

Editorial

(De)colonizing Academe: Knowing Our Relations

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All of us, Indian and white, are haunted by salmon. (Alexie, 2000)

Collaborating on this guest-edited issue of the *Canadian Journal of Native Education (CJNE)* provided an opportunity for three people with vastly different histories and relations to the traditional territory of the Mississauga Anishinaabe where we now live and work to come together in good relation to one another. It has not all been easy: tight schedules, a seemingly inescapable part of dwelling in the world of academe whether as graduate student or faculty member, are only one of the limitations we faced. But the time we stole from other commitments yielded a warmth as we came to see our shared goals for the endeavor. We learned from one another and came to deeper respect for how we work. Although there are days when the idea of working well together across all our differences as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people may seem close to impossible, this particular constellation proved to be rewarding for all three of us. As Wilson (1995) has said in another issue of the journal, "Wetaskiwin does not mean *we own this land*. It means *you too can come in and live here in peace. We share this land together*" (p. 69). This understanding of land that incorporates its spirituality and all its other complexities is where we begin our work of decolonizing. This journal is one place where we all may share this understanding of the land, the place of education, and the knowledge that we hope goes out into the world to serve us all in good relations. We decided that each of us would speak as part of the circle that formed our editorial group. If we sound like a mutual admiration society, we apologize: we wish to give you a taste of our time together.

Laara Fitznor (Cree)

Tansi, my name is Laara Fitznor. I am Cree from Northern Manitoba. I have lived and worked in Winnipeg from 1978 to 1998 where my academic and service work focused on advancing Aboriginal education across all educational levels and backgrounds. I came to Toronto in 1998 when I became a faculty member at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (OISE/UT) where I am participating in the development of Aboriginal studies in education.

When Celia invited me to guest-edit this issue of *CJNE* with her I accepted without hesitation. Before I met her, I had read her work and was impressed with her manner of writing about, working with, and relating to Aboriginal peoples and

education. When I learned that she was at York University, far from her home grounds out west, I felt privileged at the possibility of just connecting with her on common goals of advancing Aboriginal education from our respective educational institutions and perspectives. Consequently, working with her on an important journal such as the *CJNE* was an honor for me because this is one of the body of works that I have always incorporated into my teaching in Aboriginal education. I have introduced and connected many students over the years to the *CJNE* and its contributors. Now, to have an opportunity to serve as one of the guest editors was not to be taken lightly: it was a gift indeed. Another gift of this issue was having the chance to work with Lori, a York grad student who also became involved. I had seen Lori on a couple of previous occasions through OISE/UT and was pleased that she was part of our team. The work that transpired during our time together was imbued with numerous phone calls, e-mail messages, laboring over the tasks in Celia's kitchen, sharing ideas and suggestions, and, finally, organizing the journal. Each time we met we joined in a labor of love and spontaneous humor as we pulled together the pieces that make up this journal. Even though the three of us worked to edit it, we wish to acknowledge that there are many more Relations in our circle of colleagues who contributed to this issue. Authors responded to the call for papers, and reviewers took time to critique the work thoughtfully and relay their opinions to us. Peggy and Stan Wilson provided ongoing guidance through their seasoned experience with the journal, nudging and pushing at appropriate moments. Many times, as I do with my life, I felt that my Spirit Ancestors were there to guide us through this important body of work. The various dimensions of creating an issue like this remind me of the dedication of all our relations working to advance Aboriginal education. Many already established connections were strengthened through collaboration on this issue: I feel that the experience has validated and enriched me in many ways. Working in this circle of Relations has also strengthened my resolve to assert the work that needs to come from Aboriginal knowledge, philosophies, and perspectives whether we work with Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal writers. For this I say, Chi-megwetch, Ekosani.

Celia Haig-Brown (Anglo-Canadian)

Being asked to serve as guest editor for an issue of *CJNE* is an honor and a privilege that carries with it tremendous responsibility. We in academe are engaged in the production of forms of knowledge, the evidence of which finds its way into journals in our fields of study and into our classrooms as we teach. When Stan and Peggy Wilson approached me about the editing, I was surprised, pleased, and intimidated. I know much of the history of colonization in this country. I know that persisting relations—clash zones as Marker (2000) has called them—among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples are fraught with challenges. As a white woman I continually question the possibility of working respectfully so as to address the injustices and inequities people live with on a daily basis. Ever conscious of the risk of merely “colonizing better,” I ponder the possibilities of decolonizing: the interstices of appropriation and learning, of reciprocity and exploitation. I wonder about community and how those boundaries, like tidal flats, waver and shift as forces within and without ceaselessly affect their existence. I

strive to see how to work in good relation, as my friend/ teacher and sometimes student Metis educator Kathy Hodgson-Smith has guided me to say.

One of the recent major influences in my work has been Linda Tuhiwai Smith's book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999). This text explicitly addresses the relation between Indigenous peoples of the world and their own conduct of research in the lands where they have lived since time immemorial. Yet the text has the potential to speak to all those who take seriously the complexities of the process of decolonization. In a world where the stretch of colonization reaches over centuries and across continents, consciously redressing its impact will never be quick or easy. But it is a process we can embrace and teach our children. Whether working in one's own vibrant and shifting communities or in relation to other communities, its lessons are powerful reminders of the dangers and possibilities that research brings.

For me control is a central issue in the work we do together: for the most part Aboriginal people have not been in positions of control of institutionalized education in this country. Their efforts to influence schooling have been met with resistance and racist dismissal since it was first established and discussions began (Haig-Brown, 1995). Educational research and publishing have echoed this trend. Some notable exceptions are Theytus Publishing, Randy Fred's contributions to Pulp Press, and Jeanette Armstrong's ceaseless work in the Enowkin Centre to name only a few. The *CJNE* has been another stellar example. Even to consider trying to follow the lead of Carl Urion, Verna Kirkness, Jo-ann Archibald, Stan and Peggy Wilson, and others is a daunting task.

My first realization was that I needed guidance in this work. Several factors came together with that realization. Like so many others I am a recent immigrant to Toronto. British Columbia is my home: the land where my parents taught me to love rivers and see in the salmon's ceaseless cycle all the relations of life. It is where I heard the stories and felt the warmth that Kwaguelth grandmother Daisy Price brought to my mother's kitchen. It is where Daisy Price spontaneously sang her last respects in Kwa'kwala to my mother when she passed on. It is where most of my family still lives, where my grandmother is buried, and where my parents' ashes have long since become part of the soil around them, part of the ceaseless cycle.

Coming to Anishinaabe territory where York University stands I realized that I had to begin my education again. I knew little of the people with whose traditional land I was working and living. I knew little of the vibrant urban Aboriginal community in Toronto. About this time Laara Fitznor began her work as a new faculty member at the OISE/UT including organizing public lectures with Aboriginal scholars. I was impressed with her calm, clear connection to her Cree ancestry and her obvious desire to bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together to interrogate and investigate ground-breaking issues in Aboriginal education. I knew that working with her would be a privilege and tentatively asked her if she would be willing to be co-editor of the issue. About the same time Lori Moses, a Delaware doctoral student in the English Department at York University, came to work with me as a research assistant on a project called the Pedagogy of the Land. Both agreed to work as editors on the journal.

We began many months of working together, continually pondering relations between us and the Aboriginal communities in the area as fundamental to the work we did. Kitchen table talk: coffee, "real tea," herb tea, food, papers, names, histories and lives, stories of children, stories of people in common, ideas for future work all flowed as we struggled with the labor and birth of one issue of the journal. We hope that, with our work and that of all those who contributed to it, this issue will be of use and inspiration to all who read it.

Lori Moses (Delaware Nation)

Although technically assigned as a graduate research assistant, I have never had anything but the feeling of working *with* and not *for* these two wonderful women Celia Haig-Brown and Laara Fitznor. And we have had our share of fun mixed in with work. For that I thank them both. I have "met" many people electronically and received kind words from them, encouragement, and from one concern that I was working so late on the weekend! I have learned much from this process, especially about the field of Aboriginal education, as I am a graduate student in the department of English at York University working in the area of Aboriginal literatures.

As the daughter of two former teachers, a Delaware father and a German-Canadian mother, whose ideas about and commitments to education went far beyond what took place between the morning prayer and the afternoon bell, I cannot help feeling there was an element of inevitability about it all. My life has been shaped by—and perhaps even driven by—the pursuit of education and learning, but it has, at least institutionally, been one-sided. I am so encouraged to see all the efforts being made: people thinking deeply and carefully about how balance can be restored to the educational process and respect accorded to the teachings of Aboriginal peoples. At a recent Traditional Awareness gathering in Toronto an Elder reminded us that intellect alone cannot impart learning: the heart is needed as well. I hope that you will find evidence of both in this issue as we have.

The Circle of Authors and Editors

We have structured both this editorial and the journal itself such that Aboriginal contributions are woven together with and encircle those from non-Aboriginal authors. From this place of strength in coming together we have placed the articles in relation to the circle. Although this is an open issue and the articles cover a range of topics, several address adult and higher education. In this the issue makes a significant contribution to the growing literature on adult Aboriginal students and programs. Each of these works holds the possibility of serving the long process of decolonizing education.

We start with a recognition of Elders and their influence in one postsecondary program. Elder Louise Underwood has written with Bruce Cooke-Dallin and Trish Rosborough of Malaspina University-College on "The Role of Elders and Elder Teachings: A Core Aspect of Child and Youth Care Education in First Nations Communities." The article examines the roles of both Elders and "Elders in training" in a First Nations diploma program. The contributions of local people to students who remain in their traditional territories is central to the success of the program. The importance of a location that allows for minimal disruption, and at

best for enhancement of community education, adds an important dimension to discussions of First Nations control and participation in program development.

In the next article, "Empowering Aboriginal Voice in Aboriginal Education," Oneida researcher and artist Eileen Antone centers us as she begins with a prayer. She goes on to reflect on her own educational experiences and presents results of her study in the community of the Onyota'a:ka of the Thames. In words and art she shows the centrality of language and ceremony for making schools good places for Aboriginal students.

Employing a perspective that distinguishes between identity and identifying, Jean-Paul Restoule of the Dokis First Nation takes up an important theoretical analysis in "Aboriginal Identity: The Need for Historical and Contextual Perspectives." In particular he discusses the limitations of conventional conceptions of cultural identity: ultimately a conception that acknowledges the shifting context of time and space allows for richer understandings of the complexities of identifying as Aboriginal people.

Nishnaabe scholar Alan Corbiere of the M'Chigeeng First Nation brings new perspectives on wholistic education in his article "Reconciling Epistemological Orientations: Toward a Wholistic Nishnaabe (Ojibwe/ Odawa/ Potowatomi) Education." He first appeals to the Royal Commission and demonstrates the limitations of Ontario's provincial curriculum. He goes on to show how education is transformed when *aansookaanan* (legends) and *dbaajmowinan* (narratives) and the centrality of Nishnaabemwin (language) are taken seriously. The Nishnaabe world view with its assumption of spirituality and relationships takes precedence.

Non-Aboriginal researcher Elizabeth Yeomans takes us into cyberspace to another dimension of language and Aboriginal education in her article "Aboriginal Language Learning in Cyberspace: A Typology of Language Related Web Sites and Their Potential Uses." Focusing on the promise of cyberspace for language learning, her practical article includes possible uses of the Internet for language renewal and maintenance. She also provides some relevant Web sites for readers to consider and concludes with recommendations for expanding the relevance of the Internet, including a specific suggestion to establish search engines in a range of Aboriginal languages.

Non-Aboriginal teacher educator Cheryl Duquette adds to existing Canadian literature on Aboriginal teacher education with her article "Becoming Teachers: Experiences of First Nations Student Teachers in Isolated Communities." Her examination of student teachers' experiences focuses on the students' persistence as they work to complete the program. She leaves readers with three recommendations for other teacher education programs including requiring school experience for prospective teachers, offering preparation for distance education work, and recognizing the need for a strong personal support network for students entering the program.

Following 10 teachers from preservice education into the field in northern Ontario, non-Aboriginal scholar Helen Harper uses qualitative reporting in her article "'No Way to Prepare for This: Ten Women Teaching in Northern Ontario First Nations Communities—Report on Issues and Concerns.'" She suggests the need to strengthen both preservice and inservice teacher education by making it specific to the communities where teachers live. Intensifying teachers' sensitivity to

school contexts, including planning for the unexpected instead of for a “generic” school, is one approach she advocates. Explicit focus on the effects of sex and race as people develop a sense of themselves as teachers should be part of improved preparation.

The notion of local control is fundamental to Leonard Tsuji’s call for a restructured school year in his article “The Use of Modified School Years: An Important Issue in Local Control of Education.” His study is in the context of the two Aboriginal communities of Moose Factory and Fort Albany. Echoing Harper’s focus on specificity, he emphasizes the important role of a First Nations education authority in guiding changes that fit the particular needs of Aboriginal communities. Year-round schooling that takes seriously time on the land is one way to avoid dichotomizing teachings from school and teachings from home and the bush.

Choosing a selection of programs from across Canada, Metis counsellor Cathy Richardson worked with non-Aboriginal researcher Natasha Blanchet-Cohen to analyze several postsecondary education programs designed specifically for Aboriginal peoples. Their article entitled “Postsecondary Education Programs for Aboriginal Peoples: Achievements and Issues” identifies three types of programs that they categorize as add-on, partnership, and First Nations control. Brief case studies of the Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program, the First Nations Partnership Program at the University of Victoria, the First Nations House of Learning at UBC, and the Saanich Adult Education Center provide the foci for a critical appraisal of each in order to tease out issues and challenges for people working in the area. Ultimately, long-term funding that would allow for more advanced planning remains a concern.

The final article, “Keeping the Seventh Fire: Developing an Undergraduate Degree Program for Aboriginal Adult Educators” co-authored by non-Aboriginal scholar Michael Kompf and Mohawk scholar John Hodson provides an inside view of planning another postsecondary program: a degree program for Aboriginal adult educators developed out of Brock University with wide-ranging input from Aboriginal educators and advisors. It uses a successful model already in operation as the basis for actualizing the dream of the two authors. Supported by the university, the article traces the development with focus on respectful protocol, openness, and accountability to all who might be touched by the program. The construction of a clan system reminiscent of traditional clans, but with specific relation to the task at hand, including responding to a diverse Aboriginal population, serves as a fascinating, although not unproblematic, frame for the work of planning the program. Guided by Elders the process leading to the first stages of offering the program is outlined.

Finally we offer three book reviews by Shannon Simpson, an Anishnaabe student in Women’s Studies at York University, David Anderson, a Dene teacher educator and doctoral student at OISE/UT, and co-editor Laara Fitznor.

Some Final Words

We invite CJNE readers to promote past, present, and future issues as critical contributions to the growing knowledge base of Aboriginal education as a field of study. It continues to gain prominence and credibility in academia and the broader

community. We acknowledge the various educators who are working to strengthen and expand this rich area of study. Through their diligent work they are developing, establishing, and asserting the circles of knowing that reflect the diversity and complexity of the field. Most notable is their willingness to acknowledge that Aboriginal education must be grounded in core Aboriginal philosophies and perspectives regardless of the writer's location.

This issue of the journal is born out of the willingness of colleagues to put pen to paper and write their respective articles on Aboriginal education. It reflects an ongoing tension, a potential paradox whereby *writing* about Aboriginal perspectives risks overshadowing the importance of *speaking or voicing* Aboriginal perspectives: the heritage of oral traditions. This dilemma is highlighted in Brant Castellano's (2000) recent discussion of "Issues of Authenticity and Authority" where she alerts us to the necessity of writers knowing from where, how, and why they write: through their Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal locations. "Both types of writers may be motivated as well by a sense that the philosophies of Aboriginal people belong to the store of knowledge that ought to be accessible to all peoples." She further cautions us to understand that "Writing things up gives authority to a particular view and a particular writer" (p. 31). She cautions us to be respectful in how we put pen to paper when we are working with our communities where oral traditions are core. With this warning in mind, and a recognition that this journal serves as an extension of relations between the literate world and the oral world and between friends and knowledge producers of Aboriginal education, we present this issue "in a good way." All our relations.

Note

¹The spelling of this word varies considerably from one context to another. Part of this is due to dialect differences and part to the incommensurability of the English alphabet and Anishnaabemowen (the Anishinaabe language).

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