

Education Letter

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Aboriginal Education

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Rosa Bruno-Jofré, *Faculty of Education, Queen's University*

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This issue conveys the Faculty of Education's commitment to the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada and beyond. The approach intersects the transnationality of histories of colonialism with the need to critically re-address ill defined notions of education that, while operating as technologies of transformation, have often lost sight of the humanity of people. The article by Te Tuhi Robust takes us to New Zealand and to the struggles of the Maori people to re-imagine education in general and to create an actual physical space embodying their culture at the University of Auckland.

In the last thirty years, the history of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada, the richness of their cultural experiences along with the acknowledgement and critical understanding of their suffering, have been at the core of many educational projects envisioned and implemented by the Aboriginal Peoples. Lorne Belmore shows us how the Children of the Earth School in Winnipeg

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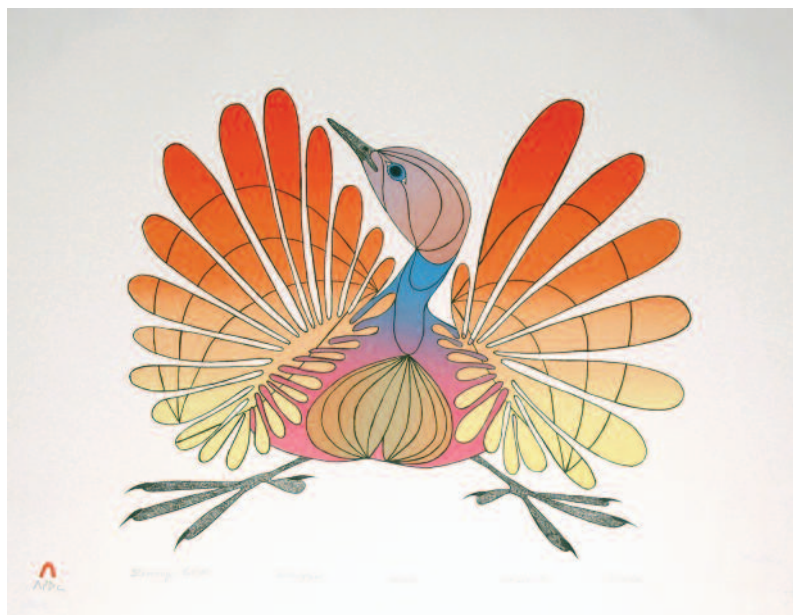


Figure 1: *Flaming Bird* by Aoudla Pudlat. Image provided by the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery with the kind permission of Cape Dorset Fine Arts.

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¹Todd, S. (2009). Can There Be Pluralism Without Conflict? in Nicholas C. Burbules, *Philosophy of Education* 2009. Philosophy of Education Society: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 51-61, quotation from 53.

represents a fascinating and successful example of the creation of an ideal in which the aesthetic and spiritual dimensions of education are part of the students' experience. Meanwhile, governmental initiatives such as the Ministry of Education's *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework*, launched in 2007, have stimulated new ways of learning, as well as a new engagement with the Aboriginal communities and parents, with the student population, and with the public both inside and outside the school, as Kate Freeman and Kevin Reed explain. Our Aboriginal Teacher Program (ATEP) has played a small role in the development of teachers working in their communities by delivering our program in their settings. Carole Morrison brings a personal dimension to this issue in her conversation with an ATEP graduate Ms. Debbie Debassige, member of the M'Chigeeng First Nation (Manitoulin Island), who has recently accepted the position of Director of School Services for K-12 for Kenjegin Teg Educational Institute, located in M'Chigeeng, and with Eden Beaudin, Ms. Debassige's grade 5 student.

The recognition of the place of Aboriginal peoples in our history, and in the major context of human experience, has powerful implications for education. The legal acknowledgement of diversity as a human right in international conventions and statements implies the recognition of the complex cognitive and psychological qualities defining an individual and her interaction with her cultural environment. It also calls for careful attentiveness to the development of subjectivities, always in process, and to what Dewey referred to as intellectual hospitality (openness, respect, and mental courage). Concomitantly, the new situation calls for a broadening of the conception of what it means to have and acquire knowledge. Chris Beeman's article poses important questions regarding our perceived meanings and functions of Aboriginal education that are in need of clarification, but more importantly he advances the notion of educating Aboriginally as a new avenue in the process of teaching and learning. This is an issue at the core of a questioning and inquisitive pedagogy that searches for terms of inclusion.

We, in Faculties of Education, encounter the challenge to think about the complexities of the issues related to Aboriginal education and diversity in general. Thus, following the lead given by Sharon Todd, it is also important to think about the radical singularity of the subject (our student) as a central feature of pluralism and about the notion of being-with others (with its inherent conflicts) in light of an understanding of democracy as an "open ended practice of negotiation through which articulations offer transformative potential".¹

When Aboriginal education becomes learning, Aboriginally

CHRIS BEEMAN, *Faculty of Education, Queen's University*

What is Aboriginal education? A pretty simple question, at first glance. It has to do with Aboriginal peoples, and it has to do with learning. But the devil—that would be the one of European importation—usually lurks in the details. I want to ask, first, what is the nature of *Aboriginal*, in the phrase at hand? Then I would like to talk about learning, and finally, I would like to suggest that we also consider the question, what is learning, *Aboriginally*?

I have noticed that many job postings use the phrase *Aboriginal scholar*. That is what employers say they are seeking. When I see this phrase, I normally ask whether the term is meant to refer to an Aboriginal person who is a scholar, a scholar interested in Aboriginal issues, or an Aboriginal person with a scholarly interest in Aboriginal issues. Usually, there is no answer given—to do so would too clearly expose at least two possible versions of a racializing or racist stance. One stance would eliminate or select based on race. The other would presuppose the research interests of a scholar based on his/her racial description. I mention this because when the term Aboriginal is used in the context of education, we need to be careful about who the Aboriginal person is, and perhaps, what it means to be Aboriginal. To do this, we need to view the term in historical context.

Let me not suppose that I can do more than to mention context in the few hundred words allotted to me. Suffice it to say that the social and political informing of *Aboriginal*—let's say, what it feels like, the social weight the term carries, as opposed to its literal definition—has changed substantially in the history of Aboriginal education in North America. *Aboriginal*, or its equivalent, has referred to the enemy, to the impoverished and unfortunate casualties of colonization, to those who were here from the beginning, to those who need to be assimilated, to those deserving of respect for their own distinct culture, to those alternately, pitied, romanticized or envied, and to countless other variations. An examination of how the permutations of *Aboriginal* have affected Aboriginal education, I leave for another time.

What is the function of Aboriginal education now? Is it, perchance, to enable Aboriginal peoples to enrich, solidify, explore, articulate, protect, and honour what is distinct about themselves? Is it to enable Aboriginal peoples to function as part of a country whose underlying principles—if one is to look at, say, the weight or function of the natural world in consideration of a cosmology—are so different from their own? Is it both? Is it to compromise, where compromise is an ethical one? Or is it to compromise, where compromise reflects tolerance?

And what of the divisions over such questions amongst Aboriginal peoples themselves? A simple answer would be to say that Aboriginal peoples ought to decide. A democratic stance would surely favour the working out of such divisions, with majorities choosing the course of action. Which majorities, when? And in whose version of democracy? How are cultures to authentically choose their future within the legal bracketing of a dominant one, whose world view also happens to dominate the planet?



Figure 2: Two Birds and Three Fish by Eliyakota Samualie. Image provided by the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery with the kind permission of Cape Dorset Fine Arts.

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Cajete, G. (1993). *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education*. Durango, Co: Kivaki Press.

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I have raised some questions about the context of Aboriginal education. Now, to some particulars. Is the Aboriginal, in *Aboriginal education*, a student, a teacher, an elder? Let's say *Aboriginal* can refer to all of these. Does that mean that the phrase at issue is justly applied when any one of these positions is occupied by a person of the correct racial category? I think most would disagree with this—only the most superficial meaning of *Aboriginal education* is rendered just because someone involved is Aboriginal.

So, perhaps it is content that is important. This is certainly significant. To try to understand a writer such as Anne Waters would be an uncertain project were the history of Aboriginal peoples in the Americas not also considered. We need to know different versions of history. We need to know about cultures, traditions, stories, art, science, medicine and philosophies that differ from a central view. And we need to learn these knowledges within paradigms of thought that differ from standard Western views.

But beyond these, I raise one last idea here because it rarely gets the consideration it deserves. This is mode of learning. In a recent paper, I proposed that we speak less of Aboriginal education and more of educating, *Aboriginally*. In other words, another important element pertaining to the term at hand is how learning and teaching occur. Some of the elders I have worked with talk about learning, differently. Their models tend to be characterized by listening and attunement within an alert, receptive stance. They speak of careful, detailed observation, deriving from this position. In this model, learning is almost always experiential. It is self-directed but carefully guided. It often involves the natural world. It responds to the needs of a community and helps identify one's place in it, where community is defined in both human and more-than-human terms.

What has this got to do with a faculty such as our own? If we accept that modes of learning are central to Aboriginal education and if, by extension, we might consider adopting teaching practices suited to these, then suddenly, what is seen as so "foreign"—and therefore so otherable—can reveal aspects of familiarity, after all. For those with an interest in recent progressive movements in Western education such as place-based learning, the principles sketched in the paragraph above might, with minor variations, be simply called effective learning, supported by good teaching. While the earlier questions I raised are significant for contextualizing the discussion, currently, I am interested in modes of learning that bridge cultures. Perhaps, more accurately phrased, I am interested in what educating, *Aboriginally*, can bring to learning in the modern West.

Indigenous Space - Ancestral connections within Contemporary Tertiary Settings: *another Era or another Error*

Dr. Te Tuhi Robust, *Director Operations (Northland) University of Auckland, NZ*

Introduction

The development of indigenous space within the tertiary sector, in particular state funded universities has been a challenge that has been addressed in different shapes and forms in New Zealand. At the University of Auckland the reporting profile confirms the university's commitment to meeting the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and is an example of the repositioning of the largest tertiary institution in New Zealand to address issues of equity and diversity. However, an important element of this strategy was the building of a traditional Maori meeting house known as a marae. This came about amidst a period of protest from Maori and non-Maori who sought to create the ancestral building within the main campus of the University. In 1988 the ancestral house 'Tane Nui A Rangī' was opened and remains one of the few traditional and fully carved or decorated meeting houses in a university.

Maori Education and Development

Underpinning this development is a history of significant events that have impacted on Maori education in New Zealand. Since 1835 with the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the subsequent signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 between Maori and the Crown or Government, New Zealanders and others witnessed lengthy periods of conscientization, resistance and transformation affecting New Zealand society. This process is sustained by the concept of kaupapa Maori theory¹ or Maori principles and practices. As the key elements in kaupapa Maori research, the conscientization, resistance and transformation encouraged opportunities to discuss the significant educational events and situations that had impacted on the educational progress of the Maori people, indigenous to New Zealand society.

In 1961, the publication of the Hunn Report² encouraged teachers and others to ensure that Maori were assimilated into New Zealand society. This led to the closure of Maori Schools in 1969 under the Education Act 1964. This legislation was superseded in 1989 and has since led to considerable changes within the education system of New Zealand in

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Figure 5: Bird of Baffin by Aoudla Pudlat. Image provided by the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery with the kind permission of Cape Dorset Fine Arts.

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¹Smith, G. (1997). *The Development of Kaupapa Māori Theory and Praxis*; (unpublished thesis), University of Auckland, Auckland.

²Hunn, J. K. (1961). *Report on Department of Maori Affairs: with statistical supplement, 24 August 1960*. Wellington: Government Printer.

³Benton, R. (1987). *How Fair is N.Z. Education? Part II, Fairness in Māori Education: A Review of Research and Information*. Report Commissioned by the Royal Commission on Social Policy, New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Wellington.

⁴Benton, R. (1993). *The Māori Language Needs of te Kohanga Reo*. Prepared for Te Puni Kokiri, Wellington.

⁵The Wānanga Capital Establishment Report: *The Waitangi Tribunal Report* (1999). Government Printer: Wellington.

⁶Ibid

⁷Retrieved from <http://www.waitangi-tribunal.govt.nz/>

⁸Freire, P. (1971). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Hammondsworth: Penguin.

the form of Maori medium education. The Benton³ research in 1971, found that the demise of native or first language speakers in te reo Maori/Maori language was inevitable if something was not done to preserve, grow and maintain fluent speakers. The conscientization or awareness raising in relation to this issue (discussed by Graham Smith 1997), led to assertive transformation by a number of Maori in the 1980's. Parents actively withdrew their children from state funded schools, which were implementing the assimilative policies, to develop and implement forms of Maori medium schooling. In 1982, the first state funded kohanga reo⁴ was opened at Waiwhetu Marae, Lower Hutt, Wellington. This led to the development of the kohanga reo movement which boasted over seven hundred Maori language nests during the 1990's. This phenomenon led to the creation of state funded Kura Kaupapa Maori schools, the first such school being Te Kura Kaupapa Maori o Hoani Waititi, Glen Eden now celebrating its 25th anniversary. This particular school as with other kura kaupapa caters to students from early schooling to university or Whare Kura level courses of study.



Figure 4: Waitangi-Meeting House. Photo taken by Phillie Casablanca.

However, mainstream universities are now striving to attract graduates from kura kaupapa schools. Whare Wananga or Kaupapa Maori based universities have been developed and receive government funding. Further legislative change to the Education Act 1989 enabled Wananga to be recognised and aligned to other state funded universities. This emerged as a result of the Treaty of Waitangi Wananga Establishment Report named as claim Wai 781⁵.

'A wananga is characterised by teaching and research that maintains, advances and disseminates knowledge and develops intellectual independence, and assists the application of knowledge regarding ahuatanga Maori (Maori tradition) according to tikanga Maori (Maori custom).'

Section 162(4.b.iv) of the Education Act 1989

The Wananga Establishment Report included discussion on the submissions made by the three wananga Maori established as tertiary education institutions under the Education Act 1989 that the Crown had failed to recognise the right of Maori (in terms of the Treaty of Waitangi), to receive capital funding, in order to properly provide for the education of Maori through programmes, and in an environment, designed to enhance their tertiary educational opportunities.⁶

The Waitangi Tribunal was established in 1975 by the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975. The Tribunal is a permanent commission of inquiry charged with making recommendations on claims brought by Maori relating to actions or omissions of the Crown that breach the promises made in the Treaty of Waitangi.⁷

Summary

The complexities of culture continue to pose a challenge to mainstream universities in New Zealand. The development of the three state funded Wananga - Te Whare Wananga o Awanuiarangi, Te Wananga o Raukawa and Te Wananga o Aotearoa are examples of institutional repositioning profiled on kaupapa Maori principles and practices and reflects the progression of Maori education since the Education Act of 1989. The rapid movement of Wananga and specializations in Maori Studies and Indigenous levels of research and development such as, Te Whare Wananga Awanuiarangi, a tribal based wananga, create opportunities to offer students courses and credentialed study pathways to a doctoral level on the New Zealand Qualifications Frameworks, and affirms Paulo Friere's⁸ statement of *'know the word, know the world'*. The presence of ancestral houses within universities suggests that universities continue to meet their respective Treaty of Waitangi obligations. However, Universities have a long way to go to be aligned to Wananga principles and practices, and therefore to having a true cultural commitment such as Wananga to New Zealand society.

The Framework In Action: Bringing First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy to Life

KATE FREEMAN, *Aboriginal Teacher Education, & Aboriginal and World Indigenous Educational Studies, Faculty of Education, Queen's University &*

KEVIN REED, *Aboriginal Education Consultant, Limestone District School Board*

The sun is shining brightly as fifty high school students from the Limestone District School Board and the Algonquin Lakeshore Catholic District School Board gather around the sacred fire at the home of Ojibwe Elder Bernard Nelson in Kingston, Ontario. Bernard shares teachings of the medicine wheel, the sweat lodge, and the seven grandfathers. His wife, Tammy, provides a feast of buffalo stew and wild rice. The students are participating in one of the many activities that have grown out of the Ministry of Education's *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework*¹ launched in 2007.



Figure 6: *Caribou in the Distance* by Mayureak Ashoona. Image provided by the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery with the kind permission of Cape Dorset Fine Arts.

The framework is designed to support learning and achievement by Aboriginal students, and to raise awareness about First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples' cultures, histories, and perspectives for all Ontario students. The framework provides a structure within which the Ministry of Education, school boards, schools, and Aboriginal communities and parents may work together towards those goals.

Since its launch in 2007, the *Framework* has stimulated much activity. A progress report published in November 2009, *Sound Foundations for the Road Ahead*² offers statistical and anecdotal information to indicate that a great deal of progress has been made in the last three years.

The report is of particular interest at Queen's University Faculty of Education, where Aboriginal teacher education has been offered since 1991. It indicates that the Ontario College of Teachers is exploring strategies to meet the need for a significant increase in the number of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit teaching and non-teaching staff across Ontario. Report findings show that enrolment in Native Studies and Native Language courses has steadily increased since the *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* was launched. This increase is, in part, because a number of boards have stepped forward to offer these courses in light of expanded funding. In 2007-08, thirty-five boards offered Native Studies and/or Native Language courses, almost twice the number of boards (eighteen) offering these courses in 2005-06.

The First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Supplement, introduced in 2007 to provide increased funding to boards for use in supporting the cost of Native Languages and Native Studies programs, has increased from \$10.5 million in 2007 to \$19.1 million in

2009-10, because of increased enrolment in Native Languages and Native Studies courses.

We are now seeing a range of creative developments flowing from this initiative. These include the capacity-building “Circle of Light Conference 2009,” where educators shared best practices related to Aboriginal education, and the Teacher’s Toolkit³. Two new Native Studies textbooks are scheduled for completion in the next year. (These Ontario-focused textbooks are for the Grade 10, *Aboriginal People in Canada*, and the Grade 11, *Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Aspirations in Contemporary Society*⁴. They are being thoroughly reviewed by First Nation, Métis, and Inuit experts from across Ontario.)

The *Framework* has stimulated increased engagement, knowledge-sharing and collaboration in a number of ways: through such vehicles as community Aboriginal education advisory committees (about 40 percent of boards have such a committee); through events and outreach sessions; through increased participation of Aboriginal parents in the schools; and through contributions of Aboriginal students.

Locally we can see specific examples of the *Framework* in action. These examples demonstrate increased collaboration, pedagogical innovation, and new opportunities for professional development.

In the Kingston area, the Limestone District School Board joined with the Algonquin Lakeshore Catholic District School Board to create a joint Aboriginal Advisory Council. Both boards have initiated Aboriginal self-identification programs.

The new Ministry funding for Aboriginal Education has allowed the LDSB to hire an Aboriginal Education consultant and a student support worker dedicated to Aboriginal students. The board also promotes professional learning about Aboriginal cultures and history and activities and events at the school level.

For teachers, the LDSB held a symposium on Aboriginal cultures and pedagogy in May 2009 to raise awareness of the *Framework* and kick-start its implementation. The board currently provides workshops for teachers on Aboriginal topics. Regionally, the board facilitated a Native Studies Professional Learning Community to enhance the skills and knowledge of Native Studies teachers in Eastern Ontario.

Elementary teachers from across the board are creating a curriculum document, which builds on the ministry’s own Teacher’s Toolkit, to make it easier for teachers to incorporate Aboriginal content into elementary classrooms. The document, which reflects the local First Nation, Métis, and Inuit populations, is grounded in the existing curriculum and suggests ways of incorporating Aboriginal content using Big Ideas⁵. Curriculum development has been supported by increased connections between the board and Queen’s Faculty of Education, which provides teachers with support such as access to its education library, and assists by identifying suitable resources.

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²Sound Foundations for the Road Ahead: Fall 2009 Progress Report on implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework. Retrieved from www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/SoundFoundation_RoadAhead.pdf

NOTES

³This toolkit and related information may be found at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/toolkit.html>

⁴Kevin Reed is a contributor to the Grade 10 text.

⁵Big Ideas are used to cluster curriculum expectations and facilitate cross curricular instruction. The Big Ideas used in the document connect to Respect, Relationships, and Change.

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For students, the board has taken steps at both the elementary and secondary levels. Self-identified Aboriginal elementary students can attend a part-time program which provides cultural teachings. The board also runs programs such as Aboriginal play days and storytelling sessions, and transports students to the annual powwow organized by the Katarokwi Friendship Centre. Secondary students can participate in an annual student conference on Aboriginal cultures and histories. They can take an increasing number of Native Studies courses; the number of courses has increased dramatically, from none in 2007 to eight in the 2009-2010 school year.

Schools in the board have also taken the lead, applying for grants to support projects such as the creation of a drum group and the painting of murals with Aboriginal themes. The board continues to build stronger relationships with local Aboriginal organizations and communities.

A great deal has been accomplished, but there is more to do over the next few years to ensure continuity and success. The November 2009 progress report identifies four main areas for development: deepening implementation through more resources and dedicated school and board personnel; increasing the degree of self-identification by First Nation, Métis and Inuit students; supporting teachers through ongoing professional learning; and increasing the degree of consultation with First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities. These areas of need exist at both the provincial and local levels. Continued enhanced funding is still essential to building momentum.

While integration of Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum is increasing, the progress report noted that additional work is needed to reinforce the relevance and importance of raising awareness of Aboriginal perspectives among all students. Increased collaboration with Aboriginal partners is essential to ensure content and pedagogical authenticity. It is through improved connections and growing collaboration that we can bring the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy to life.



Figure 7: *Drum Dancer* by Egeradluq Rajee.
Image provided by the University of Lethbridge
Art Gallery with the kind permission of Cape
Dorset Fine Arts.

Honouring Aboriginal Learners - A 20 year Model

LORNE BELMORE, *Principal, Children of the Earth School, Winnipeg, Manitoba*

As aboriginal learners leave their homes the first time to enter into mainstream schools, they rarely have positive experiences. They enter into a new bewildering world that does little to validate the experiences they have had to this point in their lives. As a result, these individuals must very quickly learn to walk a tightrope, a tightrope between their traditional teachings, languages and the views of world order and the expectations of our school systems. It is not the fault of individual schools nor of the staff; the difficulties that these vulnerable learners experience is based upon societies' expectation of uniformity. This does not include the aboriginal students' culture, traditions and belief systems, everything that they had held as their personal truths. For it is in our schools that the further erosion and loss of this all important cultural identity continues across our nation, to a segment of our population who is least capable of recovery.

Over 20 years ago Aboriginal parent groups in the Winnipeg School Division were concerned with startling facts. The children that they were entrusting to these traditional Canadian schools were rapidly losing their identity as proud aboriginals and were at risk of becoming a society of individuals with no true cultural identity.

Most of these parents were survivors of residential schools or survivors of the lingering effects of these institutions. They were appalled by the loss of identity their children continued to experience at their neighbourhood schools. They viewed the loss of aboriginal perspective, traditions and languages in mainstream euro-centric Canada as a last stand for our people. The gift of our histories passed down from our elders was being systemically invalidated by the lack of acknowledgment of its existence. After all, North American history started in 1492.

In 1988, in response to these concerns, the Winnipeg School Division, in consultation and cooperation with various community groups such as the Thunder Eagle Society, Urban Aboriginal Educational Advisory Committee and parent groups, began what was then considered a bold undertaking. They established a high school in Winnipeg's North End that emphasized Aboriginal culture, language and academics. A school that harkens back to the lessons of our ancestors, and made valid the concept of Aboriginality in the education system. It allowed First Nations youth the freedom to practice their culture in a place where it was once prohibited, in schools. In 1991, it opened as the "Aboriginal High School" and after consultation with its educational community the name "Children of the Earth" was submitted by a student, and adopted.

Students who now attend Children of the Earth are honoured to embrace our school's three mandates as it is these mandates that work to validate our students' educational experiences.



Figure 8: School children working at the Children of the Earth School, Winnipeg, Manitoba

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- 1) Heritage Languages – All students from Grade 9 – 12 are required to take heritage Cree or Ojibwe classes every year for their time at our school.
- 2) Traditional – Cultural Inclusion – All students participate in cultural programming. We engage two traditional Advisors to help ensure that our content is culturally appropriate. In true aboriginal fashion individual experiences are designed to meet the students' comfort level. While some students may decide to participate in a respectful minimalistic fashion at monthly pipe ceremonies, others may opt to become fully immersed in school offerings of sweat lodges, naming ceremonies and gender based teachings.
- 3) Inclusion of Aboriginal Perspective in current Curricula – In all curricular areas, the aboriginal viewpoint of the class or unit is incorporated to help validate the concepts presented to our students. From connections in Biology's human reproduction to Women's Skirt teaching / Moon cycles and Trigonometry to aboriginal structures and the medicine circle. These connections help our students to relate to the subject on a higher level of understanding and to feel pride in traditional knowledges.



Figure 9: A Game with a Ball by Pitseolak Ashoona. Image provided by the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery with the kind permission of Cape Dorset Fine Arts.

In addition to attention to our mandates, we strive to deliver innovative programming designed to increase retention to graduation and to foster interests in post secondary opportunities. Programs such as our Grade 9 Ka-mah-mo-beyot Ikwezansuk (All Girls Program) strives to develop personal skills in academia and self esteem to one of Canada's most highly victimized groups, young aboriginal females. Our award winning Medical Careers Exploration Program puts our students working in operating rooms next to the surgeons or preparing patients for MRI / X-ray procedures. The programming offered is designed to ensure that our students develop into the well rounded, highly motivated individuals who have a healthy understanding of who they are and where they come from that our nation requires.

Since its inception, Children of The Earth High School has evolved into a centre for heritage language instruction, cultural activities and incorporation of Aboriginal Perspective into Provincial curricula. The pedagogy promoted at the school is culturally-based, flexible and centred on the needs of our 225 students. As the model of our school evolved, numerous successes followed such as well above average graduations rates, a top ten Canadian High School designation from MacLean's Magazine and national awards for innovative program design. Our work aims at strengthening both Canadian and Aboriginal societies, as Peoples from the Four Directions learn how to work together in an honest, respectful, peaceful and trusting way on their mutual and distinct social goals.

Alumna Profile

CAROLE MORRISON, *Office of Advancement, Faculty of Education, Queen's University*

Debbie Debassige, B.Ed '96, is one of four generations of teachers in her family. Her daughter, Deanna, graduated this year from the Queen's University B.Ed program. Ms. Debassige is a member of the M'Chigeeng First Nation (Manitoulin Island). The Island is in Lake Huron, is approximately 1068 square miles, and is home to approximately 12,600 people. Ms. Debassige has recently accepted a position as Director of School Services for K-12 for Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute, located in M'Chigeeng.

1) Can you tell me a little about the degree you took?

I did a BA at Laurentian and then I did a B.Ed through ATEP (Queen's University - Aboriginal Teacher Education Program).

2) Did you come to Kingston or did you study in another community?

I studied on Manitoulin Island, a two year B.Ed program and then we came to Kingston for 2 weeks during each of the two summers.

3) How did the community you studied in affect your work and your life?

Oh yeah, it affected everything. I was more at home studying here. I felt in touch with the community at the same time I was doing my course work and learning new things. I had closer links with the community when I started working than if I had not studied here. I felt more comfortable. The atmosphere helped us open up more, ask more questions without fear. The course delivery was good. We didn't feel judged when we gave presentations or talked in class.

4) Are you teaching now? If so, where do you teach?

Yes, I teach at Lakeview School on Manitoulin Island and I have taught here for 18 years.

5) What are the biggest challenges you face as a teacher?

Meeting the literacy needs of my students is my biggest challenge. Students all have different levels. They each have different needs and I want to help them each achieve their grade level. I see gains made throughout the year but it can be a challenge.

6) Does coming from an aboriginal community make a difference in your teaching?

Yes, I have a very strong connection with the community and I have a very strong connection with parents. Coming from this community helps my confidence and helps parents have confidence in me. I have never had a serious problem with any parent. I have an open door policy and the ability to communicate with parents.



Figure 10: Three Caribou & Hunter in Kayak by Pudlo Pudlat. Image provided by the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery with the kind permission of Cape Dorset Fine Arts.

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Figure 11: *Summer Owl* by Kenojuak Ashevak. Image provided by the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery with the kind permission of Cape Dorset Fine Arts.

7) In your opinion what programs would enable more aboriginal people to pursue a degree in education?

There is a need for more native teachers. Lots of people take the ATEP diploma program but if they want to do the B.Ed they need more courses. We need a BA program in our area. There are some courses offered through Sault College, Laurentian University and Queen's University but we need more. Courses in Psychology and Sociology would help people to get their requirements. It is harder to do these courses by long distance education. More of the required courses should be offered here.

8) Is there anything I haven't asked that you feel is important for your colleagues and former classmates to know?

We have an advantage being from a First Nation School. We can relate more to community and relate to the environment, to Mother Earth. The cultural teachings, pow wows, naming ceremonies all help students to be close to their culture, their language. It increases language fluency. We can also bring in resource people and programs to the school, including local health authorities and other professionals. Larger boards may not have those partnerships.

The following is an interview with Eden Beaudin who is in grade 5 and a student of Ms. Debbasige. Eden is also a member of the M'Chigeeng First Nation. After writing and self-publishing her first book, *The Adventures of Pegasus and I and all our Friends*, Eden developed and coordinated The Pegasus Literary Writing Award. With local school support and ads in the newspaper, Eden raised more than \$1,000 on her own and was recognized with the Ontario Junior Citizen of the Year award in 2008. We wanted to hear Eden's thoughts about school. It is no surprise to learn that Eden's favourite subjects are reading and writing.

1) How many teachers teach you each day? Do you go to classes with lots of different teachers? Or do you have one homeroom teacher?

I have 2 each day. My teacher (we don't call them homeroom teachers but I guess that is what I mean) and one other teacher, sometimes for Ojibwe class or for music class.

2) Throughout your life have your school teachers been from your community or have they come from another community in order to teach?

Mostly they come from our community.

3) Do you think it makes a difference if the teacher is from your community, if he or she has lived there a long time?

Yeah, because if they come from our community they know us. Teachers from away don't know us. They could learn Ojibwe but our teachers mostly know Ojibwe already. They know the language.

4) You said your favorite subjects at school are reading and writing. What else do you like at school?

We do lots of stuff. Something my teacher did was start a recycling program. We clean dishes and raise money for field trips, like to Clapperton Island. We go on a boat.

5) Do you think school is important and if so why?

School is important to learn, to get a good job, so you can have a good future.

6) What else would you like to tell me about school or about your teacher?

My teacher Debbie always challenges me to learn more. I think my teacher is awesome because she does lots of activities with us. These are always fun. She also did education week. It was an awesome set up. I made a family tree project.

Queen's Education Letter

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Figure 12: *First Ice* by Soroseelutu Ashoona. Image provided by the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery with the kind permission of Cape Dorset Fine Arts.

Dorset Fine Arts represents the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative. Like the 34 other co-operatives of its kind in Canada, this community Co-op was established to provide income, employment and services to growing communities.

For additional information and to locate galleries where Inuit fine art is available, please visit <http://www.dorsetfinearts.com/about.html>

On Friday 28 May, we held our Education Alumni 2010 Spring Reunion Dinner. Our guest speaker was the Honourable James K. Bartleman, former Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. He received a standing ovation for his very thought-provoking talk on aboriginal youth. Please view the link for information on Mr. Bartleman's newest passion – a personal library for aboriginal students in remote First Nation communities. <http://www.clubamick.ca/>