

From Cognitive Imperialism to Indigenizing “The Learning Wigwam”

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Abstract

This paper offers an overview of the literature that addresses Indigenous ways of knowing, Canada’s education assimilation policy through cognitive imperialism, First Nations’ administrative control of education, and the history of the development of post-secondary Indigenous Studies programs. Operating within an Algonquin Anishinaabe worldview where it is appreciated that knowledge is gained through personal experience and reflection, in this paper I provide excerpts from my kokomis’ (grandmother’s) story of Indian day school and thus her experience with cognitive imperialism. In moving to the contemporary, I also provide a discussion of how I established a deepened postcolonial mindset through experiencing Algonquin Anishinaabe ways of knowing within the Department of Indigenous Studies at Trent University in Ontario, Canada.

Introduction

In the Algonquin Anishinaabe tradition, experiential knowledge and reflection upon it are indeed valid research methodologies. This is a good thing because this is how I know. Recently, I was asked to respond to the question, “Is Indigenous knowledge postcolonial?” My immediate response was, “postcolonial...what is that?” because of my inability to perceive postcolonial schemas at the level of practice in the larger Algonquin Anishinaabe community of the Ottawa River Valley in Ontario, Canada of which I am a member. Upon reflection, though, I realized I did have a story to tell. In this paper I engage the literature that addresses Indigenous people’s knowledge systems and our experience with colonization through institutionalized education. I also discuss my kokomis’ (grandmother in Algonquin) experience with Indian day school, as well as offer parts of my experience of establishing a deepened postcolonial mindset through engaging and reflecting on Indigenous knowledge at the graduate school level.

Before They Arrived

Prior to European emigration to what is now Canada, Indigenous Nations relied on sophisticated ways of knowing their world and their place within it. This included systems of governance such as the Anishinaabe clan system, a system of raising their children within the safety and protection of the extended family, a sophisticated medicine and healing society, as well as sophisticated systems of communication that included both the oral tradition and various forms of symbolic literacy. Marie Battiste (1986) discusses Algonkian systems of symbolic epistemology and literature such as the use of pictographs, petroglyphs, notched

sticks and wampum” (p. 24). These systems, she argues, were and remain an equally valid and legitimate way of establishing and maintaining a shared cognitive reality.

Leanne Simpson (2000b) asserts the learning process for Indigenous youth was very different from the institutionalized education systems found in Western societies. Learning was considered to be a life-long journey. Within this life-long journey, principles of immanence were fundamental and were expressed in ceremony, reflection, and sharing. Learning was practiced within a wholistic way of knowing that included the four dimensions of the individual: mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional. Similarly, Jean Barman, Yvonne Hébert, and Don McCaskill (1986) have stressed that within Indigenous societies family values were highly treasured where children were raised to assume adult roles and responsibilities within a context of warmth and affection. In this context, they argue, learning emphasized respect, self-reliance, proper conduct, as well as a “belief in the unity of all aspects of life” and a “lack of distinction between the ‘secular’ and the ‘sacred’” (Barman et al., 1986, p. 3). Gregory Cajete (1999) adds, “traditional Native American systems of education were characterized by observation, participation, assimilation and experiential learning rather than by low-context formal instruction characteristic of Euro-American schooling” (p. 27).

When European people first arrived, they were very much dependant on Indigenous knowledge systems. For example, Simpson (2000a) argues, “Europeans were dependant on Indigenous Knowledge for nutrition, food preparation, hunting and fishing technology, travel routes, cloth-making, shelter-making, recreation, medicines and health care” (p. 188-189). John Milloy (2003) agrees adding, “partnerships, anchored in Aboriginal knowledge and skills, had enabled the newcomers to find their way, to survive, and to prosper” (p. 4). European people were also dependant on our systems of knowledge creation in that Indigenous knowledge does not merely consist of a storehouse or stock of knowledge. Contrary to what many may think, like European people, Indigenous people had, and continue to have, their knowledge producing machinery.

The Arrival of Cognitive Imperialism

Battiste (1986) discusses one incident in particular in 1652 where Father Gabriel Druilletes reported Algonkian Indigenous people using “eal for pen, bark for paper, and writing with peculiar characters” as a moment when Indigenous symbolic literacy was indeed perceived (p. 28). Battiste (1986) further explains, when European people encountered evidence of Indigenous writing, it was destroyed because European people found the presence of Indigenous literacy threatening. Through this process of destruction and denial, Battiste (1986) laments, much of the Indigenous literacies of America were transformed, or neglected, by Euro-Christian travelers and missionaries. As a result of attacking Indigenous symbolic literacies, Indigenous shared cognitive reality began to fragment thus opening the door for a particular kind of colonization Battiste (2000) refers to as “cognitive imperialism” (p. 198). She explains cognitive imperialism is a form of colonization that “denies people their

language and cultural integrity by maintaining the legitimacy of only one language, one culture, and one frame of reference” (Battiste, 2000, p. 198).

As additional European settlers arrived and the power relationship between them and Indigenous Nations began to skew, respect of, and for, Indigenous knowledge systems further diminished. This was particularly the case after the war of 1812 when Indigenous Nations were no longer required as military allies, and the fur trade economy declined. As a result, Simpson (2000a p. 189) argues, “for the next century, Indigenous peoples and their knowledge were the target of assimilation, colonization and racism, as the government did everything in its power to destroy Aboriginal Nations, their culture, values, lifeways, languages and knowledge”. It is argued that this paternalistic one-sided relationship received its legal justification in the 1867 *British North America Act*. Specifically, section 91 “took away Indians’ independent status by making them wards of the federal government” (Barman et al., 1986, p. 2). As a result of this, Indian education policy in Canada took legislative form through the creation of the *Indian Act* (Barman et al., 1986, p. 4-5; Milloy, 2003, p. 9).

During this time of Canada’s early development, the European style of schooling of Indigenous children was already taking place through “Catholic religious orders that accompanied the first French settlers to North America” (Barman et al., 1986, p. 3). In Ontario, protestant missionaries employed Indian day schools that were “similar in form and curriculum to those available to the poor of Britain” to educate and *civilize* Indigenous students (Barman et al., 1986, p. 5).



Fig. 1: “The Learning Wigwam”
Photo credit Dennis Glassford

As a young girl, and living on the reservation at Golden Lake in Ontario, Canada (Now Pikwàkanagàn First Nation.) my kokomis attended Indian day school during the early 1920s. (See figure one above.) It was within the walls of Indian day school that she encountered education as cognitive imperialism. My kokomis called this place of learning the “Learning Wigwam” and this is what she titled her story. My kokomis wrote, “In September many students came from the woods but as soon as cold weather set in no one came from the

woods.” She continues, “I know why they did not come, they had no shoes no clothes also did not have food, some just got sick and died.”

My kokomis also wrote about how hard her teacher – Josephine Courrier – had to work, “to try and get something into our hard heads” and about the times she spent “saying prayers and singing hymns.” She wrote about moments such as the time when Father French would come in for a visit at the “learning wigwam,” and how “Archie Bernard would get up and do a step dance” where afterwards “Father French would give him a dime.” She also emphasized that Josephine taught the students, “even the boys,” how to crochet, and about recreation time when the students “would all participate in a square dance without music” where “Joe Whiteduck was the caller” and where “we danced many times in front of the furnace in the basement of the learning wigwam.” Possibly needless to say, I treasure this story.

It seems Indian day schools were a dismal failure “because the influence of the wigwam was stronger than the influence of the school” (Davin Report cited in Milloy, 2003, p. 8). As a result, and although not its genesis, based on the 1879 Davin Report the federal government of Canada institutionalized the residential and boarding school systems (Barman et al., 1986, p. 6). Residential schools were located far from reservations and the potential influences of the wigwam. Missionaries operated these residential schools. Within these residential institutions, and through cognitive imperialistic means, all aspects of life were closely regulated: dress, language, the lessons, and behaviour. It is said that the education offered within the walls of these institutions was unequal to the education provided to their non-Indigenous contemporaries and merely prepared Indigenous children for inequality. It is also argued, “fifty percent of the children who passed through these schooling systems did not benefit from the education which they had received therein” (Barman et al., 1986, p. 8). It seems that overcrowding, lax administrations, budget shortfalls, and poor hygiene and diet meant that children died in astonishing numbers, where many were “the victims of schools that hosted the white plague, tuberculosis” (Milloy, 2003, p. xv).

Although from 1920 onward attendance at residential schools was mandatory where, as such, many Indigenous parents acquiesced, exercising their agency others resisted. An ultimate and unfortunate example of resistance to the residential school system is the story of little Charlie Wenjack who, in 1966, ran away from the Residence of Cecilia Jeffery School in Kenora, Ontario. Apparently, Charlie, far from his home, “collapsed and died of hunger close to the railway track which he desperately thought might take him to his family hundreds of kilometres away” (Hodgins and Milloy, 2002, p. 223). Although not without controversy, Charlie’s spirit and memory lives on. In 1974, Trent University officials named the theatre in Otonabee College at Trent University the “Wenjack Theatre” (Hodgins and Milloy, 2002, p. 222).

Eber Hampton (2000) adds to Battiste’s discussion of cognitive imperialism as education when he argues, in the treaties that made Canada, Indigenous Nations agreed to share the land and the resources with European settlers in exchange for, amongst other things, education (p.

211). He explains, in establishing these treaties, the Crown's responsibilities included three key provisions: the establishment of schools; equal educational outcome; and, choice (Hampton, 2000, p. 211). Despite this, operating from a different set of intentions, that of cultural destruction, the Crown merely "distorted education, transforming it from a tool of self-determination into a weapon of captivity" (Hampton, 2000, p. 211). Hampton (2000) further laments, instead of funding First Nations' institutions, the Crown proceeded to fund church and provincial institutions (p. 211).

Administrative Control

Given the ineffectiveness of the European style of education, yet appreciating that there was indeed the need to function in a new context, in 1931, the League of Indian Nations of Western Canada passed a resolution "requesting that the Department of Indian Affairs [DIA] establish local reserve schools" (Barman et al., 1986, p. 12). Little changed though. Eventually, in 1946, a Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons was appointed to revise the *Indian Act*. In 1951, it was amended in a manner that permitted "the federal government to make financial agreements with provincial and other authorities for Indian children to attend public and private schools" (Barman et al., 1986, p. 13). By 1960, almost one-quarter of Indigenous children were attending provincially controlled institutions (Barman et al., 1986, p. 13).

In Canada, 1969 was a watershed moment, catalyzed by the federal government's tabling of the infamous White Paper. The 1969 White Paper called for the end of the special status for Indian people and the need for their full integration and assimilation into European settler society. In reactionary style, the White Paper led to an awakening of Indigenous political consciousness and the emergence of Indigenous political mobilization. Three years later "in 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood [NIB, now Assembly of First Nations.], produced a landmark policy statement: Indian Control of Indian Education" (Longboat, 1987, p. 24).

In 1976, senior officials of the NIB and members of federal cabinet joined efforts in negotiating a reform package for Indigenous education. The NIB specifically identified and targeted sections 114 and 115 of the *Indian Act* as problematic, asking that these sections be amended in a manner that would allow First Nations to take control of education. Although the DIA eventually accepted the policy statement, problems arose with the department's interpretation of control. The federal government interpreted First Nations' control as merely meaning a degree of participation, where the federal government delegated programs and where First Nations were to administer them. With the lack of progress in terms of achieving real power, in 1978, after two years of negotiating, the NIB walked away from the table (Longboat, 1987, p. 25). Despite the lack of real control, change did occur at the community level where, "by the early 1980s, 450 of the 577 Indian bands in Canada had taken over full or partial administration of reserve schools" once operated by the DIA (Barman et al., 1986, p. 16). Further, by 1984, 187 First Nations bands were operating their schools at both the primary and secondary level (Barman et al., 1986, p. 16; Longboat, 1987, p. 26).

Obstacles to Eliminating Cognitive Imperialism

Since 1982, Canada has a new Constitutional order – one that respects Indigenous rights. Despite this, obstacles continue to plague Indigenous education. Battiste (1998) targets the theory of diffusion as the main culprit to Indigenous educational reform. She explains, this theory posits that all knowledge is diffused from a European centre to its inferior periphery at which Indigenous Nations reside (Battiste, 1998, p. 22). Battiste (1998) also identifies several other obstacles: while over half of Indigenous students attend provincial schools, the curricula fails to represent this reality; in funding agreements, First Nations schools are required to accept provincial curricula; there is a lack of available resources for Indigenous people who wish to develop Indigenous curricula; and there is also a lack of available structures and guidance to facilitate the development of Indigenous curricula. Moreover, Battiste (1998) identifies the reality that most teachers educated in Canada's schooling system have failed to take courses about, or from, Indigenous people. Nor have they established a cross-cultural awareness of who Indigenous people are. She targets stereotypes and negative innuendoes as plaguing the mindsets of non-Indigenous people, acting as a barrier to Indigenous knowledge systems (Battiste, 1998, p. 22). It is through these obstacles, Battiste (1998) argues, that the governments of Canada continue to colonize the mindsets of Indigenous people and perpetuate their grip of cognitive imperialism.

Moving beyond critique, Battiste (1998) suggests the parameters required for a successful education program for Indigenous people: it must emerge from Indigenous ecological contexts; it must emerge from Indigenous social and cultural frames of reference; it must embody Indigenous philosophical foundations and Indigenous spiritual understanding; it must be built on the enriched experiences and gifts of Indigenous people; and it must be based on economic needs versus merely a secular experience that fragments knowledge (p. 21).

Role of Universities

Hampton (2000) asserts, university educational institutions are also implicated as a tool of cognitive imperialism in that they too operate from a location of European assumptions, and thus content, structure, and process (p. 216). He further asserts, universities play a huge role in shaping society in that, ~~no~~ "no other institution has such a pervasive effect on our lives" (Hampton, 2000, p. 216). For example, it is universities that shape our teachers, lawyers, nurses, doctors, and other professionals. According to Hampton (2000), it appears it is at the university education level where Indigenous people ~~have~~ "made the least progress in terms of First Nations control" (p. 216). Given this reality, it seems it is not only at the primary level, but also at the post-secondary level, where we need to see an Indigenousization of the academy or, as my kokomis would say, the ~~learning~~ "learning wigwam."

Universities began the process of establishing Indigenous Studies programs after the civil rights movement in the 1960s. This was a revolutionary time when students made demands that universities better represent societal needs. Clara Sue Kidwell (1978) argues, one of the

difficulties post-secondary Indigenous Studies programs have is how to combine the need to change Indigenous people's living conditions with the university's search for truth. Kidwell (1978) suggests a possible answer of establishing legitimacy for Indigenous Studies programs as a discipline lies in scholarship that develops theoretical frameworks that represent Indigenous life in terms of its relationship with the larger society. She suggests there is the need to "combine historical analysis and contemporary anthropological and sociological methods to unique Native American problems" (Kidwell, 1978, p. 6-7). In short, she argues for the need to redefine disciplines that once studied Indigenous people "like bugs on pins" (Kidwell, 1978, p. 5).

It is Elizabeth Cook-Lynn's (1997) view that when Indigenous Studies began, over twenty years ago, central to the call was a seat at the table from which Indigenous people had been excluded for well over four hundred years as well as the need for new epistemologies. She laments, this call was to challenge the orthodox disciplines that served in "disfiguring and deforming Native peoples, communities and nations" (Cook-Lynn, 1997, p. 22). Adding to Battiste and Hampton, Cook-Lynn (1997) provides an analysis of the barriers preventing the establishment of appropriate disciplinary principles and new epistemologies for Indigenous Studies: hiring practices that have merely resulted in tokenism; the pervasiveness and subversive nature of postcolonial theories; individuals searching for identity as dominating; the construction of hybrid departments such as ethnic and cultural studies; the inadequacies of the new historicism; budgets; calls by outsiders that Indigenous Studies lacks rigour and is thus anti-intellectual; too much focus on the nagging question of how does Indigenous Studies fit in; and politicians and funding agencies monopolizing and directing the process of developing appropriate disciplinary parameters.

As of 2002, there were a total of eleven Indigenous Studies programs operating within Canadian borders. Shona Taner (1999) provides a review of the development of four of these programs: Trent University in Ontario; University of Regina/Saskatchewan Indian Federated College; University of Alberta; and, the University of Northern British Columbia. In Canada, Trent University was the first to offer an Indian-Eskimo studies program, as a component of the Anthropology Department. Taner (1999) identifies several contributing factors to the creation of the program: support from President Tom Symons who was familiar with the issues of the Indigenous population; the presence of four First Nations communities within a seventy mile radius; and, Trent University was only five years old at the time. Fortunately, in 1972, the program underwent a name change and Native Studies became a full-fledged Department.

Taner (1999) also credits the establishment of the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College to several factors such as the federal government's adoption of the NIB's 1972 policy paper, as well as the political unity of the First Nations in Saskatchewan. Although the university was an established entity, it was not until 1976 when President Lloyd Barber allied with Indigenous people, and the college became a fully accredited Indian-controlled post-secondary institution (Taner, 1999, p. 294).

The Indian Association of Alberta approached the University of Alberta as early as 1972, where, five years later, the university established a committee. It was not until fourteen years after initial discussion began that the University of Alberta finally approved the School of Native Studies. The first courses began in the 1986/7 school year. Interestingly, possibly the unwillingness to establish the program, Taner (1999) suggests, was attributed to the fact that there was no senior official or ally, such as Barber or Symons, available to push the Indigenous agenda forward (p. 294-5).

Taner (1999) explains “when the University of Northern British Columbia was inaugurated in 1994, it was the first university in Canada to open with a Department of Native Studies already embedded in its structure” (p. 295). She identifies the large Indigenous population of British Columbia, the growing interest in Indigenous Studies, as well as recognition that Indigenous Studies is a legitimate field of study, as contributing factors to the success and development of the department. Although Taner (1999) does provide a discussion regarding the challenges these programs underwent in developing a curriculum, it is back to the Department of Native Studies at Trent University, and my experience in the program, that I now turn to.

Indigenous Studies at Trent University

Similar to what Battiste and others advocate, David Newhouse, Don McCaskill, and John Milloy (2002) discuss the need for Native Studies to move beyond ‘Indianism inquiry,’ where outsiders merely explain the realities of Indigenous people through their lenses. Indeed, there is the need to develop First Nations communities that are based upon Indigenous ideals. This, they argue, requires an appreciation of a new intellectual project, or, alternatively, an importation of traditional ways of knowing and being; an intellectual project that employs traditional Indigenous methodologies and epistemologies that involve “extra-reasonable” activities such as experiential knowledge, dreams, fasts, and ceremonial life (Newhouse et al., 2002, p. 78).

Newhouse et al. (2002) discuss the evolution of the Department of Native Studies at Trent University. It is argued that the philosophical and epistemological foundations of the Department were and continue to be built upon three interrelated pillars: academic; cultural; and applied/practical. While the academic component consists of traditional Western methods of teaching and research, the cultural component is rooted in traditional Indigenous culture and thus a more holistic way of knowing which includes the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of who people are. The applied component provides the much needed practical skills required.

It is argued that the cultural component “has adopted a philosophy of education that attempts to address the teachings of the Elders” (Kulchyski, McCaskill, and Newhouse, 1999, p. xviii). To accomplish this, the Department has instituted a practice of hiring Elders to teach language and cultural courses. Elder and Professor Shirley Williams (1993) posits, language courses

are crucial to Indigenous Studies because “language is where culture is” (p. 425). S. Williams (1993) is also convinced of the role language development has for Indigenous students in terms of instilling pride in students. Eventually, Trent University established criteria that accepted Indigenous knowledge as being on par with Western academic credentials and these teaching positions that Elders were fulfilling were turned into full faculty tenured positions.

The Department of Native Studies at Trent University also differs from a traditional Western academic department in other ways in that there are three additional positions. These positions consist of a Cultural Advisor, a Counsellor, as well as an Academic Skills Coordinator. These positions are invaluable to the overall function and general day-to-day operation of the Department. For example, the Cultural Advisor, Vern Douglas, works to fulfill the cultural component through the organization and facilitation of events such as the Elders’ and Traditional Peoples’ Conference, held annually in February, and evening Traditional Teachings. In addition, Counsellor Joeann Argue is available to students to assist them in their journey through the primarily Western based academy, while Academic Skills Coordinator Christine Welter works at recruiting Indigenous students.

The Department has taken additional steps to increase the number of Indigenous students studying at the university level. A diploma program was established in 1975 where, if the student chooses, he or she can transfer to the degree program after successfully completing the diploma requirements. In 1978, the BA program was expanded into an honours program and in 1985, the Department joined the Frost Centre and created an Aboriginal studies cluster within its Master of Arts program” (Newhouse et al., 2002, p. 68). In addition, in 1999 the Department began offering courses in its newly formed Ph.D. program. With the foundation already established, the doctoral program is interdisciplinary and is based upon the integration of Indigenous and Western academic knowledge that encompasses the same three pillars: academic; cultural; and, applied/practical.

In October 2004, Trent University’s newest building officially opened. This building houses the First Peoples House of Learning (FPHL) and Peter Gzowski College. (See appendix A.) This new house is named after the latter, Peter Gzowski. Unfortunately, it is argued by Newhouse (2004) that Trent University officials “found it easier to name the building after an immigrant Canadian rather than an Aboriginal person” (p. 13). This is most unfortunate in that cultural icons such as the naming of buildings and the positioning of monuments, as forms of cultural markers and symbolic literacy, are essential sources of empowerment. Regardless of this disappointment in the naming of the FPHL, it boasts a First Peoples Gathering Space, an outdoor Ceremonial Space, and the First Peoples Performance Space, and is clad in the four colours of the Medicine Wheel; yellow, red, black, and white.

In June 2005, Trent University’s Native Studies Ph.D Program celebrated its first graduates: Kevin Fitzmaurice, Jeff Lambe, and John Phillips. Indigenous knowledge was a component of the convocation ceremony; Eagle feathers were gifted to the new doctoral graduates, and the Otonabee Woman’s Hand Drum performed an honour song. In June 2006, the

Department celebrated additional graduates: Yale Belanger, Nicole Bell, Songwit Chuamsakul, Susan Hill, and Ross Hoffman, three of which are Indigenous people. As of 2010 the Ph.D program has fifteen graduates. It was in 2006, the Department of Native Studies underwent a name change to the Department of Indigenous Studies.

My Story

Due to the patrilineal line of descent once codified in the *Indian Act*, I grew up in urban Toronto, Ontario Canada (See Gehl, 2000; and Gehl, 2004.). Eventually, I turned to the discipline of Native Studies at Trent University to undertake my MA and Ph.D. degrees. While in this Department, over the years I have taken the opportunity to participate in the cultural component of the curriculum. Some of the awareness, understanding, and knowledge gained include the Anishinaabe Creation story, the Sacred Pipe, the Anishinaabe Seven Stages of Life, Wisakedjak stories, as well as the significance of the Eagle. In addition, while at Trent I have come to appreciate Indigenous systems of governance such as the Anishinaabe Clan System, the role of Elders and youth, the need for gender balance, and the ethic of the Seven Grandfather Teachings. I also participated in the Elders' and Traditional Peoples' Conference, taken the opportunity to practice drumming and singing with the Otonabee Woman's Hand Drum, and established relationships with Elders, language speakers, and traditional knowers Doug Williams and Shirley Williams.

While in the Ph.D. program I opted to take the Bimadiziwin (the way of a good life) Experiential Option; a component of the program that provides students with the opportunity to transform and learn Indigenous knowledge in a traditional way as discussed by Simpson, Cajete, and others. More specifically, the Bimadiziwin option “involves a formally-structured relationship between an Elder and a student” where “the student gets to know her own self in order to understand life” (Bell, Davis, Douglas, Gaywish, Hoffman, Lambe, Manitowabi, McCaskill, Pompana, Williams, Williams, 2005, p. 73). Succinctly, the goal is a process of learning where personal transformation occurs through “returning to the Original Instructions” (Bell et al., 2005, p. 73).

Within the Bimadiziwin option, students are responsible for finding an Elder to work with and they must submit a written proposal with their objectives clearly stated. Afterwards, a reflection paper and an oral presentation is offered to the department's cultural committee composed of four Elders/traditional people, where, in conjunction with the Elder who guided the student, it is determined through a pass or fail system if indeed personal transformation within the parameters of the Original Instructions has occurred.

During my Bimadiziwin I was fortunate to have the opportunity to spend time with Algonquin Anishinaabe Elder William Commanda, keeper of three original Algonquin Anishinaabe Wampum Belts. (See figure two below.) Wampum Belt diplomacy is a sophisticated system of codifying political relationships using an Indigenous set of symbols and traditional

medium. In reflecting on my experience with William, I realize indeed he was teaching me traditional Algonquin Anishinaabe symbolic literacy



Fig. 2: *Algonquin Wampum Belts*
Photo credit Nikolaus K. Gehl



Fig. 3: *Wisakedjâk at Mazinaw Rock*
Photo credit Nikolaus K. Gehl

During my Bimadiziwin I also focused on the Anishinaabe Creation story and establishing a spiritual and thus deeper relationship with Algonquin traditional territory. While out on the land I visited sacred locations for Algonquin Anishinaabe: Mazinaw Rock at Bon Echo Provincial Park in Ontario; and Oiseau Rock on the northern shore of the Ottawa River in Quebec. With the Anishinaabe Creation story in hand and in mind, I was able to appreciate firsthand the intersection of the four sacred elements of Creation: Water, Rock, Wind, and Fire discussed in the Creation story as well as appreciate ancient pictographs. (See figure three above.) In taking the responsibility of knowing my ancestral traditions through the Bimadiziwin option as I have, I am now more firmly grounded, both ontologically and epistemologically, in my Algonquin Anishinaabe worldview.

Conclusion

Indian day, boarding, and residential schools such as the ones that my kokomis and Charlie Wenjack attended, where they were faced with a particular form of oppression known as cognitive imperialism and as such an education style that merely prepared them for inequality, are no longer in operation. Although here in Canada the provinces continue to control curriculum within the public school system where many Indigenous people attend school, changes in Indigenous education have occurred. Today, First Nations bands do have administrative control of their schools.

The events of the 1960s represented a turning point in that student protests and demands initiated the development of several Indigenous Studies post secondary programs in Canada. In this paper I have suggested that Trent University's Indigenous Studies program is at the forefront in terms of establishing and operating under a set of disciplinary principles that are unique to Indigenous Studies, as well as in terms of practicing Indigenous epistemologies.

Through Trent University's Indigenous Studies program, my ontology is now more firmly rooted in an Algonquin Anishinaabe worldview. I am able to read and understand the Algonquin Anishinaabe Wampum Belts and appreciate the pictographs, such as Wisakedjak, that are inscribed at sacred locations, and thus demonstrate some proficiency with traditional Indigenous symbolic literacy. It is in this way that, through Trent University's Indigenous Studies program, my cognitive processing style has indeed been indigenized.

In presenting my kokomis' and my story, I have argued that Trent University's Indigenous Studies program answers Battiste, Hampton, Cook-Lynn, and Kidwell's call for new epistemologies that serve to counter the cognitive imperialism that processes of colonization unleashed against Indigenous people and their shared cognitive realities. In responding to the question, "Is Indigenous knowledge postcolonial?" and although Indigenous knowledge predated European arrival, I have demonstrated through my experience with Indigenous Studies at Trent University that I have indeed established what some might call a deepened postcolonial mindset. This is my story.

Kinoomaagewin/Education



Spiderwoman Theatre's Muriel Miguel, Lisa Mayo, and Gloria Miguel presented 'Persistence of Memory' to officially open Nozhem – First Peoples Performance Space at Trent University.



'Enweying' hosts First Peoples House of Learning on Trent University campus.

University opens doors to Native lodgings

By Lynn Gehl

PETERBOROUGH – Autumn marks the start of a new academic year. It is a time of beginnings and great promise.

October marked the grand opening of Trent University's newest building, Enweying (The Way We Speak Together). The building hosts The First Peoples House of Learning (FPHL) and Peter Gzowski College. This new yellow (or officially ochre #33) six-storey building sits on the east side of the Otonabee River – the place of new beginnings for First Nations Peoples. It consists of both academic and residential space, four academic departments, including Native Studies, Mathematics, Economics and Business Administration, the Dean of Graduate Studies, and the Associate Vice-President of Research.

The new college was named after radio broadcaster and journalist Peter Gzowski who served as Trent's eighth Chancellor. The name of the building honours his legacy as well as promotes dialogue, a fundamental aspect of university life.

The First Peoples House of Learning components include First Peoples Gathering Space, an atrium/gallery space, an outdoor ceremonial space and the First Peoples Performance Space. An early decision by the Native Studies Department to distribute them throughout the building rather than group them all in one location was designed to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue.

The top of the six-storey building contains the 250-bed Gzowski student residence. The first floor consists of academic teaching space – lecture halls, seminar and workshop rooms.

The building, designed by Dunlop Architects of Toronto and Two Row Architects of Six Nations, is fully clad in the four colours of a medicine wheel – yellow, red, black and white – which

represent the dawn of a new day, celebration, growth, and wisdom, respectively.

An excerpt for the FPFL vision statement reads: The First Peoples House of Learning is a celebration of Aboriginal learning and knowledge. It acts as a beacon of hope and opportunity, drawing peoples together in a spirit of optimism and a sense of innovation and creativity, inviting people of all nations to put their minds and spirits together to see what future can be made for the First Peoples of this land and for all members of creation.

The First Peoples Performance Space, also known as Nozhem – female bear – was officially opened on Wednesday, October 13, with a special performance of Spiderwoman Theatre's "Persistence of Memory" featuring Muriel Miguel, Gloria Miguel and Lisa Mayo with stage manager Deborah Ratelle. This production continued through Saturday, October 16.

Under the guidance of Professor Marrie Mumford, Canada Research Chair of Aboriginal Arts and Literature, many more Indigenous performance initiatives are planned for Nozhem. The space is also a dream of Professor of Native Studies Edna Manitowabi who sees theatre and performance as helping to heal our spirit and helps us to understand each other.

Performances in Nozhem continue with Nishinaabe-Kweg Ngamowinan Indigenous Women's Songs November 19-21. It will feature Asani, Spirit Wind, the Otonabee Women's Hand Drum, Waseskun and others.

For information on this and upcoming performances and ticket information please call 705 748-1011 ext 7921.

Lynn Gehl, Turtle Clan, is a non-status member of the Algonquin Nation, and a Trent University graduate student.

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