

# INTRODUCTION: THINKING PLACES: INDIGENOUS HUMANITIES *and* EDUCATION

MARIE BATTISTE<sup>1</sup>  
& CATHRYN McCONAGHY<sup>2</sup>

1 Department of Educational Foundations, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, 28 Campus Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 0X1, Canada

2 School of Education, University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales, 2351, Australia

Every conception of humanity arises from a specific place and from the people of that place. How such places shape and sustain the people of a place is the focus of education that enables each student to understand themselves and makes them feel at home in the world. The notion of Indigenous humanities being developed at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon represents an example of such ecological teachings and practices of what constitutes humanity. Ecology is the animating force that teaches us how to be human in ways that theological, moral and political ideologies are unable to. Ecology privileges no particular people or way of life. It does, however, promote Indigenous humanity as affirmed in Article 1 of the 1966 UNESCO *Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Co-operation*: “Each culture has a dignity and value which must be respected and preserved” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1966). In the Eurocentric versions of humanity, this concept is sometimes referred to as cultural diversity; yet Indigenous peoples prefer the concept of Indigenous humanities.

This special edition of *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* is guest edited by Marie Battiste (University of Saskatchewan, Canada) and Cathryn McConaghy (University of New England, Australia). The edition invited contributors to consider the development of Indigenous humanities within the field of education. Specifically, contributors were asked: How can we think within, through and about place to develop intellectual and imaginative ecologies, to reconnect with knowledges that are generous, creative, just and respectful? What does it mean to think about education creatively through place and space? Papers that made links between education and place and the fields of literature, philosophy, history, languages, the arts and theology were encouraged. The result was a diverse collection of papers from many nations, including the Sami of Finland, the Maya of Guatemala, the Māori of Aotearoa, the Cree, Oneida, Míkmaq, Anishnabeg and Chickasaw First Nations people of Canada and “the land of the turtle”, settler Canadians, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. From these diverse places, the notions of humanities and inhumanities – what makes us human and what constitutes ethical action for social justice – are explored, often in challenging ways.

In the lead paper, “Thinking place: Animating the Indigenous humanities in education”, Marie Battiste, Lynne Bell, Isobel Findlay, Len Findlay and James

(Sákéj) Youngblood Henderson describe how the Indigenous humanities is a scholarly area central to their research at the University of Saskatchewan. Their essay explores their understandings of the Indigenous humanities and offers examples of how the research team has endeavoured to clarify and exemplify what the Indigenous humanities are and what they can do to help reclaim Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies for education. They describe how their research project at the University of Saskatchewan has developed the Indigenous humanities as a set of intercultural and interdisciplinary theoretical and practical interventions designed to counter prevailing notions of place, territory, ownership and entitlement. This account of several of their experiences and aspirations will help educators, learners, scholars and activists face the challenge of restoring “place” to education through an animation of the Indigenous humanities.

The next paper by Rauna Kuokkanen, a Sami postdoctoral student at McMaster University, Canada, makes a strong argument for Sami education to be premised upon and informed by particular readings of “traditional” Sami concepts. This is a project that is timely, needed and a worthwhile contribution to the critique of Western modernist education structures. Kuokkanen’s paper enters several of the debates in the field of Indigenous knowledge – addressing such questions as: Who speaks for whom? and Is there more than one way of being Sami? The paper presents informed pedagogical connections to land/place/people/culture/story. The focus on relationships and responsibilities enlarges that space and teaches sustainability as a core relationship grounded in Sami worldview. In discussions of hegemony and epistemic violence, Kuokkanen considers how this relationship has been legitimated, what their effects have been and the conditions required in order to implement Sami pedagogy.

Herman Michell is a Cree professor at First Nations University, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. His paper, “Nēhithāwāk of Reindeer Lake, Canada: Worldview, epistemology and relationships with the natural world” illustrates the traditional worldview, epistemology and relationship with the natural world among the Woodlands Cree of Reindeer Lake, Canada. The paper begins with a brief history of the Woodlands Cree in order to provide a contextualised backdrop for Michell’s perspectives as an “insider” located within this culture. This is followed by discourse on how the Woodlands Cree worldview, epistemology, language, values and practices are linked to relationships with the land, animals and plants. The paper is an important explication of a place-based knowledge system whose validity is demonstrated convincingly. The manuscript contributes substantially to the academy’s understanding of Canadian First Nations peoples in the context of education.

Vivian M. Jiménez Estrada is a Mayan researcher from Guatemala currently at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), Toronto, Ontario, Canada. In her paper, “The tree of life as a research methodology”, she develops the premise that research, as a colonising practice, has negatively impacted knowledge production and the lives of the peoples it has touched. The author presents it as a contribution to the work of Indigenous scholars that name the spiritual, physical and epistemic violence resulting from irresponsible research methodologies and calls for decolonising practices. After a brief description of the need to decolonise the mind through the development of culturally-situated research methods, the author presents a metaphor – the Tree of Life – as the basis for understanding the interconnections necessary to conduct research in a way that benefits the communities where it is carried out. The metaphor builds on past knowledge, privileging interconnectedness, and advocates for speaking from Indigenous and woman-centred perspectives. Drawing upon a traditional Mayan concept to introduce a research model, Jiménez Estrada offers the potential for a culturally informative approach to Indigenous research theory, methodology and practice that it is ethically responsive to, and accountable towards, Indigenous peoples and their cultural values, beliefs and practices. The research framework will not only honour and respect Indigenous peoples but also other peoples as well.

Eileen Antone at the University of Toronto presents her paper “The seed is the law”. She writes, “*Ka na’* (Onyota’a:ka or Oneida word for seed)? A mere seed? How can a seed be the law?” These kinds of questions, she argues, are needed to unpack and initiate thought for constructing a framework to promote Indigenous humanities. Since humanities arise from a specific place and from the people of that place this article focuses on teachings from the Hotinosh<sup>ni</sup> that are the basis of peaceful co-existence for all creation. This paper provides a detailed and interesting historical overview and establishes a lens for critiquing current practice.

Michael Christie, at Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory of Australia, provides an interesting analysis of the relationships between Indigenous knowledge and new digital environments. His elaboration of the complex cultural politics of archiving Indigenous knowledges draws on important distinctions between data and meta-data, the complexities of knowledge ownership and repatriation, and the interesting classificatory systems by which some Indigenous knowledge does not make it into databases. Through complex processes of knowledge abstraction, commodification and objectification, the paper challenges the new accountabilities and systems for valuing Indigenous knowledges.

Deborah McGregor, a Canadian researcher, explores the professional experience of an Anishnabe educator

working in various organisations teaching Indigenous knowledge issues in both Indigenous and primarily non-Indigenous settings in her paper, "Transformation and recreation: Creating spaces for Indigenous theorising in Canadian Aboriginal studies programs". McGregor writes: "The reflections span a number of years of teaching Aboriginal worldview and knowledge issues courses and include formal evaluations from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students who have participated in the courses over that time". This paper draws upon two examples of educational institutions where Indigenous knowledge is being explored – the University of Toronto's Aboriginal Studies Program and the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER) National First Nations Youth Environmental Education and Training Program. While the University of Toronto offers a primarily non-Aboriginal setting, it houses a rapidly developing Aboriginal studies program which has been actively promoting Indigenous knowledge, language and education since its inception. CIER, based in Winnipeg, Manitoba, is an organisation focused on educating specifically Aboriginal youth, creating a space for the exploration of both Indigenous and Western knowledge in an environmental context. Both settings represent special places for thinking about decolonising Indigenous education. Integral to Aboriginal philosophy and decolonising education is the role elders play in informing and implementing meaningful education for Aboriginal learners. Both programs involve elders in central roles where they are recognised as authorities, facilitators and teachers.

Randolph Bowers, a Lecturer in Counselling at the University of New England, Australia, presents his paper called "Shieldwolf and the shadow: Entering the place of transformation". Bowers writes:

This paper speaks from a poetic voice and briefly discusses the untamed nature of metaphor and narrative. Then the story is shared. The tale relates to how healing of identity, after eons of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of social isolation and internalised sorrow requires deep abiding patience.

Metaphor and story helps patience (or is it patience helps metaphor and story ...) to uncover truths of the self, which may only emerge after many decades of searching. The story of *Shieldwolf and the Shadow* is a contemporary Indigenous tale of the place where transformation is undertaken, without fear, and with every intention that life itself will change beyond our reckoning. He suggests that when the self is changed through remembering who we really are, our past bloodlines are cleansed and our future is restored to justice and peace. We can then see what had eluded us for generations – a new path where humanities can be honoured in postmodern spaces. In this new landscape of dreams-come-true-through-hard-work, we are much

more who we are rather than what other people, systems, or frames-of-mind impose on us to be. We are spirits in human bodies, and our tasks to accomplish in this life are fantastic. The story performs the realities of embodied psychic space and the transformative powers of metaphor in encounters with traditional and still invaluable ways of knowing. Dreamwork is presented as a special discipline with special licence to receive and recount visitations from the spirit realm. Some will read this piece as self-indulgent and self-absorbed; others will read it as a courageous and suggestive attempt to take academic rationality to its limits and beyond – into other ecologies of knowing, in the name of Indigenous knowledge and healing. The paper demonstrates what Indigenous humanities could look like.

James Graham, an Assistant Lecturer at Waikato University, New Zealand, argues a case for the use of the Māori notion of *whakapapa* (kinship) as a legitimate research tool for the study of Māori, by Māori, for Māori. The author believes Māori-based studies will acquire a richer and more valid collection and interpretation of data if the notion of *whakapapa* is used rather than Western concepts of genealogy. The article emphasises the importance of the recognition of Māori notions of kinship as lived experienced, and as reflected upon in Māori communities as important aspects of research that seek to unpack complex codes. A *kaupapa* based on Māori kinship requires not only explicit knowledge acquired in the academy but also implicit knowledge acquired through intimate contact with one's fellow contemporary kin group. The reliability of research on Māori (*iwi*) also needs to privilege an emotional and ideological link to the past. The present is linked to the past in Māori cosmology so that the positioning of self as individual and as researcher is also intimately connected to kinship lineage. Thus research in Māori domains (particularly social domains) requires a methodology which links accountability for accuracy and reliability with attachments to *whakapapa* and the unique position each person holds within the universality of Māori cosmic design. The availability and acceptance of the use of research design that gives opportunity for Māori to collect and analyse data retrieved in a context of *whakapapa* is vital to understanding the effects of colonial oppression upon disrupted and erased knowledges.

Cyndy Baskin, a member of the School of Social Work, Ryerson University, Canada, conducted research circles with Aboriginal social work students in three sites across Ontario, Canada. All of the students who participated in the research circles insisted that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students learn something about Aboriginal ways of seeing the world within their social work education. Central to the arguments of the paper are the anti-colonial theories of knowledge, of colonialism, resistance and discursive agency. Baskin's paper challenges us

to consider the question: Are Aboriginal worldviews generic or specific to place? How and in what ways? The paper also provokes reflection on the Native studies Indian and White story that is privileged in most Native studies course that creates a great deal of tension among students who take these courses. Like the story of social workers dealing with racism, so also do the students feel the racialised tension in these courses. At issue is how we can move beyond a strong binary construction of “us and them”, which fortifies the tensions of historical locality to new analyses of Indigenous studies and Indigenous knowledges in the academy. Within Canada, the term “Aboriginal” refers to three designated groups of peoples: First Nations, Inuit and Metis, but in these groups lie great diversity: 600 First Nations communities, 11 language families, 72 languages and Inuit peoples of the North and Metis. Such a diverse group may then require one to rethink the usefulness of the “us” and “we” unless we all know whom this diverse inclusiveness refers to. The paper presents a discussion of issues around the ethical protocols of respect, recognising that all communities and nations have their own protocols, all of which must be considered in the social arena of work conducted in place. In addition to the inclusion of Aboriginal worldviews into social work education, she investigates possibilities for including Aboriginal research in social work, both that undertaken by Aboriginal researchers and practitioners and that undertaken in and with Aboriginal communities.

In “Using the ‘arts’ to teach Indigenous Australian studies in higher education” Karen Vaughan, at the University of Technology, Sydney, Australia, considers the active role of working out what place means and how it can be a source of inspiration for education. It also relates to the theme of the Indigenous humanities as it builds the arts in and through community dialogue and discussion of a pedagogical approach of taking up arts. It takes Australian Indigenous studies from the Indian/White story to a story of the land, to the arts and to the issues people have surrounding those important interconnections. Vaughan does not attempt to over-intellectualise that source or its meaning, rather she is more pedagogical and reflective, as she points out early in the paper.

Elizabeth Mackinlay, at the University of Queensland, Australia, conducted research on “Moving and dancing towards decolonisation in education: An example from an Indigenous Australian performance classroom”. Mackinlay writes:

After spending two hours teaching a contemporary dance workshop to a group of 25 university students, Wadaman/Yanyuwa choreographer and dancer Samantha Chalmers explained to me the significance of Indigenous Australian performance for creating a location of possibility, relationship and understanding. She commented: “Sometimes

it’s just not enough to talk about how wonderful a sunset can be, feeling the sunset is like so beyond words you know. So when they dance and I say “feel the water” or “feel the sand”, “lift your arms up like the wings”, “be a brolga” and bring it down. You know they identify with those images and therefore connect”.

Her reflections provide a good starting point to explore the special type of thinking, moving and dancing place which is opened up for decolonisation when students engage in an embodied pedagogical practice in Indigenous education. In this paper she explores what decolonisation means in this context by describing the ways in which the curriculum, the students and herself, and more generally the discipline of ethnomusicology itself, “undergo a process to question, critique, and move aside the pedagogical script of colonialism in order to allow Indigenous ways of understanding music and dance to be presented, privileged and empowered”. Decolonisation in the classroom and the interrogation of Whiteness are important areas of research and Mackinlay has discussed this in relation to a classroom situation. As she rightfully states, the paper is a reflective personal journey. The paper considers the complex relationship between embodiment and disembodiment and decolonisation and colonisation, provoking questions: In what ways is embodiment more than, or other than, the presence of moving bodies? In what ways is performativity an aspect of power/knowledge/subject formations? How can it be theorised? What could the pedagogical scripts of decolonisation look like?

Jean-Paul Restoule is an Assistant Professor in the Aboriginal Studies Program at the University of Toronto, Canada. In his paper “Education as healing: How urban Aboriginal men described post-secondary schooling as decolonising”, Restoule examines the ways urban universities have been significant confining and limiting spaces with both oppressive and empowering capacities for Indigenous men. Important in his critique are the conditions needed to move from oppressive to empowering: is it all about the instructors, or a matter of course content/perspective? Restoule explores the significance of urban as marker of place and experience in the paper – why was it significant that the participants be “urban”? What meanings are attached to the notion of “the urban” in our understandings of colonising and decolonising spaces and places?

Cathryn McConaghy, a researcher in the sociology of education at the University of New England, Australia, continues the critique of colonial regimes as the basis for recognising the legitimacy of Indigenous humanities. In “Bringing knowledge to truth: The joke and Australian (in)humanities”, McConaghy analyses the joking behaviours of Australian Governments in the face of United Nations censures. McConaghy provides a compelling account of the contradictions

of Australian liberalism. Its particular focus is on mainstream Australian ambivalence in relation to human rights abuses involving Indigenous peoples and the defence mechanism of joking behaviour whose performance is designed to undermine human rights abuse charges and sustain Australian self-positioning as a generous and humanitarian country while supporting ongoing forms of oppression. The essay makes good use of the work of Žižek, Freud, Derrida, Levi and Phillips in unpacking the psycho-social phenomenon of colonial oppression and joke-work, the acts of stealth, “forms of daylight robbery”, and patterns of “exceptionalism” at the heart of White Australia ideology.

James (Sákéj) Youngblood Henderson is a Chickasaw researcher and Director of the Native Law Centre at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon. His seminal paper, “Insights on First Nations humanities” presents a compelling illustration of the significance of the new Indigenous humanities for the contemporary world. Acknowledging that questions of what is humanity and how it is expressed has endless and dynamic answers, his paper then is an attempt

to construct and explain the answer based on the insights Indigenous humanity expressed in the continent called North America. The four fundamental insights are organised around the concept of creation as ecology; the insights of embodied spirits, the implicate order and transformation. These complementary insights inform the depth of Indigenous worldview. These insights are replicated and revealed in structure and meaning of Indigenous languages, ceremonies, and stories. These cognitive insights suggest a starting point for reflecting about whatever is most significant in Indigenous humanities in curriculum.

As a translation of First Nation insights into English, the paper is an important contribution to the task of dethinking and rethinking what can be imagined by the term “Indigenous humanities”.

These papers help us to explore Indigenous humanities, which include but are not limited to such disciplines as philosophy, history, theology, languages, teaching and learning and literatures. They help to articulate some of the core capacities of the humanities evident in all societies and cultures, including Indigenous ones. The Indigenous humanities operate locally and distinctively but confirm universals that characterise all human beings, including that which sustains our ability to communicate through language and art, to mark our place and progress across time and space, and to locate ourselves reflectively and spiritually in relation to each other, to the world we all share, and to the forces that lie beyond our understanding or control. The Indigenous humanities

function as both critique and creativity, resistance and celebration.

As critique, the Indigenous humanities work against the grain of “White” pretension, as Isobel Findlay (2003) has often reiterated – using the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house. They work against the “great forgetting” that preserves White European illusions of superiority and justice. This great forgetting is replayed in such later statements of universal rights and freedoms as are found in the US Declaration of Independence, the French Revolutionary Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and the UN Declaration of Universal Human Rights, each of which has dealt unjustly and/or inadequately with Indigenous rights, interests, accomplishments and potential contributions.

As creativity, the Indigenous humanities seek to animate and transform our intellectual and imaginative ecologies. The golden age of the Eurocentric humanities was the Renaissance in early modern Europe: the rediscovery of the ancient languages, disciplines and texts occurred virtually simultaneously with voyages of “discovery” that were the prelude to modern colonialism. The golden age of Renaissance humanism was, and not at all coincidentally, the first heyday of modern Euro-colonialism. The Indigenous renaissance, by contrast, is about being respectful and not about mastery or conquest; about decolonising elite and popular misunderstandings of Indigenous peoples; about the rooted yet generous and respectful teachings of the elders; about non-Indigenous scholars agreeing to work with and be guided by Indigenous scholars; about unleashing the interdisciplinary, multi-mediated, transcultural imagination exemplified by our knowledge that “education is our buffalo”. It is about the circle game. Such work can also be pursued as Indigenous humanities, reclaiming the law especially for custom, vision and creative justice. The Indigenous humanities invite us back to the treaty process as trust and ceremony, to understand that for the coloniser betraying the terms and conditions of treaties was a well-established habit at home before being exported to newly “discovered” territories, whereas it was a solemn and sacred undertaking for the Indigenous parties to such treaties. The Indigenous humanities gesture towards a place for justice to prosper.

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### ■ About the authors

Marie Battiste is a Míkmaq of the Potlo'tek First Nation in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. She is a Professor at the University of Saskatchewan in the Department of Educational Foundations, and Academic Director of the Aboriginal Education Research Centre in the College of Education. She is co-author of *Protecting Indigenous knowledge: A global challenge* (2000) which won a Saskatchewan Book Award in 2001, editor of *Reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision* (2000) and senior editor of *First Nations education in Canada: The circle unfolds* (1995). She was the recipient of the Distinguished Researcher Award in 2004, the first woman to receive this award at the University of Saskatchewan.

Cathryn McConaghy is an Associate Professor in the sociology of education at the University of New England. Her book, *Rethinking Indigenous education: Culturalism, colonialism and the politics of knowing* (2000, Post Pressed) employs postcolonial critique to identify the colonial regimes of Australian Indigenous education. *Provocations: Sylvia Ashton-Warner and excitability in education* (2006, Peter Lang) edited with Judith Robertson (University of Ottawa) revisits educational theory in relation to Māori schooling in New Zealand-Aotearoa in the middle of the twentieth century. Her recent research is on difficult knowledge in education and the socio-spatial dynamics of schooling disadvantage.

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


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The Editors

*The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit

The University of Queensland

Brisbane QLD 4072

AUSTRALIA

Email: [ajie@uq.edu.au](mailto:ajie@uq.edu.au)

URL: <http://www.atsis.uq.edu.au/ajie/>

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