

Volume 31 Issue 1

cjsae

the canadian journal for the study of adult education

la revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes

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LESSON IN CROSS-CULTURAL DIALOGUE

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*The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/
La revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes*
Editor-in-Chief: Nancy Taber
www.cjsae-rceea.ca

31,1 February/février 2019, 51–62
ISSN 1925-993X (online)

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L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes
www.casae-aceea.ca

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM CURAÇAO: A LESSON IN CROSS-CULTURAL DIALOGUE

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Abstract

The examination of a mid-18th-century biography about a significant developer of Ojibwe and Cree-based syllabics is the starting point for an interrogation of socio-historical cultural cohesion in Canada. The textual creole of syllabics, used widely in business and commerce, provides clues to the dynamics of cross-cultural linguistics. In this essay, I use a discussion of the influence and crucial role played by the creole language Papiamentu in the southern Caribbean island of Curaçao, and its elevation to a core language of instruction in the post-secondary system, as a means to better understand the necessity for greater intercultural dialogue in Canada's post-secondary environment. Through this discussion, I draw on the combined views of Paulo Freire, Michel Foucault, and Herbert Marcuse to illustrate ways in which Canadian learning institutions could do a more effective job to support, engage, and promote cross-cultural dialogues in the classroom. Notwithstanding policy and funding for greater cross-cultural discourse in Canadian post-secondary classrooms, teaching institutions continue to focus less on engaging in necessary difficult discussions that address diversity and far more on a Eurocentric, Westernized education concentrating on the application of dominant cultural values. In spite of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call for Indigenizing the academy and the federal government's creation of an Aboriginal Languages Act, Canada's higher-education realm does little to explicitly promote cross-cultural thinking in the way that creole would. A lack of culturally elaborate thinking is especially pronounced in areas that should touch all aspects of Canadian life, such as curricular initiatives for reconciliation. Instead of relegating such courses to focusing solely on these issues, an integration strategy is necessary. A more effective approach would be the inclusion of diversity-focused work across disciplines within the regular curriculum in order to generate a more effective intercultural developmental capacity across the curriculum.

Résumé

Écrite au milieu du 18e siècle, la biographie d'un acteur clé dans le développement d'un syllabique pour exprimer les langues ojibwé et crie sert de point de départ pour examiner la cohésion culturelle sociohistorique au Canada. Le créole textuel

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du syllabique, fréquemment utilisé dans les affaires et le commerce, fournit des indices sur la dynamique de la linguistique interculturelle. Dans le présent article, je me penche sur l'influence et sur le rôle critique de la langue créole Papiamentu de Curaçao, une île dans le sud des Caraïbes, et sur son statut comme principale langue de formation dans le système postsecondaire afin de mieux comprendre le besoin d'un meilleur dialogue interculturel au sein du milieu postsecondaire canadien. Dans cette discussion je mobilise les perspectives de Paulo Freire, de Michel Foucault et d'Herbert Marcuse pour illustrer en quoi les établissements d'enseignement canadiens pourraient mieux soutenir, engager et promouvoir le dialogue interculturel dans la salle de classe. En dépit des politiques et du financement visant un meilleur dialogue interculturel dans les salles de classe postsecondaires au Canada, les établissements d'enseignement demeurent moins axés sur les discussions délicates, mais nécessaires, portant sur la diversité et continuent de prioriser une formation beaucoup plus eurocentrique et occidentalisé axée sur l'application des valeurs culturelles dominantes. En dépit de la recommandation de la Commission de vérité et de réconciliation demandant l'indigénisation de l'académie et la création d'une loi sur les langues autochtones par le gouvernement fédéral, au Canada, le monde de l'enseignement supérieur fait peu d'efforts pour promouvoir explicitement la réflexion interculturelle de la manière que pourrait le faire le créole. Le manque de réflexion culturelle nuancée est particulièrement évident dans les domaines qui devraient toucher toutes les dimensions de la vie canadienne, dont les initiatives de programmes d'enseignement pour la réconciliation. Au lieu de limiter ces programmes à l'examen exclusif de ces enjeux, il faut une stratégie d'intégration. Il serait plus efficace d'adopter une approche transdisciplinaire qui intègre le travail axé sur la diversité dans le programme régulier afin d'augmenter l'efficacité de la capacité de développement interculturel dans l'ensemble des programmes.

Introduction

There is a small blue book that sits on the top of my bookshelf; it is very old and more than a bit musty. Entitled *James Evans: Inventor of the Syllabic System of the Cree Language*, it was given in 1899 to my then 11-year-old great-grandfather William (the inscription reads "To Willie Cooper, for diligence") as a reward for attending the King Street Methodist Sunday School in Toronto. The book was written by John McLean, MA, PhD. It tells the story of missionary James Evans (referred to in Chapter 1 as "The Canadian Cadmus," after the mythological founder of Thebes) and other Christian missionaries as they sought to convert the Indigenous populations of Ontario and western Canada in the 1800s. From my position in the 21st century, it reads like a primer for the patronizing (though sincere) indulgence and assured sense of moral superiority of the dominant White culture of the time, buttressed against the notion of First Nations people as noble, very natural, and child-like, but ultimately ignorant and mired in dissolution, who could only be "saved" through conversion to Christianity. It speaks to the position of imposing a consciousness-changing exercise on the oppressed, such that they will accept the conditions of their oppression, a situation where "the oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these 'incompetent and lazy' folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality" (Freire, 2000, p. 74).

In May 2018, as I approached the University of Curaçao, I thought of this book and the role it—and others like it—must have played in establishing a template for cross-cultural interaction in the 1800s, which is to say a linear, one-way course of action designed to enforce a foreign value system and engage components of a cultural genocide that has been seriously addressed only in recent years. The similarities and contrasts between this island nation and Canada are compelling: both born of northwestern European colonialism and conquest, both influenced by a confluence of cultures, languages, and trade, one a vast tract of land reaching into the far north, the other a small island off the northern coast of Venezuela. I was paying a visit to several of the university's professors, all of whom are building on an impressive track record for cross-cultural dialogue using the creole language Papiamentu, one of the island's official languages. They include Dr. Ronald Severing, a professor of language education and a leading expert on Papiamentu. The question I sought to investigate: What can Canada's post-secondary system learn from an island of 150,000 in the southern Caribbean? As a heterosexual White male teaching at two Ontario colleges, I approached this topic knowing well my positionality in the dominant culture and being keenly aware of the need for greater cross-cultural dialogue in society, within institutions, and in the classroom. As Freire (2013) said, "To engage in dialogue is to be genuine...it is to devote oneself to the constant transformation of reality...dialogue cannot imprison itself in any antagonistic relationship" (p. 101).

While European languages such as English became the standard means of communication in the Caribbean, superseding others, Papiamentu took a different path. Instead of seeking a movement away from this creole (from the Latin *creare*, to create) that is itself a picture of heterogeneity, Curaçaoans have embraced Papiamentu (from the Spanish *papia* and Portuguese *papear*, to talk) as a means of connecting with each other to generate a dialogue through a common language, and through that dialogue to transform their world. As Freire (2000) noted, "To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it...Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection...Dialogue is thus an existential necessity" (p. 88).

Creole Languages: Cultural and Linguistic Cornerstones

Papiamentu has been a part of Curaçao culture since the 1600s; it was first mentioned in a legal context in the 1740s in Rhode Island, where a Dutch ship (believed to belong to Spain) was taken into custody by the government of then British-ruled America, who believed that the language they heard being spoken on board was Spanish, when it was in fact Papiamentu (R. Severing, personal communication, May 4, 2018). Catholic prayer books were written in Papiamentu in the 19th century to appeal to the Black and multiracial population of Curaçao, and the island changed hands between the British, Dutch, and French before coming under Dutch control in the early 19th century. At the same time that James Evans and others were seeking to convert First Nations to Christianity, Curaçao was, like most of the Caribbean islands, a hierarchical, slave-focused, nautical society (slavery was abolished in 1863). In these societies, conflict was widespread, violence common, and uprisings frequent:

[These] maritime societies performed a critical role in the formation of Caribbean networks of trade and settlement, and the cultural forms of violence that were endemic to these societies in the age of sail naturally

affected the ideologies these networks were built upon. (Delgado, 2017, p. 183)

As a diverse society, Curaçao was "historically shaped by the mechanisms of colonialism and slavery... One's place in society depended primarily on one's occupation, ethnic heritage, and skin color" (Allen, 2010, p. 119). Over the course of the island's history, Papiamentu figured highly as the island's lingua franca, and in 1986 Papiamentu began to be taught in elementary schools; it was gradually adopted as a language credit in high schools and in 2007 was given official language status, joining Dutch and English (Spanish is also spoken widely across the island). Papiamentu continues to play a significant role in political and social identity, providing a sense of "cohesion and solidarity among all inhabitants, both those who have long historical roots in the society and the relative newcomers" (Allen, 2010, p. 120). Papiamentu's politicization is considered to be a means of uniting and strengthening the populace; this was a factor in the last great social uprising, a 1969 protest against unfair wages stemming from an oil industry strike, when its use as a means of communication prevailed over the Dutch language (Allen, 2010).

As a creole language and a blend of Portuguese, Dutch, Spanish, and some West African languages, Papiamentu is culturally seen as an "Afro-Portuguese creole but is... not considered to be an African language" (Wiel, 2017, p. 77). As such, it is not a degraded form of Spanish or Portuguese but is "measured against the linguistic standards of Dutch, English and Spanish" (Wiel, 2017, p. 75). Traditionally, creole languages were thought to be created out of a desire to build dialects that served to separate colonized lands from their European home conquerors, a form of control that positioned creole languages "as being distinct from non-creole languages because of their relationship to the hegemonic European languages from which they derive their lexicon" (Wiel, 2017, p. 76), a situation underscoring Herbert Marcuse's repressive tolerance, in which

minorities which strive for a change of the whole itself will... be left free to deliberate and discuss, to speak and to assemble—and will be left harmless and helpless in the face of the overwhelming majority [the colonizers who hold the power], which militates against qualitative social change. (Marcuse, 2007, p. 41)

This may be true, but Papiamentu's promoters and practitioners see it not as a weak offspring of other languages, but rather as a dynamic expression of unity.

Papiamentu was, like other Caribbean creole languages (such as Haitian Kreyòl or Dominican patois), viewed as "a way to assert a cultural identity which is distinct from a European identity and more prominently, as distinct from an African identity" (Wiel, 2017, p. 77). It is a powerful component of culture and (depending on who you ask) equal to or more effective than traditional European languages. A challenge to Papiamentu is that despite its official status and widespread use, "children are socialized into believing that Papiamentu will not take them as far as Dutch or English will, despite the fact that Papiamentu enjoys higher prestige in Aruba and Curaçao than [for instance] Patwa does in Dominica" (Wiel, 2017, p. 78). Walking about under the canopied walkways on the University of Curaçao campus, or wandering the streets of Curaçao's capital of Willemstad, I hear Papiamentu spoken among citizens of all backgrounds who are also able to switch easily to English, Dutch, or Spanish. With a generation of elementary-level teaching already completed, as well as the recognition of Papiamentu as an official language by the

Curaçao government and increased training in Papiamentu for student teachers at the University of Curaçao, the language is proving to be a significant force for social change in Curaçao (R. Severing, personal communication, May 4, 2018). It is also a component of the Caribbean-wide *Créolité* movement, which has language at its centre, anchoring “the orally transmitted literature and the speakers of the creole language, who display the least interest in the western influences that continue to bombard the islands” (Broek, 2017, p. 252).

By contrast, Canada’s creole language history, though forged in the fires of colonialism, followed a different path. Canadian creole languages evolved over time; Bungi (or Bungee), a creole of English, Cree, Gaelic, and Ojibwe, emerged in the 18th century and was used as a trade language over the next 200 years, particularly around the Red River Settlement, along with Michif, a blend of French and Cree (Blain, 1989). These speech forms were largely abandoned in favour of standard English and French, and Bungi in particular moved rapidly toward English, such that “today this speech has disappeared but for a few who still speak a recognizable form of it” (Blain, 1989, p. ix). The decline of Bungi was largely due to the movement of people and languages across a large land mass, as social mobility and “new” Canadians flooded the Red River area (Blain, 1989). Canadian communities may be both isolated and widespread, forming small pockets of linguistic concentration, but they are also subject to large movements of citizens in and out of the community and the pull of the dominant languages of English and French. Contrast this against islands like Curaçao, Aruba, Bonaire, and others where Papiamentu and other creole languages are spoken. Islands have smaller populations limited by physical geography—in Curaçao’s case, an island with a population of 150,000 (about the size of a city like Oshawa, Ontario)—though, like Canada’s Indigenous communities, the islands’ populations are inundated by the overwhelmingly fluid siren call of Western culture and its message of mass consumerism in all areas of life.

What does this mean for cross-cultural communication? We use dominant languages in the classroom—and through them, we (willingly or not) impress upon students aspects of the overriding culture. The Canadian classroom dynamic tends toward a teacher-driven monologue of Western, dominant-culture values and ideals, reflective of Freire’s “banking” concept of teaching, “in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits” (Freire, 2000, p. 72). As well, there is the compartmentalization and exoticization of cultures as separate, intriguing curios (as we see in the well-intended glossing-over of community and school multicultural days), which incline toward music, dancing, and food. We talk a good story of sifting cross-cultural dialogue into the lesson mix, but we also fall short in making room for the ideas and narratives that other cultures and languages represent. A paradigm shift in post-secondary classrooms, stimulated by the need for a greater cross-cultural dialogue and a sharing of ideas, is necessary. The application of approaches such as Banks and Tucker’s (1998) five dimensions of multicultural learning—content integration; knowledge construction (the socio-historical contextualization of knowledge building); equity pedagogy (giving equal opportunity to achieve academically); prejudice reduction; and empowerment of a total school culture (a mindfulness that speaks to inclusion)—can effectively assist in rebuilding an institutional approach that values diversity.

Necessary Dialogues

We must engage in the difficult dialogues that help us redefine our positionality, heighten perspectives, and encourage greater critical thinking on the part of students about diversity. Such an approach serves to empower the learner "to have the ability to influence one's personal and social environment...being educated means claiming a voice for oneself" (Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014, p. 61). My own classroom experience as an instructor has served to illustrate this for me. Additionally, in conducting interviews for a doctoral thesis into faculty perceptions of racial diversity in a community college, I found that only faculty who had specific training in diversity were open and receptive to engaging in diversity-focused dialogues; other participants in my research study took a variety of positions: denial of the need to engage in diversity-rich discussion; a lack of knowledge; a fear of engagement; or out-and-out unwillingness to engage in diversity discourses. Angst, fear, denial, dismissiveness: all are present.

As educators, we recognize that "schools must be defended...for the capacities they impart that enable students and others to exercise the agency and courage necessary both to hold power accountable and to intervene in the world" (Giroux, 2006, p. 71). Now more than ever, given the extremes of rhetoric and discourse in political and social media realms, we need to open ourselves to promoting classroom environments where we encourage uncluttered dialogue that speaks to respect and a commitment to identify, create, and share a common space between people. If, for example, as educators we share bits of social data—such as effective case studies that shed light on societal issues—we have to caution ourselves not to "museumize" the engagement or generate an exoticized experience for students, but rather to recognize that the significance of the data is key to beginning a process of holistic critical thinking and a transformative experience. Transformation is essential. Instead of a linear examination, debate, judgment, and acceptance/dismissal of a topic, an educator must help to effect a paradigm shift and "cannot wait for this possibility [of transformation] to materialize. From the outset her efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization" (Freire, 2000, p. 75). It is also why, in discussion of, for example, Indigenous cultures, it is essential to have a guide with roots in the culture, to enable those from outside the culture to contextualize and draw value from the experience, and to allow participants to experience it against their own previous beliefs, whether that might be questions about treaty land or the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, or discussion of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. This approach demands "experiential learning and collaboration in academic contexts in which individuals can learn to tolerate the tensions of and enlarge a type of third space...anchored in an Indigenous world view [of accommodation] rather than diasporic contexts [of assimilation]" (Atleo, 2013, p. 41). The teacher can then engage students in problem-posing exercises, moving them toward "the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality" (Freire, 2000, p. 81). In this way, intercultural competence—the fluid ability to appreciate difference and skilfully respond to and engage within cross-cultural contexts—is nurtured (Deardorff, 2009).

In my experience as a teacher in community-college journalism and corporate communications/public relations programs, I have dedicated extensive class time to discussing diversity issues and working toward the emergence of consciousness (Freire, 2000). This is approached with an understanding of our immersion in a

bureaucratically managed society (and the institution's reflection of this state), as defined by Marcuse's (2007) concept of repressive tolerance, which views consumerism as a driver of engagement, but not inquiry. This consumerism engages communications-heavy elements to drive essential ideas, and "advertising, public relations, indoctrination, planned obsolescence are no longer unproductive overhead costs but rather elements of basic production costs" (Marcuse, 1991, p. 49). Such a reality of consumerism and passive engagement turns all of us—administrators, teachers, and learners—into consumers of information with our fingers on the social media "like" icon, assessing the behaviour of others in accordance with societal norms. "Are they conducting themselves properly?" becomes more important than "What do they think, and why?" This calls to mind Foucault's view of post-French Revolution citizens engaging in a world of personally delivered restraint, "immersing people in a field of total visibility where the opinion, observation and discourse of others would restrain them from harmful acts" (Foucault, 1980, p. 153). It is a form of social control in which "the oppressed, at a certain moment of their existential experience, adopt an attitude of 'adhesion' to the oppressor...their perception of themselves as oppressed is impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression" (Freire, 2000, p. 45).

My work with students has included examination of societal attitudes toward diversity. It stands to reason that students, who upon graduation will be interacting in significant ways with diverse groups, must be prepared to embrace and understand these communities; they must be responsive, open-minded, and accepting, and they must be able to question mainstream attitudes and engage in critical thinking in any situation. None of us works in a box, excluded from society; we must be committed to not letting the myriad social messages that bombard us daily simply wash over us unquestioned. Instead, we have to be motivated to challenge them. For instance, in corporate communications/public relations classes, I have engaged students in investigating the use of racial stereotypes in advertising by companies such as soft-drink maker Pepsi and its depiction of a sanitized, hip-music-backdropped Black Lives Matter-style protest as a platform to sell its eponymous soft drink, or clothing company H&M using the image of a Black child wearing a hoodie that says "Coolest monkey in the jungle" to sell apparel, and those corporations' responses to negative feedback (often weak replies, essentially "we're sorry, we just didn't 'get it' when we ran the original ad"). This critical intervention (Freire, 2000) allows us to push back against the dominant culture and encourages a positive discomfort among learners that ultimately leads to greater understanding of the issues at play in society.

I have also engaged learners in discussions concerning the use of correct terms in reference to Indigenous peoples (a practice essential for anyone, but especially for those—like journalists and corporate communicators—who will find their work, and their perspectives, being seen in a public light), citing Indigenous knowledge holders, and following up discussion with visits to the college's First Peoples Indigenous Centre. At the centre, an Indigenous coach guides us through a dialogue of prevailing attitudes and relationships between First Nations and the dominant (White) culture, focusing first on the question of treaty land and then moving on to different topics. There are examples of situations where dominant-culture attitudes are expressed in disbelief or a profound lack of acceptance (and on a positive note, there are also those aha moments where students get it). At a session at my college's First Peoples Indigenous Centre recently, a student put down the value of Indigenous healing practices, calling them "so much mumbo jumbo." The Indigenous coach, the learning guide for this segment, spoke politely and firmly of the

need to respect the cultural practices of others. While this message may have been lost on the student in question, the 20-plus other students in my class appeared to understand it. On another occasion a few years earlier, I took a different group of students on a field trip to Anishnawbe Health Toronto, where they witnessed a smudging ceremony and were engaged in discussion with an advisor who talked about the necessity for First Nations to regain and rebuild their cultures. One of my students asked why Indigenous participants in the centre's programs didn't simply "focus on making and selling crafts," citing the popularity of dreamcatchers as a good example of "big sellers." The guide said that the centre's focus was not on selling crafts, but on taking back, and rebuilding, a culture that might disappear and on reconnecting with a history that had been threatened with extinction, reclaiming it so that it could provide the basis for a better future. This kind of dialogue and engagement—difficult though it may be, especially in crossing the cultural divide—is necessary. In my work, I take these lessons and discussions and link them to written assignments that focus on reflection and analysis.

In the classroom, expanding the boundaries of the student experience is necessary, knowing that we are "motivated by intellectual and political desires to speak about the nature and complexity of difference...and how these challenges cannot be decontextualized from minority engagements" (Dei & Doyle-Wood, 2006, p. 154). For instance, in a marketing class I taught, I asked students to get out of their chairs, move about the classroom, and go to designated spots representing their position for or against sporting goods giant Nike's use of former National Football League quarterback Colin Kaepernick's image in a photo advertisement. A picture of the ad was projected on the classroom screen. Nike was leveraging the popularity of Kaepernick, an African American, after he sparked outrage among conservatives (especially US president Donald Trump) for getting down on one knee (instead of standing at attention) during a pre-game playing of the American national anthem in 2016. The silent protest, designed to draw attention to racial injustice in the United States, was a viral sensation on social media. The Nike ad, a shot of Kaepernick's face with the words "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything." superimposed on top, created controversy as much for raising questions of commodification of Black protest as for shedding light on cultural schisms. As sociology and African American studies professor Saida Grundy noted, the image and words "compel audiences to believe that individual determination, in the context of social resistance, can overcome all odds, and that membership in this movement can be procured with the purchase of Nike shoes and apparel" (Grundy, 2018). The question I put to the class—"Was Nike being sincere in running this ad or will people always see it as a means of using social justice as a way to sell sneakers and other sporting goods?"—was effective in generating cross-cultural discussion and debate; instead of asking a standard "Western classroom" question such as "How successful was Nike with this campaign?" the question was "Did the company do the right thing? Why or why not?"

Such an approach—taking a difficult topic and discussing it—is necessary. We are faced in society with groups within Western culture that too often choose to dispense with discussion and instead peddle often thinly veiled hatred. This ranges from anti-Semitism and Islamophobia to increasingly uncaring and even blasé reactions to anti-Black discrimination (the arrest of two Black patrons in a Starbucks for "waiting-while-Black" is an example), as well as discrimination against Sikhs for the wearing of kirpans and turbans and the misdirecting influence of right-wing rhetoric on lower-income, disenfranchised

Whites. To bridge the multicultural gap, well-meant curricula may seek to engage students in the reading and interpretation of “confession” texts (Mayo, 2007), wherein students are presented with multicultural experiences that allow them to adopt a passive view. This serves to strengthen differences between people, “and it allows those with relatively more power to be able to find a way to live with uncomfortable knowledge by converting it into nonthreatening narratives of leveled difference...and emotions to be consumed” (Mayo, 2007, p. 168). As Banks (1974), noted, “Historically, the school has forcibly assimilated immigrants into the Anglo-American culture and reinforced and perpetuated the dominant institutions and ideologies” (p. 22).

Thus, it is essential to face cross-cultural questions head-on. In approaching the classroom from the perspective of Freirean *conscientização*, or the critical consciousness resulting from taking action against oppression through recognizing society’s “social, political and economic contradictions” (Freire, 2000, p. 35), we are asking (sometimes urging, even demanding) our learners (and ourselves) to be in a state of reevaluating their relationship with society, “to perceive themselves in dialectical relationship with their social reality...[helping them] to assume an increasingly critical attitude toward the world and so to transform it” (Freire, 2013, p. 30). This is necessary; in Canada, we add to the general ignorance of race issues and civil rights with an often profound lack of knowledge of Indigenous rights. We are still stuck in a dominant-culture mood swing that shifts from a perception of Indigenous peoples as variously a coddled “special interest group” to a criminal element or a denigrated group in dire need of the hand-up of White saviours, indicative of a complex where the White person “lifts up” the oppressed, somehow bettering them (Straubhaar, 2015). While acknowledging that McLean was writing in the late 1800s, this third point is not much different from the attitudes of the late 1800s, as noted in the book on James Evans:

...they [Indigenous tribes] felt their inferior position, arising from drunkenness, disease and poverty, so they sought not the teachings of the Nazarene [Jesus]...About the year eighteen hundred and twenty, there arose a keen and abiding manifestation of sympathy and love toward these neglected children of the forest, which...ultimately resulted in the organization of missions and schools. (McLean, 1890, p. 34)

James Evans, though presumably well-intentioned in creating a syllabic system for missionaries to understand the Cree language, was seeking to penetrate a social network linguistically and culturally, and ultimately it was for the purpose of social subjugation and control, not spiritual freedom. It is an attitude that repeats itself: in his memoir of his decades spent with the Amazonian Pirahã tribe, the linguistics professor Daniel Everett talked of his early years as a missionary and his goal, in the late 1970s, of working to “persuade them to worship the god I believed in, to accept the morality and the culture that goes along with believing in the Christian god” (Everett, 2008). It suggests Freire’s (2000) position on the necessity of changing the consciousness of the oppressed, rather than the conditions under which they are being oppressed, “for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated” (p. 74).

In Curaçao today, the god is that of Western culture, and the people of Curaçao have reinforced their own culture against it by nurturing Papiamentu as a language that emphasizes inclusivity, flexibility, sharing, and open communication, through a

heterogeneous, continuously evolving, pragmatic approach that brings people together (R. Severing, personal communication, May 4, 2018). The *Créolité* movement focuses on opposition to the overwhelming influences of Western society (Broek, 2017), and it can also be said that the very act of engaging in day-to-day discourse via Papiamentu is in itself a practical application of Freire's *conscientização*.

Conclusion

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada issued its Calls to Action. One section, entitled "Language and Culture," called on the federal government to recognize language rights. In addition to acknowledgement, the Commission asked for the creation of an *Aboriginal Languages Act* to reinforce the necessity to preserve Indigenous languages, and the appointment of an Aboriginal Languages Commissioner to promote Indigenous languages; as well, a call was made for universities and colleges to generate programs in Indigenous languages (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). In Canada, the point of preserving Bungi or Michif might be seen as moot, and we do not have the geo-social environment of Curaçao, where a richly diverse language like Papiamentu brings people together from all points of the island. But we also know that Papiamentu's place was confirmed through government action, by making it an official language in accordance with established policies and practices of the Dutch colonizers, "practices that can only be explained on the basis of the colonial past, rather than on the basis of common and basic linguistic insights" (Mijts, 2017, p. 161). Yet by accommodating the language and celebrating it in the classroom, in the university, and in society, it became a vigorous driver of cultural connectedness. In addition to official recognition by the socio-political structure of government, equally significant was the *giving of space*, and the importance of that space in the classroom:

It is surprising how long the problem of space took to emerge as a historico-political problem. Space used to be either dismissed as belonging to 'nature...' or else it was conceived as the residential site or field of expansion of peoples, of a culture, a language or a State... Anchorage in a space is an economico-political form which needs to be studied in detail. (Foucault, 1980, p. 149)

By recognizing the importance of Indigenous languages and culture, by giving them the space they need, and by preserving them and strengthening them through making them part of post-secondary training where applicable, Canada's post-secondary institutions can do much to reaffirm the significance of Indigenous culture, recognize the history, and open up possibilities for greater dialogue and understanding. And in the classroom, as teachers we can continue to bring diversity issues to the forefront, dedicating significant class time to dialogue, on awakening ourselves and our students to questions about all of the cultures—and questions of culture—that comprise our space. This demands an educational system that goes beyond the currently overused and grating position of getting students simply "workplace ready,"

for if "education" is more and other than training, learning, preparing for the existing society, it means not only enabling man to know and understand the facts which make up reality but also to know and

understand the factors that establish the facts so that he can change their inhuman reality. (Marcuse, 2007, p. 58)

Our students deserve to have a forum for talking openly about the cross-cultural issues and challenges that they face in a complex society, and “teachers must help all students define their own worlds, speak their languages, and reflect on their experiences. Students must be able at some point to relate the curriculum to their daily lives and culture” (Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014, p. 67). Such dialogue is necessary as our community becomes increasingly diverse, and “true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking—thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people...thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved” (Freire, 2000, p. 92). Ways that we can become involved in opening up these opportunities include a more focused use of the spaces available to us—classrooms, Indigenous student centres, campus meeting rooms—so that we may engage in dialogues that stimulate thinking and create a bridge from standard Western pedagogy to cross-cultural inclusivity. Outside of the creation of core courses dealing with diversity issues and Indigenous history over a semester, we can create curricula that incorporate diversity issues into *at least* one two- or three-hour class over the course of the semester, linking current issues and case studies to classroom work. As well, we can focus at least one class during the semester solely on Indigenous issues, and engage the campus Indigenous students’ centre coaches and guides in helping to create the cultural bridge necessary to give students, especially those with no previous knowledge of Indigenous history or culture, a necessary opportunity to enrich their worldview. It is an approach reflective of Freire’s (2005) view that “there are no themes or values of which one cannot speak, no areas in which one must be silent. We can talk about everything, and we can give testimony about everything” (p. 103).

As for my great-grandfather’s book, it remains on the shelf, a link to my past and a necessary touchstone for understanding the attitudes of a different time.

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