



The Native Women's Association of Canada

Background Paper

Life Long Learning

"From the Womb to the Tomb"

Introduction

The Native Women's Association of Canada presents the following position paper for the sectoral workshops on Life Long Learning that includes, Early Childhood Development, Kindergarten to Grade school, Post Secondary and Adult Learning, including Labour Market/Skills Development. The paper will identify some overarching priorities and objectives dealing with learning. It will also recommend approaches and range of options for programming to improve access to learning opportunities for Aboriginal women. Specifically, the paper deals with (1) Jurisdiction and Control; (2) Access and Increasing Integration; (3) Sustainability and Capacity Building; and (3) Curriculum Development Research and Development.

Jurisdiction and Control

The jurisdiction and control of lifelong learning must have a collaborative and strategic objective, including all stakeholders in order for it to be a systemic approach. Aboriginal women must be assured that protections will be established that will respect, protect and fulfill the rights for all Aboriginal peoples in lifelong learning goals. Specifically education at all levels must be culturally appropriate and controlled by First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples respecting gender, race, language, disability, and sexual orientation. To accomplish this Federal and provincial/territorial governments need reform that activity transfers jurisdictional control and/or inclusion of First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities to educational institutions, including child development programming. All levels of government policy must be interactive to support Aboriginal learning institutions and programming that have proven success in the goal of lifelong learning. Jurisdiction should evolve to include value learning, recognizing that learning happens in many non-traditional methods. This would clearly recognize culturally appropriate learning centres, teachings and traditions.

Within the educational systems at all levels there is a requirement to increase the number of Aboriginal women sitting on school boards. In addition there is a further need to increasing the number of Aboriginal designated seats on school boards to reflect the representative Aboriginal population of the area.

These issues can start to be addressed through the following approaches:

- Aboriginal women must be assured an equal role within all levels of jurisdiction and control, from governance to policy reform.
- Partnership working, not only between decision making levels (national, regional and local) but also between public authorities and education service providers, the business sector and the Aboriginal partners, associations, vocational guidance services and research centres.
- Education and training systems need to recognize competences acquired in non-formal and informal settings - established between the government and

social partners.

- Provinces and Territories must work towards equal representation of Aboriginal women on schools boards.
- Provinces and Territories must enforce the same percentage of Aboriginal representation on school boards in districts to reflect the number Aboriginal students attending schools (e.g. Kenora school 90% Aboriginal students in attendance, school board members should reflect 90% Aboriginal board members)

Specifically regarding government legislation:

- Laws and government policies need an approach to lifelong learning whereby competencies can be certified irrespective of how they were acquired. Competencies acquired through work should be assessed and potentially recognized in the same way as those acquired through formal institutions.
- Federal transfers to the provinces and territories must be increased to support educational programming and lifelong learning to be accessible for Aboriginal people regardless of their address or nationhood. (e.g. on-reserve or off)
- Table legislation such as a national Aboriginal child welfare legislation that includes child development in learning.

Access and Increased integration

The concept that lifelong learning is “from the womb to the tomb” must be embedded into all approaches to lifelong learning. For Aboriginal women access and increased integration into learning initiatives is essential however, basic supports are just as vital as access itself. This is particularly the case for single parent women, low-income families and those living in rural and isolated communities. Some basic requirements for First Nations, Métis and Inuit women and their children attending education and/or skills training programming include affordable housing, adequate funding for school supplies, safe, reliable and accessible daycare facilities, culturally appropriate, gender specific sexual health education (and adequate, accessible, confidential provision of reproductive health supplies and services), transportation, access to telephone lines, internet connection/hardware and resources such as mentoring and coaching for learning at home and in the community.

By creating a learning culture this gives learning a higher profile, both in terms of image and by supporting those individuals who are either high-risk learner or have disabilities to learning. Attention is required to support this segment of the population by providing incentives for the people most reticent to continue their education or skills development.

Essential environmental supports include:

- Housing programs targeted for First Nations, Métis and Inuit women with priority for single parents on reserve, urban, rural and isolated communities. Incentive mortgage rates for Aboriginal people returning to school and achieving accreditation.
- Funding grants and loans available to Aboriginal low income families to providing educational supplies and hardware for learning. Additional grants for families with children with disabilities.
- Funding for Aboriginal communities and educational institutions for daily transportation for students.
- Daycare facilities and childcare policies that allow for at-home care, extended family support and remuneration for childcare.
- Community run educational hubs equipped with public telephone and internet access and resource libraries for all levels. The hubs may be located in local community schools or community human resource centres with staff for mentoring, coaching and homework support.

Programming initiatives for child development that require long term commitments and support include:

- Aboriginal Head Start, Community Action Program for Children and the Canadian Pre-natal Nutrition Program

Other programming that requires development include:

- Broad application to educational assessments and diagnostics for special needs children and adults.
- Case management, including affordable medical intervention for Aboriginal child diagnosed with special needs or disabilities to support their learning goals.
- Specific programming for special needs and/or behavioural learning challenges for Aboriginal students from K to 12 and post secondary levels.

To support the greater participation of Aboriginal women in lifelong learning new approaches are required in the location of educational and skills training initiatives. This can be achieved through the following:

- Establishment of Learning Centres for women that focus on responding to local and regional circumstances but the following aspects are seen as crosscutting:
 - Centres should be located wherever potential learners are on a daily basis (for women this may be at shelters, daycare facilities, women's organizations) meaning both formal and less formal settings such as schools, training institutions, the workplace, community and/or health centres.
- Establishment of Community Learning Networks for women that is designed with equal emphasis on the educational and social aspects of lifelong learning, which is defined as a way of life rather than a restricted subset of education and training. The networks would focus on leisure and work, old and young, and the gifted and challenged to address all community needs. The model brings together community partners within the Aboriginal and mainstream communities for a wide range of partnerships to support lifelong learning needs. It would encourage emerging educational trends and fill the gaps for those who require upgrading and/or skills development. Each network would create programming that may include access to Information Technology and learning facilities, self-directed and modular training, distance learning through video conferencing and community website. The networks would be staffed through volunteers and the community partnerships it creates through retired or private sector assistance.

Sustainability and Capacity Building

Sustainability will require adequate resourcing, involving substantial increase in public and private investment in learning. This does not only imply substantially increasing public budgets, but also ensuring the effective allocation of existing resources and encouraging new forms of investment. Some additional ways of sustaining lifelong learning may be the following:

- Aboriginal learning institutions must be given priority to evolve into public institutions providing additional funding formulas that are available from provincial governments.
- Incentive programming with remuneration agreements for graduating students, employment options within communities for certain terms may help to support funding and human resource development demands.

Curriculum Development Research and Development

Curriculum and research development must prioritize Aboriginal cultural and recognize the traditional learning methods and tools used by Aboriginal people. Governments need to ensure that all learning institutions both within Aboriginal communities and mainstream educational institutions have these items adapted within current programs. To maximize accessibility accreditation and articulation protocols should be established with all institutions. Educational programs from kindergarten to post secondary levels must be enhanced with accurate historical Aboriginal content and appropriate cultural teachings. Aboriginal women must be integral to the design, development and delivery of curriculum and research design throughout all institutions.

Greater emphasis is required to incorporate within Aboriginal curriculum the traditional teachings of Aboriginal women's role in the community. Further gender equality issues and teachings on positive relationship building between men and women and family life is a priority. An Aboriginal women's degree program at the post secondary level could provide learning themes on leadership issues particular and designed for women. Additional gender specific research is greatly needed to determine on all aspects of lifelong learning initiatives. Other options could explore learning (with accreditation) at the workplace, allowing programs to integrate work practicums with advancement opportunities for women. These approaches provide the flexibility for Aboriginal women to meet their lifelong learning goals.

Specific curriculum development is required as follows:

- Aboriginal historical curriculum and appropriate cultural units both for Aboriginal communities and mainstream.
- Aboriginal women thematic units accurately depicting Aboriginal women's role within First Nations, Métis and Inuit women nations.
- All Aboriginal curriculums must be offered K to 12; to post secondary at all levels.
- Units offered within curriculum on gender specific sexual health education and provision on reproductive health supplies and services.

Specific programs are:

- Articulated programs that are accredited that integrate workplace and work practicums for advancement opportunities for women.
- An Aboriginal women's degree program at the post secondary level that includes specific credits on leadership, political science, and how women succeed.