

Editorial: Indigenous Youth as the New Warriors

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The inspiration for this theme edition, *Indigenous Youth as the New Warriors*, emerges from the work of Kanien’Kehaka (Mohawk) scholar Taiaiake Alfred. In his thought-provoking book, *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (2005), he challenges Indigenous peoples to take the “new warrior’s path, a journey of making meaningful change in our lives and to transforming society by recreating our existences, regenerating our cultures and surging against the forces that keep us bound to our colonial past” (p. 19). Disrupting colonial myths associated with the warrior as one who is violent, militaristic, and male gendered, Alfred puts forth a contemporary and culturally rooted expression of the “new warrior.” The “new warrior” is one who is deeply committed to the regeneration of Indigenous peoples’ integrity by reconnecting to their sources of strength that include their lands, spirituality, cultures and languages, and each other. Drawing on this metaphor of the “new warrior” in this theme issue, we wanted to highlight the ways in which Indigenous youth demonstrate the ethos of the “new warrior” as they respond to challenges, seize opportunities, and facilitate positive change in their families, schools, communities, and Nations.

Statistics suggest that Indigenous youth represent a significant and fast-growing segment of the Indigenous population in places like Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. For example, in Canada, Aboriginal youth under the age of 25 represent nearly half the Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2006). In Australia, the Indigenous youth population is much younger, with a median age of 21 years and children under 15 comprising 38 percent of the Aboriginal population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010). The United States makes similar observations in their comparison of Native American youth and other populations. We must begin to consider the economic, education, social, and political impli-

cations for such a youthful population in our society, especially as they carve out spaces for themselves, their worldviews, and ancestral languages in urban, rural, and reserve landscapes.

The challenges of Indigenous youth have been well documented in the literature. Educational gaps in achievement, suicide, health-poverty disparities, racism, criminal justice, and culture and language loss form some of the research and policy discourses concerning Indigenous youth. Common themes running through this literature are colonization, residential/mission schools, and resistance. Youth are positioned between a historical legacy and new opportunities for empowerment in their lives. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) reminds us that youth are the current generation who are paying the price for cultural genocide, racism, poverty, and hundreds of years of colonial policy. Yet, these resilient young people continue to find new ways to express themselves within their families, communities, and Nations, bridging their histories, cultures, language, and ancestors with the contemporary realities of their lives.

Research regarding this group of young people tends to focus on problem behaviours, without fully considering sources of support and strengths that assist Indigenous youth to achieve balance in their lives (Fox, Becker-Green, Gault, & Simmons, 2005). This theme issue challenges the deficit notions and negative statistics that are applied to Indigenous youth when attempting to understand their life circumstances. This issue also provides examples of Indigenous youth, whether in urban, rural or reserve settings, who are taking from and building on their Indigenous knowledge systems and culturally- and community-specific contributions to demonstrate a "courageous way of being in the world" (Alfred, 2005, p. 19). Whether (re)connecting with their lands, languages and cultures, making educational change, or shaping community programs, youth are telling us what it means to be Indigenous today and how they are preparing themselves for the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. It is through the voice and experience of Indigenous youth that educators, programs, policy makers, and researchers might come to understand their needs, goals, and aspirations and respond appropriately and respectfully.

As editors of this theme issue, each of us has our own relationship to the new warrior. Jan Hare and Jo-ann Archibald worked with graduate students Karlee Fellner and Dorothy Christian to develop this issue. Jan Hare is Anishnaabe from the M'Chigeeng First Nation in northern Ontario. She is an Associate Professor in the Department of Language and Literacy Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. Among other projects, Hare has initiated a longitudinal study that examines the decision-making processes of First Nations youth and how these play a role in where they live, given the patterns of mobility observed among Aboriginal people in Canada. The strategies of agency and

resiliency that emerged from Hare's conversations with these youth have become a central theme for her work with Indigenous students and colleagues. Hare and her son, living far from their land base, have learned that the strength, care, and support that these new warriors find and share in the Indigenous family and community are as mobile as the youth themselves, encouraging and inspiring others.

Jo-ann Archibald, Q'um Q'um Xiiem, from the Stó:lō Nation in southwestern British Columbia, is Associate Dean for Indigenous Education and a professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. She has one daughter. Q'um Q'um Xiiem means "strong clear water" and Stó:lō means river. The life ways of the river and its resources were and are an important source of strength, survival, and sustenance for Stó:lō people. Young people are like the river and its resources. Q'um Q'um Xiiem believes that Indigenous youth, as new warriors, are a critical source of hope, strength, and pride for Indigenous families, communities, and Nations. These new warriors need the intergenerational mentorship of those who have the 'good life' Indigenous teachings from the Ancestors, Elders, and cultural knowledge holders of our communities. In the days ahead, the Indigenous youth warriors will take up the challenge of developing new ways to carry out the timeless values of caring and sharing, of respecting and protecting our knowledges and our lands, and of building strong self-determining Nations, thus becoming part of the transformative legacy for Indigenous Peoples.

Karlee Fellner, of Métis/Cree, Austrian, German, Czechoslovakian, Polish, Swedish, and Norwegian ancestry, is originally from Alberta and is currently completing her PhD in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. She embodies the new warrior through her own reconnection to her Indigenous heritage, and by incorporating Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies in her research, postsecondary teaching, and counselling practice. In doing so, Fellner hopes to empower upcoming generations of new warriors to bring their own worldviews, traditions, beliefs, stories, and values into their research and education.

Dorothy Christian's Secwepemc name is *Cucw7 lah*, given to her by the old ladies in her community. She is from the Splantsin First Nation, one of 17 communities of the Secwepemc Nation, and is the eldest of 10 and a proud mother of one daughter. Dorothy's experience in field production motivated her to return to academe. She is in the second year of her PhD program at the University of British Columbia's Department of Education Studies, researching fourth world cinema as public pedagogy. Christian worked on communications from the Indian side during the so-called Oka Crisis (1990) and the Gustafsen Lake standoff (1995). She was disturbed by mainstream media's representation and glamorization of Indigenous men

toting AK-47s, dressed in the camouflaged military garb of the colonizer. For her, the “new warrior” defies the militarized image presented during the 1990s.

This theme issue offers examples of Taiiake Alfred’s “culturally rooted education”, which our “new warrior” Indigenous scholars are facilitating as they work together with the “new warriors” within our communities to see, think, and feel with Indigenous eyes, minds, and hearts—to reclaim themselves and their right to protect our cultures, our languages, and people.

We begin this issue with a guest editorial from prominent Indigenous intellectual, Dr. Taiiake Alfred, professor in Indigenous Governance and Political Science at the University of Victoria. He calls upon Indigenous youth to lead our future Nations against the contemporary colonialism that continues to threaten our existence as Indigenous peoples. He believes that being Indigenous and being a warrior are one in the same. To be Indigenous, youth must engage in a culturally rooted education that connects youth to the land, their families, and communities. This is the education for the future of our Indigenous youth.

The guest editorial is followed by Robin Gray’s article, *Visualizing Pedagogy and Power with Urban Native Youth: Exposing the Legacy of the Indian Residential School System*. Gray uses photovoice methodology to explore how urban Indigenous youth experience the legacy of the residential school system. She begins with an overview of the Indian Residential School System (IRSS) in Canada and describes the mnemonic socialization of Canadian citizens in regard to the IRSS, and the resulting misperceptions of Indigenous peoples’ experiences, histories, and realities. Gray uses Indigenous theory and methodology to explore the experiences of three urban Indigenous youth who have living relatives who survived the IRSS, thus giving voice to the stories of these new warriors such that they may be heard against the mnemonic landscape constructed by the Canadian government. Gray’s research partners challenge the mnemonic landscape by drawing attention to: the remnants of the IRSS, including the child welfare system; the loss of culture impact on Indigenous individuals, families, and communities; the continued inaccurate representation of historical events, encouraging widespread misunderstanding of Indigenous peoples; and the continued discrimination of Indigenous peoples within the modern educational system. Gray’s article encourages and empowers new warriors to challenge the mnemonic landscape through speaking, so that others may speak again.

Urban youth voice is also embraced in Amy Parent’s article, *Keep Us Coming Back For More: Urban Aboriginal Youth Speak About Wholistic Education*. Parent examines the experiences of youth participating in three Vancouver, British Columbia youth organizations. She extensively explains the wholistic framework, Indigenous methodologies, and methods employed in the study. To provide a context, Parent thoroughly examines

the historical development of past and present policies, pointing to a deficit learning model that treats Aboriginal youth as being outside of standard education practices. The benefits and challenges of “positive youth development” are referenced. Parent describes how an Indigenous, knowledge-based, wholistic approach differs from standard westernized education practices, and speaks of how this difference directly affects Aboriginal youth and their participation. Parent’s collaborative approach with the youth, Elders, and staff in programs demonstrates a cultural model shaped by basic operating principles of Indigenous knowledge systems, that enhance a reciprocal learning and teaching process.

In *Supporting Indigenous Students through Culturally Relevant Assessment: An Assessment Model Based on the Medicine Wheel*, Roselynn Verwoord, Ashley Mitchell, and Jair Machado present the development of an assessment model based on the medicine wheel, for a course at a private Aboriginal college in Vancouver, British Columbia. The authors begin with a discussion of the medicine wheel and go on to describe the importance of developing assessment-based Indigenous knowledges, given the history of Western education and Indigenous peoples, and the impact of cultural models of education on student success. The authors then explain how a team of instructors and students collaboratively developed the model in the context of the specific course and institution in which it was applied. Their model places equal emphases on learning in the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical domains, and specifies how course learning objectives and assignments are connected to each component. Through their development of a culturally relevant assessment model, the authors hope to encourage educational reforms that empower Indigenous youth in their roles as new warriors, by incorporating Indigenous curriculum and pedagogical practices that facilitate reconnection with cultural sources of strength.

The theme of empowerment through Indigenous curriculum and pedagogy continues in Sandra Wolf’s article, *Living Warriorship: Learning Warriorship Within the Context of Indigenous Community*. Wolf critically examines how Indigenous youth learn in an inclusive environment. Standard anthropological methods are applied in her complex two-year research study. As a trusted “insider”, Wolf works with a teacher and seventh-grader students as they conduct research on a topic of their choice for their history class. Wolf mentors the youth on how to collect data, compile field notes, and conduct interviews surrounding the historical 1973 Wounded Knee event. The insightful results show direct implications of how culture and Indigenous knowledge systems influence pedagogy in the classroom. Wolf’s approach had a profound impact on the youth: they embodied the practice of what they learned; the community recognized and honoured them as “history Warriors”; and one youth begins to see how he can apply his learning in a university setting.

Heather Blair, Janine Tine, and Violet Okemaw's article, *Ititwewiniwak: Language Warrior—The Young Women's Circle of Leadership*, describes a two-week summer program aimed at providing young women with opportunities to be new warriors, through learning basic Cree language, traditional First Nations values and practices, Indigenous knowledge systems, and leadership skills. The young women were also given opportunities to learn and nurture their strengths in woodworking, creative theatre, and digital technologies so that they could use these talents to benefit themselves and others outside the summer program group. In this article, Blair illustrates the importance of Indigenous language revitalization in the new warrior's battle for cultural regeneration, and describes the program along with the women and Elders involved. Through their participation in the program, the young women not only learned linguistic and practical skills, but also the significance of their roles in preserving cultural knowledge and language, and importantly, their roles as new warriors and leaders of tomorrow.

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