



Land of Shadows

[Bernard W. Andrews, ©2000](#)

To the First Nations of Canada

Prelude

When I decided to pursue a teaching career, I undertook teacher training in Western Canada. During the course of my studies, many hours were spent in discussions with colleagues on the issues and concerns of First Nations peoples within educational institutions. What particularly struck me were the good intentions and intense frustrations of these teachers and administrators, many from the northern areas of the prairie provinces, who were attempting to improve the conditions of children on the reserves. What I personally witnessed was considerable poverty and deprivation, and a clash of oral and literate cultural perspectives that manifested itself throughout most of my career as a music teacher, teacher educator and educational researcher.

In the field of music education, traditional instruction emphasizes individual competition, ensemble discipline, music literacy, architectonic forms and singular idioms such as the concert band, choir or string orchestra. This approach is appropriate for those Canadians of English, French and later European backgrounds who are socialized into Western cultural patterns. However, for Aboriginal peoples or those recent Canadians of Asian or African ethnicity, concert bands and choirs are foreign entities. Their music emphasizes individual participation, group co-operation, oral transmission, improvisation and multi-levelled communication. Many times I experienced tension in my classroom when the culture-specific practices of oral and literate forms clashed in my classroom; for example, when my students preferred rap, reggae, drum or throat music, and I required them to learn a march, suite, overture or symphony.

Conflicting patterns of oral and literate socialization are intensified by the effects of the modern media--the radio, telephone, television, computer and fax machine. The electronic field replays many of the traits of oral cultures, such as immediacy, spontaneity, a high level of participation, and visual imagery. Rock music, for example, is topical, improvisatory, group-composed and highly visual, and it is predominantly transmitted by oral means. Moreover, as both speech and tone are created simultaneously, the music is inseparable from the words. In literate societies, words and notes are conceived as objective things separate from their performance. In oral cultures, there is no such split of thought and action so that performer, composer and listener are combined in one entity. Where literate societies preserve their music in writing, oral cultures store theirs through the physical assimilation of movement; that is, the person is the tradition.

I did not fully understand the notion of 'person as tradition' until several years later. When training and supervising Aboriginal music teachers in northern Ontario, I experienced once again the cultural clash between literate Western and oral Aboriginal patterns of thinking. The issue that raised anxiety was my institution's emphasis on lesson plans as a key determinant of effective teaching and success in teacher education, and the reluctance of First Nations teacher-candidates to produce them. They adopted a "watch then do" approach to teaching. They explained it best when they stated that life is not a question of "What's next?" which represents our Western predilection for planning, but rather one of "What's happening?" They were concerned with living in the 'now' and not in a pre-determined future that may or may not occur.

"Land of Shadows" integrates poetry, prose and Aboriginal voices in a holistic way to express my feelings and thoughts on the loss of control that the First Nations have experienced as their land, their traditions, and their way of life have been marginalized in the Canadian mosaic. This piece represents a scholastic art-form entitled Proetry. In this work, the form combines text, verse and quotations in such a way that the parts flow together and reinforce each other to provide the reader with multiple perspectives on the content. Proetry can be read silently by an individual, or with partners in the manner of chamber music with each one reading the poetry, prose and quotations, respectively. Alternately, it can be performed on stage for an audience with one or more readers who read the different parts.

In "Land of Shadows," the poetry component recounts the frustration of coping with the bureaucracies of cities, and the stories that the elders tell of a time when nature had not yet been spoiled by Western European civilization. There is the telling of the coming of the tall ships, the rape of the forests, the indoctrination of the missionaries, the ruthlessness of the fur trade, and the terrible effect of liquor on Aboriginal peoples. And finally, there is the helplessness that has so often been misunderstood. The prose component provides information and commentary on the legal framework for multiculturalism in Canada, the First Nation's resistance to inclusion in the Canadian mosaic, the rise of self-determination as a proactive stance, the impact of Western colonization, the Aboriginal feelings of loss of control, and the failure of federal government schooling for young people on the reserves. Quotations from the literature provide explanatory power to the poetry and prose by recounting the personal experiences of First Nations individuals. Their words give credence to the heartache that we do not fully understand and that we seldom take the time to fully understand.

Proetry

Visions of a dream

Lost in the fibres

Among the rushes

In the choking dust

And time-paced hours

Of asphalt jungles

Tall concrete canyons

And empty echoes

Of silent conscience

When the mountains move

When the grasslands die

Water cries of thirst

The sky cannot breathe

Valleys fill with dust

Prairies crack with age

Fires will not burn

The stifling silence

Of a human grave

The government's commitment to a policy of multiculturalism received the support of all political parties in 1977. This policy was subsequently embodied in Bill-93 and, on the 21st of July, 1988, the final step in the enacting process was completed when Bill-93 received Royal Assent and the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* became law. The Act recognizes religious, cultural, linguistic and racial diversity as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society, and it acknowledges the right of minorities to use their language and cherish their heritage. Consequently, Canadians collectively enjoy the values and traditions of a multicultural population within a national bilingual framework. Aboriginal peoples, however, believe that Canada's pluralistic approach has marginalized their voices and devalued their aspirations.

In the area of Canadian history and Indian-White relations, what is taught in the Eurocolonial interpretation of this relationship. The other half of the equation is believed to be non-existent because it is not written down in history books.

Aboriginal peoples have not endorsed official multiculturalism as they argue that the policy ignores their desire for self-determination and self-government, which are the basic tenets of their collective aspirations. Further, Aboriginals do not want to be designated as one of many communities within the Canadian federation as they do not consider themselves to be an ethnic group, a visible minority or immigrants. Rather, they argue that they have a historical tradition of spiritual and economic association with each other and, through Aboriginal and treaty rights, a legal stake in the land base. For these reasons, they claim to truly be the First Nations of Canada.

The thundering plains

The windswept blue grass

Of red sapphire sun

Mocking northern lights

Careless in fashion

Of nature's caress

Shadows of contempt

For unseen horizons

Of stone-hearted men

The waters ran blue

Free as the warm winds

That soften white snow

Fish roamed like bison

In spider web streams

Jewels on the landscape

A long string of pearls

No boundaries nor

Fetters on the mind

First Nations leaders believe that self-determination is the only credible solution that will change the pattern of inequity that has caused them to remain the most oppressed and poorest segment of the Canadian mosaic. It has been their experience that their relationships with Canadian society continually leave them in an inferior position. Multiculturalism, they believe, will expound the rhetoric of equality and justice, but over time will codify the usual hierarchical patterns that reinforce their low status. Distancing themselves from such official policy and focusing on self-determination is a proactive stance, one that attempts to change the established pattern of inequity and break the cycle of dependency that has come to characterize their communities.

The ability to be objective is highly valued in the study of history, yet how can this information, when so one-sided, be considered objective and therefore acceptable to the First Nations learner. The contradiction is too great: this exhibits disrespect to the knowledge that exists with First Nations culture and to the experiences of the First Nations learners who live in the culture. As First Nations then, we have to take responsibility for correcting this contradiction ... my identity is reinforced and strengthened because I have to defend it against a 'value' of another culture.

Aboriginal peoples believe that they lost control of their socio-political structures through colonization of their territories. In this way, the Canadian government reduced the authority of their institutions to a state of dependency on federal largesse. It was primarily in response to this loss of control that Aboriginal writers conceptualized the notion of self-determination (used interchangeably with self-government) as a political construct to describe their relationship with Canada. Indeed, Aboriginal leaders emphasize that they never surrendered their nationhood, rather they signed treaties which established and ensured their sovereignty.

From the edge of the earth

Crawled a poisonous snake

Black eyes of molten fire

Crushing the earth's likeness

Burning black nature's desire

Seared dreams of a people

Carved deep in tradition

Their destiny of shadows

A cold dark uncertainty

Through the silent mist
A proud figurehead
Reared its ugliness
The gigantic prow
Crushing blue waters
Of toiling sailors
And sweating soldiers
Defying the contempt
Of nature's wilderness

The history of the First Nations peoples is a legacy of loss of control. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the educational systems that were foisted upon them. Initially, the early missionaries attempted to civilize the Aboriginal peoples through a Western European educational model which emphasized literacy, numeracy and monotheism. Successive governments promoted this approach and implemented educational policies designed to assimilate Aboriginal children into the Canadian mainstream through residential, provincial and federally-funded reserve schools. These institutions removed children from the familial setting so that the family unit became disjointed. Consequently, helplessness and heartache became a recurring motif of successive generations of Aboriginal youth, their parents and the elders.

“Years ago when my husband and I started to get old we enjoyed going to the Sundance. We had a complete outfit, our buckskin outfit for dancing. But the strict upbringing from the priest and nuns bothered us ... We never forget what we were taught in school by the nuns and priests - not to believe or join in any of the society's rituals that were connected with the Sundance.”

Children and youth on the reserves are much akin to young people across the country in their perceptions, yearnings, hopes and dreams. All of them have much to offer this place we call Canada. However, a pattern of dependence has been established by the Canadian government whereby Aboriginal peoples have been encouraged to remain on isolated reserves sustained by the infusion of federal grants, low-paying government jobs, and no income tax. Such a policy has resulted in Aboriginal peoples living in economically disadvantaged conditions and not integrating into modern society, despite programs to encourage young people to obtain degrees at major Canadian universities, and proposals to enable individuals to settle in more favourable areas.

And on the dark shore
Proud trees fell victim
Stripped of their dignity
Naked barriers cut
To seal out the sky
And stop the rivers

Burn violent warning
To the saddened faces
Of an angry people
White priests in black robes
Preached the oneness of faith
Smiling eyes of the light
Honest faces sincere
They darkened the Gods of many colours
Earth fire sun and rain
In the day of the night
In the wisdom of right
The oneness of nature

The modern media brings together aspects of orality, that is the myths and the visual image, with fundamental characteristics of the literate tradition, the symbolic form and symbolic systems. In contrast, traditional education socializes students from an oral perspective (i.e., the circle) towards a literate, objective point of view (i.e., the square) by developing skills of literacy, numeracy, aesthetic judgement and technology (refer to Figure 1). Today's students, however, are the electronic generation with perceptions that reflect many of the traits of oral cultures. Their simultaneous, subjective and emotional behaviours are a replay of their oral roots and represent the way many young people view the world. The multi-cultural diversity in Canadian schools merely intensifies the oral traits of the electronic field and creates a classroom environment with a more complex web of divergent beliefs about what is relevant. Consequently, tensions arise as the literate thrust of instruction clashes with the contrasting oral perceptions of the students, thereby creating tension and mistrust in educational settings.

"I was disappointed in the attitude of some of those I dealt with in administration who would rather 'deal' with me than 'relate' with me."



Figure 1: Traditional Schooling

Traders of fur with
Bottles of fire

That scorched the throat
And twisted the brain
Left instinct behind
To rot in the soil
Grow black roots of hate
Seeds of frustration
Green fruits never ripened
Bullets flew faster
Smashed buffalo skull
Tamed the swift arrow
And broke the strong bow
Shortened vast distance
Disobeyed time's caress
Shattered the tomahawk
And split the long spear
Severing man from himself

In effect, the circle is squared by the traditional instructional program in schools. This process is especially evident on the reserves where federal government grants mandate that band schools adopt provincial curricula which promote a Eurocentric view. In contrast, however, the effects of the modern media in society have encircled the square (Figure 2). For this reason, schools are not always seen as relevant by young people. The net result is considerable conflict and misunderstandings between teachers and students in classrooms, both in terms of learning and social behaviours. This is even more pronounced on the reserves when Western conceptions of literacy are favoured. Phonemic orthography, for example, poses serious problems for students from oral cultures in part due to the very structure of such orthographies and the emphasis on grammatical correctness. Student frustration at learning in this way has resulted in a high dropout rate and lower levels of literacy than in the other areas of the country. Many of these Aboriginal students become involved in drug abuse, and many turn to violence and suicide.

“I felt I knew more about my culture first hand, but white professors trivialized my knowledge because it was not obtainable from libraries, not written.”

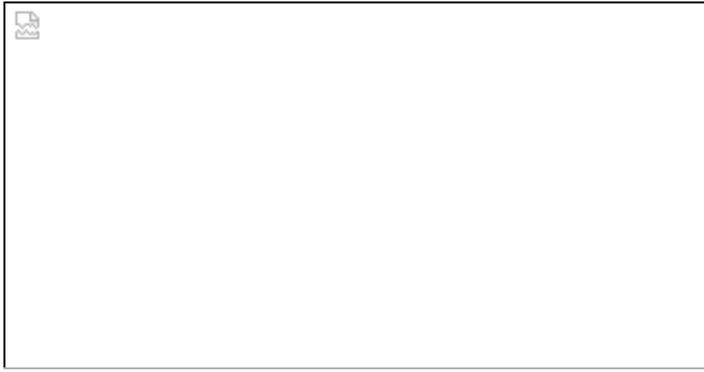


Figure 2: Conflicting Patterns of Socialization

And somewhere nowhere
In elegant shapes
Tailors cut buffalo
Into ladies' black capes
To grace the royal chase
The morning's night after
For elegant phrase
Bullets flew faster
Smashed buffalo skull
The stillness of time
Elusive to hold
Blue sifting vapours
Green gold setting sun
The synthetic man
Elusive to touch
Devoid of all features
Burnt meanings all lost in
Mixed colour shadows

The failure of government-sponsored approaches to schooling has resulted in an unacceptable drop-out rate among Aboriginal students. These individuals are simply not adequately prepared to compete in an ever-expanding technological and highly-competitive work environment. The increase in the number of young people leaving the reserves to earn a living in urban areas, particularly in Western Canada, has created an

underclass of individuals who are poor, undereducated, unemployed and underhoused. Although there are exemplary cases of those who are successful in mainstream society, it is obvious that Canadian institutions have not provided the framework to support the aspirations of Aboriginal peoples. Moreover, there is considerable resistance by the elders to any encouragement to leave the reserves as they believe such action will result in cultural annihilation.

Successive governments have always believed that assimilation was the best approach in terms of dealing with the so-called Indian question. We've all learned that this particular policy approach has cost everyone a great deal. It hurt our people and it just doesn't work because it denied our people the right to decide for ourselves what was appropriate.

The First Nations are seeking self-determination; that is ownership, in those organizations that touch their lives. Historically, they have been unfairly represented on local municipal councils and school boards. Their movement is characterized by the demand for Aboriginal-controlled schools on reserves and Aboriginal-controlled organizations in cities. Further, there are growing demands for power-sharing on boards, commissions and municipal councils as Aboriginals seek to ensure that they are represented at all of levels of the social structure. For our part, we must learn to listen more carefully to their voices. We must recognize the rich traditions and valuable contributions of the First Nations and the role that Aboriginal peoples have a right to play within the Canadian family. We must re-consider, as a Ts'kel educator stated, "mainstream's society's values, the foundations of which are competition, individuality, materialism and nonspirituality. In order for humanity as a whole to survive, we must rid ourselves of those selfish values in favour of cooperation, community, holism and respect for all life."

Footnotes

¹ Wendy Wickwire, "Theories of Ethnomusicology and the North American Indian: Retrospective and Critique." *Canadian University Music Review* Vol. 6, (1995): 186-221.

² Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1962).

³ Ben Sidran, "Oral Culture and the Musical Tradition," in *Black Talk: How the Music of Black America Created a Radical Alternative to the Values of Western Literary Tradition* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), pp. 1-29.

⁴ Carmen Rodriguez and Don Sawyer, *Native Literacy Project Research Report* (Richmond, BC: Open Learning Agency, 1990).

⁵ Alternating poetry and prose originated in Ancient Rome and was called "Menippean satire." It has a parallel in music with the recitative and aria of opera which developed in the seventeenth century. What is unique in this work is the use of the literature to reinforce the verse and the integration of quotations that recount the personal experiences of Aboriginals to provide descriptive and explanatory power. This approach was inspired by Laurel Richardson's writings in *Fields of play: Constructing an academic life*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

⁶ The contribution of Robert Tourangeau, Legislative Counsel, House of Commons, for his assistance in clarifying the legislative process and the content of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* is gratefully acknowledged.

⁷ Quoted in the research study outlined in Jo-Anne Archibald and Sheena Bowman, Editors, "Honouring What They Say: Postsecondary Experience of First Nations Graduates." *Canadian Journal of Native*

Education Vol. 21, No. 1 (1995): 58.

⁸ Glenda P. Sims and Marianne Couchie, "Is the Multicultural Classroom Compatible with Native Self-determination?," in Vincent D'Oyley and Stan Shapson, *Innovative Multicultural Teaching*, (Toronto, ON: Kagan and Woo, 1991), pp. 139-150.

⁹ Jo-Anne Archibald and Sheena Bowman, Editors, "Honouring What They Say: Postsecondary Experience of First Nations Graduates," pp. 58-59.

¹⁰ L. Little Bear, M. Boldt and J. Long, *Pathways to Self-determination: Canadian Indians and the Canadian State*. (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

¹¹ Celia Haig-Brown, *Taking Control: Power and Contradiction in First Nations Adult Education* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1995).

¹² Excerpts taken from interviews with Native women by Glenda Sims. Quoted in Glenda P. Sims and Marianne Couchie, "Is the Multicultural Classroom Compatible with Native Self-determination?," p. 143.

¹³ Ministry of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. *Indian Conditions: A Survey* (Ottawa, ON: Queen's Printer for Canada, 1980).

¹⁴ Tom Flanagan, *First Nations? Second Thoughts* (Calgary, AB: University of Calgary, 2000).

¹⁵ Leonard L. Tsuji, "The Importance of Reverse Tuition Agreements to Self-determination in the Education System." *Canadian Journal of Native Education* Vol. 22, No. 1 (1998): 67-76.

¹⁶ Bernard W. Andrews, "Multicultural Challenges to Western-style Education." *Education Leader* Vol. 5, No. 4 (1992): 12.

¹⁷ Bernard W. Andrews, "Music in a Multicultural Context: Conflict in Patterns of Socialization." *Canadian Music Educator* Vol. 35, No. 4 (1993): 11-16.

¹⁸ Jo-Anne Archibald and Sheena Bowman, Editors, "Honouring What They Say: Postsecondary Experience of First Nations Graduates," p. 59.

¹⁹ Marie Battiste, "Enabling the Autumn Seed: Toward a Decolonized Approach to Aboriginal Knowledge, Language and Education." *Canadian Journal of Native Education* Vol. 22, No. 1 (1998): 16-27.

²⁰ Paul Proulx, "A Traditional Orthography for Northern Canadian Languages." *Kansas Working Paper in Linguistics* Vol. 13 (1988): 1-18. In this article, the author advocates early exposure to syllables followed by a gradual shift to a phonemic Roman alphabet as the most effective approach to improving Aboriginal literacy.

²¹ Jo-Anne Archibald and Sheena Bowman, Editors, "Honouring What They Say: Postsecondary Experience of First Nations Graduates," p. 57.

²² Marie Battiste, "Enabling the Autumn Seed: Toward a Decolonized Approach to Aboriginal Knowledge, Language and Education." *Canadian Journal of Native Education* Vol. 22, No. 1 (1998): 16-27; Jo-Anne Archibald and Sheena Bowman, Editors, "Honouring What They Say: Postsecondary Experience of First Nations Graduates." *Canadian Journal of Native Education* Vol. 21, No. 1 (1995): 1-247.

²³ Phil Fontaine, Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, quoted in Stewart Bell, "Native Leader Dismisses Call for Assimilation," in *The National Post*, Tuesday, April 18, 2000, page A11.

²⁴ Ron Common, "A Search for Equity: A Policy Analysis of First Nations Representation on Provincial School Boards." *Education Today* Vol. 31, No. 3 (1990): 4-7.

²⁵ The Ts'kel graduate program in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia is designed for graduates of the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEDP) who are employed in leadership positions (e.g., principals, directors). The program focuses on First Nations administrative and educational challenges, issues and concerns.

²⁶ Jo-Anne Archibald and Sheena Bowman, Editors, "Honouring What They Say: Postsecondary Experience of First Nations Graduates," p. 55.

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