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Literacy in Aboriginal Education: An Historical Perspective

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This article highlights the longstanding neglect of Aboriginal literacy in Euro-Canadian schools, which do not acknowledge the uniqueness of Aboriginal people, through an overview of the history of Aboriginal education in the Maritimes up to Confederation and across Canada from 1867 to the present. The attitudes of educators and their adopted classroom practices in the Maritimes are applicable to Aboriginal education in general. If Aboriginal society had been literate before contact with Europeans then, although heavily influenced by Eurocanadian literacy as revealed in this article, Aboriginal students bring something uniquely different to the learning environment that is worthy of respect. This article discusses other ways to look at literacy that could enable teachers like me to feel privileged to have diverse literacies in the classroom.

I have been listening, but have I heard? It has taken me a long time to understand the primacy of Aboriginal literacy and its significance to culturally appropriate education for Aboriginal students. Indeed literacy is at the heart of Aboriginal education and its history. For the purpose of this article, literacy means the ability to use reading, writing, reasoning, listening, and speaking to make meaning from contemporary visual symbols that communicate ideas, values, and traditions in society. This definition embodies the notion that literacy is a dynamic process; and it develops according to the abilities, needs, and interests of individuals in a given community because, as Leroy (1995) states, "how we read and write cannot be separated from who we think we are, and what we think counts as meaning" (p. 6). Similarly, Street (1994) suggests that how we read and write is "connected with much deeper cultural values about identity, personhood, and relationships" (p. 20). A definition of literacy must consider who people are, or perceive themselves to be, rather than how well they learn a system of symbols. Therefore, the importance of Aboriginal literacy is inherent in who Aboriginal people are.

Literacy of Aboriginal People

Where do I turn to discover how crucial Aboriginal literacy is to Aboriginal people? I choose to listen to Aboriginal educators and to study their history. This choice is beset with difficulties. First, history does not respect or explicate Aboriginal literacy. Second, Aboriginal literacy has not been understood and accepted as part of the definition of being Aboriginal.

This article addresses both difficulties by examining the history of literacy in Aboriginal education and by examining what is meant by Aboriginal literacy past and present. Also, this article places responsibility for inclusion of Aboriginal literacy in school curricula on the shoulders of educators by discussing attitudes

and actions that must be taken to make education culturally appropriate for Aboriginal students, indeed all students.

One of the challenges in examining the history of literacy in Aboriginal education in Canada is that no definitive texts have been written on this topic. Consequently, I have had to focus on the record of the history of Aboriginal education and try to determine how Aboriginal literacy was respected or ignored, because none of the texts gave a direct accounting of the history of Aboriginal literacy. The major texts on this history are (a) *Indian Education in Canada* (1986, 1987), two volumes co-edited by Jean Barman, professor in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia; Yvonne Hebert, assistant professor of education at the University of Calgary; and Don McCaskill, professor and chair of the Native Studies Department at Trent University; and (b) *First Nations Education: The Circle Unfolds* (1995), edited by Jean Barman and Marie Battiste, a Mi'kmaq from the First Nation of Chapel Island, Nova Scotia, and associate professor in the Indian and Northern Education program at the University of Saskatchewan.

These books comprise articles by many authors who have taught or worked in multicultural settings. All the authors are vitally interested in the advancement of culturally appropriate education, and most are Canadian. Fifteen are Aboriginal authors representing Sto:lo, Mi'kmaq, Cree, Chickasaw, Metis, Interior Salish, Ojibway, Mohawk, Nisqu's, and Lakota Sioux Nations. With such a large Aboriginal authorship, these texts present Aboriginal perspectives on how Aboriginal education has unfolded in Canada and how it ought to move forward. Some of these articles deal with literacy, but not from an historical perspective. They present ideas about how to incorporate Aboriginal literacy into the curriculum.

Marie Battiste is the one author who establishes a place for Aboriginal literacy in the history of Aboriginal people in Canada, especially the Mi'kmaq. She maintains that the Mi'kmaq displayed a well-developed literacy in their pictographs, petroglyphs, notched sticks, and wampums, all of which existed long before the arrival of the first French settlers. Her arguments are discussed below.

Hamilton (1986), Professor Emeritus of education at the University of New Brunswick, writes the central, conclusive record of Aboriginal education in the Maritimes from the early 1600s to 1986. His account provides a wealth of information about the educational activity and philosophy of the colonies, the church, and subsequent governments. Similarly, MacNaughton (1947) and Fingard (1972), both consulted by Hamilton, give a clear picture of an education that disregarded any existing literacy in Aboriginal pupils.

History of Aboriginal Literacy

For the most part, the literacy of Aboriginal people was ignored by European settlers and educators in the Maritimes from the beginning of the French era. "The colonial policy which the first French settlers brought to Port Royal, Nova Scotia, in 1605 entailed a plan for assimilation of the Indians, beginning with their conversion to Christianity" (Hamilton, 1986, p. 3). For the next 30 years Jesuit, Recollet, and Capuchin missionaries successively labored among the Aboriginal people of Nova Scotia to make them into Christians and French citizens; the latter was never accomplished. Eventually the Capuchins formalized education somewhat, found-

ing schools in the 1630s, 1640s, and 1650s in Port Royal and bringing the Aboriginal children inside their establishments, where "Catholic morals and social values were the centerpiece" (p. 3) of instruction.

After most of the Maritime territory occupied by the French was taken by the English and Port Royal fell in 1710, Aboriginal children received no formal education until New Brunswick became a separate province from Nova Scotia over 70 years later in 1784. In the meantime, priests continued to propagate Catholicism and provide informal religious instruction for the children. Notably two priests, Chrestien LeClercq and Pierre Maillard, created systems of hieroglyphics—in the 1670s and 1680s and in 1738 respectively—so that religious teaching could be shared with Mi'kmaq converts. These hieroglyphics were accepted and used among the Mi'kmaq for both religious and secular communication. Apparently LeClercq's system "made use of existing Mi'kmaq symbolism, which may help explain why the system was successful" (Hamilton, 1986, p. 3). Perhaps the existing Mi'kmaq symbolism LeClercq used was that to which Battiste refers to in her work, which I cite below.

Whether cognizant of the fact or not, French missionaries tapped into two important aspects of Aboriginal literacy: language, both oral and symbolic, and spirituality. However, neither the Aboriginal language nor Aboriginal spirituality was of any significance except where they served the purposes of the missionaries, namely, to Christianize the "savages." They never considered Aboriginal people's existing forms of literacy. It was not until well into the 1900s that most Aboriginal people of the Maritimes could read and write English and thus be considered literate by most educators and historians.

The New England Company dominated the education of Mi'kmaq and Maliseet children from 1784, when New Brunswick became a province, until the late 1820s. This company of "leading Anglican clergymen, government officers and prominent families" (Fingard, 1972, p. 29) came to New Brunswick for the purpose of spreading Protestantism to save the Aboriginal people from "Catholicism, migratory habits, and illiteracy" (MacNaughton, 1947, p. 47). According to Fingard (1972) "In Puritan New England, founded by religious refugees, the colonists had confronted heathen natives whom they tried to convert; in loyalist New Brunswick, founded by political refugees, the colonists confronted Catholic Indians whom they proceeded to exploit" (p. 30). This exploitation was evident in the education of the children, because the purpose was to further the colonists' values and beliefs, not those of the children's parents and communities. What the children brought to the learning environment was ignored or denied by their educators.

Many schools were established throughout the area, but many Aboriginal children attended them only because the Anglican priests provided food and clothing for them and their families. In any case, their attendance was sporadic and short-lived. This Protestant education failed miserably because everything it promoted was foreign to Aboriginal values and ideas, and because by this time most Mi'kmaq and Maliseet people had been baptized as Roman Catholics. Little effort was made by the New England Company to accept and respect Mi'kmaq and

Maliseet people for who they were, their values, their knowledge, their language, and their experience.

After the New England Company closed its schools, no schools were provided for Aboriginal children until after Confederation in 1867. From the early 1800s until Confederation, little was accomplished in the education of Aboriginal children. In New Brunswick, although Moses H. Perley, the Indian Commissioner, requested schools for Aboriginal children (Hamilton, 1986), none was established. Similarly, in Nova Scotia and the adjoining province of Prince Edward Island no overall education plan was developed for Aboriginal students.

However, a few individuals did affect the education of Aboriginal people such that their work left a legacy. For example, in 1831 Thomas Irwin requested funds from the Prince Edward Island Assembly to publish a "Mi'kmaq grammar and textbook of his authorship" (Hamilton, 1986, p. 7). Although he never succeeded in that goal, his work had great influence on a Baptist missionary, Silas Rand, who arrived in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, in 1846. By 1853 Rand had moved to Nova Scotia, where he continued to press for improvement in education. However, "it was not as an educator, or indeed as a missionary, that Rand triumphed, but as a scholar who, over a period of forty years, recorded and translated hundreds of Mi'kmaq legends and created the first dictionary of the Micmac language" (Hamilton, 1986, p. 7). This dictionary is still widely available in the Maritimes.

Although a few individuals stand out in their efforts to advance Aboriginal education, it did not resume until after Confederation. Hamilton (1986) states, "in 1867 there were a few literate Indians in the Maritimes, but in more than two hundred and fifty years, no formal educational tradition of any kind had been created" (p. 8). His observation is important for two reasons. First, in this statement "literacy" has nothing to do with any existing Aboriginal literacy, but merely reflects the assumption of colonial New Brunswickers. In other words, only reading and writing French or English was counted as literacy. The persistence of this notion today reflects the need for revision and redefinition of what it means to be literate. The definition has been based exclusively on Euro-Canadian ideas about literacy and has disregarded the literacy of Canada's First Nations. Second, Hamilton observed accurately that no formal public education tradition had been established, that is, that there were no long-established schools that displayed a concerted effort to establish educational practices and precedents common to all. However, at the same time a religious and cultural education pattern had been established by both French and English missionaries. The aim of that pattern was to create Christian French citizens or English subjects in the New World. In particular, this educational pattern devalued existing Aboriginal language and spirituality and intended to replace both.

Both before and after 1867 the motivation of education and indeed of any communication with Aboriginal people was "their assimilation as individuals into the dominant culture, which was premised on European values and patterns of behavior" (Barman et al., 1986, p. 4). Barman et al. also say,

Indians were becoming less valued for their original cultural attributes, whether as partners in the fur trade or as military allies. Settlement assumed priority. This new paternalistic,

one-sided relationship received its legal justification in the British North American Act, which in Section 91 took away Indians' independent status by making them wards of the federal government. As consolidated in the Indian Acts of 1867 and 1880, Indian self-government was abolished, and finance and all social services, including education, were placed under federal control. (p. 5)

Federal control of education meant that the way the values of European literacy had been imposed on Aboriginal students was recognized as a legitimate approach to creating a unified settlement in the New World. Aboriginal literacy continued to be ignored.

Education was much more than teaching Aboriginal children the English language; it was the imposition of "proper" concepts that embodied the ideas of European civilization such as progress, individualism, and Christianity, all of which were foreign to Aboriginal thinking, sensitivities, and ways of experiencing fulfillment. The aim of speaking and reading English was secondary to the political purpose of education. Apparently, the definition of literacy in the Euro-Canadian history of Aboriginal education was the ability to read and write English at an acceptable standard that demonstrated assimilation into European values and ways of thinking.

After the Indian Act of 1867, the federal government adopted an educational program across the country to achieve assimilation. In the Maritime provinces the goal of the federal government was to establish day schools wherever possible in order to facilitate the civilization of "ignorant" Aboriginal children. By this time, however, many Aboriginal parents no longer valued formal European education because experience had taught them that it did not support their way of life. Encouraging their children to attend school was not a priority. According to Hamilton (1986),

At first, a majority of children did not even enroll in the schools, and irregular attendance and early drop out characterized the participation of those who did. Ten years after Confederation, there were just over 100 Indian children enrolled in school in the Maritimes (out of a potential 700). This number had increased to nearly 200 by 1881, but the average daily rate of attendance stood at a dreary 44 percent—more or less on par with the rate of attendance at Indian schools in the nation as a whole. (p. 13)

Seemingly, formal schooling was not an important part of Aboriginal childrearing. For 33 years efforts were made to establish schools, but the day school program did not become a reality until 1900, when "a day school was within walking distance of most Indian children in the Maritimes" (Hamilton, 1986, p. 13). However, attendance remained a problem.

In 1879, officials commissioned an evaluation report on Indian residential schools in the United States, and the recommendations led to the development of a program for the establishment of several large Indian industrial residential schools and a system of smaller Indian boarding schools in Canada. (p. 13)

The only residential school in the Maritimes was established at Subenacadie, Nova Scotia, in 1929, much later than those established elsewhere across the country. Aboriginal children were taken away from their homes and the influence of their families and were placed in residential schools far from their communities. According to Barman et al. (1986), "by 1900, out of a total Indian population of about

20,000 aged between six and 15, 3,285 Indian children were enrolled in 22 industrial and 39 boarding schools and another 6,349 in 226 schools" (p. 7). Many children suffered the horrors of the residential schools. The Mi'kmaq author Knockwood (1991) records their maltreatment in *Out of the Depths*. Knockwood's experience is typical of what Aboriginal children endured as a result of the government's assimilation policy in eastern Canada. Siblings were separated, no child was permitted to speak any language other than English, and any infraction was immediately met with harsh punishment. The humiliation destroyed the self-esteem of the children and their understanding of family and community. When they themselves became parents they struggled with parental responsibility.

It is fair to say that during the residential school period, from 1880 to 1970, schooling had little to do with respect for and valuing of the developing Aboriginal literacy of students. The emphasis was on assimilating Aboriginal children into Euro-Canadian society. The curriculum taught girls to sew, wash, iron, and mend clothes, and boys to farm. Native language was suppressed to ensure children's ability to communicate in the unilingual English society of the time.

In 1970 concerned Aboriginal leaders occupied the Blue Quills Indian Residential school in northeastern Alberta. Their direct confrontation with the Canadian government was a protest against past educational policies and experiences and a demand for "Indian control of Indian education" (Barman et al., 1986, p. 167). The year before Blue Quills, in 1969, the "federal government's announced new policy, the so-called White Paper, sought to transfer federal responsibility for First Nations education on reserves to the provinces" (Battiste & Barman, 1995, p. viii). In 1972 the White Paper was revised. Following the Blue Quills school occupation, and because of it, Battiste and Barman write,

In 1973, the federal government accepted the Indian control of Indian education policy in principle as national policy. Furthermore, it rescinded the proposal to turn over education to the provinces and acknowledged the right of national Aboriginal leaders to assume jurisdictional control of parental responsibility for Indian education. (p. ix)

Probably the only way for government control over Aboriginal children to cease was for Aboriginal leaders to take control. This necessary action was a positive beginning on the long road of improvement in Aboriginal education in Canada. Potentially, the developing literacy of an Aboriginal child would now include printed text that represented accurately Aboriginal values and ways of thinking. However, there is still a dearth of such material in most provincial literacy curricula today, mainly because Aboriginal literacy is not regarded as a long-established, unique, valid literacy that ought to influence the content of school curricula. The European views of literacy were imposed on Aboriginal people whereas their own literacy was not recognized—indeed Aboriginal people were treated as illiterate and inferior.

Aboriginal Literacy: Past and Present

When I began looking at literacy from an historical perspective, I was plagued by my awareness of the feeling of many Aboriginal students that what they brought to the classroom was not "good enough," although I believed that what they brought was valuable because they brought themselves. At the same time, in a

practical sense I knew that for anyone to move ahead in contemporary Canadian society he or she must have an acceptable working knowledge of one or both of the official languages, English and French. I was haunted by the historical reality that Aboriginal people were perceived to be illiterate and had to learn English or French in order to be considered literate. What if they had been literate before Europeans arrived to take over the land? What if our narrow definitions of literacy had helped to disenfranchise Canada's First peoples? I had to know whether Aboriginal society had been literate before contact with Europeans.

I turned to Marie Battiste, a Mi'kmaq from Chapel Island, Nova Scotia. She gives a regional Aboriginal perspective on education and literacy, and she calls for reform. She was invaluable to me in piecing together a clear picture of Aboriginal literacy past and present. In addition, I turned to Margaret Meek, a British educator and expert on children's literacy. Would I find a British articulation of the colonialist view of literacy that perpetuated the Canadian government's policy of assimilation, as recorded in this article? I suspected I would not, because I had used Meek's (1988) ideas about multilayeredness, intertextuality, empowerment, and polysemics as ways of discussing Canadian Aboriginal children's literature in a University course for beginning teachers; there was nothing restrictive about looking at texts from these four perspectives. Indeed I found ideas about literacy that transported me to the talking circles, the wampum belts, the council fires of Canada's First Nations at the same time as they pushed me into the rapidly developing world of mass media and computer technology. Meek provides support for Battiste's claim of an Aboriginal literacy existing long before Europeans—the French and the British—arrived in Canada. Meek provides this support in her inclusive and subtle definition of the processes of reading and personal development. According to Meek, literacy has two kinds of history:

One, in the change and development over time of what "counts" as literacy; the other, in the life histories of individuals who learn to read and write, and who depend on these skills as features of their lives in literate societies. (p. 13)

Both histories must be considered in order to understand how literacy develops. I had an idea about what counted as literacy for my students as revealed in their individual life histories, but I was blind to what their Aboriginal culture counted as literacy. One of the tensions I experienced in the classroom came from the fact that I was trying to reconcile the two histories of literacy to a required curriculum without first knowing the facts about Aboriginal literacy.

So I tried to discover how Aboriginal literacy was treated in the educational history of Aboriginal people in Canada. This discovery is only part of the story of Aboriginal literacy; the other part is discovering what counted (and may still count) as literacy in Aboriginal society and its significance to contemporary classrooms.

Obviously the First Nations of North America were able to communicate successfully for thousands of years before European settlers arrived in their land. Whatever form the communication took, it was based on what people knew about living that enabled them to function in society. Does being able to communicate indicate that a society is literate?

Literacy, as defined by Battiste (1986) and supported by Meek's (1991) idea about the histories of literacy,

is a relative social concept more reflective of culture and context than of the levels of formal instruction by which it is usually measured ... any attempt to define literacy must include a specification of context and examination of that society's experiences. (p. 24)

Battiste calls for an acceptance of how people interacted with others and their environment as a demonstrable indication of their literacy. However, she enlarges the concept of Aboriginal literacy beyond functionality and supports Meek's second kind of history, the life histories of people who learn to read and write, which must be considered when defining the literacy of a culture. Did the original inhabitants of North America know how to write before the advent of a European alphabet? If they did, then they lived in a literate society, according to Meek, who states that "literacy begins with writing" (p. 18).

Literacy depends on an existent form of interpretive representations of words, either alphabetic or symbolic. A literate person has learned how to read those representations in order to communicate ideas clearly and to understand what is being communicated. Battiste (1986) maintains that the Mi'kmaq of eastern Canada had demonstrated a well-developed literacy for over 300 years, as early as the 13th century, before the arrival of French European settlers in 1605 at Port Royal, Nova Scotia. Their pictographs, petroglyphs, notched sticks, and wampum (Leavitt & Francis, 1990) evidence this. Meek (1991) supports Battiste's claim that these are forms of writing when she says, "A mark, a scratch even, a picture or a sign made by one person which is interpreted and understood by others may be regarded as a form of writing" (p. 18). Barman et al. (1986) state that Battiste's claim demonstrates the existence of a coherent, sophisticated system of written symbolic communication. "Its consequence was a shared cognitive experience creating a common idea of how the world worked and what constituted proper action. Thus all aspects of tribal life were bound together" (p. 2). Being able to survive off the land does not count as literacy. According to Meek (1991), "to be literate is to learn to use the technology of our day, and to decide, on our own time, what reading and writing are good for" (p. 3). Meek's definition of literacy always depends on reading and writing. In addition, according to Battiste's argument, a definition of literacy must include the ideas of shared knowledge of one's society communicated through a system of written symbols that can be read, spoken, and interpreted. Although I believe in an expanded view of literacy as described by Battiste and Meek, I feel secure that the two elements respected by most narrow definitions of literacy were present in Aboriginal literacy, namely, reading and writing. Battiste (1986) goes on to describe the distinctive feature of Mi'kmaq tribal literacy.

A unity of consciousness created by symbolic literacy and dialogue dominated tribal cognitive and spiritual knowledge and extended itself to humans and the material environment. It bonded the people together with a strong world view and an ideal of the Good in which others participated.... In symbolic literacy, reason was the awareness of a highly concrete ideal implicit in the reality of nature. It knew no distinction between is and ought or between theory and practice. Individual consciousness tended faithfully to reflect the collective culture, and obedience to the spiritual soul was obedience to the tribal society. (p. 27)

What counted as literacy in Aboriginal society before the arrival of colonists was being able to read and write symbolic representations of ideas and events that communicated a practical and spiritual understanding of the environment and how society should function therein. From an Aboriginal perspective, then, the key importance of Aboriginal literacy is that Aboriginal language and symbolic representations transmit history, cultural knowledge and tradition, systems of understanding and education, not whether people did or did not write or have wampum, notched sticks, pictographs, or petroglyphs. As well, from a non-Aboriginal perspective the important aspects of literacy are language and symbolic or alphabetic representations of social concepts reflective of culture and context that display a form of writing and interpretation that adds to an understanding of the world (Bloom, 1987; Bruner, 1986; Langer, 1991; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Meek, 1991; Ogbu, 1983; Shor, 1992; Verhoeven & Durgunoglu, 1998). Europeans brought their form of literacy, which encompassed their values, their ideas about the world, their literature, and was based on being able to read and write alphabetic symbols. They imposed this on Aboriginal students and society. Inherent in this historical situation are two facts that influence me as a teacher of Aboriginal students.

First, the Aboriginal literacy, as argued above, that existed before European contact met all the requirements of a valid literacy and is, therefore, worthy of respect. As a teacher I must not only understand this, but also accept it. In this acceptance my ideas about Aboriginal students and literacy are stretched to include multiple literacy practices because, as Verhoeven and Durgunoglu (1998) say,

When one focuses on culturally sensitive accounts of reading and writing practices, the concept of *literacy* as a single trait does not seem very feasible. A multiplicity of literacy practices can be distinguished that are related to specific cultural contexts and associated with relations of power and ideology. (p. ix)

As I explore and respond to the idea of multiple literacy practices, I believe my attitude about Aboriginal students reflects acceptance and respect. I want to know them, how they think about life, and why they come to the conclusions they do, as I do with all students. Part of this acceptance is wanting to assist them to be aware of their rich literacy heritage; many Aboriginal students are not aware of the nature and validity of their tribal literacy because it no longer exists as it did before 1605. I want them to learn that the content and purpose of literacy depends on the attitudes and aptitudes of the learners. Therefore, a distinction must be drawn between the teacher's attitudes and the learners' purposes. Students are literate in all kinds of ways, and in some of those ways they may be more advanced than me, as in computer literacy, for example. The social fact, however, is that some literacies have a higher status than others, for various reasons, as European literacy has had a higher status than Aboriginal literacy. Many Aboriginal students may come to class with this perception because they have lived with that social and historical fact all their lives. However, the literacy that Aboriginal students bring is not only acceptable but is fundamental to the learning that occurs in class because it reveals Aboriginal ways of thinking and understanding the world.

Second, Euro-Canadian literacy has evolved, as has Aboriginal literacy, since the beginning of the 17th century. Although both literacies are still based on reading and writing, Aboriginal literacy is no longer defined within the parameters of the original tribal language. In eastern Canada, although Mi'kmaq and Maliseet languages are still alive, when Aboriginal children transfer from their community schools to public schools these languages are rarely taught, and no subjects are taught in a Native language, only in English or French.

This means that most Aboriginal students in the Maritime provinces are forced to conform even now to a literacy foreign to their own. For example, even if Mi'kmaq students are not speakers of their Native tongue, they still think about life and learning from a Mi'kmaq perspective because parents and grandparents who are speakers of the tribal language have raised them. As well, this struggle of conformity to a dominant language in order to cope with daily life is true of other ethnic group languages (Bhatt & Martin-Jones, 1994; Ferdman, Weber, & Ramirez, 1994; Fishman, 1980; Hornberger, 1989; Paul, 1994; Verhoeven, 1987, 1994; von Glasersfeld, 1995). Consequently, Aboriginal students and other minority language groups are placed at an academic disadvantage as soon as they enter a curriculum that is based on a singular view of literacy, the Euro-Canadian assumption that literacy equals reading and writing English at acceptable levels of performance. The literacy curriculum needs to be flexible enough to allow individualized creativity and learning. If an Aboriginal student interprets meaning differently or learns more readily from visual representation than from printed text, so be it. Such uniqueness needs to be recognized, encouraged, and valued by the teacher (Au, 1993; Battiste, 1998; Barnes, 1976; Leroy, 1990; Reyhner, 1992; Rogers, 1969; Swisher & Deyhle, 1992; Williams, 1962, Zarry, 1991).

Conclusion

From this brief history of literacy in Aboriginal education and the discussion of Aboriginal literacy it is evident that an education that includes Aboriginal students must be transformed such that they are valued in the process of their education. Steele (1992), a social psychologist, defines the devaluing that Black students face in schools as stigma. This definition is applicable to Aboriginal students as well. This stigma, Steele explains, has "its own condition of life, different from class, money, culture. It is capable, in the words of the late sociologist, Erving Goffman, of 'breaking the claim' that one's human attributes have on people" (p. 68). This means that as a student's personhood is devalued, he or she disconnects from the attributes that assist in the development of self-respect, confidence, and the ability to trust oneself and others. This rift is the insidious tool of disenfranchisement, because the student is not only told he or she is unacceptable; the student now feels inferior and rejected.

Disenfranchisement is revealed in school performance, as Steele (1992) explains:

From elementary school to graduate school, something depresses black achievement at every level of preparation, even the highest. Given any level of school preparation (as measured by tests and earlier grades), blacks somehow achieve less in subsequent schooling than whites (that is, have poorer grades, have lower graduation rates, and take longer to graduate), no matter how strong that preparation is. (p. 70)

Steele's statements are substantiated about Aboriginal student performance in New Brunswick public schools by Hamilton (1990) in *Closing the Gap*. Appropriate curriculum and culturally informed teachers in multicultural education are not sufficient to improve Aboriginal education in Canada. Teachers must understand the devastating effect of being stigmatized and diligently pursue the valuing of the Aboriginal student and Aboriginal literacy.

It is not enough to hear the Aboriginal voice and to acknowledge the Aboriginal presence; Aboriginal people must be valued as an integral, important part of their own education. Also, who Aboriginal people are as human beings must be valued and treasured. Therein lies the essence of spirituality, in other words, valuing the nonmaterial aspect of humanness. To ignore this is to ignore the person. To ignore this is to ignore Aboriginal literacy, because that literacy is vitally linked to who the Aboriginal student is. What was ignored in the history of literacy in Aboriginal education is still not fully understood or acknowledged in the education of Aboriginal students today. The culturally appropriate training of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers is a critical component for success in Aboriginal education.

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Equal Educational Opportunity for Native Students: Funding the Dream

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Equal special education opportunity for Native students requires a variety of special services, all of which require special funding. A three-year pilot project in special education undertaken by the First Nations Education Council of Quebec (FNEC) provided the first opportunity in Canada to analyze the cost of funding such services in First Nations communities. This article summarizes the methodology and results of a detailed analysis of the costs of special and regular education in FNEC communities. Among the most important findings are that the per-pupil costs of delivering special education services in FNEC communities were not unusually high according to any relevant basis of comparison, but that total costs were high because of high incidence rates of special needs.

Introduction

Special education programs and resources are accessible to children in provincial school systems which are governed by the principle that all children, regardless of disability, can be educated to lead productive lives ... Special education resources are crucial to the success of school under First Nations jurisdiction. (National Indian Brotherhood / Assembly of First Nations, 1988, p. 98).

The special education resources referred to in the above statement by the Assembly of First Nations are a critical means for achieving equal educational opportunity (EEO) for Native students. Simply put, EEO means the right of everyone to participate in and benefit from publicly supported education. As discussed in a companion article by Smith and Martin (2000), the provision of EEO can be conceptualized in terms of inputs, throughputs, and outputs. Funding and other forms of resources are considered as inputs in this model, enabling elements that support the actual provision of services that in turn lead to the desired results. Providing adequate funding—even if one can determine what this entails (Paquette, 1989)—will not ensure that appropriate services will be provided, nor that the desired results will be obtained. However, the failure to provide adequate funding will almost certainly ensure that neither appropriate services nor desired results will occur (Allison, 1984).

Funding Special Education Needs

Although the importance of funding in meeting special educational needs seems obvious, educators and others often ignore the subject, except of course, to advocate for more funds. The details are left to "finance people": methodologically