

## EDITORIAL

### INDIGENOUS EDUCATION: WAYS OF KNOWING, THINKING, AND DOING

*Kanonhsionni / Janice C. Hill*

*Skennen sewakwekon. Kanonhsionni iontats. Wakeniaton nawakhseroten nok Kentehakake nitewakenonh.*

Greetings. My name is Janice Hill. I am of the Turtle Clan of the Mohawk Nation and I come from the place known as Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory.

I have been taught that it is my responsibility to be a teacher, since I am Turtle Clan. This teaching comes from the fact that in our Creation Story, the world as we know it was created on the back of a Turtle – hence, Turtle Island. And Turtle was there at the beginning of time and saw the whole of Creation as it was created and therefore holds the knowledge of creation. Additionally we are taught that knowledge is to be shared, never hoarded. Therefore, I am a teacher both by birth and by design. I have worked in education/educating for my whole working life. At some point in time I decided that it was a necessary thing to teach people about who I am, my people, my culture, my traditions, my history, my worldview. I did this because I realized that it was important to create dialogue between people to work towards understanding. I believe that only by understanding each other can we ever hope to work together and truly appreciate and respect each other.

Our stories need to be shared by our own people, in our own words and from our own points of reference. Perhaps it is a necessity to work in Indigenous – non-Indigenous partnerships right now to ensure that the messages being conveyed are understandable to all and leave little room for misinterpretation; perhaps in time the partnerships will be more often freely chosen in respect and right relationship. Arlene (my co-editor) has always referred to me as a “culture-broker” because of my ability to live and work both in my own world and in the larger world around me, and because of my ability to interpret each for the other. Much of my work away from my home has been as a liaison, interpreting one world for the other. This ability has brought me to this point.

I am honoured and grateful to have this opportunity to be a guest co-editor for this special issue of the *McGill Journal of Education*. An opportunity like this one allows us to share knowledge about our peoples and allows the voices of our people to be heard by a different audience. Those who work in Indigenous education, whether they be academics and scholars or those at the community grassroots level, can share their work and research with others interested or involved in the education of our people through forums such as this.

This special issue of the Journal provides us with an opportunity to share stories from those in the field and offers a glimpse of the multifaceted entity that is Indigenous education. Even though there are core issues in Indigenous education such as jurisdiction and resources, for the most part, the *critical* issues in Indigenous education are local phenomena, as presented in the papers included here. This perspective is evident in the situation presented by Iehnotonkwaw / Bonnie Jane Maracle with regard to the critical state of the Mohawk language in her community and her nation. It is further evidenced by the paper presented by Kanatawakhon / David Maracle and Merle Richards in which they discuss the search for an appropriate and relevant way of teaching an Indigenous language to adult learners striving for fluency. In this time and space, the largest hurdles in Indigenous education, in my experience, are in identifying exactly what it is, or what we want it to be; designing systems and methods for its unique delivery; and convincing our own people that it is viable and will prepare our children for the larger world from their own distinctive frame of reference. It has been my experience that knowing who we are, our own histories, culture, language and experience, provides a foundation from which anything is possible—provides a foundation for Indigenous education, based on Indigenous ways.

In this issue of the Journal we have attempted to present a picture of Indigenous education as life-long learning, not only school-age education. We offer papers that range from education in infancy (Arlene Holland Stairs, Judith Bernhard and Aboriginal colleagues) through the school ages, until in the end we are stretching the vision of education to the point of the dreaming and looking with elders at Indigenous education as a pedagogy of the land (Celia Haig-Brown and Kaaren Dannenmann). This, in my understanding of things, brings the overall issue of Indigenous education full circle. As Indigenous people, our learning begins with the land, Our Mother, and here we end with the land. Perhaps this is where we need to begin again in order for the education of our people and all people to be truly relevant in our ability to 'be in respectful relation' with each other and Our Mother once again. This I believe is one small aspect of the point being made by Waabginojii / David Anderson in the first paper. In order for education to be truly relevant, this is where we need to begin – with the knowledge of our ancestors, and where better to find that knowledge than in the land we have

shared with them and in the learning that comes from it. For our people to continue to survive with this knowledge, though, we will need to do that in the language of our ancestors. And so, once again, comes the critical issue of our Indigenous languages.

Our subtitle for the issue, *Ways of Knowing, Thinking, and Doing*, came from looking at all of the papers presented and realizing their relationship to both the theme and each other. *Ways of Knowing* refers to our teachings, our languages, and our cultures, to the knowledge of our ancestors and Creation. *Ways of Thinking* refers to the building of education based on our own terms of reference, our teachings, and our worldview. It also refers to evaluating and validating Indigenous ways of knowing. *Ways of Doing* is the actual facilitation of learning from a cultural and/or traditional place – the land, the language, with the elders and knowledge keepers.

The whole idea being presented is one of Indigenous education as life-long and all-encompassing. It is the ideal of intergenerational learning and learning in relationship. We do not learn in isolation from one another, but in relation with one another. We have been reminded by Celia Haig-Brown and Kaaren Dannenmann of the idea presented by Paulo Freire that “knowledge is created and recreated in social interaction. Only when it is manifested can it be considered knowledge.” This vision clarifies and intensifies the importance of programs such as the Indigenous Knowledge Instructors Program presented in their paper and the cultural camp presented by Linda Goulet and Yvonne McLeod. The cultural camp takes the knowledge of the Elders out of the classroom and books and puts it back on the land, providing opportunities for interaction between students and Elders, and thus manifests their knowledge through social interaction.

We start by looking at curriculum development based on the knowledge of our ancestors, and the importance of beginning there, as opposed to curriculum based on the histories we have come to know from the point of reference of the colonizers (Waabginojii). From there, we look at education through the stages and evaluation of the very young: the importance of education based on “cultural practical knowledge” (Jeff Orr, Kelusilew / Sharon Paul and San Salom / John Jerome Paul), especially for those searching for their identity and their place in the world; the importance of “affirming cultural identity” and recognizing the racial context of education (Joanne Tompkins). Next we explore the issues around Indigenous language learning, primarily for adults and towards fluency (Merle Richards and Kanatawakhon, Iehnhotonkwás). Then on to the place of non-Indigenous players in Indigenous education and the issues that arise from that relationship (Jeff Lambe and Tekaronianeken / Jake Swamp). Finally we look again at Indigenous ways of learning, teaching and doing, both through literature (Gaiwayene / Gloria Thomas) and on the land (Celia Haig-Brown and Kaaren Dannenmann). We end where we begin; full circle.

It is my hope that by reading these papers you will get a glimpse of the struggles, challenges, opportunities and successes of Indigenous education today and by so doing will gain in your understanding of, and respect for, those who work so hard for the people. *Niawen Kiwahi*, my heartfelt thanks, for this opportunity.

### *Arlene Holland Stairs*

And I too am thankful to have this task, as sojourner – long-term perpetual visitor – in Indigenous community. A Euro-North American, for nearly half my life I have had the gift of time to work and play, talk and walk, live and learn with and from colleague-friends in Indigenous community. I work again at walking the talk of dialogue and cultural brokerage in this effort with Kanonhsionni / Janice; an exchange reflected in the co- and multi-authored pieces here and lived collectively in the whole enterprise. *Who* dialogues and exchanges with *whom* is the landscape of Indigenous cultural negotiation in education and in all of our relational lives.

Waabginojii / David speaks to – admonishes – his own people, hoping, I believe, that the rest of us are listening. Judith, myself and Indigenous colleagues (who choose not to be named) address the universalist psychological and educational core in North America with the message of Indigenous community and locality. Joanne focuses similarly on her Nova Scotian mainstemers, drawing audience in across races. Jeff and Tekaronianeken / Jake exchange with each other and with seekers from the outside. Gaiwayene / Gloria sees written English appropriated into the beauty of Indigenous relationships; Kaaren and Celia speak to each other and listen to the land. Iehnhotonkwaw / Bonnie Jane, Merle and Kanatawakhon / David talk of speaking to anyone in one's language of the teachings and spirit. Children lead teachers in the dialogues of the Pauls and Jeff Orr; youth reconnect elders and the land through themselves in the camp stories of Linda and Yvonne.

For my part, Indigenous friends sometimes tell me why I am rightfully there listening and speaking when I do not *know*: “we need our witnesses; you dig it out of us; you show us how much we are still ourselves; you help us understand white people” (here I continue to wonder greatly what I represent). Once conjoined, in the Americas and much of the rest of the world, native and newcomer cannot be known apart from the other (cf. Denig in Borofsky, 1987). For my part, I stay, I keep coming back, because I am reminded of a bigger world – sacred/secular, inextricable, balancing respect and responsibility, a life among ‘all my relations,’ which I would forget or never see if I did not keep returning and continuing the dialogue.

Before beginning I saw the significance of this special issue as confronting the still so common generic sense of “Indigenous education” as perceived

and expressed largely in terms of a universalistic formula created by 'others.' Richly apparent across the contributions here is the range of visions and experiments emerging in Indigenous education as communities appropriate – make their own – the imposition of formal Western 'knowing, thinking, and doing.' The significance of the project has come to be understood in a more complex way as a continual spiral of right, good, *authentic relationship* (wherever we may be in understanding 'authenticity') predicated on *uniqueness and cultural (re-)creativity* – resonant with Janice's vision of critical issues as local phenomena.

We must always remember that culture is something that does not stop still; it develops through challenges and interaction of people and events or it becomes distorted and dies. For the educator, the important thing is that education should be authentic. (Miriam-Rose Ungunnerr-Bauman Nauiyu, Australia, 1991)

And in the texts in this issue we see such authentic interactions literally 'all over the map' in their aspects of renewal, assimilation, negotiation, colonial awareness, peace and anger on 'both sides.' The reader is asked to attend consciously to these multiple standpoints on the move.

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So the collection is one of tales both celebratory and cautionary. Here celebrated is the strengthening of Indigenous relationships within and without; valuation of empowerment that is ongoing. Here are cautions blatant and subtle about colonial remnants carried in both Indigenous voices and those of their colleagues; issues of power in its multiple forms and (im)balances in using each other which we must question critically and continually. There is much yet to do, many places to go.

Our thanks to Barbara Castel, Robert Lovelace, Iehnhotonkwas / Bonnie Jane Maracle, and Howard A. Smith, each of whom read one of the papers in this issue. Our thanks, also, to Kiotenhariyo / Mike Asselstine and Brant Bardy for helping with the Indigenous communities map. Finally, thanks to Editor Ann Beer for inviting us along this path and to Ann Keenan for putting the issue together. Keep walking and "wait for the signs" (King).

J.H. & A.H.S.

#### REFERENCE

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