

CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY: FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION IN CANADA

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Abstract / Resume

Educators of First Nations children in Canada face the tasks of recovering the cultural heritage of First Nations and providing skills for successful participation in a culturally diverse society. Issues which must be addressed by schools to meet these challenges include an understanding of the historical relationships between First Nations cultures and mainstream educational systems; the nature of culture as dynamic and evolving and the identification of those strategies that are most effective in building upon the cultural identities of First Nations children.

Les éducateurs et éducatrices des enfants indigènes du Canada confrontent les défis de récupérer l'héritage culturel des indigènes et fournissent les techniques de participation prospère dans une société culturellement diverse. Les problèmes que les écoles doivent adresser incluent la compréhension des relations historiques entre les cultures indigènes et les systèmes éducatifs; la nature de la culture soient dynamique et évoluer, et l'identification des stratégies les plus efficaces en constituant les identités culturelles des enfants indigènes.

Introduction

Indigenous people around the world are re-affirming the validity of their own cultures and re-defining their political, economic and social priorities in the late 20th century. Central to this process is the re-socialization of youth within their own cultures, giving them a sense of pride in their cultural heritages through education. It is a shift resulting from centuries of colonial domination deliberately undermining the cultural values of Indigenous people through assimilative, and later integrative, educational policies (Barman, 1986; Kirkness, 1992). It is against this background that the educators of First Nations¹ children in Canada face the challenging task of recovering the cultural heritages of First Nations while "providing preparation for successful participation in a culturally diverse, modern technological society" (Hamme, 1996:21).

Research on the education of First Nations and other minority group students has also shown that schools which respect and support a child's culture demonstrate significantly better outcomes in educating those students (Billings, 1995; Hamme, 1996; McCaleb, 1994). As well, classroom approaches which are responsive to the child's culture promote academic achievement by providing cultural relevance and a rationale for accepting school (Archibald, 1995). However, both academic and future success also depend upon students developing an accurate understanding of relationships with the larger Canadian society (Hampton 1995; Hamme, 1996; Calliou, 1995). Educational processes must provide First Nations students with some knowledge of how their cultures interact with the rest of the complex, multicultural Canadian society in order to allow them to increase their future options (McCaskill, 1987; MacIvor, 1995). Such students will then be able to participate successfully in the larger society if they choose to do so, while maintaining their own cultural identities (Hamme, 1996).

The issues that must be addressed by schools in order to meet these challenges are multiple and complex. An understanding of the historical relationship between First Nations culture and education is essential (Hamme, 1996). As Kirkness (1992:103) argues,

the First Nations children of today must know their past, their true history, in order to understand the present and plan for the future. First Nations cultures must once again be respected and the traditional values must again be held in high esteem.

It is both a challenge and a responsibility for the educators of First Nations children to develop this understanding. The challenge is to present complex, sensitive material in a way which helps the students understand the realities of their past and present while maintaining a positive outlook for

future. The responsibility is to help students discover what role their people and they themselves as individuals should play in the future development of their communities, the country and the world (Indian and Northern Affairs, 1993).

Another pertinent issue of concern is culture itself. First Nations cultures, like all other cultures, are dynamic and continuously evolving (Hamme, 1996; Hampton, 1995). Cultural beliefs and practices are continuously being reshaped through changing environmental circumstances and interactions with other cultures (Hampton, 1995; Merkel, 1984). Schools have the responsibility of validating both traditional and contemporary cultures of their students. It becomes problematic when First Nations cultures are presented in the classroom as static and unaffected by time. As a Nish'ga Elder recently said, "There was a lot more to our traditional education than just some 'mickey-mouse' courses in moccasin making" (Merkel, 1984:1). Or as Hampton argues,

asking Natives to eschew automobiles, television, and bank accounts in the name of "preserving their culture" makes as much sense as asking Whites to give up gun powder because it was invented by the Chinese or the zero because it was invented by the Arabs. It is the continuity of a living culture that is important to an Indian education, not the preservation of a frozen museum specimen (1995:29).

What the schools should do instead is to recognize and acknowledge those traditional and contemporary cultural contributions which First Nations people have made in shaping the larger Canadian multicultural society.

Finally, educators of First Nations children must identify the educational strategies that most effectively build on the cultural identity of children while providing the necessary skills for participation in the complex, multicultural and technological Canadian society.

Historical Relationships

Long before Europeans arrived in North America, each of the numerous First Nations groups had evolved its own form of education (Kirkness, 1992; Merkel, 1984; Hampton, 1995). For some groups, it was an education in which the community and the natural environment were the classroom, and the land was seen as the mother of the people (Ahenakew, 1992; Kirkness, 1992). For other groups, the educational processes were quite structured, including such things as vision quests and ceremonies (Brown, 1988), ritualized stories (Archibald, 1990), and formal instruction (Beck, 1977; Brown, 1988). Yet for others, the education was an informal process characterized by observation and imitation of daily activities geared towards

giving children the knowledge, skills, beliefs and values necessary for social, economic and political survival in the society (Ahenakew, 1992). For most of these groups, members of the community were the teachers; each person had some knowledge to pass on to the growing children (Kirkness, 1992). All children were expected to acquire a variety of skills to perform various duties even though there were some who specialized for specific skills (Ahenakew, 1992).

But then came the Europeans and education changed, and in most cases for the worse. The initial contact of First Nation cultures and European education was through the Christian missionaries (Barman, 1986). The missionaries had the aim of "saving" the souls of the Indians and delivering them to Christ (Jaenen, 1986). To the missionaries, Indians were devil worshippers and what was required was cleansing their heathen ways and pagan beliefs, which were well entrenched in their cultural traditions. Fisher says the following about missionaries:

Because the missionaries did not separate western Christianity and western civilization, they approached Indian culture as a whole and demanded a total transformation of the Indian proselyte. Their aim was the complete destruction of the traditional integrated way of life (1997:144).

With such views, the missionaries embarked on the long process of indoctrinating the First Nations people into Christian beliefs and European ways of life.

This process of indoctrination took many forms, depending upon the particular group of missionaries. The French missionaries, for example, intended to make Indians into French men and women in all aspects of life in preparation for their eventual assimilation into the "civilized" French society (Jaenen, 1986). Indians were to be "fitted" with French manners, dress and expressions which would ultimately make them abandon their own way of life. As Jaenen argues,

The education of Amerindian children was promoted with a view to "Francizing" them and eventually assimilating them to the small French expatriate nucleus (1986:45).

From this perspective, the French missionaries developed teaching strategies that would socialize the Indian children in ways that would suit the French way of thinking. The French people valued settled living with an emphasis on farming and apprentice skills. Indian survival skills of hunting, gathering, fishing and so forth had to be replaced by the ideals of the French people, with the eventual goal of dispossessing the Indians of their land, to give way to agriculture and forestry development (Miller, 1989). These

changes would fulfil the purpose of "gradually rendering [the Indian] from a state of barbarism and introducing amongst them the industrious and peaceable habits of civilized life" (Miller, 1989:95).

Another way of indoctrination took the form of forced removal of First Nations children from their parents and communities to residential schools where children were often harshly punished for any use of cultural practices or their languages (Haig-Brown, 1988). Haig-Brown documents the following horrendous experience of an interviewee:

My father who attended Alberni Indian residential school in the twenty's [1920s] was physically tortured by his teachers for speaking Tseshat: they pushed sewing needles through his tongue, a routine punishment for language offenders (1988:16).

During the time they were at the residential schools, the children were required to speak English and were taught a curriculum that contained virtually nothing which recognized even the existence of them as people (More, 1992). Even when such recognition was made, First Nations people were cast in an unfavorable light (LaRoque, 1975).

The residential school system was not successful in its attempts at forced assimilation because most of the children placed in these institutions eventually returned to their communities. Unfortunately, however, many of these former students became marginalized in both cultures because they lost familiarity with practices, traditions and languages of their own culture (Hamme, 1996). Beside the obvious loss of culture and language, former students of residential schools have had to deal with other social problems related to some horrendous experiences they had to go through at the hands of those entrusted with their care (Sterling, 1992). Sterling reveals in a subtle way some form of sexual abuse that used to happen in the residential school she attended and the consequent physical and psychological brutality the victims were subjected to by the administration:

Last year some boys run away from school because one of the priests was doing something bad to them. The boys were caught and whipped. They had their heads shaved and they had to wear dresses and kneel in the dinning room and watch everybody eat for a week. They only had bread and water to eat for a week (1992:13).

Because of the failure of the residential school system to eliminate First Nations as recognizable and distinct cultures, the federal government supported the placement of First Nations children in public schools in the historic "White Paper" of 1969 (LaRoque, 1975). In this paper, the federal government intended to extend the transfer of all services to the provinces,

with no special status for Indians. Chretien (1969), the then Federal Minister of Indian Affairs argued that

... to be an Indian must be to be free—free to develop Indian cultures in an environment of legal, social and economic equality with other Canadians (quoted in Yuzdepski, 1983:37).

Although the federal government introduced the paper with a view to providing biracial harmony, the First Nation groups interpreted it as means of terminating them as a distinct people and culture because the paper had no provisions for the preservation of First Nation cultures. The First Nation people would be expected to embrace the Euro-Canadian culture and abandon their own after which they would emerge as common stock in the so called "just society" (Miller, 1989:232). The aim of the White paper was to enable the Indians to live side by side with the Euro-Canadians as equals competing for the same resources. The Indians would, the government hoped, surrender their special status and the land treaties, which had been signed with the Crown. The White paper aimed at enabling the Indians to take "a road that would lead gradually away from different status to full social, economic and political participation in Canadian life" (*Ibid.*).

Contrary to government aims, the White paper acted as a "catalyst" for First Nations demand for self-determination (LaRoque, 1975). In response to the White paper, the National Indian Brotherhood in 1972 drafted a paper entitled *Indian Control of Indian Education* which stated the following:

What we want for our children can be summarized very briefly

- i) to reinforce their Indian identity
- ii) to provide the training necessary for making a good living in the modern society.

We want education to give our children a strong sense of identity with confidence in their personal worth and ability (1972:3).

In 1973, a joint announcement by the minister of Indian Affairs and the National Indian Brotherhood formally accepted the principles enunciated in the paper. This was interpreted as acceptance of the proposal on the basis for federal government policy (Yuzdepski, 1983). The National Indian Brotherhood paper represented a landmark in the provision of education for First Nation schools. Jean Chretien made the following observation in 1972:

Integration interpreted as a unilateral change is unacceptable to the Indian people. Our concept of integration must be revised to recognize the unique contribution which Indian culture and language have made to the Canadian way of life. Integration

should protect and foster the Indian identity and the personal dignity of each child (quoted in Jordan, 1986:268).

The acceptance of the National Indian Brotherhood paper and the consequent legislation has resulted in increased control by First Nations over the education of their children through Band-controlled schools and the requirement that First Nations parents participate as advisors to public schools receiving federal money for the education of First Nations children.

There are over three hundred and forty one schools (341) across Canada in which First Nations people are in control (Maina, 1995:47). However, these schools have taken various forms of control. The combination of cultural relevance (Couture, 1978; Colorado, 1988; More, 1992), cultural integration (Cruishank, 1978; Dawson, 1988) and cultural immersion (McCaskill, 1987; Merkel, 1984) seems to be the approach that is gaining ground within First Nation educators. Whatever specific structure emerges, the important thing is that all these schools are at various stages of incorporating the culture and language of the First Nation people into the curriculum and assisting in the development of the communities. This is important because research has shown that cultural relevance in curriculum development is central to identity formation (Dawson, 1988; Jordan, 1986), provides survival skills (Couture, 1978; Longboat, 1987), encourages self-determination (Mackay, 1987; National Indian Brotherhood, 1972) and is a means of achieving education equality (More, 1992). The survival schools for instance, have helped young First Nation people to adjust to mainstream urban society without relinquishing their own cultural heritage (Hamme, 1996; McCaskill, 1987). Other First Nation schools with increasing emphasis on spirituality, cultural values and norms are extremely promising for the future of First Nations education.

First Nations Cultures

In order to understand the meaning of culturally relevant pedagogy for First Nations education in Canada, it is necessary to first look at the nature of contemporary First Nations cultures. Although there are many commonalities in the cultural values and practices of different First Nations groups, there are also many differences (Hamme, 1996). It has always been a simplification to speak of First Nations culture as a unity (Miller, 1989; Hampton, 1993), yet they differ in language, economic and governmental systems, history, traditional customs and religious beliefs (Hamme, 1996).

In addition to the cultural differences between First Nations groups, the complex and continuously evolving relationship of First Nations people with the Canadian society has resulted in a great diversity of cultural orientations by members of individual groups (Hamme, 1996). There are those mem-

bers within a group who have maintained a traditional way of life, while others have completely adopted the way of life of the larger Canadian society. Most people function within these two extremes but all of them have been affected in one way or the other by the dominant Canadian culture (Hampton, 1995; Merkel, 1984). Many First Nations people have forged a cultural identity that enables them to function in both worlds (Couture, 1978; Mackay, 1987).

From this perspective, it is difficult to conceptualize the meaning of culture without falling into the danger of rejecting the "artifacts of other cultures" or seemingly attempting to "turn back the clock" (Hampton, 1995:29). Merkel (1984) argues that culture itself, in many ways, can even be defined as essentially a system of values that has been translated into the social practices of daily life. In traditional Indian societies he further argues, this was reflected in the great concern that the basic or primal values of each member of the community be in harmony with the values of all other members. Merkel's definition of culture is well reinforced by Seton (1963) who goes on to say that

The culture of the Redman is fundamentally spiritual; his measure of success is: how much service have I rendered to my people? His mode of life, his thought, his every act are given spiritual significance. This significance was manifested in daily living, in the relationship with one another, in humility, in sharing, in cooperating, in relationship to nature the land, the animals, in the recognition of the Unseen and the Eternal, in the way our people felt and perceived their world (cited in Kirkness, 1992:6).

This kind of culture, as defined by Merkel and reinforced by Seton, produced individuals with a high degree of social integrity and a society we would then describe as "secure, efficient, enlightened, peaceful and tolerant in its dealings, honorable in its affairs, strong and loyal to its values and obligations, and rich in the diverse forms of cultural expression and spiritual fulfillment that represent the highest synergy of man and society" (Merkel, 1984:5). It is however important to note that none of these aspects of culture are static. To assume that First Nations people can live in such a society would be refusing to acknowledge the harsher realities of their modern existence. Cultural patterns are continuously changing and evolving over long periods of time, particularly so for First Nations cultures that have had to contend with the dominant influences of Canadian society, some of which are not mutual.

It is therefore essential that the education of First Nations students be built around the rich cultural heritage they bring with them to the classroom

in order to develop the sense of pride that is critical to personal and cultural identity and academic success (Hamme, 1996). As Merkel proposes, those aspects of traditional education that were vital to the survival of First Nations societies should be recognized and supported. I think the best place to begin is in the classroom.

In summary, I can say that a culturally relevant pedagogy will respect both the historical and contemporary aspects of a child's culture, validate the realities of the world in which the child lives by recognizing its existence and, using educational methods that build on cultural strengths, demonstrate how those strengths can be used to benefit both First Nations and the larger Canadian society (Hamme, 1996).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Hampton argues that Western education is in content and structure hostile to Native people:

It must be straightforwardly realized that education, as currently practiced is cultural genocide. It seeks to brainwash the Native child, substituting non-Native for Native knowledge, values and identity (1995:35).

Educators of First Nations children have to assume the difficult and ambiguous position of attempting to mitigate or subvert the goals of Western education (Hampton, 1995). The hostility of Western education to First Nations culture begins with pervasive ignorance about issues of culture and race. Some well-meaning educators see education as culturally neutral, a practice Hampton refers to as the "defence mechanism of denial" (1995:36). Such an educator is likely to use a curriculum that ignores or systematically distorts the culture of the students. Because some educators have their own unresolved personal issues of racism and ethnocentrism, they cannot recognize the extent to which education is culturally bound and actively hostile to First Nations culture (Hampton, 1995).

Franklin (1974) concludes that schooling is a mechanism of social control. Education in general and the everyday meanings of the curriculum in schools in particular can be seen as essential elements of the existing social privilege, interests and knowledge of one element of the population at the expense of the less powerful groups (cited in Witt, 1993). The experiences of First Nations children with Western education show that, as a means of social control, the schools have failed them.

In a study done by the Ontario government (1989) on First Nations school dropouts, it was found that some dropouts rejected courses in Native Studies, either because the perspective adopted, the content or the teach-

ers did not live up to their expectations. One dropout dismissed Native Studies as "just another history course for White kids" (1989:151). The study confirmed that in some schools, Native Studies courses are taught by non-Native teachers with no specific training and little understanding or sympathy for Native perspectives. Hence, the courses simply become a cursory history of North American Native people from a somewhat novel perspective that does little to help Native students understand their background or the issues that face them as people today.

Common (1988) argues that there is a mismatch between educational objectives of a school system based in one culture, and the way of life, values and goals of students attending it, who come from a different cultural background. When students are evaluated with instruments developed and normed for children from the mainstream educational system, the student is faced with the prospect of being evaluated not on the basis of his or her capabilities, but on the extent to which he or she has acculturated (Common, 1988). Interpreted for First Nations students, it would mean that the instruments used for evaluation are hostile to their culture and thus not appropriate. As Diamond (1987) argues, for non-Native educators, Native education simply means the adaptation of Indians to a school system and pedagogical regime which has been created to fulfil its own needs and aspirations.

It is clear from this point of view that educators of First Nations children need to develop educational strategies that effectively build on the cultural strengths of First Nations children and which include (1) the use of teaching methods and curricula that are congruent with individual and cultural learning and communication styles, (2) the direct integration of First Nations cultural concepts with curricular areas designed for competence in the larger society, (3) teaching about First Nations achievements and their historical contributions to the overall culture of this country, and (4) inclusion of materials relating to the participation and contributions of First Nations both to their communities and to the larger Canadian society in the contemporary world (Hamme, 1996).

Communication and Learning Styles

The manner in which a student learns is influenced by the values, activities and child rearing practices of the students home culture (Billing, 1995). The activities in which the early learning and communication styles of many First Nations children occurs are grounded in important cultural values resulting in learning and communication styles that are often in conflict with the values, teaching styles and assessment methods of the classroom (Hamme, 1996; Hampton, 1995). Hampton describes the conflict

in learning style and communication as being rooted in the very structure of the school, which he says is "hostile to Native cultures in ways that seem unavoidable to White educators" (1995:37).

Age-segregated classrooms; Natives as janitors and teacher aides; role authority rather than kin and personal authority; learning by telling and questioning instead of observation and example; clock time instead of personal, social, and natural time; rules exalted above people and feelings; monolingual teachers; alien standards; educated ignorance of cultural meanings and non-verbal messages; individual more than group tasks; convergent thinking; all these are structural features that undermine the cultures of Native children (Hampton, 1995:38).

This is not to say that the First Nations children cannot learn another culture or even that there is no great value in knowing another's world, only that the structure is alien and hostile, not in intent, but in the assumption that it is the only way things should be (Hampton, 1995).

Learning and communication styles among First Nations people are diverse and unique to particular groups. Ahenakew (1992) documents the learning styles of some Cree women in which one woman reveals that she made soap by remembering how she observed her mother doing it. "My mom had used to make it [soap] and I had watched it, you know" (Ahenakew, 1992:317). For the Cree people, students would more effectively learn through observation, imitation and direct experience with real world activities. This does not mean that Cree children would not learn abstract thinking; rather it means that they will learn more readily if they are first exposed to visual tasks that are closely related to their daily experiences. MacIvor (1995) advocates for traditional teaching methodologies such as experiential learning, storytelling, observation, supervised and unsupervised participation, inter-generational teaching, apprenticeship, dreaming and imagination, ritual and ceremonies, all of which she argues are important tools for teaching science to First Nations students.

Studies have also shown that First Nations learning styles tend to be global, intuitive, and holistic, looking first to the larger idea before attending to the ideas that relate to it (Hamme, 1996; More, 1987). The ability of many First Nations students to see unity and wholeness without building from detail is not well served by the frequent classroom practice of introducing material in an analytical, sequential manner with the global view presented at the end of the sequence of detail (Hamme, 1996). It has been suggested that some of the reading difficulties of First Nation children may be due in

part to the emphasis in many beginning reading programs on a sequential phonetic approach (Hamme, 1996; More, 1987).

Many First Nations cultures traditionally preferred group harmony than individual achievements. Merkel (1984) argues that in working closely with others in solidarity groups such as secret societies, warrior societies and spiritual or other types of organizations, the individual was provided with the essential materials of experience necessary for the creation of a sense of self within the life of the community. Such solidarity and loyalty to the group is likely to be contradicted by learning practices which encourage competition rather than cooperation. Any demonstration of individual superiority is avoided because it is seen as demonstrating the inferiority of others. A competitive classroom atmosphere therefore produces conflict in First Nations students who are disposed to learn cooperatively in groups rather than competitively as individuals (Hamme, 1996).

First Nations learning styles have also been described as reflective, rather than impulsive. For many First Nation cultures, participation in an activity is only expected after lengthy observation and reflection have developed a certainty of the ability to perform (Hamme, 1996). Reflective thinking suggests a habit of the mind that thoughtfully considers a speaker's words and seeks to build upon them (Hampton, 1995). In non-Native universities though

you are encouraged to criticize your colleagues or somebody you don't agree with and sometimes, to me, that looks kind of harmful. Sometimes what you are learning is that you have to be critical in order to succeed at what you are learning (Hampton, 1995:24).

The desire for adequate time to reflect and observe may explain why many First Nations students do not respond verbally to classroom questions which demand instant answers. This desire for adequate time to observe may also explain why silence is a form of communication for First Nations students. What the mainstream educators view as shyness and withdrawal or as passiveness, in which students are unmotivated and uninvolved in the learning process, is in fact an important communication tool which communicates mutual respect and a sense of unity (Hamme, 1996).

However, it would be misleading to fix on particular learning styles because there is the danger of focusing on what may be artifacts or gimmicks. It would be a serious error to assume that a single style is characteristic of all the people within the group. What is essential is to recognize that there are culturally characteristic ways of thought and communication that are of value and interest in themselves and worthy of consideration and study (Hamme, 1996; Hampton, 1995). Care must be

taken to ensure that learning styles are evaluated in an objective way for each individual in order to avoid having "learning style" become just another way of stereotyping students.

Integration of Cultural Concepts into the Learning Process

Integrating conceptual elements of traditional and contemporary First Nations culture into the curriculum validates the First Nations culture in the daily activities of the classroom. First Nations cultures and languages are central to curriculum. Teachers of First Nations students use the local resources as visual aids to show the connection between the learners and their immediate environment. An example of this way of teaching was well summed up by a principal of a Band-controlled school who said the following:

Any time we can integrate the Native perspective in any area being taught, we do so [although] no definite program is set up yet. For example in science—Trees, we read the legend *How the Birch Got its Marks*. We then bring in Native words (trees, barks, leaves)—respecting nature as our ancestors did (Maina, 1995:105).

Another example of this kind of classroom integration of traditional culture and modern technology is the Computers and Culture Project, in which secondary school students in British Columbia use computer and video technology to learn how to preserve the culture, language and history of the Carrier people (Hamme, 1996).

Cultural information was gathered through student interviews with parents and tribal elders, guest speakers, and observation and cultural events. The information was then entered by the students into the computer and stored on a videodisc. The students thus became more familiar with their traditional culture while learning computer skills and gaining experience in analyzing and organizing large amounts of information (Hamme, 1996:29).

Another way in which cultural elements can be integrated in the classroom is through oral history, stories and songs, which are important instructional techniques in most First Nations cultures (Archibald, 1990). The main source of oral history, stories and songs in First Nations cultures are the Elders, who are also the upholders of morality and cultural wisdom. Elders give accurate information because they have the wisdom of their years to guide them.

There was no room for error because an error handed down in future generations would be a grand distortion. If truths were

to be passed along, they had to be passed along correctly. Even simple parables had to have the same meticulous memorization (Brown Jr., 1988:157).

Beside the knowledge that would be integrated into the curriculum, the characteristics of Elders would serve as models for curriculum outcomes. Elders in First Nations culture give identities to the communities through the interpretation of events and histories in a manner that is immediately relevant (Couture, 1978). Integrating cultural concepts in the classroom would not only view Elders as providers of knowledge related to "legends, history, personal counselling, hand sign language, Indian religious values" (Medicine, 1987:148), but their attributes would provide a good example of what culturally relevant pedagogy can produce.

The elders' intelligence, excellent memory capacity and discursive ability are cognitive behavior which students would do well to examine in order to understand what psycho-cultural variables combine to include high level development of the faculties (Couture, 1978:129).

In the absence of Elders, there are recorded First Nations oral histories, stories and songs which provide answers to important questions of life (Archibald, 1990), and which have lessons relevant to contemporary issues. For instance the story *Coyote's Eyes* in which coyote sees through the eyes of different animals is a good illustration of the usefulness of being flexible enough to focus on the worldview appropriate to differing situations (Hamme, 1996). However, the story gives warning that using other people's eyes to view ourselves can be destructive. The lesson from this story then is that we can only be flexible in as far as that flexibility serves our own needs.

Integration of traditional First Nations cultural values with education for the contemporary world has been achieved through the use of the sacred circle/hoop, otherwise known as the medicine wheel (Hampton, 1995; Calliou, 1995). Hampton (1995), for instance, uses a medicine typology as an organizing tool to discuss principles and boundaries in the redefinition and theory of Indian education. For Hampton, Indian education must enhance Aboriginal consciousness of what it means to be Indian, thus empowering and enriching individual and collective lives (Battiste, 1995). Calliou (1995) also uses a medicine wheel model for a peacekeeping pedagogy in which she shares her personal reflections on racism and multiculturalism built from within the medicine wheel and the Iroquois Great Law of peace. The way these educators use the medicine wheel provides a unique model of understanding the continuum and interconnectedness of the events surrounding First Nations education in the contemporary world.

Historical Contributions

It is important that First Nations children learn about the ways in which the knowledge and practices of their culture have enriched the overall culture of the contemporary Canadian society. This is because many of the contributions have been borrowed and integrated without any acknowledgement of First Nations people as their source. Merkel, for instance, links the development of a democratic confederation in North America to the Indian society. He points out that Benjamin Franklin was considerably impressed by the fact that the Indian societies with which he was acquainted were "restrained by no laws ... no courts or ministers of justice, no suits, no prisons, no governors vested with any legal authority" (1984:1). The first real model of a functioning democracy was developed by an Iroquois philosopher and was in practice by the Iroquois Confederacy three centuries before Columbus (Hamme, 1996).

The First Nations contribution to the world wars has until recently been unacknowledged and unrecognized by the Canadian society let alone any school curricula. The celebration of Remembrance Day in 1992 was the first time in history that First Nations people were able to celebrate their world war heroes alongside the rest of Canadians:

Native Veterans joined Aboriginal leaders Ovide Mercredi and Ron George to place wreaths with such dignitaries as Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, and silver cross mother Ida Orser (90) of Hartland N.B., whose son, Ivan was killed in the second world war. Contributions by Native soldiers have often been overlooked. Last year, aboriginal representatives had to wait until the end of the ceremony to place their wreaths. "We are right behind Mulroney and his gang now", said a smiling Harry Lawrence, a metis veteran who was 18 in 1941 when he joined the Winnipeg Rifles, the same unit his father fought with in the First World War. "We are being slowly recognized and we are not going to be denied any more", added Sam Sinclair, president of the National Aboriginal Veterans Association (Canadian Press, Globe and Mail Nov. 12, 1992, A4).

The recognition and acknowledgement of First Nations people as having been active participants in the larger Canadian society is an important learning experience for First Nations students.

Another contribution that needs recognition and acknowledgement is the area of agriculture and medicine. Two thirds of the vegetables and cereals now consumed in the world including corn, beans, carrots, turnips, cucumbers, pumpkins, watermelons, potatoes, peas and barley were being cultivated by First Nations people long before the arrival of Europeans in

North America (Hamme, 1996; Irwin, 1996). The knowledge of medicine is not new to many First Nation people. In fact, for many First Nations cultures, every person in the community was expected to have some basic knowledge of treating certain illnesses. Ahenakew (1992) describes how knowledge and skills in medicine were not zealously guarded by specialists. A mother was expected to be a doctor and to have the ability to treat minor illnesses; only after the failure of this treatment would a specialist be consulted. Rosa Longneck, one of Ahenakew's participants, describes her knowledge in medicine and laments the fact that today's specialists prescribe pills that turn out to be poisonous when children take an accidental overdose.

In old times, there was no such thing as overdose. I still know how to treat a woman who has the chills [sic.breast feeding] you know. And I still know how to gather various roots, and also aromatic ones (Ahenakew:319).

Perhaps the most important contribution of First Nations cultures is in the area of environment. Ruby Dustan argues that while ensuring planetary survival is our first priority, the second role of Indigenous peoples is to protect what is left of the natural world within their traditional homeland with every ounce of their strength and every resource at their disposal (cited in MacIvor, 1995:8). The preservation of the natural world is important not only to the Canadian society but to the entire contemporary world.

Historical contributions to the contemporary Canadian society is significant to the First Nation learners. It gives them pride in their cultural heritage, which is a necessary ingredient to a strong cultural identity.

Contemporary Contribution

It is difficult and perhaps impossible to summarize in one page the contemporary contribution the First Nations are currently making in Canadian society and which I believe should be a large component of First Nations education. One need only to switch on a television and watch the popular Canadian program *North of 60*. It is a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) show with a predominantly First Nations cast.

North of 60 blends traditional aspects of our Native culture with contemporary Native lifestyles. "It is not stereotypical" said Tina [Keeper, one of the stars of the show]. Shows like *North of 60* are just what our people need. Positive role modeling with just plain good entertainment (Gaskin, 1995:16).

Or, one needs only to switch on the radio and to hear the lyrics of First Nations musicians such as Tom Jackson, Susan Aglukark and Buffy Ste. Marie. The latter was recently inducted into the Juno Awards Hall of Fame.

(The award is to honor those who have made "contributions towards the greater international recognition of Canadian artists and musicians.")

For most of these First Nations people, entertainment is not an end in itself. It is a tool in which social issues affecting First Nations people from all spheres of life are raised and discussed. Gaskin (1995) maintains that Tom Jackson, one of the stars of *North of 60*, not only provides excellent entertainment, he also contributes to a change of public image for Native people.

He [Jackson] portrays his Native roles in a respectful manner. Changing the stereotypes that have plagued our people for generations is something everyone can be proud of (Gaskin, 1995:5).

Buffy Ste. Marie has also used her music to expose the ills that have historically plagued First Nations people. In her song *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, for example, she criticizes the corporate culture of "Get rich...get rich quick" that has continuously degraded humanity through pollution, war and greed. For this performer of Cree ancestry, love and politics intertwine freely in her work (St. Marie, 1995).

Perhaps the most important contribution First Nations cultures are currently making to Canadian society and to the world is the leadership they have taken in identifying the root of environmental problems and offering possible solutions. In a recent international conference on the St. Lawrence ecosystem, which brought together scholars, biologists, chemists, civil engineers, geographers, ecologists, sociologist, foresters and members of the river community, noted First Nations academics and Elders took the lead. The St. Lawrence river, also known as the Haudenosaunee to the Mohawk people, has long been sacred to the Aboriginal people who inhabit its shores and basin from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of St. Lawrence (Lawn, 1995). It was against this background that Dr. Ernest Benedict, a Mohawk scholar and Elder opened the conference with the Iroquois Thanksgiving Address which gives thanks to all parts of creation.

It illustrated to scientists the holistic approach that is used by Iroquois to keep the ecosystem in good health. The Iroquois believe that all components of creation are essential and are interrelated. They believe that all creation is integral to the continuation of the planet. It was this opening address that was the real inspiration for the scholars and the scientists (Lawn, 1995:87).

The contributions made by First Nations people to contemporary Canadian society are many and diverse. Much has been accomplished in the fields of First Nations arts and crafts, fine arts, architecture, literature, en-

trepreneurship, academics and so forth. All it would mean to educators is keeping track of current periodicals, newspapers and journals in order to stay current on issues affecting First Nations people. For a teacher, it could mean the constant change of lesson plans and resources, a none too easy task for people who are already loaded with other diverse responsibilities. However, the potential gains of using contemporary materials in the classroom far outweighs the losses. Part of growing up for First Nations students is being able to recognize the contemporary struggles, opportunities, and contributions of their people.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed multiple reasons why developing a culturally relevant pedagogy is important, indeed crucial, for First Nations students. Besides the obvious historical reasons which saw the undermining of First Nations cultures, it is crucial that effective educational strategies to assist learning be developed. For them to be effective, those strategies must validate and support all aspects of a child's culture in the classroom, provide a learning environment that is congruent to home rearing practices, and provide skills and knowledge that will enable students to participate in the larger Canadian society if they so wish.

Note

1. First Nation is one of the terms used to describe some of the Indigenous people of Canada. For the purpose of this paper, other terms such as Indians, Natives and Aborigines have been used for the same reference. This does not in any way denote disrespect or lack of clarity on my part. The different usages depend upon the region where some particular literature originates or the period such literature was written. First Nation is currently the term preferred by many status Indian Bands. It is also frequently rejected by other groups and individuals classed in the *Constitution Act, 1982* under the general rubric of "Aboriginal."

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