

Urban Aboriginal Economic Development National Network



Anishinaabe Pedagogy: Deconstructing the Notion of Aboriginal Education by Illuminating Local Anishinaabe Pedagogy

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Author Information: This paper began as a course assignment in the fall of 2009. Though writing this paper has helped me illuminate the voice of my people it has also been an exercise in gratitude. I am thankful to those people within my past and present who have given me the time of day to share a story or listen to one. Without this collective space of giving and receiving there is nothing. As Thomas King once said, (2003) "The truth about stories is that's all we are."

Thank you to Dan Thomas, Garry Robson, Myra Laramée, Luke Arquette and Lyna Hart. These are the people whose stories I reference in this paper. There are so many other people that work to bring the good life back to the people through story and though I have not room to mention you, I thank you too. I also give thanks to my family and community; it is from these roots and connections that I draw strength, meaning and a sense of purpose. What I have written in this paper is an articulation of the many discussions we hold within our collective. This paper is but one voice of this living dialogue. Last but not least thank you Barbara McMillan my teacher and friend for encouraging me to write this paper. You have given me that which helps things grow: the time of day. This has been such a meaningful writing assignment. It helped me understand the basis of my commitment to community and education. I hope this story draws more of us into this dialogue.

About the Urban Aboriginal Economic Development Network: The Urban Aboriginal Economic Development National Network is an open and inclusive multi-stakeholder network of researchers and practitioners working in urban Aboriginal and Métis communities. This includes organizations, universities, federal/provincial/municipal and Aboriginal governments, private industry, community groups, and NGO's. The network's focus is on mobilizing economic development knowledge and strengthening organizational capacity.

This paper can be found on the network website: <http://abdc.bc.ca/uaed>

The interdisciplinary field of Aboriginal education continues to be a concern for a number of reasons, not the least of which is defining what the phrase “Aboriginal education” means to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, particularly those involved with teaching and learning. Moreover, in attempts to define Aboriginal education, there has been little attention paid to the distinction between the pedagogy of local First Nations’ cultures and the institutionalized field of “Aboriginal education”. For this reason, *Anishinaabe pedagogy: Deconstructing the notion of Aboriginal education by illuminating local Anishinaabe pedagogy* aims to look more closely at the concept of “Aboriginal education” by considering what contributes to how it is produced/developed and consumed/implemented at the local level. “Aboriginal education” is a modern socially constructed phenomenon that is shaped by Western and Aboriginal learning constructs. In order to reach a deeper understanding of what contributes to Aboriginal education, it is important to look beyond the paired concepts of “Aboriginal” and “education”; terminology that can overshadow contributions at local levels. As a resident of south-central Manitoba, I turn to the local Anishinaabe culture to examine what has been extracted from the life-ways of this cultural community that contributes to what is perceived and being taught as “Aboriginal perspectives” in Winnipeg schools. My intention is to contribute to an understanding of how local and distinct First Nations’ cultures contribute to “Aboriginal education” as a conceptually growing phenomenon in school systems. In so doing, I aim to contribute to the discussion of the meaning of “Aboriginal education” and to illuminate what I consider to be Anishinaabe pedagogy. This provides a backdrop from which the following can be further explored:

- An examination of the importance of understanding local and distinct Aboriginal perspectives;
- The use of traditional ways of knowing, teaching and learning as critical leverage for assessing and evaluating what is being produced and consumed as Aboriginal education;
- A consideration of how to use place-based learning, place consciousness and a storytelling pedagogy to integrate authentic forms of Aboriginal perspectives;
- A forum through which various stakeholders (teachers, curriculum writers, teacher educators, administrators, community members, local knowledge keepers) can engage on a much deeper level as we look at Aboriginal education initiatives within each of our local spaces; and
- Starting points, including frameworks, this could assist with curriculum development and lesson planning initiatives.

The issues and concepts presented in this paper take into consideration the fact that Aboriginal education is a relatively new discipline. It has evolved over the last thirty years in response to the needs of Aboriginal students who struggle within Western systems of education. It is important to understand what has influenced the foundation, focus and content of local Aboriginal education initiatives as they currently exist. My discussion begins with a description of Anishinaabe pedagogy, which has existed for thousands of years, and the relationship between Anishinaabe pedagogy and the socially constructed phenomenon of Aboriginal education. In an attempt to clarify basic distinctions between the two-paired concepts, a bifocal perspective will be utilized. That is, a Western lens and an Anishinaabe lens will be used as filters through which Aboriginal education within Winnipeg’s school systems is critically examined. For example, I utilize this bifocal perspective –as I reflect on what I learned in school that has since been introduced as Aboriginal perspectives.

There are few sources that attempt to define Anishinaabe pedagogy, particularly in a form that can be understood from a basis in Western thought. The worldviews of the Anishinaabe and the Euro-western cultures are fundamentally different. In Anishinaabe culture it is difficult to separate traditions from education, because theory and practice are interwoven animate features (Battiste, 2002, 2004). This interconnection is a characteristic element of the Anishinaabe culture that sets it apart from the precepts of Euro-western structures of education. I will attempt to overcome this difficulty by describing the most common ways of teaching and learning that originate in Anishinaabe culture. I will use my educational, professional, and personal experiences as pathways to lend greater understanding to the basic difference between the Euro western and the Anishinaabe cultures as reflected in the education system. As I move through this process. I will examine the local Aboriginal education initiatives in Winnipeg, Manitoba to describe what is being taken up from our local Indigenous knowledge structures and how this contributes to the shape of Aboriginal education as it takes form in the public schools. In addition, to using an Anishinaabe experiential lens, I also offer the perspective gained from extensive readings of academic literature (see attached), and use other educational paradigms to help differentiate between Western and Aboriginal education structures.

As I look back to my personal experience I am focused on what is problematic with Aboriginal education as it is, and what contributes to notions of Anishinaabe pedagogy that would support curricular integration within the local context of south central Manitoba. I then look to my own learning experiences as a student which first opened me up to notions of Anishinaabe pedagogy. I then look at some broad issues that have proven to be problematic in how we conceive and/or implement Aboriginal education within a Western curricular construction cycle. In so doing it is possible to begin to understand how curriculum is created from its initial starting point to the point it is delivered by teachers. Finally, I aim to identify philosophical and pedagogical frameworks that would support the integration of Anishinaabe pedagogy within Western constructs.

My Work Experience

I turn first to my work experience to begin this discussion and to consider what brought me to a point where I aim to distinguish between Aboriginal education and Anishinaabe pedagogy. I begin by looking pragmatically at my work as an Aboriginal Education consultant. This is a position that requires me to develop content, resources, and professional development learning opportunities that support the integration of Aboriginal people's history, cultures and perspectives within Kindergarten through Grade 12 public schools. I recognize that as an Aboriginal Education consultant many of my own endeavors, like those of classroom teachers, have been experimental. This experimentation is simply due to the fact that Aboriginal education continues to be an emerging discourse within Western forms of schooling. I realize that my position as an Aboriginal Education consultant was created to support the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. Although the roles and responsibilities within this position's history have changed, the major focus has been to support the integration of Aboriginal perspectives into subject area curricula. In attempts to increase my own efficacy within this position, I have, over the years, looked closely at the educational institution in order to know the system's structure

well enough to consider where and how I could effect change through implementation initiatives and integration processes. This inspection raised a number of questions including— one that asked, “Have we been effective in our efforts to merge two ways of knowing and learning that honor the distinction between the two worlds – Western and Anishinaabe?” On reflection, I realize how crucial it is to make distinctions between these two ways of knowing and learning and to recognize how systems of learning and our own pedagogical orientations impact our conceptualizations of curriculum as well as our integration efforts.

What I believe is missing is a clear and distinct understanding of what Aboriginal education is outside of Western thought. To integrate authentic forms of Aboriginal knowledge, teaching, and learning practices, teachers must learn that this represents a different way of knowing, teaching and learning. To support the integration of Aboriginal perspectives in a respectful, responsible and effective manner, Aboriginal Education consultants must consider Aboriginal ways of knowing, teaching and learning as a basis for understanding Aboriginal education. Unfortunately, the term “Aboriginal” is so broad that it often overshadows the existence of Aboriginal peoples within local contexts. For this reason, we must come to deeper notions of Aboriginal education that take into account what exists on both ends (Western and Aboriginal) of an epistemological and pedagogical continuum. To reach a deeper understanding of Aboriginal education as envisioned by Aboriginal peoples, it is necessary to look back to uncover how we have reached this current milestone. We can look into what was conceptualized and negotiated in the area of education for First Nations in Canadian Indian Treaties and consider how this differed from the residential school experience. We can look at what was envisioned in the 1972 position paper “Indian Control of Indian Education”, which held that “[u]nless a child learns about the forces which shape him: the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never really know himself or his potential as a human being.” (Native Indian Brotherhood, 1972). Within such historical records is a voice that represents one side of the Western-Aboriginal continuum/dichotomy. This is the voice I aim to amplify.

As an Aboriginal Education consultant I find myself continually looking to the past, to documents, and to people for guidance to help me more fully understand the answer to the question: “What is Aboriginal education?” In many cases I have attempted to identify the aims and goals of Aboriginal education by reading various national, provincial and divisional documents. In other cases, I have referred to my participation in local, provincial, and national Aboriginal education committees to consider the professional dialogue in which I have been engaged in order to determine common aims, goals and pedagogy. I have also looked to my own experience and interaction with local Aboriginal knowledge structures. I have reflected upon the dialogues within cultural and Aboriginal education community circles that I have heard and contributed to. All of these experiences have illuminated and helped me discover what has been articulated, envisioned, and/or practiced that would guide my efforts to define Aboriginal education. This brings me closer to notions of Anishinaabe pedagogy.

My work has taught me to test my own assumptions. Through research at the graduate level, I have examined how teachers conceptualize Aboriginal education from personal life experiences. I aimed to be critical of my own interpretations in order to be as fair and accurate as possible. This has allowed me to address the meaning of Aboriginal education; it has also

allowed me to test my perceptions of teachers who are actively engaged in integrating Aboriginal perspectives in the classroom. I wanted to consider whether teachers shared the same views I have identified as problematic with Aboriginal education and to learn from their perspectives and experience, to determine how they each brought meaning to notions of Aboriginal education. This has allowed me to “become aware of...unformulated or unsuspected specifications and dimensions of” my perceptions and experiences which turns into a conversational partnership to reveal the limits and possibilities of one’s own interpretive achievements.” (Van Manen, 1990. p76). It is also an example of the practice of Anishinaabe pedagogy at work within the context of Western academia. Moreover, I wanted to determine whether teachers are able to call upon and/or articulate whether they utilized local Indigenous knowledge sources and learning processes to assist with the conceptualization and implementation of Aboriginal perspectives.

In some cases, I found that teachers focused on the collective historical experience of Aboriginal peoples, such as those encountered in residential schools. In other cases, teachers focused upon what could be understood through a common experience by using a social and political lens. I also noticed that it is much more difficult to integrate culture than it is to understand collective experiences. I suggest that this may be owing to the fact that teachers must interact with the Aboriginal community to tap into the cultural knowledge and resources. Within this space, however, there is much diversity in beliefs and practices. It is not always easy to extract these cultural life-ways and integrate them in our schools and classrooms. Furthermore, the scope of Aboriginal continues to be broad and the term itself ambiguous. For example, teachers give examples of the bits and pieces of what they think “Aboriginal” is when they integrated it in their teaching, but overall showed ambivalence and hesitation in defining it. One teacher saw that “Aboriginal” was too broad a concept and referred more to values and worldviews as the basis of Aboriginal education. She saw that in practice it was based on real life experience, which is experimental, and she attempted to empower all learners by utilizing their real-life experiences and connections to bring learning to life.

Seen through a western lens Aboriginal education can be perceived as unpredictable, because it is always in the process of becoming and is continually changing, emerging and taking new shape. It is adaptive, not static. For these reasons, we must continue to engage in philosophical discussions, on micro and macro levels, that will bring clarity to what we mean by Aboriginal education within our schools or classroom so that can refine our focus. However, within such a discussion there are many points of tension to consider.

Issues

To start with, the term “Aboriginal education” is a problematic term as it overshadows the distinct Indigenous knowledge structures that inform our conceptions of Aboriginal education. What is problematic with this term is that it is a socially constructed Western idea, like the invention of “the North American Indian”. The trouble with concepts such as “North American Indian” and “Aboriginal education” is that they are both simulated terms; concepts that can keep us at a distance from historical truths and that can gloss over distinct First Nation/Indigenous identities. Although the word “Aboriginal” provides a common denominator to capture three collective but distinct groups in Canada (Métis, Inuit and numerous First Nations), the term only

came into popular usage in Canada during the 1980's as a collective name used to define the original peoples of North American and their descendents. It is a modern form of racialization. Social scientists have had a long history in categorizing and naming Indigenous peoples, which is entrenched in western practices and world views (St. Denis, 2004, Warner, 2006). In fact, the term "Aboriginal" was created to affirm the unique political and legal relationship the government of Canada has with Aboriginal peoples. I question the sense of using such a term derived from legal and political realms. Moreover, we cannot expect educators to understand the perspectives of distinct First Nations if we do not make them apparent. But, then, whose responsibility is it to illuminate such knowing?

My need to illuminate Anishinaabe pedagogy within local Aboriginal education initiatives was, in part, to recognize what is being taken up from local Anishinaabe culture that supports the integration of Aboriginal education within our public schools. For example, the integration of "The Seven Teachings" has become one of the latest topics to be embraced by a number of schools within Winnipeg. Over a five year period I had seen this Aboriginal education initiative grow and in many cases shape shift from school to school. I noticed that these teachings were being taught and showcased in several schools as the "Aboriginal Seven Teachings" or "The Seven Teachings." In both cases, the titles overshadowed the Anishinaabe origins. Identifying the Anishinaabe Seven Teachings as Aboriginal teachings assumes a Pan-Aboriginal perspective that can mislead students into believing that all Aboriginal peoples across Canada maintain such teachings and that they are all the same, which is simply not true.

Given the resurgence of interest in place and place consciousness, those living in and around Winnipeg should be cognizant of our local Indigenous nations and differentiate between the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe speaking First nations) and the Neheyawak (Cree speaking nations). In comparison, would it not be ridiculous to go to Europe and call the people there "the Europeans" making no distinction between the diversity of nations? The fact is the term "Aboriginal education" continues to overshadow and simplify the diversity that exists amongst Indigenous nations in Canada, especially when our Aboriginal education initiatives do not dig deep enough to acknowledge how local knowledge structures inform our Aboriginal education initiatives. My concern is that the distinct Aboriginal voices that are encapsulated and hidden within such terminology lose their distinct voices when curricula and teachers do not distinguish one Aboriginal group from the next.

What is further problematic, as seen from our collective past, is that non-Aboriginals educated in Manitoba and Canada have already learned about Indigenous people from the lens of Western epistemology; an outsider perspective that is different from multiple Aboriginal/Indigenous ways of knowing. This includes learning that has taken place both within formal and informal learning spaces that include public learning institutions and the mass media. Furthermore, these learning sites have a hand in creating negative stereotypes and developing a misunderstanding of Canada's Aboriginal peoples. For example, Indigenous nations were renamed by archeologists and categorized in cultural area groupings that were based on similarities in their subsistence lifestyles and cultures. Unfortunately, as Indigenous nations were muffled in the telling of their own existence, such descriptions became the reference points for teaching and learning practices that persist today. One wonders if these are the same frames of reference that teachers currently use when they construct Aboriginal education learning

experiences. This is of particular importance since these are the teaching and learning practices that we aim to transform by creating space for the authentic voice and presence of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples to emerge in our educational spaces. If teaching and learning practices continue to be premised on Eurocentric ways of knowing, how then do we allow Aboriginal peoples, more specifically local First Nations and Métis voices, to be the tellers of their own existence, especially within the constructs of modern schooling? For this reason I now find myself needing to acknowledge what informs my own practice as I support the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. This requires that I look deeper, to unearth what lies beneath our local and modern conceptions of Aboriginal education. Locally we would find the pedagogy of the Dakota, Nehayawak (Cree) and Anishinaabe (Ojibwe speaking peoples). My goal is to look beyond notions of Aboriginal education and recognize how the local Anishinaabek knowledge structures inform our Aboriginal education initiatives.

Schooling Experience

So how does local Aboriginal knowledge that comes from Elders and cultural learning institutes (the places where members of a community meet to practice and participate in cultural teaching and learning processes), inform/influence what is produced and consumed as Aboriginal education? In order to understand this relationship, I look to my own schooling experience where I have encountered stories that exposed me to concepts of Anishinaabe pedagogy. It was in school, within my family, or within the Aboriginal community where I learned songs, heard stories or encountered experiences that added to my conception of what is Anishinaabe. In retrospect, these learning experiences contributed to my developing notion of Anishinaabe pedagogy. This learning also contributed to my growing sense of self as an Anishinaabe person. Following are four stories, which help illustrate Anishinaabe epistemology and pedagogy within our local geography.

Dan Thomas' Story-Four Original Laws of the Anishinaabe

The first story was shared with me at Argyle Alternative High School, in a grade 11 history class where Dan Thomas, an Anishinaabe educator and curriculum writer working for the province developing Native Studies curriculum, was invited in as a guest speaker. What I saw was an Aboriginal man sharing a story that has existed amongst the Anishinaabe people since the beginning of time. It was a story about the original laws that were given to the Anishinaabe people, which, if followed, would help them maintain life on “the good red road” or in other words *Mino-Pimatisiwin*; a beautiful path that was left behind by our ancestors. From an educational perspective it made me conscious of my own existence as an Anishinaabe person and anchored me to a geographical location on Mother Earth. This gave me a sense of place as I saw roots that ran deep. I also began to see a distinct nation of people that was hidden in plain sight. This was a critical learning moment for me in many ways, and I knew it wasn't anything like I had experienced before within the context of public schooling. I was used to learning about people in faraway places or through the lens of a distant past. What Dan Thomas brought with him did not come from a textbook. It came from a story that had been passed down from generation to generation. In addition to his story, Dan brought an illustration of symbols, which

included a circle with four quadrants that had a teaching situated in each of its four directions. The first teaching/law was sharing/caring; the second, kindness; the third, honesty; and the fourth, faith. Each of these teachings was accompanied by a symbol that has helped me retain what was shared through them. Each direction has a story to substantiate the meaning of the teaching. Within each teaching Dan used the land and the animals to illustrate our relationship to all things, which also illuminated our relationship to each of the teachings. Today, I still ponder and draw meaning from the images and teachings presented within these stories. These teachings are the basis our cultural communities and they continue to be practiced and maintained as animate features of our culture. The protocols and processes that engage learners incorporate these teachings. And they are interwoven within our ceremonies and other cultural activities.

As I now reflect on this experience I recognize the socialization value of story. Stories challenge learners to take responsibility, to appreciate their choices, and to feel comfortable knowing that they have the power to make choices (as was illustrated in the honesty teaching). The story itself encourages the integration of thinking, feeling and acting. For example, the honesty teaching is illustrated by a tree. The tree represents to each of us our own sense of integrity as we walk this earth. We were told to remember that the trees are a reminder to us that we must walk with honour. The teaching stated that we can walk through life making good or bad decisions, and, although we may think that we can get away with bad decisions, it is each and every one of us who must carry this knowing in our heart and in our mind. So when we walk through life, we can always find a tree that represents how crooked or how straight we have walked. It is teaching about the responsibility to self-regulate our behavior. We must carry ourselves through this physical world and carry our conscience with us. The trees act as a reminder to be moral as we move forward in life. Fundamentally, we must make decisions about our actions. From an Anishinaabe perspective, the act of making decisions is not just a cognitive problem-solving task. It should be a mindful and holistic process that takes into account our emotional, physical, mental and spiritual well-being. We must also consider other people and the world around us. This develops a higher consciousness.

Although the teachings have clear objectives, they are more open-ended in their approach as they rely on the learner to achieve these moral ends within a contemplative state. Each person will have to make hard life decisions that affect not only their own interests, but the interests of other people as well. This is why we must be mindful of our interrelations to all things. As I now see, the educational outcomes were to instill moral values within a socialization context and to understand the humility¹ of one's existence amongst all of creation. Dan's teachings were neither abrasive nor authoritarian. There was learning that occurred that cannot be measured easily using Western means of assessment. In many ways I view these learning experiences as being more important than the content I learned in my history course that year. More importantly, his words were freeing as they created a context within which I had the freedom to choose and to learn from my own life experience. For me, this story was the beginning of a journey that would anchor me to my own life existence.

¹ I must point out that humility is one of the Anishinaabe Seven Sacred Teachings.

Myra Laramee's Story- The Medicine Wheel

The second traditional teaching I learned took place that same year and was delivered by Myra Laramee, an Aboriginal educator who worked at Argyle School. That day she shared teachings about the medicine wheel with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students alike. The medicine wheel is an ancient symbol that originates with First Nations peoples. Today, many First Nations peoples use the medicine wheel as an educational framework upon which to understand the many learning theories that derive from the First Nations of Turtle Island/North America. There are layers upon layers of teachings that are contained within this learning framework (Bopp, 1984). However, that day Myra drew a circle on the chalkboard with four quadrants that reflect the four aspects of human beings. It was a new theory, a concept/illustration I had not previously seen. She wanted each learner within the room to take notice that each of us was more than our physical selves. Her words and illustrations turned our attention toward our inner spaces that helped us recognize that we were also emotional, mental and spiritual beings. She wanted us to see that we had more to nurture/develop than our mental self; that we had a responsibility to nurture all aspects of our being including the emotional, physical, cognitive and spiritual domains.

What occurred that day was the planting of a seed within me that has continued to grow over the years. It helped me see that as First Nations peoples we have teaching models, learning theories, ways of thinking that would help me understand myself as a learner and person. It was the seed of self awareness. It was a new orientation to life and learning. The image I saw on that board was simple, yet profound. It is a useful educational device for all students, as it orients learners to those inner spaces that need attention. In hindsight, I realize this was a powerful learning experience because much of my attention as a student was often oriented to ideas and knowledge that have not stayed with me through the years. I recall learning facts and stories that were not relevant to the here and now. The curriculum that teachers teach includes the knowledge and skills I am suppose to learn as a student in public education. Much of the curriculum, as I remember it, oriented my attention away from my inner and immediate spaces. What I experienced with Myra's presentation was different: It was a critical learning moment, which attuned me into my immediate spaces. It forced me to critically reflect on my being as I was, right there and then. It was a learning framework that allowed me to experience my life more mindfully and critically from that day forward.

Overall, the medicine wheel as a pedagogical framework places learners at the centre of their own life-world. It attunes learners in their immediate and inner spaces. It is a holistic, metacognitive learning device that encourages self-awareness and self-regulation. It is a framework that helps learners understand the nature of being; existence within the four categories of being (physical, mental, emotional and spiritual). Such a framework is non-discriminating. It can help all students achieve a greater sense of self. It helps learners to interpret the world from their own life experiences. This, to me, is Anishinaabe pedagogy – a way of teaching and learning which places learners at the centre of their own being.

Garry's Story, The Clan System

The third story was told by Anishinaabe elder and educator Garry Robson. I first heard the stories of the Anishinaabe clan system in a public school classroom. It was illustrated as a seven-pointed star with an animal that represented a clan or animal totem at the end of each star point. Gary helped us to understand that the star represented a social governing system that identified how each clan contributed to the whole of the community. Interpreted from a modern lens, the Anishinaabe had doctors, teachers, spiritual leaders, hunters, warriors/protectors of justice, and philosophers. Although the clan system could have been presented as a governing system that existed in the distant past, the stories that Garry shared brought this system to life, illustrating that it was alive and amongst us today. For example, as Garry shared his own traditional name and clan with us, he also shared that it had taken years to come to such knowing and it was through continuous reflection that he found his place within our cultural community. What I recognize now is that this was also an unspoken invitation to find our own place amongst our own life-worlds. What I heard in Garry's story was a lifelong journey that illustrated how he had contemplated who he was as an Aboriginal man. It had taken him years of living to come to a place of self knowing. He also illustrated that self-knowing came from having a context from which to develop. This cultural context allowed his own presence and identity as an Anishinaabe person to emerge. It allowed him to exist as he was, as an Anishinaabe man. His traditional name and acknowledgement created this space not only in his psyche, but also allowed him to construct these cultural and literal spaces for learners. In a sense his story provides a road map on which we can each learn to grow from our own roots. Today, Garry is recognized as a respected elder who has a long history of working in the education system. This helped shape the role he would come to play in his cultural community as well as the role he played as an educator in the education system.

Luke and Lyna's Story- The Anishinaabe Prophecy Song

As a student of Children of the Earth², I signed up for a culture course and was introduced to Luke Arquette who had been designated our cultural teacher and Lyna Hart, his colleague and companion. Learning for this course took place in his Luke's home, and although I was his student for a short while, he played a significant part of introducing me to an extended cultural community. It was through Luke and Lyna that I met Aboriginal peoples who were involved in maintaining or reviving traditional practices. At the age of 17, Luke taught me how to make my first hand drum which set me on a path to connect deeply with my cultural roots. They exposed me to cultural learning sites³ that allowed me to stay on this cultural learning path. One of the songs I learned from Luke and was the Anishinaabe prophecy song. The prophecy song is a slice of a larger story; a message and an account of Anishinaabe history. It speaks of different eras the Anishinaabe people would live through, beginning with a prophecy that provoked a migration

² The first urban Aboriginal education and public high school in all of Canada

³ For example, he took me to Strong Earth Mother Lodge, which I recognize as a site designated to revive local cultures. It was here I was able to experience my first sweatlodge experience, participate in traditional ceremonies and learn more songs that were accompanied by history and teachings.

from the eastern part of Turtle Island/North America. The story eventually takes us to our present location in time, identified as “the awakening”. Both Luke and Lyna, emphasized the importance of youth in this story. As I reflect on my time with them, I realize they wanted us to see that we had a role to play in the remainder of the story. Their message was that First Nations youth would help pick up what was left behind by our ancestors that would make our nations strong again. This story was introduced as the “The Morning Song”; a piece of the Seven Fires Prophecy of the Anishinaabe. I continued to learn more about this prophecy through ongoing community sings⁴ and other cultural events. The song is a calling from the ancestors to the Anishinaabe people, telling them to wake up from a deep sleep⁵.

This story gave me a new lens to interpret the world around me, which had a significant impact on me as a young Anishinaabe/Métis woman. One example was how I interpreted the Meech Lake Accord, an attempt to change the Canadian constitution. At issue was the fact that Aboriginal peoples were overlooked in these negotiations and demanded that the Accord be rejected on this basis. What I saw in this experience was historic for two reasons. First of all, it was a reaffirming movement for Aboriginal people across Canada as it brought thousands of Aboriginal people together at the Legislative grounds in 1990 to support Elijah Harper, a key player in the rejection of the Meech Lake Accord. I also saw a people rise to sound their voice, whose collective actions spoke louder than the words. It was a sign that a reawakening was occurring. This experience opened my eyes to the unique and sometimes contentious relationship Aboriginal people have with Canada. I also was able to view it through a new lens, the Anishinaabe prophecy song, and interpreted it as the collective awakening that was foretold. Since then, Aboriginal peoples across Canada, as well as locally, have continued to organize themselves again and again. The people are now awake. Collectively these stories and teachings have many interconnections, and they reinforce each other within various contexts and learning situations. They reconnect the umbilical cord that was severed as a result of oppressive laws and policies, like those that made residential schools a reality, which prohibited Aboriginal peoples from passing on their language, culture and traditions.

Curriculum Development and Design

How do we support teachers to enact the curriculum described above when they do not have the knowledge or experience to activate these types of learning processes? To answer this question, we must consider what help teachers would need to integrate Aboriginal perspectives in a respectful, authentic and effective manner. It is my belief that they start with what is local that can bridge Western and Aboriginal ways of knowing. This will most likely require new learning, as well as a paradigm shift to acknowledge and understand alternative ways of teaching and learning. It is also important to be mindful of the fact that Aboriginal education takes on a different shape depending upon the geographical location from which it emerges. This occurs because Aboriginal peoples “are as diverse in their personal beliefs and ideologies as any other cultural or ethnic group” (Manitoba Education and Youth 2003, p. 7). Ornstein and Hunkins,

⁴ Community sings here are identified as informal community gatherings that take place in our homes. I also recognize these as community and cultural revitalization efforts.

⁵ The deep sleep is a metaphor for the loss of culture, language and traditions that were outlawed as a result of imposed government legislation.

(2004) also claim that individuals developing curriculum must keep in mind those components that help shape what the curriculum becomes (e.g., defining content, learning experiences and educational environments that support learning). Thus, from a Western educational perspective, it becomes vital that curriculum developers consider whether a technical-scientific or nontechnical-nonscientific approach will be used to construct the curriculum and learning experiences. Lastly, we must consider who should have a say in how this curriculum is developed.

Anishinaabe pedagogy in practice is not subject-centered, like Western curriculum where content and subject matter receive the primary emphasis. Rather, it is learner-centered, subjective and relies on personal engagement. It has a more humanistic-focus, and is aimed at exploring the inter-relationship between all things within a critically reflective paradigm. Moreover, it takes into account feelings, attitudes and values that can add affective components to the conventional subject matter curriculum that is already in place. In sharing the four stories above, I recognize that story is a cornerstone of Anishinaabe pedagogy. How then do we bring these stories into focus as we integrate Aboriginal perspectives? Would it be the same to read these stories from a book? I think not. When spoken, stories create a context in which we can interpret the world around us as well as ourselves in it. They create a context in which we can move back and forth between our own experience and the world represented by the storyteller. From an Indigenous perspective, the power of story is the art of placing learners at the critical centre of their own life-world. It is a practice I see as being at the heart of Anishinaabe pedagogy. This approach also contextualizes learning. That is, in Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning, Elders and oral traditions are important because they “function as the collective memory of the people” (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003, p.9). The stories I have shared are perspectives, histories and teachings that live within the life-ways of a people; carried by knowledge keepers and maintained through rigid protocols. This knowledge, in many cases today, cannot be found in print material, further reaffirming the need for human resources.

We must consider what can be learned from these experiences. For example, how can teachers facilitate learning that allows for all students to tell their stories and/or learn from their experiences? Each of our students need to tell his/her stories, to be listened to as their heard stories illuminate their existence. Stories naturally contain structural elements of the world as described above. Each story I heard contained an open-ended element that was an invitation for the learner to see themselves in the story. How then do teachers take this learning and infuse it within a teaching repertoire that has been constructed to fit within western perspectives and ways of teaching?

At the same time, we must consider what is pedagogically useful within each of these stories. We can see definite features of Anishinaabe pedagogy that can be understood through Western educational philosophies and learning constructs. When we look at what was presented by each Aboriginal educators/storytellers, we see in Myra Laramée’s medicine wheel teachings that she used a humanistic learning framework, which lends itself to being learner-centered and holistic. Its objective/outcome is premised on developing the whole person as opposed to the cognitive self. In practice, it engages students in learning from their own critical reflection and inner spaces. Dan’s story fosters imagination, connectivity, and interdependence - concepts that are central in many traditional teaching and stories. Garry’s story draws attention to personal

identities and implicitly orients students to question their own sense of purpose. This encourages learners to find their place within their life-worlds. Myra's teaching complemented these aims, as what she shared encourages self-actualization by teaching students to be critically reflective of themselves within each of their own life-worlds.

The medicine wheel is a prime example of this holistic focus that aims to explore the relationship between the four aspects of self: the physical, cognitive, emotional and spiritual. This makes curriculum integration much more complex as its scope is much broader than subject-centered curriculum that guides teaching and learning within Western schooling. This holistic framework provides opportunities to consider new ways of seeing the world, our students, and our relationship to subject matter. It helps us consider how to create meaning rather than methods. It is experiential and does not necessarily focus on what should be learned, but rather what the learning experience supports. When we think about integrating Aboriginal perspectives with Western curriculum, I view it for the most part as a nontechnical-nonscientific approach. That is because, in part, we are attempting to bring students to animate learning experiences and to connect with learning from each of their own critical centre. We are attempting to support student-centered learning in ways that would encourage learners to be accountable for learning by regulating and monitoring their learning.

A prescriptive formula for how to best integrate Aboriginal perspectives does not exist. Many of our current integration efforts can be deemed experimental. If we consider ourselves to be advancing along a developmental continuum, we would recognize that in our attempts at integration we are in a phase where we continue to envision and experiment with various concepts and frameworks. Teachers can view this as a burdensome task or an opportunity for creativity.

Integration/Implementation

The dilemma in looking at implementation/integration from a Western construct is that this process often begins with something tangible: a document of learning outcomes, new materials, courses of study and the like. However, owing to the fact that Aboriginal education is more of an attempt to integrate Aboriginal perspectives into existing subject area curriculum, or to develop new programs of learning within the school, we must pay attention to our vision/ goals for Aboriginal education. This can either be defined by individual teachers or collectively within a school or division. We must also keep in mind that the sources of knowledge are not generally found in a document. Rather, knowledge is also found within the animate world around us. According to the First Nation Holistic Lifelong Learning model (Canadian Council of Learning, 2007), the intertwining roots of trees can be viewed as a model of knowledge sources. The places in which learners can acquire knowledge through life experiences and their relationship to all things which includes: the self, family, ancestors, one's clan, the community, the nation, culture, traditions, the natural world, and other nations. Within this model, the teacher is viewed as only one of the nurturing/teaching guide. Mentors, counselors, parents, Elders, all those who can facilitate learning, also take on this role. Each is as important as the other. It is, therefore, important to consider how to access this living local knowledge that is found in the life ways of Aboriginal cultural communities. Moreover, from an Anishinaabe/First Nation perspective, it is crucial to recognize that learning is grounded in experience. As depicted by the aforementioned

learning model, the tree as a metaphor for each learner draws nourishment through both formal and informal settings - from the home, the land, the school and community.

Such an approach to integration may require a paradigm shift as it is a different approach to implementation for teachers. I say this because teachers have traditionally been educated to rely on didacticism, print, media, and technological resources to support teaching and learning. The First Nations Lifelong Learning model directs our attention to the animate world, to consider people, places and processes as sources for learning. Only recently have Aboriginal people themselves been involved in the delivery and design of Aboriginal education. Although new resources and initiatives make obvious the fact that Canadian Aboriginal peoples have ways of knowing and learning that predate Canada's existence, it is still a fairly new and emerging process in which they are engaged. The First Nations Lifelong learning model, for example, was created in 2007. It is an invaluable document as it begins to substantiate what exists on the Aboriginal end of the Western-Aboriginal epistemological and pedagogical continuum and will support integration efforts.

Within my own work as an Aboriginal Education consultant, I have thought seriously about how to bring such experiences and vision into focus. This has helped me to conceptualize integration efforts using various conceptual maps. For example, in my professional development workshops for teachers I have attempted to illustrate the integration continuum mentioned above. Using a visual illustration, I would present four progressing stages along this advancing continuum and would illustrate what each stage would look like. It begins with supplementary approaches and progressively moves toward naturally infused initiatives. A supplementary approach, for example, separates Aboriginal content and curriculum in space and time by using segregated or isolated approaches. Offering Aboriginal education learning opportunities outside of regular school hours is an illustration of this. The ultimate goal, however, is to naturalize the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives wherever and whenever appropriate, to enhance learning for all learners.

Although, I have found this continuum useful in helping teachers to critically reflect on where they are situated, there are many ways in which we can begin to integrate local Aboriginal perspectives. I have recently come to the realization that place-based learning and place consciousnesses are useful frameworks in this regard. They keep in focus the local perspectives that can support authentic integrations of Aboriginal perspectives. I draw from my own experience as a means to make sense of this approach.

Place-Based Learning

As I reflect on the critical moments that contributed to my understanding of Anishinaabe pedagogy, I think about how I gained access to cultural stories. I believe that my teachers were using place-based learning when they invited local Aboriginal speakers to speak to us and thereby enhance our learning about Aboriginal peoples. This strategy is useful for the purpose of integrating Aboriginal perspectives, because it allows teachers to access the various knowledge domains that have been identified in the First Nations lifelong learning model (i.e. other nation's stories, community, people). Furthermore, place-based learning is in line with traditional ways

of teaching and learning and, as such, is a useful educational framework to accommodate the inclusiveness of people, places and processes.

Today, place-based learning is recognized as experiential and/or community-based education. From a western lens, our modern notions of place-based education originate in pragmatic educational philosophy. Scholars, such as John Dewey (1937), saw that curriculum should be based on the child's experiences and interests so as to prepare them for their life affairs and future. Within this educational philosophy, education is viewed as a process for improving, not accepting, the human condition. Experientialism was an important aspect of Dewey's theorizing about education. As the process of coming to know/ learn, it is considered a transaction between the learner and environment. Environments are constantly changing; therefore, so must the transactions and learning experiences. This educational paradigm has features that are comparable to Aboriginal ways of knowing, teaching and learning. For example, "the goal of education in traditional Aboriginal societies was to prepare children for their lives" (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003 p.15). To do this, students need opportunities to "physically manipulate (kinesthetic), see (visual), or hear (auditory) about the concepts they are learning first-hand" (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003, p.17). There are many similarities between pragmatic education and traditional Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning. Each promotes learning that is rooted in what is local. This type of learning provides an opportunity for all students to learn from each of their experiences, from local histories, cultures and traditions, and from what exists within the immediate spaces of learners.

Place-Consciousness

Place consciousness is another important concept that could help to bring local Aboriginal perspectives into focus (See Kanu, 2005). The notion of place-consciousness builds on place-based learning constructs by ensuring that cultural brokers, teachers, educators, curriculum writers, and others responsible for integrating Aboriginal perspectives, dig deep enough within a place-based framework to unveil/utilize local Aboriginal knowledge structures (i.e., people places, processes). This perception of place-consciousness extends beyond our modern landscape. I use it here as a historical and cultural lens. It is an attempt to amplify the voice and presence of Aboriginal peoples in their homeland. More importantly, place-consciousness allows access to local Aboriginal ways of knowing, teaching and learning to inform our modern conceptions of Aboriginal education. For example, Kanu (2005) argues for a return to traditions, or that which can inform how we conceptualize educational curriculum and practice. She takes us through a process of recovering aspects of a past to recognize how traditions continue to exist within our local spaces that can be taken into the logic of the present to positively inform curricular imaginations.

A place-conscious paradigm is useful for many reasons. As Kanu (2005) notes, it is an opportunity to return to the past to move forward, combining the best of what our past has to offer as we integrate Aboriginal perspectives. She points out that this is not some nostalgic return to earlier traditions but is useful for the critical leverage it can provide as we measure our current initiatives. This allows us to use facets of critical thinking to question what is being produced and consumed as Aboriginal education. This helps us consider what knowledge and

learning process we use to integrate Aboriginal perspectives. Working with local Aboriginal peoples can help us maintain the integrity of local knowledge by letting Aboriginal peoples be the tellers of their own existence, of their past, present and future.

It is important to consider how to take this way of transmitting knowledge and apply it to Western ways of teaching and learning or vice versa. Conducting a sharing circle is one example of how this is done. In practice, the sharing circle is a predictable learning pattern from beginning to end. It begins when the first person shares and ends when the last person within the circle has had opportunity to speak. Other cultural learning institutes are similar in form. For example, the sweat lodge ceremony is a cultural learning institute that brings local First Nations stories to life. It is important to recognize that certain prayers, songs and stories are told at various points of these events/ceremonies from beginning to end. Although there are many similarities to the physical characteristics of these cultural learning institutes, the stories set each nation apart from one another as distinct nations. Within an Anishinaabe sweat lodge ceremony one will hear the Ojibwe language (the language of the Anishinaabe), stories that use Anishinaabe motifs and teachings. In a Dakota sweat lodge you will hear Dakota language, their songs, stories and prayers that will guide the learning process. Stories illuminate specific voices that are representative of a people. Illuminating Anishinaabe voice within a local context makes the most sense as it identifies local ways of knowing, teaching and learning that derive from our local First Nations peoples. We must be place conscious and take into account the local traditional homeland of the Aboriginal peoples on which are schools are situated.

As asserted within *Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into Manitoba Curricular* (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003) integrating Aboriginal perspectives begins by stating Aboriginal histories predate Canadian history by thousands of years, while pointing out that Eurocentric and mainstream perspectives have excluded Aboriginal voice. This is why it is critical for educators to develop familiarity with local Aboriginal perspectives. If we are not critically aware, we run the risk of being counterproductive in our efforts. In the worst case, we may trivialize or misinform our students about Aboriginal peoples. The point of the matter is that there are many unused resources that can be used to support the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. Some resources are found in print documents and others are found within the animate world or life-ways of the people. Place-based learning and place consciousness provide a conceptual framework that teachers can choose to use. It is meant to enrich as well as increase the efficacy of merging the expectations and resources of two-worlds. Regardless of what framework or starting points teachers will use to integrate Aboriginal perspectives, attention must be paid to both ends of the Western-Aboriginal continuum. We must work to maintain balance between these two worlds.

Conclusion

Much is being hidden and subdued when we fail to look beyond modern and Western notions of Aboriginal education. We must distinguish between local First Nations and consider how the knowledge embedded in the life-ways of distinct peoples is used to integrate “Aboriginal” perspectives in public school curricula and teaching/ learning resources. In order to effectively and respectfully merge both Western and Aboriginal perspectives, it is necessary for local perspectives to be used to substantiate Aboriginal education. The first step in this process is

to look deeply into the term “Aboriginal education”, to differentiate between the various First Nations peoples. Adopting a place-conscious, historical and cultural stance is one useful method for looking beyond modern notions of Aboriginal education. Such a standpoint takes us outside a modern template of Western education and enables us to look at what existed locally prior to European contact. It centers our attention enabling the consideration and validation of knowledge from both ends of the Western-Aboriginal epistemological and pedagogical continuum.

We must open our minds and recognize the many ways of knowing (epistemologies) and the many ways to come to this knowing (pedagogy). The task of integrating Aboriginal perspectives presents unique opportunities to step outside the lock-step approach to teaching and learning that defines much of formal schooling. It is an opportunity, outside the concerns of mandated learning outcomes and criterion referenced assessments, where teachers are encouraged to be creative, to access resources and community capital, to let the integration of Aboriginal perspectives emerge organically from and with the unique context and situation of what the school and Aboriginal community has to offer. This is a non-technical, non-prescriptive approach to teaching and learning. It deviates from the norm of transmitting knowledge and skills within a technocratic approach.

As the conceptualization and implementation of Aboriginal perspectives continues to unfold, it is interwoven with our traditional and modern attempts to decipher what Aboriginal education is. The need to define Aboriginal education in definite terms serves Western institutionalized ways of teaching and learning, and in acknowledging these ways, we must not lose sight of the fact that Aboriginal peoples must be part of this process. Accuracy and legitimacy are lost if we rely solely on print materials to integrate Aboriginal perspectives.

As more Aboriginal peoples pursue education as a career, they will bring their distinct voices and add clarity to this unfolding dialogue. As an Anishinaabe/Métis person, I myself have attempted to capture the essence of Aboriginal education from my own critically reflective centre. I have attempted to examine components of Anishinaabe pedagogy to learn how it is taken up within the context of public schools. Although place-based learning and a place-conscious lens have been useful processes that illuminate an Anishinaabe presence in local Aboriginal education initiatives, we must recognize that Aboriginal education has many goals some of which are explicit and others which are not. Aboriginal education is not just about increasing academic success for Aboriginal learners. At its base is the need to illuminate the authentic voice and presence of peoples. We must then consider how to maintain a delicate balance between the ways of knowing, teaching, learning and the expectations, aspirations and limitations that accompany both ends of the Western-Aboriginal continuum. From an Aboriginal perspective, this clarity emerges naturally as we tell and listen to each of our stories. This is where we begin the philosophical discussion of the aspirations, aims and goals of what we intend to do to support teaching and learning.

Overall, storytelling as pedagogy creates opportunities for all students to include their own voice and to learn from people of their own life-worlds. It can counter the alienating effect that schools often have on students. As noted by Michael Apple (2009), schools and our curriculum often orient students’ attention away from their own internal and cultural narratives,

which creates a disconnect from the immediacy of their life-worlds. When I reflect back on my identity and learning, I realize that I was not aware of who I was as an Anishinaabe/Métis person and that I often felt that I was fighting internally and externally against negative stereotyping. If not challenged, this could have limited my life opportunities. I was, however, fortunate to have attended schools such as Aberdeen Junior High, Argyle, and Children of the Earth High School at a time when the teachers were practicing what I perceive as place-based learning. This kind of learning coupled to Anishinaabe pedagogy placed me at the critical centre of my own being and learning processes. It was the beginning of empowering learning experiences. I was able to utilize my own life experience and local cultural narratives to enliven learning. Overall, this approach was important because it taught me to be (place) conscious of myself and my surroundings on many levels.

As illustrated in the First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning model (Canadian Council of Learning, 2007), it is important that students are placed at the critical centre of their learning. Telling our stories adds clarity to what we understand and mean from our personal location. It illustrates how schools and their catchment communities can work together to foster learning by instilling a sense of purpose and belonging in students. We must, however, be conscious and consistent in our efforts to achieve/nurture this sort of learning environment. Anishinaabe pedagogy creates opportunities to hear multi-narratives. It encompasses people, places, stories and learning processes that generate a critically reflective, holistic, student centered, inclusive learning pedagogy. It is another teaching and learning framework that teachers can choose to utilize. It allows learners to engage in the learning process from each of their own inner spaces within a critical reflective paradigm. This allows students to learn from their own knowing and to value their personal knowledge and experiences as a starting point to relate to topics and themes from their own intellect, emotion, cultural and gender orientations. It allows each learner to engage in learning from a personal space that is thoughtful and critically reflective in nature. Essentially the philosophy is that we each must become the expert of our own life by making use of our own life experiences as the basis for learning and provide a place for family, culture, and community. Education, within the constructs of the holistic lifelong learning model, is good for all students.

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