

The Inequity and Effect of Standardized Literacy Testing for First Nations Students: An Ontario (Canadian) Outlook

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ABSTRACT: The authors illuminate the distinct issues of standardized literacy testing on First Nations (FN) such as the need for equity within Ontario, Canada with regard to the provincial Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO - test) and the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), both criterion-referenced tests for students in Ontario. The authors address key areas such as historical background, test equity, literacy practices and the effect on FN students. A cursory overview of government and control via testing of First Nations was explored.

RESUME: Les auteurs, agissant pour le compte de l'Office de la qualité et de la responsabilité en éducation provinciale (OQRE ; évaluation) et pour l'évaluation en Ontario en matière d'Alphabétisation en école secondaire (Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test), mettent au clair les problèmes évidents qui découlent de l'évaluation de l'alphabétisation normalisée chez les autochtones (First Nations), comme le besoin d'équité en Ontario au Canada. Ces deux évaluations sont des critères de référence pour les élèves d'Ontario. Les auteurs traitent de sujets clés tels que les antécédents historiques, l'évaluation de l'équité, les applications en matière d'alphabétisation et les résultats chez les élèves autochtones. Le gouvernement procède à un simple aperçu et une vérification est menée en évaluant les autochtones.

Background and Purpose

From the onset of this paper we suggest the terms Aboriginal, First Nations, and Native be understood as a reference to indigenous nations of North America (Friesen and Friesen, 2002), and due to our focus, we further limit the terms to refer to First Nations (FN) currently residing in Canada. We begin by considering a recent report by the office of the Auditor General of Canada who presented an alarming picture of Aboriginal education: "There is a 28 year educational gap between First Nations and Canadians" [and the] "educational achievement of Aboriginal students ... has not changed

significantly in 10 years" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 3). In other words, Aboriginal education has not moved forward as outcomes still mirror those of the 1980's. This observation combined with increasing evidence that standardized literacy testing is not an educationally sound decision for First Nations students, especially when it is made a graduation requirement (Battiste & McLean, 2005).

In one of the biggest provinces in Canada, Ontario, erected the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) to undertake literacy testing which has become an important part of the accountability movement, with little consideration of the effect and lack of fairness such tests have for minority populations such as FN students. EQAO, created in 1996 was actually a response to recommendations from the Royal Commission on Learning (RCL) (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1994), and its responsibility was the "construction, administration, scoring, and reporting of standardized assessments" (Black-Allen, 2011, p. 16). The OSSLT was developed based on RCL's recommendation that "a literacy test be given to students, which they must pass before receiving their secondary school diploma" (OME, 1994). The EQAO and its mandate for accountability testing has received support from all three major political parties in Ontario from its inception under the government of the New Democratic Party to its continuing support by the Progressive Conservatives and most recently the Liberal Party (Volante, 2007). The primary purpose of the OSSLT was to ensure that "students have the literacy (reading and writing) skills needed to meet the literacy requirement of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD)" (EQAO, 2007, p. 5). This is part of a broader EQAO mandate to promote and maintain the "quality and effectiveness" of education in Ontario (EQAO, 2004, p. 2).

However, many reserves in Ontario are currently band controlled and could opt out of provincial curriculum frameworks as they are self-governed and a responsibility of our Federal government; still most have instituted EQAO testing at the elementary level in an attempt to raise pass rates, on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), for Aboriginal students. The problem of standardized literacy testing can be partially examined by recognizing at least three, of many underlying issues. For instance, educators' social equity obligations to minority students (Fairbairn & Fox, 2009; Heubert, 2002); the bias inherent in the testing (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005; Solano-Flores, 2008), and specific problems with standardized literacy testing such as the OSSLT as a graduation requirement (Cheng, Klinger, & Zheng, 2007; Luce-Kapler & Klinger, 2005).

Introduction

Recently, the United Nations Human Rights Council has criticized Canada's track record with Aboriginal children "calling on Canada to improve the treatment of its Aboriginal people ... in various areas including employment, housing, [and] education" (Schlein, 2009, para. 1). There is an obligation, on the part of all education partners, to provide First Nations students with the opportunities for fair and equitable education. This obligation is not being met. Standardized literacy tests—specifically the OSSLT—are, at best, not meeting the needs of First Nations students and, at worst, seriously impeding their chances of success in the education system. We, as educators, must listen to Aboriginal concerns about education. Ignoring these voices has serious repercussions we believe. These concerns include teacher, student and parent frustration at the lack of success of First Nations students within a system that already has wanting results for its First Nations students. The further restriction of success due to the increased emphasis on standardized literacy tests and accountability measures only means continued inequity for First Nations students. The EQAO, by imposing the OSSLT, has not done the difficult work of considering the impact on First Nations students. This is called "adverse effects discrimination which can be said to occur when an apparently neutral law or policy has a disproportionate and harmful impact on children within a particular protected group" (Cassidy & Jackson, 2005, p. 449). First Nations students need to feel that their needs are being met, that they are being respected, and that they have an equal chance at success.

As Nezavdal (2003) observed, a crucial problem with these tests is linked to "politicians, touting virtues of standardized "objective" tests and "accountability" are bulldozing their tests into the classroom, seemingly unaware of the potentially disastrous consequences of high stakes testing. We know that standardized testing and social conditions are inequitable and biased (p. 65). Many First Nations students have a different worldview and confront the world in a different way from students of Eurocentric cultures; this has an effect on standardized test results; specifically, the EQAO Literacy Test we believe.

Standardized literacy tests do not provide a valid form of assessment for First Nations peoples. "The *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2007) defined student academic success in Eurocentric terms that quantified knowledge acquisition and literacy development by criterion and norm-referenced test scores" (Cherubini & Hodson, 2008, p. 20). A

Eurocentric definition of success is different from notions of success for First Nations people; therefore failure on a standardized literacy test by First Nations students is deceptive. It is a fallacy to think that failure on the OSSLT means that First Nations students are less literate. Unfortunately, ministries of education, most notably the Ontario Ministry of Education, even though they are involved with education for First Nations peoples, continue an emphasis on testing and testing results rather than on greater change in pedagogical methods and curriculum innovation. Despite the fact that there is little research about First Nations and standardized literacy testing, the research that is available does point out unequivocally that many critics "question the appropriateness of a standardized test to accurately appraise the intellect or cognitive potential of children from culturally diverse backgrounds (Armour-Thomas, 1992, p. 552; Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005). Continuing to use inappropriate standardized tests, such as the OSSLT, and to use data from such tests to inform policy for First Nations education will only exacerbate the problem.

Distrust of Education

The relationship between Aboriginal peoples and external governments has been one of assimilation, abuse of power, and domination the world over. Other countries, besides Canada, have been a part of these same transgressions on FN peoples as Beresford and Gray, 2008 discovered and explain: The historical legacy of Australia's racist past is impossible to overestimate . . . these effects are still being felt today . . . How many generations does it take for the damage to be undone? (p. 207). The historic relationship between FN people and government educational institutions can adversely affect the attitudes towards large-scale assessments such as standardized literacy testing. There is significant resistance to government initiatives that enforce measuring standards. This resistance is a reaction to current elements of standardization and reform that do not adequately take into consideration FN student needs, and is exacerbated by the legacy of domination and assimilation meted out in residential schools and programs of development for First Nations imposed by Canadian governments over the last 100 years (Milloy, 2006).

The intergenerational discontent caused by residential schooling, its lies, and its legacy of sexual and physical abuse continues today (Milloy, 2006). Large-scale assessments imposed through government programming are unlikely to be an effective

measure of the current educational status of FN students because of the defiance that young people, especially teenagers, are likely to exhibit. One of the most difficult aspects of teaching in a school that includes FN students is gaining the trust of such students—a nearly impossible task, given the legacy of domination and a system that takes advantage of FN peoples (Milloy, 2006).

Examination as a Tool of Government

To fully understand Aboriginal students' resistance to standardized literacy testing, one must consider the relationship of such assessment strategies and their role in government control. Graham and Neu (2004) explained how the philosopher, sociologist, and historian Michel Foucault describes this power relationship through his theory of modern government control suggesting "modern government functions by a diffuse network of indirect power, rather than through direct control . . . Governments of today achieve their goals through techniques that create cooperative and self-disciplining citizens" (p. 295). It is a process that is continuous and largely covert. Yet, it is through policy that governments are able to gain control of populations. This is not lost on FN peoples. By instituting standardized literacy tests, the government is better able to influence how students (or "subjects") learn the skills and content decided on by the government or its representatives, which is reminiscent of residential schooling and assimilation procedures (Milloy, 2006). A standardized literacy test like the OSSLT helps the provincial government identify, sort and designate students who may be better suited to feed the machine of business. These are aspects of a similar nature to the concept of the residential school, one of the most abhorrent historical experiences of FN peoples (Milloy, 2006).

Governing of the Individual

The insidious nature of standardized literacy testing for FN students is underpinned by its focus on the individual. By implementing testing on the individual the government is better able to influence, in the name of accountability, the prospects and focus of FN student learning. Graham and Neu (2004) clarified how these provocative methods "focus on populations as the target of government which has encouraged the development of techniques for knowing populations" (p. 299). Many of the techniques have been used for many years in education such as "the examination, a quintessential tool for the government of the individual. Although government is concerned with populations, its impact on individuals should not be ignored (Graham

& Neu, 2004, p. 299). Foucault, as interpreted by Graham and Neu (2004), is able to clearly identify the elements of testing that might best fulfill the agenda of the government:

Learning to submit to instruction and testing, to sit still at a desk for hours each day, to depend upon an institution, and to adjust one's behaviour to produce socially acceptable results are all by-products of the modern education system that produces not just educated graduates, but docile citizens. These are the effects to which testing contributes, and, as Foucault described, they are directed primarily towards the examinee. . . . Whenever measurements are made, and results are aggregated, compared, and publicized, the result is the same: those who are the subjects of these measurements are revealed in their attributes, and they, therefore, adjust their behaviour towards the group norm. As Foucault points out, this happens regardless of whether the standard of measurement is regarded as a minimal threshold (as in criterion-referenced testing), as an average to cluster around (as in norm-referenced testing), or as an optimum to be striven for. (p. 310-311)

Many of us have been in these positions, as we were required to behaviourally conform, write annual province-wide tests, in a required manner, while following provincial protocols. The resultant data are then used to rank schools and students in league tables that both inform and reflect upon the students, the school, its teachers and the Administration (Nichols, & Berliner, 2007). Doing well on these tests becomes a focus within narrowed curricula which is aimed at enhancing student testing performance outcomes.

The Test

Standardized assessments, such as the OSSLT, may have started out as accountability measures that were politically expedient; however, for FN peoples these tests have become akin to assimilation. Residential schools set out to wipe out the connection between parent and child and to supplant that relationship with a Western colonial mindset and hegemony. In much the same way, though less immediately caustic, standardized literacy tests break the connection to FN culture and communication by manipulating the "discourse" of

education through data and statistics. Graham and Neu, (2004) suggest government is "predicated on language as a flexible medium in which agents can innovate modes of discourse as required. . . . The tools required to manage territory are institutional; those required to manage population are numerical and statistical" (p. 299). Tests like the OSSLT make the discussion about low test scores for FN students possible – even probable. This delimits the discussion of quality education to the elements of the test and its structures. As exemplified by the OSSLT, teachers and administrators have succumbed to more discussions about raising test scores, as the government intended, and less about the validity of testing as Graham and Neu, 2004 explained how "the power of numericizing student and teacher behaviour lies in the way subsequent decisions are shaped. Seemingly innocent choices early on in the quantification process have far-reaching effects" (p. 308). Even which subject area to test within impacts the educational process. It "generates (un)intended emphasis on the tested subjects . . . at the expense of other subjects. With the visibility given to test results, teachers are pressured into placing undue emphasis on those aspects that are measurable with the test instruments" (Graham & Neu, 2004, p. 308). Political power is evident throughout the change process from the government agency down. Superintendents, administrators, teachers, and even parents now hold discussions about standardized testing and the mechanics of preparation rather than changing teaching technique and erecting a student-centred curriculum. Students, especially FN students, are very sensitive to the changing results of testing. It defines not only their abilities, but also those of their race. They are fully aware of the injustice and this frustration manifests itself in many ways, including a defeatist attitude when it comes to testing. The evidence is very clear that the change process driven by coercive testing regimens and external inspections is failing (Nichols & Berliner, 2007).

High Stakes: Element of Control

Dominant social relations

Basil Bernstein (a sociologist at the University of London's Institute for Education) reinforced Foucault's theory of governmentality through the former's theory of dominant social relations. Many scholars have examined social relations yet Au (2008) clarified most succinctly how standardized testing is the focus of Bernstein's concept of the pedagogic device: "it [helps] to address this gap in the research by explaining how high-stakes tests operate as a relay in the

reproduction of dominant social relations" (p. 1). Bernstein categorizes the element of control standardized tests exert into three categories—distributive, recontextualizing, and evaluative:

The first is classroom content, where high-stakes, standardized tests have defined what counts as legitimate school knowledge: If a knowledge domain is on the test, then it is considered legitimate. . . . Second, high-stakes tests have been found to exert considerable control over the form that content knowledge takes in the classroom. . . . Specifically this has resulted in classroom knowledge being presented as isolated facts, as bits and pieces of datum that students need to memorize for the tests alone. . . . Third, research on high-stakes testing has also found that these tests leverage control over teacher pedagogies. (Au, 2008, p. 2)

The distributive element is an element of control through choice. These include the choices made by publishers, ministries of education, administrators, and teachers. These decisions limit the discussion of education to those elements that are the focus of the standardized test and add legitimacy to them. This may also be extended to focus on those subjects directly related to the test. By limiting the choices of students in other areas of content, there is greater control of subject focus. The distributive element will be further discussed in terms of learning styles of FN students. Control of content is only the first vehicle of control.

Recontextualizing is the second method of control outlined by Bernstein. This limits the content and discussion in the classroom to those elements highlighted for standardized testing. The discourse between student and teacher is appropriated to focus on the test. Local decision-making is seriously impeded by this function and makes the discourse less a construct of the students' hegemony and is, therefore, less relevant to them. "High-stakes testing selects and distributes students' and teachers' identities within test-influenced pedagogic discourse. As the research on high-stakes testing and inequality in the United States illustrates, such recontextualization has had deleterious effects on non-white . . . students in particular" (Au, 2008, para. 5).

The evaluative control function of testing is the choosing of those topics that are to be tested. It is a more subtle way of influencing the assimilation process that is so abhorrent to First

Nations people. By controlling what is to be tested, the notion of governing is truly captured we believe and this impacts the "children [who] are the living messages that we send to a time we will not see" (Postman, 1984, p. xi).

MySchool: Non-fiction

The OSSLT is an example of the distributive, recontextualizing, and evaluative pedagogic discourse in Ontario schools with FN students. In *MySchool*, the focus of instruction, most notably in English classes, incorporates test-taking skills as a large part of the curriculum of grades 9 and 10 classes in anticipation of the OSSLT. Specific repercussions in the classroom include an overwhelming emphasis on such skills but also have made it less possible to include FN literature, storytelling, and learning styles into the class (which will be specifically addressed later in this paper). What is most disturbing is that literacy-test preparation takes the place of true literacy instruction. Such skills-replacement activities include: time spent training to complete test questions; how to answer multiple-choice questions, including how to guess if one does not know the answer (e.g., "b or c are your best option if you don't know"); and skimming material for answers instead of reading. Book purchases and budgets have been in decline to make room for test-preparation materials (British Columbia Teachers Federation, 2007, March), and the evaluation process has been augmented with testing-related materials in the regular classroom that now create a double jeopardy for FN students who are evaluated not only on the test, but also in the classroom as they prepare for the test (i.e., standardized testing is used to prepare students for the standardized test). Vandenberghe and Gierl (2001) suggested how,

items on achievement tests are designed to be equivalent in educational testing situations. That is, the information provided to the student is designed to be the same regardless of the ethnicity of the examinee. As a result, students of equal ability would be expected to select the same answer regardless of their ethnicity. However, aboriginals and non-aboriginals may use different cognitive processing skills, and consequently, may find items differentially easy or difficult, depending on which cognitive style is elicited by the item. (p. 29)

If the OSSLT, and all standardized literacy tests for that matter, are going to be prerequisite for graduation, then they must be free from bias. On this test, over the past few years, there has been a question based on being Canadian. The EQAO is asking for empathy; a much more difficult task than what they are asking other students. Tests like the OSSLT are not culturally neutral.

Removing Subject Matter

Standardized testing, specifically the EQAO Literacy Test, ignores such basic elements of FN psyche like that of nationalism; consequently, there is unfairness on the test. This contradiction is one that has blinded advocates of testing for some time with the illusion of stability via testing: "when in reality high-stakes testing further disrupts traditional notions of time and schooling. High-stakes testing attempts to increase the velocity of time, compress learning, promote a market-like competitiveness, and implement a consumerist approach to learning" (Urrieta, 2004, p. 214).

What becomes apparent is that, despite the EQAO stating that it is concerned with reliability and that the samples are considered unbiased, it shows little consideration for and makes no mention of Native students (Black-Allen, 2011). There are a number of claims made by the EQAO about the OSSLT, such as: "they require higher-order thinking, they are similar to good classroom practices, they are criterion- rather than norm-referenced and they use tasks that are meaningful instructional activities" (Education Quality and Accountability Office, 1999, p. 2). Good classroom instruction for whom? In the case of FN students and their diverse learning methods, the test takes on a norm-referenced aspect. Eurocentric approaches and learning styles are pronounced on the OSSLT, making memorization more prevalent for FN students. Reliable results are a necessity for standardized literacy testing which is lacking on the OSSLT in that the parameters of the test must consider all relevant groups, a notion reiterated by Kohn (2000) who explained how some see testing as "acceptable, even desirable, providing that the test is well designed. We must begin by pointing out that this is largely a hypothetical argument given how flawed even criterion-referenced, open response exams tend to be" (p. 16). More likely, the OSSLT provides a test which has both "formalist and compensatory notions [which can be seen] as creating opportunities that are not worth having" (Moses & Nanna, 2007, p. 65). Simply suggesting that one is concerned with reliability does remove the responsibility of doing the difficult work of ensuring it. More

importantly, this disregard for the state of First Nations and their relation to the test has tangible and detrimental effects that “can lead to score manipulation, test administration improprieties, teaching to the test, the de-skilling of students and teachers through prescriptive reading routines, and the elimination of low-stakes subject matter, including Native language and cultural instruction” (McCarty, 2009, para. 1). Surely, removing the few vestiges of relevant curriculum from FN students in schools is not the answer. Pedagogically sound decision-making has been reduced to one of strict adherence to scores and results.

Teachers

Relationships Inherent in Aboriginal Education

The teacher in a school with FN students is under pressure to balance the elements of standardized literacy testing and proper literacy practices. The most essential element of the relationship between the teacher and the FN student is one of trust. As already established, the mistrust that FN students have of education is substantial. Teachers (Native and especially non-Native) are under tremendous pressure to establish a bond of truth and trust with their students. Standardized testing subjects students and teachers to a lot of anxiety. A praxis of success for all students must be established by the teacher. The tension in this responsibility involves the local teacher’s dilemma between deciding to teach to the test or to teach literacy. Most significantly, there is little room for standardized testing, yet ample opportunities to employ standards in an affirming style of teaching.

MySchool

Teachers of FN students are in a unique position in regard to standardized literacy testing. Allowing such bias to continue unchecked is to accept a system that simply reinforces the traditional role of education in First Nations. Mayo (2007), discussing Paulo Freire’s theories of pedagogy, notes that some form of resistance is needed on the part of teachers: “Education, for Freire, is not neutral and involves educating for either domestication or liberation. It involves taking sides . . . with the dominant” (p. 531). Standardized testing is one element that needs to be vigilantly opposed by educators. One way of promoting a more unbiased system of assessment may be for ministries of education to consider accommodating “standardized testing within a contemporary learner-centered paradigm, which endorses a more eclectic ‘toolbox’ approach

to assessment that allows the informed educator to select among diverse gauges of learning progress" (Gallager, 2003, p. 83).

The Test

It is not just the language of the tests but also the conventions of language which can be confusing to FN students as "differential performance concerns the dynamics of sociolinguistics that occurs in a standardized assessment context. Sociolinguistic variables describe courtesies and conventions of discourse that govern interpersonal interactions (Armour-Thomas, 1992, p. 555). Admittedly, students who are not English or French language users in their Canadian homes or local communities are often described as English as a second language (ESL) learners in Canadian schools. Being an ESL learner it may be more difficult to complete the standardized test as the communication style, dialect, and academic register used in large scale tests, although held to be "universal", are not equally accessible across ethnic, linguistic, and SES backgrounds (Solano-Flores, 2008). Indeed, these sociolinguistic patterns can impact positively or negatively on students' motivation and performance depending on the degree of congruence or compatibility reflected in assessment practices. While testing procedures are standardized for purposes of reliability they "cannot adjust for differential response biases in children that may be a function of their sociolinguistic experiences. But such constraints of the testing environment may preclude an accurate estimation of cognitive competence from children from culturally different backgrounds (Armour-Thomas, 1992, p. 555).

It would seem that making a standardized literacy test fair would require it to be culturally neutral and provide for the differences in dialect and structure of language inherent to a diverse population like that in Canada, including First Nations. As tests require standardization in their development, implementation and interpretation, it would be reasonable to assume that this is simply not possible as context and human elements are difficult to control for. Yet, because of the way these tests are written, with a "standard" set by the dominant culture, there is little chance of tests being changed to suit ethnic minorities:

Tests that are normed in English may include members of different ethnic and racial groups, but the percentage of culturally and linguistically diverse students included in norming samples typically is no more than that included in the population of the

United States as a whole. In such cases, for many English standardized tests, Asian and Latino children's scores are still compared primarily with those of middle class, monolingual Euro-American children. (Saenz & Huer, 2003, p. 184)

Students taking large-scale testing already have a surfeit of stress; to also expect that test to be in a language that is unfamiliar, with language and grammar constructions that are foreign, is doubly stressful for FN students: The language and organizational formats of high-stakes tests like the OSSLT, however, do not represent the ways in which language typically occurs in classrooms or other domains of academic life (Fox & Liying, 2007, p. 13).

What is necessary, at the very least, is a designation for First Nations and any other dialectical language category on standardized literacy tests to truly ascertain whether it is the language component or some other variant that affects pass scores. Without this designation we may find, like the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (CASLPA) (2010) has found that "cultural and/or linguistic biases in standardized assessment tools combined with a lack of culturally appropriate tools "(p.3) leads to misinformation. Admittedly, "developmental information for First Nations, Inuit and Métis children is lacking. Best practices borrowed from mainstream service delivery may not be effective for First Nations, Inuit and Métis families (CASLPA, 2010, p. 3).

Result

One critical consequence of these standardized assessments of literacy is that, through no fault of their own, FN students are failing standardized literacy tests more than their non-Native counterparts. One mitigating factor is language and the level to which the FN child has accepted the non-Native cultural milieu. We ask: Is their failure due to dialect, language problems and/or cultural acquisition, or simply language alone? Even with self-identification, it will be difficult to tell. To further obscure the problem, there are students with varying levels of second language acquisition:

While some come to school speaking the Native language and English, others may be predominantly Native speaking. Many are English-dominant with receptive (listening) abilities in the Native language. Still others may have no Native-language exposure at all. Students with each of these language profiles (or some combination) may be present in a single

classroom or school. These varied language abilities are not amenable to a uniform, one-size-fits-all approach. (McCarty, 2009, para. 3)

FN students have a strong sense of culture, and “have refused to abandon their rights, cultures, and values, and their movements for change have achieved significant progress” (Kavanagh, 2006, p. 14). Many see language as one of the truest forms of cultural retention. By making standardized literacy testing a measure of scholastic success, FN students are faced with difficult decisions like abandoning their languages to master standardized English. How many are simply quitting school rather than face the choice?

Conclusions

Part of the problem with testing is that school boards are implementing more standardized testing to prepare for standardized tests required for graduation (Black-Allen, 2011, p. 90). Students come away with many test-taking skills but little ingenuity, true learning, or literacy skills (Ryan, 2003). Do we want students to remember how to take tests or how to think critically, problem solve, and have an adventure?

Some aspects of education that are already being incorporated can help to alleviate this imbalance for FN students. A participatory notion of education and testing should be the first change, which “places inclusion and democratic deliberation at centre stage and involves a renegotiation of the goals and procedures of education so that diverse perspectives can be included” (Moses & Nanna, 2007, p. 65). Ways of teaching that include a critical approach to learning and self-directed learning can be harnessed to best meet the unique needs of our FN students. A critical multiculturalism perspective can also help by visually reflecting the diversity of the classroom in the content of the course, building on the positive experiences of the students. Having teachers who better reflect the diversity of the student body thus offers encouragement by way of role modeling success. And as noted earlier, we need a designation for First Nations and any other dialectical language category on standardized literacy tests to truly ascertain whether it is the language component or some other variant that affects pass scores.

Lastly, teachers may wish to avoid confrontation of sensitive multicultural contexts by introducing an outside cultural milieu or practices (such as Maori culture) to help introduce fascination and tolerance of other cultures without the loaded problem of dealing with

the festering biases of cultural clashes within the classroom. For instance, "photographing a body is culturally unacceptable to Maori because the head is the most sacred part of the body for many Polynesian tribes including Maori" (Deng, Foukia, & Savarimuthu, 2007, p. 2). This new information presenting in classrooms could lead to openness, disclosure and discussion of culture matters in a manner that sensitizes students to diversity. It is through accepting new and better teaching and learning methods into our classroom that we can be most effective.

In sum, we do conclude that a flexible, holistic, culturally sensitive assessment system is needed which uses relevant standards for FN students. Perhaps at this point in our development this is not possible yet EQAO endeavors, "to provide comparable year-to-year data to give the public information on students achievement . . . [and] "to provide reliable, objective and high-quality data that can inform school boards, improvement planning and target setting" (EQAO, *Framework*, 2007, p. 4), however, as we have learned herein this is at present a titanic mission.

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