

Book Reviews

*Sharing Our Success: More Case Studies
in Aboriginal Schooling*

George Fulford, Editor

Kelowna, BC: Society for the Advancement of Excellence in
Education, 2007, 354 pages

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Contemporary policymakers bemoan the perceived low achievements of Aboriginal students in formal learning. Their conclusions germinate from the following: statistical depictions of graduation rates, attrition rates from high school, incarceration levels, and addictions. However, enlightened scholars speak to the faultiness of portraits painted with numerical data and ask if the instruments for measuring performance accurately tell the story of teaching and learning for Aboriginal students.

Sharing Our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling and its predecessor *Sharing Our Success: Ten Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling* respond to this call from scholars who feel that statistics couched in deficit theorizing do not truly tell Canadian educators and their supporters what the state of learning for Aboriginal communities is (Chandler & Lalonde, 2004, 2005; Fayden, 2005; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). Bell's (2004) foray into the field of Aboriginal learning started with a desire "for more holistic measures of achievement" (p. 16) and ended with a list of success factors identified in the schools he and his collaborators surveyed. Fulford (2007) and his team devised a list of 44 success factors and compared them with Bell's findings. They also analyzed the following: "Aboriginal education funding, special education, language and literacy, and performance assessment and reporting" (p. 12).

The strength of the Fulford team investigation lies in its sweep of a diverse set of schools. The schools range from small and band-operated ones to those situated in urban centers, those that serve kindergarten to grade 12 students to those where the instructors serve students who are returning to formal learning after an absence in the work force, those operating on the traditional school year to those that operate on other arrangements, and those funded by the federal government to those funded by the provincial government and in operation in communities with a high Aboriginal population. Despite the diversity of the schools, several threads unite the schools visited.

Schools that are successful grow students who are "strong like two people" (Tolley, 2007, p. 86). The principal at Chief Jimmy Bruneau School in Yellowknife coined this term to describe the pedagogy imbedded in

their philosophy of learning. Students see the history of Canada, learn science, and grow according to how they see the world. Furthermore, their families and friends contribute to the maintenance and growth of the school through routine visits, discussions of curriculum, and the development of policy. Students “find their faces” and hone their unique gifts in an atmosphere that respects their diverse ways of knowing (Cajete, 2000). Principals, teachers, and staff understand current research and actively participate in their professional associations and the communities where they reside, and these connections enable them to devise curriculum and practice that reflects the world views of their students.

The lucid organization of the book—executive summary, introduction, followed by 10 case studies and three chapters that discuss patterns, issues, and policy recommendations—and its clear writing will make it an asset to practitioners involved in all aspects of education. This format satisfies the desire of Fayden (2005), who believes that educational scholarship must speak to its practitioners and affect their daily work. Substantial parts of the anthology contain the voices of the teachers, staff, and principals who discuss their professional experiences. Teachers, staff, and principals will be able to engage with their reflections and identify with their voices.

Sharing Our Success represents a new day for the practice of teaching and learning in all aspects of education in Canada. This anthology promises to affect students’, teachers’, and communities’ learning journey. Furthermore, it complicates the picture of Aboriginal education by challenging us to reconsider the broad brush of statistical depictions and to ask where the successes in Aboriginal education are occurring, why they occur, and their effect on how we think about performance and training for the First Peoples of Canada.

References

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Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods

Shawn Wilson

Winnipeg/Halifax, NS: Fernwood, 2008

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Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods provides a thoughtful critique of research practices as they have been applied in Indigenous cultural contexts around the world. The work presented in this volume was generated in response to the questions, "What are the shared aspects of the ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology of research conducted by Indigenous scholars in Australia and Canada?" and "How can these aspects of an Indigenous research paradigm be put into practice to support other Indigenous people in their own research" (p. 21). The publication emerged from the author's doctoral research and is unique in several important ways, each of which will be of interest to CJNE readers-researchers and practitioners.

First, to demonstrate the centrality of relationships in conducting of research by Indigenous scholars, the author contextualizes his own research efforts by incorporating vignettes of his personal background and experience that are addressed to his three children. In so doing, he adopts the following definition of Indigenous research: "It is the knowing and respectful reinforcement that all things are related and connected. It is the voices from our ancestors that tell us when it is right and when it is not. Indigenous research is a life changing ceremony" (p. 61). These first-person accounts of his own experience allow him to take on highly sensitive and often contentious issues in ways that foster dialogue and reconciliation across cultural boundaries rather than engendering defensiveness and alienation.

Second, the process by which much of the material contained in the book was generated represents an intriguing model of collaborative cross-cultural research in action. Drawing on a kind of Socratic dialogue that took place at an Indigenous Scholars Conference held at the University of Alberta in 2002, the author takes us on a metaphorical walk through the contemporary landscapes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous research practices in places ranging from Canada to Hawai'i to Australia. Throughout the gathering of Indigenous scholars (including members of the author's own family), participants engaged in deep conversations and shared in traditional cultural practices whereby they became immersed in a collective effort to dig beneath the surface of current research practices that affect Indigenous peoples. Throughout the narratives the author shares how his interaction with his collaborators guided him to deeper insights into his own cultural, educational, and research experiences.

Another unique feature of this book is the construction and representation of multiple models of how Indigenous world views, ways of knowing, and knowledge systems can not only survive, but make valuable contributions in the contemporary world. Imbedded in the author's efforts to identify the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological characteristics that distinguish Indigenous paradigms of research are strategies for addressing issues that cut to the heart of many of the research practices with which Indigenous scholars struggle today. Indigenous research paradigms have much to offer mainstream researchers in areas such as the critical role of community; the importance of traditional values and spiritual practices that govern peoples lives; the significance of relationships in the shaping of identity; the interrelationships between the human, natural, and spiritual worlds; and the long-term consideration of generations past, present, and future.

When critiquing research practices through Indigenous cultural filters, mainstream knowledge categories give way to more naturalistic models based on constructs such as the four directions (e.g., a medicine wheel addressing physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual development), the circle of life, and the cycle of seasons. Reflected in the Indigenous-based research models presented is a strong emphasis on the centrality of heritage, identity, land, community, and spirituality, all of which contribute to the well-being of the communities under consideration. From these elements the author constructs culturally appropriate research practices that are characterized as "research is ceremony."

Finally, a central feature of this volume that *CJNE* readers will find of interest is an insightful critique of conventional social science research practices from an emic perspective. Although there is a clear-eyed rendering of the role researchers have played in the marginalization of Indigenous peoples in the pursuit of Western colonization and hegemony, the primary emphasis throughout is on reconstructing scholarly work to bring it into line with the self-determination aspirations of Indigenous peoples. To this end, the models presented here promote strategies that seek to move cultural considerations from the periphery to the center of the research arena. The emphasis is on place-based and culturally based approaches to research that reinforce the integrity of the local culture while bringing the essential knowledge of the larger world to bear in an integrated and comparative fashion that moves beyond a dualistic two-worlds tendency.

The emerging ideas presented in *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* reflect a growing effort underway around the world to revitalize, reconstruct, and strengthen the knowledge production and utilization practices of Indigenous societies. The drumbeat through which the author and many other Indigenous scholars are applying their talents and insights is aimed at the fulfillment of a vision for research that has

been cogently articulated in the “Coolongatta Statement on Indigenous Rights in Education,” adopted in 1999 at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education in Hilo, Hawaii (the Coolongatta Statement can be found at <http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/IKS/cool.html>). In the conclusion of the book, the author reiterates the significance of ceremony as analogous to the Indigenous model of research that he espouses:

The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between our cosmos and us. The research that we do as Indigenous people is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world. Through going forward together with open minds and good hearts we have uncovered the nature of this ceremony. (p. 137)

Teaching as Activism: Equity Meets Environmentalism

Peggy Tripp and Linda Muzzin, Editors

Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005, 291 pages

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Feminists and anti-racists note that equity “is now a legal concept, containing expectation and entitlement” (Franklin, 2005, p. xxi). However, this same author of the prologue to *Teaching as Activism* cautions us that environmentalism has only recently been considered by scholars and activists. Franklin starts with her definition of environmentalism as the work undertaken to protect our natural environment from the onslaught of neo-liberal Western government's new schemes of degradation in collaboration with multinational corporations. However, the contributors to this anthology remind us that environmentalism as a paradigm and touchstone to activism affects our postsecondary system of education. Twenty-first-century university teachers and students enter the gates of facilities dedicated to upholding a Eurocentric and still largely masculinist hegemony over the construction of knowledge and practice. Discourses of rationality, practicality, and I would add “public good” bolster and defend the Western way in the classrooms and in the tenure and promotion systems of our institutions. The result is the conundrum put eloquently by co-editor Muzzin: is “higher education for emancipation or for colonization?” (p. 150) and spoken to by contributor Battiste: “Indigenous people can access what is available ... [in post-secondary education] but they cannot change the existing knowledge base” (p. 224). The hegemony over the construction of knowledge and its rationale embedded in centuries of colonization serve the interests of multinational corporations that increasingly manipulate administrators and select faculty in our systems of higher learning.

Those who are left behind in this flurry of globalization, for-profit learning, and skyrocketing tuition are the same underserved groups: women, Indigenous peoples, the working and lower classes, sexual

minorities, diverse able-bodied people, and most notably our natural environment. The contributors to this anthology range from senior scholars to mid-career scholars and practitioners, to graduate students. All the contributors reflect on their personal experiences on their learning journeys and gaze through the windows of the concrete edifices where they spend most of their professional time, with concern for the future of our world. The editors divide their anthology into three sections: personal experiences and paradigm shifts, problematization of dominant realities, and weaving new worlds and reclaiming subjugated knowledges. However, the messages that emanate from every chapter prove consistent: the present state of knowing, learning, practicing, and being requires reflection and reconfiguration, and it is up to us as students, teachers, and researchers to devise remedies in concert with and with respect for the earth. All the contributors know that they have the opportunity to share their thoughts with classes and hiring and administrative committees. Contributors Jickling, Matthews, Ainley, Abergel, Eichler, and McGregor draw from their work in government policy, teaching, and evaluation. Contributor Battiste likens the overhauling of knowing and learning to a process of healing from colonialism and checking the power of neo-colonialist forces in 21st-century higher learning. Everyone's solutions ask us to work in our teaching, practice, research, writing, and administration toward an ethical framework of knowing.

Teaching as activism represents the strongest and most unified critique of the current state of postsecondary learning in Canada. The contributors hail from diverse professional backgrounds, yet all advocate that we problematize dominant discourses and reconfigure them toward a pedagogy of empowerment for the future student professionals we will continue to graduate. However, I would have appreciated commentary either from a separate contributor or from all the contributors on the growing bureaucracy of Canadian universities. Recently, scholars in Australia provided critiques of government discourses of accountability and their punitive outcomes for marginalized groups fighting to keep their funding (Gibson, 2000). These same discourses operate in our institutions, distract our faculty and students, drive up operating budgets, and contribute to the growing distaste of university administrative bodies for faculty and employee labor unions and student unions and advocacy groups. Administrative bullying affects research and teaching in our postsecondary institutions and jeopardizes equity laws and initiatives designed to promote diverse ways of knowing and learning and protect our environment for future generations.

This caveat aside, *Teaching As Activism* represents a groundbreaking collection of essays that discuss postsecondary teaching and learning in Canada. Aboriginal educators and students will identify with the repeated calls to revise curriculum to reflect diverse ways of knowing and being.

Finally, the solutions proposed will inspire current and future researchers, teachers, and students in our postsecondary systems to rethink and critique the state of knowing and learning in academe.

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