

**King, C. (2022). *The Boy from Buzwah: A Life in Indian Education*.
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What makes us either Odawa or Cree or Inuit or Mohawk is not the statistics of how many suicides are in our community or how poor we are – but it is our different way of seeing the world around us – our relationships with our Manitou, Mother Earth, the Plants, Animalkind, and other Human Beings (King, 2022, p. 335)

Cecil King is an educational leader and activist for Indigenous-led education in Canada. In his 2022 memoir, *The Boy from Buzwah: A Life in Indian Education*, King purports to tell the story of his life. However, King's memoir quickly becomes a counter-story to that which King argues is espoused by academics – of Indigenous peoples as victims, “the red objects of white subjects” (p. 118). Instead, this memoir tells of Cecil King and many others as ambitious, intelligent, and complex Indigenous peoples leading Indigenous control over Indigenous education in Canada. In this review, I argue that King's memoir is a counter-story to academic deficit discourse and an exposé of the importance of recognizing epistemological diversity. Deficit discourse, in the context of Indigenous education, refers to the pattern wherein Indigenous education is framed in terms of problem, failure, and deficiency (Gillies, 2023; Mc-Callum & Waller, 2022; Vass, 2013). In depicting epistemological diversity, King argues that Indigenous epistemologies are best illustrated through language and that because of this, Indigenous languages must be taught and respected in education. As a life story, an academic retort, and a philosophical debate, King's memoir will be valuable to educational practitioners, policymakers, and researchers alike.

The Layout of the Book

King's memoir is clearly laid out from the mind of an educator, in that before sharing the narrative, King provides “direct teaching of the elements” (p. 47) needed for readers to wholly understand King's story: a short note on the language used and a map of the location where his story begins. Throughout the book, King includes Ojibwe words, spelled “in [his] own way,” explaining that, from his experience, speaking and being understood is more important than using time and energy to debate the rules of orthography for the language. Further, King's introduction to Ojibwe orthography also introduces King's primary argument that Indigenous epistemology is best represented through understanding language. The map of Manitoulin Island helps readers visualize and experience the land on which King's story begins: Manitowaning Bay in the Wikwemikong Unceded Territory. At over 300 pages, this memoir is a lengthy retelling of a long and fulsome life, organized across 10 chapters.

King's Early Life and Education

Chapters One to Four tell of King's early life. In Chapter One, King describes the education provided to him by his guardians, Pa (Grandfather: John King), Mama (Grandmother: Harriet King), and Kohkwehns (an elder who lived with Pa and Mama). King tells stories of growing up in Two Clock and learning from his guardians what he sees as the building blocks of successful education: high expectations, direct teaching style, holistic worldview, unconditional support, clear expectations of behavior, and "above all else, convincing the child that it matters to you that [they are] successful" (p. 48). In Chapter Two, King describes his elementary schooling under the tutelage of four qualified Indigenous teachers at the Buzwah Indian Day School, and in Chapter Three, the lessons King learned in Buzwah outside of formal schooling.

Chapter Four is perhaps the most obvious example of King's effort to counter deficit discourse. Here, King recalls his experiences earning his secondary education from Jesuit missionaries at St. Charles Garnier Residential School. King's life in residential school, which he defines as "schooling where you also live" (p. 118), is not characterized by abuse or neglect, but rather by high expectations, personal accomplishments, and a few comical examples of Jesuit missionaries' academic priorities. For example, in describing learning ballroom dancing and singing operettas, King comments, "I have yet to use this civilized behaviour to get a job or further my education" (p. 119). King does not deny the abuses of the residential school system for some Indigenous children nor the ongoing effects of colonialism. In Chapter Ten, he describes residential schooling teaching him and his peers that his "language, history, and stories were quaint [...] and] that our ancestors were brutal savages" (p. 324), lessons that he had to unlearn throughout his later life. However, King does deny the deficit discourse of Indigenous peoples as characterized only through victimhood, abuse, and deficiency, which is too often inadvertently perpetrated through academic investigations of Indigenous education.

King's Career Trajectory and University Life

In Chapters Five to Eight, King recounts his career trajectory and university life: first, working a number of odd jobs, from fruit picking to cleaning ketchup vats, then beginning his teaching career in West Bay School on the reserve on Manitoulin Island (Chapter Five). King tells of how his career unfolded thereafter, with many teaching appointments, ongoing learning through summer courses, helping revive Wikwemikong powwow, and developing the Guidance Counselling Program for Indigenous students in Ottawa (Chapter Six). It is here that King's story abuts into deficit discourses about Indigenous ability. When King returned to his home in Wikwemikong to continue his career, he was relegated to teaching English literature, despite having administrative experience, while a nun who had been a classmate in teachers' college was made principal, as the sisters of St. Joseph were firmly in control of education. King observes that, without any band authority involvement, Wikwemikong education seems "as if it has gone backwards" (p. 167), with Indigenous people losing control over their education. As one example, Ojibwe was again banned from the school space, and French was introduced instead. From this observation, King's activism began, with conversations starting about how to teach Ojibwe in schools, organizing the first powwow since the banning of such ceremonies in 1895 (the Canadian Encyclopedia, n.d.), beginning civil service work as an Indigenous advocate and guidance counsellor.

In pursuit of credentials that would help him move through the ranks of civil service and be more impactful in his advocacy work, King pursues formal credentialing, earning a bachelor's and master's degree from the University of Saskatchewan (Chapter Seven) and a PhD from the University of Calgary as the university's first Indigenous PhD recipient (Chapter Eight). At the same time, King describes how his professional career progressed during this time: the Director of the Indian Teacher Education Program at the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College (Chapter Seven), a faculty member in the University of Saskatchewan's Indian and Northern Education Program, and a researcher and historian of the life and legacy of J. B. Assiginack and many others (Chapter Eight). In all of this experience, King is telling the story of advocating and leading the movement for Indigenous people to control Indigenous education. Whereas the rest of King's memoir is written in a narrative style, these two chapters slip into a historian's recounting of roles, events, and politics. For those readers who are not policymakers or researchers, this change in tone may be alienating. However, King's narrative tone returns in his final two chapters reflecting on his life.

King's Reflections

Chapters Nine to Ten of King's memoir represent the conclusion of his work in Indigenous education. In 1992, King moved to Queen's University for a position as a full professor and director of teacher education, then took on the title "Professor Emeritus" in 1997, then Dean of First Nations University campus in Saskatoon (Chapter Nine). In recounting his work advocating for Indigenous languages and Indigenous control over Indigenous education, King is arguing for the importance of seeing epistemological differences between Indigenous and Western cultures, that become evident through language. Further, King reprimands institutions for their failure to see Indigenous epistemologies as contemporary and valid. In discussing the need for Indigenous languages, laws, and ceremonies to be taught alongside contemporary Western languages, laws, and ceremonies, King decries the pattern of positioning Indigeneity as "museum cultures" (p. 317), rather than as living, dynamic, and valid aspects of contemporary cultures.

Finally, in Chapter Ten, King aims to fulfill what he believes is the point of a memoir, "to look at the lessons learned in a lifetime and remember the mentors who strongly influenced their life" (p. 323). Accordingly, King summarizes the lessons he learned in his early life, formal education, 18 years teaching elementary education, work in Indigenous teacher programming and advocating/leading Indigenous control over Indigenous education, and 20+ years working in postsecondary institutions. It is here, after presenting a list of what he believes is required to teach Indigenous students – a list clearly built on the teachings of his guardians described in Chapter One – that King writes the excerpt I have included as an epigraph to this review. Here, King summarizes what I see as the underlying lessons of his memoir. That story of Indigenous peoples ought not to be told through deficit discourse ("[we are] not the statistics"), but through language that captures epistemological diversity ("our different way of seeing the world").

Conclusion

King's story is more than a memoir of an educational advocate's life; it is the counter-story to the deficit discourse that pervades academic writing on Indigenous education. Just as King saw that non-Indigenous control over Indigenous education led to Indigenous culture, language, and history being erased from Wikwemikong, he saw that his counter-story to abuse in residential school was "discarded" as "unimportant" and "disregarded" (p. 117). In response, King writes this memoir, taking control over his story just as he advocated for Indigenous control over Indigenous education for all these years, and just as he did in 2013, writing *Balancing Two Worlds: Jean Baptiste Assiginack and the Odawa Nation 1768-1866*. In both, King positions Indigenous people as active agents who contribute to and embody success. In essence, *The Boy from Buzwah* aims to reshape the understanding of the role of Indigenous people in the history of education, highlighting Indigenous peoples' agency and achievements rather than focusing solely on victimhood. Beyond telling his counter-story, King's memoir also acts as a compendium, telling the names and successes of many other canonical names in Indigenous activism, including but not limited to Gilbert Whiteduck, Dr. Sharon O'Brien, Dr. Arthur Blue, Freda Ahenakew, Smith Atimoyoo, Joseph Brant, and Basil Johnston. This, again, adds to the argument that King's memoir is a counter-story to the deficit discourse that pervades academia regarding Indigenous education. Herein, King has created a piece of Canadian educational literature that tells the counter-story of the history of education in Canada, where Indigenous peoples are more than victims; they are the purveyors of success.

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