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INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE STUDIES and the NEXT GENERATION: PEDAGOGICAL POSSIBILITIES for ANTI-COLONIAL EDUCATION

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■ Abstract

This paper raises issues pertaining to our collective responsibilities in nurturing the next generation of Indigenous scholars. It highlights aspects of current theorising of Indigeneity, namely, the search for “epistemological equity” through reclamation of identity, knowledge and politics of embodiment; and discusses how knowledge about our own existence, realities and identities can help produce a form of knowing legitimate in its own right and able to contest other ways of knowing. The paper concludes with what I see as some of the pedagogical possibilities of anti-colonial education using the Indigenous framework.

■ Introduction

I have many hopes for the young students in the field of Indigenous studies. Like a number of us, I have encountered many students in my short academic life who have taught and inspired me even as they readily concede my influence on their work. In fact, I owe the inspiration for this presentation to one of my former students of Hawaiian descent, Leilani Holmes, who teaches at a community college in California and is writing a book on Indigenous Hawaiian knowledge. She is one of those students a teacher comes into contact with and never forgets because of her positive influence. She sent me this note recently when informed of the honour to give this keynote address:

I feel that what you did, George, by connecting our little group at OISE, by always citing our work, by offering us ways to share as co-presenters with you at conferences ... all that went beyond the usual graduate school mentoring. Whenever possible you did away with hierarchical thinking and treated us as colleagues and people. And that kind of thing is what this next generation needs and deserves ... That is what will help this next generation to build the paths that *can* become more well-travelled over time – the paths that lead from community to university and back again to community (Holmes, personal communication, 2007).

Our descendants are our future. I believe this is true for Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous studies. The coming generation of Indigenous studies scholars bodes well for our field of study. Conferences need to create platforms and connections for students and established scholars to talk about our experiences. We need sharing and mentoring circles where students and “elder” scholars act as listeners and mentors, assist students, discuss their work, hardships, successes and failures. Oftentimes at conferences, scholars just “take the platform”. The younger ones become “satellites” sometimes, circling around the “top guns” in the hierarchy. Yet in their rooms, restaurants, bars, our

students discuss the disconnection that they feel when there is no path from their home or community to the place they have come to learn.

Most of us working in the field of Indigenous knowledge do so from within universities and other institutions of higher education. Within our institutions, production of knowledge is institutionalised on a “production-line” model. In examining Indigenous knowledge production, we must begin to think through the primary values that live in Indigenous communities. For example, the ethical precepts or “must-dos”, and ask, “How shall we transform the institutions within which we reside? How shall we actively reproduce those core Indigenous values?”

What is the sense of sharing Indigenous knowledge if it does not work to transform the institutions within which we work, and the societies within which we live? How is it ethical to work on Indigenous knowledges all the while replicating hierarchical institutionalised structures and interactional patterns? While these questions are not new, they are not the questions that we have taken seriously, or literally, “taken to heart!” Academics/scholars/activists working in the area of Indigenous knowledge cannot be stuck in power plays against one another, nor against others not in our fields of study. We can ill afford not to speak to one another in our encounters. We cannot work from a “scarcity paradigm” in our relentless search for grant money and the next publication. In our work on Indigenous knowledges, we must have time to leave the political economy of knowledge production in the academy “to go outside, into nature, which is at the core of Indigenous knowledge” (Holmes, 2007). Indigenous scholars should lead the way to break free of the production line of publications, teaching, or office hours. Because of the university-style production of knowledge, we often fail to just talk or let knowledge come to us. Our younger scholars (students) cannot be ignored. We cannot be caught in the crossfire of political battles.

We must Indigenise our institutions. In my role as an out-going Department Chair, I often asked how can I Indigenise the Department to produce and get a better sense of “community” going? It has not been easy but we must keep trying. I believe Indigenous scholars and scholarship can point to important ways. We must always bring the Indigenised values of forgiveness, spiritual healing and righteousness of praxis into our work and places. We may not have to trust our colleagues but we need to forgive, help, and care for collective selves. We have to let go of our difficult history but not in the spirit of forgetfulness but forgiving. This is the only way we can live with our Indigenous values where we work. I believe that this is what our Indigenous elders have talked about and taught us namely, forgiveness. What good will it do, really, if we continue to write about their “talk” and

yet we as Indigenous scholars do not bother to try to “walk the talk of our elders”?

In my experience working in the Western academy, I have come to understand how the “soft”, “sensitive”, and “dedicated” students can feel so lost and fragile that they sometimes just leave – just “fall through the cracks” in the fragmented universe of the university. Sometimes, there are words that lead our students to drop out of their studies. Ironically, those words are usually not about the student’s work. They are often just the off-handed comments that both students and instructors make to marginalise others who do not “fit in”. Is it enough that our programs are left with the students who de-Indigenise themselves, de-personalise/disembody the process, or who manage to “toughen up” when marginalised by other students and instructors?

It is only when we start from the position of self-reflexivity that our critiques of the academy can hold sway. African American Afrocentric theorist, Molefi Asante speaks of the necessary but painful demise of Eurocentrism (Asante, 1999). This demise holds the possibilities for an end to what Maulana Karenga has called “Europe’s self congratulatory conception of itself” (2007, p. A9; see also Karenga, 1999). There are times when I feel that as Indigenous scholars we have not been bold enough to assert our Indigenous scholarship and philosophies in the academy. For sure, it is not for want of trying. I marvel at the attempts by some of us to mimic Eurocentric thoughts and ideas and often slip into the form, logic and implicit assumptions of the very things we are contesting. How do we speak about “academic excellence” in a contemporary era remarkable for its celebration of difference and multicentric ways of knowing? How can our institutions claim any intellectual credibility in the face of a dismissal of some ways of knowing? What are the possibilities of community and social engagement that will create a degree of relevance for our academic institutions?

The adaptability, vitality, and agency of Indigenous knowledges open the horizon of human thought, practice, action, and possibilities. These knowledges are reflective of the humility of knowing and respecting our viewpoints and cosmologies. Indigenous knowledges embody the essence of ancestral knowings as well as the legacies of diverse histories and cultures. Indigenous knowledges represent essentially a “speaking back” to the production, categorisation and positions of cultures, identities, and histories. These knowledges challenge the conventional discursive frameworks and practices that seemingly present unquestionable “truths” about social existence. Indigenous knowledges are about unravelling systemic power relations that have assured the dominance of particular ways of knowing in the academy. In effect, Indigenous knowledges are about resistance, refusal, and transformation. Such knowledges are about reclamation of the spiritual and

ethical traditions of shared interests and concerns, mutual care, social responsibility, equity and justice. Indigenous scholars and learners have an obligation to reaffirm and honour our Indigenous and Aboriginal identities and the remarkable legacy on which rests our ancestral knowledges.

Indigenous knowledge: Towards a conceptualisation and operationalisation

In a keynote address in 2007, Martin Nakata asked, how do we “establish Indigenous studies as a discipline, with its own practices for engaging with and testing knowledge”? (p. 13). He further noted the expansive territory covered by the global discourse on “Indigenous knowledge” as spanning,

across a range of interests such as sustainable development, bio-diversity and conservation interests, commercial and corporate interests, and Indigenous interests. It circulates at international, national, state, regional, and local levels in government, non-government, and Indigenous community sectors, and across a range of intellectual, public, private, and Indigenous agendas. It is dispersed across various clusters of Western intellectual activity such as scientific research, documentation and knowledge management, intellectual property protection, education, and health. It is politically, economically, and socially implicated in the lives of millions of people around the globe (Nakata, 2007, p. 2).

Indigenous knowledge contrasts with the international knowledge system generated by universities, research institutions and private firms. Indigenous knowledge is the basis for local-level decision making in agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural-resource management, and other activities in rural communities. Today it is asserted that “the current interest in Indigenous knowledge is emerging at a different historical moment where Indigenous peoples are much better positioned within the legal-political order where issues of rights, sovereignty, self-determination, and historical redress provide a better base for the assertion of Indigenous interests” (Nakata, 2007, p. 8).

In a relatively recent work, we (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2006) follow the pioneering works of Fals-Borda (1981, 1991); Brokensha et al., (1995); Warren et al., (1995); Agrawal (1995a, 1995b); and Roberts (1998), by conceptualising Indigenous knowledge as “a way of knowing” developed by local/Indigenous peoples over generations. This development is a result of sustained occupation of, or attachment to, a place, location, or space with the result that such occupancy allows peoples/communities to develop a perfect

understanding of the relationship of their communities to their surrounding natural and social environments. But perhaps it is Roberts’ (1998) conception of Indigenous knowledge as knowledge “accumulated by a group of people, not necessarily Indigenous, who by centuries of unbroken residence develop an in-depth understanding of their particular place in their particular world” (p. 59) that is more telling. Such conceptualisation opens the door to multiple forms of Indigenous knowings.

These knowledges have a lot in common. They have emerged in the immediate context of the livelihoods of local peoples as a product of a sustained process of creative thought and action within communities when local peoples struggle to deal with an “ever changing set of conditions and problems” (Agrawal 1995b, p.5). Such knowledge is therefore dynamic, undergoing constant modifications as peoples and communities negotiate their complex relations with nature, land, culture and society. Indigenous knowledge is relevant to the extent that it addresses the needs of the community. While this knowledge is localised and context-bound, it does not mean that it can be boxed in time and space and/or does not transcend boundaries. All knowledges are in constant motion, and the fluidity of interactions of different knowledges makes knowledge dynamic and durable. Purcell (1998, p. 266) also points out, “as colonialism uprooted Indigenous peoples it also uprooted their knowledge systems”. However, these knowledge systems have continued over centuries to adjust to and persist in new environments. The recognition of the specific situatedness of knowledge forms does not amount to a “fetishisation of the local” (Ginsburg, 1994, p. 366).

In African and other Indigenous contexts, local proverbs, parables, fables, myths, mythologies and folklore contain words of wisdom, instruction and knowledge about society as sources of Indigenous cultural knowings. These connect traditions and histories of diverse groups, and offer a critical understanding of the complex interweave of society, nature and culture. They teach about communal belonging, responsibility, and purpose. They shed light on ideas such as “learning as community”, learners’ rights and responsibilities, and learning as a cooperative and collaborative undertaking. Proverbs, parables, fables, myths, mythologies and folklore are rich sources of knowledge that sustain communities and validate human experiences. Through oral traditions, these bodies of knowledge have been passed down from generation to generation (see Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2006).

Sometimes, the “spoken word” cannot survive the passage of time and must be textualised. Yet, we must uphold the power of orality as an elegant and purposeful form of knowledge-making. We must challenge and resist the appropriation and commodification of Indigenous knowledge forms.

Indigenous knowledge derives from collective experience and actions. The tensions of filtering such collective dimensions of knowledge through a highly individualistic and competitive academy are real and consequential.

Bringing a humility of knowing and acknowledging the power of the “not knowing” is a critical component of Indigeneity. It is also a part of the whole discourse about the sacredness of activity. Such sacred activity is in letting our knowledges speak to others. Not all knowledges are indigenous to particular locations and communities. I would argue that we must be careful in ascribing “Indigeneity” to all knowledge systems. Similarly, Indigenous knowledges are not homogenous. They are demarcated by regional, class, ethnic, gender and religious differences, and in fact, all knowledges are social and political creations serving specific interests. However, we cannot idealise the “difference of knowledges”. There is interplay and exchange among and between cultures and communities, and it is this process that harmonises difference within local communities and their knowledges. While there may be significant intellectual, cultural and political disagreements within communities, important lines of connection can, nonetheless, develop across group boundaries and Indigenous communities with implications for knowledge systems.

In conceptualising Indigenous knowledges certain issues must be broached. We must challenge binarisms and dualistic modes of thought. For example, we ought to seek to destabilise any conceptions of Indigenous OR Western systems of knowledge as “good” or “bad” knowledge. We must evoke Indigenous knowledge to challenge the linearity of Western paradigms privileged in the academy. In this regard, the power of thinking in circles can release us from linear modes of thought and the culture of knowledge hierarchies. Our conceptions of Indigeneity must also challenge static, fixed conceptions of “Indigenous.” Despite the pitfalls, limitations and costs, we can still cultivate an Indigenous space in the Western academy. This space can empower a synthesis or “cultural interface” of knowledge. It will require that we address the dangers of wresting Indigenous knowledge from its contexts and placing it on a different terrain.

■ Epistemological equity and identity

In my on-going research on equity and questions of epistemology with graduate student researchers, we are bringing another level of interrogation to Indigenous knowledges. The question of how to create spaces where multiple knowledges can co-exist in the Western academy is central; especially so, since Eurocentric knowledge subsumes and appropriates other knowledges without crediting sources. At issue is the search for epistemological equity. In fact, Indigeneity and Indigenous knowledge are about the

search for epistemological equity. We all know there are different conceptions of equity, for example, equity may mean different things to different people. One of my colleagues, Tanya Titchkosky (2007), claims that equity is not something one simply possesses, rather it is something we must collectively work to achieve. We must set goals, and identify and remove the myriad barriers that lie in our way. There are tensions between how we come to operationalise equity and equality. Equality is about levelling the playing field. In contrast, equity is about responding specifically to the exclusion of certain bodies. This response may not necessarily entail equalising the playing field. It may mean much more for praxis.

This calls for paying due attention to the ontological and epistemological claims of Indigenous knowings. In order to breathe life into equity we must situate equity in discussions over Indigenous knowledge production and Indigeneity. Epistemological equity is contingent on recognising subject identities as “real” and consequential. Identities thrive under particular material and discursive conditions. Therefore, caution must be exercised when becoming dismissive of identity politics. Identity politics have in recent years been held in disrepute and literally prosecuted to death. But identity politics is neither vulgar nor irrelevant. How can we afford to ignore the consequences of misrecognition of self and subject identities? Identities can provide the foundations of structural critique when the pursuit of politics is located or grounded in one’s positionality. We need to ask who gets to claim their identities, for whom, how and for what purposes? The negation of identity can be a form of selective historical amnesia when we come to think of how historically certain identities have been encoded with punishment while others have been privileged. There is a politics to claims of affinity and affiliation which is justifiable and constitutes a basis for social change and knowledge transformation.

Theorising must lead to politics. The worth of a “social theory” must not be measured simply in terms of its philosophical and ontological claims, but rather, in terms of the ability of theory to offer a social and political corrective. In speaking about theorising “Indigeneity” and “Aboriginality” I, therefore, want to take back theory and make it work to reflect one’s politics and lived realities. Knowledge, experience and practice must lead to theory. Consequently, as Indigenous and Aboriginal peoples, we cannot theorise ourselves out of our identities. In fact, not to speak of identity/ies may be a luxury for some. It is luxury because its denial is “costless” particularly when it is a denial of privilege. For many to deny a racial, class, gender, sexual or even spiritual identity is unthinkable and undesirable. Such identities are real and have consequences in everyday experience. Identity is about who we are, and how we come to know and act politically.

No one today comes out openly to say that Indigenous knowledge is “beneath the dignity of the Western academy”. Yet there is little doubt that there exists a skepticism towards Indigenous knowledge and the claims to know from an Indigenous experience. When do we as Indigenous peoples/scholars get to say who we are outside of the Euro-centred hegemonic construction of our identities? How do we establish the Indigenous presence in our institutions? I would argue that perhaps we do so through claims to identity, place and culture. What we make of the Indigenous presence also depends on the extent to which we as Indigenous scholars and workers use our collective identities to organise politically and intellectually for change. What makes our institutions “successful places” for Indigenous/Aboriginal and racial minority learners is our ability to resist marginalisation and to claim a space. This is a constant struggle. Once we claim our space, it is even more difficult to hold on to that space.

The voice of difference holds a power that I have termed “epistemic saliency” as it circulates through debates about oppression, colonisation and Indigeneity. The experiences of oppression/colonisation position us to know differently as we unpack the dynamics of oppression and Indigeneity. Our histories and identities are unique and yet contingent and intertwined. The uniqueness of Aboriginal histories and existence necessitates a conceptual and practical distinction of issues affecting Aboriginal communities and those of other racialised communities. This does not mark our knowledge as more relevant or valid, but does affirm that the connection of identities to knowledge production should not lead to a form of “epistemic relativism”. The contingent and intertwined nature of our histories and identities means that it does not serve any purpose (other than the interests of the oppressor) for the causes of Indigeneity and anti-racism to be pursued in ways that create divisions and binaries between concerns of Aboriginality and racialisation of subjects. In the Euro-American context, while I agree that the Aboriginal bodies experience a separate and distinct kind of racism, this form of racism is in a great part related to their identities (e.g., Indianness). In other words, anti-Indianness as a virulent form of racism is different and yet connected to anti-Black/African racism. The epistemological and pedagogical understanding of oppression point to powerful connections of racisms and Aboriginal colonisation, as well as imperial and cultural genocide.

Therefore, bodies matter in discourses about Indigeneity. This is a question of transcendence. This is beyond a project of representation, linking identity to knowledge production and/or the idea of multiple knowings. The idea of embodied knowing draws a connection between identity and knowledge production. More importantly, claiming

Indigeneity is about spiritual healing and praxis that calls for an embodiment of knowledge. In evoking notions of the “spiritual” in the politics of claiming Indigeneity we also look for ways to deal with the de-spiritualisation of the “self”, and the disconnection between soul, mind and body in conventional knowledge production.

■ Towards a critical Indigenous discursive framework

In this section of my paper, I want to propose some ideas and principles for the development of a critical framework of Indigeneity to meet contemporary challenges. I ground this undertaking in an African knowledge base. I am working with Indigenous African concepts, values and principles – community, collective responsibility, mutual interdependence, and responsible governance – that will not recognise adaptations of Western value systems. This knowledge base is not unique to African peoples or cultures but indeed is shared by most Indigenous communities. However, the Indigenous discursive framework I propose also incorporates diasporan (African) social thought. It has a broader project of decolonisation that conjoins the mental, spiritual, political and material levels. However, I place spirituality rather than politics or economics at the centre of the analysis.

I argue that the search for Indigeness is only a means to an end, that is, the emergence of Indigenous people’s discursive power. I feel compelled to reiterate that in recent years we hear of such discourses as “New Humanism” and a “Renaissance”. The Indigenous contribution to global humanity and world civilisation has been long standing and there is nothing “new” about that humanism. Indigenous knowledge is old, and the Western concept of Humanism takes its cue from Indigeneity. I have identical responses to the word “renaissance” – another trope that has such a Western heritage.

The framework roots Indigenous identity within history and outside Euro-American hegemonic constructions of the Other. It empowers us to reframe our Indigenous histories as we navigate the current diasporic context. The framework projects a cultural rebirth and revival reflecting the integrity and pride in self, culture, history and heritage, as well as a commitment to the collective good and well-being of all peoples. The ideas and principles of an Indigenous discursive framework are rooted and actionable in local/grassroots political organising and a form of intellectual activism. Discursively this framework affirms a local, national and international consciousness and an understanding of the politics of “national culture and liberation” that is matched with political sophistication and intricacies.

I put forward 13 principles as a way of offering a conceptual and analytical clarity of the critical Indigenous discursive framework:

1. Land, history, culture and identity have powerful explanatory powers in contemporary communities and socio-political encounters.
2. History, culture and spiritual identity are sites and sources of asymmetrical power relations structured along the lines of difference (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability).
3. Land and spiritual identity are salient, fundamental analytical concepts offering an entry point in understanding the lived experiences of those who are Indigenised.
4. Although "land and spiritual identity" have a special salience that salience should not lead us to a discourse of reductionism or the idea of irreducible/essentialised difference.
5. Land and spiritual identity achieve their full effect when intersected with class, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, language and religion.
6. A critical Indigenous discursive framework brings three conceptual understandings to Indigeneity:
 - i) colonialism, in its deep-reaching denial of history and identity has created unequal outcomes for groups in terms of their histories and spiritual identities;
 - ii) this results in situational variations in intensities of different identities; and,
 - iii) central to decolonisation for Indigenised and colonised communities is the urgency of *regaining our spiritual power and strength*.
7. The power of Western knowledge rests on its "epistemological racism" – built on the assumptions of superiority of Western civilisation (see Scheurich and Young, 1999). Indigenous knowing resists the dominance of Westernity and its power to subsume all forms of thought, with notions like "reason", "progress", "rationality" and the "Enlightened discourse".
8. Within Western cultures knowledges exist in hierarchies of power. Such hierarchies of power are themselves only meaningful in a competitive culture. The competitive nature of these communities itself help produce "Othered subjects".
9. It is through a nurturing of oppositional stances informed by our relative subject positions and experiences that the dominance of Westernity and Eurocentricity can be subverted. In fact, the Indigenous discursive framework claims the intellectual agency of the Indigene to define oneself. It affirms the epistemological relevance of the Indigene to set the terms of our engagement in dominant culture.
10. A critical Indigenous discursive framework is anti-colonial. It is about resistance, subject(ive) agency and collective politics. It centres the agency, voice and political and intellectual interests of Indigenous and Aboriginal subjects in accounting for and resisting oppression and domination. The politics of knowledge production for Indigenous and Aboriginal scholars is to claim our agency through self-actualisation and collective empowerment.
11. The Indigenous discursive approach poses alternative conceptions of "difference" and "Otherness". It challenges the notion of social difference as "problem", and sees an important distinction between affirming difference and engaging in a politics of "Otherness". A "theory of difference" constructs difference as a site of identities, knowledge and power; while a "theory of Otherness" constructs difference as the negative "Other". The process of Othering establishes "self/Other", and "us/we" distinctions and provides a basis for denying resource and power to groups in society. Otherness imagines difference simply in the exotic Other rather than seeing difference as embodiment of knowledge, power and subjective agency.
12. The Indigenous discursive framework highlights spirituality and spiritual ontology. This calls for placing at the centre the "spiritual" in the axis of social movement politics, making questions of economics, culture and history the superstructure. This approach to Indigenous praxis cannot be viewed simply as a project of decolonisation and the unravelling of the power relations of knowledge production, interrogation, validation and dissemination.
13. Finally, the Indigenous discursive framework critiques the independence of "scholarship", "politics" and "activism". It does not subscribe to the luxury of the independence of scholarship from politics and activism. However, the framework is also mindful of not prescribing particular politics. The learning objective is to create a space to legitimise politics in the intellectual/academic realm.

■ Pedagogic possibilities for anti-colonial education

In the concluding section of my paper, allow me to make a segue into the notion of anti-colonial education and its pedagogical possibilities. Indigenous knowledge is part of the struggle for self-determination, political and intellectual sovereignty of Indigenous peoples. Claiming Indigenous knowledge in the Western academy is an anti-colonial struggle for independence from exploitative relations of schooling and knowledge production. To the critical learner the strength of Indigeneity lies in the synergies of culture, history and identity. In particular, as already noted, it is the search for Indigenous identity outside of the identity that is often constructed within Euro-American ideology/hegemony. Scholarship and politics of education should first seek the intellectual wellness and improvement of the person and personhood of each learner.

In reclaiming Indigeneity, scholarship must connect firmly with Indigenous struggles and aspirations. For example, the history and culture of Indigenous peoples must be understood as a necessary intellectual exercise and as part of our political, material, spiritual and mental decolonisation. The search for knowledge is valuable if it allows Indigenous peoples to identify with their past, histories, cultures, identities and land/place. An Indigenous framework with its interconnections of self, group, community, culture and nature can provide compelling arguments against racism, colonialism, and imperialism that have ensured divisions, fragmentation, and inequities in communities. Indigenous peoples' survival and destiny rests on a form of intellectual, cultural, spiritual and political liberation and emancipation grounded in an anti-colonial modernity (see also Du Bois, 1947 in a related context).

In the search for solutions to current social problems, the relevance of Indigenous concepts and practices is not in doubt. In fact, in articulating the pedagogical possibilities of Indigenous knowledges I would reiterate three major areas in need of interrogation. First, is in the area of reclamation of the Indigenous past, history, culture and spiritual identities for knowledge production. This implies a resistance to amputation and offering an intellectual challenge to those who would subjugate Indigenous peoples' knowings and experiences. Indigenous knowledge is about culture and rootedness in place and history.

Second, is in the area of searching for an understanding of the possibilities of anti-colonial education. Anti-colonial education is about challenges to contemporary forms of (post-colonial) education as vestiges of neo-colonial brainwashing (Chinweizu, 2007). Such education continues to denigrate what Indigenous peoples and their cultures have to offer the world. As Indigenous scholars and activists we must continually work to find ways to address the (ir)relevance of school curriculum, texts, classroom pedagogy and instruction. Anti-colonial education must also address social difference.

We must rethink the (post)colonial education project of national integration, citizenship responsibility and nation building. This is in part because my research work on African schooling and education, for example, has been revealing. In emphasising the goal of national integration, post-independence, "post-colonial" education in Africa has denied heterogeneity in local populations, as if difference itself was a problem. With this orientation, education has undoubtedly helped create and maintain the glaring disparities and inequities, structured along lines of ethnicity, culture, language, religion, gender and class, which persist and grow. This pattern must be disrupted. An anti-colonial education will bring an expansive definition to colonial and colonising relations as anything that is "imposed and dominating".

The question of identity connects issues of Indigeneity and belonging in terms of a rootedness in a place and culture. In Canadian contexts (and I am sure elsewhere), there are obviously current re-articulations of "nation", "citizenship" and "belonging" that reveal the complexities of subject(ive) identities and politics. Youth culture and diasporic identities exemplify these complexities. But apart from youth born in the diasporic contexts, there are others (including their parents) who still trace their rootedness to particular ancestral homelands. As members of the "nation" and "communities", the experiences of these individuals cannot be denied even as we seek to privilege new youth identities in the nation. These adults are not in a place of displacement and neither can they be seduced into amputating their past. Furthermore, the world is not just about the diasporic encounter and neither is the cosmopolitan the only place of abode and meaning. The connection here is that Indigenous peoples need to listen to the voice of the diaspora which is differently inflected for the youth. Youthful versus elder Indigenous voices offer a different knowings regarding roots and routes.

Third, and related to the preceding, anti-colonial education must begin to theorise the "Indigenous" beyond its current boundaries and spatialisation. For so-called "displaced" or migrated communities, the search for diasporic connections must not only lead to a gaze on the ruptures, disruptions or discontinuities. This search must also promote claims of belonging and connectedness to place, identities and cultures, as well as issues. In the latter sense, I am referring to connecting Indigeneity to contemporary issues such as racisms and colonial oppressions, women's rights, gays and lesbian rights, patriarchy, AIDS/Health, environment, class and poverty.

One of the biggest pedagogical challenges of anti-colonial education is the search for synthesis of multiple knowledges. As Nakata (2007) reminds us, in the debates about knowledge synthesis some have taken the position that Indigenous knowledge systems and Western sciences are "so disparate as to be 'incommensurable' (Verran, 2005) or 'irreconcilable' (Russell, 2005) on cosmological, epistemological and ontological grounds" (cited in Nakata, 2007, p. 8). Sometimes the marker of difference is in what is deemed "science" and "not science" or what is "valid" knowledge and what is "not valid" and the criterion for making these determinations. We must search for connecting points of different and multiple knowledges. Nakata (2007, p. 9) cautions that:

It is important for those wanting to bring Indigenous knowledge into teaching and learning contexts to understand what happens when Indigenous knowledge is conceptualised simplistically and oppositionally from the standpoint of scientific paradigms as everything

that is “not science”. It is also important to understand what happens when Indigenous knowledge is documented in ways that disembodies it from the people who are its agents, when the “knowers” of that knowledge are separated out from what comes to be “the known”, in ways that dislocates it from its locale, and separates it from the social institutions that uphold and reinforce its efficacy, and cleaves it from the practices that constantly renew its meanings in the here and now.

Of course, we cannot pursue synthesis while failing to recognise the pitfalls, limits and the perils. We need to continually remind and ask ourselves: what is the politics of creating a knowledge synthesis? In articulating the terms of “the cultural interface” and the possibilities of forging a critical Indigenous standpoint, Nakata (2007) notes:

I am not out singularly to overturn the so-called dominant position through simplistic arguments of omission, exclusion or misrepresentation but rather out there to make better arguments in relation to my position within knowledge, and in relation to other communities of “knowers”. We see and act on things in these ways all the time (p. 12).

Far from being simplistic, however, I do believe that pointing to the omissions, negations and devaluations is politically and intellectually important. Another key question is: what is our politics in making particular claims? The omissions, negations and erasures are relevant to the politics of legitimising multiple knowledges in the academy, as well as exposing the tendency for some forms of knowing to masquerade as universal (and become hegemonic) even when they are borrowing from other ways of knowing.

Synthesis of different knowledge has always been an important aspect of Indigenous philosophies and ontologies. Discursive synthesis is at the heart of claims of multicentric knowing. Connections of ideas to different spaces and locales have been recognised in Indigenous thought processes and expressions. In fact, the notions of “humility of knowing” and “uncertainty of knowledge” imply that the learner must always welcome multiple interpretations of social events, facts and ideas given the location, politics and identities of the learner as knower. And so I conclude where I began. We must remain focused on claiming the power of humility of knowing and an awareness of the existence of multiple meanings, interpretations, and experiences.

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