

# Editorial

## Hands Back, Hands Forward: Revisiting Aboriginal Voices and Re-Visioning Aboriginal Research

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Elder Tsimlano, Dr. Vincent Stogan, of the Musqueam First Nation is often asked to open gatherings with a prayer. His prayer establishes an atmosphere of respect and caring for the people and their knowledge. He asks us to form a circle and join hands in prayer. When we hold hands he asks us to extend our left palm upward to symbolize reaching back to receive the teachings of the Ancestors. We learn these teachings and they then become a part of us. We then extend our right palm facing downward to symbolize sharing these teachings with others, especially the younger generations. In this way the teachings of the Ancestors continue, and the circle of human understanding and caring grows stronger. This theme edition of the Canadian Journal of Native Education is in honor of the teachings of Tsimlano: *Hands Back, Hands Forward: Revisiting Aboriginal Voices and Re-Visioning Aboriginal Research*.

Since 1986 the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia has shared editorship of the *Canadian Journal of Native Education (CJNE)* with the University of Alberta and the University of Saskatchewan.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Verna J. Kirkness, founding Director of the First Nations House of Learning, was a co-editor from 1986-1992. I began to edit the *CJNE* for the First Nations House of Learning with the 1992 theme edition *Giving Voice to Our Ancestors*. The approach of the new millennium seems like a good time to reflect, acknowledge, and re-vision Aboriginal research and academic discourse. I asked a number of people who have assisted me in reviewing and selecting *CJNE* articles to identify articles published in First Nations House of Learning theme editions that they consider milestones in creating and strengthening Aboriginal academic discourse and research. The First Nations House of Learning has published the following theme editions:

1986: *Indian Control of Indian Education*

1987: *Tradition, Change and Survival. "Education into Culture" is the strategy for ensuring our survival: "The answers are within us"*

1988: *Schooling and Beyond*

1989: *Language is a Gift from the Creator*

1990: *Through Two Pairs of Eyes*

1991: *Struggles and Triumphs*

1991: Supplement. *The Experience of Indian Residential Schooling*<sup>2</sup>

1992: *Giving Voice to Our Ancestors*

1993: *Researching with Mutual Respect*

1995: *Honouring What They Say: Postsecondary Experiences of First Nations Graduates*

1995: *Education and Healing*

1998: *Creating Power in the Land of the Eagle*

The articles selected for this particular edition either exemplify important Aboriginal traditional teachings and discourse, critically examine pressing issues, or present research on areas where little exists. There were more recommendations than could be reproduced for this theme edition. Some articles that were recommended were not included because they were subsequently reprinted in books or were published in very recent theme editions of the *CJNE*. The five reprinted articles symbolize the action of reaching back to hear once more the important teachings of Aboriginal voices. The two new articles that end this theme edition show how research and critical analysis are enacted to strengthen research concerning Aboriginal education and identity.

Carl Urion was a co-editor of the *CJNE* for seven years. His editorial "Changing Academic Discourse about Native Education: Using Two Pairs of Eyes" is included in this edition because it is a milestone article for challenging and truly exemplifying Aboriginal discourse. Carl challenged the problem of placing Aboriginal discourse and academic-institutional discourse in a dialectics oppositional framework. The dialectics approach takes us nowhere of any significance. Another unproductive approach that dominated academic literature in North America until the early 1970s focused on acculturation (Urion, citing Hedley, 1991). In order to shift Aboriginal academic discourse from the single-lens approaches of earlier eras to multidimensional perspectives, Urion asks us to think deeply and compassionately about First Nations discourse in education. Carl reminds us that the *CJNE* can only reflect, not constitute, Aboriginal discourse. He leaves us with some criteria that may comprise Aboriginal discourse, and a number of educational questions and topics that still need to be taken up by research if we are to make a positive change. Carl Urion not only poses thought-provoking questions; he shares some of his insights and Ancestral teachings in order to show us a process for examining Aboriginal academic discourse and research. In a traditional storytelling manner, he presents many possibilities for engagement, but lets us as listeners/readers and researchers take responsibility for our learning and action.

Elder Alfred Manitopeyes gave Linda Akan<sup>3</sup> (1992) something to share with the readers of the journal in the article "*Pimosatamowin Sikaw Kakee-quaywin: Walking and Talking. A Sauteaux Elder's View of Native Educa-*

tion." Her translation from the Saulteaux language takes a reader only part of the way to an understanding of what this respected Elder gave us for reflection and action. He gave her the additional responsibility and privilege of collaborating with him to bring the reader the concepts embedded in the good talk by encouraging her to comment on how to listen to an Elder, to point out the concepts that he focused on and implied, and to tell of his talk's meaning for her. Their talk is personal—there is a unique intimacy in the meeting of the minds on the occasion of a good talk, but there is no compromise of that privileged intimacy in the sharing of it. Linda Akan demonstrated compassion and mutual understanding of the Elder's teachings and a great respect for the Saulteaux language. We can return many times to the languages represented in this article and find new meaning each time if we are ready to engage in this kind of story-meaning.

Felicity Jules' (1988) article "Native Indian Leadership" presents a methodology based on the oral tradition of life-experience stories. She spoke with three respected First Nations leaders to identify important characteristics of Aboriginal leadership. In Canada, and in the education literature, no other research articles have been published that present Aboriginal leadership from experienced Aboriginal leaders' perspectives and from a cultural methodology that stems from the oral tradition. Some of the essential leadership values and practices included having personal integrity and honesty, humility, the importance of serving others and taking a facilitating role, and being trained over a long period of time by other community leaders. The three Aboriginal leaders were setting precedents in self-government, self-determination, and community empowerment in the fields of education, community development and governance, languages, health, and economic development. We need to continue and expand the research about Aboriginal leadership, especially in education and the role of women, as the majority of educational leaders today are women.

Verna J. Kirkness' (1987) article "Native Indian Teachers: A Key to Progress" focuses on Aboriginal teachers as leaders of change and improvement in education. She reiterates what First Nations community members state as important for educational improvement: relevant and quality cultural curriculum, effective communication and relationships between the school and community, and recognition of the need to develop cultural identity, self-esteem, language, and history. She emphasizes that First Nations teachers are the key to making significant change and improvement if they have cultural sensitivity and knowledge and take the responsibility of being role models for Aboriginal students and cultural brokers between First Nations and non-First Nations societies. Kirkness also calls for research that examines the impact of First Nations teachers using methodology that is First Nations and is interpreted from a First

Nations perspective. Articles do exist that document case studies of First Nations teacher education programs and pedagogy used in these programs, but we do not have articles that vigorously study their impact using Aboriginal methodology. Verna continues to be a teacher who makes a significant difference and invaluable contributions to First Nations education. She has received an Order of Canada and a National Aboriginal Achievement Award, in addition to many other awards. Verna's editorial leadership of the *CJNE* created an important academic meeting place where many strong voices for quality Aboriginal education were and continue to be heard.

Opal Charter-Voght's (1990) article "Indian Control of Indian Education: The Path of the Upper Nicola Band" describes a structured-experiences workshop process where a local First Nations community in British Columbia examined the following questions: Where have we been? Where are we now? Where do we want to go? How will we know when we get there? The workshop centered on the involvement of Elders, band council representatives, band members, parents, teachers, and students. Over the three-day period the group reflected on their educational experiences, assessed the quality of education in their band school, created new visions, and established goals and action plans. One year later Charters-Voght, examines the progress of the staff and school in implementing the community-based educational plan. This example truly exemplifies the principles of community involvement and local control extolled in the 1993 Indian Control of Indian Education Policy (ICIE) adopted by the federal government and numerous First Nations communities across Canada. Opal is still the principal of this same school nine years later and believes that the direction started in the ICIE workshop is still relevant and useful as guidelines today.

The next article presents a current case study of an Alaskan Native school and community that also implements facets of Indian Control of Indian Education. Carol Barnhardt's article "Standing Their Ground: The Integration of Community and School in Quinhagak, Alaska" summarizes a two-year research project (1997-1998) that examined school reform initiatives in Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat School (K-12). Local community values, language, and culture are integral to the school's physical facilities, policies, practices, and curriculum. Half of the school's teaching staff is from the community, and the language of instruction in kindergarten to grade 4 is Yup'ik, the local Native language. The students and staff use both Yup'ik and English, making the school truly bilingual. It is refreshing to see how a school and community actualize Indian Control of Indian Education despite their many challenges. We need more case studies of First Nations schools that bring the school and community together in a vibrant and meaningful way as is shown in Barnhardt's respectful research approach.

Gail Guthrie Valaskakis was an invited scholar to the University of British Columbia to present a lecture as part of the President's speaker series *Creating Power in the Land of the Eagle* in 1997. Her paper and presentation "Sacajawea and her Sisters: Images and Native Women" were very well received. The visual image of the Indian princess or maiden persists over time: the recent Disney movie *Pocahontas* is a prime example. Gail presents both the romanticized story and a counternarrative of Pocahontas. The former is a movie representation, whereas the latter is traced from historical documents of the Virginia Historical Society. However, the historical story is one of "civilization, Christianization, and assimilation." The other image that has plagued Native women is the "squaw or drudge." Valaskakis presents myriad images, real and imagined, that have an impact on our individual and gendered Aboriginal identities. Her article shows how Others have been complicit in these created and re-created stereotypical images. Now more than ever, we need to tell all our historical stories, reexamine our historical identities, and present images that represent the diversity of Aboriginal families, communities, and Nations. We must continue to ask, Have we moved from the princess or the drudge images? Gail Guthrie Valaskakis takes us back to an important starting place, our identities as Aboriginal people, and how these have been shaped by looking back at history and reaching back to confirm what makes us Aboriginal.

Compassionate care, deep thinking, and respectful approaches to Aboriginal knowledge, discourse, and research will take us far in the new millennium. In Sto:lo tradition I raise my hands and give thanks to all the previous contributors and editors of the *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, and I look forward to joining hands with future contributors.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The University of Saskatchewan shared editorship of *CJNE* from 1986-1988. For this theme edition I focus on the editorship and theme editions published by the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia.

<sup>2</sup>This edition was a collaborative effort between Department of Educational Foundations, University of Alberta, and the First Nations House of Learning at University of British Columbia.

<sup>3</sup>Linda Akan passed away in October 1993.

#### References

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