

Beyond Cultural Differences and Similarities: Student Teachers Encounter Aboriginal Children's Literature¹

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This article examines teacher education students' interactions around a course in Aboriginal children's literature. Observations of these students suggest that expressing and exploring ideas and feelings about issues like stereotyping helps them develop a supportive kinship, which promotes learning that transforms attitudes. Some questions explored in this article are: (1) What is effective learning in a multicultural classroom? (2) How can teachers and students become learning partners in the multicultural classroom? (3) What is the difference between understanding culture and valuing people? This exploration may assist teachers to identify changes in students' social, cognitive, and emotional development within the context of a growing community of learners from various cultures. Teachers may also find the students' evaluation of the classroom atmosphere and dynamics useful in gathering and preparing material for multicultural settings.

Dans cet article, l'auteure analyse les interactions d'un groupe d'étudiants-maîtres au sujet de la littérature pour enfants en milieu autochtone. Les remarques de ces étudiants donnent à penser que le fait d'exprimer et d'explorer des idées et des sentiments sur des questions comme les stéréotypes les aident à tisser des liens qui favorisent l'apprentissage et transforment les attitudes. L'article aborde les questions suivantes : (1) Qu'entend-on par un apprentissage efficace dans une classe multiculturelle? (2) Comment les enseignants et les élèves peuvent-ils créer des partenariats d'apprentissage dans une classe multiculturelle? (3) Quelle est la différence entre comprendre une culture et valoriser les personnes? Cette réflexion peut aider les enseignants à identifier les changements dans le développement social, cognitif et émotif des élèves au sein d'une communauté grandissante d'apprenants de diverses cultures. Les enseignants peuvent également trouver l'évaluation de l'atmosphère et de la dynamique de la classe par les élèves utile pour la recherche et la préparation de matériel destiné à des classes multiculturelles.

A multicultural classroom may be defined as a setting in which students of various ethnic origins are grouped to learn together. Although some student teachers may understand intellectually the problems and difficulties of a multicultural classroom, they can also benefit from effective classroom models that translate abstract ideas about multicultural issues and ways of learning into concrete practices that value learners and their ideas. In this article I provide an account of such a model, a course in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student teachers are grouped together.

The goal of the course is to help student teachers learn about Aboriginal children's literature and how to use it to best advantage in primary and intermediate classrooms. My account emphasizes interrelationships among five aspects of the course: (1) the inspiration that framed the content and format of the course, (2) the educative and training function of the course for student teachers, (3) the theories of learning in which the practices of the course are grounded, (4) the definition of *effective learning environment* in a multicultural classroom, and (5) the dynamics between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students as they attempt to resolve conflicts that emerge when they discuss the literature.

Clearly, the content of Aboriginal children's literature is worthy of attention in its own right; however, the purpose of this article is to examine how student teachers come to focus on reading as an interpretive, public, and discursive activity and how they evaluate these processes for themselves as potential teachers. The concern here is with ways of reading, the pedagogical process, rather than specifically with what is read.

The teaching and learning I describe took place in ABRG 3688, "Aboriginal Children's Literature," a course taught at the University of New Brunswick to Aboriginal (primarily Micmac and Maliseet) and non-Aboriginal students. My experience with this course highlighted issues and principles having broad significance for multicultural education in language for learning (linguistics), teaching methods (pedagogy), and ways of reading (literary/cultural studies).

ORIGIN OF THE COURSE

I was motivated to develop ABRG 3688 by my first experience teaching Aboriginal literature in a university English course for First Nations students. The need for Aboriginal content was clear, so I included several stories written by Canadian First Nations authors. The students' positive responses to reading and writing about Tomson Highway's *Rez Sisters* (1988) and Beatrice Culleton's *April Raintree* (1984), for example, confirmed the appropriateness of these materials. Some students wept openly with April as she gathered us into her struggle to find her personal identity. We laughed with the Rez sisters over their bingo addiction and their resolve to attend "the Best Bingo in the World" in Toronto. The students were excited and very much involved as they studied the material. Then the unit on Aboriginal literature ended.

I felt disappointed that we had only begun to explore Canadian Aboriginal literature and that we had not stopped to examine the shared narratives developing as we responded to the literature and to one another. Our discussions indicated that the Aboriginal content did what Hardy (1977) says the novel does: it "heightens, isolates, and analyses the narrative motions of human consciousness" (p. 12). Stories and plays by First Nations authors were a catalyst for the classroom dynamics as the students expressed thoughts and feelings evoked by

the shared experiences that the texts articulated. This fascinated me; although I could not explain it at the time, something unexpected and valuable had happened in that English course. I felt compelled to design a course on Aboriginal literary content that would be relevant to student teachers' future careers. During my research, I discovered a body of literature I had not known existed, literature written for children by Aboriginal authors and authors whose sensitivity to First Nations people was realistic, positive, and informative (e.g., Grant, 1990; Lutz, 1991; Moses & Goldie, 1991; New, 1990; Petrone, 1990, 1991; Stott, 1995; Taylor & Jaine, 1992). I first offered the new course in fall 1993 and continue to teach it annually.

CLASSROOM DYNAMICS

The Crucial First Class

The first class establishes the pattern for learning during the rest of the course. Usually ABRG 3688 has 14 to 20 students, with an even mix of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. If possible, the course is held in a small room where we all face each other. I sometimes know the Aboriginal students from previous classes but seldom know the non-Aboriginal students. Some non-Aboriginal students find this situation perplexing because they are accustomed to being the ones known by the teacher and to being in the majority; in ABRG 3688 they sit quietly wondering, as one student said, whether they have chosen the right course. One student wrote about the complexity of her feelings at the outset of the course:

At the beginning of this term I was essentially afraid of facing certain feelings and insecurities I have had regarding Native people all my life. Because I have never really gotten to know Native people personally, I was very much afraid that I might offend them by my ignorance.²

This student was able to identify her own limitations very early and recognized the value of knowing an individual, rather than just having information about a people or culture. Aboriginal students, on the other hand, are often quiet even though they know me, because the course and the circumstances are new.

Despite my confident manner, I, too, come to the first class with butterflies. The unknown looms before me, and I enter the classroom aware that students may decide not to cooperate. I know that for this course to be beneficial to everyone, I must help create a supportive climate as quickly as possible. It will not just happen; I must work at this with focused determination. So, the beginning moments are laden with anticipation and apprehension for all of us.

I start by introducing myself by name, not by a university title. If I recognize people in the class I welcome and introduce them; then I have others follow my

example. In my experience, students are curious about their teacher, so I ask what they would like to know about me. No one is forced to ask questions but anyone is free to do so. From the beginning I seek to establish the kind of atmosphere that Bochner (1982) says reduces tension and hostility in inter-group contact. He describes the atmosphere as one including "equal status of the participating persons . . . interdependent activity . . . cooperation with superordinate goals . . . and . . . a social climate that favours inter-group contact and harmony" (p. 16).

Harmony is crucial. Competition between students or cultures is not permitted to enter the dynamics. Treating all questions with the same respect and answering them honestly helps establish equal status for all students. Students' questions help to create an air of intimacy: I am often asked whether I am married and have children. While I answer these questions I can, for example, talk about how I feel about being a wife, mother, teacher, and researcher, about how I am often frustrated because the days are too short. As they listen to my responses I involve them in conversation by asking, "Has anyone else ever felt like that?" As we move from facts about ourselves to feelings, I am always amazed at how candid and open that introductory discussion is. Within that first 90-minute class, the students and teacher relate to one another at an affective level. Because we have begun to share ourselves by sharing our stories, we make a commitment that we will keep personal discussion confidential. Usually one student suggests that we agree on confidentiality, and the other students take that commitment very seriously. Already the seeds of mutual respect are sown, even though they lie shallow in the soil of inexperience.

The Learning Process

The stated goals of ABRG 3688 are to have students examine books written or illustrated by Aboriginal authors (especially those written by Canadian Aboriginal authors) for primary and elementary school aged children to gain an understanding of why this literature would be an asset in any classroom, and to plan some effective ways to use the books in the classroom and with individual children. However, students need to be permitted to be themselves, without pretence, so that they can acknowledge genuine knowledge and genuine ignorance rather than produce simulated knowledge based on what they think the teacher wants to hear.

An unstated goal of the course, for me, is to focus on social interaction as an indispensable part of academic performance. The social action is often displayed in what Mezirow (1992) calls "rational discourse as a means of validating beliefs" (p. 250): students are permitted to discuss their beliefs in an open forum while exploring the views of others. The learning process, though informative, ought to be liberating for both the teacher and students. Wells (1986) says that learning resides within learners and not within a decontextualized body of

knowledge. So students need to be permitted to grapple with content in such a way that they come to think and feel differently about themselves and how they fit into their surrounding worlds and are set free to discover and to change their perceptions and their feelings.

The constructivist theory of cognitive dissonance (e.g., Festinger, 1957) helps explain how some learning occurs in ABRG 3688. In the classes, there are moments when we suddenly discover that things are not the way we thought they were in the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds. Such revelations are not new to Aboriginal students, who seldom find a comfortable place in a controlled educational environment. In the class, however, they can pursue their reactions because class members are concerned for each other and because non-Aboriginal students share those feelings of being on unknown emotional ground in an academic setting. The non-Aboriginal students are unfamiliar with such discomfort and draw heavily on Aboriginal support. For example, when faced with the reality that some non-Aboriginal teachers discriminate against Aboriginal children, the non-Aboriginal students are appalled: "Do some teachers actually treat Aboriginal children like that? They need an attitude check, big time!"

During the first two weeks of the course, we read and discuss articles such as those by Swisher and Deyhle (1989), Cronin (1982), Zarry (1991), Lake (1990), Lee (1982), Rhodes (1988), Catey (1980), and Armstrong (1987). At the same time that students are thinking and writing about how to eliminate racism from the classroom and from themselves, they begin to read the children's books.

Articulating the learning process for oneself and others is in itself educative. Barnes (1976) states that "not only is talking and writing a major means by which people learn, but what they learn can hardly be distinguished from the ability to communicate it" (p. 20). As I facilitate honest dialogue among the students, the learning advances. Communication is to be valued and examined in the classroom because it reveals learning. So I model specific communication skills, such as listening, interacting, and giving positive feedback, and the students take time to practice these as they share their thoughts and feelings about points where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures intersect. Reflexive learning takes place at these intersections, says Barnes, who believes they compel a student,

if he is to continue his proposed action, to bring to sharp awareness parts of his world which were upon the periphery of his consciousness, and to construct for himself understanding which did not previously exist. . . . Learning from disjunction can be generated by two equals . . . if they trust one another sufficiently to work towards mutual understanding, and if they find subject-matter which falls within the range of their purposes. (p. 106)

Aboriginal children's literature provides that subject matter.

LITERATURE AS A FOCUS FOR LEARNING

The use of literature as a basis for enhancing self-concept is not new (e.g., Ehle, 1982; Frye, 1988). In ABRG 3688, reading and talking about cultural issues reveals more than differing traditions. Saravia-Shore and Arvizu (1992) say that “cross-cultural literacy extends beyond ‘cultural literacy’—the knowledge and understanding of one’s national culture—to encompass knowledge and understanding of other cultures’ patterns of interaction, values, institutions, metaphors and symbols as well as cross-cultural communication skills” (p. xi). I believe people can move through their initial emotional and intellectual responses, which in many instances are barriers, to a genuine acceptance and appreciation of one another and change individual thinking and attitudes. I envision student teachers learning about others’ cultures in such a way that what Saravia-Shore and Arvizu advocate can be a reality for them: “that diversity be grounded in understanding human differences as well as universals, and that such an understanding be translated into behavior which supports respect for and among people and their many forms of interacting” (pp. xv–xvi). But, if educational content is all that is needed to come to understand and value others’ cultures, then why not leave the students and Aboriginal children’s literature alone to do their own work? When I taught a unit on Aboriginal literature focused on the content alone, I missed the opportunity to permit people to confront their thoughts and feelings about controversial issues and to learn from sharing those thoughts and feelings with one another. I did not want this to happen in ABRG 3688.

Through the rapport that develops among them and the issues they discuss, students in ABRG 3688 begin to articulate both how and what they are learning. Initially, I did not expect this: I had thought that was my task, not theirs. Instead, the students became the living dynamic of the learning process. Of one session, an Aboriginal student said that real learning takes place when we are able to admit to ourselves what thoughts and feelings we have. “Dealing with me,” as another student put it, “is real learning.” I cannot decide what that “dealing with me” means for each student. They know themselves better than I do. However, with the focus on reading, I can create a safe environment that allows personal responses to be formulated, explored, and developed.

In reference to young learners, Barnes (1976) states that the “more a learner controls his own language strategies, and the more he is enabled to think aloud, the more he can take responsibility for formulating hypotheses and evaluating them” (p. 29). This is true for adult learners as well. For example, student teachers in ABRG 3688 talk among themselves about what words are most appropriate to describe the creation figure in Aboriginal mythology. The western Canadian term “trickster” is unacceptable to Micmac students when applied to Glooscap. They insist on using Glooscap’s name and not labelling him in any way. In the process of determining which words to use, students have to formu-

late appropriate, non-threatening questions. They take care to choose words that free others to think aloud so that they can reach agreement. They take responsibility for creating word pictures representative of the ideas and traditions important to Micmac and Maliseet students as well as to non-Aboriginal students. Being able to deal with themselves and others in a "think aloud" format moves the learning forward through discovery.

In addition to creating a safe learning environment, another thing I can do as a facilitator is be clear to myself and to students how such processes are grounded in theories of reading, learning, and conceptual development (e.g., Appleyard, 1994; Barnes, Britton, & Torbe, 1990; Bruner, 1975; Kimberley, Meek, & Miller, 1992; Meek, 1988; Mezirow, 1994; Potter, 1996; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; VonGlaserfeld, 1995; Wells, 1986). Students need to know that their discoveries arise not from sentimentalism but from a credible learning process that can be adopted as a format for lifelong learning.

Students make these discoveries in ABRG 3688 through consultation and discussion with classmates and the facilitator, individually, in small groups, and with the whole class. Students must be responsible for their own learning if they are to maintain their individual creative selves. A systematic, curriculum-centred education does not ensure this. According to Au (1993), "students of diverse backgrounds find themselves in the position of having to choose between school success and their cultural identity" (p. 13). In fact, Ogbu (1982) and Philips (1983) suggest, under a Euro-Canadian curriculum-based education, Aboriginal students will automatically be assimilated into the mainstream culture and lose part of their Aboriginal heritage. This happens when "who people are" is not acknowledged as fundamental to academic performance. If ethnicity and equality are to survive in the classroom and in the Canadian mosaic, it is crucial to maintain individual identity. Ogbu questions the validity of teaching Aboriginal students a curriculum that has no relevance to their Aboriginal experience. The results of using Aboriginal children's literature attest to the effectiveness of relevant material. One Aboriginal student wrote that listening to and studying stories about her culture made her "feel good" about her own identity. "After all," she said, "if you never hear anything—or anything good—about your culture, you learn to be ashamed of it. These books really help me to deal with my own feelings that were suppressed for as long as I can remember. This is the first time I can really open up and express how I am feeling inside."

Because the topics in the children's books are relevant to general human experiences, the students do not need to help one another accept their relevance. Instead, the students are motivated by an inner need to explain themselves and the need to have others understand them. One said, "Talking out my thoughts helps me know what I am feeling." The result is that the sessions move to a more deeply personal perspective on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures. How and why they think and feel as they do become the paramount questions

in students' effort to understand, to relate to, and to accept one another. When one becomes "bogged down" in a discussion, another often asks a helpful, leading question—for example, "Was that situation because of your upbringing?"—and the first is then freed to continue to explore his or her thoughts. The students listen to and support one another. When their experiences differ, as they often do across cultures, they examine their responses and seek ways to communicate. Often this takes time and, as facilitator, I bite my tongue a lot. For example, the non-Aboriginal students often do not know how to refer to their Aboriginal classmates as a cultural group. They talk about possible descriptors and arrive at what feels comfortable. During one such discussion an Aboriginal student said, "Sometimes I call myself an Indian, sometimes Aboriginal, sometimes Native. I hear all these terms on the news. But I guess I like Aboriginal because it means 'first to the land.'" From then on, we used *Aboriginal* very easily because the students had agreed upon it. I could not legislate such an open, caring exchange, with its goal of mutual acceptance. The intricate process of human interaction based on course content is carefully monitored and directed by a facilitator open to self-discovery. An epiphany takes place as students become emotionally involved in what they share as human beings.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION IN THE COURSE

The means by which progress in ABRG 3688 is assessed also helps trace how learning occurs. Three major assignments assist students to become acquainted with the course content, to interact with one another about the books' content, and to express freely their thoughts and feelings about anything pertaining to the course.

First, students keep a weekly journal that they submit for feedback. I collect the journals and interact with their observations and ideas by writing my own comments and questions. I ask that they make their writing autobiographical and reflective. The journal thus contains their thoughts, feelings, questions, observations, and some interpretations, not merely summaries or reviews of content. The entries presented earlier show how the journal assists students to "open up" for the purpose of personal commentary and evaluation. They also demonstrate that they are learning to integrate theory, pedagogical practice, and their own experience. For example, students often reflect on my oral reading of stories. As they recognize that reading stories aloud is crucial to children's literacy and their own, they think and write about the benefits of this activity and how they plan to use it in their own classrooms.

Once the students learn through my written responses that they not only can but must be honest and true to themselves in their journal entries, their writing changes. For example, they admit and accept that they feel animosity towards other cultures. They are true to their feelings by standing by them in discussion

until they resolve the negative ones and refine and accept the positive ones, if possible. If resolution is not immediate, they leave class with a new self-awareness. Being able to face those feelings in a journal entry is beneficial for future reflection. One student wrote, "It amazes me to see that I am truly dealing with me. Journal writing is helping me to heal some of the concerns I have had for a long time." This Aboriginal student found the courage to face her feelings of not fitting into either the Aboriginal or the White world because she had been raised off the reserve.

When students feel secure in themselves they willingly discuss new concepts. My evaluation of their journal entries is based on how well they marry theory and practice. The journal writing assists them to progress from individual thought to the more extended public forum of classroom discussion crucial to individual development and change (Fullan, 1993, p. 15). Reticence gives way to a new attitude of enquiry. Journal writing is pivotal to the direction of the course in that the students decide which issues and which pedagogy are most beneficial for their purposes.

The second assignment requires students to participate in a group presentation designed to explore a topic or a genre, such as stereotyping or picture books, and to evaluate the effectiveness of Aboriginal children's books in developing any child's literacy. By the eighth week of the course, when these presentations begin, students have learned that their acquisition of knowledge depends on group interactions as much as on their individual learning. While helping students continue to explore the literature, this assignment gives them the opportunity to explore and develop interactively in a setting they control entirely. In mixed groups of four, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students meet to fashion a format for their ideas. They perpetuate the bond that has developed among them even though they are now working in groups outside the safety of the classroom. When an upset occurs within a group, the members negotiate until they feel the problem is resolved. Their presentations indicate that this group work, as another type of public forum, helps to advance learning.

The third assignment gives students a variety of options. Some write a critical analysis of a series of books of their choosing. Some write integrated units on conflict studies, social studies, or cross-cultural studies. Others read several books to children to determine how children respond to those by Aboriginal authors and those about Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal authors. A popular final assignment is to write a children's story and explain why and how it would assist a child's literacy development. In this task, students look at the elements of a "good" story and the characteristics of books that engender literary growth, such as "intertextuality, polysemics, multilayeredness, and entitlement" (Meek, 1988).

In addition to completing assignments, students discuss such topics as how people learn, how to develop a language to facilitate learning, oral literature, the

history of Aboriginal literature in Canada, acculturation, appropriation, assimilation, and Aboriginal authorship.

STUDENT RESPONSES TO ABORIGINAL LITERATURE

In the books selected for the course, Aboriginal voices speak boldly and directly to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal readers about traditional beliefs and cross-cultural interests. The students hear those voices and reflect on them. The books give all students, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, the foundation on which to base questions. I remember asking, after a class had read Iris Loewen's *My Kokum Called Today* (1995), if Aboriginals are condemned by members of their community if they leave the reserve. Because the story deals with this topic, I felt less apprehensive about asking such a question. As one student said, "I feel that my [asking this] question might be misinterpreted by my Native peers, but the book is the vehicle which permits me to ask."

Through the readings, other significant issues are confronted, including stereotyping. For example, when studying Jan Truss's *Peter's Moccasins* (1987), one non-Aboriginal student said that "assuming that the blond, blue-eyed girl is not Native also brings to light a stereotype that I did not realize I possess, and for this I am grateful." The issue of Aboriginal people's trying to live in two worlds is poignantly presented in *Peter's Moccasins* and in Esther Sanderson's *Two Pairs of Shoes* (1990). One non-Aboriginal student observed that *Peter's Moccasins* "doesn't dismiss either culture, as that would be harmful, if not impossible. It asks the reader to consider and value both." An Aboriginal student said of the same book that:

It tells of the experiences I live through all my life. . . . When I go off the reserve, I become someone else to keep up with the people and when I am on the reserve I am home. I can relax and be myself. And that's the message I get from the grandmother when she says, "There is a special time to wear each pair of shoes." When I am home I wear my moccasins and when I am at school or university I wear my patent shoes.

This student responded to the story at an affective level whereas the non-Aboriginal student had responded to it intellectually by focusing on the story's purpose. During class discussion, these students interacted in such a way that they helped each other come to a more holistic response.

Other topics of concern to students include maintaining a healthy relationship to Mother Earth (e.g., *Jen and the Great One*, by Peter Eyvindson, 1990; *The Big Tree and the Little Tree*, by Mary Augusta Tappage, 1973), preserving cultural traditions (e.g., *Cheryl Bibalhats/Cheryl's Potlatch*, by Sheila Thompson, 1991; *Where Did You Get Your Moccasins?* by Bernelda Wheeler, 1986/1992), recording traditional myths and legends (e.g., the Nanabosho stories by Joe McLellan and the *Keeper* series by Joseph Bruchac and Michael Caduto,³ *North-*

ern Lights: The Soccer Trails, by Michael Kusugak, 1993), and maintaining Native spirituality (e.g., *The Crying Christmas Tree*, by Allan Crow, 1989; *Little White Cabin*, by Ferguson Plain, 1992; *My Kokum Called Today*, by Iris Loewen, 1995).

These themes are universal, although culturally specific in their presentation of traditional beliefs. It is as if the authors provide a voice for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. One student noticed that:

The discussions all begin by exploring a more general human characteristic or situation, rather than cultural issues. For example, the true meaning of Christmas for each of us, the concerns of grandparents and parents, allowing children to make their own choices, feelings, and handicaps. . . . The cultural issues are there, are significant and are discussed, but the books have more depth than a cultural documentation.

The concerns that emerge enable the students to speak eloquently and passionately and to come to know each other as individuals, representative of cultural histories but not limited by them.

THE TEACHER AS LEARNER

ABRG 3688 has helped me trace the evolution of my own learning and teaching. Regardless of the composition of a class, the adventure of teaching for me lies in discovering how my students learn, how we can best learn together, and how I can facilitate the learning. When I began teaching the course, I focused on "how to teach this book" and the intellectual implications of the themes. Soon, however, I realized that while I was preoccupied with the content of the literature, the students had broader concerns. However well-meaning my focus, it was short-sighted because it missed what the students were actually learning. I needed to stay attuned to students' dynamic engagement with their learning. Because the essential business is a series of connected and evolving interactions, stepping out of that discourse and interchange may isolate the teacher from it, which is what happened to me the first time I taught ABRG 3688.

To be literate is to be able to interpret information and create meaning, rather than simply to extract meaning. I learned that this pedagogical principle applies to group dynamics as well as to reading theory. All readings are individual, but they can only be articulated socially. Students come to see that the knowledge that will help them to understand themselves and their worlds is both individually and socially constructed. In other words, understanding is negotiated. This is exactly why Fullan (1993) says that "there is a ceiling effect to how much we can learn if we keep to ourselves. . . . People need one another to learn and to accomplish things" (p. 17) and that "people must behave their way into new ideas and skills, not just think their way into them" (p. 15). Fullan asserts that effective learning can occur only when people are permitted to interact with the

information they have received and with their developing ideas. In ABRG 3688, I have experienced the truth of Fullan's assertions.

Reading and discussing literature offers a rehearsal of potentially real experience, what Harding (1977) calls "virtual experience" (p. 379). At the same time, it imposes an imaginative and valuable distance from the immediately personal. Paradoxically, reading the content of Aboriginal children's literature allows attention to the personal. To teach student teachers to discover the interpretational learning process and apply it to their own classrooms is my fundamental goal.

OUTCOMES: A WAY FORWARD

Many educators are working to develop effective teaching methods in multicultural classrooms. An evaluation of classroom dynamics may prove useful. For example, for Aboriginal students, in particular, to benefit from formal education, they must be respected as responsible learners. What they bring to the class must be valued. They must be trusted to construct their learning. When students are given the opportunity for genuine, open interaction about issues crucial to culture, not only do they make meaning of their worlds but often they also willingly make changes in their thinking and perception (Bruner, 1990; Shweder, 1990), as non-Aboriginal students in ABRG 3688 did with the term "trickster," for example. Effective learning results.

Classroom dynamics may seem an unusual basis on which to analyze the effectiveness of a course. The point is that whatever causes a teacher to stop and think about a class ought to be pursued beyond mere reflection. Once a constructive evaluation is made, the format and content of a course can be framed. The pedagogy evolves as teachers ground the learning process in learning theory. Educators must continue to find effective ways to respect ethnicity and equality in all classrooms. I believe that this depends partly on valuing who the students are, assisting them to value one another and what they bring to the class, and allowing them to be responsible for their learning. How to accomplish that remains the challenge for each teacher in each classroom.

NOTES

- ¹ An earlier version of this article was presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education in Montreal, June 1995.
- ² This and the following excerpts are from recent student assignments. I am greatly indebted to these students for welcoming me into their learning experiences and for sharing their insights into teaching with me.
- ³ Joe McLellan's Nanabosho stories are published by Pemmican Publications in Winnipeg; Joseph Bruchac and Michael Caduto's *Keeper* series are published by Fifth House in Saskatoon.

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