information that was passed on traditionally was valued and respect by all those that had to learn the skills being taught to them. Inspiration came from within the families, older siblings, mothers, grandmothers, fathers, grandfathers and extended family.

Changes that have come with colonialism have affected the knowledge of the people. Knowledge that has been around for centuries has dissipated into thin air. The new ways have taught our people to be spoiled and they don't want to learn anything. Or they find everything too difficult to do the old way. The old ways are just about gone and how can we keep our language "ALIVE."

The effort to keep things traditional and maintain the language as it was passed on for generations is acknowledged and we know from the Elder's dialogue that it has been an important tradition for us as Aboriginal people. As the Elders spoke they made it apparent that all information passed down from the Elders of the past had a vital role in the survival of our people.

## 2. How would you describe your understanding of the meaning of learning spirit?

**Witness Participant A:** Over the period of time that we spent together, I thought about the idea of a learning spirit. I talked one evening with another participant about trying to identify what it is that draws us in one direction or another. She was interested in the history of her Band and telling their story. She was also interested in learning about different technology to learn more about nature and share this with others to help them learn. I shared with her and the group that I was interested in nature and was studying in this area. I believe that it is my personal learning spirit that draws me to try to understand and interact more with the natural world (earth, animals, sky). I believe it is my personal learning spirit that led me to become a teacher who specializes in teaching about the natural processes of life. I think that the learning spirit is a form of personal and collective energy that has an influence on what we do and how we do it. One of the Elders talked about people who have a kind nature and people who have an angry nature. That Elder said that those who have an angry nature should try to get rid of it because more anger will come and stick to it and make it more powerful. I have heard this teaching many years ago and never forgot it. Although anger is a natural part of our experience, learning how to manage it is important so that it doesn't get in the way of more positive experiences and attitudes.

I think there were two very significant moments in the whole dialogue session that helped me understand a learning spirit better. Those were personal stories shared by two of the male Elders. One wept when he told his story. It was a very beautiful experience that led him to work to learn about ceremonies for his people. He said that he never shared that story before. He also said that he never really talked about these things at all before because he was quite shy. I think the sharing up to that point created a feeling of a safe environment in which he felt it was okay to share his story. Another Elder following that also talked about overcoming challenges with alcohol and making positive choices in his life to return to cultural ways and ceremony.

I believe that when we try to teach someone else something, this needs to be done very carefully because this is a time when great damage can be done to a learning spirit, especially the learning spirit of a younger person. I think that traditional teachings are very powerful, but the learning spirit is very fragile. I understand this needs to be taken into consideration when providing teachings. I think this is why the Elders say that using a soft voice is the most important thing in teaching. I believe that when teachers are not careful, that this is one of the main things that drive young people away school, even from family, culture, language and traditions. I see that many young people choose to learn from their friends and others who don't criticize them, or simply accept them for who they are and any short-comings that they

have. Young people will choose to continue their learning journey together with other like-minded individuals.

After thinking for several hours about the experience of the Elder's dialogue, it occurred to me that organizations may also have a learning spirit. Perhaps this is the collective energy and wisdom of the groups involved. If the spirit of the place is destructive or sick, then when you come into it you are affected by it also. In the same way, if there is good energy and kindness, this strengthens and helps everyone overcome negativity.

**Witness Participant B:** It is my understanding that the learning spirit is a gift from the Creator, and is a part of one's being. It is present from conception and birth and exists in an individual's heart and soul. It is a holistic concept, characterized by a combination of learning strengths, gifts, and capacities, which are supported through inter-relationships with culture, language, tradition, community, self, and the natural world.

As I understood, one Elder spoke of the learning spirit (along with the Creator and the spirit world) providing guidance throughout life's learning journey.

I suppose it is partly up to us as individuals as to whether or not we attend to our learning spirit's guidance and act upon it, but also, our previous experiences and knowledge will influence how we interpret, and act upon, that guidance.

Our learning path is partially influenced by our learning spirit, but is further influenced by our learning experiences all along the learning journey. Those learning experiences are in turn influenced by the inter-connected relationships between ourselves and our communities, culture, language, history, and our knowledge of these. (In reading the above, it may be somewhat difficult to unravel my meaning, but it is an interconnected and circuitous concept. The learning journey is not a linear journey, but rather the learning path, or paths that make up the journey, are interconnected and circuitous as well.)

**Witness Participant C:** One of the Elders summed it up really great! She said that all teachings from the Elder with knowledge of the spirits were important and that spiritualism was crucial to development. She informed us that as an individual a person has two spirits that inhabit them. The negative and positive spirits are always with us. These two spirits are always around and she said the influence can be strong from the bad spirit unless you can control it. I understood that personal development is a choice and each one of us can decide to go in the direction we want to. The spirit that is negative can influence us but we can make choices that are helpful and healthy.

The bad spirit watches you when you are doing things that are not right. It grows as you do things that are not good. Most of what you do can impact the kind of growth that will take place with you spiritually. The good spirit is there to help you grow as well and it will depend on how much growth you make toward the positive end.

My understanding is that it is a personal choice of how we want to grow spiritually. The choices we make whether it is good or bad can directly impact our personal growth spiritually.

### 3. How have these characterizations of a learning path resonated with you in terms of your own learning journey?

**Witness Participant A:** I think that we all need to feel part of some group. I think that attending an Aboriginal university program was a really important part of forming a positive identity. I recall one year when the question of whether to have our school strictly for Métis students arose. This would have meant that the First Nations students would not be allowed entrance. I think all of us spoke out against that as a possibility because we liked to attend school together and recognized our individual strengths and the strength of collective diversity. So, the Elder's dialogue brought together Elders from different language groups that we could also learn from the collective wisdom. It felt good to hear and feel the common value systems. It felt good to share in the ceremony of cultural leaders from a community not our own. One of the women shared with the group that as Saulteaux people, they always include one woman as a significant part of the pipe ceremony. This is different than Cree practice, but I noticed it was honoured at the next pipe ceremony. It only needed to be said once and no one would forget it. It became a respected comment and was acted on. Being a non-First Nations person does not mean that I cannot participate and support First Nations ceremonies and teachings. I can learn some of these things. I can live in the manner of these teachings. It does not mean that I am trying to be First Nations, but am working to develop my own sense of self and place in the world. Being a mixed-blood person may have political connotations, but I think 'walking in two worlds' is the challenge that all Aboriginal people face now.

I was impacted by the trust shown by those who shared personal stories. I learned that my own spiritual experiences are not different from what some of the Elders experienced. Although I did not share my stories, these were important moments for me that really made me feel good about what I knew and how I knew it. I wished that time had permitted more time to interact with these Elders on a personal level, but feel a kinship toward the group and would not hesitate to go visit any of them to talk more. Relationships are built on trust and common experiences. I think often people don't have these elements in their lives and it does have an impact. The negative experience I had at the end of the event reminded me that one should stay away from these kinds of people. I think that the humility shown by the Elders is a key value. When one does not show humility I think that it demonstrates a weak spirit that wants to dominate others. This is what the Elder teaching about soft voice was all about.

**Witness Participant B:** My learning journey has been characterized by my own personal characteristics and interests, focusing on a need to understand the "why" before I could attain a concept from childhood onwards, and on understanding the whole before I could understand the parts (ie understanding the 'big picture' before focusing in on details). As a visual learner, I found it easier to follow my learning path when it contained visual representations of knowledge, particularly when those representations were in the form of some type of circular model. And my learning journey, or path, was not a linear journey, but one of taking detours and exploring side roads along the journey (upon discovering something of interest).

My experience has been that although learning builds upon past learning, it is somewhat difficult to label which part of a learned knowledge is new learning and which part was pre-existing knowledge. Also, it is somewhat difficult to break down some knowledges into sub-



parts or steps. The knowledge is one continuous story, not a number of smaller stories (this also is somewhat difficult to explain, as you will likely gather in trying to sort out what I am saying....). Let's take a simple example: a math problem with say, 8 steps in its solution. I see the solution as one continuous step rather than 8 smaller steps – this gave me the dickens of a time when trying to “show the steps to my answer in my math assignment” in school – WHAT STEPS?

As a member of the cultural majority (white, blue collar family), my learning journey was supported throughout my childhood by my mother, who was a teacher, and by my membership in the dominant group. Although in my childhood I did not realize my privilege as a member of that group, I certainly did understand my good fortune of having a teacher for a mother.

I recall, along my learning journey, the first instance when my learning spirit, and personal spirit, was wounded. I experienced embarrassment and/or discomfort in the privilege of knowledge acquisition and in the injustice of an educational institution. In grade 5 (as an adult, I know that to reach grade 5 before being wounded in learning spirit is a privilege also), our teacher gave us a weekly quiz, every week, on the subject matter studied that week, and our desks were re-arranged weekly based on the results of the quiz. Some students always sat at the head of the class, row 1. And some students always sat at the back of the class, row 6. It was always the same 1 or 2 students at the head of the class and the same 1 or 2 students at the foot of the class. I don't recall witnessing taunting or anything, just an overwhelming personal feeling of discomfort with the discrimination/marginalization of other students. I was always at the head of the class, and I felt somehow responsible for my involvement in a marginalizing practice, until I began to be sick on quiz days so I could stay home (partly playing sick, partly sickened by discomfort with the practice). I didn't know of another way to deal with the situation. Of course, that wasn't a solution. It was an extremely unpleasant year.

Although I strive to gain some small understanding, I really can't even *begin* to comprehend the wounding (or killing) of the learning spirits of those grade 5 children at the 'back of the class' every week.

**Witness Participant C:** The teachings that were taught to us were through oral tradition and hands on experiences. Gender roles were clearly defined as to what we needed to learn. Gender roles were given because we had a different type of survival. We lived off the land, we gathered berries and roots, and the men hunted moose, deer, and other small game for sustenance. Women did the duties around the home & also children were taught to look after each other. We were always taught to maintain respect for our older siblings, grandparents and parents. We were also taught to respect if anyone older was communicating with you, you did not talk unless you were motion by being asked a question.

All the teaching would be similar to that of other Aboriginal teachings. Values and customs were very strong regarding the family unit and the support that came with the teachings. It still hold true in some clans and family. The characteristic of individualism is very strong in society's teachings today, but I think I have kept a lot of my teachings.

#### 4. What do you think is needed to nourish your learning spirit? What was missing in your past journey? How could this be different for future generations?

**Witness Participant A:** Personally, I have a great need to be around people who respect the natural world for its inherent beauty, power and ability to sustain our lives. I need to be around people who can provide gentle teaching without being angry or criticizing. I recall being at a sweatlodge ceremony many years ago and since I had no glasses on and was a little nervous about being there, I made a mistake outside the lodge. Everyone stopped and I was told what I did wrong. Nobody raised their voice or made me feel worse than I already did. But, they gave me a task to carry out to make up for that mistake. The Chief's two young daughters were there for their first sweat. I was told to look after these young girls and to teach them what I knew about what was going on before, during and after the sweat. I noticed that people were listening to what I said even though I was trying to speak quietly. No one interrupted or interfered with that process which I think was a vote of confidence. I think that if I had advised the girls wrong someone would have intervened. Even when we shared food after the ceremony the teaching continued. So, this told me that it is possible to make a mistake and yet be placed in a very important role as a measure of correction. I thought it was a good learning experience and was so grateful to be given the opportunity to do this task. I am still very proud of being able to do something positive to make up for a mistake. This is a different learning process than taking a test and then waiting to find out what mark you received from the teacher. It is 'process' of learning that does not stop and start. Those girls will carry my teachings with them through their lives now. So will I.

My learning spirit needs interaction with the natural world. Earth, dirt, leaves, rain, streams, bugs, four-legged animals, birds, lightening, stars, fire are all important things that I feel lost without. I can watch an ant hill or watch the birds build a nest, take a dust bath or play in the pools of water on the sidewalk left by the sprinkler in my yard. I feel honoured to be able to see these things. I believe that I need these experiences. I am only truly happy when I am around the natural world. I think this is because the first seven years of my life were spent playing in the bush and near water. My father was an outdoorsman and was an excellent hunter and fisherman. My mother was an excellent gardener and we picked berries every year for winter fruit and jam. Living in Ontario in 2003-2004 was interesting, but I really missed the terrific lightening and rain storms from Saskatchewan. I was enormously pleased that the night I drove back there was a huge lightening storm for several hours. I feel really happy when I hear the crashing thunder and I think this is necessary for me to hear. Living overseas in the past was an awakening of how much I loved the deep blue sky at night in winter, the sound of footsteps on frozen snow, and hoar frost on trees. Saskatchewan is a sensory experience that is part of me.

All of the significant parts of my environment contribute to being at ease with learning about ceremony and traditions. Maybe it's traditions and then ceremony. Children learn about what is around them before they begin to learn the sacred ceremonies. Urban children and many adults now do not have this opportunity. Being removed from the natural world is like being sent to prison. There is an absence of a very powerful energy and influence. For many years I avoided acknowledgement of spiritual experiences, and even stopped participating in most

traditional First Nation ceremonies. I made this choice because I did not have a mentor that I had regular access to and did not understand what to do with these experiences. So, I tried to avoid them. Recently, an Elder told me that was probably the right thing to do. He said these experiences are so important that they need to be handled properly. Since I didn't have anyone to teach me those things I may have been open to significant danger. I believe this. So, I think that these are things that go hand in hand. I think young people need to have relationships with the natural world and with spiritual teachers who can help them understand the world around them as they grow up. The choices that they make for their own learning journey is up to them, but if they do not have opportunities then the choices they make will be limited also. I think it is important to allow children to grow up and seek out what they want to learn, but having their own language in addition to English will also give them more understanding, choice and options for their futures.

**Witness Participant B:** I believe that the four components of the self (heart, mind, body, and spirit) must be valued in order for the learning spirit to be nourished on the learning journey. The learner must be supported to believe in the self as a lifelong learner with many learning gifts and capacities.

The approach to the learning experience must therefore value the learner's learning spirit, its gifts and capacities.

At the Elder's Gathering, I heard Elders speak on the importance of valuing self, culture, language, tradition, ceremony, place, community, history, and the natural world in nourishing the learning spirit. The learning spirit can only be nourished if the spirit of the self, which encompasses all of these aspects, is nourished as well. The learning journey must begin from a place that values the learner's self, experience, and knowledge.

Other necessities for nourishing the learning spirit include an approach to learning that is holistic, learner-centred, and that focuses on the self as a lifelong learner. The learning approach must be process-based rather than product-based. The learning journey must follow a path of relevance for me.

For myself, the valuing of gender, learner differences, and social relationships also plays an important role in nourishing my learning spirit. Often in my past learning journey, and particularly in childhood, gender, learner differences, and social relationships were neither valued nor acknowledged. In my early learning experiences, from my non-Aboriginal perspective, all learners were subjected to the same structured approach, as if all learners were identical and brought identical learning gifts and capacities, and selves, to the learning experience. All learners were assumed to need the same skills/knowledges, regardless of what they brought to the learning experience. Differences, which should have supported learning gifts and capacities, were not acknowledged or valued. In fact, they were ignored, not accepted, sometimes even criticized.

Future generations must be supported in approaching the learning journey from a position of the self. The territory of the learning journey must have the learner as the centre. Western educational systems must focus on learning process instead of learning product in order to support both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners. Curriculum that is integrated and holistic,

rather than compartmentalized and product-centred, must be the learning tool. Learning goals must be relevant to the learner first rather than generated by the system. How to accomplish all of these “musts” is another matter. But I believe the path has been laid out and the journey has begun. Partnerships with all agencies, organizations, and institutions have been, or are being, formed as a first step. I would like to assist in that partnering in any way possible, and am considering ways to build partnerships between Aboriginal agencies and the system I work within.

**Witness Participant C:** It is evident in the Elder’s words that teachings have to continue through to the next generations. She stated in order for the language and culture to be maintained we must continue to teach our children the values and beliefs of all the teachings.

For myself to maintain the spiritual growth I would like to continue learning the ways that have been taught to us for years. Elders taught us survival and spiritual growth through meditation and prayer. Those ways help us focus on who we were. It also helped us keep the family strong as well. Each generation loses its culture and language because we do not try to maintain it. For my teachings I continue to strive for knowledge from the old and the wise. It is imperative to learn those ways.

My grandparents and parents taught us about being considerate, good, not malicious, honest, not deceptive and humble, not angry to grow spiritually. We were told behaviour that was positive was the importance of developing spiritually. Tell your truths not matter what, because people who lie tend to believe they are actually telling the truth after awhile. People who learn to express themselves truthfully are more likely to grow spiritually quicker than those that harbour lies.

An example of maliciousness can lead back to where it came from. I was told to sabotage people intentionally would give ten-fold of what a person gave. Often As I was growing up kids would be mean intentionally. I was told, “Don’t bother fighting back” it is not worth it. I was also told it is not about you when people are mean. It is more about them!

Consideration is also part of the process, know that upon doing things consider all that is around and who is a part of your circle. Do not do things that will hurt people in your circle. Always consider every person’s feelings not just your own.

## 5. What impact have the Elder’s teachings had on your life path and your learning? If these teachings were more widely known, how might these teachings impact

- Individuals?
- Families?
- Communities?
- Nations?
- Canada?

**Witness Participant A:** In my early childhood, I experienced what many other Métis families experience in intentional detachment from extended family (especially those who dance and drink and speak their mind), or denial about heritage, or absolute silence about family history. I remember those old Métis people even though I was very young. A couple of years ago I mentioned to my father that I first smelled Sweetgrass at his grandmother's house when I was about 5 or 6 years old. He agreed that she probably knew about those things. He also told me that she spoke about five languages fluently including Cree and French (I don't think English was one of them). But I didn't really learn anything from those older Elders as I didn't spend much time around them and I was quite young. From one grandmother, I did learn how to play cards (good math skills), laugh and tell a good story! From another grandmother I think I learned how to be a good worker, and also she taught me how to pray. Elders all have different personalities and different things they teach you.

It wasn't until I was much older (in my 20's) that I was around a new family every day that I learned a lot from. That grandmother taught me how to be kind, the strength that comes with being a spiritual person and how much the Elderly appreciate young people who visit with them, help tend to their physical needs and just enjoy their company. It feels really good to make an Elder feel good.

Traditional teachings came later in my twenties. These provided very significant influences on my life and choices. They are like grandparents to all young people. It doesn't really matter if you are related by blood or not. Elder's teachings taught me how to think about the world around me. They taught me how to evaluate what is good or not good in my life, and how to be patient if I wasn't sure. They taught me that we don't understand everything and must be humble about that. We are frail as human beings and completely dependent on the earth to survive. I think learning about the hierarchy of life (with small life / tiny life / microscopic) being the most important and human beings being the least important helped me to understand that most people don't know their place in the world and this is why they abuse the earth. Most of the teachings that I learned seem to be so simple and common sense that I wonder how it is that everyone doesn't know these things? I wonder why we are missing out on such important foundations. Personal knowledge echoes through families, communities, nations and even our country of Canada. We are all familiar with certain families that are strong in their traditions and others who are very dysfunctional. I think families that are strong have older generations who are anchored in their culture and traditions and who know the foundational teachings. I think families, communities, countries and even globally healthy thinking is a result of having good anchors in foundational teachings. Like I mentioned earlier, I think that 'systems' have a learning spirit too.

**Witness Participant B:** Although I did not experience the Elder's teachings along my life path and learning path until the brief teachings I have now witnessed, from my perspective I believe that Elder's teachings could have impacted me by allowing me to more fully understand and appreciate my learning self, the place of my learning self in the world around me, and my responsibility in that worldview role. The Elder's teachings would have given my learning spirit permission to ask 'why' in an educational institution, rather than leading me to feel like a 'pest' in my asking. No, "just because" is not much of an answer! This response is not a familial response or a traditional response, but definitely was the response of the educational system (please forgive me for generalizing here, of course there were a number of exceptions).

If Elders' teachings were more widely known, they might impact everyone by encouraging, actually, requiring, honor and respect for all people, and for all places and things within the natural world. Honor and respect begin within the self, and spread outward like ripples in a pond. Elders CAN teach that honor and respect. And Elders DO teach that. Unfortunately, not everyone has the good fortune to experience, or be impacted by, the Elders' teachings. Elders' teachings for honoring and respecting the self and all else could impact all aspects of society, strengthening the family unit and communities, and in turn, giving those communities voice for educational reform. Elders' teachings could reform Westernized formal and informal educational experiences and institutions, centering the learning experience on the learner rather than on the institution or the learning product. Elders' teachings could impact Canada by encouraging Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities/peoples to honor and respect each other, and to gain an appreciation and understanding for each other's culture, tradition, and history, and by discouraging economic, educational, cultural, racial, and social discrimination (I know, easier said than done). But the question has been "Where to start?" Perhaps with Elders' teachings for all (maybe from within the 'Western' educational systems is the only option?). I am so heartened to hear that those educational systems are realizing some of the root causes of their own failures and willing to learn how to address solutions to those causes.

**Witness Participant C:** In learning that positive growth is critical to positive spiritual development I would like to continue down that road. It is imperative to learn the ways of the old. Traditional ways teach us to be strong and to maintain the values and beliefs of our culture. I love learning from the older people. I also love the things we are taught spiritually. I would maintain and continue learning the learning processes of our people. Their knowledge is valuable! If it ever becomes lost it would not be good. It is good that tradition is passed down to people who are willing to learn the ways.

These teaching are very much acknowledged in our family. Dad is the Elder in our clan, therefore when he speaks or asks for something to be done, family he has asked will follow through. We as siblings respect the older siblings and it has been going on for years. It is still carried on today. Family is important to us. We all acknowledge our family ties and try very hard to maintain that tradition. Some will stay close others will drift off to individuality. The family ties were strong and valued, but with the change in society and looking after number one the dynamics have changed quite a bit.

It is an accepted thing that some people will go and do their own thing. Some have changed with time others in their hearts have stayed traditionally following the ways of the old teachings. Those people seem to stay much stronger. They also remain strong in living good lives. To sum this up, some will learn & others will not follow traditions. It always boils down to individuality and what a person wants in their lives.

## 6. What other comments would you add about this experience?

**Witness Participant A:** I think that the experience of the Elder's dialogue reminded me of my place in my own journey toward Elderhood, and of the importance of practicing what I have been taught and making it an integral part of my attitude and behaviour. I need to remember the importance of silence and of keeping things simple. This is hard in a university setting, but



important in everyday life. It will be a constant struggle for balance. I miss being around Elders on a regular basis for their wisdom and friendship. They make me want to be a better person. They are a refuge from the confusion and uncertainty of life.

I also learned that I need to find a way to cope with the negative spirits that surround me in human and other forms. I do utilize traditional ceremonial practices, but was reminded that this is not superficial but to be respected and used for important purposes. I keep seeing images of those Elders, and I think that even their physical presence brings a certain kind of teaching. How they dress, how and when they meet eyes with you or smile. They are a whole package of knowledge from the inside out.

I am very glad that I was able to participate in this event, and learned many things about patience.

**Witness Participant B:** I also believe that my brief experience in hearing about Elders' teachings will now impact me in my work in education, in supporting others to gain an understanding of the importance of acknowledging and supporting their students' learning spirits, their language, culture, traditions, and histories, as integral components of their learning journeys. I am considering how to initiate this approach through professional development, and I will need to seek out guidance and ideas from those with more wisdom and knowledge than I possess. I believe that it is imperative that our organization works towards the goal of nourishing the learning spirit of all learners.

**Witness Participant C:** I'd like to thank you for the invitation! It was worthwhile to hear those Elders speak because they had a lot to share. Most of the teachings they spoke of were similar to our traditions. The way they were taught was by oral traditions and hands on; it is the same as our culture.

It brought back strong memories of my late mother who was the matriarch of our family. Her inner strength and respect for all people helped us grow. It is within the process that process she also taught about prayer and meditation. The workshop hit home and it was a positive experience.



## **Appendix I: Ethics Proposal**



**Application for Approval of Research  
Protocol:  
Behavioural Research Ethics Board  
(Beh-REB)**

**1. Name of researchers**

Dr. Marie Battiste, Professor, Department of Educational Foundations,  
College of Education  
University of Saskatchewan  
966-7576  
[Marie.battiste@usask.ca](mailto:Marie.battiste@usask.ca)

a) N/A

**b) Anticipated dates**

March 26, 27, 28, 29 2008

**2. Title of Study**

Nourishing the Learning Spirit: A Dialogue with Elders

**3. Abstract**

Little is known about the learning journey that each person travels to arrive comfortably at their own awareness of their gifts, capacities, strengths, which broadly can be seen as the actualization of their learning spirit. This learning journey is a holistic outcome of diverse conditions, contexts, relationships, education, training, and connections with a living universe. Yet, often success in life is narrowly measured by how many years of schooling one has or income one receives. This project is interested in how First Nations' Peoples understand the concept of learning and how a holistic learning path can be understood better for achieving full actualization of the learning spirit. This dialogue session is part of a knowledge gathering and sharing project which explores the nature of the Learning Spirit in Aboriginal learning, the literature, issues, and promising practices, and considers how learning can be enriched lifelong to nourish the learning spirit.

**4. Funding**

This project is jointly funded by the Canadian Council on Learning, the Office of the Treaty Commissioner and the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre.

**5. Expertise**

Principal Investigator:

**Dr. Marie Battiste**, Professor in Educational Foundations, College of Education, Academic Director of the Aboriginal Education Research Centre, U of S, and Co-Director of the

Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, U of S will function as an expert scholarly resource in the oversight and support in this research and writing of the final documents. She is acknowledged nationally and internationally as an expert in Aboriginal educational theory and has her doctorate degree focusing on Mi'kmaw literacy. Dr. Battiste has published numerous books and articles on traditional Indigenous education, and was recognized with the Distinguished Researcher Award for the University of Saskatchewan in 2004. In 2006, she was elected as a member of the Executive Committee of the Canadian Commission for the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In 2008, Dr. Battiste received the National Aboriginal Achievement Award in the field of education.

Yvonne Vizina, Associate Director, Aboriginal Education Research Centre, U of S, will be serving as primary event coordinator and research assistant for this project.

AJ Felix, Sturgeon Lake First Nation will be assisting with coordination and facilitation of male Elders before and during the event. AJ is a respected member of the First Nations community and was recommended for this role by the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre.

Howard Walker, Muskoday First Nation will act as an 'alternate' if required for coordination and facilitation of male Elders before and during the event. Howard is a respected member of the First Nations community and was recommended for this role by the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre.

Judy Bear, Sweetgrass First Nation will be assisting with coordination and facilitation of the female Elders before and during the event. Judy is a respected member of the First Nations community and was recommended for this role by the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre.

Winston Walkingbear, Director of Cultural Resource Development, Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre will assist with project coordination and advice regarding traditional First Nation ethical protocols.

Darryl Chamakese, Regina Shingoose, Darren Okemasim of the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre and Allan Adam, audio visual technician will serve as language translators during the event.

## **6. Conflict of Interest**

There is no conflict of interest of the researcher or experts involved in this research project.

## **7. Participants**

A maximum of 12 Elders representing the major First Nations language groups in Saskatchewan will be invited. Target subgroups are: Dénesuline: 1 man, 1 woman; Cree: 2 male, 2 woman; Nakwē: 1 man, 1 woman; Nakota: 1 man, 1 woman; Dakota: 1 man, 1 woman.

A maximum of 10 Witness Participants will be invited to listen to the teachings of the Elders and provide written feedback to the researcher on the learning process experienced. Diverse participants will be invited including: male, female, First Nation, Métis, school division representative, university representative, adult education representative, and youth representative. Some of these categories will overlap.

a) **Recruitment materials**

A letter of invitation is attached in Appendix A.

8. **Consent**

Once ethics approval has been obtained by the U of S Beh Research Ethics Board for this research study, an information package containing a letter of invitation (Appendix A) and consent form (Appendix B) will be prepared for participants. Because of anticipated distances among Elder residences, fax or mail service, and uncertainty of Elder or Witness availability, prospective participants will be contacted in person and by telephone by cultural facilitators or project coordinators to request their attendance at the event. Traditional protocol requires person to person interaction in this regard. This is not considered coercive in Aboriginal communities as Elders are aware that they have the right to decline participation without consequence. Normally tobacco is gifted before making any request; however, instead, tobacco will be presented at the event for those who do attend.

All participants will be provided with the letter of invitation and consent form at the start of the event. Before asking participants to complete the form, the principal investigator will review the ethics process and consent form with participants and remind them that their participation is voluntary and they can leave at any point during the event. Verbal consent to participate will also be accepted and noted in writing by the principal investigator. In the event that a translator is required for consent, the translator will be asked to sign the consent form used for the participant.

During the dialogue session, with participant consent, a videographer will be recording some of the dialogue in group sessions and also conducting personal interviews. It is the intention of the research team to adapt the video footage from the master copies into a documentary film in the future. A media release form is attached in Appendix C.

If a participant advises in advance that he/she does not wish to be video-recorded the videographer will avoid recording, or edit out, the participant image. At any time during the discussion session a participant may request that the camera be turned off for a period of time. Participants may also request that some or all of their comments captured on video are not made public by notifying the Principal Investigator within 7 days following the event. If you withdraw from the research study, you must notify the Principal Investigator within 7 days of the event. The withdrawal will be noted in writing by the Principal Investigator, and this will be respected during the editing process. A copy of the request will be kept with the master copy of the video footage for future reference.

Discussions will also be recorded in the form of field notes by the event coordinator from the University of Saskatchewan. A selected number of invited guests will be present as Witness Participants. They are responsible for participating in the Elders dialogue and responding in written personal journal entries to a series of predetermined questions about their learning experience.

The ideas and information gathered in written form at the workshop will be analyzed in aggregate form and summarized in a report, which will be distributed to all workshop participants. The report will also be shared with the research project funders. Video footage recorded at the event will be held by the videographer at all times and processed at the

Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre and the University of Saskatchewan. Locked storage facilities at the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre and the U of S will be ensured. A series of short video clips (less than 5 minutes each) will be extracted and made suitable for public posting on the Internet as digital vignettes. Only the research team will have access to the original video recordings and vignette electronic files.

## 9. Methods/Procedures

This knowledge-gathering project will apply an Indigenous research methodology honouring traditional protocols of prayer, tobacco, food, relating, and gifting as ways to demonstrate intention and acceptance of the knowledge gathering and giving. The research method will employ a roundtable discussion with participants facilitated in a culturally sensitive manner. This will include an offer to facilitate men's discussions, women's discussions, as well as whole group discussions. Translators for Cree, D  ne, Nakwe and Dakota languages will be available for participants who wish to express their ideas in their own language. Witness participants will be asked to write their reflective responses to the interview questions throughout the event. Elders and witness participants will be interviewed for a video documentary utilizing the established research questions.

At the event, participants will be asked to respond to a series of questions about the concept of nourishing the learning spirit. Questions are provided as part of the Letter of Invitation in Appendix A.

Elder Research Questions: (to be posed to Elders for roundtable discussion)

1. How do Elders understand a lifelong learning journey with learning spirit(s)?
2. What are the main influences in a person's learning path?
  - Who or what nourishes the learning spirit? (*teachers? Family members? Self? Others?*)
  - How does where and how you live influence or affect the learning spirit? (*School? Community? Making a living on the land?*)
  - How is the learning spirit nourished? (*family influence? Naming? Ceremonies?*)
  - Why is it important to nourish the learning spirit? (*what happens when we don't?*)
3. What are the greatest influences and processes for nourishing the learning spirit?
4. Where have you witnessed effective Aboriginal Learning (*programs / practices / learning events*)?
5. What makes you think this was effective/successful (evidence/outcomes)?
6. What do you think are the life-giving learning forces for the successes you have witnessed?

Witness Participant Questions: (to be responded to in written form)

1. Describe important stages in Elder's learning journey. What has inspired them?
2. How would you describe your understanding of the meaning of learning spirit?
3. How have these characterizations of a learning path resonated with you in terms of your own learning journey?
4. What do you think is needed to nourish your learning spirit? What was missing in your past journey? How could this be different for future generations?
5. What impact have the Elder's teachings had on your life path and your learning? If these teachings were more widely known, how might these teachings impact

- Individuals?
- Families?
- Communities?
- Nations?
- Canada?

6. What other comments would you add about this experience?

Participants will initially be gathered all together to listen to the project overview, think about the questions which will be asked and to discuss the responses together. All participants will have an opportunity to share their ideas and participate in the discussion, but Elders will be asked by the facilitators to take the lead in the discussion. Facilitators will be responsible for ensuring the Elders have sufficient time to talk. This may require discussion time is spaced in one to two hour blocks periodically throughout the event, including evenings to provide adequate rest time for the Elders.

The ideas and information that Elders provide in the discussion sessions will be noted in field notes taken by the researchers during the event.

The ideas and information that Witness Participants provide to the principal investigator in their reflective written submissions will be used to inform the research in the same manner that interview transcripts would be used.

Video footage recorded by the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre at the event will only be done so with the consent of the participants. In the event that some individuals do not wish to be video-recorded, individual interviews and smaller group sessions with those who do wish to be recorded will be offered. It will be highlighted by the principal investigator and facilitators that participation is voluntary. Consent form is attached in Appendix B. Because of the personal nature of video recording and longevity of digital media within publically accessed domains, only written consent will be accepted for this process.

The ideas and information gathered in written form during the event will be analyzed in aggregate form and summarized in a report, which will be distributed to all event participants.

## **10. Storage of Data**

Notes recorded at the event will be securely stored by the Principal Investigator, in a locked file cabinet on the University of Saskatchewan campus for a minimum of five years. Video footage will be processed at the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre and a copy will remain in the possession of this First Nations community organization according to the guidelines of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) utilized by First Nations communities for research. Master copies will be stored with notes from the event in a locked storage cabinet on the University of Saskatchewan campus.

## **11. Dissemination of Results**

The ideas and information gathered in written form at the event will be analyzed in aggregate form and summarized in a report, which will be distributed to all event participants and funders of the research. After permission has been received of the edited video, video clips from the event will be posted on the website of the Aboriginal Education Research Centre

and the website of the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre. Video clips may also be posted on the Canadian Council on Learning website.

Participants will be informed that the data will be used as the basis for public presentations and publications.

## **12. Risks, Benefits and Deception**

Benefits to the Office of the Treaty Commissioner include using the event experience as a learning process for professional development of OTC employees through observing how Elders teach and learning through observation as a means of informing future OTC strategic planning processes through Indigenous ways of knowing;

Benefits to the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre include protection of First Nations' belief systems and ways of life; recording of Elders as education resource and contribution to historical records.

Benefits to the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, U of S include new research information and knowledge exchange on the education concept of Nourishing the Learning Spirit.

Benefits to Elder Participants includes leaving a legacy of teachings; having their life experiences and knowledge systems honoured. Benefits to Witness Participants include contributing to new research that informs educational thought and scholarly work.

There are no known risks or deceptions associated with participation in this event or research project.

## **13. Confidentiality**

The ideas and information gathered in written form for this research project will be analyzed in aggregate form and summarized in a report, which will be distributed to all event participants and funders of the research.

The report generated in written form for this research project will include an acknowledgements page, which will list event participants and their organizational affiliation. However, the report itself will not attribute any ideas or information gathered in the event to any particular participant.

## **14. Data/Transcript Release**

N/A

## **15. Debriefing and Feedback**

Copies of the report generated in written form for this research project will be distributed to all event participants. Participants who would like to find out more about the results of the event or research project may also contact Dr. Marie Battiste.

## **16. Required Signatures**



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(Signature of Researcher)

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(Date)

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(Signature of Student Researcher)

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(Date)

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(Signature of Dean/Department Head)

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(Date)

**17. Required Contact Information**

Marie Battiste. Academic Director  
Aboriginal Education Research Centre  
College of Education  
University of Saskatchewan  
28 Campus Dr., Saskatoon, SK S7N 0X1  
Tel: (306) 966-7576  
Fax: (306) 966-1363  
Email: [marie.battiste@usask.ca](mailto:marie.battiste@usask.ca)

### **Appendix A: Letter of Invitation**

You are invited to participate in a research study on the subject of *Nourishing the Learning Spirit*. The purpose of the research is to collect information teachers and learners, analyze the data, and discuss ways that the findings may be used in educational processes in the future.

This dialogue session is designed to:

1. Provide a forum for Aboriginal Elders to share their perspectives regarding the concept of Nourishing the Learning Spirit in order to understand learning from within cultural contexts that enable Aboriginal learners to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that improve their life long learning.
2. Investigate and analyze the impact of traditional Elder's teaching in nourishing the learning spirits of identified 'witness participants'.
3. Generate information that can be collected in written form, synthesized and contributed to a national body of research on Aboriginal Learning.
4. Provide a forum for audio/visual recording of proceedings that will be edited into a documentary format.

You are invited to be interviewed and contribute information to this study by responding to a set of questions which will be provided to you in advance of the dialogue session. The event begins the evening of March 26 with a traditional meal and introduction to the material. Discussion will continue March 27 and 28 with the Elders and Witness participants with sufficient time allocated for rest, and gender specific dialogues if they are requested. Traditional meals will be offered March 27 & 28 evenings. Elders may leave after the dialogue conclusion on March 28. The morning of March 29 will be reserved for discussion among the event coordinators and witness participants. The event will be concluded by noon on March 29. A consent form will be provided to you to obtain permission to use the information you provide. If you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact Dr. Marie Battiste and more details will be provided.

This research has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Ethics Committee. You may contact the Research Ethics Board if you have questions or to learn more about your rights as a participant by phoning collect to 1 (306) 966-2084.

Sincerely,

Dr. Marie Battiste  
Academic Director, Aboriginal Education Research Centre  
College of Education, University of Saskatchewan  
Tel: (306) 966-7576 Fax: (306) 966-1363  
Email: [marie.battiste@usask.ca](mailto:marie.battiste@usask.ca)

## **Appendix A: Letter of Invitation Question List**

Elder Research Questions: (to be posed to Elders for roundtable discussion)

1. How do Elders understand a lifelong learning journey with learning spirit(s)?
2. What are the main influences in a person's learning path?
  - Who or what nourishes the learning spirit? (*teachers? Family members? Self? Others?*)
  - How does where and how you live influence or affect the learning spirit? (*School? Community? Making a living on the land?*)
  - How is the learning spirit nourished? (*family influence? Naming? Ceremonies?*)
  - Why is it important to nourish the learning spirit? (*what happens when we don't?*)
3. What are the greatest influences and processes for nourishing the learning spirit?
4. Where have you witnessed effective Aboriginal Learning (*programs / practices / learning events*)?
5. What makes you think this was effective/successful (evidence/outcomes)?
6. What do you think are the life-giving learning forces for the successes you have witnessed?

Witness Participant Questions: (to be responded to in written form)

1. Describe important stages in Elder's learning journey. What has inspired them?
2. How would you describe your understanding of the meaning of learning spirit?
3. How have these characterizations of a learning path resonated with you in terms of your own learning journey?
4. What do you think is needed to nourish your learning spirit? What was missing in your past journey? How could this be different for future generations?
5. What impact have the Elder's teachings had on your life path and your learning? If these teachings were more widely known, how might these teachings impact
  - Individuals?
  - Families?
  - Communities?
  - Nations?
  - Canada?
6. What other comments would you add about this experience?

## **Appendix B: Consent Form**

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled *Nourishing the Learning Spirit: An Elder's Dialogue*. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

**Researcher:** Dr. Marie Battiste, Aboriginal Education Research Centre, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 966-7576.

**Purpose and Procedure:** You are invited to participate in this four-day dialogue session with Elders from various language families within Saskatchewan. This project is interested in how First Nations' Peoples understand the concept of learning and how a holistic learning path can be understood better for achieving full actualization of the learning spirit. This dialogue session is part of a knowledge gathering and sharing project which explores the nature of the Learning Spirit in Aboriginal learning, the literature, issues, and promising practices, and considers how learning can be enriched lifelong to nourish the learning spirit.

The workshop was organized by the Aboriginal Education Research Centre at the University of Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre with funding provided by the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, Nourishing the Learning Spirit Bundle, the Office of the Treaty Commissioner and the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre. The purpose of the workshop is to engage in a discussion about learning and the learning spirit and to create multiple types of data (field notes, video, journal reflections, Elder stories) based on the discussion.

During the dialogue session, with your consent, a videographer will be recording some of the dialogue in group sessions and also conducting personal interviews. After permission has been received of the edited video, video clips from the event will be posted on the website of the Aboriginal Education Research Centre and the website of the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre. Video clips may also be posted on the Canadian Council on Learning website, made into a documentary or used in other public presentations. If you do not wish to be video-recorded the videographer will avoid, or edit out, your image and contributions. At any time during the discussion session you may request that the camera be turned off for a period of time. You may also request that some or all of your comments captured on video be not made public by notifying the Principal Investigator within 7 days following the event. If you withdraw from the research study, you must notify the Principal Investigator within 7 days of the event. The withdrawal will be noted in writing by the Principal Investigator, and this will be respected during the editing process. A copy of the request will be kept with the master copy of the video footage for future reference.

Discussions will also be recorded in the form of field notes by the event coordinator from the University of Saskatchewan. A selected number of invited guests will be present as Witness Participants. They are responsible for participating in the Elders dialogue and responding in written personal journal entries to a series of predetermined questions about their learning experience.

The ideas and information gathered in written form at the workshop will be analyzed in aggregate form and summarized in a report, which will be distributed to all workshop participants. The report will also be shared with the research project funders. Safekeeping of the video footage recorded at the event will be the responsibility of the videographer until it is turned over to the

Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre and the University of Saskatchewan. A copy of the video footage will remain in the possession of the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, a First Nations community organization, according to the guidelines of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) utilized by First Nations communities for research. Master copies will be stored with notes from the event in a locked storage cabinet on the University of Saskatchewan campus. Locked storage facilities at the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre and the U of S will be ensured. A series of short video clips (less than 5 minutes each) will be extracted and made suitable for public posting on the Internet as digital vignettes. Only the research team will have access to the original video recordings and vignette electronic files.

It is the intention of the research team to adapt the video footage from the master copies into a documentary film in the future. Your consent on this document is also provision of consent for that future project.

**Potential Benefits:** Participation in this workshop will give you an opportunity to influence and/or contribute to the development of understanding the learning process and learning spirit as discussed within the scope of this research. The results of this research project will be made available to the Canadian Council on Learning and will be available across Canada.

**Potential Risks:** There are no known risks associated with participation in this workshop.

**Storage of Data:** The information gathered in this workshop will be recorded, analyzed and reported in aggregate form. The data will be stored by the research supervisor for a minimum of 5 years after the completion of the study. Notes recorded at the event will be securely stored by the Principal Investigator, in a locked file cabinet on the University of Saskatchewan campus. Video footage will be processed at the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre and the U of S. A copy of the video footage will remain in the possession of this First Nations community organization according to the guidelines of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) utilized by First Nations communities for research. Master copies will be stored with notes from the event in a locked storage cabinet on the University of Saskatchewan campus.

**Confidentiality:** The report generated from this workshop will include an acknowledgements page, which will list all workshop participants. However, the report itself will not attribute any ideas or information gathered in the workshop to any particular participant. Full confidentiality of the dialogue session cannot be guaranteed as a result of the group format for the event. However, all participants are asked to respect other participant's confidentiality.

**Right to Withdraw:** Your participation in this workshop is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. Any personal information that you share will be part of the dialogue. You may withdraw from this workshop and research project for any time, without penalty of any sort.

**Questions:** If you have any questions concerning this workshop and research project, please feel free to ask at any point. You are also free to contact the researcher at the number provided if you have any other questions. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on March 25, 2008. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (306 966-2084). Out-of-town participants may call collect.

**Follow-Up or Debriefing:** As noted above, copies of the report generated from this workshop will be distributed to all workshop participants. If you would like to find out more about the results of this workshop or research project, please feel free to contact Dr. Marie Battiste, at (306) 966-7576.

**Consent to Participate:** I have read and understood the description provided. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in this workshop and research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

---

(Name of Participant)

---

(Date)

---

(Signature of Participant)

---

(Signature of Researcher)

**Appendix C: Media Release Form**

**MEDIA RELEASE FORM**

DATE: March 26 - 29, 2008

PROJECT(S): Nourishing the Learning Spirit: An Elder's Dialogue

I give the *University of Saskatchewan* permission to reproduce the still and video images, and I agree that and all licensees and assignees (which may include but are not limited to the University of Saskatchewan) are entitled to use images described above in any form whatsoever, either wholly or in part, in any medium, (including but not limited to broadcast, print, or the internet) and in conjunction with any wording or other photos or drawings, worldwide. I understand that I do not own the copyright of the images.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject's Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

**Aboriginal Education Research Centre  
Room 1212, College of Education  
University of Saskatchewan  
28 Campus Drive  
SASKATOON SK S7N 0X1  
Phone: (306)966-1360  
Fax: (306) 966-1363**



## Appendix II: Audio / Visual Results

1. There were two sets of 7 DVD's recorded of the Nourishing the Learning Spirit: Elder's Dialogue. Recording included footage inside the Elder's lodge at Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation, and the men's circle at the fire outside the lodge. One Witness Participant provided their commentary orally during the men's circle. The DVD sets are being kept at:
  - a) Aboriginal Education Research Centre, University of Saskatchewan (*as per approved U of S ethical proposal*); and
  - b) The Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre (*respecting Aboriginal community protocols regarding Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP)*).
2. There are two copies of 5 full size audio cassettes of discussion recorded during the Elder's Dialogue. The recordings were of the Elder's voices. Most of the Elder's spoke in their original language. No English translations were recorded.
3. There were two sets of DVD video vignettes extracted of Cree Elders from the Elder's Dialogue DVDs by the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre (SICC). SICC edits the video vignettes and included English language text subtitles. An additional copy of the vignettes was created by the University of Saskatchewan for the Office of the Treaty Commissioner.
4. A second set of video vignettes has been requested by the U of S of the D ne and Nakwe Elders. SICC has conveyed they are working on the second DVD of vignettes.
5. A series of photos were taken at the Nourishing the Learning Spirit: Elder's Dialogue event. Photos are retained by the Aboriginal Education Research Centre, U of S.



Regina Shingoose and Dolly Neapetung



Judy Bear



Malvina Iron



Susan Yantz





Women's Circle



Men's Circle



Outside the Elder's Lodge



Keeping the Fire





Leon Moberly, Jerome Tootoosis  
& Albert Mooswa



Leon & Jerome



Nellie Squirrel, Mary Jane Stoney,  
& Regina Shingoose



Patrick Robillard



Albert Mooswa



Cecile Albert



Dolly Neapetung



Jerome Tootoosis





Leon Moberly



Mary Jane Stoney



Nellie Squirrel



Patrick Tootosis



Wesley Thomas



Nellie Squirrel & Regina Shingoose



Facilitators



Men's Circle



TECHNICIANS  
&  
FACILITATORS



Allan Adam



Darryl Chamakese



Judy Bear



Winston Walkingbear



Yvonne Vizina