

The International
JOURNAL
of
LEARNING

Not Just Adding Aboriginal Contents to a Non-
Aboriginal Curriculum

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VOLUME 12, NUMBER 10

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEARNING
<http://www.Learning-Journal.com>

First published in 2005/2006 in Melbourne, Australia by Common Ground Publishing Pty Ltd
www.CommonGroundPublishing.com.

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ISSN: 1447-9494 (print), 1447-9540 (online)
Publisher Site: <http://www.Learning-Journal.com>

The INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEARNING is a peer refereed journal. Full papers submitted for publication are refereed by Associate Editors through anonymous referee processes.

Typeset in Common Ground Markup Language using CGCreator multichannel typesetting system
<http://www.CommonGroundSoftware.com>.

Not Just Adding Aboriginal Contents to a Non-Aboriginal Curriculum

Preparing Saskatchewan Teachers for the Rising Aboriginal School Population

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Abstract: By 2016, more than 40% of Saskatchewan's students will be of Aboriginal origin according to Statistics Canada. Educators will face the challenge to meet the educational needs of the rising Aboriginal population. The dual goal of reinforcing Aboriginal identity and to provide training necessary to survive in the so-called modern world, introduced by the Assembly of First Nations in 1973, points towards a cultural basis. Emphasizing this cultural basis, this presentation shows an example of how Aboriginal education concepts can be incorporated in teacher training programs. Integration of Aboriginal education is discussed from an Aboriginal cultural basis with mainstream theory and concepts explained into it rather than using the usual approach of fitting Aboriginal concepts into mainstream theory.

Keywords: Aboriginal Content

An Introduction

When I was Young

When I was young, it seemed that life was so wonderful, a miracle, oh it was beautiful, magical. (Supertramp 1979)

MANY A STORY starts with the words *once upon a time*, setting the time frame for the tale that follows, saying that the times told in the story are over. My story, which I partly quote from my Doctor of Philosophy dissertation (Witt 1998), will start with the words *when I was young*, which I borrowed from *The Logical Song* by the rock group *Supertramp* (1979), indicating that, as I am still alive now, the time when the story began is, of course, still impacting my behaviour and the way I understand the world today. It is also the first reference to the topic, education in general and Aboriginal education in particular, directly referring to education at home, the part of education that is so often overlooked in the discussions on how to meet educational needs of culturally diverse people because the educational needs are unfortunately mostly only interpreted as *knowledge* to be learned, which usually translates into contents of curricula. Yet, home education is not only the first education for the human being, it also creates the basis for any formal education as the cultural identity of a person has a direct impact on learning methodologies, the way knowledge is processed. And this means that a teacher needs to build a personal relationship with every individual student, at least to the extent that s/he knows and understands the student's identity, in order to be able to transmit the knowledge

s/he is supposed to teach in school. Or, as it refers to non-Aboriginal teachers teaching Aboriginal students, the teachers would

have to learn about the first language and culture of *any* child they taught – and would have to take account of these in their teaching. (Leavitt 1995, p. 126)

That relationship can start with sharing one's identity. I see the custom I observed with many Aboriginal people in North America of introducing themselves at the beginning of any communication by quoting on their lineage, as Eber Hampton, a member of the Chickasaw Nation, starts his paper on Aboriginal Education (1995, p. 5), as reference to this awareness that any communication, and thus also teaching, is only possible when the persons involved get a glimpse into each other's identity. In my case this introduction starts as:

Although I was born in Painten, Bavaria, I grew up as a Silesian, being born to Irmgard Witt (nee Horn), originally from the ethnically more German Lower Silesia, and her husband Werner Witt, originally from the ethnically more Slavic Upper Silesia.

This introduction should lead to some understanding on the complexity of personal identity, which also includes what is called *post memory*, my memory of what my people have been before my own birth, related to me by parents, grand parents, relatives and the home environment as a whole. It should also set the stage for the awareness that my worldview was developed in the time *when I was young*, and any learning that followed was processed through this understanding, my cultural basis, meaning that the



success of *formal education* was directly dependent on either the closeness of the teaching I received to my own cultural understanding, or my ability to interpret contents transmitted by culturally different forms of understanding into my own. It should also not be surprising that this paper is very personal as the other point I want to make is that education is understood as a personal matter connected to and based on one's personal identity, and practised through personal relationship between teacher and learner as the following two quotes on Attawapiskat (Swampy Cree) elders should underline:

You have to be patient and have time with the education of children. Always trust your relationship first. (John Mattinas, quoted from Witt 1998, p. 252)
Traditionally parents would start to teach their children at a young age.
Parents were around their children all the time. They had a tight relationship...
(John Hookimaw, quoted from Witt 1998, p. 252)

But then they sent me Away

But then they sent me away to teach me how to be sensible, logical, responsible, practical.

Won't you please, please tell me what I've learned, I know it sounds absurd, but please tell me who I am (Supertramp 1979) Wer bin i dann, hob I me g'frogt, wo kimm i eigentlich her (Norbert Witt 2003)
Being sent to school at age six was for me a much more traumatic experience than for my Native Bavarian peers, as when *they sent me away* I did not only leave my save home environment, but from now on my new adult mentors also related to me in a rather different way, based on different values, as I was used to. The difference in worldview learned at home to that taught in formal education, and, in my case, also experienced by myself in the ethnically different environment I grew up in outside my home, led to identity problems, arising when expectations by the society in and assumptions about the growing up person are different from the identity and values of the family the person is born into. In my case it led to resistance to the formal education I was supposed to receive in school with the consequence of eventually dropping out. And that scenario refers directly to the situation most Aboriginal youth find themselves in. I eventually overcame my identity crisis, completing my formal education at night school and later university, eventually being able to accept my cultural basis and processing any additional education through the lens of my worldview, which, as I am also a musician, resulted in the song I quoted above with lyrics in my adopted Native tongue, Bavarian, which is neither my mother's nor my

father's tongue, yet is a part of my identity. And it is identity that was brought to the foreground of Aboriginal education by the National Indian Brotherhood (now: Assembly of First Nations) making "reinforcing Indian identity" (NIB 1973) into the first goal of Aboriginal Education.

Again, underlining the importance of a cultural basis in education, I am quoting on Attawapiskat elders' vision of *Aboriginal Education*, emphasizing that Aboriginal Education has to be based on Aboriginal worldviews:

[Nowadays] 'education' is only about white man's way. Life is only seen as material life with commodities. (Shano Fireman, quoted from Witt 1998, p. 252)

We were always adopting white man's way, but this doesn't work. You cannot be half white and half Indian. There is no faith in ourselves anymore, no self-esteem. (John Mattinas, quoted from Witt 1998, p. 249)

It seems that children started to change when they started to go to school here on the reserve. Our way of life is not taught there.

(Mary Wabano, quoted from Witt 1998, p. 252)

Particularly in Saskatchewan, the province with the in Canada highest percentage of Aboriginal people among its citizens, teachers are then faced with this seemingly impossible task of reinforcing identity of their Aboriginal students in the multicultural classroom. The University of Regina therefore tries to incorporate an *Aboriginal Education Perspective* in its professional studies classes, which takes into account that successful teaching of Aboriginal students has to go beyond just adding Aboriginal contents, having to consider identity of the culturally different student. And that means that teachers have to be familiar with and have an understanding of the cultural background of their Aboriginal students. The university thus acknowledges the existence of a valid Aboriginal education system and by this moves away from a dominant education paradigm that Reagan (2005, p. 5) calls *epistemological ethnocentrism*. In this, western paradigm "education" has been equalled with "schooling" and any indigenous practices in education were therefore either ignored or have "been reduced to the study of socialization and acculturation ... left to anthropologists and others" (Reagan 2005, p. 6), rather than situating them within educational discourse.

Education and Identity – The Goal of Aboriginal Education

The Human Capital Theory

The primary motivation of looking into Aboriginal Education in more depth are of economic nature, considering the basis of increasing discussions about Aboriginal Education in Saskatchewan being population statistics which point out that the dramatic growth of Aboriginal population in the province will lead to future economic problems if education of that growing part of the province's population is not seriously attended to. According to those statistics "by the year 2011, approximately one-third of the school population will be of Aboriginal ancestry" and "by 2015, 46% of students entering Kindergarten will be of Aboriginal ancestry" (<http://www.statcan.ca>). The connection to the province's economy is made with the indication towards labour force reserve, pointing out that "60% of First Nations population were labour force age in 1991 and it is projected to increase to 71% by 2041" (<http://www.otc.ca>). Education interpreted within this context points towards an analysis within the human capital theory that "conceptualizes education and training as investments which are expected to produce a future return for the individual and for society", based not only on the conception that "Native peoples' economic well being and labour force status would improve markedly if only more Indians completed high school and post-secondary studies" (Wotherspoon & Satzewich 2000, p. 113), but also on the view that the province's economy would suffer if one third of its population is not adequately prepared for entering the labour force. Seen within this context, the contents of education, the knowledge to be taught, would mostly depend on the needs of the economy, which desires to utilize an *educated* labour force. On this basis, the need for successful education of Aboriginals is then easily understood, but the questions why after about two hundred years of official Aboriginal education in Canada the goal of integrating Aboriginal people by way of *education* is still not reached, why Aboriginal people seem to resist education offered to them by mainstream, and finally how to deliver successful education to the growing Aboriginal population, remain unanswered.

The first thought coming to mind is that education has to be more than just catering to the economy of the country. And Wotherspoon & Satzewich (2000) indeed point out that "despite its common sense approach to the notion that educational and social status should be linked, a human capital approach to native education is severely limited" (p. 115), which seems to indicate both that the intent of education goes beyond economical considerations and that

education of Aboriginal people might not at all have been intended to improve their own economic status.

Character Education and the Cultural Basis

To the first statement, that the educational basis extends beyond economical considerations, Wotherspoon & Satzewich (2000) explain that the approaches to use education for satisfying economic needs "tend to reduce education to a matter of economic concern, thereby undermining the significance of formal education to character formation and human development" (p. 115). In the first quarter of last century Durkheim already points out that "education is in the nature of things as applicable to the moral as to the intellectual elements of culture" (Durkheim, 1961 edition, p. 105), thus defining education as cultural activity and both knowledge and moral (character) as cultural elements. And in this context education of children who are culturally different from the one teaching them becomes complicated because both knowledge and *character* will be interpreted according to cultural definitions, or, as Ayer (2004) makes aware, "education cannot be neutral – it is always put to use in favour of something and in opposition of something else" (p. 31), which in Aboriginal education could mean that *mainstream* interpretations of knowledge and character would be the *favoured* part while the cultural interpretations originating in the child's home environment would be the *opposed* part. The idea of character formation could then state a threat – that of assimilation and destruction of Aboriginal culture(s).

Considering the different culture and values *character* would be interpreted on, the design of Aboriginal education would then necessarily have to differ from education emphasizing both knowledge and values from a different cultural set. Michael Apple (1990), in regards to education in mainstream, capitalist society points out that

along with other mechanisms or cultural preservation and distribution, schools contribute to what has elsewhere been called the 'cultural reproduction of class relations' in advanced industrial societies. (Apple 1990, p. 64).

This contribution of education to *cultural reproduction of class relations* offers a possible explanation why Aboriginal people resisted the education delivered to them by the state, as their desire would, naturally, be to reproduce their own society rather than the one represented by mainstream education, which is also expressed by the Attawapiskat elders I quoted above. In a society where, as the Anishnawbe elder Art Solomon puts it, "women are the

heart of the nation, the keepers of culture” (Turpel 1991, p. 175), and which, as Boyko (1998) points out, are matriarchal and politics and education are tied to spiritual awareness (p. 193), character formation would be interpreted through gender roles that are different from the ones mainstream values are based on. Gregory Cajete, a Tewa from New Mexico, therefore refers to the importance of gender and the cultural basis in modern Aboriginal education:

‘Mitakuye oyasin’, we are all related, we are all of community, and in engendering the educational structures and processes to pass on to the next generation, we honour what is most human in each of us. (Cajete 2000, p. 87)

The phrase *what is most human in each of us* refers to character education, which should be based on how the people themselves, and not on how a different cultural group would interpret humanity.

And at this point *education* can state a problem when the one offering it refers to different cultural values than the one s/he is offering it to. This also raises the question about the motivation of the colonizing, now mainstream, society to look into Aboriginal education at all. What was the initial purpose behind it? We should not forget that, before the state saw the urge of *educating* them, Aboriginal peoples had their own education systems, based on their spiritual worldviews, with the goal to pass on their worldview to future generations, so that they could live what the Cree call *pimaatosowin*, the good life, the life as it was planned out by the Great Mystery.

Interpreted in this context, human development and character formation are linked to worldview and cultural understanding, which explains why Aboriginal education has to be different from mainstream education if we take both goal of education and its success serious.

And success in education would be an issue for those who are training to become teachers. Education students who are being prepared to teach in multicultural classrooms would then have to be made aware that character formation is not so much presented by the contents taught, thus the inclusion of Aboriginal contents cannot be the sole answer, but that they are taught in a more hidden way by methodologies used and the structure of both the institution they are teaching in and the curriculum they have to follow. What is needed then is the awareness of this hidden curriculum, knowledge of culture of the children to be taught, and flexibility in using teaching strategies the culturally different child can respond to.

The question I asked above, why, when following the human capital theory, education of Aboriginal people after approximately two hundred years has still not changed the social condition of Aboriginal people could then partly be answered as being the

failure of mainstream education to get through to the Aboriginal child due to ignoring the cultural basis that influences character building and processing of knowledge.

How does one consider this cultural basis without changing one’s own though? To answer this question, as it is done later on in this paper, we first will have to agree that a definition of *Aboriginal Education* will differ depending on which cultural context it was developed in and which purpose it was supposed to serve.

The approach nowadays most commonly suggested and utilized is to offer the same education to everybody, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike. However, following through with offering education to Aboriginal children that is equal to education to other children in the classroom would necessarily mean that for Aboriginal children, who received an education at home referring to a different cultural basis, character formation in the mainstream sense translates into character change, as the values *character* is interpreted on differ from those held up in their homes. For Aboriginal people this would mean assimilation, letting go of their own interpretations and worldviews.

Different Interpretations of Aboriginal Education

History and Mainstream Definitions

On the non-Aboriginal side, as education did not lead to improvement of social conditions of Aboriginal people over so many years, we will have to ask if that improvement was at all intended or if there was another agenda. Wotherspoon & Satzewich (2000) offer one explanation by suggesting that

Aboriginal education was understood as instrument of domination, which presents a sharp contrast to human capital theory’s claim that schooling is a vehicle for social mobility. (p. 116)

In terms of assimilating Aboriginal peoples into mainstream society, there should be no doubt that this was actually the goal of Aboriginal Education, as the Office of the Treaty Commissioner points out that in the relations between the newly formed state of Canada to the Aboriginal population

one key problem was that Canada did not enact laws to implement the treaties, but rather relied on policies guided by the *Indian Act*, policies aimed at assimilation. (<http://www.otc.ca>)

People who believe in linear development might still see assimilation more positive than negative because

it seems to offer advanced *development* to so-called *underdeveloped* peoples. Yet, reality today shows that Aboriginal peoples, rather than progressing socially, have become the poorest part of Canadian society. This raises questions about the intent of Aboriginal education as it was originally defined and offered by the Canadian state. The question would then particularly be what motivated the state to assimilate Aboriginal peoples, how assimilation was interpreted and if thus it was actually intended to offer equal chances to Aboriginal people once they welcomed assimilation into mainstream society.

The indication by Wotherspoon and Satzewich (2000) towards domination already suggests that creating equal chances for the Aboriginal population was not the intention of Aboriginal Education, and the history of Aboriginal Education in Canada confirms that there was a hidden agenda, which, in the light of nation building in North America, was that educational institutions were employed by colonial authorities as a tool to assert their hegemony (Gustafson 1978), or, as Kellough (1980) interprets it, to *liberate* Aboriginal land and resources for capitalist development and to provide a surplus pool of labour. The above mentioned human capital theory is in this case interpreted completely through the needs of the state who wanted both land/resources and the surplus pool of labour, not concerning itself with the advancement of Aboriginal peoples. In the context of Aboriginal education we have to be aware that the by Wotherspoon and Satzewich (2000) mentioned *domination* was intended to *make Indians into citizens* by teaching them how to accept the authority of the state and the place in the lower strata of society they were assigned in it.

To understand the relations to Aboriginal peoples in Canada we then have to take a short look into the historical context, which I will offer below based on Wotherspoon and Satzewich's (2000) summary, being aware that racism has played a role from the beginning. For Aboriginal people, the newcomers to their country turned out to be a threat to their existing social systems, and

the very fact of contact had altered social and material relations. Racism was often institutionally embedded in social and economic relations, like regulated divisions in trade and the multi-tiered pricing system of the Hudson's Bay Company (Bourgeault 1988, pp. 50/51).

Nevertheless, Aboriginal people were needed for the fur trade as middlemen to give the companies access to the interior of the country and to Aboriginal trappers that produced the pelts. In terms of education there was no need for the colonial powers to plan any Aboriginal education, as at that time Aboriginals were self-reliant and Aboriginal ignorance about

unjust social and economic relations, which they might recognize when being educated in the newcomers' sense, were of economic advantage for the non-Aboriginal companies.

The reasons for the change in relationship to the former allies in trade and war was that by the 1820s the fur trade, the economic foundation of the British and French colonies, was established in a way that Indians were not needed as middlemen any longer. Yet, their land was needed for further development. Wotherspoon & Satzewich (2000) interpret this chapter of the start of Aboriginal education made necessary by changing relations to Aboriginal peoples on the basis of Aboriginal peoples having lost their usefulness to the colonizing powers:

As Indians' utility as Indians was vanishing, it became imperative either to marginalize native peoples or to seek assimilation into the cultural mainstream. Both options were pursued, although the latter became official state policy. (p. 117).

With assimilation in mind, the goal of education was, however, not to teach the necessary skills for survival in the colonial society but primarily to change the cultural basis of Aboriginal education, which is now to be anchored in the values of the colonial society. The goal of Aboriginal education thus originally was to educate the Indian out of the Indian child, which is clearly stated in this early 20th century note on Aboriginal education:

The task we have before us is to win over the Indian children by sympathetic interest and a firm, kind, guiding hand; there is no other way

The foundation must be in the development of character – learning is a secondary consideration. (Ferrier 1906, p. 13 and 15)

This task of changing character and culture of the Aboriginal child was eventually executed in three phases:

- Boarding Schools to remove traditional alternatives
- Industrial Schools for further character formation that favours integration as citizens of the state,
- Indian Day Schools (on reserve) to complete assimilation into European culture and employment patterns (Wotherspoon & Satzewich 2000, p 120)

However, education Aboriginals received from the state was not intended to make them equal to non-Aboriginal people in society, but concentrated on preparing them for employment in the lower strata of society. And even this goal lost its significance for economic development in the "context of massive labour recruitment in Europe and the United States

early in the 20th century” (Barman, Hebert, & McCaskill 1986, pp. 8-9).

With the increased immigration of workers (agricultural and industrial) from Europe, the importance of Aboriginal people as possible labour force decreased, which put Aboriginal Education on the back burner. Thus, in 1909, federal administration of Indian Affairs was reorganized to emphasize functions of population management and the facilitation of economic development by non-Native enterprises on Indian and northern lands, and “Native education policy reflected the broader strategy of confinement of Indians on reserves and isolated lands” (Wotherspoon & Satzewich 2000, p. 122). This did not change throughout the first quarter of the twentieth century as

although the Indian Act was amended in 1919 to make schooling compulsory for Aboriginal children, schooling was restricted to a maximum age Aboriginal children were entitled to receive education, while individual progress was retarded by provisions to hold classes only on a half-day basis. (Stevenson 1991, p. 222).

Consequently, Aboriginal children “rarely advanced beyond the early elementary grades” (Barman, Hebert, & McCaskill 1986, p. 11). With the new education policy, Residential Schools, which combined half days of instruction with chores and practical training, replaced boarding and industrial schools (Wotherspoon & Satzewich 2000, p. 124). The state partly withdrew from Aboriginal education even financially, as the chores for the children included work on school farms to finance the schools. This was not considered child labour but preparation for Life (Advisory committee on Indian Affairs in B.C. 1951, p. 2).

In the middle of last century, Aboriginal education was again put on the agenda and the goal of assimilation then seemed to increasingly stress equality in education again, which meant that the federal government pulled back from Aboriginal education, trying to transfer education altogether to the provinces, which had authority over education of the non-Aboriginal population already. With an amendment to the Indian Act in 1951 the federal government entered into joined agreements with the provinces and local school boards encouraged Aboriginal children to attend provincial schools, sometimes by direct intervention in parenting, as it was done in the residential school era already. Yet, the residential schools which had been so crucial in altering social relations among native communities gradually gave way to a less rightly bounded but equally punitive system of control conducted by armies of social workers, health care workers, education specialists

and civil servants. (Wotherspoon & Satzewich 2000, p. 127)

With the integration of Aboriginal education into the education system of the country, the state seemed to finally concentrate on actually creating equal chances for Aboriginal people in society. However, as Johnston (1983) analyzes it, although well meant, the efforts of those workers to deliver *better* education to Aboriginal children contributed to a further destruction of social life on reserves, as children were still taken out of their communities for (re-) education. Altogether, although the level of education did increase,

the native child encountered several barriers including language and cultural differences, teachers who were insensitive to or lacked cultural training related to aboriginal concerns, and Eurocentric curricula and material. (Burnaby, 1982, p. 20)

In view to the social status of the general population of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, Aboriginal education has failed in the forms it was offered, although individuals might have benefited from the education they received. The benefits were that individuals used the education they received to analyze the oppression it was meant to justify, and, as Haig-Brown (1988, p. 26) points out, using the example of the Kamloops Residential School in British Columbia, knowledge and strength gathered in surviving the ordeal of re-education have “led to today’s work in education by Native people throughout British Columbia” (p. 126). Nevertheless, their *survival* was based on them holding on to their traditional values, which should underline that the ability to utilize knowledge Aboriginal individuals gained by the residential school education came about because of their strong identity, which enabled them to process the transmitted content in a way they could utilize it. Even in this case, education had value not because it was based on mainstream culture but despite of this fact.

To this point, however, the question of the cultural basis of Aboriginal education, which was altered since the state offered formal education to Aboriginals, had not been a consideration in any of the programs, and Aboriginal communities and parents had little or no involvement at all in the formal education of their children.

Concluding this paragraph, we have to be aware of both definition and intent of education offered to Aboriginal peoples. Historically, the initial intent was not to advance Aboriginal peoples socially but rather to dominate them and to have access to their lands. Although the intent seemed to alter later with the attempt to offer the same education to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, the result did not change dramatically, and altogether, Aboriginal education in Canada has not led to changing the poor social

conditions Aboriginal people are still experiencing. In this way, Aboriginal education has turned out to be a failure and we will have to look into the causes of this failure, meaning that Aboriginal education needs a new approach and can definitely not be based on the education approach that had failed before, even when the approach has slightly altered by now offering so-called Aboriginal contents in the curricula. The problem seems to be in the definition of Aboriginal education, which still emphasizes assimilation and by that expresses that Aboriginal people still have to *catch up* to the rest of society, a definition that seems to stress that the failure of education is sought in the Aboriginal peoples' insistence to stay true to their own worldviews. By my own definition, the *Aboriginal* is still left out of Aboriginal education, as knowledge and its interpretation is still dominated by an education system that presents itself as culturally neutral. For more than a century this kind of education contributed to the destruction of Aboriginal cultures by re-educating their children and in fact prevented rather than promoted social development. Aboriginal education was defined within these parameters. If Aboriginal education was indeed targeting the advancement of Aboriginal people, we would, logically, have to change the basis of definition, and in the quest for a basis for Aboriginal education, we would have to look towards Aboriginal definitions and try to understand Aboriginal peoples' own interpretations of education.

Aboriginal Definitions

By the late 1960s the then Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau tried to reinterpret the relations between Canada and her Aboriginal population by aggressively trying to phase out treaty relations and to finalize assimilation of First Nations into Canadian society, which would eventually cancel all the treaty rights Aboriginal people still referred to. In 1973, the National Indian Brotherhood (now: Assembly of First Nations) responded to this advance with the policy paper *Indian Control of Indian Education* defining the goals of Aboriginal Education as

- reinforcing Indian identity, and
- to provide the training necessary for making a good living in modern society (National Indian Brotherhood 1973, p. 3)

With the indication towards Indian identity, the cultural basis of Aboriginal education was brought to the attention in discussions of Aboriginal education for the first time, emphasizing that not only did Aboriginal people have their education systems before colonization but also that from now on they intended to emphasise an Aboriginal perspective on so-called modern, formal education as well. By this

new definition of Aboriginal education, the goal of assimilation into mainstream society, which had been in the foreground since Aboriginal education became a matter of the state, seemed to have been cancelled altogether, at least in theory. Aboriginal education became more than education for Aboriginal people by an education system that presents itself as culturally neutral but, in fact, gears towards reproduction of what Apple (1990) calls capitalist society. Since 1973, Aboriginal people have reclaimed the education of their own children now emphasizing that, due to the different cultural basis, Aboriginal education is necessarily different from mainstream education. With control over education eventually having been transferred to the First Nations by the 1990s, Aboriginal education was redefined as education with an Aboriginal cultural basis and with the goal to teach and reproduce Aboriginal societal values.

Although there are still doubts about *standards* and *quality* of Aboriginal education as compared to mainstream, the idea of Aboriginal people being responsible for the education of their own children seems to have been largely accepted, at least the education offered to Aboriginal children in their own communities (on reserve). However, reality is that over 50% of the Aboriginal population meanwhile live in the cities and their children attend public schools. In order to include them and their educational needs in the sense of the Assembly of First Nation's definition of Aboriginal education with the goal of reinforcing Aboriginal identity, Aboriginal education will have to be discussed and defined from a different level that allows the inclusion of Aboriginal children in multicultural classrooms.

And at this point I want to refer back to my introduction. During her talk on traditional medicine, Janice Longboat (2005), a Mohawk elder, pointed out the existence of an Aboriginal education system parallel to the so-called formal education when she said: "I went to two universities. The first one was the university of the universe". With *the university of the universe* she, of course, refers to Aboriginal education she received at home by her mother and grandmothers, following the tradition of observing nature and interpreting natural occurrences into human society, and explaining the universe through the spiritual worldview of her people. The Cree-Metis psychologist Joe Couture (1991b) refers to the same practice of observing nature, calling this kind of education

primal experience [which is]... centred in the pervasive, encompassing reality of the Life Force, manifest in "laws" – the Laws of Nature, the Laws of Energy, or the Laws of Light. (Couture 1991b, p. 208)

Continuing that “I am glad I went there first because only by these teachings could I understand the other” Longboat (2005) confirms the point I made in the introduction that the first education at home will form structures of learning and understanding, which means for Aboriginal education that the culture the individual grew up in is the only means for the Aboriginal child to process and understand *the other* knowledge taught at school, no matter if s/he is taught in a reserve school or in a public school. Similarly, Hampton (1995) emphasizes the importance of Aboriginal education he received at home for his understanding of the world:

No aspect of a culture is more vital to its integrity than its means of education. As I have been taught, nourished, and sustained by my culture, so it is my duty and privilege to transmit it. I value my Anglo education and respect its necessity and power in this society, but my deepest values and my view to the world were formed within an Indian culture. (Hampton 1995, p. 7)

Hampton interprets mainstream education clearly as an add-on of contents, pointing out that values and worldview (the philosophy behind education including the way to learn etc.) were received by his Aboriginal education. This means that the basis of his education is the culture of his father.

The act of teaching is also understood in a different way. The location of *knowledge* is the cosmos, what Longboat (2005) calls the universe, and it is accessible to every human being. The Cree educator Willie Ermine (1995) explains how knowledge can be accessed by introspection, which gives the teacher in Aboriginal education more the role of a helper to access the knowledge the child already has within rather than that of the carrier of knowledge who puts it into the child from without:

The being in relation to the cosmos possessed intriguing and mysterious qualities that provided insights into existence. In their quest to find meaning in the outer space [the physical world], Aboriginal people turned to the inner space. This inner space is that universe within each person that is synonymous with the soul, the spirit, the self, or the being. (Ermine 1995, p. 103)

This interpretation also connects education to spirituality, which, interpreted as the individual's relationship to *the spiritual*, is as personal as the act of teaching and learning:

The Cree word ‘mamatowisowin’ ... describes the capability of tapping into the life force as a means of procreation. This Cree concept describes a capability ... to be creative. ... For the Cree, ... ‘mamatowan’ refers not just to the self but to the being in connection with happenings. It also recognizes that other life forms manifest the creative force in the context of the knower.

It is experience in context, a subjective experience ... The experience becomes knowledge. (Ermine 1995, p. 104)

As experiences are different, *knowledge* cannot be seen as one absolute but becomes pluralized as well with different people interpreting different knowledges. This view to knowledge and my quoting from different Aboriginal sources (Mohawk, Cree, Chickasaw, Metis) should also underline that the definition of Aboriginal Education will always differ in details depending on the cultural context the individual derives from. This should also include the altering cultures of Aboriginal peoples who moved to the cities. Nevertheless, when we want to teach Aboriginal children successfully, we have to widen our awareness of different worldviews.

The different views to the world also extend to the view on pedagogy altogether, influencing how the learning process is interpreted by the learner, and thus how motivation to learn and self-confidence is built. During a course on the cultural implications of teaching English and Native languages to Native Indian and Inuit children offered at Concordia University in Montreal in the summers of 1987 and 1988, a teacher from Kahnawake, Quebec contrasted

the English maxim, ‘If at first you don’t succeed, try, try, and try again,’ with the Mohawk version, ‘Watch and listen and do it right’. In the one culture, all the attention is on the goal; the assumption is that it will be difficult to attain, but the obstacles are worth overcoming. In the other culture, eyes and ears attend to what is happening now; this is the desirable [Native] strategy, successful in and of itself. (Leavitt 1995, p. 135)

While the earlier quoted references to nature observation, including the sometimes observed conception of “time as sequence rather than duration” (Leavitt 1995, p. 125), should provide a clue of how certain teaching subjects, like science, can be perceived and understood in different ways, the above mentioned maxim or philosophy refers to different perceptions of life facts that would require a different approach, or strategy in teaching, which Leavitt (1995) describes as “collaboration between children and adults, storytelling and oral history” (p. 125).

Finally, connecting to Ermine's (1995) description of the source of knowledge, education is also spiritual. The connection to the spiritual has to be understood as the non-dualistic worldview that does not differentiate the physical from the spiritual world:

Non-dualistic thinking develops a physical image of the spiritual. The thoughts of the “world” are [like] creatures, and processes of growth

and becoming, and not abstract concepts and explanations. (Couture 1991a, p. 60)

To round up the image of Aboriginal education, I take the above examples of storytelling and oral history as one vehicle to summarize a possible Aboriginal definition of education. Janice Longboat (2005) described the storytellers who made their rounds through the whole community throughout the year not only as educators but also as vital part for survival of both economy and community because by steadily incorporating their observations in the different parts of the community they also gave reports of happenings and resources in the other parts of the community. Education, as she interprets it, has sharing at its centre, sharing of knowledge, advice and assistance. Sharing is always mutual, which, in the context of education, means that the roles of teachers and students are interchangeable. Referring to Ermine (1995) I also conclude that in the Aboriginal perception there are multiple knowledges which, when shared, will lead to mutual benefits and, as knowledge can be accessed from within, education is connected to spirituality, is individualized, and meaning can only be extracted when *knowledge* is interpreted by reference to the self and to one's personal experience. This means that the individual will always be her/his main teacher. To underline *the personal* in this process of interpreting meaning into the *facts* we are taught, I quoted on my personal experience at the beginning of this paper.

Aboriginal education also has to be understood as the education children receive at home, which constitutes their thinking structures and their understanding of the world. For the wider context of Aboriginal education I want to point out that definitions of Aboriginal education can only come from Aboriginal peoples themselves and that they will differ depending on the cultural context they are developed in.

At this point I also want to include the topic of gender I mentioned in the introduction, which, in the *modern* context of discussions of *equality*, becomes important for education, as education determines the future of the people. In most Aboriginal societies, education is women's domain, and, interpreted from their view of an egalitarian society, this responsibility of educating the children, passing on culture and way of life, constitutes a powerful position within that society. The Lakota anthropologist Bea Medicine thus refers to women power, saying that

our power is obvious. Women are primarily socializers of our children. Culture is transmitted primarily through the mother. The mother teaches languages, attitudes, beliefs, behaviour patterns etc. (Halder 2002, p. 2)

Similarly, the Navajo artist Mary Morez points out the status of grandmothers in her society:

In our society, the woman is the dominant figure who becomes the wise one with old age. It's a female society, you know. But the Navajo woman never demands her status. She achieves, earns, accomplishes it through maturity. (Halder 2002, p. 2)

As keepers of culture, women determine *the right way*, which is reflected in stories like the *White Buffalo Calf Maiden* (Marshall 2002, pp. 17-18), who brought the sacred pipe to the Lakota, or *Copper Woman* (Cameron 1991, pp. 25-35) where woman is shown as the first human being from whose substance (mucus, tears, saliva) together with the substance of Mother Earth (sand), man was created.

Reality in the modern Aboriginal family might be interpreted differently, but this fact only underlines the point why we have to start discussing Aboriginal education. The changing *reality* is created by the worldview that is taught in formal education, which, being formal and official, is given far more weight than the traditional worldviews that are certainly still taught in the families albeit they are not lived within a society that feels it has to orient itself according to the vision of those who educate their children.

The challenge of Aboriginal education in the formal, official setting – in schools – is to conserve the traditional philosophy and worldview, which constitutes the educational basis for those who grow up in it, despite being educated in a different, yet dominant cultural setting. In other words, the question is how to reinforce Aboriginal identity, the identity that was built at home from birth to entering the school, within an education setting that bases in a different culture.

How to Prepare Teachers

The relevance of Aboriginal education for teacher training is obvious in view to the population statistics I quoted on at the beginning. Due to the fact that in Saskatchewan the Aboriginal population will soon make one third of the total population, Aboriginal education has become a priority in the province. Teachers have to deal with the challenge of a rising Aboriginal student population in their classrooms because, as already mentioned, more than half of the Aboriginal children will not attend schools in Aboriginal communities but public schools in the cities they live. Success in Aboriginal education, as discussed above, will be dependent on the teacher's ability to mobilize the students' own learning properties, which, as introduced as educational goal by the Assembly of First Nations' education paper (NIB 1973), are connected to identity. When Aboriginal identity is to be reinforced by education, teachers will play a crucial role, and teachers thus have to be knowledgeable of the identity of their Aboriginal

students and their cultural knowledge. The teaching of Indigenous knowledge in Aboriginal Studies programs and, for the purpose of preparing teachers for educating the growing Aboriginal population, also in education programs seems to point towards a solution:

Universities are obviously purveyors of culture. The attainment of this goal, in programs about and for indigenous students, is understandably conditional on the experience of the faculty itself. Native Studies faculties, knowingly or not, are prime agents of aboriginal culture preservation and development. (Couture 1991a, p. 65)

In terms of school education, preservation of Aboriginal culture and, for the Aboriginal students, reinforcement of Aboriginal identity was thus sought by teaching some Aboriginal history in university courses and adding so-called Aboriginal contents to the existing school curriculum. However, mere adding of *Aboriginal contents*, which might also be interpreted as such from a different cultural point of view, will not be enough to reinforce Aboriginal identity. Knowledge also has to be transmitted in a way that the child understands, which would ideally mean in the way it was transmitted at home and by a person from within this cultural context.

Couture (1991a) attests to culture as basis of knowledge acquisition and learning by pointing out “difficulties of acquiring indigenous knowledge”, which “stem from the nature and requirements of the knowing process itself” (p. 65). Leavitt (1995) refers to the same phenomenon, expanding on possibilities schools would have in educating Aboriginal students by pointing out that the different ways of transmitting knowledge are usually not exploited in school:

Traditional education relies upon ways of knowing, ways of interacting, and ways of using language which are not normally exploited in formal school. The teachers saw not only that these ‘ways’ are the basis of culturally appropriate education for Native children, but also that they offer unique alternatives for meeting the needs of non-Native children. (Leavitt 1995, p. 125)

In order to really reach the Aboriginal child, the teacher would have the responsibility “to look at how a Native child develops in her own culture” because “the child will carry with her the theory of teaching and learning embedded in the native culture” (Leavitt 1995, p. 126), which means that the teacher has to have knowledge of her/his students’ cultures. This does not mean that the teacher has to change her/his own worldview, yet s/he has to be open and try to understand the views of the individuals in the classroom in order to give them the possibility to process the knowledge in their own way.

Referring back to my introduction where I made the statement that for me entering school was a more traumatic experience than for my Bavarian peers because I had to leave my familiar cultural context of how adults related to me altogether, I again connect to the situation of Aboriginal children in mainstream education settings who find themselves in the same situation that knowledge acquisition and relationships change when they enter school:

All traditional Native methods occurred within cultural settings that were characterized by subsistence economies, in-context learning [*holistic* - my emphasis], personal and kinship relations between teachers and students and ample opportunities for students to observe adult role models who exemplify the knowledge, skills, and values being taught. (Hampton 1995, p. 8)

To show the relevance of these methods for Aboriginal education in general, not only in traditional Aboriginal communities, Hampton (1995) continues that “in attenuated form, many Indian families and communities continue to use these methods to teach their children content from both Indian and Anglo cultures” (p. 8). The mentioning of content of both Anglo and Indian culture to be transmitted in the appropriate Aboriginal way is again an indication that content itself is of secondary consideration while the cultural basis, expressed in structure and methodology used, will have to be attended to first in order to be able to transmit the contents.

Bottom line is that teachers have to be aware of both contents/history and methodology in Aboriginal education in order to be able to teach Aboriginal students successfully. In teacher training programs, possible Aboriginal methodologies can be discussed from the basis of theories students already know and then checking the applicability of education theories like Gardner’s (1983) multiple intelligence theory to the Aboriginal education context. However, as Hampton (1995) also points out, “the lack of theory of Indian education not only hampers research, it also impedes the practice of Indian education” (p. 11), which means that the supposedly Aboriginal methodologies will have to be checked on their authenticity as well before any *binding* conclusions are given to the future teachers who expect success when applying the theory in practice.

Particularly in Aboriginal studies programs, universities also try to transmit Aboriginal knowledge in a more authentic way by inviting guest speakers like storytellers into the courses. We have to be aware though that storytelling as teaching method is not extensively used in the *modern* education context any more and that therefore the contents might have to be discussed after the session in order to make sure that the audience actually grasped the meaning. Nevertheless, the exposure of education students to

teaching methods from a different culture has the purpose to widen awareness and forming understanding of different cultural understandings in the becoming teacher, which will help even in multicultural settings that go beyond Aboriginal education.

The suggested inclusion of Aboriginal perspective in the teacher education program of the University of Regina, which was the basis for this paper, includes both practical, actual applications of Aboriginal education, like storytelling and discussions of theories in order to prepare education students for the challenge of having to reinforce cultural identity in students from a culture other than their own. While first year students (in EPS 100) will hear about history of Aboriginal education and listen to or read Aboriginal stories, which they will also interpret, second year students will discuss Aboriginal education concepts from Aboriginal curricula like *Dene Kede* (North West Territories Education 1993) and try to apply some of them in lesson plans. Third year students then take a look into Aboriginal epistemology as in this paper quoted on Ermine (1995), Couture (1990), Hampton (1995) etc., discussing the readings within critical theory. Some of them are also again exposed to a more authentic Aboriginal education context by participating in cultural camps of Aboriginal communities as their off-campus, outdoor education experience, which is part of the program but does not only take place in Aboriginal culture camps.

The inclusion of these topics in the professional studies classes (EPS) will altogether only be an introduction, yet it gives the education students the tools to expand their awareness of other cultures and to find resources when faced with the challenge of teaching in multicultural classrooms.

Conclusions

Referring back to my introduction, my education started *when I was young*, at home, since I was born into a certain cultural context. This cultural context became the basis for interpreting any additional contents taught in formal education, outside the home. Education has a cultural basis, and the cultural basis of education for the individual is formed at home. And this is where educators have to connect. Saskatchewan's population statistics with a dramatic

rise of the Aboriginal population in the province fuelled the urgency of discussing Aboriginal education due to concerns that the province's economy will suffer if its labour force is not sufficiently educated. In order to make education for Aboriginal peoples successful, teachers not only have to be aware of the history of Aboriginal education in Canada, but also of the reality that Aboriginal education was meant to assimilate Aboriginal peoples, and that altogether this approach has failed as it has not improved the poor social conditions Aboriginal peoples are in, nor did it keep Aboriginal youths in school. The reasons for the high school drop-out rate of Aboriginal youth have to be sought in the way education is offered to them, ignoring the different understanding Aboriginal youths have of education. Education is not culturally neutral, and education with a non-Aboriginal cultural basis can therefore not reinforce Aboriginal identity, the desired goal of Aboriginal education. Identity is, however, the basis for self-confidence and thus for motivation and ability to learn. Thus, it is not enough to just add so-called Aboriginal contents to an altogether non-Aboriginal curriculum that reflects non-Aboriginal values, worldview and methodologies. Teachers in bi-cultural or multicultural classrooms have to have an awareness of their students' cultural backgrounds and knowledge of and willingness to use different methodologies that reflect and support the individual students' cultural bases. The University of Regina is presently adjusting its teacher education program by not only teaching about the history of Aboriginal education but also by discussing and exposing student teachers to Aboriginal epistemology. Teacher training programs will not be able to thoroughly discuss all the different cultural interpretations of possible individuals in a multicultural classroom, or, in the context of Aboriginal education, of all different Aboriginal groups. However, they can raise awareness and give the student teacher some tools with which s/he can adjust to different cultural contexts or understandings. For Aboriginal education to be successful it is not enough to just add a generally defined set of so-called Aboriginal contents but the teacher has to be able to adjust contents and methodologies according to the needs of the culturally different individuals in the classroom.

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