

EDITORIAL – ON COALITION AND REPARATIVE POLITICS: LANGUAGE, CONTEXT, AND HISTORY

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coalition: a temporary alliance of distinct parties, persons, or states for joint action; the act of coalescing

coalesce: to unite as a whole; to unite for a common end

reparative: of, relating to, or effecting repair

politics: the total complex of relations between people living in society
(Merriam Webster OnLine Dictionary)

Since we constructed the call for this special edition, more accurately since the research around which my submission to this volume was conducted, I have become increasingly conscious of my use of terminology for the work that is the theme of this special issue. That is, I am aware that increasingly I refer to this work as immersing in “coalition and reparative politics” rather than “coalition work” or “coalition building” or “building alliances.” In using the former (coalition and reparative politics), I embrace the language of Cynthia Burack (2004) who reminds us of the importance of language and her “conviction that shared social contexts discursively shape the identities and belief systems of political actors” (p. 3). Burack attends to Black feminist thought, which, she notes, serves to raise compelling questions about group membership. I primarily address Indigenous group contexts while simultaneously recognizing the multiplicity of identity groups, which include among others those of race, ethnicity, religion, ability, and sexual orientation. Representations of each are potentially embedded within any so-called

identity group that makes up the complex structure of politics in today's world that Burack alludes to. To argue the importance of attentiveness to language, I return to Burack's (2004) words:

Attentiveness to language is an ongoing project because we are constantly building on and revising the knowledge of the past. But it also continues to be necessary because as language users we are always prone to forget or to misremember why we were so concerned about language in the first place. (p. 8)

Such attentiveness to language is a thread running through the articles in this issue and I invite the reader to be conscious of the language usage of each author, some in deliberate, provocative ways, others in more subtle nuanced ways, to note generalizations and, as Burack did, "to consider them in context, and to remain skeptical about them" (p. 8). In adopting Burack's language, defined above, my intent is to illuminate the messiness, the discomfort, the disruptive and complex nature of the work, to highlight that in group relations we all at different times may exhibit forms of cooperation that go beyond what is usual while at other times exhibit seemingly irrational forms of belligerence, hostility, or contentiousness. Yet ultimately, the goal is to unite for a common end, to repair, respond to, and act upon the previously buried knowledge of the past and to recognize the complex of relations between all people in a shared society.

As one might expect, my thinking about significant concepts and issues continues to evolve over time in relation to observations, experiences, readings of new texts, and recursive passes over previously read texts. That is, with each reading, I see the possibility of second and even third readings of those texts, and recognize an ever-growing array of plausible interpretations and applications of allusions within the texts, and in some cases, elevated importance and clarity. For example, Burack (2004) conceptualizes coalition politics at three levels of analysis: conflict within the self, within the group, and between groups – and argues that the three frames are mutually constitutive and inextricably related to one another. I adopt these frames in my article in this issue. However, while facilitating a session on coalition and reparative politics recently, with a group of largely but not exclusively First Nations people, I was asked to revisit these frames, to dwell there longer, in relation to a woman parti-

participant's view that "coalition" meant to bring people together, which of course is accurate. Revisiting those frames along with providing contextualized examples (some of which were drawn from the group) and paraphrasing what it means to be "mutually constitutive and inextricably related to one another" rather than brushing lightly over them proved invaluable. There is no intention here to suggest "dumbing down"; on the contrary, it is to recognize the import of these frames and how our grasp of them may play out for each of us with subsequent returns to consider them. In fact, as that session wound down, another woman verbalized how she had begun to think about those three frames in relation to other concepts and arguments shared during the session. Further, she now recognized as argued that the first frame, conflict within the self, might indeed be the most challenging to take up because to do so requires us to examine our own assumptions, bias, and attitudes and how they impact intragroup and intergroup dynamics. Alluding to these three levels of analysis in this editorial is intended to raise the reader's consciousness of these frames in like manner and to note how they may be in evidence in the articles in this issue, however implicitly or subtly stated.

Logically, each author interprets the notion of coalition politics in varying ways in relation to her or his respective contexts. My opening article "Coalescing in Cohorts: Building Coalitions in First Nations Education" defines coalitions. I discuss the purposes and principles of coalitions, and clarify the relationship between intra- and inter-group contexts, arguing that cohorts in First Nations education, indeed any cohort, ought to be sites for working through tensions, differences, and assumptions; that is, they ought to be sites for intra-group coalescing that simultaneously prepare students for inter-group encounters.

In "Native Education and In-Classroom Coalition Building: Factors and Models in Delivering an Equitous Authentic Education," Saunders and Hill provide a backdrop of Canadian Native education before offering a curriculum model developed as a means of reversing the failed outcomes of previous initiatives. Through their model, they recognize the imperative of developing coalitions among educators and students.

In the third article, "Decolonizing Knowledge Production: The Pedagogic Relevance of Gandhian Satyagraha to School and Education in

Ghana," Adjei dares to examine how the Gandhian philosophy of Satyagraha (non-violent resistance) and its three fundamental elements – appeal to the oppressor, non-cooperation, and civil disobedience – may contribute to a decolonizing process in Ghanaian education. He argues that this system has been subjected to colonial domination and control because it has adopted an Euro-American canon, worldview, and epistemology. In doing so, Adjei draws parallels to the experience of Indigenous students in North America. Adjei analyzes the principle of Satyagraha through the lenses of anti-racist and anti-colonial thought while emphasizing that we are all implicated in the site of oppression and privileges. Thus, he cautions us to avoid the trap of casting our gaze only on areas where we feel oppressed while ignoring how we oppress others.

St. Denis's provocative article, "Uniting Aboriginal Education with Anti-Racist Education: Building Alliances Across Cultural and Racial Identity Politics," addresses sensitive issues of "authenticity" and "belonging" and explicates the historical roots of these identity politics. Further, she explores how cultural and language revitalization efforts among Aboriginal people not only have limitations, but argues that some of these efforts may have contradictory effects. She offers an anti-racist framework to interpret, respond to, and better understand such conflicts. Additionally, she argues that a critical anti-racist education holds the possibility of providing a foundation to forge alliances between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

REFERENCES

- Burack, C. (2004). Coalitions and reparative politics. In C. Burack. (Ed.), *Healing identities: Black feminist thought and the politics of groups* (pp. 142-167). Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press.