Social Justice Pedagogy Across the Curriculum

The Practice of Freedom

Edited by

Thandeka K. Chapman
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

Nikola Hobbel
Humboldt State University

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Indigenous knowledges and Social Justice Pedagogy

Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy and Teresa L. McCarty

Schooling and its processes make value judgments about what kinds of knowledge(s) count. Indigenous knowledges tend to be misunderstood and marginalized in the context of Western schooling. These misunderstandings can “count” against Indigenous students in profoundly negative ways. The goal of this chapter is to provide insights from research, theory, and practice on Indigenous knowledges as a means of informing education policy and practice for Indigenous students. Our focus is on ways of knowing for Indigenous peoples in the United States and Canada — a highly diverse group who nonetheless share certain experiences and values.

We begin by outlining what we mean by Indigenous ways of knowing, emphasizing that Indigenous knowledges are: (1) emplaced within distinctive physical landscapes and social networks; (2) rooted in community; (3) systematic; and (4) lived in everyday social practice. We then explore relationships, responsibility, and reciprocity as anchoring principles for the transmission, acquisition, and expression of Indigenous knowledges. Recognizing that teaching and learning are integrally connected and that social justice too must be lived, we examine three case examples that demonstrate the possibilities for “doing” social justice pedagogy in ways that embrace Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and teaching for the benefit of all students.

I grew up in a home where only Navajo was spoken. . . . We lived in a one-room hogan (a traditional earth and log dwelling), with no modern amenities. I learned to greet people by kinship. We never called each other by our English names, only by our Navajo names. . . . At an early age I learned the values, beliefs, and traditions of my people. For instance, in Navajo we begin prayers with shimá nah Hasdzáán, shíshá yah díítłí. By this we mean we have the same relationship to mother earth (shímá nah Hasdzáán) as we have to the person who gave birth to us. The passing on of these values and of history, ritual, and family traditions was done through oral tradition.

(Dick, 1998, pp. 23–24)

This introductory epigraph, taken from the language autobiography of Navajo bilingual educator Galena Sells Dick, illuminates the different ways of conceptualizing what knowledge is and who (re)produces it. It also suggests the ways in which Indigenous knowledges, though they differ among themselves, as a whole tend to be misunderstood and marginalized in the context of Western schooling. As Galena Dick continues her account:

My “formal” education began at the age of seven in a boarding school 35 miles from home. . . . It was confusing and difficult; we had to struggle. . . . the Navajo word for school is ólita’, meaning “a learning place associated with the white man’s world.” But the treatment we received in school gave us little to admire about the white man’s world or his language. (1998, pp. 23–24)

In this segment of her autobiography, Galena Dick refers to the physical and psychological abuse Native students endured for speaking their mother tongue in school. Colonial schooling for Native American students was aimed at what one federal official called “blotting out” Indigenous languages, lifeways, and identities (Adams, cited in Crawford, 1992)—practices that, in new contexts and guises, continue to this day.

In this chapter we expand on the lessons in Galena Sells Dick’s account to offer a theoretical and epistemological orientation to Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, which, we argue, encompass ways of being, teaching, learning, and valuing. Our focus is on ways of knowing and being for Indigenous peoples in what is now the United States and Canada—a diverse group of peoples (there are more than 560 Native nations in the U.S.A. alone) who are nonetheless distinguished by certain shared experiences and values. As we will see, a primary understanding is that Indigenous knowledges are lived and embodied within particular people and communities—that is, they are emplaced. We also explore the ways in which Indigenous ways of knowing and being are linked through principles of relationality, responsibility, reciprocity, and respect.

With this groundwork in place, we move to the relationship between Indigenous ways of knowing and social justice pedagogy. In keeping with the understanding that, like Indigenous ways of knowing and being, social justice too must be lived, we devote this portion of the chapter to concrete examples of the possibilities for “doing” social justice pedagogy in ways that embrace Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and teaching.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

A great deal of research on Native peoples and Western education highlights cultural differences or “mismatches” between Native students and the culture of the schools. While this research has been immensely valuable in countering fallacious notions of inherited, racialized “intelligence,” too often culture is conceived as static and monolithic (see, e.g., Eisenhart’s 2001 discussion of these problems). This reduces culture to a superficial list of traits or artifacts, and learners to one-dimensional proportions, as in the widespread myth that Native American students are “silent,” “non-analytical,” or “right-brained” learners. (For critiques of these approaches, see Foley, 1996; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, pp. 20–21; McCarty,
I learned about the seasons, growth cycles of cultivated plants, and what one had to think and feel about the land; and at home I became aware of how we must care for each other: all of this was encompassed in an intricate relationship which had to be maintained in order that life continue. (1993, pp. 29, 38)

This “intricate relationship” has, in the course of Anglo-European colonization, been steadily assaulted, appropriated, and displaced. Yet, as we discuss throughout this chapter, the nexus of place and peoplehood remains central to contemporary Indigenous ways of knowing and being (for international accounts that illustrate this point, see Villegas, Neugebauer, & Venegas, 2008). The land, the history, and the community of a place are the agents of knowledge discovery and use. Every place is defined by all these factors, and assuming the specificity of such a reality is to assume that universality is a rather weak concept, not paying heed to all that makes a place a unique instantiation of creation and creative endeavor.

According to Manuelito, “Land exists as sacred space. . . . For Navajos, life is a journey through sacred landscape” (2005, p. 81). Like the hoo'ghan (home) in Galena Sells Dick’s account, “land is a place of birth, growth and development, and death” (Manuelito, 2005, p. 81). Cradled in the context of specific landscapes, knowledge is raised (see, e.g., Kawagley’s [2006] discussion of this for the Yup’ik of present-day Alaska). The landscape—the places where teaching and learning take place—is not just a blank backdrop for the journey, but the loci of the power to move through a knowledge-seeking journey. It is an active space, not a neutral, insignificant one.

Indigenous Knowledge is Rooted in Community

At the heart of Indigenous ways of knowing and being are notions of community and communal survival. We simply cannot understand these issues without a deep and abiding understanding of how, for many Indigenous peoples, community is at the core of existence. The survival of Indigenous community is more important than a single individual. Individuals, through self-discovery and selflessness, become whole, thereby insuring community survival. Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) write, “The ultimate test of each human educational system is a people’s survival” (p. 30).

This sentiment is captured through Brian Yazzi Burkhart’s (2004) insightful reworking of the Cartesian Principle. Descartes based his philosophies of knowing and being on the principle that says, “I think, therefore I am.” This belief in the individual is evidenced in myriad policies, court decisions, and laws that serve as the foundation of the present-day United States. But consider Burkhart’s reworking of the Cartesian Principle when he writes that an Indigenous version is, “We are, therefore I am.” At its core, then, the knowledge systems, ways of being, and teaching philosophies for many Indigenous peoples are focused on community and survival.

Similarly, Deloria (1992) notes that the freedom to think and act in ways governed by individual will, promoted in some other epistemologies, is most
Indigenous Knowledge is Systematic

We know that these knowledge systems are systematic and systemic. Notwithstanding Galena Dick's use of the term “formal” to characterize her schooling experience, we caution against reproducing the formal/informal dichotomy. As Lomawaima and McCarty write,

This popular but artificial dichotomy fails to describe the complexity of American education [both] inside and outside of schools. Its failure regarding Native educational systems is even more profound because it communicates that they are “accidental” or “unplanned.” . . . The label “informal” is another one-dimensional strategy used to denigrate and marginalize Native education. (2006, p. 27)

As many Indigenous accounts attest, the lived curriculum and pedagogy in Indigenous communities are often quite formal in that they are planned, transferred, and acquired in very systematic ways with the end goal being one of sustenance and continuation/survival. The four-day Navajo kinaalda or girls' puberty ceremony, for instance—still practiced today—is designed to help girls “make themselves strong” by running each morning toward the dawn light (Begay, 1983; Markstrom, 2008). Through formalized learning experiences such as this ceremony, and through everyday social practice, Navajo young people are both prepared and tested for what lies ahead. As these and many other Native accounts testify, Indigenous peoples learn, know, and do things (an application of knowledge) for the purposes of survival (Kawagley, 2006). There is nothing informal about survival.

Indigenous Knowledge is Lived

Indigenous ways of knowing view knowledge as both embodied and intensely intellectual. Medicine remarks that, “Elders are repositories of cultural and philosophical knowledge and are the transmitters of such knowledge” (2001, p. 73), reminding us that when an elder dies, it is like a library burning. These sentiments suggest that Indigenous ways of knowing and being are embedded in the lived lives of real people and evolve and adapt over time. They are not static—although the past greatly influences their present incarnations—but rather are dynamic instantiations specific to particular groups of people and places (Basso, 1996; Battiste, 2002).

In contrast to this emphasis on lived and embodied knowledge, Western definitions of knowledge tend to emphasize the development of professional skills and credentials for which one is financially compensated, suggesting the degree to which mainstream conceptions of knowledge value “book smarts” over lived experience (Deloria, 2001). At the same time as we recognize these differences, thinking in terms of a dichotomy between Western and Indigenous ways of knowing is not particularly useful in that it erases complexities, nuances, and closes off spaces of possibility. Battiste (2002) makes this point vividly, writing:

Indigenous scholars discovered that Indigenous knowledge is far more than the binary opposite of western knowledge. . . . Indigenous knowledge fills the ethical and knowledge gaps in Eurocentric education, research, and scholarship. By animating the voices and experiences of the cognitive “other” and integrating them into educational processes, it creates a new, balanced centre and a fresh vantage point from which to analyze Eurocentric education and its pedagogies. (p. 5)

As we illustrate with the pedagogical examples in the second part of this chapter, these knowledges can be—in fact, must be—configured in a way that is complementary, rather than contradictory.

Related to this more nuanced view of knowledges, even within a particular community (and like human communities around the world), not everyone will operate from the same epistemological foundation. Battiste (2002) reminds us of this reality:

Within any Indigenous nation or community people vary greatly in what they know. There are not only differences between ordinary folks and experts, such as experienced knowledge keepers, healers, hunters, or ceremonialists, there are also major differences of experiences and professional opinion among the knowledge holders and workers, as we should expect of any living, dynamic knowledge system that is continually responding to new phenomena and fresh insights. (p. 12)

The diversity of knowledges and ways of knowing is fundamental to the dynamism of knowledge systems and the survival of communities.

This holistic knowledge is evidenced in our attempts to present a picture of what Indigenous ways of knowing and being offer. The interconnectedness of our knowledges, experiences, and sources of knowledge is critical to understanding how Indigenous peoples have survived well over 500 years of genocide. These are peoples who have adapted and adjusted to their situations and the threats aimed at their extinction. As an Indigenous student once said to Brayboy, “I am the descendant of a people who would not die.” This survival and unwillingness to die is
directly connected to moving outside traditional categories and recognizing the interconnected nature of all things in the world.

Knowledge is contextual and contextualized; it is lived and is an integral part of survival; truth and knowledge cannot be ends in themselves. These conceptualizations are often at odds with school-based notions of knowledge as a noun, rooted in things or possessions, passive, or so abstract as to not be seen. From an Indigenous perspective, knowledge is seen and active, and those who possess it must be active in their acquisition and use of it. Burkhart (2004) continues along this vein, writing that, “Knowledge is what we put to use” (p. 21).

In this way, we see a definitive connection between ways of knowing and being. If knowledge is lived, then the process of living demonstrates what one knows. Ways of being become so intimately linked to ways of knowing that separating the two is impossible. We can see what one knows by what one does; what one does, or puts to use, demonstrates one’s knowledge.

**Relationships and Responsibility: Twin Pillars of Indigenous Knowledges**

In his book, *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World*, historian Donald Ficxoo begins with this:

“Indian Thinking” is “seeing” things from a perspective emphasizing that circles and cycles are central to the world and that all things are related within the universe. For Indian people who are close to their tribal traditions and native values, they think within a native reality consisting of a physical and metaphysical world... people raised in the traditional ways of their peoples see things in this combined manner. (2003, pp. 1–2)

A circular worldview that connects everything and everyone in the world to everything and everyone else, where there is no distinction between the physical and metaphysical world, and where ancestral knowledge guides contemporary practices is the premise of American Indian philosophies. This holistic worldview is fundamental because it shapes all other understandings of the world.

More specifically, holistic understandings do not draw separations between the body and mind, between humans and other earthly inhabitants, or between generations of humans. Instead, connections, are central for knowledge production and the responsible uses of knowledge. Responsibility is a logical outgrowth of these philosophical understandings. When everything and everyone are connected, a person has a responsibility to act according to his or her surroundings. She/He understands that one’s actions affect everything else. She/he is invested in maintaining balance. These connections are also central to how Indigenous peoples view their own places within the larger cosmos of all living things. For example, Meyer (2001) shows how Hawaiian educators articulate relationships between the body and mind, describing knowledge as “felt” and “in pulse. Without heart we don’t have sense” (pp. 141, 143). That body sense has profound implications for action.

Greek philosophers who were engaged in humanistic studies came to understand that humans were superior to other natural physical entities, which was later used to justify manipulation of the earth for selfish ends. Contrary to these Western epistemologies, however, “Indian people did not [sic] believe that they were greater than nature, and they altered their cultural norms to fit the cycles of the seasons” (Ficxco, 2003, p. 44). We would argue that many Indigenous peoples presently do not believe that they are greater than nature and that they adapt and adjust to all changing systems and structures. Thus, Indigenous peoples’ relationship to the earth is often one of humility and responsibility. Among others, Battiste (2002), Medicine (2001), Marker (2003), Stoetfel, Zedeno, and Halm (2001), Ficxco (2003), Grande (2000), Deloria (1992), and Meyer (2001) point out that responsible use of knowledge in building, nurturing, and maintaining relationships is a fundamental value among Indigenous peoples.

**Reciprocity: Completing the Circle**

A reciprocal relationship exists where communities act to support individuals and individuals act with the best interests of their communities in mind. What do we mean by reciprocity? Reciprocity, as we use it here, is not simply a quid pro quo or a sense of “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours.” Instead, it is a sense that individuals act outside of their self-interests for those of the community and work toward their own betterment for the community’s sake (see, for example, the way that Deloria [1992] explains the idea of self-development as an integral part of Indigenous communities). The point here is that individual development occurs for the betterment of community. Additionally, those who are given gifts of guidance, shared wisdom, and teachings are expected to pass this on to others. As McCarty et al. (1991) write in their analysis of Navajo theories of individual growth and development: “Knowledge...is intended to be shared and used, for good or valued ends. This is the essence of k'ee [kinship, clanship]; knowledge should be used, not for narrow individual purposes, but to benefit the social group (the family or clan) as a whole” (p. 51). If we consider the connections between the past, present, and future, these values come into deeper clarity.

For community members or allies who are given gifts, their responsibility is to ensure the community’s survival. One way of doing this is by responding to the needs of the youth and sharing that knowledge (and its concomitant power, where appropriate) with the next generation. Simply stated, reciprocity is guided by the mantra, “We give so that others can take, for our survival. We take so that we can give to others. Those who receive must give what they have to others.” Only through reciprocity is community survival possible. This simple fact points to one of the reasons for the centrality of the community rather than the individual. Individuals play a role in the survival of communities; they can never come before it. Thus, the purpose of knowledge, first and foremost, is to ensure personal growth, rooted in relationships with other members of the community and with the places the community inhabits. Whitt (2004) describes knowledge sharing as gift giving. As such, she contends, “It is, after all, the givers of gifts who must determine when, to whom,
and how the gifts are to be given” (p. 209). Further, she argues that the recipient of a gift has a responsibility to that gift and the person or community who shared it with him/her. This gift giving relies on principles of reciprocity.

Applying the Principles: Indigenous Knowledges in Action

In the previous section, we overviewed the “building blocks” of Indigenous ways of knowing and their concomitant ways of being and valuing: a rootedness in place, the centrality of community, and the guiding principles of relationality, responsibility, and reciprocity. It is now time to link our discussion of Indigenous knowledges to social justice pedagogy and to consider what this might look like in practice.

First, some definitions. Expanding on Nieto and Bode’s (2008) definition of social justice “as a philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity,” we add that social justice pedagogy is the process of engaging in and creating a social-educational system that allows us to move toward equity and fairness for all. Social justice is both a theoretical and philosophical stance and an active engagement with the world. Just as Indigenous knowledges do not exist in isolation or the abstract, social justice too must be lived. From this perspective, pedagogy is more than simply the act of teaching; it too is an active and critical engagement with the world. Thus, teaching and learning are coterminous; one cannot truly engage in teaching without also being a learner.

What might these understandings of Indigenous knowledges and social justice pedagogy look like in practice? In the remainder of this section, we explore three illustrative examples that suggest the possibilities for “doing” social justice education in ways that embrace Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and teaching. The examples were selected both for their distinctive qualities (i.e., they are models of pedagogical practice) and their inclusiveness across American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian contexts. As we detail these case examples, we ask readers to consider the ways in which they exemplify the conjoined pedagogical principles we have highlighted in the foregoing sections: place, community, relationships, responsibility, reciprocity, and equity and fairness for all.

Bahidadj High: “Our Alumni are Going to be Tribal Leaders”

Bahidadj High (a pseudonym) is located in an urban metropolitan area of the southwestern U.S.A. Bahidadj is a particularly relevant case for our purposes, as its mission is to serve as an academically rigorous, bicultural, community-based high school for Native American youth. “By infusing all aspects of the educational experience with elements of [Native] language and Native history,” a school brochure reads, “the school will nurture individual students, helping them become strong and responsible contributors to their communities.”

Approximately 150 students in grades 9 through 12 attend Bahidadj High; many are bused in daily from their home villages on reservation lands some 70 miles away. A former church, repainted in vibrant colors, the school facility is surrounded by working gardens and native desert trees planted by students and their teachers that are part of Bahidadj High’s ethnobotany and permaculture curriculum. The gardens and a traditional Native outdoor kitchen serve as a gathering place for students, teachers, neighborhood residents, and parents. Inside the school, the organization of space is equally distinctive, with student projects and the Native language evident throughout the building.

Bahidadj High teachers, many of whom are Native American, frequently use the metaphors of family, home, and community to describe their school: As one teacher noted in a 2003 interview with McCarty, the school is “more of a community school which just happens to be located in an urban setting.” A sense of community also grows out of the school’s unique mission. Bahidadj educators clearly articulate the social justice dimensions of their work and the belief that schools can be agents of positive social change:

[Education can enable social change and political change, but... with our student population, it becomes less abstract. Most of our students are [name of tribe] and the [tribal] Nation is very small. ... if we create tribal leaders in the school... we have to give them as many responsibilities [and] tools as we can to make decisions in the future. ...[M]any of our alumni... are going to be tribal leaders.]

(Bahidadj High educator interview, 2005)

Bahidadj High’s curriculum combines Native language and culture with conventional courses. English literature courses, for example, emphasize poets and writers of color, including Native American authors. The U.S. history text is Howard Zinn’s (2003 [1980]) *A People’s History of the United States,* which begins with a critique of the Christopher Columbus story: “Even allowing for the imperfection of myths, it is enough to make us question... the excuse of progress in the annihilation of races, and the telling of history from the standpoint of the conquerors and leaders of Western civilization” (Zinn, 2003, p. 22). This critique is evident in the writings of Bahidadj High School students: “My teacher doesn’t teach us out of a textbook,” one student states, “because... they’re often too one-sided. Instead, she tells us both sides of history”—

It makes me think of [the Chiricahua Apache leader] Geronimo and what they did to him when he was captured. They dressed him up and made him dance like crazy, just to give the public the idea that Indians acted like that. After learning all that it makes me wonder about what else people lied about.

(Juan, 2003, p. 27)

In addition to Spanish, students’ tribal language is taught; even non-Native speaking teachers at Bahidadj High take classes in the language. “I choose to learn about my culture,” a student states, “so I can know where I come from, and know who I am” (Juan, 2003, p. 29). The primary purpose of these and Native culture classes is
to develop a respect for them based on first-hand experience. Of the ethnobotany curriculum, a teacher says: “The presence of a garden in a struggling neighborhood can be a wellspring for building pride and self-esteem” (Woelfle-Erskine, 2003, p. 72).

This experiential, community-based learning is central to the Bahidad School philosophy and curriculum. Senior capstone projects investigate important issues in students' communities using human as well as textual resources, and including an action component. During a recent school year, one student was researching sweatshops. Another was investigating diabetes in the local Native community and organizing a health fair for younger Native students. Other student projects have included a volunteer mission to Chiapas, Mexico, to help build a school and regular field investigations in the surrounding desert region to learn about the use and terminology of local flora in the Native language and English (Tirado, 2001).

Bahidad High has consistently demonstrated academic excellence, by its own standards as well as those of the state. Perhaps even more important are students' expressions of the empowerment gained through an education steeped in Indigenous knowledge and social justice pedagogy. “I can always look toward the future,” a student writes, “while still looking back at the past to find out who I am. As long as I know my background, I can have some sense of pride, and can know that I won’t get lost” (Juan, 2003, p. 29).

**Culturally Responsive Schooling in Alaska: “A Firm Grounding in the Language and Culture Indigenous to a Particular Place Is Fundamental”**

Treating all people “with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity” and “moving toward equity and fairness for all” requires new approaches to assessment that hold schools and educators accountable to the children and communities they serve. In Alaska, a statewide initiative has created a parallel set of Native cultural standards and guidelines intended to complement those for mainstream schooling adopted by the state. These cultural standards

are predicated on the belief that a firm grounding in the heritage language and culture indigenous to a particular place is a fundamental prerequisite for the development of culturally-healthy students and communities associated with that place, and thus an essential ingredient for identifying the appropriate qualities and practices associated with culturally-responsive educators, curriculum, and schools.

(Assembly of Alaska Native Educators [AANE], 1998, p. 2)

The standards grew out of a collaboration between the University of Alaska Fairbanks and the Alaska Federation of Natives, who created the Alaska Native Rural Systemic Initiative (AKRSI), a statewide network of 20 partner school districts representing 176 rural schools and 20,000 primarily Alaska Native students (Barnhardt & Kawagle, 2005). According to Ray Barnhardt and A. Oscar Kawagle, university-based educators who were instrumental in forming the partnership:

The activities associated with the AKRSI have been aimed at fostering connectivity and complementarity between the Indigenous knowledge systems... and the formal education systems imported to serve the educational needs of rural Native communities. The underlying purpose of these efforts has been to implement research-based initiatives to systematically document the Indigenous knowledge systems of Alaska Native people and to develop pedagogical practices and school curricula that appropriately incorporate Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing into the formal education system. (2005, p. 15)

The Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools—one outcome of this unique partnership—are guidelines for students, educators, curriculum, and communities intended to ensure that students achieve state standards "in such a way that they become responsible, capable and whole human beings in the process" (AANE, 1998, p. 3). The emphasis is on fostering strong connections between students' in-school and out-of-school lives, recognizing multiple ways of knowing and worldviews.

Within this framework, culturally knowledgeable students are expected to assume responsibilities for the well-being of their communities, recount their family histories, understand the role of the heritage language in their identities, and determine the place of their Native community within wider state, regional, national, and international economic systems (AANE, 1998, p. 5). Culturally responsive educators recognize the validity and integrity of traditional knowledge systems, incorporate the expertise of elders in their teaching, and “continually involve themselves in learning about the local culture” (AANE, 1998, p. 9). A culturally responsive curriculum reinforces the Indigenous knowledge students bring to school, drawing on substantive elements of that knowledge while tapping local languages and oral traditions to plumb deeper meanings. Schools and communities are expected to demonstrate respect for Native elders by providing multiple pathways for them to interact with students and “a place of honor in community functions” (AANE, 1998, pp. 17, 21).

Accompanying the standards are guidelines for preparing culturally responsive teachers, strengthening Indigenous languages, nurturing culturally healthy youth, respecting cultural knowledge, and developing cross-cultural orientation programs. Teacher preparation guidelines, for example, call for developing “a philosophy of education that is able to accommodate multiple world views” (AANE, 1999, p. 4). Further, “teachers should build on students’ prior knowledge... learn about the local language[s] and culture[s] of the community in which they are situated, and be able to apply local knowledge in the delivery of academic content (AANE, 1999, pp. 4, 8). They should use multiple instructional strategies grounded in local ways of teaching and learning, and a broad assortment of assessment tools “that maximize the opportunities for students to demonstrate their competence”
teaching through Hawaiian at the tertiary level; Nāwahi is the university’s laboratory school.

Hawaiian-medium schooling has yielded impressive academic results. Nāwahi students, 60 percent of whom come from reduced and free lunch backgrounds, not only surpass their non-immersion peers on English standardized tests, they outperform the state average for all ethnic groups on high school graduation, college attendance, and academic honors. The school has a 100 percent high school graduation rate and a college attendance rate of 80 percent. School leaders Kauanoe Kamanā and William Wilson attribute these outcomes to an academically challenging curriculum that applies lived experience rooted in Hawaiian identity and culture. Reflecting the principles of place, reciprocity, relationality, and respect, the school has succeeded by “holding Hawaiian language and culture high through the hard work so highly valued by Hawaiian elders. . . . That hard work means applying oneself in academics to outperform those in mainstream schools to move the Hawaiian people forward” (William H. Wilson, personal communication, July 23, 2008, and September 8, 2008; see also Wilson & Kamanā, 2001, 2006).

Critical Pedagogy, Social Justice, and Indigenous Knowledges—Working Beyond the “Indigenous versus Western” Divide

If education could do all or if it could do nothing, there would be no reason to speak about its limits. We speak about them, precisely because, in not being able to do everything, education can do something. As educators . . . it behooves us to see what we can do so that we can competently realize our goals. (Freire, 1993, p. 25)

Critical pedagogue Paulo Freire recorded these thoughts in an interview during his first year as Minister of Education in Sao Paulo, Brazil. To rephrase Freire’s words, recognizing the systemic limits of schooling, it nonetheless “behooves us to see what we can do” to transform the practices that continue to exclude Indigenous knowledges from the schooling experience of Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) youth. In this chapter, we have explored key epistemological, philosophical, and pedagogical “threads” which, when woven together, make up the cultural cloth that we have pluralized with the labels of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing. We have also provided examples of how such cultural weavings can be activated in real, live(d) classrooms and schools. Although we have focused on a few key examples, there are many others we might cite that demonstrate the ways in which education practitioners are bridging the pedagogical divides portrayed in our opening epigraph.

These examples illustrate the spaces of possibility in which Indigenous students are supported in achieving academically by mainstream standards and those of their communities. Without ever calling them epistemologies, the educators and communities in the cases profiled here have clearly put into action that which we have spent this chapter describing. These hopeful pedagogical demonstrations
point the way beyond the Indigenous—Western divide. In Freire’s words, they illuminate “what we can do” (our emphasis) to create a critically conscious, socially just, and uplifting education for all learners.

Points of Inquiry

• Given the definition of Indigenous knowledges in this chapter, how might social justice be a “lived pedagogy” for teachers?
• How would you define “place, community, relationships, responsibility, reciprocity, and equity and fairness for all” in your life and community? How do your definitions resonate with or differ from those Brayboy and McCarty discuss for Indigenous knowledges?
• In what ways are “standards for learning” culturally defined? Who creates them? How do they affect the ways diverse students approach “standards for learning” in school?

Points of Praxis

• Ask students to define how culturally based knowledge works in their lives and communities.
• When teaching lessons that reflect particular cultural experiences or worldviews, include a reflective component that allows for comparison among these worldviews.
• Assist students in connecting with a school (public, federal, private) that has a significant Native population. In collaboration with teachers and students at the school, design learning activities and experiences of mutual benefit to all.
• Take advantage of the human and material resources available through community-based American Indian centers, institutions of higher education, and Native American tribal offices to provide accurate and authentic materials and referrals to people who are willing to speak with students on Native American issues. Invite community resource people from diverse communities to participate regularly in learning—teaching experiences in and out of the classroom.

References


Chapter 10

Welcoming the Unwelcome
Disability as Diversity

David J. Connor and Susan L. Gabel

This chapter claims disability as a form of human diversity integral to social justice education and multicultural curricula. Using Disability Studies (DS), we confront widespread misconceptions and stereotypes about how disability is conceived in relation to social judgments of human difference. We then relate these notions of difference to implications for education and social justice pedagogy. First, we look at limiting, oppressive conceptualizations of disability that circulate within the dominant discourse of special education. Second, we briefly narrate the origins of DS, and its development of the social model(s) that radically reconceptualized disability. Third, we focus on the value of Disability Studies in Education (DSE) in unlearning pervasive, damaging stereotypes in order to rethink and reteach disability. Fourth, we sample DSE in action. In closing, we make a case for interdisciplinary research and pedagogy, and focus on the growth of DSE as a tool to be used by all social justice educators.

If asked to identify examples of “diversity” cast large, many readers of this book might respond that race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, social class, and so on, constitute diversity. Civil rights movements have resulted in increased awareness of diversity and increased access to all aspects of society for various groups, although admittedly, we are still a far cry from true equality. In addition to African-Americans, women, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender/queers (GLBTQ), people with disabilities and their allies have also forged a civil rights movement, in an attempt to move them from the margins to center stage. Comprised of an estimated 15 percent of the population (U.S. Census, 2005-7), members of this group have proven to be resolute and subversive. They are resolute because the movement continues to challenge both material and abstract obstructions in the form of physical barriers and human attitudes. They are subversive because although disability has historically been associated with stigma, devaluation, shame, and self-loathing (Goffman, 1963; Stiker, 1999), it now cultivates celebration, value, pride, and self-love (Barnes, Oliver, & Barton, 2002).

Linton (1998) illustrates the resolute and subversive aspects of disability in her classic work Claiming Disability where she urges us to think critically about disability, as “a juncture that can serve both academic discourse and social change” (p. 1). In doing so, she identifies academia as complicit with the rest of society