

## **INTEGRATING ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES INTO CURRICULA: A LITERATURE REVIEW**

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### **Abstract / Résumé**

Much has been written about the theory that the poor performance of Aboriginal students is due to the lack of culturally relevant curriculum and to teaching strategies which do not reflect Aboriginal worldview. This paper reviews the literature on integrating Aboriginal perspectives into curricula. It includes an examination of the history of Aboriginal education in Canada followed by an explanation of Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy and of Aboriginal learning styles and ways of learning. Practical suggestions for integrating Aboriginal perspectives into curricula are outlined. Finally, implications of the research are discussed with a view to the future of Aboriginal education.

On a beaucoup écrit sur la théorie selon laquelle le rendement médiocre des élèves autochtones est causé par l'absence de programmes d'études culturellement pertinents et par des stratégies d'enseignement qui ne reflètent pas la vision du monde des Autochtones. Le présent article examine la documentation sur l'intégration des perspectives autochtones dans les programmes d'études, y compris un examen de l'histoire de l'éducation des Autochtones au Canada, suivi d'une explication des connaissances et de la pédagogie indigènes, ainsi que des styles et des modes d'apprentissage des Autochtones. L'article présente aussi des suggestions pratiques pour l'intégration des perspectives autochtones dans les programmes d'études. Finalement, il traite des incidences des recherches sur l'avenir de l'éducation des Autochtones.

## Foreward

Generally, Aboriginal peoples in Canada prefer to be identified by the name of their tribe or nation. However, for the purpose of this paper, the terms Aboriginal peoples, First Nations, North American Indians, and Native people have been used interchangeably to represent the Indigenous people of North America. It is important to note, however, that each of these terms has a distinctly different meaning.

In the context of this paper, Eurocentric education refers to the European-based system of education (mainly English or French), that has been, and continues to be, imposed on First Nations across Canada, without taking into account their respective value systems, histories, languages, or their knowledge. It is an education that postulates the superiority of European knowledge over non-European knowledge (Augustine 1998).

## Introduction

### Cause for Concern

For more than thirty years, both federal and provincial governments have acknowledged the low educational success rates of Canada's Aboriginal students. As early as 1967, the Hawthorn report documented an alarming 94 percent drop-out rate before graduation for Aboriginal students. While the gap is gradually closing, with an 80 percent drop-out rate in 1988 (National Indian Brotherhood 1988) and decreasing to a 75 percent drop-out rate in 2003 (Brunnen 2003), there is still much cause for concern. Achievement of Aboriginal students is much lower than that of their non-Aboriginal peers throughout their schooling. For example, on British Columbia Provincial Foundation Skills Assessment tests in Grades 4, 7, and 10 in 2000-2003, literacy levels for Aboriginal students remained in the 50 percent range while those for non-Aboriginal students averaged in the high 70 to low 80 percent range (Bell 2004, British Columbia Ministry of Education 2003). Similarly, high school grade-to-grade transition rates were better for non-Aboriginal students, with 78 percent graduating, compared to 42 percent for Aboriginal students (Bell 2004, Petten 2003). In today's climate of increased public accountability where the spotlight is on achievement, and pressure is on all schools to improve student performance, there is much discussion at the federal, provincial and local levels regarding the failure of the education system in the area of Aboriginal student achievement, but little has been done to improve the situation (Battiste 2002, Greenway 2002, Robertson 2003). As Cardinal (1999, p.26) asserts: "While educators are busy revamping curriculum and designing evaluation tools...Aboriginal

peoples are being left further behind.”

The conventional interpretation of the low achievement rates of Aboriginal students often implies that the fault lies with Aboriginal individuals, their families, and their communities, however increasingly researchers contend that it is the school system, not Aboriginal students or their culture, that must be fixed (Battiste 2002, Cardinal 1999, Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist 2003, Kirkness 1999, Robertson 2003). Many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators and researchers feel that the poor academic performance of Aboriginal students is due to ignorance of and/or the lack of sensitivity to Aboriginal learning styles and to teaching strategies which do not reflect Aboriginal worldview (Agbo 2001, Cardinal 1999, Castellano & Lahache 2000, Hughes & More 1997, Nichol 2005, Pewewardy 2002). Another reason often cited is that, despite the fact that the literature on curriculum development clearly indicates that curriculum should be in harmony with students' life experience within their particular ethno-racial cultural background (Agbo 2001, Doll 1996, Smith & Lovat 1990), curriculum for Aboriginal students is not culturally relevant (Bell 2004, Cardinal 1999, Greenway 2002, National Indian Brotherhood 1972, 1988, Osborne 2001).

In schools with Aboriginal students, educators struggle with the challenges of providing education which is meaningful and relevant, and at the same time mindful of the outcomes mandated by the provincial government. Efforts at adding Aboriginal content to curricula usually consist of adding units designed to “enrich” existing curriculum content instead of changing the core assumptions, values, and logic of the curriculum itself. Meaningful and relevant education for Aboriginal students, however, requires fundamental changes to create a curriculum that is rooted in Aboriginal understanding of the world, not only in content, but also in the teaching and learning activities which are in harmony with the life experience of Aboriginal students (Augustine 1998, Munns, Lawson & Mootz 2000, Tharp & Yamauchi 1994). It is only when Aboriginal students find a sense of place and belonging in the school system that their achievement levels will improve (Antone 2000, Augustine 1998, Baskin 2002, Cardinal 1999, Battiste 2002, Greenway 2002, Kirkness 1999, Manitoba Education and Youth 2003, Pewewardy 2002).

### **Purpose and Scope of the Review**

The purpose of this paper is to review the literature on integrating Aboriginal perspectives into curricula, particularly the literature which moves beyond discussion of simple add-ons to current curricula, to an examination of more far-reaching changes which would affect core learning. For the purpose of this review, curriculum is defined as being al-

most everything in the school: the books, the pictures, the seating plan, the music, the announcements, the school staff, the extra-curricular activities such as clubs and sports, the food, and even the reception of parents in the office. In other words, curriculum is the whole environment (Allingham 1992, B.C. Human Rights Commission 2001).

This review focuses on First Nations in Canada, however, it also includes some literature on American Indian and Alaska Native education and, in a few cases, literature in Australia, where parallels are evident. The review includes academic literature by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars and researchers published within the past decade, although in some cases earlier literature is referenced. The earlier literature includes milestone studies commissioned by various non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal organizations which provides background on the issues in Aboriginal education in Canada. It also includes early references frequently cited in many of the more recent studies in Aboriginal education. An examination of some early literature highlights the fact that improvements have been slow and inconsistent (B.C. Ministry of Education 2003, First Nations Education Council 2003).

The review begins with a historical background of Aboriginal education from European contact to the present, followed by a description of Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy which existed long before European contact. Some of the early and current literature on Aboriginal learning styles and ways of learning will be reviewed in the next section. Implications of the research will be examined, first in general, then more specifically with respect to parent/community involvement, teacher education, and teaching strategies. Finally, recommendations for further research will be made.

## **History of Aboriginal Education**

### **From Assimilation by Segregation to Assimilation by Integration**

Dozens of reports on Aboriginal issues released over several decades, making hundreds of recommendations for reforms, have concluded that education, in both their present and previous forms, have been used to ensure the cultural, economic, political, and social oppression of Canada's Aboriginal peoples (Hawthorn 1967, National Indian Brotherhood 1988, British Columbia Human Rights Commission 2001). The use of schools as an instrument of oppression of Aboriginal people began in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, when European missionaries established schools for Aboriginal people on Reserves (Cardinal 1999, Kirkness 1999). Since Aboriginal children were seen as the segment of Aboriginal society that would be the most receptive to the imposed standards of Western civilization, assimilation through education—or “cultural genocide” as some

refer to it (Bailey 2000, Cardinal 1999, Pewewardy 2002)—became a primary concern of the Canadian government (Cardinal 1999). However, because attendance was poor, the schools were ineffective as tools of assimilation therefore in 1894 amendments were made to the Indian Act to allow the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their homes and communities to segregate them, often for years at a time, in residential schools which existed from the 1890s until the 1980s.

As children were removed from the influence of their homes and forced to reject their traditional dress, languages, and religion, Aboriginal world-views, languages, and cultures were gradually eliminated from the children and subsequent generations in a combination of powerful forces of cognitive imperialism and colonization (Antone 2000, Bell 2004, Battiste 2002). Residential schools produced generations of individuals who lost their sense of belonging—people who belonged neither in Aboriginal culture nor in western culture—and created widespread social and psychological upheaval in Aboriginal communities (Antone 2000, Greenway 2002, Kirkness 1999). Negative attitudes about education continue in the Reserve communities which still suffer from generations of lost parenting skills and cultural knowledge (Bell 2004, Demmert 2003, Greenway 2002, Petten 2003, Pewewardy 2002, Robertson 2003):

Many Aboriginal peoples believe that the educational systems imposed on them by the federal and provincial governments have had the greatest negative effect on the nature of their lives. (Manitoba Education and Youth 2003, p.4)

In the 1960s, Canada's policy with regard to education of Aboriginal people changed from one of assimilation by segregation to one of assimilation by integration (Cardinal 1999, Morin 2003), and as residential schools began to close, Aboriginal children began to enroll in public schools which were unprepared for them (Greenway 2002). The integration concept was a continuation of government control over the lives of Aboriginal people, for it was introduced with little or no consultation with Aboriginal parents, Bands, or organizations (Greenway 2002). No preparation of teachers or of curriculum was made to accommodate the children of another culture. This approach to education has not been one of true integration where Aboriginal cultures were respected and recognized, rather it continued to be a process of assimilation where Aboriginal students were being absorbed into the non-Aboriginal society (Kirkness 1999) through the continued use of a Eurocentric model of education (Battiste 2002, Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist 2003, Robertson 2003, Youngblood Henderson 2000).

As residential schools were gradually phased out and the integration of Aboriginal children into the public school began, documents such

as the Hawthorn report (1967) and the National Indian Brotherhood's 1972 and 1988 reports on Aboriginal education called for improvement in Aboriginal education. In 1972, the federal government accepted a policy of Indian control of Indian education, which gave First Nations the right to operate their own schools, however one of the funding contribution requirements was (and still is) that First Nations must use provincial curricula, despite the fact that it is culturally biased and inadequate to meet the needs of Aboriginal students (Battiste 1998). While the literature acknowledges that some improvements in Aboriginal education have been made, the school system continues to be based on a Eurocentric model of education (Goddard & Foster 2002, Youngblood Henderson 2000). The Aboriginal child continues to be caught between two cultures and is therefore outside of and between both. Youngblood Henderson (2000, p.76) expresses the experience of Aboriginal students:

...the realization of their invisibility is similar to looking into a still lake and not seeing their image. They become alien in their own eyes, unable to recognize themselves in the reflections and shadows of the world.

### **Indigenous Knowledge and Pedagogy**

With few exceptions, the written history of Aboriginal education relates attempts to apply a Eurocentric education and education processes to Aboriginal people and ignores the Indigenous knowledge that was in existence pre-contact (Augustine 1998, Baskin 2002, Battiste 2002, Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist 2003, Mattson & Caffrey 2001, Partington 2001, Warner 2005). Literature on the topic of Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy does exist, but it is limited in scope and depth. In forcing assimilation and acculturation to Eurocentric knowledge, first in residential schools and later in public schools, governments and educational systems have displaced Indigenous knowledge and in doing so, have failed First Nations children. "What is Indigenous knowledge?" is a question which must be explored as a first step in remedying the failure of the existing educational system.

Prior to the invasion of the Aboriginal settlements in North America and the imposition of the Eurocentric educational system, tribal nations had their own very diverse educational systems (Kirkness 1999, Pewewardy 2002). While recognizing that each First Nations society had a unique educational system, there are a number of principles and practices which hold true for many Indigenous peoples (Warner 2005). Indigenous pedagogy recognizes the child as a physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual being, one who learns best in a circular, holistic, child-centered environment (Augustine 1998, Elliott & Erlandson 2003, Holt

1992). The traditional Aboriginal method of educating children saw the whole child, therefore all aspects of the child (mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual) were addressed (Cardinal 1999, Manitoba Education & Youth 2003). The First Nations education systems were designed to educate the child informally through observation and interaction with parents, relatives, Elders, and social groups in such a way that skills were developed in order to allow the child to function adequately within the natural environment (Battiste 1998, Manitoba Education & Youth 2003, Nelson-Barber 1999). The traditional approach to raising children was one of guiding without interfering, allowing opportunities for problem-solving and decision-making independently (Charlie 2002, Hughes 1989). Since Indigenous knowledge was passed from one generation to the next through modeling, practice, and animation, not through the written word, but in the oral tradition, Aboriginal languages were a critical link to Indigenous knowledge and to the survival of the culture (Battiste 1998). Within traditional Aboriginal cultures all people are respected and viewed as having important contributions to make to a community however Elders are shown a special respect (Barnhardt 1990). Elders are the archives of the communities, the holders of traditional knowledge (Augustine 1998, Manitoba Education & Youth 2003), and children were taught that respect, wisdom, and knowledge were gained by listening to and observing Elders (Hughes & More 1997, Nelson-Barber 1999).

In traditional Aboriginal societies, children were taught to view all of the people with whom they had contact as being related to them. This sense of belonging and kinship was not limited only to people, but also extended to the land as well. Common to all Aboriginal groups is the view that the land is the giver of life and law and must be respected above all else. Land is viewed as sacred and the traditional lifestyle of Aboriginal peoples is rooted in it; Aboriginal peoples live and learn from the environment (Williams, Snively, Edwards & McMillan 2003). Further, Aboriginal peoples have a respect for the relatedness of all things in the natural world (Barnhardt 1990, B.C. Ministry of Education 1998). Education of children reflected the interconnectedness of everything in that it was recognized that there were a limitless number of interconnected factors that might affect a child's being. Traditionally, spirituality was central to the Aboriginal way of life, as all parts of creation were believed to have spirit (Baskin 2002, Barnhardt 1990, Cardinal 1999, Doige 2003, Holt 1992, Hughes & More 1997, Kirkness 1999, Manitoba Education & Youth 2003). The over-riding goal of education was to prepare children for their lives as positive, participating and contributing members of their society (Cardinal 1999, Kirkness 1999, Manitoba Education & Youth 2003).

## Aboriginal Learning Styles and Ways of Learning

Hughes and More (1997, p.4) define 'ways of learning' as "the mental processes and instructional settings which a student uses while learning" and 'learning style' as "a way of learning in which the student has a strength." The concept of Aboriginal ways of learning and learning styles as an approach to improving education opportunities for Aboriginal students is not without criticism. McCann (1995, p.47), for example, says she is uncomfortable with the fact that 'Aboriginal learning style' "... implies that there is a particular way in which Aboriginal students think, a particular way in which their brains work." Others (Hughes & More 1997, Pewewardy 2002, Swisher 1991), although advocates of the uses of learning styles, caution against potential stereotyping, stating that there are wide variations amongst individuals and that there is no evidence of a single Aboriginal learning style. Pewewardy (2002), however, concludes that certain generalizations based on research can be made regarding the impact of culture on the learning styles of Aboriginal students. The strongest argument in favour of the usefulness of Aboriginal learning styles is that some of the generalizations made reflect aspects of Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy, as seen in the summary below.

Aboriginal students tend to:

- be global learners, those who understand best when the overall concept is presented first and details later (Hilberg & Tharp 2002, Hughes & More 1997, Pewewardy 2002), suggesting a need for more discussion and modeling at the beginning of a lesson.
- be field dependent, therefore less able to separate a part from the whole (Hughes & More 1997, Pewewardy 2002).
- be imaginal learners or learners who learn more easily from images, diagrams, and symbols than from words (Hughes & More 1997).
- be concrete learners who learn best with support from materials that can be seen (Hughes & More 1997, Nichol 2005).
- be reflective, that is, they think through the new learning and may need to rehearse it before using it (Hilberg & Tharp 2002, Nichol 2005, Ogbu 1978, Pewewardy 2002), suggesting that more time might be needed.
- learn best through observation and imitation (Hilberg & Tharp 2002, Pewewardy 2002, Swisher 1991) or what More (1989) refers to as 'watch-then-do.'
- value the group more than the individual (Hilberg & Tharp 2002, Nichol 2005, Pewewardy 2002), implying that a student may hide academic competence to avoid seeming superior to the rest of the group (Swisher 1991)

- prefer spontaneous learning (Hughes & More 1997)
- prefer contextual learning in real-life context (Harris 1990, More 1989, Nichol 2005).

Equally as useful as knowing their students' learning styles is for teachers to know their own learning styles for, according to Hughes and More (1997), one's teaching styles are based largely on one's learning styles. Teaching styles can have a significant effect on whether students learn or fail (Swisher & Deyhle 1989) because as Swisher (1991, p.5) explains, "Teaching style . . . is a critical factor in communicating expectations of school learning styles."

### **Implications of the Research**

For the past 300 years, Aboriginal education was and still is characterized by non-Aboriginal people using non-Aboriginal methods to administer the education of Aboriginal people with little or no acknowledgement of Aboriginal worldview (Antone 2000, Bailey 2000, Douglas 1994, Mattson & Caffrey 2001, Williams et al 2003, Youngblood Henderson 2003). According to a British Columbia Human Rights Commission (2001) discussion paper, educational equity will be achieved when Aboriginal children see themselves and their people reflected in the curriculum and feel a sense of belonging in the school system. A culturally based education (Demmert 2003) must be provided, and the curriculum and curriculum process must acknowledge and reinforce the fact that Aboriginal people are involuntary minorities (Burns 2000, Ogbu 1978), a distinct and unique people striving to regain self-determination within the overall fabric of post-colonial Canadian society (Mattson & Caffrey 2001). In an exhaustive review of the research on the education of Native American students, Demmert and Towner (2003) concluded that culturally based education has six critical elements: Aboriginal language programs; pedagogy that stresses traditional cultural characteristics; pedagogy which reflects Indigenous ways of knowing and learning; curriculum based on the culture of the community; parent/community involvement in schools; and knowledge and use of the social and political mores of the community. It is worthwhile to examine these some of these elements in greater depth as they apply to integrating Aboriginal perspectives into curricula.

### **Parent/Community Involvement**

Demmert (1999) asserts that schools are not capable of doing the job of education without the direct assistance of parents and the full support of the communities they serve. Certainly, many studies have shown that strong working partnerships between schools, parents, and

communities exert a powerful positive influence towards improved academic achievement, and this is especially true in Aboriginal environments (Bell 2004, Demmert 2003). However, historically and currently the Aboriginal parenting community has been, and often continues to be, uninvolved in the public education system. The active traditional role of the parent and extended community as mentors working directly with children, therefore, has been lost. Kirkness (1999) observes that parents often have no idea what is going on in school, and are not informed about the educational system and how it operates (Baskin 2002).

In addressing the involvement of the Aboriginal parenting community in the public school system, it is critical to acknowledge the legacy of residential schools, which left parents feeling marginalized and disempowered (B.C. Human Rights Commission 2001, Baskin 2002, Mattson & Caffrey 2001) as well as distrustful of the school system (Bell 2004, Robertson 2003). In many instances it may be necessary to “reach out” to parents (Bell 2004, Gipp & Fox 1991) in order to build effective bridges between the school and the parent community. Smith (1999) describes some methods of decreasing discomfort and attracting parents, such as staff preparing meals for parents on a regular basis, and offering night programs in cooking and crafts in a family-centered approach where parents and community members are respected, supported and treated as equals. Bell (2004) details case studies on ten exemplary Aboriginal schools, many of which have adopted similar methods. In addition, Bell advocates frequent face-to-face or telephone contacts between parents and teachers and an “open door” policy to help develop relational trust. Katz and McClusky’s (2003) “Three Stars and a Wish” project, wherein parents went to school to tell the children personal stories in the oral tradition which the children used for writing, is a promising example of how a school can embrace Aboriginal ways of learning and encourage parental involvement.

Beyond the involvement of parents is a need for the whole community to be involved (Baskin 2002). J. Lipka’s (1994) project on “culturally-negotiated schooling” is an excellent example of how collaboration between the community and educators can result in truly transformational education for Aboriginal students. As Lipka (p.9) explains, “Cultural negotiation is a process that makes schools’ hidden values and processes visible to community and school while making the community’s knowledge, values, and processes visible to schooling.” Douglas (1994), Evans, McDonald and Nyce (2000), Baskin (2002), and Agbo (2001) recommend a participatory approach to curriculum development, wherein the encounter between school and community is no longer a one-way transaction, rather a process of cultural rapport. Educators becoming partici-

pants in their students' community is another way of fostering cultural rapport.

### **Teacher Education**

A culturally based education recognizes teachers as the immediate agents of contact and therefore on the frontlines of school improvement. Hunt (1987) asserts that if educators want to create change, they need to start with themselves, beginning with the recognition of their own worldviews so that eventually they will be able to understand the worldviews of their students (Baskin 2002, Pewewardy 2002). The education of beginning teachers must include an understanding of the oppression of marginalized groups as a foundation for reconceptualizing teaching and classroom practice (Osborne 2002). An extensive literature review by St. Denis and Hampton (2002) supports the view that educators, including those who are Aboriginal, must be aware of the effects of historical racism because it is a contributor to the lack of success of Aboriginal students. Teachers of Aboriginal students must also become familiar with the culture of their students (Gipp & Fox 1991, Hawthorn 1967, Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist 2003) and "make learning in the classroom as compatible as possible with the learning that takes place outside it" (Leavitt 1994, p.183). Reyhner, Lee and Gabbard (1993) outline a specialized knowledge base for beginning teachers which is above and beyond what is in most teacher education programs. It includes these topics: knowledge of culture and society; the historical background of Native education and mainstream education; and instructional methodologies for Native students.

There is an urgent need for more Aboriginal educators, but despite a severe shortage few Aboriginal people enroll in teacher training programs and those who do often drop out (Robinson 1994). Since Aboriginal teachers face "the danger of being evaluated out of the profession" (Lipka 1990, p.40), Robinson (1994) proposes an alternative model of evaluation which would honour the fundamental characteristics of successful Aboriginal education. The literature reveals the dilemma of the Aboriginal educator: having to give up being Aboriginal to be successful (Bailey 2000, Reyhner et al 1993, Robertson 2003, Robinson 1994). Bailey (2000), a non-Aboriginal teacher educator concerned about what she refers to as her own complicity in ongoing cultural genocide, states that even the Aboriginal teachers in teacher education programs are trained to teach in the Eurocentric tradition of education. In addition, those Aboriginal teachers who successfully complete their teacher training are under enormous pressure to preserve and enhance students' understanding of their cultures while continuing to work in a system that

is largely Eurocentric (Battiste 2002, Bouvier 2004, Orr & Friesen 1999, Robertson 2003). Overwhelmingly, the research points to a need for not only an alternative model of evaluation for Aboriginal teachers, but also to a need for further development of alternative models of teacher education programs which should include the specialized knowledge base described by Reyhner et al (1993).

### **Teaching Strategies**

For Aboriginal students to have a sense of belonging in school, teachers must do more than simply introduce Aboriginal content into the curriculum; they must also adopt Aboriginal methods and values so that students may come to know their own identity and potential from within the understanding of their culture (Barnhardt 1990, Leavitt 1994, Lipka 1990). Research suggests that “good teaching” in one cultural context may not transfer to another (Moyle 2005, Nelson-Barber 1999) because “establishing the conditions that engender trust between teachers and students rest in part on understanding particular cultural values” (Nelson-Barber 1999, p.2). Culturally responsive teaching cannot be approached as a recipe or series of steps that teachers can follow to be effective, rather it relies on the development of certain dispositions toward learners and a holistic approach to curriculum and instruction (Pewewardy & Hammer 2003). Culturally relevant pedagogy (Osborne 2002) is a term which refers to building from students’ daily lives and cultures in such a way as to foster ethnic pride and academic success using teaching strategies with which students are comfortable. Osborne provides a framework of nine “signposts” which is compatible with Demmert and Towner’s (2003) findings on culturally based education as well as Pewewardy and Hammer’s (2003) and Reyhner, Lee and Gabbard’s (1993) suggestions on culturally responsive teaching.

The summary of teaching strategies listed below may be useful in working with Aboriginal students. This list was compiled from the work of Barnhardt (1990), Bell (2004), British Columbia Ministry of Education (1998), Castellano and Lahache (2000), Catholic District School Board Writing Partnership (2003), Charlie (2002), Hughes and More (1997), Manitoba Education and Youth (2003), Nichol (2005), Swisher and Deyhle (1989), and Tharp and Yamauchi (1994). In many instances, these suggestions are mentioned in multiple sources.

### **Storytelling**

Long before Europeans came to Canada, Aboriginal people had a strong oral tradition whereby teachings were transmitted by word of mouth from generation to generation. Elders and other community mem-

bers can be invited to tell stories as a way of illuminating Aboriginal history and worldviews.

### **Talking Circles**

The talking or sharing circle is a traditional Native technique that is used to bring people together in a quiet, respectful manner for the purposes of teaching, listening, learning, and sharing. Participants are encouraged to speak not only from the mind, but also from the heart. Each person in the circle is given the opportunity to speak, but may pass if he/she desires.

### **Concept Mapping/Webbing**

Webbing may begin with a concept presented in the middle of a page. From that concept, a group of students may brainstorm all related concepts that they feel are relevant or that flow from that initial concept. Concepts will multiply as more ideas are generated. Each individual within the group may build upon the concepts of others.

### **Video**

The use of video or film can be particularly effective because it can take students to an experience outside of the four walls of the classroom and allows students to observe. To help students become productive when viewing a video, teachers may employ a number of methods before, during, and after viewing.

### **Experiential Learning**

Traditionally, Aboriginal children learned by doing things. It is recommended that students have opportunities to physically manipulate, see, or hear about concepts they are learning first-hand and preferably in a natural setting. It may be easier for students to make connections between the concepts they are learning and their own life experiences when they are able to experience the concepts in a natural setting. Building strong community links can extend the boundary of the classroom into the community by seeking the assistance and support of local Aboriginal people.

### **Cooperative Learning**

Aboriginal children may perform new skills more willingly when teachers use cooperative learning, while they may disengage or avoid competition when teachers use primarily verbal instruction. It is preferable to focus on tasks that can be performed as joint projects.

### **Scaffolding Instruction**

Scaffolding is the term used for the support and guidance given a

learner by a more competent other. As the student masters the task the support is gradually withdrawn. This strategy is in keeping with Indigenous pedagogy where an older person is the teacher of the child.

### **Whole Language Approach**

A writing process approach is preferable to focus on the development of grammar-based sub skills. A whole language, integrated approach that emphasizes the experiences of students is more sensitive to Aboriginal learning styles.

### **General Guidelines for Teaching Aboriginal Students**

- Learners should be given an opportunity to privately rehearse a skill before demonstrating competency publicly.
- Individual learners should not be spotlighted.
- Warmer, more personal teaching styles are most effective.
- Silences and longer pauses after asking questions are to be expected.
- An overview of the lesson is the best way to begin.
- Desired behaviours should be reinforced indirectly rather than by using direct praise.
- Sensitivity to non-verbal cues is necessary.
- More global, holistic instructional approaches which emphasize the development of self-esteem, confidence, and empowerment are desirable.

Teachers must also have access to suitable curriculum materials. Resources included in units of study must provide an accurate and authentic picture of Aboriginal peoples, in which Aboriginal students see themselves depicted in a way that enhances their self-image (Elliott & Erlandson 2003). A useful checklist for identifying stereotyping and bias in learning resources is provided by the British Columbia Teachers' Federation in a resource on creating racism-free schools for Aboriginal learners (Daniels & Cameron 2002). Curriculum materials must also be culturally relevant (Augustine 1998, Reyhner, Lee & Gabbard 1993). Since there is a dearth of appropriate texts and resources, textbook instruction should be de-emphasized (Reyhner, Lee & Gabbard 1993). It is important to recognize that Elders are libraries of knowledge, preserved through oral traditions (Augustine 1998). Oral traditions should be retrieved and passed on to future generations, for if they are not, the knowledge will pass on along with the Elders.

Assessment of student learning is another important component in the integration of Aboriginal perspectives into the curricula. Since cultural bias often exists in the instruments used to measure student learning, approaches that consider Aboriginal student achievement from a

broader perspective than quantifiable knowledge, measurable skills, and years of schooling must be adopted (Bell 2004). Aboriginal student success lies in more holistic ways of knowing therefore it is more appropriate to use culturally adaptive modes of assessing student performance, such as portfolios, exhibitions, demonstrations (Barnhardt 1990). These more flexible and responsive approaches to assessment allow teachers to recognize the various forms of intelligence and accommodate cultural differences at the same time (Gipp & Fox 1991).

## **Conclusion**

There is a remarkable degree of similarity in the conclusions drawn in much of the literature covered by this review. The same issues and problems are identified and essentially similar recommendations are made in the literature written over the past thirty years. The question arises: "Why hasn't there been more progress?" Kirkness (1999) asserts that recent initiatives in Aboriginal education have resulted in little change because educators have continued to rely on theories and practices of the dominant society. Evidently, fundamental changes must be made if Aboriginal students are to receive an equal education, and these changes must be led by Aboriginal peoples themselves. It is clear that Aboriginal education is currently in a transition state and has to evolve into "a thing of its own kind" (Cardinal 1999, p.11).

Despite the fact that education has been, and arguably still is, used as an instrument of oppression, Aboriginal peoples see education as the key to their needs as Aboriginal people (Augustine 1998, Youngblood Henderson 2002), but they also have a need to maintain their own culture (Antone 2000, Augustine 1998, Bell 2004, Petten 2003). Aboriginal education cannot be effectively approached from either an Aboriginal nor a European cultural perspective alone (Stairs 1994). Stephen Harris (1990) argues that it is possible to have the ability to operate effectively in two sets of culturally appropriate ways, referring to it as "two-way Aboriginal schooling." Hughes and More (1997) discuss a similar "both ways" concept, the hallmark of which is that, while it is necessary for some aspects of each domain to grow separately, there also needs to be a merging of some aspects of each domain.

The literature reveals that there is clearly a need for further research in several areas of Aboriginal education. Bell (2004, p.41) points out that the literature is only "beginning to provide empirically-based research to answer important questions related to education success for Aboriginal children." While Demmert (2003) sees a tie between academic performance and culturally based education, he acknowledges that most of the research has been descriptive or narrative rather than quantita-

tive. Research is needed on student learning styles and their impact on student achievement because much of the research to date has been exploratory (Hughes & More 1997). Research is also needed on the efficacy of language programs and their effects on students' long-term academic success (Demmert 2003).

While it seems evident that work is needed on an expanded and improved research data base which will allow Aboriginal education to move forward, Baskin (2002) cautions that current research epistemologies are racially biased and are part of the problem, therefore research must also be addressed as a target for change. The literature suggests that participatory or empowerment approaches which are connected to Indigenous philosophies and principles are best because they will allow the community itself to determine the appropriate concerns and then to guide the entire process. While there are many challenges ahead to be faced by educators of Aboriginal students many of those advocating transformational change to Aboriginal education state the promise of a culturally negotiated curriculum and envision the true integration of a knowledge system which meets the needs of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (Battiste 2002, McCann 1995, Stairs 1994, Youngblood Henderson 2000).

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### Biography

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