

# THINKING PLACE: ANIMATING *the* INDIGENOUS HUMANITIES *in* EDUCATION

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## ■ Abstract

Illustrating contexts for and voices of the Indigenous humanities, this essay aims to clarify what the Indigenous humanities can mean for reclaiming education as Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies. After interrogating the visual representation of education and place in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, the essay turns to media constructions of that same place as an exemplary site for understanding Aboriginal relations to the Canadian justice system, before sharing more general reflections on thinking place. The task of animating education is then resituated in the Indigenous humanities developed at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada, as a set of intercultural and interdisciplinary theoretical and practical interventions designed to counter prevailing notions of colonial place. The essay concludes by placing education as promise and practice within the non-coercive normative orders offered by the United Nations. In multiple framings and locations of the Indigenous humanities, the essay aims to help readers to meet the challenges they themselves face as educators, learners, scholars, activists.

*The word "education" implies the entire process of social life by means of which individuals and social groups learn to develop consciously within, and for the benefit of, the national and international communities, the whole of their personal capacities, attitudes, aptitudes and knowledge. This process is not limited to any specific activities (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1974, section 1(a)).*

## ■ Introduction

This essay seeks to clarify and illustrate some of the contexts for and voices of Indigenous humanities and what they can do to help reclaim education as Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies. Recognising the power of images to animate positive and negative thinking and conduct, the essay first interrogates the visual representation of education and place in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. It then turns to media constructions of the same place in discussing Aboriginal relations to the Canadian justice system. Building on this archive of thinking in and about this place, the essay then turns to more general reflections on thinking place, on the privileging and policing of Western knowledge, and the capacities of the Indigenous humanities to dispel ignorance and illusion and rethink academic and other places. The task of animating education as an empowering place for all students is then resituated in the Indigenous humanities developed at the University of Saskatchewan as a set of intercultural and interdisciplinary theoretical and practical interventions designed to counter prevailing notions of colonial place. The essay concludes by placing education as promise and practice within the non-coercive normative orders offered by the United Nations (UN). We hope readers find useful our multiple framings of the Indigenous humanities – as critique of those academic disciplines which provided colonialism with its alibis; as disclosure of the role of Indigenous philosophy, history, language, orature, kinship and spirituality in the sustaining of traditional societies and managing encounters with neighbours and newcomers; and as creating spaces inside and outside the academy for respectful intercultural, interdisciplinary work to happen, in the traditional Indigenous and non-Indigenous humanities, but also in the new humanities like gender studies, cultural studies, critical race or legal studies. We hope also that the sharing of a few of the



Figure 1. “First graduating class, May 1912”, University of Saskatchewan. Courtesy of University of Saskatchewan Archives (A-3638).

locations in which we are animating the Indigenous humanities will help readers to meet the challenges they themselves face as educators, learners, scholars, activists.

#### ■ Visualising place is no hiding place

Every conception of humanity and education begins from a human body in territory and a consciousness in which a specific place takes prominence. This locale shapes an understanding of existence over time in that place and sustains the people, providing them with an understanding of themselves and an awareness of their being at home in the world. Such a dynamic is being played out in Saskatchewan as it celebrates its centenary in 2005, using visually mediated history and place to imagine the province’s communal life – past, present and future. “The Centenary” in Saskatchewan offers an opportunity to consider in some of our classes this year what it means for the province to claim it is “just” 100 years old. In the visual arts, this question enables us to think about this place, and to invite students to “dialogue with” visual texts – using them as a catalyst, a prompter, a facilitator of the Indigenous humanities – to think critically about individual and collective memories and their roles in the formation of official historical narratives (Mirzoeff, 1998).

A recent research project demonstrates the use of visual culture as a decolonising tool. Figure 1 is a black-and-white archival photograph entitled “First graduating class, May, 1912”. It represents the first class to graduate from the University of Saskatchewan (founded in 1907): seven students (five men and two women, all White) grouped around Sir Walter Murray, the first president, and one other faculty member. Faculty and students are dressed alike in black formal academic gowns. While the gender imbalance is immediately visible, all are clearly at ease in the social and learning ecology of the University of Saskatchewan. Recirculated in 2005 as a centennial bookmark, this historic photograph effectively “re-whitens” this institutional place in colonial memory.

The visual data in this photographic image clearly belong to what Tagg (1992, p. 102) calls an “honorific culture” in which it is “a privilege to be looked at and pictured”. This photograph is part of a larger photographic narrative depicting the institution’s key ceremonies including convocation; the earliest buildings on campus which resemble the ancient colleges of Oxford and Cambridge with their arched windows, pointed gables and spires; and staged vignettes of faculty conducting lectures and seminars. This early twentieth century visual archive represents the University of Saskatchewan as a White settler university built for the children of the pioneers: a world in which Latin mottos, stone gargoyles, quiet courtyards and Gothic-style buildings exist unblushingly alongside a university farm with barns, sheep, poultry and experimental grain plots.

This photographic narrative of the university clearly marks the “worlding of a world” to borrow a description of the multitude of ways in which colonial mimicry and space is mapped over Indigenous life-place (Spivak, 1985, p. 128). It privileges the university as White settler colonialism putting itself on the map. In this process of cartographic transformation, visual culture (paintings, photographs, postcards, built forms) plays a constitutive role in building the provincial imaginary and concealing Indigenous humanities. In the university’s earliest photographic narrative, it is clear that the institution is founded on a vision and visualisation of education and culture that look to Europe as the centre of all knowledge and civilisation. This Eurocentric curriculum is hidden in plain view in the Gothic-style buildings, picturesque grounds filled with imported trees and shrubs, and the academic ceremonies and rituals also imported from Europe. While deeply derivative, the “campus” experience functions as a narrative of “new beginnings”, progress, and bright futures. In its intense focus on the past 100 years, Saskatchewan’s settlement discourse sweeps the landscape clean of meanings before settlement, erasing (or marginalising) the histories and cultures of the Indigenous peoples of the territory. The central fantasy at the heart of such narratives is that “North America was peacefully settled and not colonised” (Razack, 2002, p. 2).

But every visual archive has its internal and external others and can be made to reveal things at variance with the intentions of the makers and disseminators of the images it claims to “contain”. Quite different, then, is Figure 2, a photograph entitled “Battleford Industrial School football team”, taken in 1897, just a few years outside the province’s centennial frame and a few miles north of the main university campus.

This image of education depicts 11 young men, members of the Industrial School football team, posing for a group portrait, wearing medals and sports shirts inscribed with the logo “IS” (which does not mean Indigenous Saskatchewan!). This

photograph portrays young “minds” as a mix of athletic and artisanal physicality. It clearly belongs to a vast instrumental colonial archive of photographic records in which, as Tagg (1992, p. 102) puts it, “the production of normative typologies is joined to the tasks of surveillance, record and control”. Cree artist and curator McMaster (1992, p. 76), in reading this image emphasises the oppressively assimilative education Indigenous children received at a boarding school designed to “erase their savage influences and to expose them to the benefits of Western ‘civilisation’”. It was an education that broke the treaty promises to provide schools on reserves where “Indians would become ‘educated like a white man’” (Cuthand, 2005, pp. 57-58). McMaster (1992) pays attention to the power relations and forms of domination at work in the colonial photographic encounter, noting the multiple ways in which the boys are transformed from subjects into objects by the colonial gaze. His reading looks from the other side of the photograph, in order to return the White settler gaze. Searching for evidence of the boy’s defiance, McMaster (1992, p. 76) writes: “I was intrigued by their apparent ambivalence about being photographed, indicated by the clenched fists or folded arms ... Even in the dehumanising atmosphere of the Industrial School, these boys stand firm”.

This re-reading of an archival photographic image belongs to a growing body of anti-colonial work that is re-engaging with the storytelling potential of the photographic medium. In recent years, Indigenous artists and writers such as Jeffrey Thomas, Jimmie Durham, Dana Claxton, Leslie Marmon Silko, Jane Ash Poitras and Carl Beam have used postcolonial reading strategies to re-vision historical photos of North American Indigenous peoples trapped in a range of colonial archives. Appropriating found historical photographic images, they interrogate, subvert and transform their cultural literacies in order to put meaning on the move.

If one counterpoints the two group portraits, a consoling singularity of view becomes more obviously unwarranted, and a more unsettling articulation of place and education asserts itself. It produces a new mapping of difference, of the mutually imbricated histories of colonialism and its contemporary legacies. If we use montage as a tool of cultural analysis for these photographs, we encounter a representation of educational place as profoundly organised by racial, class and gender boundaries. It is a neo-colonial educational system constituted by the social and spatial apartheid so deeply etched into the culture of the British Empire. This visually mediated place remains a public secret in Saskatchewan’s glorified centenary year, telling a story that can and must be interrupted and changed. As Taussig (2002, p. 338) notes, a public secret involves a practice “of knowing what not to know”, an ongoing performance of repression and expression, that is at the very basis



Figure 2. “Battleford Industrial School football team”, 1897. Courtesy of Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta.

of being “properly” educated and socialised. But looking back can mean defiance as well as nostalgia, depending on who is doing the looking. The plurality, hybridity and ambiguity of visual practices, perhaps especially commemorative ones, provide a setting for unpacking old and new colonialisms and uncovering via the Indigenous humanities those split geographies of “us” and “them” that continue to structure the academy and its disciplines.

#### ■ Not taking cover in “Canada’s Apartheid”

In spite of dire warnings and clear directions in decades of reports, inquiries, studies and educational initiatives, the experience of Aboriginal peoples at the hands of elite and official Canada remains an urgent concern. That experience, “the product of historical processes of dispossession and cultural oppression”, according to the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), “casts a long shadow over Canada’s claim to be a just society” (RCAP, 1996a, p. 1). The ways in which Canadian education has failed all Canadians, but especially Aboriginal peoples, are graphically revealed in the public perception of Aboriginal peoples in the Canadian justice system. Such perception enables and is enabled by the centennial visual representation of Saskatchewan by animating it in textual representation and legal testimony. Though the 1967 Canadian Corrections Association report called for “a massive educational campaign” (p. 23) to break up a vicious cycle of myth-making perpetuating stereotypes, concern with social indicators (poverty levels, employment and education, family breakdown, substance abuse, housing, mental and physical health, suicide rates) has often become only a subtler form of the colonial practice of pathologising individuals and communities. The problem is further aggravated by the tendency among the oppressed to internalise and enact dominant myths in a “self-validating” circular process that confirms the bias of mainstream perceptions.

If there have been significant changes in comprehending the involvement of Aboriginal people

in the criminal justice system, it has been moving discussion away from blaming the victim or inventing criminal pathologies for Aboriginal individuals or communities and towards a concern with the structures of social inequality embedded over the decades in the colonial legal system. The result has not always been as devastating as a report for the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission on “the use of violence against Aboriginal youth as part of an institutionalized form of racial violence” and “part of the routine practices of policing” (in McNamara, 1992, p. 32). However, if stereotypical views of Indigenous peoples are disappearing from official government policy, they remain powerful “in the popular imagination” and influential “in shaping decisions of the police, prosecutors, judges and prison officials” (Jackson, 1988, p. 5). And the media have often been guilty of over-representing Indigenous perpetrators of crime while under-representing them as victims, or otherwise misrepresenting and reducing Aboriginal peoples to caricature or stick figures (Lawrence, 2002) severed from their histories and from meaningful futures.

In 2001, for instance, John Stackhouse’s 14-part series of investigative reports on “Canada’s Apartheid” published in the *Globe and Mail* aimed to illuminate the social realities of so-called Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations. Stackhouse began in Saskatoon, welcoming readers to “Harlem on the prairies”. An important teaching tool, his essay has much to tell us about the state of the nation, how Canada understands its divisions and diversities, where responsibilities lie, the potential for mutual or collective understanding, and the material consequences of disciplines of knowledge, discursive practices, and identity categories for producing, policing, or dismantling boundaries that control access to social, cultural, legal and economic spaces.

Readers might reasonably have expected that as a leading exponent of serious journalism in a quality newspaper Stackhouse would enlighten them on the historical and legal facts of treaty federalism (Henderson, 1994, 2003), the history of colonisation (RCAP, 1996b), the racial and spatial logic of the *Indian Act* (Razack, 2002), the jurisdictional complexities that leave off-reserve and Métis peoples unprotected by the fiduciary relationship with Aboriginal peoples, and the particular struggles of “othered” groups (that is, those represented as different, as “they” and therefore excluded from the “we” of the dominant culture). Instead, Stackhouse perpetuates stereotypes of a “poor and polarized” province. Casting himself as an intrepid traveller in Canada’s internal *terra incognita* – “a square mile of reckless inebriation” – he takes readers to a strange and dangerous place of the barely or unbearably human (Aboriginal) “other”. In place of historical analysis of the legal production of disadvantage and criminality, Stackhouse recirculates views that current realities are attributable

to Aboriginal peoples because they “can’t cope with the transition from isolated reserves to a multicultural city” (3 November, 2001, p. F2). Stackhouse accepts at face value the evidence of his informants without attending to the history of relations of domination that have helped shape identities and geographic (and other) isolation and pathologies of disadvantage, while failing to see the evidence before his eyes (hidden in plain view) of powerful models of achievement in the Aboriginal community. Nor does Stackhouse acknowledge his responsibility for producing the “realities” he describes in his highly selective mapping – or for doing so much damage to relations among peoples.

Had he cared to look, he might have seen the appointment of Cree Judge Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, economic development initiatives, a flourishing urban reserve (established in 1988) increasing employment and reducing poverty, Aboriginal partnership agreements, a talented and distinguished Aboriginal cultural community, enhanced education levels, and a 10% Aboriginal student population at a University of Saskatchewan committed to playing a lead role in Aboriginal education and scholarship, integrating Indigenous knowledge, and partnering with Aboriginal communities. Indeed, the University of Saskatchewan is home to many of the finest Aboriginal scholars, institutions, programs and curricula in the country. Instead, Stackhouse’s “investigative” practice, in a series of skewed dispatches from the “front”, ignores its own neo-colonial presumptions, priorities, and methods. It ignores what McIntyre (2000) calls “studied ignorance” and “privileged innocence” that uphold the status quo, assigning power, privilege, access to elite institutions, and hence the capacity to shape “realities” and “truths”. Such privilege allows its holders not to know or think about systemic inequality or their own role in sustaining inequality; they can then “dissociate themselves from, and presume themselves innocent of, the cumulative appropriations and dispossessions that define systemic relations of domination” (McIntyre, 2000, p. 159). It ignores the ways that Aboriginal peoples, as RCAP (1996a, p. 4) puts it, have been “legally and politically surrounded in Canada – they are fenced in by governance they did not discuss, design or desire”.

It is precisely the racialised urban space that Stackhouse naturalises that makes the “Aboriginal problems” so visible and so readily documented while concealing so much else. Though the “pain and ugliness over on the non-Aboriginal side of the road is less visible, less publicized, less a topic of scholarly debate and official scrutiny”, it is “nonetheless there, a mirror image of the spiritual erosion on Indian reserves” (Daes, 2000, p. 6). But the problems on the mainstream side of the road slip imperceptibly under the radar screen of social scrutiny. Meantime, focusing only on the surface appearance of incomprehensible

conditions, the repeated cycles of violence and victimisation, abuse and self-abuse, in a “crime-ridden native community” is enough to make attending police feel “their blood boil”. One former police officer spoke on condition of anonymity of a frustration so profound that “you could kill someone”. Not only are people pushed to dangerous levels of frustration by conditions they cannot comprehend, but they seem doomed to perpetuate or aggravate those conditions. Such surface concern with social indicators diverts attention from the justice system as itself a source of domination and oppression. To ignore the law’s role in establishing and enforcing definitions of race as well as racial stereotypes and discrimination (Backhouse, 1999; Monture-Angus, 1999) is to defer indefinitely the effective decolonising of the administration of justice and the realisation of Aboriginal aspirations.

McNamara (1992), La Prairie (1990), and Brodeur, La Prairie and McDonnell (1991) have likewise urged careful treatment of social indicators. In particular, they have argued that “over-representation” as a conceptual tool to address injustice over-generalises, naturalises and simplifies “the problem”. In other words, over-representation depends on representational presumptions that unfairly racialise or categorise and generalise on the basis of a single feature that is presumed to be defining. In this fashion domination legitimates itself, silencing and sequestering those dominated and rewriting them as bearers of deficiency and dysfunction. Thus, “over-representation” functions as misrepresentation, contributing to broad characterisations of “cultural divides”, to insufficient analysis of the meaning of privileged justice indicators, to failures to hold the system to account – and to a diminished ability to intervene and change the way things are done.

In the meantime, the allocation of resources continues to support academic, bureaucratic, and media expertise to define and address problems and solutions for Aboriginal peoples who continue to be excluded in large measure from control of the process – and from the middle-class lifestyles of the experts. This resource pattern serves as an instrument of ongoing ignorance and colonial prescription. Media, like the academy and public service, become less a place for independent thinking than an only too predictable, apparently ineducable extension of the neo-colonial state. Through the lens of the Indigenous humanities knowledge reveals itself to be ignorance, justice injustice. As with the production of academic alibis, covering a story becomes too often a cover-up for elite irresponsibility and a covering-over of Indigenous stories.

### ■ Thinking place

To understand the suppression of Indigenous humanities in universities and the media is to replay

colonial encounters in a freshly critical key. This effort of thinking, unthinking and rethinking has of course in so many places proven almost *unthinkable*. It has been a prohibited activity. It has also been taken as a sign of backwardness and deficiency to be ignored or ridiculed in social and educational encounters between Indigenous peoples and those intent on displacing, enslaving, assimilating or eliminating them. Thinking in Indigenous languages and Indigenous ways has until very recently fared spectacularly badly in those elite institutions explicitly and traditionally dedicated to thinking, namely universities. And the consequences of elite ignorance, resistance and refusal have been felt within school systems that take their cues and key features of their curricula from their educational “betters” within mainstream knowledge hierarchies.

If one thinks of “thinking place” as a place *for* thinking, the history of “the” university can and should be read as a history of promoting orthodoxies and punishing heresies, a pattern that continued long after the institution diluted or revoked its allegiance to specifically theological notions of right and wrong thinking. Indeed, the modern research university exchanged its dependency on ecclesiastical authority for a deep complicity with Euro-colonialism, a complicity which drew not only on new disciplines like political economy, anthropology, psychology and sociology, but also on the cognitive residue of humanities disciplines like philosophy, classics, law, philology, literary studies, history and theology to cast Empire’s civilising mission as more a matter of duty and generosity than of arrogance and greed. Eurocentric construers of canonical texts were also the producers of colonial pretexts for the acquisition of vast foreign possessions from Europe’s Indigenous “inferiors” around the world, because, before such acquisition, Indigenous territory was apparently no place for thinking at all.

The privileging and policing of Western knowledge and its educational apparatus therefore necessitates that every institution claiming to be a thinking or teaching place be held to account for the presumptions and entitlements it too rarely questions, the exclusions and injustices it happily or unthinkingly practices in the name of objectivity, universality or excellence. Bodies of knowledge, seen through the lens of the Indigenous humanities, are produced by knowledgeable but limited human bodies *in territory*, bodies institutionally legitimated as disembodied, disinterested and transcendent but bodies that feed, flourish and flounder – just like the rest of us! But the Indigenous humanities are helping to dispel academic illusions and pretensions, making universities and schools objects of inquiry as well as prestigious sites of inquiry. These institutions are themselves places that need to be thought about and rethought, especially in their relations to Indigenous knowledge and heritage,

and the place of “place” within both. Of course, they are not the only places where thinking occurs.

The decolonising of education is not happening in a vacuum but in specific contexts within a process of changing places (or spaces) and the critical geographies such change has stimulated in the work, for instance, of Smith (2003) on the dependency of internal and external American imperialism on the “science” of geography, or Rogoff (2000) on the power, limitations and desires of geography’s “visual culture”. With the dismantling of European empires after World War II came a major redistribution of sovereignty and territory. But the uneven and incomplete restoration of physical lands to their “original” inhabitants did little to benefit many Indigenous peoples, while at the same time it replaced colonial rule with First World economic hegemony, and, increasingly, the trumping of the local by the global, the rootedness of peoples by the cyber-routes of capital, place by space. The tying of their thinking, language and identity to place seemed to re-primitivise Indigenous peoples at the very moment the “real” action was moving to the cosmopolitan, the transnational, the post-territorial. Modernity seemed to be endlessly morphing while Indigenous peoples remained intent on regaining relationships with their traditional lands and hence fixed in time. However, this was no more than a dangerous illusion that continues to threaten not only Indigenous peoples and their stewardship of their lands but the health of the planet we all share. New lies about Indigenous backwardness linked to new agendas for post-territorial domination must be exposed and replaced by collaborative critique in the Indigenous humanities and the creative powers of that Indigenous renaissance already underway all around us.

Thinking place together with time and space can go a long way towards animating the Indigenous humanities in and as education. This will include producing remedies for what Tewa educator Cajete (2000) has called the split mind, *pin geb beb*, meaning a seemingly schizophrenic life of being an Indigenous person trying to live within a hostile Eurocentric society. Dubois (1969) spoke of “double consciousness” as the psychic fate of African Americans. In both cases, a disabling kind of doubleness is imposed or induced from the outside, the translation of colonial double-dealing into a dichotomous existence collectively and individually for those whose land, language, culture and very being are colonised. The internal contradictions of the oppressor must be projected into the interior places of the Indigene in a system of psychic and spiritual violence calling itself education. Such things need to be said – but also effectively supplemented or displaced in discursive and other shifts from anti-colonial critique to capacity-building. And of course Indigenous thinkers show the way by dramatising the productivity of double consciousness: to be at once inside and outside is

to gain critical relation to dominant ways of doing and thinking. Likewise, the Indigenous humanities constantly implicate the Eurocentric humanities in understanding and documenting injustice, but they also bring back into effective circulation ways of learning, knowing and teaching whose lessons have grown more needed the more they have been repressed. Thus critique comes to share “its” space with Indigenous place and capacity.

### ■ Indigenous humanities and the genius of place

Each child represents a micro-ethnic group, worldview and schemata of which teachers need to become aware. What in Eurocentric terms is referred to as cultural diversity becomes through an Indigenous lens, the Indigenous humanities. Indigenous humanities seek to resist the Eurocentric, discursive categories and regimes of “othering” embodied in the concept of “culture”, which has been built on the oppositional binary of race (McConaghy, 2000). Instead of exaggerating cultural differences, Indigenous humanities speak to the core of humanity, recognising the similarities and differences of all peoples who develop from their ecological origins. Indigenous humanities represent ecological teachings and practices concerning what it means to be human. Ecology is the animating force – derived neither from theological nor political ideology – that teaches us how to be human. Ecology privileges no particular people or way of life and requires a respectful outlook to ensure human survival. Like ecologies, heritages or cultures should play a key role in education. They honour and nourish a respect for diversity rather than fetishising narrow preferences and needless authoritarian hierarchy. Indigenous concepts of humanity relate a certain style of being human, of doing important tasks, and overcoming the forces of doubt and inertia. This orientation is best illustrated by doing rather than categorising experience and the natural world. Among the best examples of the Indigenous humanities in action are the works of many writers, poets, singers, artists and dramatists, including Buffy Sainte-Marie, Linda Hogan, Thomas King and Edward Poitras, who offer voices that expand Indigenous artistry, creativity, imagination and dreams. They understand concepts of humanities and creativity as performance or doing or living. Action brings humanity and creativity to life, and doing and being turn life into knowledge and wisdom. They perform an animated and animating curriculum that can educate us all, if we allow it to.

Indigenous humanities operate locally and distinctively but confirm activities that characterise all human beings: the 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 these activities can be found across all

disciplines of secondary and postsecondary education. As a postcolonial strategy for improving education, Indigenous humanities function as critique and creativity, resistance and celebration. As critique, they work against the grain of “White” pretension to racial supremacy, using the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house (Findlay, 2003). All educators need to recognise the Eurocentric ideologies that have shaped educational curricula and therefore their students, and recognise very different and legitimate ways of knowing and doing that are not now a typical part of the educational process. Further, postmodernism supports postcolonialism in challenging grand narratives about how the world operates in education or is reflected to students and requiring consideration of all peoples, the diversities of culture and knowledge, and solutions that are not universally owned, socialised and acknowledged.

The great forgetting or misprision replayed in pedagogy and curricula has dealt unjustly or inadequately with Indigenous peoples, their rights, accomplishments, interests and actual as well as potential contributions. While the golden age of Renaissance humanism coincided with the first heyday of modern Euro-colonialism, for instance, the postcolonial Indigenous renaissance is about being respectful of ecologies and Indigenous heritage and not about mastery or conquest; about replacing elite and popular misunderstandings of Indigenous peoples; about Canadian scholars and educators working together with Indigenous scholars; about the transdisciplinary, multi-mediated, transcultural imagination of a better educational system. It is about reclaiming Indigenous heritage and knowledge for vision and creativity, and even peace. But the work requires a deconstruction of socially constructed canons and a transformative reconstruction through dialogues and conscientisation among and between various communities.

### ■ Rethinking the places of education

The Indigenous humanities gesture towards a place for education to prosper if it agrees to work under a non-exclusionary version of humanity. And this postcolonial educational proposal invites us back to sustainable teaching. An inclusive postcolonial educational system is well placed to nourish and export the protocols of respect, collaboration and creativity that achieve justice in education and lead to the revaluing and protection internationally of Indigenous knowledge and heritage. As RCAP (1996c) reminds us, educational institutions have a pivotal responsibility in transforming relations between Aboriginal peoples and Canadian society. All institutions should consider respect for Indigenous knowledge and heritage to be a core responsibility rather than a special project to be undertaken after other obligations have been met (RCAP, 1996c, Vol. 3, p. 515).

With compulsory schooling laws accepted in “developed” countries, education is generally held to be a benign liberator of the mind and a rich resource from which creativity, intellectual growth and future capacity can be drawn. For Indigenous peoples around the world, however, education has not had these outcomes. On the one hand, we witness a growing number of First Nations youth completing elementary and secondary schooling (for Canada see Auditor General of Canada, 2000, 2004). On the other, the metaphor of split head consciousness (Cajete, 2000) describes not a peculiar individual affliction but rather a larger consciousness revealed in multiple forms among Indigenous peoples navigating conventional educational systems. This split head consciousness is an educational outcome that arises from the denial or disfigurement of the consciousness, heritage and humanity of generations of Indigenous children. It has been the source of inequity, exclusion, subordination and self-harm of Indigenous peoples worldwide.

Accordingly, education is one of the critical sites for decolonising work, particularly because the modern structures of the economic and education systems have been so often crafted out of the colonial borrowings of European systems. As a result, the purposes and structures of education have remained discreetly or openly colonial and paternalistic, sustained in this orientation by public policy and funds. It is important to understand that in Canada, as elsewhere, political decisions about society, its past and future, have been made without adequate input and direction from Indigenous people. Indigenous peoples have not participated fully in Canada’s political creation, its socio-cultural transformations, and its goal-setting. If it were not that the Indigenous peoples of the world have held much of the land, they would be minor players in all of its configurations of territory and use of resources. Yet, their lands were a necessity for colonialism to take hold, and their negotiations and subsequent agreements in treaties provided the foundation on which Canada could build an internal empire. While Indigenous people were considered part of that enterprise, they were not invited to be citizens, voting or otherwise, in the provinces or in federal elections until the mid-1960s. By then most of the structures and policies for contemporary society were firmly in place.

While Canada has been built on Indigenous treaties, its educational policies have largely ignored Indigenous choice and the treaty provisions on education. The original failure of Canadian policies to perceive Indigenous education as a separate protected right deriving from nation-to-nation negotiations for creating equitable futures – and not just to maintain colonial dominion over their resources and lands – has created systemic discrimination against Indigenous knowledge, heritage and humanities in education and in society at large. Today, the critically important

postcolonial quest for Indigenous peoples is to bring their knowledge and their being fully into their children's lives. Reclaiming, recovering, restoring and renewing Indigenous peoples' rights and humanities are clearly a revisionist project of great magnitude – taken to sites of work and study, whether in the political activism of blockades on the roads, in protests in and over the waters, in the courts, and in schools and classrooms. And teachers and students everywhere need to be aware of its significance.

Since the early 1980s, awareness of diversities in Canadian society and of their value in problem-solving and in achieving peaceful relations with one another has been a force for change in schools. New policies and curricular directions have emerged as a result of this awareness. Saskatchewan has taken great strides in accommodating the range of thinking about multiculturalism, heritage rights, and research, policy and inclusive educational practices. But this is not to say that education has been able to change the social constructions that racism and colonialism have ushered in and which continue to be sustained in ordinary practices. Nor has there been sufficiently widespread recognition of the legitimacy of diverse knowledges, languages and humanities among the diverse populations of Canada and Saskatchewan. We have not travelled far enough from the stereotypes resurfacing in Saskatchewan's centenary celebrations, on and off campus. The confinement and control of knowledge exercised in exclusive disciplines and coercive methodologies is thought to be consistent with pretensions to a just society; regrettably, the perpetuation of unequal outcomes has yet to be recognised as the consequence of contemporary socialisation, legal and social structures, and Eurocentric self-advantage covering as neutral and universal education.

Postcolonial education is intent on changing the outcomes by changing precept and practice. It is this intention that has led to our collaborations in projects, funded in part through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and involving education and social justice. In seeking to animate a decolonised university education, we focus on changing our scholarship of teaching and education (Smith, 1999) at all times mindful of the constitutional context of education rights. Throughout our research (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002) we have kept in the foreground RCAP (1996c), its reminders of Ethical Guidelines for Research, and its many recommendations for future postcolonial work. Sensitive to the responsibilities and complexities involved in framing and animating new sensibilities, preliminary processes and tentative solutions, we invested in collaborations with local schools, organisations, elders and individuals; nurtured relationships through dialogues on diverse Indigenous issues; involved elders, community members, teachers and university faculty to raise awareness of the

exclusions and the possibilities and multiple effects of Indigenous humanities on our interdisciplinary work. Meanwhile, we nurture transcultural coalitions across education, the humanities, the social sciences, commerce, law and physical science, working through our own projects together, and creating animating and animated spaces for Indigenous art, literature, science, languages, law, commerce and culture to grow. Bringing to the university and to the communities Indigenous scholars and non-Indigenous allies, we engage conversations around multiple concerns and nourish partnerships and networks to help us re-imagine the possible and pursue the needful.

By means of a complex arrangement of conscientisation, resistance and transformative praxis, we seek to clarify and urge an agenda of restoration for human dignity and the collective dignity of Indigenous peoples. In recognising the existing right of self-determination among Indigenous peoples, through the Indigenous humanities, we offer our sites of animation to encourage Indigenous peoples to promote, develop, exercise and maintain their orders and laws and to determine their political status while pursuing freely their cultural destiny within supportive social and economic development. Such aspirations require each of us to recognise those elements foreign to our knowing that have entwined themselves negatively within us, sapping us of our natural strength. We need to see with new eyes the experiences that have defined our lives, and to subject ourselves as well as others to the critical gaze. In looking at our collective histories, we hope to account for current educational policy and its impact on Indigenous peoples, while taking ourselves to the doorways of understanding, discovering new possibilities, other strategies, and new sources of power and strength. From this place we create space for revisiting the past, re-ordering the present, and facilitating a sustaining future.



#### The normative place for everyone: The United Nations framework

Law, one of the great inventions of humanity, helps substantiate our species' claims to humanity, rationality and imagination. It offers a way of thinking about and regulating the nature of the human and promoting human aspirations for justice. In this sense the law is an optimistic institution, which speaks authoritatively while seeking to ensure that even the unknown and the unforeseeable will be subject to rules rather than precipitants of iniquity and chaos. It even provides remedies for racism, colonialism and injustice.

The law established by the UN regime presents an optimistic representation of Indigenous humanities in education. Like all law, it is ultimately directed inward, onto human communities themselves. UN conventions and declarations reveal a liminal legal system attempting to decolonise human consciousness and



nature, to educate and persuade rather than coerce. They embody the postcolonial, global convergence, developed through debates and accommodations and creating normative place and standards for animating the Indigenous humanities. Together they represent the best framework – consensus standards for a fair and minimum definition of globalisation – for respectful incorporation of Indigenous humanities into curricula outside Eurocentric disciplinary ideologies and nationalistic policies.

Many nation states and peoples have affirmed that diversity is the global norm. Nations have agreed to broad principles for decolonising human science and education, as outlined in the Human Rights Covenants, the UNESCO conventions and declarations, and International Labour Organisation Convention (No. 169) concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (ILO) (Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 1989a) and interpreted by Indigenous peoples in the polycultural Indigenous Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the proposed Guidelines for the Protection of Indigenous Heritages (Wiessner & Battiste, 2000). These principles, in the voice of UN law represented in key documents, offer educators a framework for engaging the Indigenous humanities in all education.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (General Assembly of the United Nations, 1948) and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1976), Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice (DRRP) (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1978) affirm these foundational principles:

- “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”. This “inherent” dignity and the “equal and inalienable” rights protected by human rights and the rule of law generate a theory of “common heritage of humanity”(UDHR, 1948, arts. 1, 4).
- “All peoples and all human groups, whatever their composition or ethnic origin, “contribute according to their own genius to the progress of the civilisations and cultures” (DRRP, 1978, preamble).
- “All peoples of the world possess equal faculties for attaining the highest level in intellectual, technical, social, economic, cultural and political development” (DRRP, 1978, art. 1(4)).
- They have the “right to be different, to consider themselves as different and to be regarded as such” (DRRP, 1978, art. 1(2)).
- These “differences can in no case serve as a pretext for any rank-ordered classification of nations or peoples” (DRRP, 1978, art. 1(5)).
- Human beings can and may live differently, and the resultant diversity “has to be respected as it informs the right to maintain cultural identity” (DRRP, 1978, art. 1(3)).

In the UN framework, “culture” is defined “as a product of all human beings” and in its broadest sense defines “education” (DRRP, 1978, art. 5). Creativity, according to the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UDCD) (UNESCO, 2001), “draws on the roots of cultural tradition, but flourishes in contact with other cultures” (art. 7): “it takes diverse forms across time and space ... As a source of exchange, innovation, and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations” (art. 1). Culture, then, is neither decorative nor discrete, but should be regarded as the “whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features that characterize a society or social group” (UNESCO, 1982). What is more, it is “the right and the duty” of peoples to develop their cultures (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1966, art. 1(2)). In the context of “debates about identity, social cohesion, and the development of a knowledge-based economy” in increasingly diverse states and societies, “it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as a willingness to live together” (UDCD, 2001, preamble, art. 2).

Stressing what all peoples have to gain from cultural diversity, the UN framework underlines implications for human rights and for ethical responsibilities:

- “The flourishing of creative diversity requires the full implementation of cultural rights” (UDCD, 2001, art. 5).
- “Cultural rights are an integral part of human rights, which are universal, indivisible, and interdependent” (UDCD, 2001, art. 5).
- “The defence of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity” (UDCD, 2001, art. 4).
- It “implies a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the rights of persons belonging to minorities and those of indigenous peoples” (UDCD, 2001, art. 4).
- “No one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their scope” (UDCD, 2001, art. 4).
- “Cultural diversity widens the range of options open to everyone; it is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual existence” (UDCD, 2001, art. 3).
- “Freedom of expression, media pluralism, multilingualism, equal access to art and to scientific and technological knowledge, including in digital form, and the possibility for all cultures to have access to the means of expression and dissemination

are the guarantees of cultural diversity” (UDCD, 2001, art. 6).

In addition, the diversity of cultural orientations and the right to be different “may not, in any circumstances, serve as a pretext for racial prejudice” (DRRP, 1978, art. 1(2)). Racism can never be justified: “Any theory or law which involves the claim that racial or ethnic groups are inherently superior or inferior, thus implying that some would be entitled to dominate or eliminate others, presumed to be inferior, or which bases value judgments on racial differentiation, has no scientific foundation and is contrary to the moral and ethical principles of humanity” (DRRP, 1978, art. 2(1)). Nor is it a case of winners and losers because racism “perverts those who practice it while hindering the development of its victims” (DRRP, 1978, art. 2(2)). In general, states are required to “protect the existence and identity of national minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity” (General Assembly of the United Nations, 1999, art. 1).

Economic, social, and cultural rights are importantly connected to the “right to education” (DRRP, 1978, arts. 26 (1)): “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (CRC, 1989b, art. 29; General Assembly of the United Nations, 1979, art. 10; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 1974, art. 1(a)). Each person has duties to the community and family “in which alone the free and full development of his or her personality is possible” (UDHR, 1948, arts. 29(1) and 16(3)). Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children (UDHR, 1948, art. 26(3)), while states have a responsibility to “promote, at various stages and in various types of education, study of different cultures, their reciprocal influences, their perspectives and ways of life, in order to encourage mutual appreciation of the differences between them” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1974, art. 17).

In the field of education, states, the teaching profession and unions have the obligation to ensure that Indigenous peoples “have the opportunity to acquire education at all levels on at least an equal footing with the rest of the national community” (ILO, 1989a, art. 26). They have the obligation to develop and implement “education programmes and services in cooperation” with Indigenous peoples, and to foster “national and regional development” (ILO, 1989a, art. 27(1)). Further, “These educational measures shall be taken among all sections of the national community, and particularly among those that are in most direct contact with the peoples concerned, with the object of eliminating prejudices that they may harbour in respect of Indigenous peoples” (ILO, 1989a, art. 31). In addition, government obligations to “adopt

measures appropriate to the traditions and cultures of Indigenous peoples to make known to them their educational rights and duties” (ILO, 1989a, art. 30) entail these commitments:

- Education programmes and services “shall incorporate their history, their knowledge and technologies, their value systems and their further social, economic and cultural aspirations” (ILO, 1989a, art. 27(1)).
- Governments and competent authorities shall make efforts “to ensure that history textbooks and other educational material provide a fair, accurate and informative portrayal of the societies and cultures of these peoples” (ILO, 1989a, art. 31).
- States are required to ensure “that curricula and textbooks include scientific and ethical considerations concerning human unity and diversity and that no invidious distinctions are made with regard to any people” (DRRP, 1978, art. 5(2)).
- “Measures shall be taken to preserve and promote the development and practice of the indigenous languages of the peoples concerned” (ILO, 1989a, art. 28(3)).

In UNESCO’s Convention Against Discrimination in Education (CADE) (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1960), ratifying states have “recognized the right of members of national minorities to carry on their own educational activities, including the maintenance of schools, is essential to full development of the human personality” (CADE, 1960, art. 5 (1)(c)). Such rights require authorities to remedy historical disadvantage by ensuring:

- Training of members of Indigenous peoples and their involvement in the formulation and implementation of education programmes (ILO, 1989a, art. 27(2)).
- The progressive transfer of responsibility for the conduct of these programmes to these peoples as appropriate (ILO, 1989a, art. 27(2)).
- A “standard of education in these school activities” that “cannot be lower than the general standard laid down or approved by the competent authorities” (CADE, 1960, art. 5(c)).
- “Educational resources ... to combat racism” (DRRP, 1978, art. 5).
- “The teaching of human rights and fundamental freedoms at all levels of education” (DRRPPURHR, 1999, art. 15).
- “The dissemination of knowledge and the findings of appropriate research in natural and social sciences on the causes and prevention of racial prejudice and racist attitudes” (DRRP, 1978, art. 6 (2)).

These principles offer a framework that promotes Indigenous humanities in education. Yet, nation states have been slow to implement this legal framework.

Persistent national and local challenge reveals that in spite of human consciousness, rationality, purposes, and education, the cunning human will always be a mystery to him or herself, which can never be comprehensively mastered by the law. The failure of nation states to implement their ratified covenants and declarations exemplifies the moment when state integrity and ingenuity fail!

### ■ Next steps to animation

Thinking about place as itself a living organism is one of the next steps in our project. It is a step that may seem to echo anthropological talk about animism or essentialism but is connected to ancient and autonomous Indigenous ecologies that can help animate and further educate the Indigenous humanities in practices that join respect with sustainability. The extinction of Indigenous peoples has been too often attended by the virtual death of the earth for which they were stewards. But Indigenous peoples remain today the planet's most important human exemplars of diversity, and the ones most closely tied to biodiversity. Even the most "advanced" and detailed satellite images confirm this. Our species' future, beyond desertification-as-homogenisation, lies with peoples, their thinking places and their thinking about place. How modern states and their citizens respond to this reality depends massively on understanding, and thus equally massively on public education. Alas, Indigenous ecologies and epistemologies can be seen as standing for just more things for the unscrupulous to steal, just more fuel for "development", for the gold-rush global swarming that accelerates global warming. But they can also be seen as nature's other treasury, to be shared and carefully replenished, through links to Indigenous economies, the non-acquisitive cartography of the four directions, the respectful ceremonies of treaty and tradition. If there is no place for thinking place in these ways in contemporary thought, there may remain no place for thought or life at all.

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


THINKING PLACE:  
*The Indigenous Humanities & Education*  
*Marie Battiste & Cathryn McConaghy (Eds.)*

*Volume 34 — 2005*  
ISSN 1326-0111  
ISBN 1864998431

# the AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL of INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

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 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* is a peer reviewed research journal publishing articles in the field of Indigenous education, broadly defined. It is the only journal for educators devoted specifically to issues of practice, pedagogy and policy in Indigenous education in Australia. The journal has an international audience and is highly valued by its readers as a reliable source of information on Indigenous education issues. Contributions on the participation of Indigenous people in education and training; equitable and appropriate access and achievement of Indigenous people in education and training; and the teaching of Indigenous studies, cultures and languages to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students are encouraged. Notes to Contributors can be found at the back of each issue. The journal is published by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit at the University of Queensland, under the strategic management and with the support of the Unit Director, Michael Williams.

■ *Editors:* Jackie Huggins & Elizabeth Mackinlay

*Managing Editor:* Sean Ulm

*Administrative Assistant:* Jan Stewart

*Graphic Design:* Lovehate Design

*Printing:* Printpoint Australia Pty Ltd

*Artwork:* Adapted from *Jungle Vine* (2002)  
by Macsen Ja-wukanyi Chalmers

■ All correspondence and submissions should be addressed to:

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■ The views expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the Editors or Publisher.

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The University of Queensland, 2006

ISSN 1326-0111

ISBN 1864998431



THE UNIVERSITY  
OF QUEENSLAND  
AUSTRALIA

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