



BEST PRACTICES

IN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

**First Nations Education
Steering Committee &**

BC Ministry of Education

9th Provincial Aboriginal
Education Conference
November 1-3, 2003
Whistler, BC

Welcome

Once again, we are pleased to present the summary of the annual Provincial Aboriginal Education Conference that took place in Whistler, BC on November 1-3, 2003. The First Nations Education Steering Committee and BC Ministry of Education were pleased to co-host this important opportunity to share ideas for enhancing First Nations education in BC.

This year's Conference theme was "Best Practices in Aboriginal Education," a focus that was meant to reflect the great progress that is being achieved in British Columbia.

The Conference hosts would like to recognize everyone who attended the event this year. The enthusiasm and commitment that was demonstrated by all of the Conference participants is a wonderful indication that improvements will continue, and that the collective efforts being made will result in greater success for First Nations learners.

THE FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION STEERING COMMITTEE &

THE BC MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

NOVEMBER 2003

Traditional Welcome

Lorna Williams, Director of the Ministry of Education Aboriginal Education Enhancement Branch, welcomed all of the conference delegates to the Provincial Aboriginal Education Conference and thanked everyone for coming.

Lorna Williams then introduced Martina Pierre, an Elder with the St'at'imc Nation, who has a Masters in Education and teaches secondary-level English and First Nations languages as well as adult education. Martina Pierre welcomed the conference participants with a song and words in her own language.

Lorna Williams also introduced Chief Ian Campbell of the Squamish Nation, a Hereditary Chief who works all over the province of British Columbia to inspire young people. Chief Campbell shared a welcome song with the Conference delegates, and he also provided the following comments.

“It is wonderful to see everyone gathered here this morning. You come from many villages, and the work that each of you is doing is very special, very sacred. You are mentoring children who so badly need your guidance. This chapter in our history is so exciting; we have a chance to share our own stories, to transform as we grow, and to share in the transformation that is all around us right now. We have much to celebrate on this beautiful day, and I thank you all for joining together in this important event.”

Welcome from the Conference Organizers

Lorna Williams then shared some comments as the Director of Aboriginal Education for the BC Ministry of Education.

“Welcome again to the 9th Provincial Conference on Aboriginal Education. This year, we are gathered together to talk about a very exciting and interesting topic – the “best practices,” or the successes we’ve had in education. Those of us who have been involved in education for many years know it has long been a battleground for the minds of our people. Recently, though, we’ve finally begun to work in partnership for our benefit. I have had the privilege to visit areas throughout BC, and to talk with students, teachers, parents, and administrators. The discussions I’ve had have given me a greater understanding of what is happening throughout this province.

I’ve been involved in education for over 30 years, and I have seen great changes in that time. I believe that we can be very proud of our accomplishments. The stories people have to share are inspiring. In the past, when talking about First Nations education issues we have often focused on problems. Too often, we have forgotten the amazing accomplishments we have made, and the great strengths of our young people. It is wonderful that we are here today to share those stories of success, and I am pleased that we have such an exciting conference program to help us do that.

To begin this event, I would like to introduce our first keynote speaker ... Judge Steven Point.



LORNA WILLIAMS



JUDGE STEVEN POINT

Keynote Speaker: Judge Steven Point

JUDGE STEVEN POINT of Skowkale First Nation is one of a handful of First Nations people appointed to the Provincial Court of British Columbia. He assumed his judgeship in February 1999.

Steven and his wife, Gwen, have four children and nine grandchildren.

Steven has a long history of working for Sto:lo people and communities. He encouraged the revival of traditional singing and dancing by his involvement in Sto:lo longhouses and by serving as a committee member for the Chilliwack Pow Wow.

Steven's other achievements include:

- Director of the Native Law Program in the Faculty of Law at UBC
- Instructor of Native Law at the University of Saskatchewan
- Adjudicator and Administrative Tribunal at the Federal Department of Immigration and Employment
- Practitioner of Criminal Law and Native Law as a partner in the firm Point and Shirley.

In addition, Steven served as Chief of his community for many years and was Chiefs' Representative for the Sto:lo Nation Government House from 1994 to 1998.

“When preparing this speech, I couldn't help thinking that it is hard to take oral traditions and put them in a can. You have to be there. When you get home, no one reads anything you've said. As Chief, I used to get mail from all over – everyone wanted me to speak at different events. But pretty soon, the speeches became fodder for the fireplace, and I would think “those are nice words; they're warming my heart.” Then, someone would come to my door to talk to me, and I would really come to understand how he or she felt and what they were trying to tell me. That's what I call making a connection, and that is what I would like to speak to you about this morning.

I don't know how many schools I've been in, working with young people. I was hired as a home-school coordinator back in the 1970's. In those days, Native kids went to school and they would sit at the back of the classroom and not participate in anything. We were hired to try to change that.

Early in my career, I went into one classroom and met a little girl in grade 4. I said “I'm here to help you. If you need me, call me.” The little girl said “you should look at my math book.” I did, and I told her she had done really nice work. She then asked me to look in her English book. Well, at that point I started thinking “I've got to go. I'm busy. I'm the home-school coordinator. Don't you know that?”

I left the classroom and as I walked away I heard someone running after me. It was the teacher. She asked me what I had said to the little girl. I told the teacher “I didn't say anything. I just told her who I was.” The teacher then told me that the little girl had been in the school for three months and hadn't said anything before that day!

I went home wondering about that. I told my mom what had happened, and she said “don't you remember when I used to tell you to listen to me; don't talk when I'm talking; you only

talk when someone speaks to you.” I realized that’s the way we were taught at home. My mother used to talk to us. She used to sit in the other room while we ten kids were eating. We lived in a one-bedroom home, and a lean-to that my dad built. All of the kids slept in one room, and my grandfather used to sleep with us in the middle of the room. He was my teacher, too.

When you see someone, you probably introduce yourself, tell them about who you are, where you are from, and what you do. That’s on the outside – the label. But you also have to teach children to connect with the inside, with their Elders, their spirits.

Sometimes children are lost and they need guidance. Years ago our people were lost and the spirits came. They taught us how to make a fire, gave us laws to live by, taught us how to treat one another, told us about the future – that disease was coming. The prophets served an important function; they provided guidance for the people. We were told about a flood that would come. We got ready. We lashed our canoes together and stored food to prepare ourselves. But some people didn’t listen. They thought they knew better. When the waters came they tried to quickly get ready, but the canoes didn’t stay together and their boats drifted away. When the canoes came back down, the First People started all over again – the ones that had listened.

That story is not only about the past; it’s about what’s going to happen. Aboriginal people have been in a storm, with winds raging and waters rising. We’ve been in a struggle for many years. In that struggle, we sometimes looked for an enemy and started to point fingers at one another. Instead, we need to lash our canoes together so we can withstand the winds and waters. We know change is coming. Are we ready?

In order to be ready, we need connections to one another, with our Elders, with our spirits. And those connections can’t be surface connections; they must be made from the inside. What’s inside of you? It’s what you teach your children. At the end of our lives money won’t buy truth. Survival is the rule. Native people and non-Native people must collectively lash our canoes together and make strong connections so we will survive. We must stop fighting one another or that’s what our children will learn. We must experience compassion, understanding, humility, and faith.

To end, I’d like to share a story my grandniece told me. Chipmunk was lost in the woods. Every so often chipmunk would get down on his hands and knees and pray to the Creator “help me, I’m lost.” The Creator did not reply. Chipmunk tried again and again. He tried to make a connection through prayer. Finally, a small bird flew overhead and dropped some white stuff on Chipmunk’s head. Chipmunk said “cut the crap, I’m lost.” That story tells me that help, connections can come in many forms – it all depends on our perspective.

Thank you for joining me this morning.”

Lorna Williams thanked Steven Point for his humour, his stories, and his wisdom, which would guide people through the next two days.

Best Practices Panel

Lorna Williams introduced the Best Practices Panel presenters.

ANNE MACLEOD is from Nathan Barton Elementary School in the Nisga'a School District. Nathan Barton Elementary School has demonstrated success in improving the literacy rates of their students through the engagement of parents and the community. Statistics show that the Nisga'a School District is among the top five BC School Districts in terms of literacy growth in the last 10 years. That kind of success does not happen by accident; it requires a great deal of commitment and hard work. The Nisga'a School District was able to make great strides in a short timeframe due to concerted efforts and focused improvements.

DEBBIE MOORE is the Education Coordinator with Kitselas First Nation, and her participation on the panel is evidence of the important role that Education Coordinators can play in engaging parents and community members in education.

Anne MacLeod, Grade 6/7 Teacher, Nathan Barton Elementary School, Nisga'a School District #92

“I would like to begin by thanking School District 92 and the First Nations Education Steering Committee for their support of our students. This morning, I will not speak extensively about the work we are doing in the area of numeracy because we will be presenting a workshop on that topic later in the conference. Instead, I will talk about our literacy program, and I would like to begin by saying that our growth in the area of literacy required real effort from the School District, teachers, but also our parents and communities. We worked very hard to achieve success in literacy, including an evening program every Tuesday and Thursday with children 1 – 8 years of age. They came in for 1-1/2 hours to participate in the school environment so that they would feel comfortable there. The evening program included puppets, puzzles, and card games, with everyone involved in all of the activities.

This year, we began to include older children in our programs. We have been emphasizing their part as role models by having them work and read with the younger children. At the end of each event we have a book draw, and as a result children have begun to love books.

We also have a regular craft night to bring families into the school in a non-academic setting. That program has also been very successful. One great example was our pumpkin carving activity. Last year we brought in 30 pumpkins for carving; this year we needed 60 and they were all carved by the end of the evening!

We have assemblies once a month, we do singing, and the turnouts are increasing all the time! The Principal also started a tots gym for children ages 2 – 4. The kids come and play in the gym and they're taught skills at the same time.

The results of our efforts are that parents feel totally comfortable in the school. Academic and behaviour improvements are also being evidenced. Parents realize the importance of books, and at a recent book fair we had \$1,600 in sales!

We know that our children can do what they set out to do, and parents now know that they can help their children to achieve success. That's what is making our programs work. Thank you for listening.”



CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS IN BALLROOM

Debbie Moore, Education Coordinator, Kitselas First Nation

“I would like to begin by thanking the Creator for making it possible for me to attend this conference. I am very excited to share a few ideas with you this morning.

We all know that the first teachers are mothers, fathers, and grandparents. I appreciate having learned from their kind, gentle, yet stern ways. Both of my parents went to Residential school. My father was not fortunate enough to access healing through the Residential Schools project. My mother tried to do that once. I have learned that healing is a lifelong process, and I am still on my healing journey. I learned that through my story, my mother’s story, my father’s story.

Many people are still unable to share their lives. They feel uncomfortable in sharing and letting things go. It is difficult to remember the past but let the pain go, but you can do it with your inner strength.

I didn’t graduate from high school. I helped my mother raise my younger siblings. My mother had a challenging life. I believe that you have to forgive yourself in order to forgive others, and my journey has helped me forgive myself.

Our youth are facing many challenges – peer pressure, stereotyping ... but I have great hope from a young group of headstart parents. For a couple of years I promoted parents clubs in communities, but it seemed to be at no avail. Then eventually, with the help of FNEESC resources, it started to work. I handed parents a Parents Club bag and told them “you’re a member.” Then at the end of the last school year, a teacher with a child in the headstart program asked about the Parents Club and how to make one work. I made that person feel comfortable by letting them sign up so they would feel they belonged. Once in a while new participants join and we are building interest all the time.

How do we do it? We provide door prizes, and we've already had three meetings this year. There are a small number of parents participating, but they're getting organized. They've decided they want to view parenting videos to learn more about what they can do for their children. They've also decided to start growing food so they can have access to healthy foods. All of the ideas have come from the parents. It is driven by them. And they have been surprised and grateful for the support FNESC has been providing. We really appreciate that.

Parents have started a wake-up club for kids who have difficulty getting up in the morning. Parents from headstart to college are now involved, and we are planning to hire a coordinator to bridge the gap between parents, educators, children, community members, and leaders. The new coordinator will set up a language and culture day on Fridays for parents and kids to promote language learning. That's possible because we have a four-day school week. Our history is really important. It tells us who we are, and gives us identity.

We're hoping that parents will take an interest in data about how well their children are doing so they will ask "what can I do to help?" I'm confident that our community gatherings will do just that. Our parents don't tend to join PAC Committees. Too often, they are fundraising focused. That's not relevant for us. We want to help address the challenges our children face so that they can have a positive journey.

Changes do not happen overnight, so we must be consistent and never give up. We must use our voices to help make change. Too many children are still in classrooms needing help, but not asking for it. We find too many kids in high school with elementary reading levels. We want to help those kids. In terms of making connections, that's what we are all here to do today, and that's what I've tried to do by sharing with you this morning."

Lorna Williams

"I would like to thank the panel presenters for their words of inspiration and wisdom. We really appreciate that they have been willing to come to share their experiences with us.

There are many ways to tell a story. Stories have always been a way we've learned. The next speaker comes with stories told in a unique way. There have been many changes to our lives. As I drove up here yesterday I was thinking about this place. My family came to these mountains, rivers, and valleys to gather foods and medicines. In late July and August we would come to pick berries. We came because the berries ripened here later in the season. One year we came and the picking area was cemented over. This type of thing has happened to us many times in the past.

We have depended on this land for our sustenance and our spirits. In today's world we need to do other things, as well. We need employment. Long ago when I was in grade 7 I did a survey of my peers and asked what they wanted to do with their lives, in their employment and in our communities. Almost everyone had an idea and the commitment to community was still thriving. But by the end of high school, only one of my peers could pursue their goals.

Since then, I've asked the same question of young people. For some time, very few of them had any idea what they wanted to do. There seemed to be little in their futures. But I think that is changing. It is very important that the changes continue and children are able to set goals and get the skills they need to make them happen.

With those comments, I am pleased to introduce the second keynote speaker of the conference, Roslyn Kunin.”

Keynote Speaker – Dr. Roslyn Kunin

Regional Economist for the federal government for 20 years ... policy advisory to senior levels of government ... author of countless original multidisciplinary analyses ... and speaker at numerous symposia, Dr. Roslyn Kunin is the principal of Roslyn Kunin and Associates, Inc.

Currently, Dr. Kunin is Director of the Business Development Bank of Canada, a member of the National Statistics Council of Statistics Canada, and Director of the North South Institute. She has served as the Chair of the Vancouver Stock Exchange, Governor of the University of British Columbia, and has served the community as Chair of the Vancouver Crisis Centre and as Vice President of the YWCA. In her career, Dr. Kunin has worked in the private sector, taught at several Canadian universities (including SFU and UBC), and served twenty years as Regional Economist for the federal government in BC and the Yukon.

Recipient on several occasions of the Association of Professional Economists of BC's Crystal Ball Award for forecasting the Canadian economy, Dr. Kunin is a former director of the Canadian Association of Business Economists. She is a recipient of the YWCA Woman of Distinction Award, a Canada 125 Medal for service to Canada, Canadians and the community, and holds the distinction of holding an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Victoria.

“Thank you for your kind introduction, and thank you for inviting me to this territory and this conference.

Today, I would like to try to answer a question – how can we best prepare young people for the 21st Century? I've actually spent my whole life trying to answer questions of that kind.

First, I would like to suggest that what every young person needs is a sense of self, of hope, of belonging, and of their culture. Without that, nothing else will work, and so we all need to keep promoting those things as a priority.

Second, what we all need is the ability to earn a living, to support ourselves and our families, to be independent, and to contribute to our communities. Today, this area will be the focus of my talk.

Where will the opportunities be in the upcoming few years? I'm sure that some of the answers won't be a surprise to you.

I've just finished a study on the jobs that will be created through the Olympics, and the kinds of jobs that will be created by that event will require similar sets of skills that are needed more generally.



DR. ROSLYN KUNIN

We need to do a better job of preparing our children for trades and technical occupations. I can't emphasize that too much. Serious shortages in those occupations are coming. Trades and technology workers know how to do something, not just what to do. At University, on the other hand, you tend to learn what, but not how.

In the 1960's, one percent of the population had a University degree. Now about twenty percent of the population has a University degree. If students are going to get a degree, they should think about getting one that will teach them how to do something. They should also think about learning how to do something that does not require a University education – and that could be in the area of trades and technology. We never have enough people with those kinds of training. Chefs, cooks, mechanics, builders, plumbers ... most people employed in those occupations are aging.

I would like to share with you all a story about a boilermaker. I was in a high school talking about where jobs were located, and a 19 year old recent graduate spoke after me. He had entered an apprenticeship program as a high school student that allowed him to enter into the boilermaker trade. Upon graduation, the young man received a job offer to make \$100,000.00 a year. He would have to work hard, take overtime, and travel to make that salary, but it was a great job.

I'd also like to share a second example. A group of apprentices in Kelowna all owned houses by the time they were 21 years old. They rented out those houses and were already making a good living at a very young age.

The greatest shortage of workers right now is managers and supervisors for trades and technology. Where do those people come from? They are people who have practiced those trades and worked in those jobs. So there is a career path and room to move up in the trades.

The process for entering trades and technology jobs is changing. The BC government is re-examining processes for training to help people get there. Also, communities are working in joint ventures and partnerships to keep creating training opportunities.

For young people not interested in the trades and technology fields, there are other areas of shortage, including tourism, retail, and hospitality. Entry-level workers are needed in all of those fields, and they are definitely not necessarily dead end jobs. Supervisors and managers in these fields are one of the fastest growing areas of employment.

Whistler, for example, is putting up a huge new Pan Pacific hotel. The hotel will be based in Japan, with headquarters in Hawaii, and the Vice President works out of Hawaii. But that Vice President started his career by washing dishes, proving once again that to move up in that industry you start at the bottom.

Transportation is another area of demand, including drivers, and people with the education and supervisory skills to manage those occupations.

Entrepreneurship is also a key field, particularly in small communities. People interested in that area will require specific skills, plus an ability to offer those skills in a self-employed

mode. More and more people are self-employed for more and more of their lives, and this is good information to put into the heads of young people.

Finally, I would like to give all of the educators in the room a list of the basic skills everyone will need in the 21st Century.

- A good solid grade 12 education, including math and sciences.
- Basic English literacy skills, including an ability to read, write, spell, and understand.
- Solid numeracy skills.
- Computer skills, including Internet knowledge and broadband access.
- People skills, such as an ability to get along with a range of people.
- Technical skills.
- Entrepreneurship, which involves asking a basic question – what good or service can I provide that someone is able and willing to pay for?

Thank you for listening today. I hope those ideas are beneficial.”



DEBORAH JEFFREY

Deborah Jeffrey, President of the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), opened the second day of the Provincial Aboriginal Education Conference and welcomed all of the participants to the event.

Deborah began by introducing Evelyn Camille of the Kamloops Indian Band, who shared a prayer in her language.

Deborah then welcomed Chief Nathan Matthew to share some opening remarks for Day Two, and she thanked Chief Matthew for his lifelong commitment to children and communities.

Chief Nathan Matthew

“It is very good to be here this morning, with so many other people who have made it their life’s work to improve First Nations education, wherever they are in the province.

We all know that the issues facing us today will not be resolved quickly. We have made great progress, but there are still many challenges before us.

Sometimes, to me it feels like a pilgrimage. Every year we come together and share a faith – a firm belief that we belong here, that we have a right to exist with safety, security, fun, traditions, and that we can select our leaders and structures to create the systems we want for ourselves. We also believe that education is central to building the quality of life that we want.

Yesterday, we clearly heard that part of building what we want includes relating to students individually. So many of us understand that fact in terms of our roles. That is the spirit and intent of educators ... to build good will, to be confident that we can make a difference. For young children, connecting can make a tremendous difference.

Roslyn Kunin also helped us all to remember that connecting the world of schooling to work and life beyond are critical. That was a great reminder of the importance of helping children to use their education in useful ways.

I also had the privilege of dropping in on several workshops yesterday. I was reminded again and again of the importance of relationships and of connecting intellectually, but also emotionally and spiritually. That’s what drives success.

The panel yesterday also spoke to the notion of parenting and education, and they reminded us that building literacy skills involves connecting what is happening in the school to the community and families. In this regard, I encourage you all to never give up; organize other parents, maintain your resolve, and share your commitment.

I enjoyed a number of other workshops yesterday that shared some very important ideas.

In the graduation requirements review, I was reminded that learning about First Nations issues is becoming a greater requirement for all learners in the province. That is key. But we must continue to emphasize the fact that we are not just a historical study; we are still here.

I heard about the importance of effective testing, which is an idea we all need to attend to if we are really going to improve education.

The storyworks workshop presented ideas for sharing First Nations realities through our own stories, which is so powerful. We must let children do contemporary research using ideas that were inspired by First Nations traditions.

One of the workshops focused on creating a positive school environment, and ways to move ahead in healthy ways. The extent to which we can help children deal with their challenges really determines our education success.

In the First Nations jurisdiction workshop, we talked about how we will move ahead in having our rights and authority recognized. It is related to our relationship with other governments, and it is only made possible through the strength and support of people like you. It is very energizing to see real progress being made in this area.

In the Roots of Empathy workshop, we learned about a program that is built around bringing a mother and an infant into a classroom to share information about child development. That program really gives an idea of how others feel, which the students can extend into all areas of their lives.

Being at this conference is a great reminder of the magic of learning, of providing someone an opportunity to explore something, learn from it, and use that learning in moving through their lives in a positive way. That's what we've been doing here; learning, sharing our knowledge, and sharing our faith that we can make this world a better place.

Thank you very much for being a part of that sharing.”



CHIEF NATHAN MATTHEW



MARIE BAPTISTE

Keynote Speaker – Marie Baptiste

Marie Baptiste is from the Secwepemc and Okanagan Nations, and she has been active in many organizations in her community, as well as in the establishment of the All Nations Trust Company and Collaborative Visions Society.

“Good morning everyone. It is really great to be here this morning.

I am a very spiritual person, as I am sure many of you are, as well. One thing I have always been told that I would like to share with you today is that you will have a great impact on our children and grandchildren for generations to come. You have been given the greatest gift of all – of the mind.

What concerns me is the environment. All of us are affected by the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the water we drink. No matter who you are those things affect you.

I would like to talk briefly about water. How many of us would go to the Fraser River and drink the water? The water has an impact on our lives, our bodies, on everything. We have to start thinking about the environment and what we can do to clean it up.

And what about the air? That also has an impact on us—particularly our children. We are polluting the air and the ground. You can almost see the pollutants in the air.

Why am I sharing this with you? Because you are the educators. You can share these issues with your students and help promote our role as caretakers of Mother Earth. You can have children write about those issues, do artwork, and encourage them to expand their minds and their ideas. People need to find alternatives and you can help our children to understand that.

Those are my main thoughts for today. I want to close this morning by reminding you all that you have an impact on so many people. You are the role models in your communities, you are the sunshine in a child’s eye, and you are very special.

Thank you.”

Smithers Student Success Film and Panel Discussion

Lorna Williams opened the film presentation portion of the conference with the following comments.

“This project and video share a story that began many years ago. I heard about this exceptional group of students and wanted to learn more about their success. Most of the students entered kindergarten together, attended Moricetown School, and had Victor Jim as a teacher. People heard about these students entering middle school, and then word spread as they moved to secondary school, as well. I think these students are like many other students in the system. What is exceptional is that the students, teachers, school system, and parents worked together to make sure they received the quality of education they deserved. That was key. The video shares the words of the students themselves, as well as their staff, to share what it is that contributed to their great success. The interviews you will see this morning will soon be digitized and available over the Ministry of Education web site. I believe that this group of students will help us know what to do to ensure success.”

Following the video production, a panel of students and teachers from Smithers shared their stories personally.

Andrew Tom, Wet’suwet’en Student

“Good morning. I would like to talk to you this morning about community-based education. As we all know, students attend school six hours per day, and it is very important to know what they do with the rest of their time. I believe that the recipe for success is 30 ml role models, 1 tbsp community involvement, and 1 cup of cultural awareness. But then the exact recipe is really unimportant – what comes out in the end is what matters most.

My role model was my grandmother. She always told me that education is for you. My other role model is my late cousin. She always encouraged me no matter what. She made me listen and think. I heeded her advice and she inspired me to do community work as well as involvement in school.

I would also like to tell you about the Moricetown Play Society. That is a 100% youth driven group based on youth values. The group organizes leadership training, peer counseling, job search skills, career preparation, work experience, peer counseling, a homework club, HIV awareness, web site training, and community training. The group is seeking to build a stronger tomorrow by encouraging youth to chase their dreams.

I also want to personally say that I had Victor Jim as a teacher and I am thankful to him for his challenge and his determination to make me work so hard.

I see society as a canoe. When we work together we get to our destination safely. My friends keep me afloat. When I’m having trouble they brighten my day. High school can be a competitive place and we need our friends to encourage and support us and make sure we are doing well.

Thank you for listening to me today.”

Sashia Leung, First Year University Student

“I’m going to talk to you this morning about leadership in school. A friendly atmosphere, safe environment, and asset workers to support First Nations students are key. Leadership groups in schools are also great. They open doors for Aboriginal students and give them a great sense of acceptance. It is also important to encourage students to participate in sports so that they stay active and get to know people.

Having role models is critical, as is acknowledging Aboriginal students for what they are doing well, to show other students that they are successful and working hard. Aboriginal role models in our schools were inspirational.

Advocacy is another way to encourage students and make them more willing to try to make a difference in their lives and the lives of their peers. Home and community support are also key factors in success, and will help students to reach their highest potential and follow their dreams.

Teachers should not only provide students with theory, but also the how, hands-on. Be a friend to students, be a role model for the future leaders. That will make a real difference.”



Role Model Panel (from left): MILLIE GUTTENUK, VICTOR JIM, SASHIA LEUNG, ANDREW TOM, LORNA WILLIAMS

Victor Jim, Parent and Teacher

“I like to challenge my students and raise the bar high. The joy I get is when my students’ eyes light up when they discover that they can do the work and do the best they can. I tell my students to reach for the stars, that they can do anything they want.

It is also vitally important that parents support their children. Not all parents are able to do that right now but we can work to improve that situation. And while we talk about parent support, let’s not forget community support, as well. In our community, we pulled together to raise enough money to send our children to France. Those types of things are important.

Pride in who they are is also critical for students. It allows them to stand up and compete.

I would like to also put in a plug for the School Board and School Trustees and thank them for sending me to this Conference. Schools are now inviting me to talk about what to do to help schools be more successful. I don’t mind doing this because it helps everyone to change their attitudes toward Aboriginal children.

My last message today is to continually challenge Aboriginal students. When you have students like ours, raise the bar. Don’t take it easy on them because of who they are. That way, they will become good citizens of this country and they’ll make their Nations proud.”

Millie Gunnanoot, Parent

“As a parent, I encouraged and motivated my child. I stood behind him and set high standards. I believed in him, and his father and I tried to be good role models for him, as did his extended family members.

Having teachers who set limits also builds character in a child. Students appreciate having teachers who talk about personal things. Encouraging them in sports is also key.

Parents can also encourage other children. I talked to my son about my experiences and my sharing made a lot of difference. I wanted something better for my son. I didn’t have the education and support he got, so I monitored what he was doing, helped with his homework, read report cards, questioned what was needed, and visited his teachers. We communicated with his teachers and had a good rapport. I think that is very important.

Kids also need to know that they belong somewhere. I think the most important thing is to provide the basics – food, shelter, and most of all the love our children need. Too many of our kids don’t have that kind of support at home, so schools must tell children that while they’re at school they’re loved. They need someone who will be there for them all of the time.

Thank you for listening to a few of my thoughts.”

Deborah Jeffrey then thanked all of the panel presenters for their thoughtful, inspirational words, and she thanked the conference participants once again for their dedication to First Nations education.

Images from the 2003 Aboriginal Education Conference



conference participants



Lorna Williams leading a workshop introducing the new First Nations Studies Twelve textbook



One of the numerous workshops



Implementation of standardized Test Results workshop



The Banquet!



Roots of Empathy Workshop Leaders: L. Daniels, S. Lavallee, S. Froehlich



Drummers



"Now that you have Education data, what questions can you ask?"



Display from a workshop on Organizing a Heritage Fair