Editorial

Changing Academic Discourse About Native Education: Using Two Pairs of Eyes

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For well over 300 years there has been a written discourse about First Nations people, formal education, and schooling in Canada. The nature of that discussion has sometimes evolved slowly and sometimes changed fast. Some of the questions have remained fairly constant, but the major questions seem to change over time. That may be one indication that this written discourse has yet to get the questions right.

One constant in this literature is that there seems to have always been an assumption that the discussion must be founded on an accurate definition of the characteristics of First Nations peoples, so quite a bit of this literature attempts to describe Indians in connection with an implicit formal educational goal. As with other representations of life, we sometimes recognize the portrayals, and sometimes the portrayals are skewed and distorted.

When we read the older literature we relate to the questions and the writers in different ways, perhaps depending upon how familiar the questions are that were raised during those eras. Some of the vital questions from one era can be strange and inappropriate during another.

Egerton Ryerson Young's writing is a good example of how a misguided question can skew observation. Young was a Methodist missionary in the North West during the last half of the last century. During the 1890s he published a book about his experiences and in it he took up the burning question of his day, one that simply makes no sense nowadays. Judging by the number of editions the book went through, and the fact that over a period of about ten years several editions were published in London, Toronto, and New York, the book was fairly widely read. A modern impression of Young himself is that he was a good and earnest man who respected Indian people. All of us, Native or not, can identify with the individual Indian people he described because they ring true in his writing, even through the medium of Young's vision. The framework that Young was constrained to use, however, alienates him from all of us, because the burning question of his day was this: which must come first, the "Christianization" of the "Indian" or "his" adoption of "civilization." If that question does not seem absurd to us now, it must seem at least quaint. In a 1990s reading of the book, we recognize the Indian people because there is a continuity there with Indian people today, and we wonder at how Young could have let such an absurd question frame his observations and relationships; none of us can easily identify with the unctuous and pious "society" that posed that question about the sequencing of educational objectives and social change.

The 1966-67 Hawthorn report is closer to us in time. There is a great deal of comparison between Natives and non-Natives in the report. In it we are asked to accept a detailed list of such observations as this—that non-Indians speak a grammatically correct form of their language; the characteristic of Indian people that is compared here is predictable—Indians speak incorrectly. There are pages of such comparisons. The only organizational principle seems to be that the more negative attributes are "Indian" and the more positive "non-Indian." Though the report is less than 25 years old, much of the discussion is as conceptually foreign as Young's strange and passionate argument. Can anyone read the collective attributes of either "Indians" or "non-Indians" in those comparisons and identify with either group? The Indians in the report are the one-dimensional Indians of the literature, less personal than Young's Indians, and surely not our friends, relatives, and students. Further, the reader must be curious about where in the real world the peculiar group called "non-Indians" can be found, living out their apparently happy, ordered, future-oriented, remarkably clean, and above all functional and idealized lives.[1] Television and basal readers used to celebrate these people, but even those media have begun to deal with less one-dimensional characterizations of people.

The *Canadian Journal of Native Education* has been part of the written discourse about schooling and First Nations people for 18 years. It has been a fairly important part of it: just around half of all the published works referenced in Education Research Information Clearinghouse (ERIC) about Canadian Indians during the 1980s has been published in this journal. The journal has reflected some of the changes that have taken place since 1974.

One of the ways to generalize about the process of change in discourse is with the peculiarly European idea of "dialectics." The academic, establishment-based, and institutionally-oriented discourse has been only a part of a larger discourse. It might be seen in a dialectical relationship with another discourse. For as long as there has been an academic discourse about schooling in First Nations, there has been a discourse within and among First Nations themselves about the subject. This discourse is not as well documented on paper, but is as well referenced in indigenous systematics as the academic discourse. It is as accessible, but on wholly different terms.

The idea of dialectics captures the idea of a kind of tension between institutionally based discourse and First Nations' discourse. That tension has sometimes been productive, sometimes contentious, and often illusive because the one discourse usually ignored or trivialized the other.

Any global generalization about those separate traditions of discussion has to be formulated cautiously, because both traditions are complex. Apparent appositions, maybe even contradictions, are inherent within both traditions. A

[1]One of the ways I used to illustrate this for a class was to take off the column headings of the many characteristics attributed to Indians and non-Indians in the Hawthorn report, mix up the values and traits, and ask the class to re-sort them into the appropriate columns. No group of students, no matter what cultural group they were from, could do this with any degree of success.

second and more general caution is that broad characterizations can be either instructive and explanatory, or they can be reductionist and simplistic.

This journal is artifactual and archival of that dialectics in two areas. Both involve the relationship between academic-institutional discourse and First Nations discourse, and arise from the very fact that the two have been separate.

The first area of the journal's contribution has been inward-looking, evaluative, and critical of academic tradition. A good illustration of this comes from the early years of the journal. In the early 1970s Max Hedley reviewed the academic literature in North America about Native education and made a generalization, that was published serially in this journal. His broad generalization falls into the category of those "instructive and explanatory" ones, based as it is on an intricately reasoned argument and on extensive reference to examples.

His summary statement was that no matter what other theory about Native education was ostensible and explicit in academic discourse, the underlying framework for our discussion continued to be one of acculturation. In other words, Hedley said, a premise in academic discourse was the reality of a psychosocial dynamic that had been put forward in 1930s and 1940s anthropology. It gave voice and academic sanction to an assumption that had been around for much longer: Indian people would change and become like the "other" group. The acculturation model was an attempt to explain the inevitability of this outcome in terms of another cultural dynamic, that of diffusion, or the exchange of traits across cultural boundaries. In the case of Native/non-Native relationships in North America, the model was supposed to describe the exchange of values. The concept of acculturation explained in mechanistic terms how this was supposed to take place in a situation where cultures were in conflict and where one of the cultures was dominant. The concept provided a functionalist explanation for how individuals in the minority culture, as a result of prevalent social structures, would unconsciously adopt individualized and situational values that were "functional" in the context of the relationship of dominance and subordination; those values would inevitably reflect the "dominance" of the dominant culture.

An implication of Hedley's argument was that no matter how we prettied up our arguments in terms of "cultural difference," "sensitivity" to other cultures, or "cross-cultural communication," the predominant underlying premise was that this dynamic of acculturation was real. Some other concomitants of the model follow.

The model is clearly a cultural-determinist model; it assumes that we can describe cultural configurations, values, and rules, and then predict individual or modal behaviour. A major problem with this, of course, is that it does not work.

The acculturation model affirms the reality and stasis of cultural boundaries. It assigns individuals to either one of the cultures within those static boundaries. Individuals who can "function" on both sides of the boundary are "bicultural." Traits and values, not just individuals, belong to either one or the other of the cultures. Applied to Native education, it focuses on First Nations cultures and contrasts them to that ambiguous, further-unspecified "Anglo," "European," "dominant," or "other" culture. In the end, it measures "success" in education by

how closely the end results in Native culture approximate the end results in the homogeneous "other," and "dominant" culture. "Success" as a metric is in fact the cultural property of the "other" society. An interesting aside is that the framework accomplishes this conceptual magic not by looking at anything "Native" at all, surely not by looking at "Native" values on their own terms, but rather by beginning with the assumption that this social dynamic is objectively and empirically describable.

The only change that is possible in Native culture is change that is reactive to non-Native dominance; that is, there is no quarter for the internal dynamics of First Nations culture to provide for change. Pushed to the wall, First Nations groups may foment a "revitalization movement" out of selected atavisms. The model provides no room for the survival of First Nations cultures.

The model leaves no room for the legitimacy of First Nations' discourse except as exotic. Insofar as First Nations discourse and academic discourse have anything in common, the model would predict that a diffusion of values has taken place. Cultural boundaries are real in the model. Our job in Native education, it follows with the model, is to transcend them. The objective of such transcendence is to effect a change in Indian values.

Almost 20 years ago, Hedley examined our major literatures and theoretical discourses in Native education and said that that model typified virtually all our academic literature. We were as bound by it as Young, in the 1870s, was bound in his big question about Christianity and civilization.

It is still fundamental to a great deal of academic discourse and practice. It is observed in pedagogy any time a technique or strategy is devised that supposes an intractable difference between populations, and further supposes a primary legitimacy to academic discourse over a First Nations discourse in the definition of the difference.

The acculturation model describes a kind of dialectics as well, because it assumes an initial definition of polarity—two cultures juxtaposed in an asymmetrical relationship. Dialectics describes a relationship between opposing poles or juxtaposed positions, statements, and populations. Dialectics is a process of either maintenance or resolution of those appositions, leading to a specification of larger contexts of apposition. Like the concept of acculturation, it is mechanistic. Dialectics "disembodies" ideas.

This journal has captured some of the dialectics within academic discourse. A good illustration is a continuing literature about "learning styles." Most of the literature has reflected an attempt to define a distinctive Native learning style; the journal has included examples of that, as well as cogent criticism of the attempt.

The second major contribution of the journal has been in its acknowledgement of First Nations discourse. I have invoked the term "dialectics" to describe the tension between academic discourse and First Nations discourse, but in order to discuss First Nations discourse I will drop it.

The nexus of interaction in First Nations discourse is not essentially dialectical; the first description is not of two or more juxtaposed entities, or two or more people, or cultures, involved in reciprocal processes. Its first assumption is the integrity of the person. It assumes a context in which there is unity and

wholeness to be discovered or reaffirmed; people involved in the discourse may disagree in their statements, of course, but the discourse is one of discovering the properties of the unifying context, and finding out how the discoursing individuals fit within the context and thus come to unity. Like academic discourse, it is thus essentially empirical, and rests on observation. The major difference is the requirement—not just the acknowledgement—that the observer be part of observation. Statements are not disembodied, but are evaluated in terms of multiple contexts, and further evaluated according to where the statements originate.

Thus in First Nations discourse, another first consideration of a statement is the moral authority of the person making the statement. It would be a mistake to think, however, that authoritative First Nations discourse is the property of only persons of recognized moral authority, or elders. The process of the realization of the discourse is one that educationists should understand, because it is a function of "teaching": it is not that a person of moral authority teaches by telling someone something. The relationship between a person of moral authority and another person creates the discourse; it is created anew in each generation; it changes, but maintains its stability and its internal organization. The currency for the interaction is not explicit statement of positions, though explicit statements are derived in the process. The currency for the interaction is the very living beings involved in the discourse. One referent of the moral authority of the persons involved has to do with the way a statement fits, observably, aptly, and experientially, in multiple contexts.

There is a constant requirement on interactants to assess implications of statements on as many levels as possible, and to play with levels of metaphor and implication. Explicit statements, to be taken at face value, are the stuff of academic discourse (though as any undergraduate or editor can tell us, the requirement is usually honoured in the breach). An explicit statement in First Nations discourse is an elementary one. The purpose for teaching and discoursing by systems of implicature and in mathematically elegant and precisely defined systems of metaphor is not to be enigmatic or poetic. One reason is that metaphor is powerful; an apt metaphor can carry a huge information load with it, because it can be interpreted at many different levels and in many different contexts.

A related reason is that this kind of discourse makes the "learner" engage in the process of the creation of the discourse—you don't know what a statement means unless you think about it. In short, the moral authority of a statement derives from its reaffirmation of natural balance. The elders are people who are expert at that. They—like all teachers if we knew it—are vulnerable, because their moral authority is tested by the context at every pass, and they allow us to be party to this.[2]

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[2]Though these things are consistent with First Nations discourse, they are neither definitive of it nor unique to it. It is old hat now to remark that modern theoretical physics uses metaphors that are consistent with First Nations' cosmologies. In the area of education, there are other

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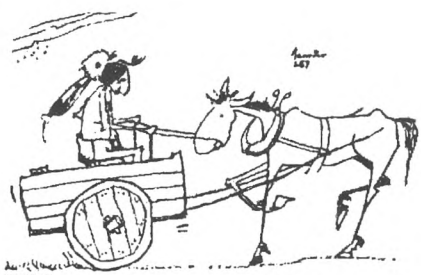
In this discourse, one of the implicit statements is always one of a placement of the interactants in time and space, relative to the earth and to natural processes. That is the all-encompassing context. An implication of this is that this discourse is a very personal thing. It is realized, usually, in face to face interaction.

This is all by way of saying that the *Canadian Journal of Native Education* may acknowledge traditional discourse about First Nations education, but it will not be a vehicle for it because no journal can be.

It is also a statement that the discourse of the journal and of the wider academic discourse that it represents will not mean anything—will be preoccupied with questions about civilization and Christianity, and about acculturation—unless it acknowledges and reflects the invariant properties of First Nations discourse and the current topics of it. To do otherwise is presumptuously to define the academic field of discourse as the "real" one, and in the process, to question the legitimacy of First Nations discourse in the definition of issues.

This raises some important questions: How does the journal "acknowledge" and "reflect" a discourse which it cannot incorporate? What are the implications of the kind of general review of academic discourse with which Hedley provided us?

One statement about the state of Indian education that was published in this journal and that reflected First Nations discourse was one of the earliest to appear in the journal. At the request of Alan Berger, who started this publication as a newsletter in 1974, a well-known Chipewyan artist drew a masthead for *Indian-Ed*, this journal's first emanation. That logo is reprinted to the right.



The journal can reflect First Nations discourse in several ways. The most immediate example is the last issue (Volume 17, Number 2, "Through Two Pairs of Eyes"), published at the University of British Columbia. Jo-ann Archibald, in "Coyote's Story About Orality and Literacy," looks at the concepts of orality and literacy through two pairs of eyes. With Coyote, Archibald first allows the juxtaposition, the "dialectics," of orality and literacy to stand in conflictual relationship, but in reaffirming the need to maintain First Nations' oral traditions she and Coyote remove nothing from "literacy"—there is no essential apposition, and the literacy—a valued thing—does not deny the legitimacy of the oral

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modern academic discussions that seem to be consistent with indigenous knowledge systems. Chaos theory, the idea of fractals (see Gleick, 1987, for example), and the cybernetics of living systems as explained by Maturana and Varela (1980) are some areas of academic discourse in which Native scholars recognize "new" knowledge as being consistent with our "old" ways.

medium. The legitimacy of neither oral nor literate vision is denied; neither oral nor literate vision is "more" or "less" Indian.

Even earlier in this journal, Mabel Johnson allowed the reprinting of a piece she wrote for the *Yukon Indian News*: "Tlinget Way To Tan a Moose Hide." That article can stand as a description of steps in tanning a moose hide. It reads like speech (e.g., "Put the hide on the stick and this time start from the tail and work up against the hair, cutting if off with a long bladed knife. ... The knife is sharp so watch you don't cut the skin," [p. 14]). It can also be read as saying something about tradition, modernity, and education generally. It certainly speaks to the reader in personal terms, establishes the reader very coherently in time and place relative to the earth, and speaks to us about the relationship between "learning" and "book learning." She ends her description

> I'm sure some of you will have this paper when you're working on your moose skin. If the wind blow[s] your paper away, you'll be hunting for it! "Where's that damn paper?" I'm 71 years old and I can tan a moose skin, as easy as I can put on lipstick! (p. 15)

Neither Archibald nor Johnson claim a uniquely "Indian" facility for the understanding of their arguments, nor a uniquely "Indian" application. They include all of us—all of you—as audience. That is, they deny no one's integrity; they hold no one culpable; they exclude no one from the discourse. They let us laugh a little. They recognize that learning is a transcendent experience, a kind of play. They reflect First Nations discourse.

There is a discourse that is rarely reflected in the journal, and that might be called "public discourse." That appears to have changed fundamentally just this past year, but the events of 1990—Oka, Meech Lake, the British Columbia court decision that questioned aboriginal rights—provided for more public discourse, and let us see how it has changed during the 1980s. It is apparent in media reports that there is a public realization that First Nations' definitions of social relations do not correspond with those of the establishment; more importantly, there is an indication a First Nations perspective on these issues is accessible, understandable, and even reasonable to many, many, non-Natives: the present political, economic and environmental context makes the claims and principles of this aspect of First Nations discourse make sense in a wider, public discourse. The public discourse is less and less couched in terms of conflict in the context of a zero-sum game—that is, that what one group gains, the other loses.

Academic discourse has not quite kept up with public discourse.

All of these observations motivate an editorial policy for this journal. In the first place, the Journal will not simply affirm the legitimacy of First Nations discourse as distinct from academic discourse, but will recognize that the two discourses constitute multiple visions of the issues. It is not a "translation" of one world view to another that is required, but access to the multidimensionality provided by two pairs of eyes.

An example of the practical way that this will be realized is in an upcoming supplemental issue. Part of First Nations discourse in Canada about schooling is a discussion of the residential school experience. The Journal will reflect—not constitute—that discourse in two major pieces of work, based on interviews conducted in Cree with alumni of residential schools. The interviews themselves

are a small part of First Nations discourse; they do not form simply a "data corpus" for academic exposition as ethnohistory. The validity of the generalizations in the articles does not emanate from ethnohistorical cross-validation, buttressed by archival sources. That kind of validity is elementary. The validity of the discourse is the moral authority of the interactants to the interviews, who know that the earth witnessed the things about which they spoke.

We will attempt to at least keep up with public discourse in recognizing that there is no more zero-sum game. Conflict is sometimes the best description of a situation; the policy of the journal is to recognize that it is not always the best description of social relationships, in any of economic, political, individual, local, interactional, psychological, cultural, tribal, or ethnic terms. Discussions in which the a priori assumption is conflictual are too old-fashioned for this journal.

The acculturation model has become a piece of embarrassing baggage in education; long after it has been discredited in theoretical anthropology, it is still the predominant model in academic and applied educational discourse and threatens to fuel another 50 years of discussion about conflicting values.

The academic discourse that is represented in this journal must incorporate a challenge, and a questioning of these assumptions:

That a difference in values is itself a problem

That our descriptions of value systems are sufficiently well developed to predict behaviour; that we can assign individuals to a group, based on ascription of values; that cultural determinism is more than a tautology

That an educational problem rests on an intractable cultural difference

That an answer to educational problems is to be found in more description of Native characteristics

That we are involved in a zero-sum game; i.e., that there is only so much culture to go around or that only so much culture will fit in an individual's head; that there is some metric of "limited good"—what one group gains, the other loses

That academic discourse is the "real" discourse in First Nations education, that it can incorporate First Nations discourse, or that there should be a fundamental difference in ethos or integrity between the two

That there is some value in comparisons between cultural groups in terms that imply that the standards and central tendencies and modalities of one are definitive of the good, or desirable

We need to do this because we need to address some practical issues and to develop better theory in the process.

For example, the beginning of a very long list of straightforward practical questions are these: (a) How do we deal with Treaty rights in the curriculum? (b) How do we combine scientific studies of land, the use of information retrieval systems about land, and social impact studies about people on land, in the context of First Nations knowledge about land, and with the First Nations a priori assumption that we are of the land—and articulate a school curriculum that

prepares First Nations people to make decisions about land (a positive and creative combination, not a problem of conflict); (c) How do we maintain the integrity and autonomy of Native communities: how do we focus on healing the dynamics of our communities; what do schools have to do with this? (d) How do we deal with the technological explosion and confusing institutional discourse about distance education and what are the possibilities for First Nations communities in this field? (e) What do we do about teachers who do not love children? What are the implications for teacher preparation of a question such as that? (f) How does the present pattern of school administration seem to discredit parental and family involvement in education, and only allow its support for schooling on "school" terms? (g) What educational philosophy allows for Adult Basic Education to be, nationally, so ad hoc and so subject to the exigencies of "funding," and what is to be done about that? (h) What practical techniques and technologies allow us to improve written history with our knowledge of oral history, without doing discredit to either? (i) What are some effective and cost-effective ways of individualizing teacher-student interaction in First Nations schools? and (j) Do we need theoretical critiques of the concept of "empowerment" of critical education theory, and other current models, in order to keep us from reinventing new "Christianization/civilization" and "acculturation" models?

It is not a particular model of education, nor a particular ideology that motivates a statement that our discourse needs to change. This editorial statement is simply a statement of what we know already, and as such is in a time-honoured tradition in social science: it is a long statement of the obvious. (That may be the prerogative of editors.) Academic discourse changes to be cognizant of First Nations discourse; it does so because good scholarship demands no less.

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Information for Contributors

The first issue of each volume of *Canadian Journal of Native Education* is a general issue, published at the University of Alberta. It usually consists of both commissioned and submitted articles. The second issue of each volume is based on a specific theme, and is published at the University of British Columbia. Papers in that issue are usually solicited by the editor.

The journal invites submissions for the general issue. We seek articles, essays, reviews, and research reports that deal with any aspect of First Nations education or socialization, broadly defined.

Submissions are sent for blind review by peers, teachers, academicians, and First Nations educators.

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