

Book Reviews

Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise

Marlene Brant Castellano, Lynne Davis, and Louise Lahache (Eds.), UBC Press, hardcover \$85.00, softcover \$29.00. ISBN 0 7747 0783 0, 278 pages

Reviewed by **Laara Fitznor**

Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise contains impressive reflections on educational pieces from the report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). Two new articles, not included in RCAP, were added to complete the contribution to fulfill the promise of Aboriginal education. Organized into four parts, the book highlights 19 contributors in 13 chapters, which include "core content of selected research reports and round table papers on education commissioned by RCAP and revised and updated by the original authors." RCAP recommendations on Aboriginal peoples regarding education are a critical piece in the book, which the authors include in the appendix. These recommendations alone are worth reading for innovative planning in the area of Aboriginal education. The contributors include Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators, practitioners, and researchers who have an interest in and commitment to advance decolonizing and culturally relevant Aboriginal education. Co-editor Brant Castellano cautions that the body of work contained in this text is only a snapshot of the complexities inherent in looking at Aboriginal education in its entirety.

Marie Battiste, a member of the Mi'kmaq Nation, a prominent researcher and educator in Aboriginal education, endorses this book with a foreword that calls for readers to recognize that we are "between stories." Battiste alerts us to the magnitude of the problems in the "destruction and pain" of the "old story" and offers an encouraging picture where "the emerging one is that of the ongoing vitality of Aboriginal people, from whose experience we can learn. Aboriginal people believe that education is an integral means of helping the new story unfold." Further she notes that we must not become complacent with this new story because the challenge is still up against pervasive Eurocentric ideologies that "continue to obstruct the efforts being made."

The contributors tackle a number of themes evident in a variety of educational settings and delivery methods that demonstrate: In spite of past assimilative attempts Aboriginal education is alive and well, and principles of Aboriginal perspectives emerge in the context. In the context of their writings, the contributors acknowledge that "education is at the heart of the struggle of Aboriginal peoples to regain control over their lives as communities and nations." Aboriginal education documents the gains made in moving from earlier assimilation attempts toward transforming Aboriginal educational experiences to self-expression and self-determination for the empowerment of Aboriginal peoples and communities. These gains were evident in discussions related to policies and practices of Aboriginal education.

The book documents various contexts such as rural Aboriginal, urban Aboriginal, First Nations, Inuit, and Metis communities wherein the contributors

emphasize the Aboriginal philosophies and practices that frame Aboriginal education initiatives for success of programs, while highlighting the struggles in pursuit of their goals. They highlight various educational sites that clearly work to allow the emergence of Aboriginal philosophies and practices, deliberate reclaiming of cultures and languages, healing issues, self-expression and self-determination, self-government, and cultural, linguistic, and political rights inherent in Aboriginal education. They suggest the foregoing must be reflected in all content and teaching methods, program designs, and curriculum development whatever the context: face-to-face or by distance education and reliance on various new communication technologies.

The recognition and admission of past transgressions against Aboriginal peoples is another theme that resonates throughout the book. In addition, the reader is alerted to the reality of the present climate of ongoing constraints and Canadian Eurocentric dominance related to curriculum development and program designs, funding, jurisdictional battles, limited and governmental supports, and geographic issues in which Aboriginal education lives. As reiterated by Brant Castellano, "This book has recorded the opportunities for, and difficulties of, negotiating the terms of Aboriginal education in the final decades of the twentieth century. What have we learned about the potential for fulfilling the promise in the twenty-first century?" She ends with a confident message that supports the "new story": "The Seeds are planted and innovative, creative strategies, recognition and support of self-determination, self-government, and the spirit of Aboriginal peoples are the strengths to build on." This book is a bonus for educators at different levels of educational spheres as it is an informative and comprehensive overview of education articulated through the different case studies and models of Aboriginal education. The reader can learn other important lessons from reading and studying the book. These lessons are paying serious attention to themes of diversity pertaining to languages, cultures, communities, teaching methods, and curriculum design factors. Another is understanding that the issues are complex and related to past transgressions of colonialism and assimilation, while finding ways to draw from Elders' wisdom and current relevant works. Finally, there are no easy answers, and the answers must come from the communities.

I refer to a quote in the first few pages of the book that reflects an Elder's wisdom. We, the "real ones" here on Mother Earth are entrusted with the "responsibility to carry that [education of Aboriginal traditions, cultures and languages] because we hear seven generations in the future. They are our future. They are the ones that are not yet born" (Charlie Patton in RCAP, 1997, *Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise*). I wanted to start this review by quoting words of wisdom from Elders who I believe would have made contributions to the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* and hence the book *Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise*. However, the voices of Elders are largely absent from the book. As a reviewer who is Aboriginal and who has worked from Aboriginal perspectives and philosophies throughout my career, I was dismayed and surprised that the voices of Elders were not prominently portrayed through a chapter in the book, albeit Elders as contributors to cultural and languages classes and programs are mentioned as contributors to aspects of different initiatives discussed in the chap-

ters. However, in spite of this omission, the editors have made a critical contribution to the growing discussion of and literature on Aboriginal education. This book is a valuable resource that needs to be seriously studied across all teacher education programs and educational sites.

Through a moving reflective call for responsibility and action, editors Marlene Brant Castellano, Lynne Davis, and Louise Lahache (three women, two of whom are Aboriginal) have implored us for the sake of Aboriginal education grounded in Aboriginal philosophies, self-determination, perspectives, ways, histories, languages, and culture to attain an Aboriginal citizenry. As they see it, "The promise of education is that it will enable Aboriginal people to sustain well-being while meeting their responsibilities in the circle of life." However, they acknowledge their concern that the promise of education, although not currently being fulfilled, *will* be fulfilled. As usual, it is the hope that life will get better that moves us forward to work on behalf of the next seven generations, and this is the hope that educators can carry forward into their work. Chi-meegwetch, the editors and the writers are to be commended for their important contributions to this book.

First Nations? Second Thoughts

Tom Flanagan (2000), Montreal, QC; Kingston, ON:

McGill-Queen's University Press

Reviewed by **David Anderson.**

For over 500 years Europeans have been asserting their will, their institutions, and their way of life on Indigenous peoples around the world. Using the tools of war, domination, and subjugation, they have been able to force their institutions on people, write laws, and use the army or police to enforce these laws, and then write history books telling of their struggles in this foreign land. They truly believe that their way is right and that the Aboriginal peoples they have colonized will embrace their beliefs. As Arnold Toynbee (1946) stated, "So long as we think of them as 'natives,' we may exterminate them or, as is more likely today, domesticate them and honestly ... believe that we are improving the breed, but we do not begin to understand them."

This colonial mindset continues to this day, as witness the latest offering from Flanagan (2000), professor and author from the University of Alberta. In his recent book *First Nations? Second Thoughts*, Flanagan continues to expound what was once a powerful colonialist mentality that refuses to accept any other way of thinking. He has prepared arguments for the elimination of treaty rights, for the redundancy of including Aboriginal, Metis, and Inuit rights in the 1982 Canadian Constitution, and suggests that Aboriginal leaders in Canada are working from an "Aboriginal Orthodoxy" based on outdated claims, poor judgment, and guilt. Flanagan argues that the evolution of civilization, nationhood, and sovereignty—concepts defined by European scholars such as John Locke and Thomas Hobbes—are advanced as the only true (and just) voice that must be accepted by the colonized world. For Flanagan the dichotomy is Civilization and Savagery (p. 26). However, in a traditional way, there is no dichotomy: there are only different forms of organizing ourselves. Indeed, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary states that civilization is "the culture characteristic of a particular time or place." What concerns Flanagan is that

Aboriginal culture and philosophy are so different from those of the Western paradigm that they cannot be accepted as valid.

In his presentation of the "Aboriginal Orthodoxy," Flanagan says that there are eight ways that Aboriginal leaders have falsely presented, made up, or misrepresented the details of our existence. Starting with the much discussed Bering Strait theory, Flanagan suggests that being here first is not enough to give Aboriginal people ownership of the land. He argues that without courthouses, legislatures, or jails, there was no reason to assume that a civilized population existed. According to Flanagan, what the newcomers found was land that was not being used productively, natural resources that were untouched, and no clear leader or king who ruled over the people. These conditions meant that the newcomers had to develop their own theories of where these people came from (Columbus and indeed all of Europe were not expecting to find this new land or the people who inhabited the land). These theories also gave the newcomers the right to their own sovereignty over this new land and the right to settle it as they thought proper.

Flanagan is reiterating the philosophical arguments that justified the spread of death and disease around the world. The expansion of empires, in particular the British Empire, was an economic activity. Industry required raw materials, business required markets. Finances, ownership, and power were central to this philosophy. What Flanagan fails to include in his work is the litany of death, destruction, coercion, and manipulation that occurred as relations between Aboriginal peoples and the newcomers developed. Flanagan describes well how this relationship deteriorated from a Nation-to-Nation relationship to a situation where the Aboriginal people were treated like wards, unable to conduct themselves in the company of European conquerors. To Flanagan, however, this was not a deterioration of relations, but rather the affirmation of European control and power: complete colonization.

In each of the eight elements of "Aboriginal Orthodoxy" that Flanagan presents are half-truths, misinformation, and the continuation of a colonial mindset that is becoming a less than proud tradition for non-Aboriginal Canadians. The selective details presented for each of these elements reflect the bias and stereotypes perpetrated by colonizers. Incidents of band councils misappropriating funds, lack of an industrial base, poor housing, lack of proper sewage and running water, low standard of living, and lack of formal education are presented as if Aboriginal people had control of their lives and access to the wealth and affluence of Canada.

Flanagan accepts no responsibility for the possibility that the problems in First Nations communities are the result of colonialist laws and policies. These laws and policies were written and enforced with the express purpose of eliminating Aboriginal people from the land and making them into Canadian citizens. Residential schools were built to teach First Nations children the fine arts of farming, sewing, and cooking. There was even some form of employment service to assist graduates with jobs so they would become valuable members of Canadian society as farm hands, cooks, and housekeepers. Until 1960 any First Nations individual who wanted to vote, enter the army, or live off the reserve was deemed not to be an Indian (as defined by the Indian Act) and was enfranchised. They

became Canadian, and were not Indian any more. The treatment these people received, the subject of prejudice, and the continual vilification of First Nations people is not even discussed.

Flanagan's entire argument is designed to blame the victim.

For Flanagan it is the First Nations communities that are at fault. "When aboriginal governments, with their small size, limited resources, and shortage of skilled personnel, undertake such an ambitious agenda, there are bound to be many failures of competence" (pp. 100-101). In order for First Nations members to actualize the benefits of Canada (and colonialism), they must give up what remains of their homes and their communities. He argues that everything that has been left to the Aboriginal people: their treaties, their reserves, their claims to Traditional Land Use areas, their call for a renewed relationship with Canada (RCAP, 1996) are to be dismissed. In his "Aboriginal Octagon," his stop sign, Flanagan suggests that we should give up these claims and simply become part of the Canadian way.

Flanagan has not heard the voice of First Nations people and the growing respect that is being paid to our voice. As Marie Batiste (2000) reports, the Delgamuukw Decision was where the judicial system heard the voice of Aboriginal people and ruled, "If the courts are required to consider oral traditions, then all other decision makers should likewise consider the validity of oral traditions ... as significant sources for the distribution and dissemination of Aboriginal knowledge and scholarship" (p. xx). For Flanagan, "If the Supreme Court's Delgamuukw decision is interpreted in that spirit, the treaties will be transformed from intelligible, enforceable agreements to unpredictable relationships in which everything is up for renegotiation" (p. 165). And for Flanagan this is the problem.

The continued reluctance to see Aboriginal people as a people with a culture and understanding that is contrary to that of Western capitalist culture is unacceptable to colonizers. What is the fear? Are they afraid that if Canada accepts ideas of planning for Seven Generations, we would not accept the progress for the sake of progress? Instead Canada would plan to use the resources in a more ecologically viable way. We would accept recycling, the Kyoto agreement, the development of public transportation. But these concepts are contrary to big business and capitalist pursuits.

The voice of colonization clearly is not dead, as witness the position of the Alliance party in the recent Canadian federal election, a party for which Flanagan himself was a recent policy analyst. Flanagan argues that we should stop the work we have accomplished in developing alternative ways. Instead we should accept our fate, "Call it integration, call it adaptation, call it whatever you want: it has to happen" (p. 196). He suggests that we privatize our reserves, denounce the work toward Indian self-government, and integrate into mainstream Canadian society. He suggests that our university graduates are leading the way in this direction and urges others on reserves to follow.

But we will continue to fight this colonial attitude. We will continue to grow as our communities struggle with policies of assimilation and forced poverty. We will continue to work to renegotiate treaties, originally written by Canadian officials, not our Aboriginal leaders, and struggle to have our voice heard both in Canada and internationally. This struggle will continue, and we will celebrate our succes-

ses and our future. Attending a pow-wow either at the Toronto Skydome or in local communities like Pic Mobert will provide evidence of our persistence and our energy.

References

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A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood

Kim Anderson, Toronto, ON: Second Story Press, 2000

Reviewed by **Shannon Simpson**

In *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*, Kim Anderson explores the experiences, issues, and realities of being a Native woman in past and contemporary settings. *A Recognition of Being* is written as a journey. After personally situating herself, Anderson then provides the reader with a comprehensive overview of the history of Native women. Although careful not to imply that she is talking about all Native women's experiences, she focuses on the many commonalities experienced by Native women in the past and in current situations. The racist notions of Native women perpetuated in present-day realities are discussed in detail. Anderson goes further and uses four main areas to discuss her ideas about contemporary Native women and obtaining a positive identity. Anderson maintains that Native women must: resist negative definitions of being; reclaim Aboriginal tradition;

construct a positive identity by translating traditions into the contemporary context; and act on that identity in a way that nourishes the overall well-being of our communities.

With this framework set out, the book flows easily from section to section and provides a process for Native women to use on a journey to understanding and obtaining a positive and healthy identity.

Anderson begins by situating herself as a Cree-Metis woman and discusses the journey she has taken to get to where she is today. Throughout her book she effectively uses personal stories, interviewees' personal accounts, and Aboriginal academic references to provide the reader effectively with a balance of perspectives and analyses regarding the experiences of Native women. Anderson intentionally uses an "Aboriginal method of contextualizing knowledge" as opposed to mainstream academic approaches to knowledge. This enables her to present her work from a personal perspective with experiences and realities expressed throughout. Although mainstream academia discourages writing from a personal perspective, Anderson demonstrates the power a personal account combined and balanced with Aboriginal academia can have, especially when written by and for Aboriginal peoples.

What began as her master's thesis developed into a personal journey and demonstrates a process Native women can embark on in order to reach a healthy and positive self-identity. Anderson's book arose out of past discussions with Native women who had survived abuse, and she says this led her to a vision for a better way of life. She interviewed 40 women for her book and uses their discus-

sions and stories throughout to further substantiate her work. She discusses thoroughly the importance of decolonizing the stereotypical images of Native women that lead to a perpetuation of negative self-identification and the significance of going back to the traditions and reclaiming what can be useful in our current journeys.

Obvious cultural clashes and opposing world views exist between Native peoples and mainstream society, and Anderson clearly demonstrates how these clashes have had negative and detrimental impacts on Native women. Her book offers reassurance through common stories and constructs a healthy analysis by offering solutions to being a Native woman and living in mainstream society. Most important to me is her discussion of traditions and how we must enable the notion of tradition to be fluid to allow it to transform and adapt to our present-day circumstances. By accepting that we will never be able to go back to the traditions exactly as they were before colonization, we enable ourselves to promote a transformation to suit our needs in contemporary society. It is imperative that we as Native people acknowledge the worlds that surround us and the worlds in which our cultures are embedded. We must learn how to adapt our traditions to present-day circumstances. Anderson suggests we allow and promote the use of traditional ceremonies in urban areas to create a strong and vibrant urban Aboriginal community. She acknowledges this notion throughout, and it is enforced in her concluding dialogue with Bonita Lawrence.

I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in exploring the constructs surrounding the identities and realities of Native women. I would especially recommend this book to Aboriginal women. I was easily able to identify with the ideas and realities presented, and I am confident that these are not unique to the women involved in the book. What is unique, however, is Anderson's written work on such a topic. For such a common experience, little comprehensive writing is available on issues surrounding a journey toward a positive, healthy Native female identity. I believe that Aboriginal women, men, and non-Native people could greatly benefit from reading *A Recognition of Being* and would thereby gain a greater understanding of the realities Aboriginal women face in today's society.