

Coming Full Circle: Looking to Grandmother Moon

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In many ways Grandmother Moon calls upon us to (re)member Land. Her connections to the tides of the oceans and the rhythms of life bring us back to our essential connections and responsibilities to Land and understandings of self-in-representation. It was important to us that this special issue came out in the spring as Grandmother Moon offers particular teachings associated with each month and, in particular, the full moon cycles. There are many teachings connected to Grandmother Moon and they vary land to land, nation to nation, community to community. Jamie Sams, a Cherokee and Seneca Elder (1994) shared what she was taught by Kiowa Elders about the original 13 Clanmothers and the Grandmother moon teachings. According to Sams, throughout the spring moon cycles Grandmother Moon calls upon us to listen with our hearts in order to hear and see the truths understanding ways to be self-determining while working toward finding healing solutions and accepting the truths. In Anishinaabe teachings, the spring moons are associated with rebalancing our lives, cleansing our spirits, recognizing our life energies and spiritual core, as well as reconciliation. Each of these calls upon us in some way to balance our energy, open our minds and hearts to multiple perspectives, look to the teachings for guidance and (re)member our responsibilities to Land and all our relations. Each of the articles in this special issue calls upon us open to our eyes, minds, spirits, and hearts to considering Indigenous thought regarding Aboriginal education.

Throughout the articles in the special edition we explored Land and its varied connections to education across diverse geographical and epistemic locations. These varied epistemic locations make it important to discuss where the authors are in terms of their understandings of the relationships inherent in Land or land and its connections to education. Zinga and Styres (2011) introduced the capitalization of Land in recognition of the “fundamental being of Land and its role in the conceptualization of identity for Indigenous peoples” (p. 62) as well as in recognition of Land as a living entity. This has been taken up in the further work of Styres and Zinga within this special issue and within the Styres, Haig-Brown and Blimkie article. Other authors while recognizing and understanding the spirituality of Land have expressed their understanding of land in various ways and commonly refer to land without capitalization. We have retained the authors’ use of Land and land when discussing their articles and contributions to the journey we have undertaken in this issue.

Our journey around the circle began with Debassige and his exploration of Aboriginal literacy within an Anishinaabe context. Debassige discussed the oral sharing of Indigenous knowledge and how it is adapted to the social context in which the sharing occurs. He also stressed the importance of sustaining a lived relationship with stories and

of understanding the complexities associated with writing down knowledge. Debassige revealed his connections to land through sharing the vision of a turtle shaker that led to the development of a theoretical model and practice as well as sparking a spiritual exchange that actively informed and co-constructed his understandings of spirit-centred literacies. Where Debassige challenged us to open our minds to a broader understanding of literacies through a connection to land, Styres and colleagues immersed us in understandings of land within the urban context. Styres, Haig-Brown and Blimkie took us on a journey through the spiritual, emotional and intellectual aspects of Land and how those aspects inform our understandings of self-in-relation. Central to their theorizing is the understanding that Land is the first teacher and understandings of the centrality of Indigenous peoples' relationships with Land as core to educational curriculum and development. Restoule, Gruner and Metatawabin also grounded their work within land and contextualized it within Mushkegowuk ways of knowing. Like Styres et al, they stressed the importance of connecting to land and understanding the various complex relations connecting Aboriginal youth to the land. Restoule et al shared the concept of paquataskamik and explored how Elders share knowledge with young people and teach them traditional ways of knowing that centre upon an identity that is historically and geographically informed by land.

Catlin shifted our consideration of land and its complex relationships into the classroom. While Restoule et al spoke of learning on land, Catlin challenged us to consider how connections to land can be invited into the classroom to inform our understandings of multiliteracies. She spoke of how Elders' interactions with land are beyond the capacity of the English language to adequately capture the nuanced and spiritual activity that can be described in Aboriginal languages. McGregor also discussed the role of traditional ways of knowing in the classroom as contextualized within Nunavut. Throughout the article we were asked to consider that schooling in Nunavut draws upon Inuit foundations and has emerged out of educational self-determination, which poses some interesting considerations. Within the classroom the curriculum has to achieve a balancing act that will assist youth in living in two worlds and equip them to understand the concerns of one of those worlds' aspects such as multiculturalism and human rights while also understanding cultural notions of responsibility and Indigenous sovereignty. Youth need to be able to be grounded in their cultural traditions and to understand how traditional knowledges can move forward into the next generation. Kitchen and Hodson also addressed the challenge of balancing two worlds in their consideration of an Aboriginal teacher education program. They stressed the importance of relational knowing and the centrality of relationships within Aboriginal education. In contrast, Deer considered ways to integrate Aboriginal perspectives into a mainstream pre-service education program. Deer spoke of how transformational approaches that offer alternative viewpoints and social action framing were needed to assist preservice teachers from engaging in tokenistic pedagogy when integrating Aboriginal perspectives into their future classrooms. Similarly, Madden, Higgins and Korteweg also engaged in a consideration of tokenistic pedagogies when they examined the role of Aboriginal community members in a local school board and schools. Like Deer, they addressed the tendency for Indigenous knowledge to be broken down into disconnected pieces that could be fit into mainstream curriculum. Madden et al stressed the necessity of drawing

upon Indigenous knowledge holders as foundational to the process of integrating Indigenous knowledge in meaningful ways. Both the Deer and Madden et al articles posed tough questions about who should be integrating Indigenous knowledge into Canadian curriculum. Madden et al spoke with Aboriginal community members who were concerned that teachers that lacked the lived experiences, inherited knowledges, cultural relationships with or permission from Indigenous communities were teaching Indigenous content.

Bomberry brought us back to community in her exploration of how Haudenosaunee ways of knowing have provided her with a foundation to understand the complex meanings and realities associated with being a Native person who walks in two worlds. By sharing her educational journey and her evolving understanding of her own identity as contextualized within her community, Bomberry offered insights on the educational challenges mainstream education presents for Aboriginal youth. She also stressed the primacy of community in education and in understanding the intricate realities and relationships within Aboriginal communities. Continuing the focus on community, Styres and Zinga explored the primary role of community and the centrality of Land within Indigenous education research. They articulated the importance engaging in a decolonizing journey that opens up ethical spaces in which power differentials can be engaged while equitable and balanced relationships and responsibilities are continuously negotiated. They challenge and disrupt normative boundaries and push against the margins imposed by mainstream practices and understandings.

Throughout this special issue, exciting initiatives within Indigenous education have been shared. The articles, each in their own unique way, challenge those engaged in Indigenous education to ask the tough questions and push against imposed margins and false dichotomies that offer prescribed spaces for Indigenous education to fit within mainstream pedagogies and practices. Indigenous thought is deeply rooted in and informed by ancient teachings, very old pedagogies and understandings of self-in-representation. It is time to (re)member our connections to Land and find ways to bring these storied ways of knowing to bear on addressing the complex realities faced by Indigenous youth in the classroom and across all educational and landscape contexts.

Everyone has their own journey and through this special issue an opportunity has been provided to share in and learn from the journeys of others. Zinga and Styres (2011) speak about how journeys are deeply intimate and personal and as such cannot be transplanted as each individual needs to find their own path. Educators and those involved in education systems need to decide how they will choose to respond to the call for action within Indigenous education. Indigenous thought will not be successfully and meaningfully engaged in education as long as it is seen as an add-on to the mainstream curriculum or forced to conform to and be manipulated into spaces and roles defined by mainstream educational approaches. Indigenous thought has the potential to transform the ways we think about and *do* education. The challenge that lays before educators is whether or not we have the courage step outside our confined and standardized classroom and embrace change, face the complex and tangled realities surrounding Indigenous education and journey forward by creating ethical spaces where power relations, tensions

and challenges may be engaged in meaningful ways. A good place to start is by asking whose traditional lands we are currently on. What is our relationship to that land, and what are the historical and contemporary stories that are layered upon and woven into Land.

References

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Zinga & Styres (2011). Pedagogy of the Land: Tensions, Challenges, and Contradictions. *First Nations Perspectives 4*, 59-83.