

ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES AND THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

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We are still not having [Aboriginal] people succeed in the mainstream education system ... the numbers have not changed, so something is not right (Participant, Antone & Cordoba, 2005, p. 5).

Aboriginal peoples are an important part of Canada. With approximately 72 languages and 614 First Nations reserve communities, there is a richness of knowledge, tradition and customs, and depth in epistemological (ways of knowing) and ontological (ways of being) understanding that can add to the wealth of this country. However, with so much potential for reciprocal learning, why is “something not right” in education for so many Aboriginal students? This literature review will explore the following question: *“To what extent do teacher attitudes, norms, values, basic assumptions, and behaviour influence authentic inclusion, infusion, and embedding of Aboriginal perspectives in the Alberta Social Studies Program?”* While the knowledge and skills preparation of a teacher directly influences the quality of teaching and impacts student learning, the authors go beyond knowledge and skill development to explore how teacher attitudes and perspectives influence learning and the teaching of Aboriginal perspectives. Furthermore, effective teacher practice and strategies (e.g. culturally responsive teaching) are described.

PERSPECTIVES AND ALBERTA EDUCATION: THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

Alberta Education has implemented a revised Social Studies curriculum that recognizes Indigenous people and embeds Aboriginal perspectives into the heart of the program. It emphasizes the understanding of ‘multiple perspectives’, including the learning of Aboriginal perspectives, and highlights

three main elements: knowledge and understanding, values and attitudes, and skills and processes (Alberta Education, Social Studies, Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2005-2007). It is the first time the concept of 'multiple perspectives' has been embedded in an Alberta Program of Studies. But, what is/are perspective(s) and how can educators teach perspectives they do not deeply understand?

In the *Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12 Program Rationale and Philosophy*, the *Program Vision* provides some insight into the concept of perspective:

The Alberta Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12 Program of Studies meets the needs and reflects the nature of 21st century learners. It has, at its heart, the concepts of citizenship and identity in the Canadian context. The program reflects multiple perspectives, including Aboriginal and Francophone, that contribute to Canada's evolving realities. It fosters the building of a society that is pluralistic, bilingual, multicultural, inclusive and democratic. The program emphasizes the importance of diversity and respect for differences as well as the need for social cohesion and the effective functioning of society. (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 1)

Overall, 'perspective' is not clearly defined in the Alberta Program of Studies vision statement.

Additional local resources that refer to perspectives include, but are not limited to, Alberta Education's *Our Words, Our Ways* and the Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education, *The Common Curriculum Framework for Social Studies Grades K to 9*. In document *Our Words, Our Ways*, Alberta Education encourages teachers to be engaged in internal and external exploration:

An effective way of learning about students' Aboriginal cultures is for teachers to become aware of their own perspectives, for example, to reflect on what they know about Aboriginal cultures and how they have learned what they know. (2005, p. 33)

The Western Canadian Protocol encouraged a similar discovery process: Positive values and attitudes with respect to others are grounded in respect for the value and dignity of all human beings. This is reflected in a concern for quality of life and a willingness to understand and respect diversity in individuals, groups, cultures, communities, and societies. Appreciating human diversity implies a critical consideration of one's own and others'

perspectives. Such a consideration involves acknowledging the limitations of personal perspectives in understanding the world, and enables students to identify and speak out against intolerance, prejudice, racism, and other forms of discrimination. (Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education, The Common Curriculum Framework for Social Studies Grades K to 9, 2002, p. 11)

Since the teaching of perspectives is a significant and important part of the Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies, it is important to have a sound understanding of what ‘perspectives’ is in order to effectively address or focus on it with students.

Defining Perspectives

According to the Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary (2009), perspective incorporates a broader and collective process of investigation than point of view or standpoint. Although it is difficult to separate perspective from point of view and/or standpoint, the point of view and standpoint position of investigation is a more personal and individual process. Cajete (2000) explains that achieving “perspective” is a deliberate act where one seeks to understand the environment in relation to oneself. It involves, as Donald Schön (1983) describes, deep reflection, reflection-on-action alongside reflection-in-action. Gaining perspective requires an unveiling of obstructions (e.g. misconceptions, stereotypes). Ultimately, perspective is influenced by values, beliefs, and experience; therefore, it is important for educators to get a sense of the overall experience of Aboriginal children – their context and reality.

THE CONTEXT: THE ABORIGINAL EXPERIENCE

Canada’s demographic continues to dramatically change as a result of, among other things, globalization, technology, and decreasing mortality rates. In January, 2008 Statistics Canada released a report that announced that Aboriginal people in Canada (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) had surpassed the one-million mark, reaching 1,172,790 (Statistics Canada, 2005). Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (2006) reported, between 1996 and 2001, the high school completion rate for students 15 years and older rose by:

4.8 percent for First Nations on reserve (from 36.6 percent to 41.4 percent)

6 percent for Métis (from 52 percent to 58 percent)

5 percent for Inuit (from 37 percent to 42 percent)

This compared to 3.5 percent for the general Canadian population – from

65.2 percent to 68.7 percent (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2006). In 2001, 42 percent of the Aboriginal population 15 years of age and over was without a high school diploma; compared to 31 percent of the non-Aboriginal population (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2009). These statistics signify a need to examine and change, among other things, schooling, teaching, and learning practices for Aboriginal students. "The issue of Aboriginal student achievement is multidimensional and complex and the context needs to be understood by program directors, policy makers, school administration, and teachers if they are to make systemic, sustained difference for Aboriginal students in terms of educational and holistic well being" (Ottmann, 2009). In this case, knowledge systems of educators need to be examined at the fundamental level; this includes an in depth examination of Aboriginal perspectives for the purpose of enriching learning for all students and to fulfil the mandate outlined by Alberta Education Program of Studies.

"Jagged Worldviews Colliding" (Little Bear, 2002): Making Essential Connections

When we don't know each other's stories, we substitute our own myth about who that person is. When we are operating with only a myth, none of that person's truth will ever be known to us, and we will injure them – mostly without ever meaning to. (Wherner & Smith, 1992, p. 380)

Ever since Christopher Columbus landed on this continent, the First Peoples and the "newcomers" have been on two diametric trajectories (Miller, 2000). Consequently, there have been misinterpretations, misconceptions and stereotypes that have led to discrimination and racism in every realm, including education. Disparity arises when people are marginalized and when they are intentionally excluded from decision-making processes that determine their destiny, when their stories and voices are ignored and/or silenced.

Over the years, Aboriginal people have requested and often insisted to be a part of decision-making deliberations. The inclusion of Aboriginal people is critical because Aboriginal perspectives "can only be fully learned or understood by means of the pedagogy traditionally employed by the peoples themselves" (Daes, 1994, as cited in Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p.41). For educational policy to be meaningful, Aboriginal people have to be involved in the process from the beginning; otherwise, programs and incentives will continue to fail and the clash of "jagged worldviews colliding" (Little Bear, 2002) will continue.

ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES

'Aboriginal perspectives' is not easily defined because it cannot be fragmented from culture, language, and philosophy that are influenced by ancient epistemology and ontology. Furthermore, in teaching Aboriginal perspectives, Butler (2000) contends "the diversity of Aboriginal experience provides an ideological minefield for many teaching professionals" (p. 97). She also contends "the recognition of Aboriginal diversity must be a fundamental aspect of Aboriginal perspectives" (p. 99). Although Aboriginal perspectives are multi-layered and diverse, there are some common threads in Aboriginal philosophy (this including spirituality) and practice that contribute to a broad definition of Aboriginal perspectives. In this section, the concept and practice of 'Aboriginal perspectives' will be explored from the point-of-view of culture, language and storytelling, spirituality, and foundational practices as presented by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal authors. The intent will be to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of educators.

Indigenous Epistemology and Ontology

Indigenous ways of knowing (epistemology) and ways of being (ontology) differ from Western thought. Synott (1996) described Australian *Tjukurrpa* Aboriginal ontology as being informed by relatedness, holistic paradigm, interdependence, and process. Although this is an Australian Aboriginal interpretation of world-view, it is synonymous with the North American perspective. This ontological perspective translates to deep respect for all of creation, an understanding of the mutual relationship in all things, and the important responsibility that humanity has to sustaining the well being of everything in the world.

Leroy Little Bear (2008) offered an insightful point of view on Aboriginal ontology and epistemology that emphasized balance, renewal, and sustainability of life. He summarized Indigenous thought in six points: the fluidity of change; spirituality; everything is alive; everything is interrelated; renewal and repetition; and holistic thought. From this perspective, knowledge is contextual, experiential, holistic and personal in nature. Along with developing an intimate understanding of, and perhaps relationship with, creation and the cosmos, Indigenous peoples are encouraged to look inward for knowledge. Ermine (1995) elaborates:

Those people who seek knowledge on the physical plane objectively find their answers through exploration of the outer space, solely on the corporeal level. Those who seek to understand the reality of existence and harmony with the environment by turning inward have a different, incorporeal knowledge paradigm that might be termed Aboriginal epistemology. (p. 103)

Indigenous epistemology, ontology, and perspective can only be learned from Indigenous people, and learning of this depth takes time and patience.

Education and Schooling: The Perceptions

Since schooling was a structured experience that came after European contact, it is important to understand how select authors define education and learning so meaningful classroom applications can be made more effective. Gregory Cajete (1994) differentiated education and learning: "Education is an art of process, participation, and making connections. Learning is growth and life process; and Life and Nature are always relationships in process. Learning is always a creative act" (pp. 24-25). The expectation of an individual and the community to take an active role in life is captured in Cajete's description. The idea that "learning is always a creative act" translates to involvement and thinking at a higher level.

Historian, J. R. Miller (2000), described the traditional approach to instruction in a generalized sense: "Instruction was suffused with [Indigenous peoples] deeply ingrained spirituality, an invariable tendency to relate the material and personal in their lives to the spirits and the unseen. Moreover, they all emphasized an approach to instruction that relied on looking, listening, and learning – 'the three Ls.'" (p. 16). Learning is a process that is achieved from active, attuned, and intentional observation of the visible environment and of the spiritual dimension. In this perspective, learning is a multidimensional process and it requires knowing the visible (physical) and invisible (spiritual) aspects of oneself and of creation.

"Mitakye Oyasin, we are all related, we are all Of Community. In engendering an understanding of this fact in the educational structures and processes that we create, we honor what is truly human in each of us" (Cajete, 1994, p. 165). Cajete's quote epitomizes the purpose of learning about oneself and one's environment – we are all related, we are all connected, we are bound by our existence and by our world.

Spirituality and Education: First Nations and Western Perspectives

To understand the importance of spirituality, it is important to examine the common values that First Nations people share and how these differ from Western culture. All aspects of Indigenous life are interconnected when referring to spirituality. Hernandez (1999) stated that “knowledge of Native epistemologies would allow educators to move beyond the ‘what’ to the ‘why’ Native students leave school. Increased knowledge of the philosophies that underpin Native students’ perceptions and actions in school is necessary if research is to move beyond the level of description and ascription to a more accurate representation of Indigenous students and the role culture plays in their schooling experiences” (p. 3).

Western and First Nations attainment of knowledge differs greatly. Western thought perceives the universe through ‘atomism’ – viewing and measuring the universe objectively and fragmentally (Cajete, 1999) which leads to feelings of isolation and the belief that the universe is separate from humanity. “In comparison, First Nations people view the universe from a global perspective. Nature and the universe, including people, are connected and giving entities. The view of interconnectedness and harmony lends itself to valuing community. Jules (1999) lists values significant to First Nations communities as “cooperative behaviour and the greater good of the tribe over individual wants (p. 7)” (Ottmann, 2002, pp. 26-28).

The Spirit

In general, Aboriginal people have a strong spiritual orientation.

Most First Nations children were taught to be keenly aware of their surroundings (seen and unseen), to be grateful for all life, and to rely on the Creator. Garrett (1996) notes that “Native American children develop a heightened level of sensitivity for all the relationships of which they are a part and which are a part of them, for the circular (cyclical) motion of life, and for the customs and traditions of their people” (as cited in Hanohano, 1999, p. 216).

Hanohano (1999) feels that “spirituality is the fundamental principle that Natives have been searching for in their university [and schooling] experience. It is a search from within that will give Aboriginal and other students the harmony and balance that is needed to meet the demands and rigours of [life] and lead them to discover their true selves. And it is this search for truth that leads us to consider Native education” (p. 211).

The Assembly of First Nations 1988 Report on Education states the

importance of the "well-being" of students, and their desire for a "holistic" style of education that would prepare them for "total living." The question now is, "how are educators going to achieve holistic education?" Hanohano (1999) believes that this could be achieved by integrating spirituality, culture, and education (p. 207). He stresses that "the quest now becomes one of finding how faculties and institutions can incorporate the wisdom and spirituality of our communities and Elders to increase and enhance the harmony and balance that is so essential to fulfillment on their educational missions" (p. 218). (Ottmann, 2002, pp. 31; 36)

Is there a relationship, a bridge that educators can build to incorporate the spiritual dimension? Doige (2003) posits that "[f]ocus on the students' spirituality as the missing ingredient that makes traditional Aboriginal education and the Western system of education compatible. Spirituality unites the human part of all of us and permits the differences to exist; through our spirituality we find our connectedness to one another" (p. 144). Humanity has a longing to develop spiritually.

Elders: Teaching and Language

Elders continue to be a positive force in Aboriginal communities. They are a source of knowledge and strength. Heavy Runner and Morris (1997) remind us of the timelessness in learning and of value of Elders:

The elders teach us that our children are gifts from the Creator and it is the family, community, school, and tribe's responsibility to nurture, protect and guide them. We have long recognized how important it is for children to have people in their lives that nurture their spirit, stand by them, encourage and support them. (p.1)

There is a strong link between culture, language and identity. For this reason and because numerous words and concepts cannot be interpreted into English, many Elders have been encouraging the learning and acquisition of one's native language, and as Battiste (2000) shares, "Elders are the critical link to Aboriginal epistemology through the Aboriginal languages. The last vestiges of Aboriginal languages exist in pockets of the Aboriginal population" (p. 201). Elders have a vital role in communicating important messages, such as the need to revitalize language, to the Aboriginal community and, in this case, to the educational community. Since Elders play an important role in the learning process, educators should ask, "How can I/we invite and include Elders in the school, to facilitate teacher and student learning?"

Elders are the conduits of knowledge, of language, and of the evolving Aboriginal identity, but the intent, as Dawn Brown expresses, is to pass the message and the stories onto the children: "Success is the understanding in keeping one's spirit alive and well. Following a path of their Dreams, for each dream that is, will be. In that if one follows the teaching of the Elders, the Circle will withstand all that crosses one's path. Our Children are the Keepers of our stories, our Lives, and Dreams" (Coquitlam Education Enhancement Agreement, 2007, p. 17). Brown's quote emphasizes another important factor in learning about Aboriginal perspectives – storytelling.

Storytelling

Aboriginal people continue to have a strong oral tradition. Leroy Little Bear (2002) stated that, for Aboriginal people, "Storytelling is a very important part of the educational process. It is through stories that customs and values are taught and shared" (p. 81). In their study, Antone and Cordoba interviewed Aboriginal people about their perceptions of storytelling. One participant explained:

That's how we do the teachings through storytelling and legends, and that was our way our kids learned; that was teaching. The right way and the wrong way, you could learn through the legends for thousands of years, you didn't have to have degrees or anything. So we learned a whole lot about life through storytelling and it's important that we still continue that process because more so now kids are having tremendous difficulties in school. (2005, pp. 5-6)

The learning that happens through storytelling is often indirect as the lessons that emerge are left for the listener to discover. Learning in this way requires active listening, an engaged mind, and higher-order thinking skills.

THE AFFECTIVE DOMAIN

The primary question of this review is: "*To what extent do teacher attitudes, norms, values, basic assumptions, and behaviour influence authentic inclusion, infusion, and embedding of Aboriginal perspectives in the Alberta Social Studies Program?*" This question not only highlights the "inclusion, infusion and embedding of Aboriginal perspectives" but it questions the influence that teacher attitudes, norms, values, basic assumptions and behaviour has on student learning. This question delves into the affective domain of teaching and learning.

Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains developed by Benjamin Bloom and colleagues (1958) included three distinct spheres of influence on educational efforts: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. These domains "have been used for decades as frameworks for instructional objectives, curriculum design, and assessments of achievement" (Dettmer, 2006, p. 70), and can account for the "attitudes, skills and knowledge" found at the core of the Alberta Education Social Studies Program. While the cognitive and psychomotor domains of learning represent the knowledge and skills taught and achieved in the classroom, the affective domain represents aspects such as feelings, attitudes, and values.

The affective learning domain "describes learning objectives that emphasize a feeling tone, an emotion, or a degree of acceptance or rejection" (Krathwohl et al., as cited in Carleton College, n.d., p. 5). The new Social Studies Program in Alberta expresses the importance of the affective domain through its goal of promoting "the development of values and attitudes" (Alberta Education, Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12: Program Rationale and Philosophy, 2005, p. 8). Furthermore, as a key component of the new Program of Study in Alberta, "Social Studies provides learning opportunities for students to ... appreciate and respect how multiple perspectives, including Aboriginal ... shape Canada's political, socioeconomic, linguistic and cultural realities" (Alberta Education, Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12: Program Rationale and Philosophy, 2005, p. 2). As such, the Social Studies Program calls for what Farley (2001) referred to as "affectively-orientated strategies" (p. 181) that can be applied through humanistic "personal frames of reference". Farley added that:

The case for affectively-oriented strategies is not one for adding on to the existing curriculum. It is not a fad, frill, or trend. On the contrary, it lies at the very heart of what it is that the schools have always attempted to do – to allow youth the opportunity to become more human by providing an environment where they have the opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to find fulfilment in a human society. (p. 181)

The successful employ of this approach in Social Studies relies heavily on the classroom teacher. Ultimately, the inclusion of Aboriginal and multiple perspectives in the Social Studies Program is intent on humanistic outcomes.

Neumann and Forsyth (2008) also stress the importance of the teacher's role:

The affective domain of learning, which encompasses attitudes, beliefs, values, feelings, and emotions (Billings & Halstead, 2009), relies on instructor creativity to stimulate those elements because teaching learners in the affective domain is more complex than teaching in the cognitive (facts, concepts, and principles) or psychomotor (motor skills) domains. Altering feelings and values in a brief class requires higher-level teaching strategies from the instructor. (p. 248)

In the affective realm, teachers should be confident in their teaching and since their responsibilities include addressing 'attributes', they should be aware of their own basic assumptions, values, and beliefs and the influence that their perspectives has on learning and values development of students.

Teacher Attitudes and Beliefs

It is what teachers think, what teachers believe, and what teachers do at the level of the classroom that ultimately shapes the kind of learning that young people get. (Hargreaves & Fullan, as cited in Yero, 2002b, p. 4)

How Aboriginal perspectives is taught and delivered in the classroom should matter to all educators because the 'how' of teaching influences student beliefs systems and consequently relationships. The 'how' of teaching is largely determined by a teacher's level of knowledge, skill, attitude and belief of Aboriginal perspectives, of Aboriginal people. Each teacher comes to the classroom with dispositions that are inclusive of a "unique mental representation of the world of education and the roles he or she plays in that world" (Yero, 2002a, p. 4). All teachers will: "define the purposes of education as he or she sees fit ... modify the official curriculum according to personal preferences, interests, and teaching strengths and weaknesses ... [and] teach his or her personal beliefs and values" (Yero, 2002b, p. 2). In an attempt to determine the impact of teacher attitudes on culturally diverse students, Cochran-Smith (1997) asserted that the following questions must be considered: "What assumptions do teachers and students of all ages bring to school with them about 'the self' and 'the other'? What understandings do they have about meanings, cultures, and families that are not like their own?" (pp. 28-29).

According to Yero (2002b), the beliefs, values, and actions that teachers bring to the classroom "generally exist outside of conscious awareness" (p. 6) and "are largely unexamined" (Yero, 2002a, p. 12) by both the teacher and the educational system. What this means is that teacher behaviours often result

more from “habit” than “from higher-level thinking processes” (Yero, 2002b, p. 6), which can be detrimental to educational reform efforts. Yero (2002a) continued:

Many studies have shown that the individual beliefs and values of teachers play a vital role in shaping the objectives, goals, curriculum, and instructional methods of schools. Those same beliefs and values can spell success or failure for any reform efforts imposed by a school or district. Even when there is surface agreement on what *should* be done, variations in the way teachers perceive the task create huge differences in implementation. Any teacher who has taken part in attempts to develop a “common” curriculum has experienced the kind of disagreement that can occur over what aspects of a subject *should* be included and how the subject *should* be taught. (p. 7)

In Alberta, the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in the Social Studies Program plays a large part in the educational reform efforts designed to narrow the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners, while increasing the level of knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of Aboriginal histories, cultures, and contributions. Therefore, it is critical to consider the influence of teachers’ prior knowledge, attitudes, values, and beliefs.

Unfortunately, many teachers have not had the appropriate educational background to prepare them for diverse classrooms, and specifically they were not prepared to integrate Aboriginal culture and perspectives (Gilchrist, 2005); therefore, school leaders need to make sure that most importantly “educators of all racial and cultural groups develop new competencies and pedagogies to successfully engage our changing populations” (Howard, 2007, p. 17). Research has shown that other factors have a great effect on student motivation, such as sense of belonging, trust in the people around them and the belief that teachers value their intellectual competence (Howard, 2007, p.19). In addition, Clarke and Drudy (2006) observed that teachers were not likely to use methods most suitable for teaching diverse populations. In conclusion, Clarke and Drudy share, “Teacher educators need to be aware of the values that student teachers hold, the manner in which they express those values and the way in which they respect views that are different from their own” (p. 383). The next section explains how this awareness is possible through the understanding of culture and cultural competency.

Culture and Cultural Competency

Heavy Runner and Morris (1997) believed that culture has a “valid and positive role in supporting youth and tapping [into] their resilience” (p. 1). They explained, “A culture’s world view is grounded in fundamental beliefs which guide and shape the life experiences of young people ... and those who work with young people and demonstrate respect for these fundamental values, beliefs and behaviours, foster the natural resilience of children” (1997, p. 1). Cartledge and Loe (2001) described culture as learned, shared, dynamic in nature, and that “it incorporates values that dictate behaviour” (p. 34); therefore, when educators have students from different cultural groups they “must treat culture not as a rigidly prescribed set of behaviours or traits but as a general framework through which actions are filtered or checked as people negotiate their daily lives” (p. 34). Cartledge and Loe further note, “All behaviour is culturally based. Children who come from and identify with culturally diverse groups are likely to engage in behaviours that are at variance with the culture of the school. The success of these students is predicted in their abilities to transverse these environments with minimal dissonance” (p. 33). Overall, an educator’s understanding of individual, organizational and societal culture directly influences teaching practices and the quality of teaching.

In relation to Aboriginal people, Doige (2003) believes that schools need to embrace their knowledge, history, traditions and practices as an integral part of the overall school culture, and that learning of Aboriginal peoples should be integrated throughout the whole curriculum. An integrated curriculum of diversity is also supported by Dimmock and Walker (2005) when they comment: “If, however, the aim is to go beyond tolerance of cultural differences and towards understanding of, and respect for, other races and cultures, then themes and ideas of a multicultural nature need to be embedded in subjects across the whole curriculum, in an integrated way” (p. 103). This philosophy and practice of teaching and learning becomes much more effective when the whole school community becomes involved.

Teachers should be aware that they are also filtering their own actions through a specific cultural lens, and that their success depends on how well they interpret and transverse the cultural diversity in their classroom. Misinterpretation and misconceptions by teachers, and also by students, can result in negative experiences, a breakdown of relationships at multiple levels, and

a disruption of learning, or refusal to learn, and disengagement by students. Cartledge and Loe label these undermining and potentially frustrating situations as “cultural discontinuities” (p. 35). For this reason, Cartledge and Loe, along with other prominent authors (Pewewardy, 1998; Dimmock & Walker, 2005) promote cultural competency and cultural sensitivity for educators and school leaders.

According to Cartledge and Loe (2001), cultural competency means that teachers “will become skilled in their perceptions of the culturally specific behaviours of their students and will be able to distinguish these actions from problem behaviours or behaviour disorders” (p. 38). They advise “cultural sensitivity can be expressed through our unprovoked emotional reactions to people” (p. 38). Cartledge and Loe warn that a teacher’s effectiveness and awareness can be reduced by reactions (e.g. fear, mistrust, pity) that are “based solely on the ethnic or racial characteristics of an individual” (p. 38). This also is an indication of reduced cultural sensitivity. Dimmock and Walker (2005) suggest that “transfer and mobility of theory, policy, and practice between systems needs to be more ‘culturally sensitive’” (p. 18). They further explain that cultural sensitivity “needs to begin at the formulation rather than at the implementation stage” and that this “approach requires a better understanding of culture and cross-cultural similarity and difference” (p. 18). For culturally responsive philosophy and practice to become established in a school and for it to positively impact student learning, both affective and cognitive aspects of learning need to be embraced throughout the school in various forms (e.g. policy, curriculum etc.) and become consistently evident in teacher behaviour.

*The Reflective Practitioner:
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Teachers’ Belief Systems*

Richards, Brown and Forde (2007) posited that culturally responsive pedagogy focuses on individual and collective strengths, and because it “facilitates and supports the achievement of all students” (p. 64), it is learner-centred. Richards, Brown and Forde identify three dimensions of culturally responsive pedagogy: (a) *institutional*, (b) *personal*, and (c) *instructional*. The institutional dimension comprises of the values and policies upheld by the school administration. The cognitive and emotional processes that teachers intentionally experience to become culturally responsive is representative of the personal dimension. The instructional dimension refers to the materials,

activities and strategies used to support culturally responsive pedagogy and instruction. As in the Medicine Wheel, educators should strive for synergy, and the balance of the three dimensions. However, the authors note, "While all three dimensions are important ... the two most relevant for teachers' work: the personal and instructional dimensions" (p. 64).

As teachers prepare for teaching that is more culturally sensitive, they are encouraged to deeply reflect and explore their own history, and their own feelings, beliefs and values toward differences in culture and differences in people. Richards, Brown and Forde (2007) explain:

Teacher self-reflection is an important part of the personal dimension. By honestly examining their attitudes and beliefs about themselves and others, teachers begin to discover why they are who they are, and can confront biases that have influenced their values system (Villegas & Lucas 2002). Because teachers' values impact relationships with students and their families, teachers must reconcile negative feelings towards any cultural, language, or ethnic group. Often teachers are resistant to the notion that their values might reflect prejudices or even racism towards certain groups. When teachers are able to rid themselves of such biases, they help to create an atmosphere of trust and acceptance for students and their families, resulting in greater opportunity for students. (p. 65)

The intent of this introspective exercise is to understand and, in some instances, challenge barriers (e.g. stereotypes, etc.) that inhibit learning and healthy relationships, to strengthen a teacher's overall identity, and to establish a commitment to creating a culturally sensitive classroom.

Donald Schön (1983) encouraged educators to bring to the surface basic assumptions that are taken for granted in daily routine. Once evaluated, values and beliefs can be affirmed or challenged and changed. Schön (1983) identified two types of reflective thinking: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action can be viewed as an 'action-present' exercise in thought; reflective thinking happens while a problem is being addressed, when the outcome is outside of one's "knowing-in-action". Reflection-on-action happens after decisions have been made. In this conscious exercise, decisions and practice are deeply evaluated to promote effectiveness of future actions, and actions and decisions that address anticipated issues are determined. Schön viewed the reflective thought process as an essential exercise for educators because it helps to clarify and strengthen educational

philosophy and it promotes improvement in practice. This personal journey, one that includes an evaluation of thought and practice, can have profound professional implications and positive influences on student learning.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Alongside developing cultural competency and consequently reflective practitioner skills, educators can explore culturally responsive teaching (CRT) practices. Culturally responsive teaching involves: using resources, teaching material, and instructional strategies that respect the culture, life experience, and the learning needs of each student; acknowledging the contribution that each student has made to the culture and learning dynamic of the classroom; consistently maintaining high expectations for all learners; and the formation of relationships with students that are genuine and caring (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000; McKinley, 2005; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997 as cited in Howard, 2007). "For indigenous learners, being 'culturally responsive' means being sensitive, aware, and capable of employing cultural learning patterns, perspectives, family structure, multiple world views, and tribal languages in the teaching, learning and mental ecology of the classroom" (Pewewardy, 1998, p. 31). In this respect, Pewewardy also encourages a transformational and holistic approach to education, and the need to acknowledge "the organic, subconscious, subjective, intuitive, artistic, mythological, and spiritual dimension of our lives" (1998, p. 33). Insight, depth and creativity are required in this approach to learning.

Cartledge and Loe (2001) summarize culturally responsive and culturally relevant teaching to four principles. They state, "Educators must become cross-culturally competent and skilled in the basic principles of culturally relevant teaching. Among other things, teachers must learn ways to discern behaviour problems from cultural differences, create positive and affirming environments, communicate and foster desired classroom behaviours, and use the child's culture as the basis for critical social learning" (p. 44). CRT requires teachers to be aware and responsive at multiple levels – extrinsically and intrinsically.

Teachers are encouraged to model behaviour that is respectful and to use language that maintains a student's dignity and builds confidence. As a result of culturally responsive teaching, students are likely to experience consistent and meaningful affirmations of their cultural identities. The National

Aboriginal Education Committee from Australia highlighted the importance of identity formation: "Identity needs to be securely founded and maintained in their own cultural frame of reference. For it is only when a person's identity is firmly established and stable that they can attempt to cross into other different cultural frames of reference without becoming lost or confused" (1989, p. 10, as cited in Children's Service Office, 1993, p. 14). Students who have an understanding and a secure sense of their own identities are likely to have the confidence and curiosity to ask critical cultural questions, and to be open to learning about people outside of their own cultural communities.

From the review of literature, recurring themes of culturally responsive teaching are evident. Collectively, the whole school community can learn more about the concept and practices of culturally responsive teaching by establishing research and leadership teams, and creating professional development communities based on the topic. These collective staff opportunities also offer support for those teachers practicing culturally responsive teaching. However, in an individual and collective perspective on cultural relevance, passion for learning is vital (Ladson-Billings, 1994, as cited in Cochran-Smith, 1997, p. 38). Educators need to have the desire and the passion, to teach in a culturally responsive manner if it is to gain hold and momentum in the classroom. Passion is very evident and can be seen by students; it has a way of being infectious and can be used to transfer important lessons to students about humanity. In addition, CRT raises the social consciousness of everyone in the classroom, acknowledges the students' whole self, emphasizes the beauty of humanity, facilitates relationships based on respect and dignity, and utilizes the strength of diverse cultures in the classroom to enhance learning. It demands the best from everyone. In the process, higher learning is achieved as curriculum content is enriched by the cultural experiences of ethnically diverse students.

In a climate and culture that supports CRT, it is safe to presume that the teaching of Aboriginal perspectives is also supported. The effective teaching of Aboriginal perspectives in a positive CRT climate and culture is still a topic of exploration.

ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES: BRIDGING THEORY TO PROMISING PRACTICE

In learning how to effectively teach Aboriginal perspectives, many teachers may look for models or best and/or promising practices to draw inspira-

tion from and to guide teaching instruction. Cochran-Smith (1997), however, does caution the degree of replication:

Knowledge and interpretive frameworks, as well as ideologies and political frameworks, guide and are guided by the practices that teachers develop and alter over time to meet the current and future intellectual ... social, and emotional needs of culturally diverse learners in specific school and classroom sites. Because teachers' practices are not discrete from, but profoundly interdependent with, their knowledge and interpretations, these practices cannot be understood, as "models" of effective teaching or, as is sometimes referred to in the current reform literature, "best practices." Given all that we know about the diversity of teachers' and students' cultures, experiences, and ways of knowing, and all that we know about the diversity of classrooms themselves as cultures, it is extremely unlikely that there will ever be specific effective practices that are transportable – full-blown and whole – from one classroom and school site to another. (pp. 47-48)

Best and/or promising practices are contextual and directed by student needs; however, increasingly, there are exemplars of Aboriginal perspectives in practice. There is also more examination of the quality of Aboriginal educational resources by Aboriginal educators and scholars. This somewhat newly directed focus should generate quality resources that will lead to providing support for both teachers and students.

For a teacher, the confidence and comfort level decreases when there is an expectation to teach an unfamiliar concept, topic or subject (Bulter, 2000). Bulter cites Groome (1994), "Many teachers comment that they feel more comfortable engaging in Aboriginal content of the form, most commonly referred to as 'traditional' culture, rather than what are regarded as politically laden contemporary cultures" (p. 98). The perception is that pre-contact and traditional forms of Aboriginal history are fixed, therefore, more teachable. Butler also adds that the complexity of the topic for many teachers is increased with the language, traditions, customs, language diversity, and the contemporary urban-rural differences and challenges. Consequently, "in search for the definitive Aboriginality, teachers fall into the trap of synthesizing Aboriginal cultural traits to form a generic Aboriginal culture in which central [Aboriginal] cultural traits are seen as desirable and appropriate for all Aboriginal people" (p. 98). A danger in teaching Aboriginal perspectives

in this manner is that Aboriginal people are presented as “static, apolitical, ahistorical constructs” (p. 98). The evolution and adaptive nature of a culture and a people is ignored.

Butler (2000) identifies three ways in which teachers implement Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum and classroom programming: teacher use of Aboriginal life histories, Aboriginal speakers and Aboriginal education professionals, and the use of Aboriginal students. Each of these approaches can have issues. With Aboriginal life histories, teachers have to discern the quality of resource material and know how to interpret the readings and/or audio-visual material. Butler suggests using material that has been approved by credible educational and Aboriginal organizations. Bringing in Aboriginal peoples to share experiences and teach Aboriginal perspectives and content is perceived as most credible and is most accepted by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (p. 97). Through this approach, teachers are also learning; however, Butler cautions the transfer of teaching responsibility of Aboriginal perspectives to the Aboriginal presenter. She warns, “Some teachers fail to engage with the spirit of policy requirements, consigning some Aboriginal aspects of education as outside their understanding or effort” (p. 97). In many cases, the already under-funded, under-staffed, under-resourced and sometimes unrecognized Aboriginal support becomes ‘over-taxed’. The final approach, the utilization of Aboriginal students, is most problematic. This may be the only time that a student gets “singled-out” and perceived as the pseudo-expert, and they may not be comfortable with presenting personal experiences with their classmates. The degree of cultural and historical knowledge that students process vary, and this information may not meet the expectations of the teacher and the students – further increasing the risk of failure in the eyes of the student. The goal and major responsibility of educators is to make education responsive (Sapre, 2000, p. 304) and, in this case, culturally responsive.

In the Master’s research, *Integrating Aboriginal Content and Perspectives: The Experience of Four Elementary School Teachers*, Gilchrist (2006) discovered that the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives and content in classrooms varied, indicating that there are numerous approaches to infusing FNMI perspectives. Gilchrist noted:

One teacher was informal in her approach and she shared different perspectives...another teacher stated that the level and depth of integration changed with teaching experience. (2006, p. 32)

Whatever the teaching and learning strategy may be, Kanu (2005) supports systematic and an integrated approach. Kanu insists:

Inclusion, however, has been interpreted and practiced by teachers as occasionally adding non-dominant cultural perspectives to the school curriculum, leading radical multicultural theorists to advocate for full integration (meaning infusion throughout the school curriculum) to support more fully the learning of non-dominant culture students and maximize their chances of school success (Banks, 1994; Gay, 2000). (p. 51)

Inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives should permeate the school culture and contribute to the positive climate that the school community feels on a daily basis. In this case, inclusion is a lifestyle, a way of being and doing in the classroom and throughout the school.

In their Australian study on programming aimed at engaging Aboriginal students, Lowe and Tassone (2001) identified three critical issues to success: greater understanding and recognition of the issues faced by Aboriginal students and communities is necessary; greater attention in curriculum development initiatives and in school programs for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students; and, successful implementation of programs is largely dependent on 'ownership' by school staff (pp. 12-13). As Fullan with Stiegelbauer (1991) and this study supports, ultimately, the success of school change is dependent on the buy-in, implementation, and evaluation exercises of school staff and teachers. Patterson and Rolheiser (2004) also state, "When groups of teachers, working hand-in-hand with school administrators, commit to changing the culture in their schools, they get results" (p. 1). The success of the delivery of Aboriginal perspectives in the Alberta Social Studies curriculum depends on the willingness of teachers, grades K-12, to develop and prepare their knowledge, skills and attitudes for the purpose of positively impacting their students. Although there are basic principles of Aboriginal perspectives, conceptual and themes of strategy, success also largely depends on 'praxis'; knowing how to bridge theory to practice which begins with "[g]oing public with questions, seeking help from colleagues, and opening up one's classroom to others go against the norms of appropriate teaching behaviour" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 87, as cited in Cochran-Smith 1997, p. 37).

According to Orr (2004), Social Studies programs that are inclusive of Aboriginal perspectives provide teachers with the opportunity to "teach for" Aboriginal issues rather than simply "about" Aboriginal histories, cultures

and knowledge. According to Orr, “teaching *for*” Aboriginal issues, has as its central curricular goal that students will arrive at a deeper understanding of Aboriginal social issues. It is based on the premise that a main focus of teaching Canadian social studies is to develop students’ ability and commitment to serve as citizen advocates for greater social justice and equity for Aboriginal peoples. Teaching *about* ... [Aboriginal] peoples takes the position that as social studies teachers we teach about Aboriginal peoples, with no emphasis on social justice and equity. It assumes that in a democracy competing perspectives should and will be brought forward and it is the individual’s responsibility to sort through these competing perspectives. (pp. 165-166)

“Teaching *for*” Aboriginal issues in Social Studies is likely to encourage affective learning opportunities for all students to develop the attitudes and values that will ultimately contribute to student demonstrations of ‘social compassion, fairness’ and social justice for Aboriginal peoples.

CONCLUSION

It is important to reiterate that classroom practice is contextual, so there is no correct prescriptive method to teaching Aboriginal Perspectives. Meaningful learning happens when a teacher intimately knows himself or herself, and knows his or her students – where they come from and from what worldview they interpret their environment. Reaching this state of intimate understanding, may require deep, second-order change processes. In this respect, second-order change constitutes the seeking of personal understanding in relation to the environment. This process of discovery is a courageous movement, a shift to a place below the surface, to a more protective place, a place where the affective domain resides – a place where values and beliefs evolve. It is in a sense, a vision quest. If conscious, deliberate changes happen for an educator at this level, the chances of sustainability for those changes increase – the desired changes are captured for the future. As the literature throughout this document supports, second-order, deep seated changes in both the cognitive (the way Aboriginal peoples are known) and affective (the beliefs and feelings towards Aboriginal peoples) domains are needed for meaningful and ‘effective’ teaching of Aboriginal Perspectives in the Alberta Social Studies curriculum; they are needed to perhaps address what the Elder indicated in the beginning of the document, to move towards “something more right” for Aboriginal students, for all students.

To what extent do teacher attitudes, norms, values, basic assumptions and behaviour influence authentic inclusion, infusion and embedding of Aboriginal perspectives in the Social Studies program? As the findings from this literature review reveal, the affective domain (i.e. teacher attitudes, norms, values, basic assumptions) directly influences the quality and degree of inclusion, infusion and embedding of Aboriginal perspectives in the Social Studies Program. This knowledge increases the importance for a balanced approach to the teaching and learning of Aboriginal Perspectives.

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