

# Journal of American Indian Education

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## Preface

This second special edition of the *Journal of American Indian Education* acknowledges the commonalties of our worldwide struggle as Indigenous Peoples to mitigate the destructive effects of colonization on Native thought and lifeways. Two significant themes are threaded throughout the writings of this issue, both consistent with and reflective of major themes associated with the tri-annual World Indigenous People's Conference: Education (WIPC:E). The first is expressed as a basic tenet of the 1993 *Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Rights in Education*. It simply asserts, "The right to be Indigenous is the most fundamental and important of all Human Rights."

The second is represented in the theme —"The Answers Lie Within Us"— from the most recent 1999 WIPC:E at Hilo, Hawaii.

While the contributors to this edition speak to specific regions and nations in the Northern Hemisphere, they also speak to conditions that are shared by most Indigenous Peoples in our world today. In their reflections on the conditions of Native education at the cusp of a new millenium, they clearly celebrate the ability of Native people to have withstood the onslaught of colonialism during the past several hundred years. However, they caution that this resilience is not enough and that we must regard our condition, as

Verna Kirkness observes, as still "mired in the effects of colonialism."

All of the contributors point out that, in order to advance indigenous education, we must invest ourselves less in content and focus on the *processes* that affirm Native lifeways, languages and cultural epistemology. These processes must be affirmed, supported, and implemented by Native People on their own terms. While self-determination has allowed significant progress, there remains a great impediment that Oscar Kawagley describes as "Cognitive Imperialism." If not overcome, history may just repeat itself, only now, at the hands of Native People under the rubric of self-determination.

The contributions in this special edition are thought-provoking and spoken from the heart. They represent an honest appraisal of the condition of Native education and suggest paths for the future.

In the first selection, our Native Hawaiian contributors, David Kekaulike Sing, Alapa Hunter and Manu Aluli Meyer offer us a fourth chair in a "talking story" session, thus involving us in the *how* of Hawaiian cultural epistemology.

Through our participation in this group *mana*, they demonstrate and underscore a fundamental belief that they feel must be prioritized back into the process and product of what education is for Native Hawaiian People. In this way they offer us both wisdom and insight about Native epistemology and the political nature of "doing things the Native Hawaiian way."

In the second selection, Verna Kirkness combines and annotates two of her recent writings that offer a forthright appraisal of First Nations education.

She posits a continuing struggle to identify a meaningful education for Canadian Aboriginal People based on the policy of Indian Control of Indian

Education. In order to claim Native "independence" in education, she exhorts us to "cut the shackles, cut the crap and to cut the mustard." Effective and meaningful education for Native people will be based on a marriage of the past and the present. It will honor Native cultures, including our values and our languages, as well as Native Peoples' contributions to the development and progress of society.

In writing about Yupiaq education in Alaska, Oscar Kawagley poses the question: Why should someone from the outside come in with foreign values and forms of consciousness and impose them upon another? He notes that, so far, education has made Yupiaq people, as well as other Alaska Natives, consumers instead of producers in charge of their own livelihood. In planning and working for their own destiny, Yupiaq and other Alaska Natives need to affirm and retain their unique Native identities. In Kawagley's view, this is best accomplished through the use of the Native language because it thrusts them into the thought world of their ancestors and their ways of apprehending and comprehending their world.

Finally, the Coolangatta Statement is reprinted in full. This eloquent declaration has universal application regarding the fundamental right of access of any colonized peoples to education without having to forsake their special connectedness and belonging to Mother Earth. The basic human right to be Indigenous involves the freedom of Indigenous people themselves to determine who is Indigenous, what it means to be Indigenous, and how education relates to Indigenous cultures. This

Statement readily embodies and supports the wisdom and insights provided by the contributors to this edition.