



# **The Gifts Within**

## **Carrying Each Other Forward in Aboriginal Education**

Edited by Rebecca Priegert Coulter



## The Learning Journey

BY REBECCA PRIEGERT COULTER

**L**earning is a life journey. As Athlueetuq's grandfather observes (chapter one), the journey begins from the moment we are born and get our first teachings about kindness. As we move along the learning road, we reach various milestones, some that are institutional and formal and some that are more personal and individual. The fifteen contributors to this book have reached one of the more formal markers for each has just completed a Master's degree in Education at the University of Western Ontario. The chapters which follow, "the gifts within," reflect the views of the authors as they reach this particular milestone on their learning journey.

Undoubtedly, the authors' ideas and understandings will continue to develop and grow but taken as a whole, the chapters in this book reveal much about the larger, discernible trends and debates in Aboriginal education today. While acknowledging the past and the terrible burdens of the residential school experience, along with the on-going legacies of colonialism and oppression, there is also a strong desire to move on to making a significant change in schooling for young people and to identify

approaches to education that will yield successful and meaningful outcomes.

In chapter one, Athlueetug shares the stories and teachings of her grandfather and father and reflects on her own experiences of schooling as a student and a teacher. Her unique presentation of the three voices illustrates how the learning journey has changed over three generations for the Inuit and raises questions about what education might offer today by acknowledging what is learned from the land and from traditional ceremonies. In her biography of Susie Jones, an Elder and leader in the Residential Schools Survivors Movement, Margaret Tucker honours the work of a special leader who “walks in two worlds” in order to effect changes in schooling for Aboriginal children both in the community and in the provincial school system. Chapter two thus provides a profile of a woman who has committed her knowledge and skills to healing the pain of the past and building the possibilities of the future.

Chapters three, four and five focus on language reclamation and revitalization as a crucial part of the development of First Nations’ educational alternatives. In chapter three Simeon Russell Blackbird shares the research he completed in co-operation with the Anishinaabe Language Advisory Group and discusses what language speakers and learners told him about the challenges and possibilities of developing a community approach to language revitalization. Anika Altman reviews the scholarly literature and other research on early years Indigenous language immersion programs in chapter four and highlights what can be learned and adopted from previous and current initiatives in communities in Canada, the United States and New Zealand. Then, in chapter five, Janette Richmond provides stories in English and Ojibwe as shared and told by two Elders. The stories can be used for teaching purposes, both for language learning and for reflection on the lessons offered in the stories.

Three classroom teachers working in First Nation schools discuss some of their approaches to teaching in chapters six, seven and eight. Craig Joseph Bunda, a primary school teacher, discusses his use of technology in the classroom as a means to enhance student engagement and learning while respecting traditional cultural knowledge. Kevin Lamure shares the planning and implementation process for a culinary arts program for ele-

mentary school students that links nutrition with other school subjects and delivers the package through hands-on activities for students. In chapter eight, Linda Lou (Sands) Classens explores the results of introducing guitars and keyboards into a First Nation school and records the impact on previously disengaged students. She also uncovers some important learnings about how to engage community members in the school by drawing on their expertise.

Support for First Nation parents is offered by Alicia Whiteye in chapter nine. In a smart play on common acronyms in special education, Whiteye develops an IEPP (Indigenous Education Plan for Parents) that utilizes the Seven Grandfather Teachings and provides advice for parents faced with negotiating the rocky terrain of special education review and accommodation processes for their children.

In chapter ten, Muriel C. Sampson raises important questions about the use of standardized testing in band-operated schools and argues that the imposition of external standards on Aboriginal communities has gone on for too long. She suggests that First Nations should determine for themselves what they wish to achieve through education and, along with this, how they can judge whether they have met the goals they set for themselves.

The multiple roles and responsibilities of administrators in First Nation schools are explored by Catherine Hampshire in chapter eleven. She examines leadership models, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to argue for a new dreamcatcher approach that brings together the reinforcing strands from several of those models to create a meaningful framework for administrative practice in First Nation schools.

In chapter twelve, Darlene Holmes looks at programs in two provincial secondary schools designed to support success for students from local Aboriginal communities. She describes the program elements that have yielded improvements in student retention and engagement. In chapter thirteen, JoAnn V. Henry argues that teachers should listen to young people to learn more about what encourages and supports students and leads to graduation from high school. Through research with former students who have now completed secondary school programs and her own reflections as a teacher, Henry offers insights about what needs to be done to ensure student success.

In the last two chapters, attention is turned to the post-secondary experience. In chapter fourteen, John K. Snake muses about what is needed to create useful and honourable partnerships between First Nations and universities. Patricia Whiteye, in chapter fifteen, explores one partnership in graduate education that worked and resulted in “100% success.” It is the partnership that produced this book.

It is also a partnership that must be acknowledged in so many ways. It is one that has taken me a good new distance on my own learning journey. I am deeply grateful to the fifteen learners who shared their lives with me for two years and who taught me a great deal about what it means to be Aboriginal in Canada today. I am thankful for the help they offered in my struggles to understand how a white woman can best be an ally and work in solidarity with Aboriginal communities. And, of course, I appreciated the willingness of fifteen students to encourage and assist me in resisting certain rules and regulations of the university that only served to set up roadblocks on our shared road to learning!

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