

Decolonizing Education

Nourishing the Learning Spirit



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Foreword

Tawow! Tawow! Tawow! I can hear the echo of this greeting as visitors arrive at my grandparents' home. The literal translation of this greeting being: *there is room here* [for everyone] (often repeated three times). It is an appropriate start to the foreword for this book.

It has been a privilege to be part of an ongoing conversation on education with Marie Battiste over the past 30 years plus, each of us having made a lifetime commitment to be part of the change in our respective cultural communities and in the larger spheres of public educational institutions and society — and the world, in general. I first met Marie in the early 80s through our affiliation with the Mokakit Indian Education Research Association, founded in 1983 to challenge the Eurocentric research paradigms and to support and foster educational excellence in our communities.¹ The dominant research paradigm of the day, based on deficit theory, often resulted in an essentialization of Indigenous peoples, followed by a litany of pathologies. Marie was completing her doctoral work and later serving as Director of Education in her home reserve of Potlotek at the Mi'kmawey School, in the first bilingual education school in Mi'kmaw territory on Chapel Island, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. I had left the classroom to join the staff of the newly formed Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research, as Coordinator and later Director of the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program. It was an exciting time professionally and politically, as the advocacy work of so many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit had finally paid off across the country and new institutions were being created to advance our stories, languages, and being of this place. I think Marie would agree that we were privileged to be a part of these undertakings. These actions, along with the support we receive from our families and communities of spirit around the globe (interrogating the basic

1 Mokakit is the Blackfoot concept for excellence. It is also significant to note that many of the original members of Mokakit had and/or continue to play leadership roles in education in Canada.

tenet of western knowledge — critical theorists, feminists, anti-colonial theorists) anchors our continuing advocacy and commitment to education.

It was also about this time that the world's Indigenous peoples began gathering on many fronts. One such front was the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (WIPCE), held every three years and continuing, bringing together Indigenous peoples, educators, and their allies from all over the world with themes that underscore that *the answers are within us*, in our languages and cultures, and in the stories of our relationships to place. In the context of these supportive relationships with individuals and communities of like mind and heart, we were able to give wing to our dreaming and consciousness as Indigenous people — no less creative or imaginative than any other people inhabiting this earth — as we resist, remember, re-right, recover, reconcile our place in our respective nation states. One of the more comprehensive and exciting projects, for which we formalized our relationship, was the work of the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre of the Canadian Council on Learning, awarded to the Aboriginal Education Research Centre, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan and the First Nations Higher Education Consortium of Calgary, Alberta. Dr. Marie Battiste and Dr. Vivian Ayoungman served as directors for this project, while I served one of the 2.5 positions in a coordinating role. Marie also assumed an additional role as an Animation Theme Bundle Holder (out of six themes) for *Nourishing the Learning Spirit*.²

Inspired by an exchange with Willie Ermine, Cree ethicist, Marie's re-collection and re-thinking of Aboriginal education in *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit* represents a fundamental shift in thinking of decolonization as a process that belongs to everyone. As such, it has huge implications and possibilities for re-imagining our relationships as envisioned in treaty and/or embedded within Canada's Constitution, as Canadians and as world citizens in the context of the natural world, which sustains all of our existence. The work is unfinished. Having just completed the work of the *Joint Task Force to Improve Outcomes in Education and Employment for First Nations and Métis* in Saskatchewan, I am cognizant that there will need to be much more to our conversations than "gaps" in educational outcomes. If we are to realize our full potential as a nation state and as conscious Earth citizens, we will need to "remake our world in more holistic and far sighted ways."³ Perhaps, as Marie suggests, to transform our educational systems that reflect shared aspirations and goals *with* First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, it begins with consideration of what a truly inclusive culture is for Canada, one which moves

2 For more information, visit <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/>.

3 Turok, Neil. (2012). *The Universe Within – From Quantum to Cosmos*. CBC Massey Lectures. Canada: Harper Collins Canada Ltd.

beyond the maintenance of an identity, language, and culture of a colonial society derived from a historically biased position. Without a shared culture, nationally and locally, is it possible to know how we might measure the success of our educational endeavours in our educational systems?

In this book, Dr. Marie Battiste shares her personal journey and story of inspiration, resistance, and transformation — with influences personal, theoretical, philosophical, and global, which have shaped her thinking and being — as a Mi'kmaw educator making a difference in the Canadian education systems that she has been a part of. To unpack the evolution of Aboriginal education policy and developments in Canada, the perspective she has chosen is from the standpoint and experience of the Mi'kmaw. Despite the horror and trauma of the racist ideology that has shaped educational policy and developments through state and church, she provides extensive references, for the record, to show that the Mi'kmaw have never lost sight of the importance of culture and language in their continuance as a people. Nor have they lost sight of their distinct rights embedded in treaties and/or in the Canadian Constitution, now recognized as part of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

It will be quickly apparent that the broad strokes of the picture she paints, resulting from her work in her home community and province of Poletuk, Nova Scotia, her work locally with colleagues at the University of Saskatchewan, and others nationally and internationally, is a familiar one shared collectively by Indigenous people and their allies in Canada and the world. She claims that, despite the dislocation of Indigenous people from their lands, they have continued their struggle to maintain culture and language as core components of education, based on distinct rights recognized in treaty and in the Constitution, and they have continued to resist policies that seek to erase their sense of being as Indigenous People. In this “tortured space” she shares how her own family and community has been making their own way; and, while there have been losses, they have survived. Even now, as her community is faced with many challenges, they are not looking for governments to provide the solutions. Rather, they are seeking *reconciliation* of their rights as Indigenous people and they want to be participants in creating a better future for themselves and for all Canadian citizens. This sentiment is echoed in the final report of *Voice, Vision and Leadership: A Place for All — The Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People* (2013), work I have just completed in Saskatchewan with Gary Merasty (chair) and Don Hoium. The report states, “First Nations and Métis people in Saskatchewan and Canada have a strong history as nation builders. Even in tough times, they have worked to retain and regain the strengths and gifts to help build their communities, the province of Saskatchewan, and Canada. Nor do they think that governments will solve all of their challenges, as they rec-

ognize the importance of strengthening their own capacity as individuals and communities. However, there are times they need government and institutions to respond in meaningful ways to their needs.”⁴ I would add to this, “and aspirations.” The latter point, of the importance of responsive governments and institutions, is not lost to Marie, either. Her “discursive arrow” is pointed “not at teachers or their methods but largely at the federal and provincial systems and the policy choices made and the inequities coming from them” (p. 14). Further, she notes “the Canadian government has a vital constitutional role to play in protecting the country’s remaining Aboriginal knowledge, languages, and heritage” (p. 66). I agree. Those who are aware of Dr. Battiste’s work will know she is no stranger to the discussion and critique of Aboriginal education in Canada. Once again, with an undaunted learning spirit, she brings to bear her own unique gifts through listening, sharing, taking heart, and acting to bring about change with others on the damage wrought by racism and its economic effects on children, an eroding land base, and natural environment.

The book represents a formal shift of thinking and writing from a modernistic, expository prose of grand western narratives to a more storytelling manner as a way of uncovering — revealing — a nuanced and balanced perspective of a colonized history and, through it, unmasking the faulty logics of knowing grounded in objectivity and eurocentric theorizing that have undermined Indigenous peoples’ knowledge systems. As she writes, “maybe this is wisdom taking its rightful place” (p. 17).

Throughout, she offers a critical gaze, bringing together activism, research, and scholarship to advocate for systemic change and trans-systemic reconciliation of diverse knowledge systems (in the humanities and sciences). However, she cautions that structures and guidelines must accommodate the fundamental concept of *diversity*, because “no single Indigenous experience dominates other perspectives, no one heritage informs it, and no two heritages produce the same knowledge” (p. 66). In creating institutional and systemic change, she offers a way out guided by the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and *an ethical space* (inspired by the work of Cree ethicist Willie Ermine). An ethical space is a theoretical space created among human communities for retreat, reflection, and dialogue to share understandings and to work together to create *a shared future*. It beckons a co-operative and an ethical order of good relations.⁵ More fundamentally, though, Marie observes,

4 Voice, Vision and Leadership: A Place for All — The Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People (2013)

5 Willie Ermine, in *Significant Leadership and Ethical Space Transforming Educational Opportunities for First Nations and Métis Learners in Saskatchewan* (2009) by Michael Cottrell, Jane P. Preston, Joseph V. Pearce, and Terrence R. Pelletier. Saskatoon: University of

“Indigenous peoples must be the ones renewing and reconstructing the principles underlying their worldviews and languages, and how these inform their own humanity” (p. 68).

This book is also an invitation for all of us to work together — as Indigenous, to offer our unique gifts to the important work of decolonization, moving beyond cultural awareness and inclusion — challenging racist ideology as we rethink and re-imagine ourselves in relationship with one another sharing place — one earth. The work requires us to care deeply about learning, to love it, she writes. How will we enter into those ethical conversations? What will it mean for the curriculum we offer to our children and youth? How will we measure our progress to meet our aspirations and goals? There are no excuses for doing nothing, either. She reminds us there are covenants, such as the rights of Indigenous people and our own Canadian Constitution to guide us; but the important work must come from the heart, as relationships are matters of the spirit that cannot be legislated.

Neil Turok in *The Universe Within — From Quantum to Cosmos* (2012), observes that we have gained immensely from powerful scientific, technological advances created by the human mind in the past three centuries as we sought to understand a universe that is eternal. However, we will need to dig deeper into a diverse human consciousness, with the entry of new cultures into the scientific community as vital sources of energy and creativity in the future and consider how science can ultimately serve “society’s goals and creating the kind of world we would like to inhabit.”⁶ What humanity has achieved, Turok observes, comes from “our capacity to understand, invent and create: from *The Universe Within*.”⁷ If we heed Marie’s invitation to rethink the premise of Aboriginal education in *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit*, perhaps it will take us a few steps toward the journey envisioned by Turok. “As we link the intelligence to our hearts,”⁸ the common ground might be an understanding that we are all part of something greater than our differences.

Grateful that you have taken time to read this passage and grateful for today — thunder sounding in the distance and a promise of rain — I offer my thanks and gratefulness. *Marsi, Ninanâskomon!*

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6 Turok, Neil. (2012) *The Universe Within – From Quantum to Cosmos*. CBC Massey Lectures. Canada: Harper Collins Canada, Ltd. p. 249.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 212.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 257.

Introduction

Listen, there are words almost everywhere. I realized that in a chance moment. Words are in the air, in our blood, words were always there. . . . Words are in the snow, trees, leaves, wind, birds, beaver, the sound of ice cracking; words are in fish and mongrels, where they have been since we came to this place with the animals. . . . Words and thoughts retain their capacity to create, to cause and to change.

Kimberly M. Blaeser. 1996. *Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral Tradition*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
(Quoting Vizenor from “Landfill Meditation 8,” pp. 18-19)

AS A NEW MEMBER OF THE TEACHING FACULTY at the University of Saskatchewan in 1993, I was given an opportunity to create a special topics course in my areas of interest for a cohort of graduate students from Prince Albert (PA). I chose to develop a new course, “Decolonizing Aboriginal Education.” Every other weekend, I traveled north to PA, where I offered the course to a talented group of men and women as our department’s first distance-delivery masters degree program. My students were largely Cree from neighbouring First Nations communities, mostly teachers within the First Nations schools seeking to get a graduate degree. I recall one, Willie Ermine, remarking one day, “This course should be called Decolonizing Education, not Decolonizing Aboriginal Education. The whole system needs to be changed!” I have often thought about that comment, and I have called this book *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit*, as I have long accepted that decolonizing education is not a process generated only for Indigenous⁹ students in the schools they attend or

9 Many terms such as Indigenous, Aboriginal and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit are used in this book. I acknowledge that these, like the term Indian are not terms that the People call themselves for most have their own terms, like Lnu among my people for their civilization although they have been called Micmac or Mi’kmaq in literature. I try to use Indigenous when considering the people beyond Canadian borders and use Aboriginal or First Nations, Métis, or Inuit

for students in First Nations programs in universities. Throughout my career since my coming to the University of Saskatchewan, I have aimed my research and discursive arrow not at teachers or their methods, but largely at the federal and provincial systems and the policy choices and the inequities coming from them. Empowered by years of administration and teaching in First Nations schools, serving on boards and committees, and writing and speaking across Canada and beyond to faculty, students, teachers, administrators, and federal and provincial agencies, I am more than ready to address what I see as issues within the whole system. Through this book, I share my critical perspective, activism, research, and scholarship that have put me solidly in the camp of advocating for systemic change and trans-systemic reconciliations. I am Mi'kmaq, and as a professor at the University of Saskatchewan for the past two decades and some before in other schools and universities, I have been forging a path of critique of current Eurocentric education and its practices while also researching and writing about a newer agenda of Indigenous science and humanities, both of which must be part of a global reclamation for education scholarship.

While much of my writing is found in fields of educational policy, curriculum theory, and educational practice as it relates to Indigenous students and Indigenous knowledges, this book shares the foundations for how those issues and insights emerged over my career as an Indigenous educator. Over the past 25 years, I have offered analysis and inspiration from the experiences of the many Indigenous people, particularly as my dissertation unfolded as the history of my ancestors' literacy experiences and history of education. That professional story was not so different from my own family story, but narrative writing has not featured as a large part of my work, regardless of venue. Storytelling is very much part of the tradition I was raised in, but such narratives were not welcomed and encouraged as good methodology in the academy.

My mother was a gifted storyteller, and I a respectful listener. I lived in a home where my mother shared stories of all her relations and her memories of each, their character, and the life events that affected them. My dad was not so much a talker as a listener, until he got with his "old timer" friends, then the stories flew out of him, too. He was a handsome man who lit the room with a big smile and gentle eyes. My aunties and uncles shared those characteristics of storytelling, and I came to enjoy all the benefits of a wide range of

when referencing the nations in Canada of Indigenous peoples. I acknowledge the tensions around the terms that my colleagues have long addressed, and offer that these terms, and the merits of the arguments for and against Aboriginal are not meant to offend. I also acknowledge that it is a common protocol today to capitalize Aboriginal as it is a nationality much in the same way as other groups are respected with capitalizing. I do so for Indigenous as well.

knowledge, just by being present and listening and able to stimulate conversation with my questions. As the youngest in my family, I was particularly bold in asking questions, which were largely encouraged. My mother often shared with me how often one frequent male visitor would come and talk incessantly. Everyone would just let him go on and on from one topic to another, listening but not doing much than the perfunctory nod or in Mi'kmaq the discursive holder "eh-heh." One day I climbed up to the table, and after listening for a while, I asked, "What are you talking about?" The adults all howled with laughter, as this was on their minds as well.

There were many silences to my questions, which, as the years went by, I realized were related to the layers of oppression that Mi'kmaq people had lived under. It was about the politics of knowledge production, their intersections with power, race, poverty, and gender, and the processes of colonization, including a patriarchal government and Indian agents. There were stories of people who suffered at the hands of these people, and I could see how our own experiences, though better in many ways because of where we lived, were similar. But there was a notable difference in our experiences. Few, if any, of those of my parents' generation had gone to school beyond a few years, and few cousins my age had finished high school, or even elementary school. During the potato harvest in Maine, many families would come for weeks with their children to work in the industry. In Maine where I grew up, potato harvest went with closed schools, but not in Canada. So my cousins would leave their school for several weeks; some caught up later, but others did not. Residential schools were still ongoing, and while I did not have to go, my cousins and older sister were among the survivors. My own history was held in stories and in the people who experienced multiple layers of both good and bad, all shared widely. My early education did not answer those questions; rather, it ignored them or marginalized the people to singular ideas embedded in grand narratives about country and history. It was not until I got to graduate school that I found classmates and a few professors who understood the plight of the poor, the classed society, the nature of difference, and educational underachievement.

As my learning spirit connected, I yielded in time to being a writer and a teacher, not of stories of my own, but sorting out inequities left unresolved, seeking theory to name what Indigenous students experienced in schools, or visioning of transformations to make the circumstances of one's birth less significant to success or quality of life. It was then that I went back to my family, my mother in particular, to sort out what her life was like and how things came to be from her perspective.

The opportunity came after my father died, and my mother came to live with my family for short periods before returning to her home in Potlotek. Trying to share with my mother her mourning, and to break the silence, I

sat with her often, sometimes quietly doing some cooking or watching television, or at other times urging her to talk. She was obliging when I asked about family and friends, and I was amazed at how sharp her memory was, so crystal clear that she could remember certain days or times, who was there, what people wore, and what they said. As the weeks went on, I asked if I might take notes, thinking this may be important for my kids one day. My own memory was bad, maybe because I did not do like my mom did and tell the same story over and over. So I got inspired and asked her if I might be allowed not just to write her story but also to tell her life story in writing. She agreed and we set out with a new purpose, spending hours talking about her childhood and youth, the major diseases that nearly killed her mother, and how she got the dreaded diseases too, her early romances, and finding my dad and our family life. Each day we worked a little bit on the story and after she tired, I went to my computer to type my notes. For a time this went on, but we did not finish the storying then as there were many changes going on with both of us. I had to go back to work after the summer off, her health was changing, and my sister decided to leave Boston and move in with my mother so that she could continue to live with her in her own home. What a blessing this was for us all. When I did finally give the story back to my mother, many months later, my older sister first learned of her own fated path going to residential school in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia. She learned about the struggles the family endured, and how life unfolds in many difficult ways. After the years of her own struggle, my sister began her own healing journey, starting with coming home to be with our mother and beginning to learn about her own history. This was the only publication that detailed my family life, which was my mother's story, not my own (Battiste, 1993).

Outside this experience of family life writing, I rarely shared my family stories in subsequent writings, even when the postmodern theorists called for it as a way of distinguishing one's location or position as an insider versus outsider, or positioning a counter dialogue, or confirming notions of authenticity. But at the time of my explorations in writing as a Mi'kmaq, I was not following anyone's lead, *per se*, for few writing models inspired me. Rather, in my work and my writing I was driven to get the knowledge to make a difference as a teacher, an administrator, a curriculum developer, or a professor. My search was ongoing, and I read profusely to find where current research and knowledge approached understanding the conditions and scenarios that were related to diverse groups such as Indigenous peoples.

Theorizing oppression and the deconstruction of educational histories of my people and the patterns of Eurocentrism and the decolonizing strategies in education have been my most productive writing moments, as I drew on a growing number of Civil Rights and Human Rights authors who were inspir-

ing me. As the balance of disciplines began to shift in education from modernistic expository prose of grand narratives to more storytelling, to personal narratives and postcolonial analysis of colonization, to research in one's own perspectives, I took greater delight in reading and writing and found that the shift had brought my own analysis into a different light. It also helped me find a greater balance with my own history and offer those as partial analyses of the choices and paths that I took. Maybe this is wisdom taking its rightful place.

bell hooks has noted that women from oppressed groups have stories to tell, and to tell those stories is an act of resistance. Speaking in and through stories then becomes a way to engage self-transformation, a kind of rite of passage. So as I write this book, I am aware of the value of story and its ability to transform my research, and resist the Eurocentric frameworks that privileged other peoples' stories and analyses of Indigenous peoples' lives. It is also transforming me and bringing back life to living.

Within my stories are not my personal struggles with schools or teachers or curricula, for I remember little about my Eurocentric education or the conventional approaches that I had been part of. I tried to stay under the radar of the teacher, not to be noticed or labeled dumb. Little is there I care to remember. Many memories I have long ago let go. But what I think is important is my own path toward understanding the collective struggles of Indigenous peoples framed within a patriarchal, bureaucratic enterprise of government, with education used as the manipulative agent of various intended outcomes, some well-intentioned, some not, but all strategic. These collective struggles are the transforming points of my learning and vectors from which I grew into new responsibilities. In this introduction, I focus on a few memories of growing up that affected my choices. These are forms of guidance that have shaped the course of my scholarship and life. I choose these as a way to take out my story and connect to the lives and wisdom of others who have been my teachers.

Several friends and elders have helped me through my journey. My husband, Sa'ke'j Henderson, of course, my hero and love of my life, whom I met at Harvard and who was my tutor in a public school law class at Harvard. But there are others. I acknowledge Saulteaux Elder Danny Musqua for his generous stories that have been an inspiration for me throughout my years in Saskatoon. His sharing of the foundation for Anishinabe teachings on learning has given me a depth of understanding of the learning spirit. His stories also complement my own Mi'kmaw teachings drawn from my Mi'kmaw heroes such as Elder Murdena Marshall and the late Kji Keptin (Grand Captain) Alex Denny, who both have been closest in guiding my learning spirit with their humour, activism, and wisdom that helped me to understand more fully my

Mi'kmaw consciousness. They have shared their lives in typical Mi'kmaw¹⁰ fashion, guiding, teaching, humouring, supporting, and sharing generously with humility and grace.

I have come to understand more fully my own life journey. Sauteaux Elder Danny Musqua constantly reminds those willing to listen that each of us has a journey on earth that is solely about learning. Learning, he often says, is the purpose of our life journey. We carry both a physical and spiritual energy that is both constant and changing. The constants come from our spiritual energy that is connected to spirit guides that have traveled with us before our birth, and the changing is the physical form that transforms constantly through life to death. At conception, our spirit enters the physical form of our body (after it has traveled through six other stages of development before arriving in a human body), together with other guiding spirits that travel with us throughout our life journey, providing inspiration, guidance, and nourishment to fulfill the purpose of the life journey ahead. Elder Musqua notes that our life spirit knows what the life journey of each person is and travels with each person to offer guidance to keep us on course. This does not happen deterministically, however, as each person's free will and desire will take them in diverse paths, and in each there is learning. Learning is both difficult and enjoyable, but ultimately it helps us shape the person we are.

It is like the deep struggle I had with coming up with my dissertation topic, and when it came, it was a bright moment; there was clarity in life, and a purpose that kept me motivated and focused. My spirit guides were guiding me to that moment. This cosmology or theory of being is one that is repeated in ancient stories of tricksters like Kluskap, Badger, Nanabush, Wasakechuk, Raven, Napi, and others in many diverse situations who inspire us in life with their experiences, always learning and transforming from their learning, and being the inspiration for others in understanding the various bumps and bruises of life as well as the great leaps of faith and change that come from making our choices. These stories offer great benefits from their learning.

We are all on a journey to find our unique gifts given to us by the Creator, Elder Danny Musqua tells us. *Knowledge is held by the spirits, shared by the spirits and comes from the spirits . . . our body then can be seen as carrier of the learning spirit* (Elder Danny Musqua, in D. Knight, 2001). The "learning spirit," then, is the entity within each of us that guides our search for purpose and vision. Our gifts unfold in a learning environment that sustain and challenge us as learners. Pueblo educator Gregory Cajete believes such a setting enables learners to "find their heart, face and foundation" (2000). The face is our iden-

10 Mi'kmaq is a noun used to reference the collective of Lnu people and Mi'kmaw is the adjective always preceding a noun.

tity, our heart is the passion that engages our life purpose, and the foundation is the talents and skills needed to put the passion to work. But that source is ultimately connected to a spiritual source, and these are vital foundations of Aboriginal learning.

My spiritual story began on the other side when I chose my parents — or maybe they chose me, or maybe together we chose each other. I was born in Houlton, Maine, during potato-picking harvest, in 1949, while my parents were on a seemingly brief seasonal work stop in Maine. When I was born, my mother and father and their two other small children were living behind the potato farm in a one-room tarpaper shack, as most Mi'kmaw farm hands tended to do at that time. Seeing this seeming poverty and perceived hardship with a new baby, the barren wife of the potato farmer thought she could help. I heard this story many times as I grew up. She had developed an instant connection to this tiny fair-skinned infant, an emotive bond that women feel upon cuddling newborns, and relayed to my mother what she thought she could give to me. She wanted my mother to allow her to adopt this baby. It was not even tempting, my mother said. Despite the seeming context of scarcity, my mother saw no burden in her children, and despite her seemingly impoverished situation, it was all she, like all Mi'kmaq, knew. My mother took pity on her, though, and as consolation, she did let Harriet Bither name me. She chose a name that was near and dear to her: Marie Ann. After having taken pity on her and given her this privilege, my mother did not have the heart to tell her that she already had another daughter named Marie Eleanor who was in residential school in Nova Scotia. So like one of the old comedy television shows featuring the two Daryls in a family, we have two Maries in the family.

My parents, John and Annie Battiste, ended up staying twenty-three years in Maine before returning home to their reserve. Chapel Island Reserve was renamed later to its name that Mi'kmaq always called it — Potlotek in Unama'ki (Cape Breton, Nova Scotia). Twenty-three years is a long time to remain away from their “home,” and often I wondered why they did not go back earlier. I recall my mother talking about the many times she had to leave “home” to sell baskets with her mother or aunts, and the many experiences with white people. While she often was away, home was Potlotek, and it was the only one she talked about with fond memories. She often spoke of when she would go “home,” what she wanted in the house they would build, and the life with the relatives that such a life would afford. They did not stay in Maine for the great job opportunities or the prosperity showered on us from being there, for we started out living in a tarpaper shack behind a potato house in Linneus, Maine, and gradually moved into low-cost rented houses and apartments, living always on the edge. My dad was a hard worker, but unskilled and untrained in the modern sense of employment. He was big and muscular, and was often

hired to do the hard grunt labour of carrying the heavy stuff. My mother was a pretty, petite but stout woman who had a love of cooking and a knack for cleaning. Like many Mi'kmaw women in her early youth, she was hired as a domestic, cleaning homes, often two or more a day. Once it was learned that she was also a great cook, she was enlisted to be the cook for many years for the nuns in Houlton and later for the priests. Often I went with her to help her get through her work more quickly, and I developed these needed family skills. In particular, I developed a love for cooking and keeping a tidy house.

Scarcity was always a challenge, one that required my mother and father to draw on their creativity and cultural resources to make ends meet. Although they survived marginally by being labourers and domestics, in times of great need they made baskets from ash and maple trees, beautiful colourful baskets that they sold after working several days on them. When the baskets were all done and piled high in the shed, my mother would gather them in a sheet and start her trek, going house to house in many locations to sell the baskets for a dollar or two. She often told me stories of these transactions when she used to sell baskets with her mother. At the end of a day they would ask for lodging where they were and get sometimes a bed or a floor, for which they traded a basket. This basket-making was a long-time family enterprise and one that has deep significance to Mi'kmaq.

All of us (two sisters and a brother) were enjoined to learn how to make those baskets. It was a cultural economic enterprise that all Mi'kmaq knew. Getting the wood for the baskets meant for me and my sisters Geraldine and Eleanor, sitting in the woods with our mother or in the car for hours, while she told us stories. Eventually my dad would emerge from the woods with a sweaty face, carrying a long thick log with the axe on his shoulder. After putting it in the trunk, he then would then return to the forest for the second or third log. His muscular build warranted his being called by the local families, affectionately, "Big John" after a song that was popular at the time.

Once home, my father prepared the raw materials, pounding an axe into the wood, splitting and shaving the logs until they stood in straight splints. Each one would be shaved and then pounded evenly with the back of the axe until each splint would split and could be pulled apart. My mother finished off the splints, shaving them with a sharp knife into fine thin strips that she would then soak and dye in many bright colours. When dried, the splints were woven into the floor of the basket, intertwined with the coloured, thinner strips for the sides and top. My brother, sisters and I eventually were taught how to weave the sides. When we were done, my mom would finish the top and add any needed embellishments, and my brother and dad would make the handles and pound in nails on the potato baskets. Creativity was a requirement of the poor, so when potato season was gone, my dad also made axe handles or strap-

ping for seats of old chairs, or he took work as a labourer wherever they would take him. Racism was probably the most frequent issue, but that was what life was like for Native people living in Aroostook County in Maine.

Then why did they stay so long in Maine? Why would they leave the reserve, where they could be assured of some government-supported housing, to live without supportive family around them and having to make do with the minimal? As my dad often reminded us, life on the reserve was hard, too, and there was little available in the way of jobs or education. So they stayed in Maine, and later in Boston, largely for the education that our residency promised. At the time they left the reserve, no Mi'kmaq had made it beyond early elementary school, and no one went to college.

Centralization was a federal policy that removed the Mi'kmaq from their traditional homelands to centralized reserves. Residential schools were still looming. My dad had a notion that my birth in the States and my brother and sisters' going to school there would assure us an education that would make life better for us. I heard that so often that I came to believe it, and it became an inspiration for my continued perseverance throughout my education.

After my parents settled into a home in Houlton, Maine, they went to get my sister from the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School in Nova Scotia. After three years her inner spirit was broken, her identity shattered, and her voice taken. She came home to find me, a new sister in the family. Attending the residential school was the worst thing that could have happened to her, yet attending racist public schools in Houlton was the next challenge. My mother told her often to look after her younger brother, and look after him she did. I often wondered when she came home with a bloody nose if that was what school was going to like for me, too, and if I would have to fight my way through school. But I was the youngest child, raised with my loving parents, and I did not have to take responsibility for anyone outside myself. I could take advantage of the situation of being youngest, of being light skinned, and having older siblings who looked after me. My dad said life required that I do my best in everything I do, and as my mother was always helping my sister, I benefitted from her tutelage, and her teaching my sister Geraldine to read and do math. Life got a little better when my mother transferred us all to the Catholic school system, easing us through some of the elementary school years, although my mother had no idea the trauma bringing my sister to the nuns would be for my sister Eleanor. Residential school had traumatized her too deeply to benefit much from that school. As a result, my sister left school after grade 8, and I continued my education through high school in Houlton before my family moved on to Boston.

Thankfully, my family remained in the United States until I, the youngest, graduated from university. I was a teenager of the 60s. This was a time

in the United States when social programming was ripe, when bilingual education was emerging as a consequence of federal initiatives trying to create improved outcomes among disadvantaged children who had little access to the curriculum due to their language and cultural backgrounds, then called “disadvantaged and culturally deprived.” Black activist Martin Luther King, President John F. Kennedy, feminists Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem, American Indian leaders Russel Means and Dennis Banks, among others, were raising the issues of equality and civil rights, human rights, and Indian rights. All of these shaped my emerging social consciousness, as I gained a better awareness of poverty’s effect on children, and the economic effects of racism and discrimination. At the time, I believed that it offered hope for those less fortunate, as immortalized in Martin Luther King’s speech, “I Have a Dream.” I recall memorizing passages as they lifted my spirit, even as my friends in the college dorm knew little and were never challenged about their complicity in creating and sustaining poverty, racism, and colonization. They enjoyed the performance of my speech, eloquently and passionately memorized. It would take many more years before the discourses of whiteness and white privilege would illustrate their complicity in the social issues of the day.

These are but a few of the passages that would emerge as significant for me, an Indigenous scholar and activist, though the story is far from done. The chapters in this book — some parts from my dissertation, from writings on cognitive imperialism, from my work in Aboriginal languages, from my work at the United Nations, and from my research and writing on decolonization, while others are taken from speeches I have given — bring together parts of a life journey that brings my perspectives and my journey to light. I offer these to my children Jaime, Mariah, and Annie, to my grandson Jacoby, and to the many graduate students who have called on me to ask about my life, my inspirations, and my intended legacy. So many graduate students have graced me with their appreciative words about how I have helped them articulate their own directions in reclaiming their Indigenous selves and their collective heritages. I dedicate the book to educators seeking to make changes in their thinking and in their work, knowing that the decolonization of education is not just about changing a system for Indigenous peoples, but for everyone. We all will benefit by it.

The Legacy of Forced Assimilative Education for Indigenous Peoples

I ASK YOU TO IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT THE EXPERIENCE of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Imagine that for hundreds of years your peoples' most formative achievements and traumas, their daily suffering and pain, the abuse they live through, the terror they live with, are ignored and silenced. Their compelling voices and stories, largely cast in romance novels or on television in stereotypes for the public, are occasionally brought forward, used to sanction some programmatic innovation, or to support some theory of opposition or resistance, and then re-positioned in the margins of knowledge and curriculum.

Consider that for more than a century, Indigenous students have been part of a forced assimilation plan — their heritage and knowledge rejected and suppressed, and ignored by the education system. Imagine the consequence of a powerful ideology that positions one group as superior and gives away First Nations peoples' lands and resources and invites churches and other administrative agents to inhabit their homeland, while negating their very existence and finally removing them from the Canadian landscape to lands no one wants. Imagine how uncertain a person is whose success is only achieved by a complete makeover of themselves, by their need to learn English and the polished rules and habits that go with that identity. They are thrust into a society that does not want them to show too much success or too much Indian identity, losing their connections to their land, family, and community when they have to move away as there is no work in their homeland. Assimilation. This context is important to postcolonial education, as I offer ways we can continue to reflect upon this experience in a proactive way. This experience continues to challenge our consciousness and our quest for healing. This chapter shows how the horror inherent in this educational process came to be for Mi'kmaw peoples in Canada a familiar path to all First Nations, as evidenced by their having the same patriarchal system of Indian agents, government, Indian residential schools, and contemporary education systems. It is a subject that every citizen of Canada should know, because every citizen in Canada is connected to it.

Forced assimilative education among Aboriginal peoples in Canada is distinct from the choices that immigrants have to make when they arrive from other lands. Immigrants, including refugees, make their way to Canada knowing that they will have to learn a particular culture. For some, the choice of living in a culturally similar community or having a school that guides them along the way helps them make this transition. Aboriginal people in Canada have entered into a relationship with the Crown through treaties and subsequently with the Canadian government to provide teachers and schools to assist them in making a livelihood after the original forms of livelihood were reduced or taken away. The central concepts of the Aboriginal and treaty right to education were an enriched education of First Nations that supplemented the learning system that is integral to the transmitting of knowledge, identity, and life skills to First Nations children.

Aboriginal and treaty rights are unique to First Nations, made distinctive by signed treaties or specific agreements between Inuit, First Nations, or Métis with the federal government of Canada, and affirmed in the Constitution of Canada. These arrangements are not recognized for other Canadians. First Nations education is both an Aboriginal and a treaty right, and affirmed and recognized in the new constitutional order of Canada. Three models of an independent Aboriginal right to education exist: (1) the retaining of First Nations choice in the treaties as an Aboriginal right; (2) the right of Treaty First Nations to choose an appropriate educational system for their children as a prerogative and an obligation; and (3) implementing “appropriate education” for Treaty First Nations, as other treaties allow, within federal discretion. In exercising federal discretion against First Nations choice in the treaty education clauses, however, the courts have imposed a fiduciary duty and the honour of the Crown doctrine (Henderson, 2007, chap. 33).

Treaty First Nations recognize that the treaty rights to education have not been implemented, but have been subverted by governmental interests and policies. Aboriginal and Indigenous elders are also aware of the eroding environment and land base that will require new ways of thinking and interacting with the earth and with each other. Aboriginal peoples are not the only ones experiencing a growing awareness of the limitations of technological knowledge and its capacity to provide solutions to our health, environment, and biodiversity, as we witness the undiscovered potential capacity of knowledge systems rapidly eroding and in need of urgent reform and action.

Aboriginal peoples in Canada and Indigenous peoples throughout the world are feeling the tensions created by a Eurocentric education system that has taught them to distrust their Indigenous knowledge systems, their elders’ wisdom, and their own inner learning spirit. Neither the assimilative path of residential schools and day schools in the first half of the last century, nor the in-

tegrative approaches of the second half of that century in Canada, have succeeded in nurturing many Aboriginal students beyond high school. Most consider education an ongoing failure. In 2006, only 30 per cent of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit had received a certificate, diploma, or degree, compared to 50 per cent of non-Aboriginal Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2008).

Educational institutions and systems in Canada are also feeling the tensions and the pressures to make education accessible and relevant to Aboriginal people. With the rise in Aboriginal populations, especially in the northern territories and prairie provinces, and with the expected future economy depending on a smaller number of employed people, the pressure on conventional educational institutions to make Aboriginal populations more economically self-sufficient through education increases (Avison, 2004). In addition, educators are aware of the need to generate a more diverse population of trained workers, as they seek to address the diversity that exists in the population at large. As diversity is recognized, so also are questions about the processes for engendering inclusiveness, tolerance, and respect. In 2010, a report of the Canadian Councils of Ministers of Education, affirmed by much of the literature on Aboriginal education, directed its criticism at the increasing achievement gap within elementary, secondary schools, and universities among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The gap shrinks somewhat with students attending trade schools and colleges located close to their communities, as well as with an increasing number of Aboriginal women attending school. Interestingly, even Aboriginal single women with children are more likely to go to school than Aboriginal men. Reports of labour market relationships with schooling are strong, which may account for why Aboriginal people are sitting at the bottom of the labour market because of low education. Eurocentric education policies and attempts at assimilation have contributed to major global losses in Indigenous languages and knowledge, and to persistent poverty among Indigenous peoples. In Canada, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) conducted a six-year study and wrote a five-volume report on the massive damage to all aspects of Aboriginal peoples' lives. The 1996 report was the result of a huge mobilization of Canadian scholars and public servants in an effort to unravel the effects of generations of exploitation, violence, marginalization, powerlessness, and enforced cultural imperialism on Aboriginal knowledge and peoples. The Royal Commission's conclusions and recommendations reflect the broad consensus of 150 distinguished Canadian and Aboriginal scholars, and the deliberations of fourteen policy teams comprising senior officials and diverse specialists in government and politics (RCAP, 1996, pp. 5, 296–305).

The Royal Commission's report creates a postcolonial agenda for transforming the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Canadians. It affirms how the false assumption of settler superiority positioned Aboriginal

students as inherently inferior. This false assumption contaminated the objectives of residential schools and led to the systematic suppression of Aboriginal knowledge, languages, and cultures (1, pp. 251, 331-409). The report argues that this demeaning and ethnocentric attitude lingers in current policies that purport to work on behalf of Aboriginal peoples. Although the assumption is no longer formally acknowledged, this does not lessen its influence on contemporary policies or mitigate its capacity to generate modern variants (1, pp. 249, 252-53). The report proposes that Canada must dispense with all notions of superiority, assimilation, and subordination and develop a new relationship with Aboriginal peoples based on sharing, mutual recognition, respect, and responsibility. Unfortunately, the report, entitled *Gathering Strength*, has gathered more dust than strength, as the government of Canada has done little to acknowledge its contents or its value.

Many Aboriginal and Indigenous scholars and postcolonial writers have been imagining new restorative education programs. Like those who took part in the Royal Commission, they see that education is the key matrix of all disciplinary and professional knowledge and more. They also recognize that education and literacy have not been benign processes, for cognitive imperialism, licensed by dominant English languages and Eurocentric discourse, has tragically diminished Indigenous languages and knowledges and contributed to the discontinuity and trauma Aboriginal peoples continue to experience.

After taking a course in cultural imperialism at Stanford with Martin Carnoy, I had fashioned a name for that experience I had lived in and felt confined to and for which most Aboriginal students resisted with their feet. When Indigenous knowledge is omitted or ignored in the schools, and a Eurocentric foundation is advanced to the exclusion of other knowledges and languages, these are conditions that define an experience of cognitive imperialism. Cognitive imperialism is about white-washing the mind as a result of forced assimilation, English education, Eurocentric humanities and sciences, and living in a Eurocentric context complete with media, books, laws, and values. Indigenous people understand the crisis they live in and feel the urgency for reform. For many, their hopes were put into their own schools in their communities, yet for most they have had to have at least some of their education in public schools where changes are more about measuring success along the lines of their own content. The crisis is best described in a discourse of a decolonized education that seeks to reconcile contemporary education with the past and with the peoples' present, ensuring that the ideological and self-interests within Eurocentric education are not imposed on Indigenous peoples and they build their own present with their own agency and power intact. Kanu (2005) further explains decolonization:

The recent calls . . . to decolonize Indigenous education is part of a larger effort to reflect critically on the impact of colonization on Indigenous people, in particular internal colonization whereby carefully selected mechanisms, such as the subjugation of Indigenous knowledge and the use of colonial ideology to cultivate psychological subordination in the colonized, are employed by dominant groups to subordinate or regulate Indigenous populations. (p. 1)

Some provinces have begun to work through understanding the importance of diversity and cultural inclusion and in some instances making it a priority, yet they have not understood entirely what is at the core of the issues for inclusion for Indigenous peoples, and what ways to make this happen without repeating past problems. The core of understanding relationships built with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples is first and foremost a distinction that is embedded in relationships built from treaties and later agreements that framed the relationships of people in place to the immigrating settler populations. This is least understood in Canada. Most Canadians today still view Aboriginal peoples as first settlers, not First Nations. What they notice first is what is on the surface, racialization and government spending, and both fill them with anxieties that come to the surface when treaties and Aboriginal rights are asserted. Yet, the rising population of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit has caused concern for the future of the Canadian economy.

In 2004, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), the national body of all the provinces' heads of education, agreed to make Aboriginal education a priority, and the work of finding an appropriate pedagogy, content, and inclusive processes in all the provinces and territories began (Avison, 2004). The 2004 CMEC Report found:

- First Nations graduation rate is at 42 per cent compared to 78 per cent for the general population.
- 31.3 per cent take and pass provincial examinations in Grade 12 English.
- 5.5 per cent take and pass Mathematics 12.
- Grades four, seven and ten use Foundation Skills Assessment (like Canadian Tests of Basic Skills), showing significant gaps in performance between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.
- Reading scores in grade 4 are well below non-Aboriginal students, suggesting a need for early childhood education and literacy programs (Avison, 2004).

The CMEC established the tenets of the priorities for Aboriginal education:

- Recognize early childhood education as a key to improved literacy.
- Provide clear objectives and a commitment to report results, including working closer with Government of Canada and Aboriginal communities.
- Institute strong teacher development and recruitment.
- Improve accountability arrangements with Aboriginal parents and communities.
- Share learning resources.
- Support the elimination of inequitable funding levels for First Nations schools.
- Create a National Forum on Aboriginal education. (Avison, 2004)

Since 2010, the CMEC has established priorities for Aboriginal education in each area of early childhood learning and development, elementary and secondary education, post-secondary education, and adult learning. Each of the recommendations are suitable and necessary for the provincial institutions to contribute to affecting the educational gaps, yet there is more underlying the surface of cultural inclusion. The challenge is not so much finding receptivity to inclusion, but the challenge of ensuring that receptivity to inclusive diverse education is appropriately and ethically achieved with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit support, and that the educators become aware of the systemic challenges for overcoming Eurocentrism, racism, and intolerance. The “add and stir” model of bringing Aboriginal education into the curricula, environment, and teaching practices has not achieved the needed change (RCAP, 1996), but rather continues to sustain the superiority of Eurocentric knowledge and processes.

Subsequent reports and task forces — such as Canada’s Senate Subcommittee on Aboriginal Education (2011) and the Report of the National Panel on First Nation Elementary and Secondary Education for Students on Reserve (2011) — seem to reveal similarities of issues across Canada. Again, while each of these reports offer analyses and recommendations for Canadians and politicians to understand the needed structural changes, each refer to inequities, racial discrimination, and student resilience, the differential treatment of schools across federal and provincial fiduciary responsibilities, and the differential knowledges across the cultural divides that prevent communities and parents from feeling welcomed or appreciated in the schools. There continues to be a lack of materials and resources, and lots of tension and sometimes apathy, in making inclusive, culturally responsive, anti-oppressive education. The challenge also continues for educators to be able to reflect critically on the current educational system in terms of whose knowledge is offered, who decides what is offered, what outcomes are rewarded, and who benefits, and, more importantly, how those are achieved in an ethically appropriate process.

The key in designing meaningful education in Canada must begin with confronting the hidden standards of racism, colonialism, and cultural and linguistic imperialism in the modern curriculum and see the theoretical incoherence with a modern theory of society. No theory of Canadian society exists that reflects its order as an eternal pattern of human nature or social harmony. In this predicament, education theory has to confront the line between truth and propaganda.

Often, the purposes of the educational institutions betray this current explanatory theory. Their purpose is to create and transmit an imagined culture of Canada or the provinces in a market-driven society. But the imagined culture remains elusive. It is a culture of nationalism imposed by the state. It is not reflective of the heritage, knowledge, or culture that the students bring to education, or their skills and shared traditions. It is not reflective of the normal everyday one that they live with their families. It is only reflective of an imagined and aspirational “other.”

Since there is no agreement about transmitting knowledge, heritage, and culture, the resulting curriculum is made normative by a cloak of standards and expectations on all educators and students. The current structure helps preserve class structures and a ruling elite rather than sort out everyone according to their inherent capacities. The status quo also argues for family or parental responsibility to be passed to the state in the form of compulsory education. These educational purposes imply a disintegration of the family and culture for the abstraction of the society as defined by a standard curricula, and its defined outcomes and successes as identified as graduation from high school and now some post-secondary school, college, or university.

Aboriginal peoples’ invisibility continues to be ignored under modern educational curricula and theory, and psychic disequilibrium continues (Canada, House of Commons 1990, pp. 29–35). As the twenty-first century turned, we need to take a look at where we have been and where we are going. For many of us, we have become painfully aware of what has happened to the children and Aboriginal youth across Canada, and we have statistical reminders of how that education has affected them. We must find resources to enable all children to have the fundamental human rights outlined in the *United Nations (UN) Charter of Human Rights* (1948), the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), and now the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007). Like the provisions in the Victorian treaties and the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB, 1972) policy paper on Indian Control of Education, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, to which Canada is a signatory nation, provides that “education of the child shall be directed to . . . the development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, languages and values.” Article 29 (2) affirms the right to establish and direct

educational institutions that conform to the minimum standards of the state. In 2009, the Committee on the Rights of the Child issued general comment No. 11 on Indigenous children and their rights under the Convention, which calls for basic measures to be taken in support of the implementation of the rights of Indigenous children and provides guidance on how these obligations are to be implemented by States parties with respect to Indigenous children. In 2012, the UN issued a thematic report on the rights of Indigenous Children in the Secretary-General's report on the Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/67/225). The report noted that Indigenous children suffer extreme forms of exclusion and discrimination, but they are rights holders and are therefore entitled, without discrimination, to all the safeguards that are necessary for their survival, development, and protection (s. 9). The situation of Indigenous children is inextricably linked to the histories and experiences of the wider Indigenous communities in which they live. Issues of a cross-cutting nature impacting upon all rights of Indigenous children include respect for cultural identity, protection from discrimination, and the implementation of the rights of Indigenous children (s. 15–23). They are protected in international law by both individual and collective rights and freedoms. Indigenous peoples' collective freedoms are specifically guaranteed under article 27 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, in the *International Labour Organization (ILO) Indigenous and Tribal Peoples' Convention, 1989 (No. 169)*, and in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (sections 11, 12). The report considers the measures needed to address the rights of Indigenous children in education (sections 26–39).

These principles present the challenge to the Canadian education system and Aboriginal parents to design meaningful and honourable education for Aboriginal people that recognizes, respects, and integrates Aboriginal knowledges, heritages, and ways of life as an integral part of education, instead of biased fragmented concepts of culture buried in Eurocentric discourses.

Education theory teaches a social science that presents humans as the product of culture and motivation and interest stemming from those structures the society creates. Once modern society became convinced of the absolute right and virtue of its values and institutions, either real or imaginary, it set out to convert all other societies with which they came into contact. What it saw was largely defined by what it was — by the assumptive knowledge it was heir to, and the particular rhythms of contemporary thought in its own culture. The modern educational system was created to maintain the identity, language, and culture of a colonial society, while ignoring the need to decolonize. Culture in this educative context is a mask for evolutionary or racial logic. Its theory is derived from a biased position.

Culture was an educational concept that allowed Euro-Canadians to focus on empowering the deprived and the powerless, yet not having to confront any explanation or evaluation of the effects of racism or colonialism on these cultures or people. In this sense, civilization is taken as a possession of Euro-Canadians, and the contents of other cultural realms are understood as merely comparative. These cultural borderlands are understood as exceptions in modern thought rather than central areas for inquiry and empowerment. But modern educational thought finds actual human consciousness too messy to be studied, which may account for why youth get the facts but not the discussion of what their own purpose is within the life in which they are submersed.

Most often, Indigenous people, including Aboriginal peoples of Canada, have been depicted as members of a “timeless traditional culture”: a harmonious, internally homogeneous, unchanging culture. From such a perspective, the Indigenous cultures appear to “need” progress, an economic and moral uplifting to enable their capacities. This developmental perspective serves as a self-congratulatory reference point against which modern society can measure its own progressive historical evolution. The civilizing journey is conceived of more as a rise than a fall, a process more of perfection than degradation — a long and arduous journey upward, culminating in being “them.”

The decolonization and human rights movements among Indigenous peoples, teachers, and students have had to face this culture problem. Because the classic works in the curricula do not present clear or fair interpretations of their world views or languages, they have had to suggest a total revision of anthropological and social analyses. Around the globe, Indigenous thinkers have had to prove that the received Eurocentric notion of culture as unchanging and homogeneous was not only mistaken but irrelevant. They have had to prove that their world view is distinct from the cultural ethnographies constructed about them through the historical and political processes of modern thought. They have had to prove that they are not brute, timeless events in nature, that the so-called classic works confuse local cultures with universal human nature. They have had to demonstrate how ideology often makes cultural facts appear natural. They have had to use social analysis to attempt to reverse the process: to dismantle the ideological in order to reveal the cultural (a peculiar blend of objective arbitrariness and subjective taken-for-grantedness). The interplay between making the familiar strange and the strange familiar is part of the ongoing transformation of knowledge.

Although efforts have been made to sensitize teachers to part of the cultural and psychological context of Indigenous pupils through in-service programs, little has yet been done to include a realistic portrayal of their knowledge, languages, heritages, histories, or governments into the standard curricula. Rather, what schools have had to contend with in terms of materials are false

and pernicious representations of Indigenous peoples as vanishing Canadians, Indians of childhood, savage warriors, and images of redskins, performing Indians, celebrity Indians and plastic Shamans, exotic and spiritual Indians, and problem protestors (Peters, 2012). There is no right for Indigenous peoples to offer their own self-representation in curricula, or their own visions for education, because all of that was decided by elite groups who decide what goes into the curricula, how much, and from what perspective.

The problem, thus far, has been assumed to be about enhancing the integration of Indigenous children into school cultures so that they can learn Canadian curricula. The education system has not yet ensured that non-Indigenous children develop an accurate understanding of the Indigenous peoples in Canada and their knowledge systems, much less who is their neighbour. Instead, education systems perpetuate a biased construction of the strength of colonialism posing as globalism, Eurocentric institutions, economic survival of the nation, cultural institutions, and reasoned democracy alongside the idea that Indigenous peoples are primitive, uneducated, justly conquered people who would have been assimilated long ago but for their cultural backwardness. This is the discursive legacy of museums of anthropology and regional and local history.

The educational discourses for analyzing the problems and the experimental strategies for change have created several eras and narratives around culturalism. Culturalism is a strong and influential tradition in Indigenous education. Culturalism is a complex mix of ideologies, discourses, and practices that serve to legitimate Eurocentrism in its many forms of scholarship, law, and social practices so as to make them invisible to those who benefit from them. Culturalism, like other similar terms such as cultural racism, has developed strategies that mask its Eurocentric foundations and purposes of education and its privileged consciousness and perspectives. Informed by the assumption of superiority, culturalism is a strategy of “othering” that effectively dismisses and de-legitimizes diverse thought and values, knowledge and heritage, treaties and rights, and culture (McConaghy, 2000).

Cultural transmission and socialization, societal restructuring through assimilation and integration, empowering communities through self-determination, counter-hegemonic, anti-racist, anti-oppressive, post-structural, post-modern, and postcolonial discourses have offered diverse theoretical lenses of analysis of situations involving Indigenous children and youth. Depending on the agents of the lens and perspectives, Indigenous education has been analyzed extensively and criticized widely over the past fifty years by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, educators, policy analysts, and administrators. Yet the core issues of how student successes are identified and measured, or by what methodology or approaches successes will be achieved, remain elusive.

In designing meaningful and honourable education for Indigenous people

in the 21st century, the need for an adequate and relevant educational program that recognizes, first and foremost, cognitive imperialism and its multiple strategies and replaces it with reconciliation through affirmation of the diverse heritages, consciousnesses, and languages of Aboriginal peoples. The next measure is for a trans-systemic evaluation of both Indigenous knowledges and Euro-Canadian knowledges and how they can be framed so that neither is entirely lost but sustained by a new cognitive framework for curriculum, systems, and training.

Where Indigenous knowledge or epistemology survives, it is transmitted through the Indigenous languages. Aboriginal languages in Canada provide a direct and powerful means of understanding the legacy of Aboriginal knowledges and provide deep and lasting cognitive bonds, which affect all aspects of Aboriginal life. Through sharing a language, Aboriginal people create a shared belief of how the world works and what constitutes proper action. The sharing of these common ideals creates a collective cognitive experience for tribal societies that is understood as Aboriginal or Indigenous knowledge systems. Indigenous knowledges are diverse learning processes that come from living intimately with the land, working with the resources surrounding that land base, and the relationships that it has fostered over time and place. These are physical, social, and spiritual relationships that continue to be the foundations of its world views and ways of knowing that define their relationships with each other and others. Indigenous elders have transmitted the functions and knowledge inherent to their living on the land and made clear that what the land reveals is that all things are interconnected, it is sacred, and our people must be stewards of its continued protection.

The next chapters will begin to expose, elaborate, question, and critique these Eurocentric assumptions as the foundation that failed First Nations education. By reviewing the current systems of education and how they have defined diversity, educational discourses within systems of racism and cognitive imperialism, I assert that discourses of achievement, diversity, and inclusion have not been successful because educators have assumed that the problem resides in Aboriginal students, in what is projected onto them as discourses of lack of capacity rather than on the operating assumptions and structures of the Eurocentric system that hides its power and privilege in whiteness, and ignores complicities with dominance, difference, and disadvantage. The next chapter will start with an overview of the historical foundations of First Nations education, highlighting some events and processes leading to the treaties, especially as experienced by Mi'kmaq. It will then focus on the treaty process, and the British sovereign arrangements with First Nations, as well as address the colonial apparatus underlying assimilative Eurocentric education.

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