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3. THE CURRICULAR PROBLEM OF INDIGENOUSNESS: COLONIAL FRONTIER LOGICS, TEACHER RESISTANCES, AND THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF ETHICAL SPACE

The colonial past and the social and spatial divides that separate Aboriginal peoples and Canadians haunt contemporary Canadian society.[1] This problem of separateness has manifested itself in the form of civilizational frontiers that effectively demarcate social and cultural boundaries which reinforce these divides. This colonial frontier logic conceptualizes historic and current realities as separate and distinct. Historical, social, and cultural understandings of the concepts of fort and frontier have become conflated with ways of organizing and separating people according to race, culture, and civilization; as a result, Aboriginal peoples and their ways have been reduced to an existence *outside* Euro-Western civilization.

The socio-spatial separation of Canadian (insiders) and Aboriginal (outsiders) is a naturalized idiosyncrasy of Canadian society that has been passed down generation by generation in the form of an authoritative national historical narrative. Unquestioned, these ideas have deeply influenced the assumptions educators hold about knowledge, classroom culture, subject disciplines, the purposes of education and schooling, and have perpetuated a logic that divides the world in troubling ways (Willinsky, 1998). These influences leave many educators unable to comprehend historic and ongoing Aboriginal presence and participation within Canadian society.

Colonial frontier logics have also been perpetuated curricularly in the form of stories of nation and nationality that children have been told in Canadian schools for decades. Increasingly, however, Aboriginal educators who wish to demonstrate the presence and participation of their people are contesting this curricular logic. The perspectives being shared are very much related to the exclusion or isolation of Aboriginal ways of knowing and the processes of colonialism through which Aboriginal people and communities were relegated to the sidelines as the nation of Canada was developed.

Governments and educational jurisdictions across Canada have heard these critiques and developed curricular initiatives that focus on reimagining the roles that Aboriginal people, communities, and their diverse perspectives can and will play in the future of Canadian society. Such acknowledgements and resultant initiatives suggest the need for trans-cultural understanding. On what terms should this be done? In curricular terms, the tepees and costumes approach has been tried for many years, but leaves teachers and young people with the unfortunate impression that Indians have not done much since the buffalo were eradicated.

J. Nahachewsky and I. Johnston (eds.), Beyond 'Presentism': Re-Imagining the Historical, Personal, and Social Places of Curriculum, 23–41.

Attempts at the so-called *inclusion* of Aboriginal perspectives have usually meant that an anachronistic study of Aboriginal people is offered as a *possibility* in classrooms only if there is time and people are still interested. More recently, Aboriginal educators have forwarded curricular initiatives specifically designed for Aboriginal students that focus on the revitalization of Aboriginal cultures and languages. Despite some successes with these initiatives, I note that colonial frontier logics are recapitulated in curricular forms and a troubling form of civilizational separation is maintained. What is needed is a decolonizing form of curriculum theorising that conceptualizes Aboriginal and Canadian perspectives as relational, inter-referential, and mutually implicative.

Such a shift will only be possible, however, if the field of curriculum studies can eschew received colonial and neocolonial renditions of Indigenousness and instead accept Indigenous knowledge systems as viable expressions of culture that require a respectful place within public contexts.[2]

This chapter focuses on the conceptual problem posed by Indigenousness for practitioners in the field of education and on how and why this problem persists in the current context of identity politics. In addition, this chapter argues that respectful recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems constitutes an important opportunity for academics and educators to engage with Indigenous peoples and their wisdom traditions in ethical ways.

This argument is developed around reflective comments from preservice teachers studying at the University of Alberta who resist, in various ways, the integration of Aboriginal perspectives in the Social Studies curriculum that they are expected to teach. This resistance is rooted in colonial frontier logics that have reductively portrayed Indigenousness as a primeval cultural and sociological condition anthropologically categorized as an example of how people live before they become civilized. Indigenousness has thus been considered a condition to be overcome through education rather than a perspective worthy of curricular inquiry.

This is why many educators today still view the idea of Aboriginal curriculum perspectives as a strange aberration that works at cross purposes—mixing insider notions of education with outsider cultural beliefs and practices. Settler societies like Canada are slowly beginning to come to terms with this intellectual legacy. An important starting point for this process is public recognition that Indigenousness is a viable subject position in the world today that does not require congruence to Euro-Western standards.

IDENTITY POLITICS AND THE PROBLEM OF INDIGENOUSNESS

Over the past several decades, it has become fashionable for academics and theorists to use the prefix *post* to designate advances in thinking and corrections to earlier misinformed theories of culture, identity, language, and knowledge. When using terms like postmodern, postcolonial, or poststructural, for example, the common perception is that critical progress has been made in thinking. These *new* theories, as post, imply a temporal quality to these advances, as though the project of human enlightenment will move forward with time as the error of past ways is revealed and critiqued.

These post theories have had a profound effect in conceptions of identity. Post theorists dispute the possibility of a coherent and unified identity, arguing instead that each of us, from birth to death, has a contingent sense of self that will be subsequently altered as we age, experience the world differently, and affiliate ourselves with various people, contexts, and ideas. Identity, in this view, is considered conflicted, fluid, and constantly shifting.

Some minority groups, however, have rejected these post theories of identity and countered that there is much more at stake with identity when the social context is rife with oppression, systemic violence, market logic, and institutionalized injustice. In such conflicted and conflictual situations, identity becomes a means for making a political statement and the grounds from which one can stand in opposition to common-sense societal norms. This identity politics involves consciousness of one's personal and inherited history—identity—and sustained efforts to assert and reiterate this consciousness via public discourse as a way to strategically remind listeners of difference (Bromley, 1989, p. 210). Thus, identity claims that post theorists dismiss as impossible fantasies are deemed as necessary to the sociopolitical struggles of marginalized groups.

In light of these critiques, how is it possible to claim Indigenousness? It is perhaps best to begin with an understanding of who is Indigenous and how such an identity claim can be viewed as directly tied to wisdom traditions. Indigenous peoples can be considered members of communities who have lived in particular locations for a very long time (Dei, 2000, p. 114; McLeod, 1999–2000, p. 39). This long-term habitation has supported and perpetuated deeply rooted spiritual and metaphysical relationships with the land (and other entities) that thoroughly inform and infuse the specific cultural practices and linguistic conventions of the people. Indigenous communities are considered unique, in relation to other distinct communities, because these venerable connections to land and place have been maintained and continue to find expression in communities today.

In this sense, then, Indigenous peoples, as descendents of the original inhabitants, are seen as the holders and practitioners of a sui generis sovereignty in their traditional lands. The inherited traditions, although certainly altered and adjusted in response to changing times, connect the people to cosmological, epistemological, and ontological insights that foster the maintenance of a unique form of citizenship. Politically, and on a global scale, Indigenous peoples are seen as united in a common struggle to defend their cultures, languages, and lands from further damage and erosion brought under the guise of economic progress and development.

Thus, Indigenousness, as a subject position, is less of a constrained and essential burden and more of a personalized responsibility to honour inherited wisdom traditions. To properly grasp this important difference, we must remember that most Indigenous societies do not conceptualize individuality in ways congruent with European liberal democratic assumptions. For many Indigenous peoples, an individual's sense of self grows out of how he or she fits into the community. The community itself stands at the centre of a much larger whole, and the role of the individual is always to give back to the community. In general, "Indigenous societies are *synecdochic* (part-to-whole) rather than the more Western conception that is

metonymic (part-to-part)" (Weaver, 2000, p. 227). Little Bear (2000) illuminates this distinction by emphasizing the value placed on holism in Indigenous wisdom traditions:

> The value of wholeness speaks to the totality of creation, the group as opposed to the individual, the forest as opposed to the trees. It focuses on the value of the constant flux rather than on individual patterns. . . . If a person is whole and balanced, then he or she is in a position to fulfill his or her responsibilities to the whole. (p. 79)

Ideally, then, an Indigenous person would see his or her identity as intimately connected to inherited wisdom traditions and the vitality of the community as a whole.

Unfortunately, the political economy of being Indigenous does not always allow individuals to operate in the realm of the ideal. Indigenousness is also often evoked to inspire opposition to colonial and neocolonial logics. From the perspectives of many Indigenous scholars, what needs to be opposed are current post theories that discount the beliefs of their communities, unilaterally proclaiming the end of subjectivity just at the time Indigenous communities are beginning to recover from colonial legacies and assert their ways.

The ironic flip-flop wherein Indigenousness is declared a romantic fantasy in the wake of an intense, centuries-long studying and theorising of Indigenous *difference* is not lost on Indigenous scholars. Quite naturally, there is suspicion that someone else is, once again, exercising a self-proclaimed intellectual authority to determine Indigenous identity and delimit its expression in the world. The shifting post academic field fails to acknowledge the viability of a pointed, critical, and Indigenous reply rooted in subjective "communitist" experience (Weaver, 1998, p. 22). Such replies insist that Indigenous wisdom traditions offer a viable way out of the trap created by neo-liberal market logics and vivify the possibility that we can live differently in the world today (Alfred, 2005; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Smith, 1999; Stewart-Harawira, 2005).

The key point here is that the assertion of Indigenous identity does not necessitate a negation or discounting of other perspectives, as though Indigenousness can only be properly considered in isolation from other commitments. It is possible to simultaneously promote Indigenousness while also recognizing that Indigenous and Euro-Western knowledge systems exist simultaneously, in context and in relation to each other, and that the quality and character of those relationships is unpredictable (Nakata, 2002). Thus, the form of Indigenous identity being promoted here is relational rather than hermetic.

Take the concept of Aboriginality in Canada as an example of this. The Canadian concept of Aboriginal, as a nationalized interpretation of Indigenousness, has legal and constitutional purposes and is used to denote, as a distinct minority group, the modern-day descendents of the original inhabitants of the place now called Canada. Uniting these diverse peoples as Aboriginal are two general identity assertions: Aboriginal people are inheritors of Indigenous wisdom traditions *and* victims of oppression and disenfranchisement stemming from colonial policies.

However, many Indigenous groups reject the label Aboriginal as a colonial term itself, see it as only convenient for the needs of governments, and repudiate it as too generic and dismissive of the cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of various Indigenous communities (Alfred, 2005). Despite these critiques, the categorical definition of Aboriginal still applies in Canada, and it encompasses, for the most part, First Nations peoples, Status Indians (with and without specific Treaty rights), Non-Status Indians, and Métis; people defined as such live in various regions of the country in urban or rural (reserve or settlement) settings with huge disparities in terms of access to economic, political, and social resources.[3] This undeniable diversity of Aboriginal experience in Canada makes it seem blatantly contradictory to claim any fixed form of Indigenous identity.

The emphasis on legal and political definitions of Indianness coupled with the intense social and cultural ramifications of the Imaginary Indian (Francis, 1992) have created a situation in which many Indigenous people, still reeling from the devastating effects of colonization, yearn for an authentic understanding of who they are and what such an identity claim might mean. This complex and ambiguous situation is a natural reaction to tremendous change in a relatively short period of time.

Ontologically speaking, what these identity conflicts indicate is that many Indigenous people desire some foundational philosophies to provide them with guidance and direction in confusing times. In many Indigenous communities, these foundational cosmologies, ontologies, and epistemologies, though certainly not understood and expressed as they were in precolonial times, have nonetheless survived much tumultuous change. These then inform identity statements and are the basis for revitalization movements in many Indigenous communities today. However, rather than striving for some form of unattainable authenticity, I argue that Indigenous peoples should instead be concerning themselves with the ways in which their inherited wisdom traditions and spiritual principles can provide guidance on how to engage and teach the dominant society about balance, justice, peace, and living well on the land. Such a focus does not require denial of the diverse, complex, and contradictory influences that shape Indigenous subjectivity today. It does, however, call on Indigenous peoples to frame their own understandings of wisdom traditions in ways that honour and sustain their practice in Indigenous communities *and* demonstrate their relevance to Canadian public policy. After all, as *Kainai* Elder Andy Black Water advises, our tepees are all held down by the same pegs now (Blood & Chambers, 2008).

POSITIONING THE TEACHER: RESISTANCE, AMBIGUITY, AND BIOGRAPHICAL CRISIS

This message of shared reality and relationships connecting Aboriginal and Canadian has become a rising public policy priority. Across Canada, curricular initiatives have been introduced that acknowledge Aboriginal perspectives and integrate them into Programs of Study across subject areas and grade levels. Alberta Education, the branch of government responsible for education in my home province of Alberta, has been a curricular leader in these initiatives. These

policy shifts are guided by the *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (Alberta Learning, 2002) that specifically identifies the need to increase the knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal cultures and knowledge systems by all Albertans as a major educational goal.

Following these directives, program leaders from Alberta Education have had extensive consultations with Aboriginal leaders, educators, and community members regarding curriculum reorientation to these new policies. Social Studies is the first major subject discipline in Alberta in which new Programs of Study are being gradually implemented by teachers in the classroom. While most curriculum change creates anxiety for teachers, especially when there is high expectation that teaching practice will be significantly altered, the new Social Studies program in Alberta has caused a particularly high level of stress for Social Studies educators. Most noted among the changes to this curriculum is a shift to an emphasis on issues-focused and inquiry-based approaches, as well as the explicit statement that an understanding of Aboriginal perspectives and experiences is an integral part of Canadian citizenship and identity (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 4).

As these policies have been translated into Programs of Study from Kindergarten to Grade 12, educators across Alberta have been confronted with two realities. First, the new Social Studies curriculum demands that teachers embrace the issues-focused and inquiry-based approach which means, for many, a significant shift in their pedagogical practices. Second, the writers of the new Social Studies curriculum documents did an admirable job of linking Aboriginal perspectives with larger topical issues like globalization, nationalism, democracy, ideologies, and Canadian history.

The significance of this shift is that Aboriginal perspectives cannot be treated as separate special interest topics of inclusion somehow supplemental to more rigorous issues. Teachers are expected to engage their students in explorations of Aboriginal perspectives on a wide variety of topics as a regular part of their classroom inquiry processes, in association with other considerations (such as immigration, multi-culturalism, globalization, or environmentalism), and this practice obviously requires significant background knowledge on the part of teachers. Most teachers in Alberta find themselves woefully unprepared to engage with Aboriginal perspectives in these ways. Few of these teachers have taken a single university or college course connected to Aboriginal perspectives, and fewer still have ever actually met an Aboriginal person in their private lives. Although many teachers are themselves highly educated, there is a huge informational gap when it comes to Aboriginal knowledge systems and perspectives on, for example, history, politics, economics, and citizenship.

Given that Alberta's teaching population is overwhelmingly Euro-Canadian, and given also that this demographic reality is unlikely to change any time soon, we can expect that the success of these critical curricular initiatives will ultimately depend on educators who have little or no experience with Aboriginal perspectives. This seems a rather daunting challenge that places the teacher in the awkward and unconventional position of the learner rather than the expert who possesses all necessary knowledge. Yet, the complex tasks of rethinking the role of the teacher in the classroom, reconsidering what counts as knowledge, and challenging some

of the common-sense and normalizing discourses of teacher education is precisely what is at stake in this curriculum shift. If this curriculum is to be successfully implemented, I believe that it will be as a result of teachers' ability to resist the normalizing assumption that everything that occurs in the classroom depends on the teacher as expert and reframe their task as an opportunity to learn *from* Aboriginal perspectives rather than as a government-imposed requirement to learn *about* Aboriginal peoples:

> Whereas learning about an event or experience focuses upon the acquisition of qualities, attributes, and facts, so that it presupposes a distance (or, one might even say, a detachment) between the learner and what is to be learned, learning from an event or experience is of a different order, that of insight. (Britzman, 1998, p. 117)

The implication here is that regarding Aboriginal perspectives, in a teacherly manner, as yet another set of facts to be added to one's burgeoning teaching informational repertoire replicates the very same colonial frontier logics that the new curriculum has been designed to contest. The desire to externalize knowledge of Aboriginal peoples is coextensive with the need to regard Aboriginal reality as separate and distinct from Canadian reality. A separate culturalist interpretation of Aboriginal reality permits a rendition of lovely knowledge—studying their traditional culture in culturally appropriate ways will improve their self-esteem—to stand in place of the need to interrogate the difficult knowledge of colonial frontier logics that condition and propagate common-sense myths about history, identity, and human relationality (Britzman, 2003). Here we also see the deep influence of anthropology, exhibition pedagogy, and representational epistemology (Biesta & Osberg, 2007, pp. 16–17) in relation to Indigenousness, in that knowing *about* Indians through lectures, textbooks, history books, and films still has more intellectual authority than sustained social, political, and ethical engagement (Deloria, 1998, p. 189).

To see oneself implicated in discussions of difficult knowledge regarding the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada is to experience a certain biographical crisis (Britzman, 1991, p. 8). "New knowledge is first confronted as a criticism toward and loss of the learner's present knowledge if the knowledge offered is felt as discontinuous with the self, if it seems to threaten the ways the world has been perceived" (Britzman, 1998, p. 128).

In such engagements, teacher resistance to such knowledge is natural and to be expected (Carson, 2005 p. 6). When we consider that so much of teacher education is predicated on the need for the individual who wants to be a teacher to conform to a predetermined identity role that suits institutional needs, demonstrate normalized competence in these contexts, and unconsciously conflate teacher thinking with teacher identity, we begin to understand the intense postcultural dynamics that are invested in the creation of a teacher.

As Smits (1997) points out, this predetermined role of the teacher plays out as a storyline that parallels, and often displaces, a person's own history, and the difficult task of the teacher becomes one of conciliating the teacher story with the

personal story in ways that maintain fidelity to some meaningful moral orientation (p. 284).

This moral orientation is most often informed by common-sense notions of citizenship and the characteristics of a good person and how these are, in turn, conditioned through the process of education in various contexts. These influential forces interact to create a powerful conception of identity that is often seen as cultureless, that is, shaped by common-sense naturalized ways of doing things rather than by specific historical and cultural assumptions and prejudices that can be genealogically traced.

Such conceptions of identity are resistant to reflexive auto-critique done in the interest of understanding personal and professional presuppositions and priorities more intimately. This explains, in part, why the possibility of new curricular knowledge, like Indigenous knowledge, is resisted by many teachers. Most do not see their personal or professional selves, which are often difficult to distinguish, implicated in such knowledge. Instead, the knowledge, as new, is perceived by many educators as foreign and thus outside accepted educational practice, usually only included at the behest of government officials pandering to special interest groups, and therefore a malignant threat to the professional integrity of the teacher to properly deliver meaningful lessons and prepare their students for continued study of more worthwhile forms of knowledge.

Thanks, in part, to the long-lasting influence of the writings of Herbert Spencer, Euro-Western conceptions of scientific knowledge have been considered the most worthwhile curricularly (Banks, 1980). An education focused on the teaching of science as a subject discipline and general scientific thinking throughout the curriculum, Spencer contends, would properly prepare young people for complete living (Deering, 2001, p. 147). This idea of useful curriculum "appealed to politicians and the administrators of the great institutions of modern states because it made the schools very largely into agencies of socialization" (Egan, 2002, p. 117). Such emphasis on scientific principles as the guiding purposes for education would obviously exclude Indigenous perspectives from serious consideration. Rather, Indigenousness, in anthropological terms, was interpreted as scientific evidence and confirmation of Euro-Western civilization and ascendancy (p. 28). This insight helps us better understand how common-sense educational talk came to classify curriculum as a developmental and scientific exercise undertaken to get the topics of study accurately sequenced, organized, and delivered.

I have had the unique opportunity to investigate these conceptions of curriculum as an invited presenter to preservice teachers studying and preparing to teach Secondary Social Studies during their Advanced Professional Term (APT) at the University of Alberta. Course instructors would typically request, in nonspecific terms, a 2-hour session for their students on Aboriginal perspectives in Social Studies as seen in the new curriculum. After doing several of these invited presentations, I became critically aware of the problematic position I was placed in when I parachuted into the classroom unaware of the context or previous discussions, delivered the necessary information on Aboriginal perspectives, and left without eliciting much response from the students.

In my presentations, I used texts and images to contest and interrupt the official history of Canada with the experiences, memories, and stories of Aboriginal peoples, some of which included the memories of my own extended family. Mixed in with this were digressions into extended explanations of contemporary issues of Aboriginal identity, stereotypes, accepted identity terms, and some philosophical thoughts regarding Aboriginal perspectives and the need to reframe our understandings of curricula. I thought it was an interesting and provocative presentation. However, the students rarely engaged with these issues in ways that would indicate that they felt the same. Silence was the most common response, although some students would ask informational-type questions to clarify or correct their previous understandings. Obviously, there are many ways to interpret these responses (one of which might be that I am not a very effective presenter!), but during my time with the students I discerned a strange externalization of Aboriginal perspectives—as though the information I shared with them needed to be kept at a cautious distance. In light of the current context of identity politics, this should not be surprising. Still, deep consideration of the ways in which preservice teachers reacted to the presentation of Aboriginal curriculum perspectives led to a related preoccupation with the terms according to which I spoke to them. How could I speak in ways that would foster deep listening and engagement?

In the effort to gain more insight on this question, I decided to ask students from two different Social Studies APT classes at the University of Alberta to provide a written reflective response to my presentation. Most respondents expressed appreciation for the presentation, and many suggested that the presentation had more accurately reinforced or confirmed much of their previous thinking about Canadian history and Aboriginal perspectives. These findings are consistent with general observations that I have made during previous and subsequent interactions with preservice teachers. For the most part, these students recognize that formal education systems have marginalized Aboriginal peoples and their knowledge systems in the past, and they express a related desire to critique accepted teaching practices and discuss new ideas and approaches.

While the responses are interesting and useful in some ways, I find most of them uncritical in the sense that the respondents simply repeated or confirmed their agreement with statements they heard from me during the presentation. I believe that most students choose to respond in these uncritical ways because they perceive it as safer and easier to simply tell a researcher what they believe he wants to hear.

I am much more interested in critical statements from respondents and interpreting the significance of those statements to the larger project of better understanding the deep influence that colonial frontier logics continue to have on the field of curriculum studies. Below, I share selected excerpts of critical written responses from students that will be interpreted with these issues in mind. I present the statements in groupings based on their subtle commonalities:

> I think I require more training on how to present a lesson in an aboriginal context before I attempt one and claim that it is authentically aboriginal. Perhaps more examples on how to do this would have helped.

> I am interested in Aboriginal history, but with my limited knowledge at this point in the subject am not confident in how I will present the Aboriginal views properly.
>
> It seems like a very logical approach, but I think it would be very difficult to engrain a way of thinking into one's process of instruction that they do not know inside and out. This may be a reason why this dichotomy between curriculum and aboriginal education exists. You would have to be an internal element of a particular society in order to perpetuate their corresponding views. Such views would, at that point, flow freely and uncandidly to illustrate indigenous perspectives in the many facets of the instructional and educational processes.

These three statements demonstrate a reliance on the notion of cultural disqualification as a form of resistance to new teacher knowledge. The current context of identity politics has fostered a conceptualization of cultural difference as a imposing rift that works to restrict membership, and its related authority to speak and re-present, to those deemed most culturally authentic. The preservice teachers who authored the statements express a self-conscious awareness of Aboriginal identity politics (in relation to themselves as outside that culture), and a cautiousness in discussing such issues. At some point in their education, privately and publicly, they have come to believe that discussing Aboriginal issues can be extremely contentious, emotionally unsettling, and fraught with danger of being accused of cultural insensitivity, closed mindedness, or even racism. When confronted with these tensions, these preservice teachers retreat behind a comforting shelter of real or passive ignorance that effectively disqualifies them from participation.

The pedagogical logic implied here is that teachers are only allowed to teach about their own cultures—a logic that the field of education has never upheld. In accepting this ignorance and disqualification, these teacher candidates dismiss the opportunity to interrogate the constructs that shape group identifications and better understand how their responses are conditioned by common-sense answers to the problematic question of cultural difference. The unfortunate result of this disengagement is that the boundaries of inside/outside are maintained and reinforced. In so doing, however, the integrity of the individual identity is also stabilized, a phenomenon that has also been noted in another recent study: "Ensuring, therefore, that there is the continued separation of the ideological sets enables the candidates to provide justifications for their ideas, while simultaneously limiting the degree of dissonance that they experience" (Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005, p. 156).

Kanu (2005), in her study of Manitoba teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of Aboriginal culture in curriculum, also suggests that teacher disengagement from the curriculum based on lack of knowledge of Aboriginal perspectives may be understood as an active resistance to difficult and dissonant knowledge. Resistance to this knowledge, and the feelings of estrangement, discomfort, guilt, and defensiveness it foments, is performed through the "ideal of ignorance," disqualification, and the denial of self-implication (p. 58). These "contradictory positions are a

manifestation of a whiteness striving to maintain its distance and legitimacy against an unstable social network" (Levine-Rasky, 2000, p. 265).

It seems worthwhile, in light of these teacher resistances, to consider the ways in which common notions of knowledge, knowing, teaching, and learning also become problematic when new curricular knowledge is confronted by the teacher.

In the three responses, there is a palpable concern with the new knowledge of Aboriginal perspectives as a perceived threat to the respondent's abilities to be competent teachers. This concern reveals a certain mindset regarding a teacher's relationship to knowledge that has deep roots in Euro-Western culture and formal structures of education. There is a common-sense perception that the teacher must be an expert in control of the knowledge that will be presented and represented to the students. This perception is built on the notion that the world is ultimately knowable. Knowledge, in this sense, is considered measurable, quantifiable, calculable, and an accurate representation of a preexisting reality independent from the school context (Biesta & Osberg, 2007, p. 16). True knowledge is considered accurate and dependable according to how well it represents an independent reality.

This understanding of knowledge is connected to the modernist assumption that preexisting epistemological truths are out there in the world to be uncovered if the proper mental habits are employed. The accumulation of knowledge parallels human progress and forges a linear teleological path. Colonial renditions of Indigenousness have been represented in the Euro-Western academy as knowable, in a reductive cultural sense, when appropriately positioned on this human evolutionary path. However, recent decolonized assertions of Indigenousness that contest and belie colonial logics are increasingly considered outside Euro-Western knowability and thus incomprehensible.

For a teacher to attempt to teach something that is perceived as unknowable is a fundamental contradiction of basic pedagogical tenets that are foundational to institutionalized understandings of teaching, education, and knowledge (Jones, 2001, p. 283). Linked to this contradiction, and the ambiguousness it causes for those trying to teach, is the psychoanalytic possibility that the comprehension of Indigenousness has the potential to so thoroughly disrupt and destabilize fundamental Euro-Western economic, historical, and postcultural assumptions that the regular citizen cannot tolerate *knowing* such things subjectively.

> Ignorance [or professing not to know] is thus no longer simply *opposed* to knowledge; it is itself a radical condition, an integral part of the very *structure* of knowledge . . . . Ignorance, in other words, is not a passive state of absence—a simple lack of information: it is an active dynamic of negation, an active refusal of information. Ignorance . . . is nothing more than a *desire to ignore.* (Felman, 1982, pp. 29–30)

I believe that the admission of ignorance of Aboriginal perspectives evidenced in the statements from the preservice teachers is indicative of a biographical crisis on their part precipitated by their inability to comprehend Indigenousness and ameliorate the implications of this to their growing challenge of becoming a

teacher. The curricular mixing of insider and outsider knowledge subverts more established forms of knowledge and challenges the notion that everything can be known, and thus controlled, by the teacher.

From the perspectives of these student teachers, the imposition of Aboriginal perspectives in the school context amounts to changing the subject and context because formal schooling has never before considered Indigenousness in these ways. "Ignorance . . . 'grows' only in someone when knowledge and context no longer fit each other" (Vitebsky, 1993, p. 107). Ignorance, in this example, is a form of resistance and a strategy of self-preservation on the part of the preservice teachers.

The admission and acknowledgement of Indigenous knowledge systems in institutionalized settings has the potential to so thoroughly destabilize common-sense assumptions of knowledge, teaching, and learning that this disruption must be resisted and externalized. Engagement with Aboriginal perspectives is forestalled until knowledge and expertise arise. This teacherly preoccupation with guaranteed meaning is a significant impediment to their necessary engagement with Aboriginal curriculum perspectives. If educators could come to see that they, as Canadian citizens, have a personal and family history that already intimately implicates them in Aboriginal issues, then the realization and interpretation of these inherited relationships could begin to break down these resistances. Implicative knowledge of Aboriginal perspectives will emerge through their sustained engagement with those topics. In this educational context, Aboriginal perspectives are reframed as an opportunity to learn rather than a threat to existing knowledge.

Active ignorance of Aboriginal perspectives and resistance to its implications is linked to the belief that the imposition of Aboriginal curriculum initiatives in school settings is a moral threat to the character of schools and schooling. Note the following statements from two preservice teachers:

> Curriculum is scary! Unfortunately this presentation has not eased any fears regarding my impending "doom/awaking" and the mini-revolution that is about to occur in Alberta.

> I know it is important for my students to understand the history and how the cultures are different, but I still feel like I would be cheating my students if I focused on aboriginal studies and ignored everything else. My students come from many backgrounds and I don't think it would be fair to teach one perspective if we can't teach them all.

A commonality discerned in these statements is the perception that the integration of Aboriginal perspectives into the new Social Studies curriculum is considered a disorienting disruption of the regular business of school. These respondents view this disruption as a significant threat to the philosophical and moral integrity of the education system and thus themselves as future teachers. These perceived threats of Aboriginality in educational contexts are linked to larger societal concerns regarding Canadian public policy and the future of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. In general, there is a pervasive belief that Aboriginal peoples are a thorn in the side of Canadian society. Although many Canadians will readily admit that Aboriginal

peoples and communities have been victims of historical injustices, this admission is tempered with the conviction that civilization has brought more good than bad to them. Historical injustices are thus justified on these grounds.

For many Canadians, the cult of victimization surrounding Aboriginal peoples today is a trap that can only produce anger, frustration, dysfunction, animosity, dependence, and victimhood for those caught in it. The suggested solution to this problem is that Aboriginal peoples get over their past, shed their communal role as special status victims, and live in Canadian society with the same rights, privileges, and responsibilities as individual Canadians. That this solution has never really been seriously considered as a viable option to Canada's Aboriginal *problem* seriously irks many Canadians.[4] Coupled with the irksome reactions to these public debates is resentment over the ways in which Aboriginal peoples are literally and figuratively regarded as obstacles or barricades to social harmony in Canada. Such resentment stems from the belief that Aboriginal peoples in Canada frequently extort economic resources and political attention to selfishly get what they want from the Canadian government. Morality, in the sense of accepted standards of goodness and badness in public contexts, informs and fuels this resentment.

Aboriginal perspectives are perceived as a moral threat to Canadian society when they are experienced as an unwelcome imposition foisted upon Canadians to placate someone's demand for recognition of historical wrong-doing. Many Canadians believe that their right, as citizens, to follow their own moral guidelines is in danger of being co-opted by a constrained morality that typifies the Aboriginal agenda. What is considered at stake in these debates, then, is the right of the large majority of Canadian citizens to maintain their own standards of moral correctness. The postspatial configuration of insiders and outsiders reappears in yet another context.

The contentiousness of statements of moral correctness in Canadian public contexts can be seen in the speech given by Assembly of First Nations Grand Chief Phil Fontaine to the Canadian Club of Ottawa in May 2007. Fontaine, in his efforts to raise awareness of the devastating effects of poverty, crime, and unemployment in Aboriginal communities across Canada, warned the audience that they could see an increase in peaceful protests and blockades if significant efforts were not immediately undertaken to improve the shameful living conditions of Aboriginal peoples. In his warning, Fontaine emphasized that the anger and frustration levels of Aboriginal peoples were palpable, and he feared that these feelings could reach a breaking point and threaten public safety and well-being.[5] In this case, Aboriginality is framed as a very real threat to the existing social order *if things do not improve.* How might this message be heard by Canadians? The image of the recalcitrant and threatening Indian man has certainly played a prominent role in popular media for many generations. The natives are expected to be restless and pose a moral threat to the lifestyle of the insiders—this is the mythical story, based on fort logics, which Canadians have been told for many generations.

More recently, however, the spectre of Aboriginal unrest has been expressed as an impending crisis to Canadian social order. Aboriginal policy has been informed by this idea of crisis as moral threat. Rather than driven to respond to the low quality-of-life crisis lived daily by many Aboriginal people, this spectre of

impending crisis has influenced Canadian public policy makers as a looming disruption of the social good. So, while Aboriginal leaders describe the living conditions of their people as unacceptable and *im*moral, average Canadians insist that conformance to accepted moral standards is precisely what will help Aboriginal peoples climb out of the debilitating political and postcultural morass that deforms their lives.

As with most issues of conflictual social concern, these contentious debates eventually find controversial expression in educational contexts. The "moral panic that stages education" has been a significant force in the attempted reconciliation of Indigenousness to Canadian curricular standards (Britzman, 1998, p. 58). Consciousness of the impending crisis of Aboriginal dissatisfaction has influenced curriculum thought by encouraging "crisis policy-making" (Tomkins, 1981, p. 163). This insight suggests that curriculum initiatives involving Aboriginal peoples in Canada, such as the one under consideration here, are not necessarily motivated by some ideal of social good, but rather by a need to address, through policy, an impending social crisis. In this conception, curriculum is a policy tool that can be used to anticipate possible disruptions to the social order and stabilize the status quo. Gradual change is desirable as long as it conforms to the moral model supported by the curriculum.

When the moral character of debates surrounding Aboriginal policy and curriculum initiatives are considered in their fullness, it becomes easier to understand how Aboriginal curriculum perspectives can be perceived as "scary," fearful, an "impending doom/awaking" and "mini-revolution" by some preservice teachers. The perceived scariness of Aboriginal curriculum perspectives is directly linked to the widespread incomprehensibility of Aboriginal presence and participation in Canada today.

While many educators would readily support the teaching of Aboriginal perspectives to Aboriginal students, they have a much more difficult time accepting a policy decision requiring them to teach Aboriginal perspectives to all students. Two things make this notion scary. First, there is the historical, cultural, and moral baggage associated with Aboriginal peoples that constructs them and their ways as outside Euro-Western knowledge systems, unknowable to insiders, and thus incommensurate with any formal public education endeavours. The second is the realization that acceptance of Aboriginal perspectives in education will necessarily call into question many of the common-sense assumptions associated with knowledge and schooling. For example, the acknowledgment of Aboriginal perspectives as they relate to official versions of Canadian history will necessitate critical reflection on the many civilizational myths that have shaped the story of the nation. To call into question such institutions is to also question one's own identity as socially constituted and regulated by them:

> The point is that sociality is governed by relations of power, and relations of power govern the self. A central dilemma, then, of the slippery and shifting meanings of equity and difference concerns how individual and collective perspectives on these terms become implicated in larger discourses of

> social regulation. (Britzman, Santiago-Válles, Jiménez-Múñoz, & Lamash, 1993, p. 190)

Such subjective disruptions are indeed potentially quite scary. One way to resist such scariness is to invoke transcendent values both as a way to withdraw from and resist personal implication and instead take a moral stand. One respondent asserts resistance to Aboriginal curriculum perspectives through a declaration of allegiance to universalized values of Canadian multicultural equality and fairness. Adherence to such transcendent values can be understood as one way to attempt to stabilize meaning when faced with an ambiguous teacherly dilemma such as this (Britzman, 1994, p. 67). The desire is to rise above the ambiguity and locate one's position through the logic of accepted and moralized social standards. However, in taking such a stance, the respondent reveals a grave misunderstanding of the Aboriginal perspectives curriculum initiatives in Social Studies in Alberta. The teacher is not required to teach Aboriginal studies or ignore "everything else," but is expected to help students understand how the various perspectives on issues (one of which is Aboriginal perspectives) are connected.

Problematic, too, is the respondent's concerns over the fairness of teaching "one perspective if we can't teach them all." This statement expresses equality as a moral compass to aid in the deflection of the various claims made by cultural groups for special recognition and attention. The multicultural rhetoric of equality has particular currency as a public policy logic: "The *Canadian*-Canadian model of nationhood, which has 'citizenship,' civil and legal rights, political rights and duties, and socioeconomic rights as ideals, is a Western liberal model that places the notion of equality at its centre" (Mackey, 2002, p. 157).

What needs to be unpacked and interpreted with the respondent's statement and its implications for teacher education are the ways in which regular or normal curriculum is perceived as free of specific perspectives while curriculum initiatives that emphasize particular perspectives are dismissed as overly biased. Previous curricula were not regarded as perspectives-based because they were presented as culturally neutral and based on supposedly universal social, economic, and democratic values. Ironically, while the equality argument has powerful pull associated with multicultural rhetoric, it is precisely in the ways such idealized democratic qualities are constructed as "*not cultural* (in that it is not presented as the project of one cultural or ethnic group)" that requires sustained critique in teacher education (Mackey, 2002, p. 162, italics original).

CONCLUSION

The argument that frames this chapter is that Euro-Western interpretations of Indigenousness have fostered the creation of a colonial frontier logic that supports the isolation of Indigenous peoples within settler societies and excludes them from serious consideration on public matters like educational policy and curriculum. In recent years, this logic has been challenged in the form of curricular initiatives that forward Indigenous perspectives as a necessary part of the process of improving the relationships linking Indigenous peoples with the peoples who have come to

live on their lands. These initiatives need to be interpreted and understood according to de-colonial goals and in accordance with the concept of "ethical space" between Aboriginal and Canadian in order to instigate the processes of understanding necessary to traverse received colonial divides (Ermine, 2004).

How can the creation of an ethical space be fostered in educational settings? One of the most important ways is through ethical interpretive work by educators that forwards human connectivity as a critical starting point for working through the tension-filled terrain of cultural politics today. Following insights from Indigenous wisdom traditions, I see ethics as a shared public project that fosters respectful engagement and more critical understandings of culture. Understanding culture more critically requires recognition that cultures are not insular things, but rather that cultures embody process-oriented theories of the world that are recursively renewed through interactions with others.

While the significance of contextually-specific cultural practices and beliefs cannot be discounted, it must be remembered that culture is a frame through which we understand ourselves as different *and* in relation to others, the Creator, and the Earth. The challenge is to balance these relationships in sustainable ways. In this conceptualization, then, culture is not an oppositional problem of Inside versus Outside that must be overcome through assimilation and incorporation. Instead, and at its heart, cultural practice is an organic theory of renewal and relationality. We can understand ethical interpretive work and ethical space in the same ways.

Simple informational answers concerning identity, culture, and history will not suffice here. What needs to be recursively worked out, in the form of temporary answers, are the terms according to which ethical space can constitute the character of Aboriginal and Canadian relations in Canada. The guiding vision of this reeducation project will not be to forward Aboriginal perspectives in place of all else, but rather to help Canadians realize that their formal education and socialization has, both subtly and overtly, presented them with a theory of Indigenousness that has shaped and conditioned their ability to respond to Aboriginal presence and participation encountered in their daily lives.

To facilitate this reeducation process, Indigenous teachers and scholars, on behalf of the families and communities that they come from, have a responsibility to promote their values, perspectives, and priorities *as matters of common public concern and consideration.* This requires cordial and respectful engagement beginning with building relationships with those outside of one's own identifiable group. This is how decolonization on a societal level will occur. To clarify this point, I lean on Martin Nakata, an Australian Indigenous scholar who has "attempted to theorise the Indigenous position as an interface position, rather than an oppositional position" (McConaghy, 2000, pp. ix–x). He writes,

> Our position is one of intersection in the first instance, however we are geographically, historically, socially, or economically located. Our position—historic, cultural, social and economic—has been discursively circumscribed for us and governmentally enacted upon us . . . . Unless we begin to understand our position in terms of the (often shifting) discursive regimes that produce that position we will continue to have difficulty articulating the

> complexity of our position. Until we do we are bound to reify the very categories of race and culture that have historically constituted our position as inferior, as secondary, as marginal, as different, as other. (p. x)

Taking up Nakata's challenge, then, as well as the commonly heard Aboriginal spiritual invocation *All My Relations*, I wish to assert relationality and inter-referentiality as ethical curricular and pedagogic positions from which to interpret the conflictual cultural terrain and publicly address the tensions that arise there. Resisting the temptation to frame Indigenousness in isolated and exclusionary ways is the first step toward decolonization.

NOTES

1 These labels were chosen after much deliberation. The term Aboriginal is meant to refer to all people living in Canada who are of Aboriginal descent and identify themselves as such. Canadian is meant to denote those people living in Canada who are not Aboriginal, mostly Euro-Canadians, but also people from all over the world who have come to live in Canada. For the purposes of discussions like this, it is necessary to label different groups according to descent and genealogy, but I am also mindful of the ways that such labeling can unintentionally separate and split people. In using these labels, I also wish to acknowledge that people come from diverse contexts, and their experiences and frames of reference have much to do with how they participate in discussions such as this. These contexts, experiences, and frames of reference often overlap. Aboriginal people are obviously also Canadian, though being Canadian is often only a circumstantial concern. Aboriginal connections to the land are usually considered more important than allegiances to the Canadian nation.

2 The switch in terminology from *Aboriginal* to *Indigenous* is meant to denote broader and more global concerns regarding the intersection of knowledge systems and intellectual traditions that often traverse arbitrary political boundaries. I use *Aboriginal* when considering specific Canadian concerns and *Indigenous* when referring to issues of common concern to Indigenous people throughout the world.

3 This definition does not include Inuit peoples, themselves Indigenous to their traditional territories in northern Canada, because their individual and collective experiences with colonial governments are markedly different from those termed Aboriginal.

4 The Trudeau government did introduce the infamous White Paper in 1969 that suggested the removal of special status for Aboriginal peoples, but this suggestion instigated a widespread political uprising in Aboriginal communities that is still being felt today. The reaction against the White Paper was so vociferous that it was soon removed from the political agenda as a workable option.

5 Media coverage of Fontaine's speech can be found at: http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2007/05/15/fontaine.html?ref=rss

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