Decolonization, Animation, Knowledge Mobilization

Marie Battiste joined Lynne Bell and L.M. Findlay to report on a project of decolonization undertaken at the University of Saskatchewan, dedicated to "animating postsecondary education."[1] No longer content with efforts to recruit and retain Aboriginal students, Battiste and her colleagues focused on "the presumptions and content of university curricula and disciplinary knowledge,"[2] which remains "Eurocentric," a fact that, they assert, functions "to shelter and sanitize a destructively colonial and Eurocentric legacy."[3] They cite the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, 1996), calling on "Canadian academics to decolonize their traditional presumptions, curricula, research, and teaching practices in order to live up to their obligations, mission statements and alleged priorities for Aboriginal peoples."[4]

The task of decolonizing education requires "multilateral processes of understanding and unpacking" the conceptual edifice of "domination, patriarchy, racism, and enthocentrisms" that perpetuate the "academy's privileges in place" with "institutional and system-wide centering of the Indigenous renaissance and its empowering, intercultural diplomacy."[5] Cohering this far-flung set of strategies is "animation," a term they assert is "ripe for reclamation from the Eurocentric grip of Judaeo-Christian theology, classical philology, modern anthropology, and Jungian psychology."[6] They continue: "Our version of animation enacts process principles whose educational force inheres in recognizing and honouring the abilities and gifts of Aboriginal peoples," thereby recognizing that

> Aboriginal education requires a process of participation, consultation, collaboration, consensus-building, participatory research, and sharing led by Aboriginal peoples and grounded in Indigenous knowledge rather than the (neo)colonial command economy that imposes programs, courses, and information generated in the university by academics and administrators to "assist" Aboriginal students.[7]

Battiste and her colleagues cite several "sites of animation," among the "the Elders," "Ethical guidelines," "Educational materials," "*Sui generis curriculum*," all requiring a "*Critical Indigenous mass*" structured by "Dialogues and networks" making an "ethical, creative community effort" toward an *Indigenous renaissance*."[8]

Also working from the RCAP (1996), Brant Castellano, Davis and Lahache characterize Aboriginal education as central to regaining Aboriginal self-control "over their lives as communities and nations," requiring the transformation of education from one of assimilation to one of self-expression and self-determination."[9] In the 1980s, non-Aboriginal policymakers had acknowledged that "Aboriginal concepts of

education were valid for Aboriginal peoples," and "a few isolated voices were beginning to articulate an awareness that Aboriginal approaches might have value for a broader constituency."[10] The "present generation" is at the "fulcrum of history," they assert, and the "promise of education will be fulfilled," as "Aboriginal people know that the will to learn is inseparable from the will to live."[11] Restoring the "dignity" of "Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning" – drawn from both "Elders' teachings and "the world around them" - is essential to renewing cultural "vitality."[12]

Abele, Dittburner and Graham focus on public policy (from 1965 to 1992) as it relates to Aboriginal peoples, looking specifically for evidence of "progress towards mutual understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives."[13] Their key question is: has there been "effective public policy dialogue"?[14] To answer they identify "three distinct phases"[15] in the dialogue on policy: (1) the period from the release of the Hawthorn Report until 1982, the year of constitutional patriation; (2) the period from 1982 until 1988, the year the Assembly of First Nations blueprint for education, *Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future* (Assembly of First Nations 1988), was released; and (3) 1988 until 1992, just after the establishment of RCAP.[16] Abele, Dittburner and Graham underline "the importance of specific events in shaping education policy."[17]

Brant Castellano focuses on the "information legacy" left by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), a CD-ROM *For Seven Generations*, a "unique resource" in her judgment, "touching virtually every aspect of Aboriginal people's lives and their relations with non-Aboriginal people in Canada."[18] Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators across Canada were provided with an early version of the CD-ROM and were invited to provide feedback on how the materials could be used in current curriculum; an Education Guide for secondary school and adult learning was included.[19] However, "the breakthrough sought by RCAP in secondary school and adult education has not yet been achieved" due to the "limited use of the CD-ROM by educators."[20] Brant Castellano called for a "joint effort on the part of government and interested members of the public to publicize the existence and to promote the study of RCAP's information legacy."[21]

COMMENTARY

Decolonization promises (re)animation of past cultures, "reactivation"[22] in my terminology, a "renaissance" of Indigenous cultures (as Battiste and her colleagues phrase it). While Abele and Battiste and their colleagues emphasize institutional and collective elements, others – like Fanon[23] – acknowledge the subjective and social elements of decolonization. In these formulations "process" would seem to be elevated

above "content," but as Brant Castellano's study shows, decolonization depends on knowledge and its mobilization.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Battiste, Bell and Findlay 2002, 82.

[2] Battiste et al. 82-83.

[3] Battiste et al. 2002, 83.

[4] Battiste et al. 2002, 83.

[5] Battiste et al. 2002, 84.

[6] Battiste et al. 2002, 86.

[7] Battiste et al. 2002, 86.

[8] Battiste et al. 2002, 91-93.

[9] Brant Castellano, Davis and Lahache 2000, xi.

[10] Brant Castellano, Davis and Lahache 2000, xiii.

[11] Brant Castellano, Davis and Lahache 2000, xvii.

[12] Brant Castellano, Davis and Lahache 2000, xvii.

[13] Abele, Dittburner and Graham 2000, 3.

[14] Abele, Dittburner and Graham 2000, 3.

[15] Abele, Dittburner and Graham 2000, 4.

[16] Abele, Dittburner and Graham 2000, 4.

[17] Abele, Dittburner and Graham 2000, 4.

[18] Brant Castellano 2000, 147.

[19] Brant Castellano 2000, 150.

[20] Brant Castellano 2000, 151.

[21] Brant Castellano 2000, 153-154.

[22] Pinar 2015, 31.

[23] Pinar 2015, 188.