

Book Reviews

Indigenous Education Models for Contemporary Practice: In Our Mother's Voice. Maenette Kape 'ahiokalani Padeken Ah Nee-Benham and Joanne Elizabeth Cooper (Eds.). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2000, 202 pages.

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Indigenous Education Models for Contemporary Practice: In Our Mother's Voice by Maenette Kape 'ahiokalani Padeken Ah Nee-Benham and Joanne Elizabeth Cooper is a unique and exciting approach to addressing the important question of what philosophy should drive education for Aboriginal peoples. The authors contest the main premises of the Western model of education by developing an educational vision that is rooted in, and supportive of, Indigenous ways of knowing. The book emerged from a gathering at Sol y Sombra in Santa Fe, New Mexico, that brought together a select group of 14 Indigenous educators from New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the United States who have been recognized as leaders in their own communities for their work in establishing innovative responses to educational challenges. The book explores these individuals' community and/or tribal perspectives on education and attempts to situate them in a pan-Aboriginal series of principles. For this the book's authors are to be commended.

The book holds great promise as a tool to help various First Nations frame and give voice to their perspectives on education and to engage in the construction of an Indigenous educational policy and practice. Refreshing about the book is its representation of models using real-life artifacts that were constructed by participants to assist them in telling their individual and tribal stories of education. Each participant was asked to design his or her ideal model using objects from the environment where the gathering took place such as feathers, rocks, and plants and then to use their model to express in words their understanding of an Indigenous model fit for their particular community. This method could prove useful to other educators, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, in that it frees individuals from the bondage of organizational language and opens a more aesthetic and holistic space for thinking about philosophy. Unfortunately, these graphics are photographed from a distance, and clearer details would greatly enhance the description and meaning of each

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model and serve as a more vivid and useful catalyst for further development of Indigenous models by other individuals and groups.

Nonetheless, each model gives us a snapshot of what is unique about each of the tribal groups that are represented at the gathering. We have an opportunity to see and hear some of the unique features of Maori, Okanagon, Native Hawaiian, Oneida, Cochiti Pueblo, Blackfoot, Cherokee, Ojibwe, Athabaskan, and Australian Aborigine educational philosophies from the perspectives of these 14 participants. This provides the reader with the opportunity to see the diversity of various Aboriginal communities and to get a sense of some of the particular challenges and accomplishments of each group. Individuals told their own stories of how they were attempting to educate their communities to preserve or restore language and culture and to live harmoniously and productively between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds. These models make up most of the text and are presented in sections according to one of the four thematic perspectives of epistemology, language and culture, spirituality, and community, which are used to frame participants' educational models. Thus the models show us some of the key priorities that each group sets out for its community.

Although the book succeeds in presenting a framework for affirming a range of individual Indigenous perspectives on education, it is difficult to accept all these models as equally valid. Are these models new ideas, or are they in use and actually being implemented in these communities? We do not know for sure that they are working. All we know is that they are ideas that leading educators are advocating. Some, such as Okanagon educator Jeannette Armstrong from the En'owkin International School of Writing, indicate that their models are being implemented. Jeanette Armstrong wisely points out that it may take 20 years before the full extent of her model's effectiveness is known in her community. However, she indicates that anecdotal evidence suggests it is leading to fuller use of Aboriginal language in her community. Many of the models do not make these important qualifications, and the editors do not help us to see this. A final chapter or a concluding section to each model is needed that would assess the degree to which each model is a representation of actual practices, how widely accepted it is in the particular community, and the potential and actual impact of the model for addressing each community's educational needs.

It is also not clear if the views expressed by these educators are widely held by members of each Aboriginal community. Although there is great value in having such renowned educational leaders as these identify clearly what they see as needed in their particular communities, it is important to be clear that often it is their individual opinions, not those of their communities, that we are hearing.

Little empirical evidence supports these models at present, and the main value of this books is not in its truth, but in the catalyst it provides for exploring more fully the need to seek deeper and fuller meanings of what educational practices should be. The authors have assisted the participants in creating a going-to-the-source framework to help Indigenous communities think about their educational aspirations in relation to their communities and the assimilat-

ing tendencies of the dominant Western society. In this case, the construction of a common model is built across Indigenous cultures rather than in one particular Indigenous community. Although it is presented as a useful vehicle for bringing together Indigenous communities with different political, epistemological, and cultural concerns and issues, we need to ask if this idea is realistic given the many diverse perspectives across and within Indigenous communities. The going-to-the-source model and the processes used to create it may serve as a useful way to bridge political differences that divide many Aboriginal communities at the individual community level. Currently there are few examples of communities where there is a consensus on what educational values should be used to advance First Nations communities. It is more common in my experience that communities are politically divided, if not politically paralyzed, because of competing perspectives between educational goals that are uniquely Aboriginal and those that are largely assimilating forces of the Eurocentric and mainstream. Benham and Cooper's model-building process, which focuses on the organic metaphors of planting, gathering, and harvesting provides a refreshing framework for storytelling that goes beyond individual telling and focuses on the need for collaborative construction of meaning. As such it may serve as an important way to unite divided communities.

Although this book could benefit from more empirical evidence to validate its model or further clarification of the limits of its models, we should celebrate the storytelling it uses as an important aspect of Aboriginal research methodology. Using stories as a vehicle to show the importance of Aboriginal ways that have been passed to these participants by elders *In our Mother's Voice* has important implications for helping Indigenous communities to frame their educational goals in a way that is uniquely Aboriginal. It will no doubt provide inspiration to others working in Aboriginal education (as it has to me in my own work with Mi'kmaq educators in Nova Scotia) in attempting to set a direction for community-controlled education that is rooted in an Aboriginal world view.