

Editorial: Transformational Sites of Indigenous Education

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The issue of transformation as both an outcome and a practice is crucial to Indigenous communities. To speak of and to pursue meaningful transformation is also to understand that the *status quo* situation in which Indigenous people are living their lives is often problematic—and that subsequently there is need for urgent change. This is particularly true of the schooling and educational circumstances of most Indigenous peoples who live in colonized states around the Pacific perimeter. Schooling and educational success remain elusive for disproportionately large numbers of Indigenous students in countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Alaska, Hawaii, the United States mainland, Canada, and the Pacific Nations. In trying to understand what has gone wrong, various analysts have focused on the problems of the Indigenous learners themselves (through deficit-oriented studies); others have looked at the inadequacies of how and what we teach (through curriculum and pedagogy studies); we have also critically examined the structures of schooling (through critical and systemic studies); and yet despite all this academic effort, relatively little has changed in terms of Aboriginal educational success (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Smith, 1997; Urion, 1999). What may be problematic, of course, is the nature of how we are enquiring into the problem and the solutions that we derive from these misinformed readings. Given this poor return from the research and the lack of significant change in the educational life chances of large numbers of Indigenous learners in the Pacific Rim nations, it might now be useful to focus more critically on the notion of *transformation*.

One Indigenous context where there has been such a focus in recent years is in New Zealand. Indeed the Maori educational revolution in New Zealand during the 1980s has produced at least three key lessons that might inform other Indigenous contexts including First Nations (*First Nations* is used inclusively to mean any person of Aboriginal ancestry) here in Canada: the need to be positive and proactive in developing transformation for themselves (the idea of self-determination); the need to

develop transformation through multiple strategies in multiple sites (the idea of valuing many contributions to this struggle); the need actively to heal the divide between Indigenous communities and the Academy (the idea of Indigenous people theorizing for themselves, developing research by and for themselves to answer the questions to which they want answers). Put simply, as argued in the New Zealand research (Smith, 1997), Maori parents specifically and Indigenous communities generally want an education that will deliver excellence in the cultural needs of the child and also excellence in world knowledge. These three learnings underpin the collective agenda of the articles brought together in this volume.

This issue of the *Canadian Journal of Native Education (CJNE)* puts a timely emphasis on the important matter of *transformation*. Generally considered, education and its key components of schooling, teaching, and learning are necessarily concerned with transformation. However, for Aboriginal communities in Canada the need for education to be both transformed and transforming is more urgent today than ever before. The growing educational crises and the widening learning gap that envelops disproportionately large sections of the First Nations peoples in Canada needs to be named, understood, and transformed. The education and schooling crises related to First Nations, despite good intentions (notwithstanding that it has been the subject of various reports over the years such as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, and more latterly reiterated in the British Columbia Fraser Institute Report, Cowley & Easton, 2004), has disturbingly continued unabated. The irony, of course, is that public spending in First Nations education has supposedly been increasing. This in turn begs questions of accountability: put bluntly, what has been returned on this investment? Who will be held accountable for these failures? What responsibility accrues to a public education system to deal with First Nations learning needs? Of course, these are not easy questions to answer. The point is that the evaluation of the education system from the First Nations point of view must be the extent to which the existing circumstances of educational underdevelopment are transformed. The ongoing cycle of First Nations educational marginalization must be changed. Transformation of schooling and education is not merely a set of strategies related to changing learners' behavior, changing the curriculum, changing pedagogy, changing governance, and so forth. Political, economic, and social changes also need to occur in the wider community context. Transformation and how it is attained requires a critical and political understanding, and eventually commitment to act.

From the Indigenous academic point of view, our work must also be called to account. We need to interrogate what we do academically (through teaching, research, and service) against the key question of "What is changed for our communities that promotes people's well-

being?" Particular responsibilities accrue to Indigenous academics. In particular, Indigenous academics must lead and model transformation by understanding the conceptual and practical elements of transformation as a process and an outcome.

Great care and skill are required from all educators, academics, and researchers involved in Indigenous education to heal the divide and overcome the suspicion that our communities have of the Academy, especially with research. We can begin transformative work by asking the following key questions.

- What counts as transformation?
- How do we get it?
- How do we know we have got it?
- Transformation for whom?
- Transformation in whose interests?
- Transformation by whom and what is the mandate for the transformation?
- What counts as a Native researcher?
- To whom is the Native researcher accountable?
- What counts as meaningful research for Native communities?
- What interests are at stake, and whose interests are being served?

The above discussion set the context for the articles in this issue to be brought together. These articles portray a range of diverse sites and approaches to transformative activities. They interrogate the status quo circumstances as being problematic and for the most part not working in the interests of First Nations needs and aspirations. This diversity of approach, insofar as it conforms to the ideas of engaging in multiple sites and multiple strategies to deliver multiple changes, is to be encouraged.

This issue of *CJNE* opens with a group of articles based on the *Forests for the Future* research project, which demonstrates a First Nations community and university collaboration that resulted in a transformation of Tsimshian education and research methodology. The *Forests for the Future* papers were one of the outcomes of a unique collaboration between anthropological researchers from UBC and community members from Gitxaala, an Indigenous community on BC's north coast. From conception through implementation, revision, and reporting back to the whole community, collaboration and respectful research practices were placed as the central and fundamental principle of work. As described by contributing authors Lewis, Menzies, and McDonald, implementing this approach was not a simple or straightforward application of rules of conduct, but rather was built on a conception of research as a long-term relationship. And as with all such relationships, this process requires goodwill, commitment, and compromise.

The key goals of the project involved researching local ecological knowledge in Gitxaala and identifying ways and means of applying Git-

xaala ecological knowledge in locally relevant resource management. At its core the project incorporated three central components:

1. applied research into local ecological knowledge;
2. policy development and evaluation focused on achieving the meaningful participation of all peoples and organizations reliant on our common forest resources;
3. educational activities designed to facilitate mutual respect, effective communication, and knowledge sharing between First Nations and other natural resources stakeholders.

It is fair to say that from a community perspective the educational activities and resources have been of the greatest interest and excitement (see Butler, this issue, and the comments about the project's educational values by community researcher Sam Lewis in the video *The View From Gitxaala*, www.ecoknow.ca). The essays in the *Forests for the Future* section of this issue report on the research and educational results of the first two years of the project, 2001-2003. The articles explore the project from a range of vantage points: community leaders, Indigenous scholars, classroom teachers, and university-based researchers.

Wuyee Wi Medeek (John Lewis) speaks from his vantage point as Gitxaala's Chief Treaty Negotiator in "Forests for the Future: The View from Gitkxaala." Wuyee Wi Medeek opens our issue with a reflection on the benefits of collaborative research, the difficulties inherent in such an operation, the community experience of the *Forests for the Future* project, and a consideration of areas that could be improved for future research projects. His contribution provided the inspiration for the accompanying video *The View from Gitxaala*, which documents the research process used (see www.ecoknow.ca for an online version of the video).

Charles Menzies writes from the vantage point of an Indigenous scholar located in a major research institution (UBC) about the process of negotiating respectful research relationships. His contribution "Putting Words into Action: Negotiating Collaborative Research in Gitxaala" describes the process of consultation, accommodation, and negotiation important for establishing and growing a respectful research relationship between the University and Gitxaala. Caroline Butler, a graduate student in anthropology at UBC, writes from the perspective of a field researcher charged with coordinating the on-the-ground research in the community. In "Researching Traditional Ecological Knowledge for Multiple Uses," she examines how the particular and differing interests of researcher and community members can pull together to produce research results that simultaneously meet the needs of communities and fulfill the expectations of research institutions.

Veronica Ignas, Edosdi (Judy Thompson), and Paul Orlowski write from the perspective of classroom teachers and curriculum designers. In addition, each of these authors contributed detailed lesson plans for use in

the British Columbia K-12 curriculum (see www.ecoknow.ca for complete curriculum materials). The development of the project curriculum materials was directed by Ignas, who was the extension-education coordinator for the project. Ignas and Edosdi also write from their vantage point as high school science teachers and Orlowski as a high school social studies teacher. All have worked in a variety of contexts with First Nations students.

Ignas' article "Opening Doors to the Future: Applying Local Knowledge in Curriculum Development" lays out the underlying pedagogic and theoretical frameworks that were used to guide the development of the *Forests for the Future* curriculum materials. In her paper she describes the pedagogical and theoretical models for curriculum design that informed the development of our curriculum materials. Edosdi documents her experience as a Thaltan educator in developing a Tsimshian plant knowledge lesson plan in "Traditional Plant Knowledge of the Tsimshian Curriculum: Keeping Knowledge in the Community." Based on her experience working with the students and Elders in Gitga'ata, Edosdi reflects on the development of the Tsimshian plant knowledge lesson plan. Central to her discussion is the importance of valuing local Indigenous knowledge so that students "would be able to view their own knowledge and the knowledge and wisdom of their Elders and community as both valid and valuable in the context of science, and more generally, to all academic work." Orlowski and Menzies discuss the development and piloting experience of the unit Orlowski designed for the project *Tsimshian Involvement in the Forest Sector*. Based on earlier research (Menzies & Butler, 2001) Orlowski and Menzies' essay "Educating about Aboriginal Involvement with Forestry: The Tsimshian Experience—Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow" highlights the importance of teaching materials for Indigenous students that place the experience of their community front and center. Orlowski piloted the materials in two settings: in the Tsimshian territories and in a Vancouver school. Although the responses were different, the authors note that material relevant to students—that is, Tsimshian materials for the North Coast students, and First Nations content for the urban First Nations classes—is more likely to inspire and motivate students.

In the concluding paper to the *Forests for the Future* grouping, James McDonald, an anthropologist who has worked with the Tsimshian community of Kitsumkalum for nearly three decades, discusses the importance of long-term research relationships that respect the local—or in our case Tsimshian—protocols. McDonald's paper "The Tsimshian Protocols: Locating and Empowering Community-based Research" stands as a summary of the issues and contributions of this group of papers, as well as a significant contribution to community-based research methodology in its own right. Anthropologists and other social science researchers have often

struggled with research ethics and issues of power. McDonald's paper demonstrates one important path out of this quagmire: "to work with communities and individuals in ways that respect their realities, their needs, and their futures."

The remaining articles exemplify multiple sites of educational transformation in a public school district, questioned in university contexts, sought through Internet-delivered education, demonstrated through community based storytelling, and enacted in First Nations language revitalization. Each of these articles asks some of the critical transformative questions described above. They show the struggles experienced through process and outcome transformative criteria. Most important, the authors share aspects of their success so that others may learn from these experiences.

Ted Cadwallader in "Hwunitum and Hwulmuhw or My Experiences in an Organizational Change Project" highlights the leadership roles of Aboriginal community members and school district staff in creating positive institutional change through the development of an Aboriginal Education Improvement Agreement for a public school district in British Columbia. Building relationships, trust, shared decision-making, accountability, vision, and communication contributed to transformational change. Michael Marker's article "Theories and Disciplines as Sites of Struggle: The Reproduction of Colonial Dominance Through the Controlling of Knowledge Within the Academy" identifies key issues about the continuing struggle of respecting and understanding the importance of Indigenous knowledge. At the same time, this struggle has potential for transformative effect, and some change is happening in universities because of the presence and critical engagement of Indigenous students and faculty who take responsibility for transformative action. John Hodson continues asking critical transformative questions and raising cogent issues about Internet-delivered education in "Aboriginal Learning and Healing in a Virtual World." His research project received enormous participation from Aboriginal people, which shows that Aboriginal people do participate when they believe that the research purpose and content is relevant and of interest to their well-being. Hodson and the research participants remind us of the need for healing from colonial oppression and the transformative healing power of Indigenous teachings and culture.

Kim Anderson continues the discussion of dealing with colonization and healing through Aboriginal women's lived experience stories in "Speaking from the Heart: Everyday Storytelling and Adult Learning." She describes the pitfalls and possibilities of group discussions, highlights the role of the facilitator, and emphasizes the power of storytelling for creating transformative personal change. The final article returns us to the importance of Indigenous identity, relationship to land, relationship to

each other, and all our relations through Indigenous languages. Stelomethet, Ethel Gardner, in "Tset Hikwstexw Te Sqwelteltset: We Hold Our Language High," describes beautiful poetic monologues from Sto:lo people involved in a Halq'emeylem language renewal initiative. Gardner identifies the larger community, political, economic, and policy implications that are needed to support the advancement of Indigenous languages. The tenacity, skill, and commitment of the Halq'emeylem language revivalists demonstrate transformative action when people bring their hearts and minds together.

The editors of the *CJNE* issue *Transformative Sites of Indigenous Education* raise our hands in thanks and respect to the authors for asking critical questions, identifying key issues, sharing understandings and insights, and advancing knowledge on this important topic.

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