LIVING WITH LITERACY

A REVIEW OF LITERACY PROGRAMMING FOR URBAN ABORIGINAL LEARNERS

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ECALA
7114 – 98 Street
EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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by
Cora Weber-Pillwax, PhD
Sarah Cortez, Research Assistant

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INTRODUCTION

Literacy in the Canadian Aboriginal context is multifaceted. The intergenerational trauma from aggressively assimilationist national laws, policies, and practices, such as those that established and governed Indian residential schooling, particularly from 1876 to 1996, have had far-reaching, damaging and disadvantageous effects on the lives of contemporary Aboriginal peoples. Hanemann (2005) argues that "the educational disadvantage of indigenous groups has to be seen in a context where illiteracy is one component of many compounding factors within a vicious circle of poverty, poor health, high unemployment, drug abuse and crime" (p. 6). Illiteracy or low literacy levels are but one factor in a complex web of dysfunction caused by the legacies of historical trauma. The development and delivery of Aboriginal basic adult literacy programming must be considered within a matrix that forefronts not only the trauma experienced, but also the subjugation of Indigenous knowledge systems and languages. The purpose of this first section of the report is to provide a contextual review of statistical data and identification of barriers to literacy that will inform the subsequent analysis of document and interview data. The second section will make linkages between literacy and five domain areas identified as being influenced by and influencing low literacy levels. These five areas are: educational attainment, labour force outcomes, income, interaction with the justice system, and health outcomes. The third section will discuss the literacy needs of urban Aboriginal people in relation to the collage of background information foregrounded in this report. The fourth section will discuss information gathered from service providers concerning literacy for Aboriginal people. The fifth section will provide a synthesis of the review. Finally, the sixth section will provide concluding remarks. Existing substantive literature relating to Aboriginal adult literacy generally, to promising practices in Aboriginal adult literacy programs, and to identification of some programs exhibiting those practices will be interspersed throughout the review. The literature in the area of Aboriginal literacy is sparse, and the address of promising practices is even more limited; however, several themes did arise, including identification of barriers to participation for Aboriginal adult learners and presentation of arguments or reasons to support the perseverance of literacy programming despite these barriers.

I. Background Information for the Review

CONTEXT

Although the term *Aboriginal* is not considered by some groups as acceptable for usage in how they name or describe themselves[1], *Aboriginal peoples* is the all-encompassing term from the *Constitution Act 1982* wherein Section 2 defines *Aboriginal peoples* as including "the Indian, Inuit and Metis peoples." *First Nations* is accepted as the contemporary term replacing the wide-spread use of the term *Indians*, excepting in

[1] In 2008, the Anishinabek Nation made a resolution against the use of the term because it represented assimilation and displacement.

situations where the term is used in reference to those persons in registered membership lists established according to the rules and regulations of the Indian Act, which thus also formally precludes the usage of other identifiers such as *First Nations*. The use of the term Aboriginal in this report is as an adjective to describe those peoples specifically referred to in the *Constitution Act 1982*; the terminology in the report is not used to represent names and identifiers by means of which Indigenous individuals or groups self-identify. The report acknowledges that Aboriginal persons and groups have the right to self- identify according to their own ancient histories, but in relation to the content of this report, that factor does not enter into the data collection processes, nor into the analyses of those data.

This review into literacy programming for Aboriginal adults within the metropolitan area of Edmonton can be made more comprehensible with some historical and geographical context. Building on the previous introductory comments regarding terminology, First Nations people are classified as either Registered/Status Indians or non-Registered/Status Indians. In Canada, there are 617 First Nations, previously referred to as *Bands*, and 60 Aboriginal languages (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2015). As of 2011, there are 851, 560 First Nations people in Canada, with 637, 660 identifying as Registered Indians. More than half of these First Nations members live off-reserve, and mostly in urban centres. Self-identified Metis people constitute 451,795 persons, or 32.3% of the total Aboriginal population and 1.4% of the Canadian population. In Alberta, there were 220,695 Aboriginal people, representing 15.8% of the total Aboriginal population, and 6.2 % of the total Canadian population. The census metropolitan areas with the largest populations of First Nations people with registered Indian status who lived off reserve were Winnipeg (25,970), Edmonton (18,210) and Vancouver (15,080). In Winnipeg they represented 3.6% of the total population, 1.6% in Edmonton and 0.7% in Vancouver. The largest population of Metis was in Alberta (96,865) where 21.4% of all Métis in Canada lived. One-quarter of Métis in Canada lived in four western census metropolitan areas: Winnipeg with 46,325, Edmonton with 31,780, Vancouver (18,485) and Calgary (17,040) (Statistics Canada, 2011).

The 2011 National Household Survey showed that there were 392,105 Aboriginal children aged 14 and under in Canada. 49.6% Aboriginal children lived with both parents compared to 76% non-Aboriginal children; 34% Aboriginal children lived with one parent, compared to 17% non-Aboriginal children, majority of both sets were with single mother. About 10,525 Aboriginal children (2.7%) lived with one or both grandparents (no parents) compared with 0.4% of non-Aboriginal children. Additionally 35,540 Aboriginal children (9.1%) lived with at least one parent and at least one grandparent, compared with 3.9% of non-Aboriginal children. Further NHS results showed that 3.6% of Aboriginal children (14,225) were foster children, compared with 0.3% of non-Aboriginal children (15,345). Almost half (48.1%) of all children aged 14 and under in foster care were Aboriginal children. Aboriginal children aged 4 and under were somewhat less likely to be in foster care than those who were older (3.1% versus 3.9% of those aged 5 to 14). In addition to foster children, a further 4,515 Aboriginal children aged 14 and under (1.2%) lived with other relatives in arrangements that did

not include at least one parent or grandparent. These relatives could be extended family, such as aunts, uncles or cousins. This was the case for 0.2% of non-Aboriginal children of the same age group. 4.5% of First Nations children were in foster care, 1.7% of Metis children, and 2.8% of Inuit children (Statistics Canada, 2013)

In looking at numbers for Edmonton specifically, the 2011 National Household Survey noted that 61,765 people identify as Aboriginal (26,945 First Nations; 31,775 Metis; 1,115 Inuit); Aboriginal people constitute approximately 5% of the population in Edmonton. Edmonton is second only to Winnipeg as one of the four primary urban centres in Western Canada hosting high populations of Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal population in Edmonton is young and growing. Nearly half (48%) of this demographic is under the age of 25. Another 48% of Aboriginal peoples in Edmonton fall within the range of 25-64, and the remaining 4% are above the age of 65. Statistics Canada predicts that by the year 2031, Aboriginal people will constitute between 4.0% and 5.3% of the population in Canada versus 3.9% in 2006. Further, they predict an average annual growth of Aboriginal people of 1.1% - 2.2% from 2006 – 2031, in comparison to a 1.0% annual increase of the non-Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2011).

BARRIERS TO LITERACY

Several barriers to participation in adult literacy programs for Aboriginal learners were identified in the literature.   Chief among these are material barriers. Lack of money/funding (Lickers, 2003), lack of access to transportation (Jones, 2003; Lickers, 2003; Silver, Klyne, & Simard, 2003), and living in isolated communities (Hanemann, 2005) were found to be significant barriers to accessing literacy programs for Aboriginal learners. Lack of motivation, which is linked closely to material barriers (Hanemann, 2005) and poor attendance, particularly among younger learners (late teens – early twenties) (Silver, et al., 2003) were also identified as barriers. Hanemann (2005) posited that Aboriginal adult learners put the needs of their families first. Aboriginal learners often have additional familial responsibilities (Battiste, 2005), such as childcare (Lickers, 2003; Silver, et al., 2003) which impede their ability to pursue literacy learning. Low levels of self-esteem and self-confidence associated with a number of different factors was also acknowledged as a barrier to literacy for Aboriginal people (Lickers, 2003; Silver, et al., 2003). The stigma associated with low literacy (Hanemann, 2005; Swanson, 2003) and experiences of racism in earlier school years (Silver, et al., 2003), were also identified as barriers, and can be seen as contributing to the immense mental, emotional and spiritual pain (Lickers, 2003; Silver, et al., 2003) experienced by Aboriginal adult learners. A final identified barrier was communication difficulties emanating from English as a second language among some Aboriginal adult learners (Lickers, 2003; Swanson, 2003). Despite multiple barriers, Aboriginal adult learners are keen to increase their literacy skills and to achieve higher levels of education. Reasons to learn include creating a better life for their children (Silver, et al., 2003), being able to help children with their homework (Silver, et al., 2003; Swanson, 2003), encouraging

their children to pursue higher education (Swanson, 2003), and obtaining better jobs (Swanson, 2003).

II. Relationship or linkages between relevant domains and the literacy (levels and types) of Aboriginal people in Edmonton
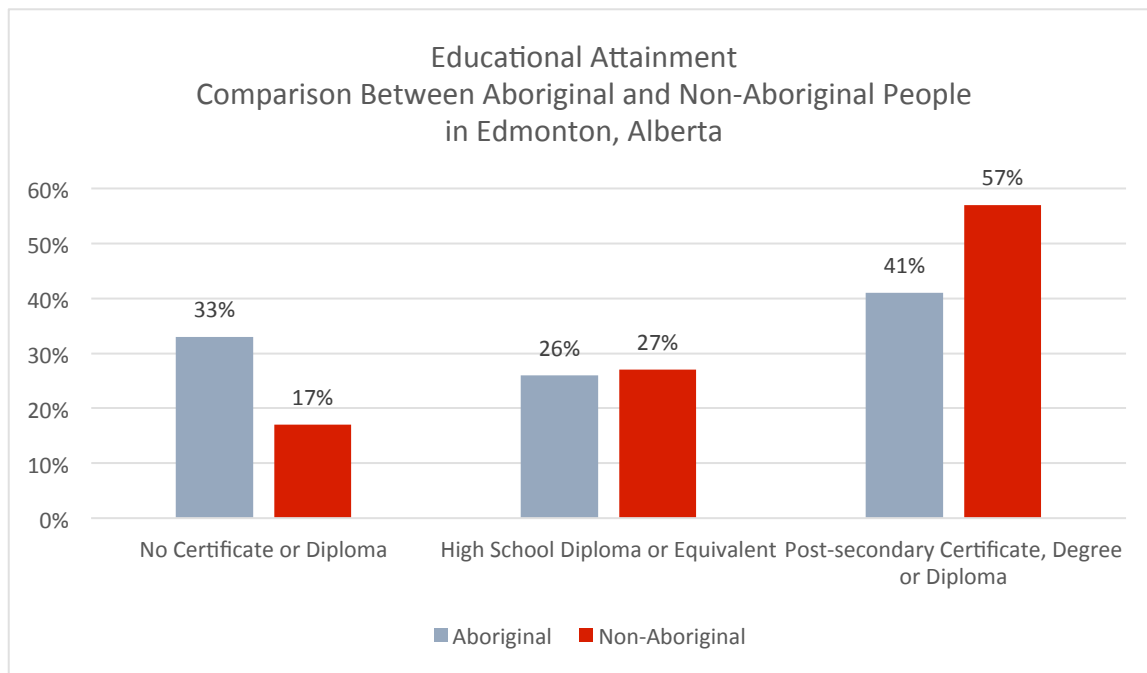
The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) affirms that literacy is a fundamental human right (Hanemann, 2005). The literacy levels of Aboriginal people in Canada are demonstrably lower than their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Bougie, 2008). The International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS), conducted in 2003, is a key source of data on the state of adult literacy in Canada. The IALSS included data on Aboriginal adults in urban areas of Saskatchewan and Manitoba and in select communities of all three territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut). While data was not obtained for Aboriginal people in Alberta, the findings are comparable because while Saskatchewan, Manitoba and the Territories have the highest densities of Aboriginal people; Edmonton has the second highest number of First Nations, Metis and Inuit individuals living within its borders, second only to Winnipeg. The IALSS found that slightly more than 60% of Aboriginal people in surveyed areas scored below the Level 3 threshold, which is equivalent to high school completion (Bougie, 2008). This is a full ten percentage points behind non-Aboriginal Canadians. Level 3 is generally required for most employment opportunities in Canada. As Gulati (2013) argued, "In other words, 60% of the Aboriginal population are unable to understand and use the information around them to create a better life for themselves and their families" (p. 3); a situation that severely diminishes Aboriginal people's opportunities for success in a contemporary knowledge-based economy. Further, Bougie (2008) notes that performance at or above Level 3 is associated with positive outcomes, such as "increased civic participation, increased economic success and independence, and enhanced opportunities for lifelong learning" (p. 4).

The cost of low literacy is extremely high and is a significant factor in social and economic outcomes for Aboriginal people (Bougie, 2008). In particular, low literacy levels influence educational attainment, labor force outcomes, income, interaction with the justice system, and health outcomes (Gulati, 2013). Each of these areas will be discussed, and relevant statistics from the National Household Survey (2011) for the Edmonton CMA, when available, or relevant federal statistics will be provided in order to contextualize the current situation of Aboriginal people living in the urban centre of Edmonton, and to make the linkages between low literacy levels and deleterious effects in each of the previously mentioned social and economic indicators. Further, the simplified statistics and their implied linkages to social realities of Aboriginal peoples in the city of Edmonton are provided as significant context for the urban and Aboriginal complexities that underpin literacy and multiple other services required to acknowledge and address the needs of urban Indigenous populations.
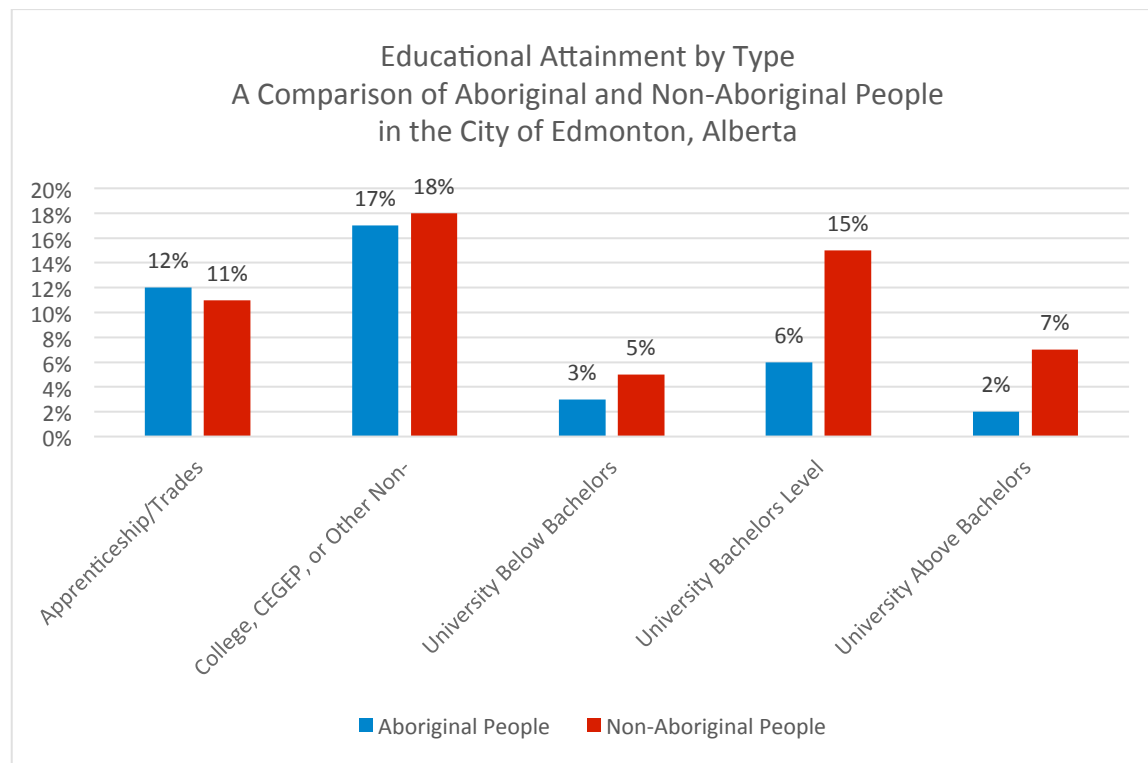
Educational Attainment

Educational attainment has been shown to have a direct impact on each of the other social and economic indicators mentioned (Gulati, 2013). The National Household Survey (Statistics Canada, 2011) which reported on a number of measures for the Edmonton metropolitan area demonstrates that Aboriginal people in Edmonton continue to fall behind in a number of key socioeconomic indicators, including education, labor force status, and income. As shown in the following charts, Aboriginal people in Edmonton continue to have lower rates of educational attainment than non-Aboriginal people. According to the NHS, 33% of Aboriginal people have no certificate or diploma versus 17% of non-Aboriginal people. While high school diploma rates for Aboriginal people at 26% have nearly met those of non-Aboriginal people at 26%, the rates of post-secondary certificate, degree or diploma for Aboriginal people (41%) are a full 18 percentage points behind non-Aboriginal people (57%) in Edmonton.

Educational Attainment
Comparison Between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal People
in Edmonton, Alberta

Of the 41% of Aboriginal people who have obtained a post-secondary certificate degree or diploma, the majority have achieved either a College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma or an apprenticeship/trades certificate or diploma. There continues to be a significant gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people when it comes to post-secondary completion at the Bachelor's Level or above. Only 6% of Aboriginal people have achieved a University degree at the Bachelors Level versus 15% of non-Aboriginal people; 2% of Aboriginal people have achieved a University degree above a Bachelors Level compared to 7% of non-Aboriginal people. In fact, while the educational attainment of Aboriginal people in Canada has improved steadily over time, the gap between the proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people with university degrees is actually widening (Parkin, 2015).

**Educational Attainment by Type
A Comparison of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal People
in the City of Edmonton, Alberta**

	Aboriginal People	Non-Aboriginal People
Apprenticeship/Trades	12%	11%
College, CEGEP, or Other Non-	17%	18%
University Below Bachelors	3%	5%
University Bachelors Level	6%	15%
University Above Bachelors	2%	7%

■ Aboriginal People   ■ Non-Aboriginal People

LABOUR FORCE OUTCOMES

In considering labour force outcomes, Aboriginal people in Edmonton continue to lag behind their non-Aboriginal counterparts. As mentioned previously, lower literacy levels contribute significantly to this result. Gulati (2013) noted that literacy at Level 3 is necessary for most jobs in Canada. The finding of the IALSS that more than 60% of Aboriginal people scored below a Level 3 is indicative of a serious issue relating to individual obtainment of employment for this demographic. The following chart is a comparison of the labour force status for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people age fifteen years and over in the City of Edmonton. The unemployment rate for Aboriginal people age fifteen years and over is nearly double that of the non-Aboriginal population, at 11.7 and 5.6 respectively.

	LABOUR FORCE STATUS – 15 Years or Older	
	Aboriginal	**Non-Aboriginal**
Employed	88%	95%
Unemployed	12%	5%
Participation Rate	69.0	73.2
Employment Rate	60.9	69.0
Unemployment Rate	11.7	5.6

INCOME

Lack of sufficient income follows impeded access to labor force participation, and its relation to low literacy levels is multilayered. Labor force outcomes define income levels and both are determined in large part by literacy levels. Further, educators are familiar with the types and numbers of material barriers related to income that potential learners often face in accessing literacy programming, including transportation and childcare. Aboriginal people in Edmonton continue to report lower levels of income as evidenced by the 2011 National Household Survey. In the chart below, income of Aboriginal people is shown to be on average $8,000 - $10,000 less annually than that of non-Aboriginal people.

	INCOME	
	Aboriginal	**Non-Aboriginal**
Median Income	$26,763	$37,243
Average Income	$38,056	$49,266
Median Income After Tax	$25,291	$33,503
Average Income After Tax	$32,377	$40,901

Further, the 2011 National Household Survey found that the prevalence of low income for Aboriginal people in the city of Edmonton far surpassed that of non-Aboriginal people. In every age group, the income gap is pronounced. For instance, 29% of Aboriginal children under the age of eighteen years lived in low income households versus 13.9% of non-Aboriginal children.

	PREVALENCE OF LOW INCOME	
	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal
Under 18 years	29%	13.9%
Under 6 years	33.6%	14.6%
18-64	19.7%	10.4%
65+	12%	6.8%

INTERACTION WITH THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

According to Gulati (2013), low literacy levels are related to interaction with the justice system. She noted that between 65% and 70% of federally incarcerated inmates cannot read and write adequately. This is significant, particularly for Aboriginal people, because of the overrepresentation of both Aboriginal men and women within the criminal justice system. For instance, according to the 2013-2014 Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator of Canada, in the last 10 years, the incarceration of Aboriginal people overall has risen 47.4%; yet, the White population in Canada has decreased by 3% over the same ten year period. Alarmingly, the federally sentenced Aboriginal women population has increased by 112%. Aboriginal comprise 22.8% of

the total incarcerated population despite constituting only 3.9% of the Canadian
population.

HEALTH OUTCOMES

Smylie, Williams, and Cooper (2006) argue that "health promotion discusses literacy
both in terms of its direct effects on health and as an indirect social determinant of
health, via its effects on variables such as income, social status, and food security" (p.
S22). Additionally, and in support of this, Gulati (2013) states that literacy is an
important aspect in the understanding of nutrition, the proper use of medications and
health prevention. Aboriginal people in Canada are disproportionately over-represented
in a myriad of physical and mental health problems, such as diabetes, hypertension,
addiction and learning disabilities (Bougie, 2009; Reading, 2006; Reading, & Wien,
2009). For instance, Friesen & Krauth (2010), in their study of Aboriginal and non-
Aboriginal grade seven students in British Columbia found that 18% of the Aboriginal
students were disabled in some form versus only 7.1% of the non-Aboriginal students.
Further, the United Nations, in an interjurisdictional review, found the following in
regards to Aboriginal people in Canada:

- Life expectancy for Aboriginal peoples is seventeen years less than for
  non-Aboriginal peoples
- Rate of tuberculosis for First Nations peoples is 35 times higher than for
  the non-Aboriginal population
- Over 50% of Aboriginal people have Type 2 diabetes and the share is
  expected to increase (Gulati, 2013, p. 16).

According to Smylie, Williams, and Cooper (2006), health and literacy are integrally
intertwined within an Aboriginal context; within a holistic framework, literacy or more
accurately multiple literacies "become(s) a metaphor for living a healthy life" (p. S22).

III. Edmonton is located specifically within the time and space represented by this collage of background information and is described specifically in relation to urban Aboriginal people and their literacy needs.

Across the nation at the municipal, provincial and federal levels, the plight and promise
of Aboriginal peoples are being considered in a very real way. We are a crossroads, at
a time and place where the relationship between the general population of Canadians
and Indigenous Aboriginal peoples must change; Canadians must be more responsive
to the actual needs of Aboriginal peoples, and must acknowledge and recognize that
Aboriginal knowledge and insights are essential and foundational for a way forward.
The historical trauma of Indian Residential Schools, along with devastating effects and
impacts from other assimilationist policies, laws and procedures directed at Aboriginal
peoples since first contact and through contemporary generations, are being revisited

and reconsidered under the banner of reconciliation. At the federal level, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has issued 94 Calls to Action (May 2015), of which the first five domains are child welfare, education, language and culture, health and justice (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Given the previous linkages identified between literacy and socioeconomic factors, each of these domains and the calls to action have significance for any future literacy planning and programming.   In his mandate letter to Carolyn Bennett, Minister of the newly named Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Prime Minister Trudeau wrote the following:

> As Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, your overarching goal will be to renew the relationship between Canada and Indigenous Peoples. This renewal must be a nation-to-nation relationship, based on recognition, rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership. I expect you to re-engage in a renewed nation-to-nation process with Indigenous Peoples to make real progress on the issues most important to First Nations, the Métis Nation, and Inuit communities – issues like housing, employment, health and mental health care, community safety and policing, child welfare, and education (Trudeau, 2015, para.13)

At the provincial level, in a letter to her Cabinet Ministers dated July 7, 2015, Alberta Premier Rachel Notley followed up on a campaign commitment to implement the objectives and principles of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*:

> The United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* speaks to Indigenous people's basic human rights, language, land and their right to control their own lives. At its heart, the UN declaration encourages all of us to celebrate and preserve Indigenous cultures and traditions and to work alongside Indigenous people to ensure they are participating in decisions that concern them (Notley, 2015).

At the municipal level, Edmonton Mayor Don Iveson announced the year of reconciliation during the Truth and Reconciliation's final stop in Edmonton in March 2014. At that time, Mayor Iveson committed to the following three priorities:

- Educate city staff on the history and impact of residential schools
- Commit to higher Aboriginal youth participation in civic programs, fill gaps in city programming and allow youth to explore careers in the public service
- Create a public space in the city for Indigenous ceremonies and cultural practices (http://aptn.ca/news/2015/06/03/edmonton-soon-largest-aboriginal-population-embraces-reconciliation-aims/)

Each of the leaders indicated a commitment and some foundational guidelines and/or strategies to work in partnership and collaboration with Aboriginal people. Further, each commitment orients to and addresses the ongoing effects of the intergenerational

trauma that continues to manifest in many different and damaging ways as evidenced by the statistics offered earlier in this report. These statistics tell a story of a population in crisis where individuals and families are trying simply to survive their day-to-day realities. Literacy programming and planning in this context requires innovative thinking grounded in Aboriginal cultures and languages. Each of the statements offered by our municipal, provincial and federal leaders is a commitment to the preservation and reclamation of Aboriginal languages and traditions.

Aboriginal histories, knowledges, cultures and languages were recognized by many, if not most, of the authors reviewed who are writing on Aboriginal literacy. In fact, one of the broader goals of Aboriginal literacy involves the safeguarding of Aboriginal language and culture (Antone, 2003). The value of recognizing and incorporating Indigenous knowledges and languages was seen as a particularly important component of effective literacy programming (Antone, 2003; Hanemann, 2005; Lickers, 2003; Ningwakwe, 2003; Peltier, 2010; Robinson, 2009; Swanson, 2003). Hanemann (2005) argued that "Indigenous literacy is a complex issue involving the need to heal, to compensate, and to reclaim identity, language, indigenous knowledge, tradition, culture, and self-determination…there is an urgent need to develop culturally and linguistically sensitive approaches to adult learning for indigenous populations starting from their needs, and going beyond literacy" (p. 11). Using ceremonies, such as talking circles (Lickers, 2003; Ningwakwe, 2003), inviting Elders to share teachings (Lickers, 2003), and accommodating traditional practices, such as hunting, fishing and harvesting (Swanson, 2003) were seen as vital to the success of literacy programming for Aboriginal people. Antone (2003) posited that:

> Models of Aboriginal literacy find new ways of incorporating traditional Aboriginal knowledge and methodologies into the learning situations of Aboriginal learners. These models counter the assimilation process that continues to be detrimental to Aboriginal societies. Aboriginal models of literacy involve a process of transformation from oppression to revitalization (p. 14)

Further, one of the most insidious barriers to literacy learning identified for Aboriginal adult learners was low self-esteem and low self-confidence (Lickers, 2003; Silver, et al., 2003). These particular barriers are endemic, and stem largely from historical trauma related in particular to Indian residential schools and the intergenerational effects that flowed from those schools. Lickers (2003) claimed that "we can teach people to read and write, but without the self-esteem and self-confidence to use these skills, they are no better off than they were before" (p. 57). Ningwakwe (2003) argued that Aboriginal adult literacy learners need to be taught that they did not fail; rather, that the system failed them. He states, "the system did not recognize their realities, their learning styles and did not make room for them as whole persons'" (p. 39).

This particular quote leads to a promising practice that was mentioned repeatedly: teaching must be for the whole person. A number of the studies in the review

addressed the importance of a holistic approach to Aboriginal adult literacy (Antone, 2003; Battiste, 2005; Jones, 2003; Ningwakwe, 2003; Silver, et al., 2003). As noted by Ningwakwe (2008), "the non-recognition of Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body, or both left and right brain, in the educational context has created the notion of separation in the minds of people" (p. 16). A learner-centered pedagogy that attends to the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual aspects of each individual is viewed as essential to Aboriginal learner success. Further, a supportive, holistic education can assist Aboriginal adult learners in believing in themselves (Battiste, 2005). Battiste (2005) calls for the development of a *sui generis* or one-of-a-kind education, which is largely realized through providing specialized supports to attend to the many barriers facing Aboriginal adult learners in their pursuit of literacy education. Strong social, emotional and practical supports are often identified as essential for learners' success; supports might include for example providing childcare or childcare subsidies, calling students if they don't attend to see how they are doing, driving them or providing access to transportation to and from the program, providing flexibility in program hours, and small cash incentives (Silver, et al., 2003; Swanson, 2003). Further, programs that incorporate life skills, such as communication, conflict resolution, problem solving, decision-making and anger management (Lickers, 2003) are shown to contribute to learner success. One study (Gelfer, Higgins, & Perkins, 2001) carried out in the United States looked at the implementation of a family literacy education project (Project LEAF) that included adult basic literacy skills and early childhood education for young children in their program. Ten percent of the families were Native American. The study found that once a month home visits were particularly effective in increasing Native American participation. This recognition of the importance of children and family and of learners' familial commitments is crucial to learner success. Swanson (2003) argued that including units on family management is a good practice for Aboriginal adult learners.

In consideration of literacy programming, the literature review indicated positive effects from a strong sense of mutual respect and cooperation between literacy practitioners and learners. Further, a number of positive attributes of both instructors and staff of adult Aboriginal programming were identified. Foremost among these were the deferential manner (as in respectful, polite and courteous) with which they treated Aboriginal learners (Jones, 2003; Silver, et al., 2003; Swanson, 2003). The presence of patient and supportive literacy practitioners fostered a friendly and non-judgmental atmosphere that put the learners at ease and allowed for positive and purposeful interactions (Silver, et al., 2003; Swanson, 2003). Even seemingly small gestures, such as greeting learners enthusiastically when they walk through the door and viewing each learner as brave for having done so were mentioned as important (Ningwakwe, 2003). Programs where learners feel cared about and valued (Jones, 2003) and where the atmosphere is warm and personalized (Silver, et al., 2003) are seen as essential to learner success. Instructors who are passionate and dedicated about their work are seen as particularly important. In fact, Swanson (2003) argued that the practitioner's relationship to his/her students is the single most important factor in literacy programming. Other important traits of teachers include a willingness to share their own

histories (Swanson, 2003), unconditional acceptance (Ningwakwe, 2003), and mutual respect (Peltier, 2010).

These aspects of literacy learning speak to working with individuals and communities as the base for growth and community wellness. It speaks to individual and community empowerment, which "comes from within individuals or groups and cannot be bestowed by others" (Pinnow, 2009, p. 6). Pinnow (2009) posits that community empowerment and involvement means that the community is always involved in "deciding, designing and delivering programs" (p. 11).   A strong sense of community amongst learners and instructors was identified as an important trait of successful Aboriginal adult literacy programming. Programs using cooperative learning groups (Swanson, 2003) and finding common issues for learners to consider and discuss (Ningwakwe, 2003) can engender a support system. Native issues, in particular, dealing with local issues or topical events are effective gateways for supportive and relevant group discussions (Jones, 2003; Swanson, 2003). Further, the building of community amongst Aboriginal adult learners can help in creating a "warm, highly personalized, non-hierarchical atmosphere (Silver, et al., 2003, p. 1) that has also been identified as essential to learner success.

IV. Service Providers and Literacy for Urban Aboriginal People

Introduction

This section of the review will discuss the information shared through several on-site interviews in Edmonton with agency representatives identified by Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association (ECALA) as service organizations or agencies that might be providing basic literacy programming for Aboriginal adults.[2] Although not directly related to literacy programming, several other interviews were conducted with individuals associated with urban Aboriginal organizations that served Aboriginal adults in the training and employment sector. While ECALA does provide funding to organizations in the city for literacy-oriented programming, no regular funding stream has been created specifically aimed at addressing the basic literacy needs of urban Aboriginal people.[3]

Overview of commonalities

An overview of the information collected through semi-formal interview sessions with six to eight representative agencies showed a strong sense of shared understanding about literacy and how literacy needs of Aboriginal people are being addressed by their agencies. Some of these points of common views are especially significant in that they relate to and/or are deeply indicative of critical factors identified in the literature as especially meaningful in effective literacy programming for Aboriginal people. The next

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[2] Appendix A for agencies interviewed.
[3] Appendix B for ECALA funded agencies

sections will discuss several identified points in more detail and in relation to the information gathered from the interview discussions.

Programs are intended to serve all clients:

The commonly shared view amongst the interviewees was that their services and programs were designed to address specific needs of anyone who presented for assistance or services and programs being offered. The need for Aboriginal-specific programming did not garner support in the context of most of the review sessions, nor was it presented as an area of need generally in the urban setting. The one exception mentioned was in relation to employment and training needs of Aboriginal adults. Nonetheless, at least one of the agencies reported that they operated programs with funds specifically targeting services for urban Aboriginal people. These programs were associated with supporting parents and youth in need of basic supports. Even in these cases, however, the agency emphasized that their primary guideline in offering most of their services and programs was accessibility and availability for anyone who chose to access them.

Program design and curricular content in relation to Aboriginal people's cultures and knowledges:

Most agency representatives held the view that an approach specifically oriented to the literacy needs of Aboriginal learners would not necessarily present any advantages over what was already in place for all learners, at least through their programs. All groups spoke strongly in support of accessibility to their programs and services. In relation to the programs specifically, one general but common feature was the lack of evidence of any form of curricular or program focus directly grounded or based on culturally specific Aboriginal knowledge systems or ways of being. There was nothing reported or observable to indicate that any specific form of Aboriginal knowledge was being included as foundational for curricular and program purposes, including program design, process and/or content.

All of the agencies operate programs with a predominantly Aboriginal client learner base, yet no mention or demonstration of a specific cultural relevance in program design or curricular content was ever brought forward or pointed out as a significant factor in program planning.

Visuals and vocabulary used in relation to programs were obviously and intentionally offered from Aboriginal perspectives in several instances, but clearly, from observations at the sites and with attention to the program descriptions, the interviews demonstrated that most program content can accurately be described as adhering to and reflective of the values and educational practices of mainstream Alberta and Canada.

Program objectives and assessment:

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The primary indicators for measuring program success or effectiveness for the agencies seemed to lie with attendance and the numbers of people who either registered or dropped in (depending on the program). The numbers of persons and their rates of attendance for the duration of the program assessed effectiveness of programs in promoting and facilitating literacy. Attendance and participation was an indicator of success especially for the drop-in programs, e.g. programs at the Bissell Centre. At the same time, most of the agencies reported that there were people who came into their programs because of court orders, i.e. to get their children back from the government systems, or to meet various system requirements; no agency volunteered statistical data on the numbers of persons who might fall into this category. In relation to long-term planning for literacy-programming assessment in the urban context, this might be an area of study since literacy could thus be considered from several different and significant directions and perspectives.

Significance of partnerships for agency programming:

Most of the agency representatives readily acknowledged the importance of partnering with other organizations and/or systems of authority as an enhancement of the agency's own services and programs. Interactions with Child and Family Service, Children's Services, schools/education systems, and police/justice system were mentioned as significant partners in serving the people who accessed their programs or used their services. Positive examples of the types of services and benefits that accrued to their clients from these partnerships were shared. The possibility for conflicts of interest in agency-partner relations was not seen as a concern or potential issue since open lines of communication and mutual understanding between the two bodies was held to be in the best interests of the person being served. Clients and service recipients were cited as the primary beneficiaries and the basis of such partnerships. Advocacy was not mentioned nor taken up as a function of any agency.

Parenting programs as basic literacy programs for adults:

Several of the agencies described programs related to parenting and/or child development as their responses to the literacy needs of Aboriginal people. They felt that these programs could easily be viewed as alternative approaches or other types of programming that could meet the needs of adult basic literacy for Aboriginal people. Most of the agencies provided such programs for parents, pregnant youth and/or parents with young children. Several of the parent and child programs seemed to be built on the model of the *Rhymes that Bind* program offered widely by the Center for Family Literacy at many locations around the city, with some serving high numbers of Aboriginal parents. Other examples of parenting programs that were described include the Multicultural Rhymes that Bind, Orenda House, Parent Link Centre, Traditional Parenting, and Health for Two; one agency had several programs that had been specifically funded to serve Aboriginal children, Aboriginal youth as parents, and

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Aboriginal parents. The parenting programs in general were not described as being Aboriginal in content or approaches, nor did there seem to be any Aboriginal theoretical or philosophical orientation mentioned in the program descriptions or objectives. Nonetheless, these parenting programs were presented as literacy programs for Aboriginal adults, and very good examples were provided in support of this position. In fact, and albeit indirectly, the parenting programs seem to be the most significant programs presently in place to address the literacy needs of Aboriginal adults in the urban setting.

The one point that needs to be considered more carefully in this situation is the shared and unchallenged view that programs can be built and offered as a universal type, a singular design, content and pedagogy, that can effectively meet the distinct learning needs of every people, regardless of their cultural or linguistic history of belonging.

Aboriginal people as learners in parenting literacy:

With one exception, the agencies described the learners in their parenting programs as primarily young Aboriginal mothers. The programs themselves were being offered as literacy programs that the agencies believed would serve the needs of the young mothers as Aboriginal people. In some ways, it would be accurate to say that based on numbers in attendance the parenting programs are being implemented specifically for Aboriginal parents, and we can acknowledge that at least some of these parents are in attendance through external factors of coercion, and others are in attendance for social inclusion or to deal with other aspects of vulnerability, such as poverty and day care. Of note, however, is the fact that these characteristics and/or social circumstances that surround program attendance do not detract from the agencies' important contributions to the people who attend their programs and use their services. The services and programs enrich and enhance lives and the trust relationships established with and amongst the parents and children are acknowledged as crucial in dealing with personal growth and self-realization issues, relieving personal isolation and marginalization, and contributing to the individual's sense of community. These are invaluable agency contributions where in a city this size, with the second largest Aboriginal population in Canada, there might otherwise be very little, or nothing.

Focus on the individual as a community:

Most agencies addressed or described the significance of community in their work with individuals; in particular within those agencies that are defined or that define themselves as Aboriginal, a definite objective clearly underpins their programs and services to help the individual find or begin to build a sense of community with others during the time spent engaged in agency programs and services. This understanding of the importance of community to Aboriginal clients and learners is clearly one of the basic guidelines for programs relating to Aboriginal people. Bringing people together to cook, eat, learn songs and read stories together is addressing the Aboriginal value and understanding of the individual-in-community as one.

LIVING WITH LITERACY: A REVIEW OF LITERACY PROGRAMMING FOR URBAN ABORIGINAL LEARNERS

One exceptional and new literacy program was described as an ECALA-funded Aboriginal-specific literacy project. The activities were described as a mix that includes traditional sharing circles, traditional teachings with an Elder, creative writing, and Cree language sessions that include oral and written teachings. Every activity and event is conducted or occurs within a Cree Aboriginal context; people are reported as responding in very positive ways. Although the program is offered as drop-in activities, the description of individual learner/client responses indicates positive potential for literacy movement and significant literacy development possibilities amongst the most vulnerable Aboriginal persons inhabiting the most depressed region of the city. Aside from that, other individuals from other regions of the city are attending the activities and benefitting from the program in their own ways and with their own reasons, i.e. to learn the language and to participate in traditional activities that are embedded within Aboriginal values and knowledge systems.

These are only beginning indications, but the reports on this new program seem to suggest a promising future. A cautionary note in response to the information shared is that the planners themselves acknowledge their own lack of information and knowledge in how to keep the movement going and how to help it grow into it's fullness. At this stage in the process of this program's development, such lack of knowledge regarding Aboriginal literacy programming may have been an advantage, and the seed seems to have been planted in good soil. In learning contexts such as this, however, the possibilities can dissipate very quickly without knowledgeable direction and an almost invisible yet typically Aboriginal form of community development leadership. Again an apt reference to the Silver et al (2006) article can be helpful: "Aboriginal community development starts with the individual with the need for people to heal. Part of this is rebuilding and building identity from damage of colonization" (p.49). The reviewers hold the view that this program can be supported towards a much more formal and measurably effective Aboriginal-specific literacy programming, without losing any of its present creative "brightness" and promise.

The focus on the individual is where almost all of the agencies do their work, and that is almost always about healing. Whether the programs are termed "parenting" or "literacy", and whether or not most of the agencies know and understand, or acknowledge this, their programs and services are being accessed as sites that could support individual healing. These sites are supporting, and are about, literacy for Aboriginal people, but the rebuilding starts with the individual and that individual seeks healing and community.

V. Synthesis of Information

Introduction:

This section will provide analyses of certain areas determined through the research process to be of particular value to ECALA in its ongoing discussions and consideration of literacy programming for urban Aboriginal people. These concepts and 'larger' questions have been pulled out for further study because of their complexity and

multiple forms of impact on the daily lives of urban Aboriginal peoples. The bases of these analyses are derived from the whole information gathered, including content from interview sessions and literature review.

Analysis of program design and curricular content:

The omission of Aboriginal knowledge, including histories, cultures, languages, and spiritualities, in program and curricular design, content and pedagogy of literacy programming is one that requires serious review. Programs that are developed for educational purposes can hardly ignore the extensive and growing evidence in educational reports and academic research that has been widely published and available via mainstream media for decades. This evidence became strongest for Aboriginal peoples beginning in the 1970's when Aboriginal and other educators and community development workers took up the internationally acclaimed and contemporaneously relevant work of Paulo Freire, along with another internationally acclaimed document from the National Indian Brotherhood (1972), and today continuing the assertions through the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action* to support the active participation of Aboriginal peoples in their own educational programs and processes. The hard evidence exists to state that Aboriginal people must be the leaders and the teachers in developing their own programs of education and literacy if they are to attain the 'good lives'[4] they desire at equivalent levels of socio-economic positioning with other Canadians.[5] This evidence is also to be applied in literacy programming if such is to be effective with urban Aboriginal people.

In looking ahead at the success rates of existing programs for addressing literacy of Aboriginal people in Edmonton, it is not difficult to predict that without meaningful Aboriginal presence and inclusion in literacy program development, including design and curricular content, there will be no positive changes or literacy improvements amongst the urban Aboriginal population in Edmonton. Because the literacy levels of Aboriginal people are so very disproportionately low in comparison with non-Aboriginal people, no improvements in literacy levels over the next few years does not bode well for personal and collective growth for any group or society in this province and country. In Edmonton, the numbers of Aboriginal people accessing the programs referenced earlier are not actually increasing their levels of literacy, though they are acquiring strengths and knowledge that will move them forward in their lives. If basic reading and writing and numeracy literacy programming are needed, and all the relevant statistics point to that need for Aboriginal people, then the parenting programs cannot remain as the only programs attending to adult basic literacy for urban Aboriginal adults. If they do, they will be serving as a primary but significant distraction, oriented to addressing the disproportionately high numbers of Aboriginal people who are accessing these

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[4] To achieve and live a 'good life' is the most often cited highest goal of education from an Aboriginal perspective.

[5] Other relevant reports and research speaking to Aboriginal leadership in education includes Sterzuk (2013); Macgregor (2010); Cajete (2003); Battiste (2000); Hampton (1995); Castellano et al (2000); Meyer & Maldonado (2010); Wotherspoon & Schissel (2003), and many others.

programs usually motivated by survival and not by a need for basic literacy. This type of
"distraction" maintains the cycle of survival while ensuring the lowest levels of literacy
for Aboriginal adults.

Predictably, programs for Aboriginal people come and go; in effect, they grow and die.
The unfortunate consequence of this cycle is that Aboriginal people will continue to live
and die in the conditions described earlier, waiting for the opportunity to develop their
own programs that meet their learning needs.

The multiple forms of program and curriculum development processes that have been
developed and that support meaningful Aboriginal educational leadership and
participation are encouraging in the assurance that, with the good will and intentions of
decision-makers, the move towards more effective programs, curricula and pedagogy
for literacy development amongst urban Aboriginal people is readily attainable.

Analysis of individual and community in literacy programming:

Because of the physical contexts and the financial constraints within which these
present programs are operated, the challenges to offer programming from an Aboriginal
foundation would be extremely complex and would need to be addressed from multiple
loci simultaneously. Most of the agencies presently working on literacy for Aboriginal
people are themselves operating from a position of survival and maintenance, and they
seem to be maintaining at a fairly low level of Aboriginal programming capacity. A
cursory review of some of the newsletters and the types of programs that are being
offered are indicative of low levels of capacity for operating effective programs for
Aboriginal targeted learners; these also indicate in indirect ways low levels of
expectations for learners' advancement and types of development.

The following narrative demonstrates how multiple factors affect the outcomes of a
program on the learner clients. The program description was provided as an excellent
example of a *Rhymes that Bind* program, but one that has received some substantial
modification so as to make the program more culturally relevant and meaningful to a
particular group of children and parents. This excellent example of educational program
planning and coordination presents highly effective early childhood teaching strategies
and very strong inclusive education approaches to meet the needs of immigrant parents
and grandparents who want their grandchildren and themselves to be supported as
individuals, as family members, and as community members.

The narrative description of the program follows:

> *One parent and child program was an exception in its design and cultural
> acknowledgement of its learners. The Multicultural Rhymes that Bind programs
> are offered to Chinese people in two Edmonton locations. This program is offered
> for two hours rather than the usual one; it has the professional support of two*

> *Chinese facilitators and uses both a Chinese and English languages; it provides
> children and parents a healthy and more substantial snack compared to the
> cracker, cookie and water offered at of other programs; and finally, it offers an
> additional parents' learning enhancement program during the additional hour.
> This enriched program is offered through a partnership of the Center for Family
> Literacy and a multicultural organization in Edmonton. Compared to another
> Rhymes that Bind program offered at the Bissell Center for Aboriginal parents,
> this program is educationally more sound, and cognitively more effective, as well
> as physically, emotionally, and spiritually more rewarding and beneficial to the
> lives of children and parents.*

While the strength and likely the success of the program lies within the commitment and
effort of the facilitators who are of the Chinese community themselves, this example and
the narrative raised a logical question, especially within the context of other *Rhymes
that Bind* parenting programs in and around the city. If the quality of programs can vary
so much according to factors controlled, managed or influenced by service agencies,
then surely we can expect that community educators, literacy practitioners, and social
and community development service agencies must aspire for and acquire a critical
understanding of the theoretical foundations and operational components that drive
educational programming, including those that could drive Aboriginal-specific literacy
initiatives. To know and understand the theoretical foundations of effective Aboriginal
programming is as important and consistent for literacy programming as it is for all other
Aboriginal educational and training programming.

Some resolution and perhaps policy direction may be needed in order to assist with the
decisions of practitioners and service/program providers regarding whether or not
Aboriginal-specific programming is required for the effective development of literacy
levels amongst Aboriginal people. Although none of the interviewed agencies are
offering adult basic literacy programs for Aboriginal people, they did indicate a fairly
strong sentiment that Aboriginal-specific funding is not an approach that they would see
as an advantage to their own programming or services. The reasons they give are
logical, and for the most part, relate to the fact that many, if not most, of the people who
access their services are the most vulnerable and the most lacking in capacity to deal
effectively with ongoing and consistent social and personal challenges in their daily
lives. In other words, the agencies are responding and reporting on approaches they
use and deem to be most effective in serving people who are living in ongoing states of
crises and social need. Literacy, as it is presently understood and being offered by the
agencies, is very much related to the client/learners' personal and familial survival, and
the skills of literacy that rise to the surface to be addressed are those most needed for
survival, becoming in turn those foci that make up the agency's programming. This
process gives rise inevitably to a focus on programs oriented to those deemed the most
vulnerable; from those agencies who shared, most of them reported a strong focus in
one way or another on programs related to parenting for those with young children.

In the parenting programs, a variety of parent 'incentives' were described. Knowing the nature of incentives to be tied to a desirability factor as interpreted or held by the target person, parenting program incentives and extras often include extra time for the child in daycare, meaning or implying "free' time – or rest time - for the parent, and bus passes. These incentives or extras represent items that most people take for granted, but in fact are rare for people living in poverty and various forms of social or personal vulnerability. Personal time and mobility are highly valued by every person, but especially by those who don't have them or cannot afford them.

Analysis of community and values in agency programming:

Agency interviewees demonstrated by their stories that they understood and valued highly the sense of community and the value of sharing; this was particularly present in those representing agencies acknowledged or known to be Aboriginal. All of the interviewees referred to their learner clients as members of a *community*, and most spoke passionately of their agency's programming and service contributions as the basis of building *community* amongst the people whom they served. The intention of supporting a community of learners in some cases, of helping a mother or a youth to find a supporting hand or to be in a community, came out very powerfully in the descriptions that interviewees shared of their own distinctive agency's programming and work. Some agency interviewees were adamant in their views that their services and programs would ensure and support the 'good' of their client over all else. I understood in some ways that this valuing of the individual might also have been a reason for the occasional obvious reaction to the idea that support services or literacy programming might be provided only to Aboriginal people.

The commitment and caring of each interviewee for the work of their agency and the people they served was exceptional in terms of how far these attributes moved beyond professionalism, responsibility, and accountability. This emphasis on *community* is one that can easily become the cornerstone of a new and vital transformation for the service agencies who are attempting to assist urban Aboriginal people in meeting their literacy and other more demanding and immediate needs in Edmonton.

Two points can be developed further in relation to this commentary. Firstly, the traditional Aboriginal value that every individual is to be valued and respected as a spiritual and sacred being can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Referencing the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) report (Anderson, 2015), 89% of Aboriginal people said they strongly or somewhat agreed that others behaved negatively or unfairly "towards Aboriginal people" (p.78). Yet, only 36% "feel non-Aboriginal people do not accept them" (p.79). The wording of the question itself is problematic in that many traditional values continue to be held/lived by Aboriginal people and this in itself can raise a conflict in relation to the question being posed and/or the information being sought. Experiencing even one incident of support from a non-Aboriginal person is sufficient for an Aboriginal person to disagree with the statement that "non-Aboriginal people do not accept" him/her. This

statement is not an indication that this Aboriginal person has not had many occasions of non-acceptance from non-Aboriginal people; it merely states that the person chooses to maintain the traditional valuing of that one person who "accepted" and that valuing takes precedence over the negative actions or "non-acceptance" of the others. Literacy for Aboriginal learners involves knowing contemporary expressions of traditional values, and it also requires the direct encouragement and opportunities for the development and understanding of the need for contemporary expressions of those values. This is a key part of the healing that is almost always referenced in discussions centred on Aboriginal learning. Hence, literacy for Aboriginal people requires their explicit traditional and contemporary knowledge and therefore, their active involvement in programming design, content, and pedagogy.

Secondly, the definition of community varies amongst Aboriginal groups. Referencing the UAS again, 77% of Metis and First Nations people in the city of Edmonton feel they belong to a mostly Aboriginal community, and this sense of belonging enhances a sense of Aboriginal identity. *Community* is defined primarily by Aboriginal people as: family (61%), friends (%*%), neighborhood (35%), members of own cultural group (26%), and Aboriginal people in the city (25%), and co-workers (23%) (Anderson, 2015, p.50). Although Aboriginal services is considered by some (20%) to be *community*, this location in the prioritization of *community* to urban Aboriginal people indicates that service agencies, even those such as Friendship Centres whose objective is specifically to promote or enhance community, are fairly low in Aboriginal people's experiences of *community* in the urban context (Anderson, 2015).

Because community holds such a critical role in the shaping of individual identity, community and the sense of belonging to an Aboriginal community in an urban context will obviously impact all learning and development processes for Aboriginal individuals and families. While the firmness and courage of some service agencies to stand and perhaps even to speak on behalf of their Aboriginal learner clients is laudable, agencies must also recognize, acknowledge and support those who come to them for specific forms of assistance to find and build their own sense of Aboriginal identity and sense of Aboriginal community of support *outside* of the service agency. Reviewing the history of Edmonton in terms of its programs and services for Aboriginal people, the commitment of some of the service agencies in their work with people has spanned decades. They have worked with the vulnerable, the poor, the helpless, the homeless, the mentally and physically challenged, the marginalized for any reason, the Aboriginal. The contributions of service agencies in helping to create opportunities for Aboriginal people to build their own communities around families and friends within the urban context is an unexplored and underdeveloped area of work. The article by Pinnow (2009) speaks to this concept, albeit somewhat obliquely, as she presents a renewed vision of her agency and how it might reconsider and rebuild itself to be more strongly aligned with its own ideals and expectations of itself as a defender, supporter and builder of real *community*.

Though the evidence of integrity, loyalty, compassion abounding clearly amongst the service organizations and agencies in Edmonton can be seen and heard, the spark that

burns the Aboriginal flesh remains. These attributes and honourable intentions cannot create or support the life of a community of clients if they are not themselves born from first-hand knowledge of life in the same context as the ones they serve. This is the source of that burning in the consciousness of Aboriginal people collectively.

Silver et al (2006) discussed this with acuity and accuracy in describing the urban Aboriginal situation in Winnipeg as "urban aboriginal community development". They discussed Aboriginal community development as a process that begins with healing from colonization, and requires a sense of community which in turn "necessitates the creation of aboriginal organizations, Aboriginal people reclaiming their 'collective organizational identity'".

They explain that Winnipeg has been engaged in this action for 30 years and that Aboriginal community development "has to start at the individual and local community level – healthy individuals require healthy communities, and vice versa. It has to mean Aboriginal –controlled organizations. And perhaps more significantly, it needs to be rooted in traditional Aboriginal values."

Silver et al (2006) cite two reasons for stating this, pointing out that Aboriginal people want to keep their traditional values, and they want urban organizations that are 'infused with Aboriginal values":

> One is that large numbers of Aboriginal people have never wanted to assimilate and do not want to do so now. They want to live in and take advantage of the dominant culture, but to do so as Aboriginal people working in a way consistent with Aboriginal values.
> The second is that … an Aboriginal form of community development rooted in Aboriginal values places a premium on community and sharing (p.49).

In undertaking the process of this review, we have been honoured to participate and engage very briefly with some of the literacy groups involved and living these values of community and sharing.

VI. Conclusions

These conclusions (recommendations) are derived from an overall critical overview and analysis of the interviewees' theoretical locations along with their logical responses, an overview of website information related to ECALA funded literacy organizations, and the literature-based review and promising practices related to Aboriginal literacy. The review concludes with these recommendations that acknowledge the positioning of ECALA as a key funder and supportive organization for adult literacy programming, including literacy for Aboriginal learners, within Edmonton.

The following recommendations are presented for consideration as those most viable and promising in terms of adult basic literacy for Aboriginal people, and for both short and long-term planning and operations of ECALA:

- Develop a proposal to the government(s) for long-term sustainable funding to develop policy, guidelines, teaching and learning resources including programs and curricula specifically designed for adult basic literacy serving urban Aboriginal people.
- Develop a plan and submit for funding to support literacy training specifically for instructors and facilitators supporting adult basic literacy for urban Aboriginal people.
- Convene a series of meetings/workshops to engage the expertise of an advisory body of Aboriginal educators who are knowledgeable and experienced in the field of urban Aboriginal literacy and education.
- Convene a 1-2 day public forum, workshop format, focused on gathering of "best knowledge" on policy development, program design, pedagogy and curriculum development dealing specifically with basic literacy for urban Aboriginal adults/Aboriginal adults.
- Conduct research (i.e. knowledge scan) that provides ECALA a comprehensive database, with evaluation, of culturally appropriate and effective resources available for Aboriginal adult basic literacy.
- Create an assessment to accurately gauge or otherwise determine the capacity of pertinent post-secondary institutions to facilitate and engage with adult basic literacy programs for urban Aboriginal people/Aboriginal people.
- Design, develop and implement a review process based on Aboriginal concepts of *community-building* with urban Aboriginal people in Edmonton to articulate their own urban literacy needs.
- Continue to support current programs that are serving family literacy needs in situations of social crises.

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LIVING WITH LITERACY: A REVIEW OF LITERACY PROGRAMMING FOR URBAN ABORIGINAL LEARNERS

APPENDIX A: <u>Agencies Interviewed and/or Visited</u>

1. Bent Arrow

2. Ben Calf Robe

3. Centre for Family Literacy

4. Rhymes That Bind – Centre for Family Literacy

5. Bissell Centre

6. Indigenous Literacy Program – Bissell Centre

7. Aboriginal Parenting Program – Bissell Centre

8. Edmonton Learning Centre

9. Otenow

APPENDIX B: ECALA FUNDED AGENCIES ABL

1. ACTION FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES SOCIETY

2. ASSIST COMMUNITY SERVICES

3. BISSELL CENTRE

4. CANDORA SOCIETY

5. CANADIAN VOLUNTEERS UNITED IN ACTION (CANAVUA)

6. CENTRE FOR FAMILY LITERACY

7. DICKENSFIELD AMITY HOUSE

8. FUSION FELLOWSHIP

9. HIV EDMONTON

10. LEARNING CENTRE, THE

11. MULTICULTURAL FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE

12. PROJECT ADULT LITERACY SOCIETY

13. SENIORS ASSOCIATION OF GREATER EDMONTON (SAGE)