Local Cultural Resource Knowledge, Identity, Representation, Schooling and Education in Euro-Canadian [American] Contexts

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The paper begins with a re-conceptualization of local cultural resource/Indigenous knowledge and the relevance for understanding current challenges and possibilities of education [broadly defined] in pluralistic contexts. Specifically, the paper theorizes the link between identity, knowledge, representation and schooling in the particular case for minority youth education. The discussion is situated in recurring debates about multi-centric knowledges and inclusive schooling in Canada. The paper utilizes an anti-colonial gaze to argue that the epistemologies of marginalized youth and, particularly, how they come to know and act within schools offer interesting reads on why and how social difference is critical for educational success. The paper also situates the local subject knowings of learners and educators at the centre of theorizing and searching for ways to improve schools so as to respond to the needs and concerns of a diverse body politic. We can affirm learners' perspectives and accounts of their schooling experiences while being critical of such voices and avoid a reification of student voices. An important question in rethinking schooling and education in Euro-American contexts is what to do with [minority and dominant] students' voices and experiences from multiple vantage points? Anti-colonial theory asserts that in order to re-conceptualize schooling using students' experiences, it is important to move beyond a simple narration to a theorization of these experiences. The affirmation of such knowledges is not simply a search for authentic voice more so than a recognition of the contestation of knowledge from different positionalities. The schooling experiences of marginalized youth narrated by the learners themselves does not necessarily denote an 'authentic experience'. What is required is for research to bring a panoptic and critical gaze to such experiences and knowledge, and to explore the limits and possibilities of understanding schooling from the voices of minority students.

This paper is informed by extensive research in the Canadian and Ontario school systems exploring issues of minority youth marginality, disengagement and resistance in schools, as well as the exemplary practices of inclusive schooling known to promote academic success for youth. The discussion embraces a cultural politics of schooling to acknowledge the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, ability, language, politics and religion and the impact on youth educational outcomes. In working with a nuanced understanding of 'educational success' the paper utilizes students' narratives of schooling experiences to shift the conversation beyond a conventional/dominant educational agenda. It is argued that rather than employ research to simply to "generate knowledge about a group of students" (e.g., understanding the academic experiences of successful students) or seeing these students as "objects of knowledge", we need to focus on youth discourses of resistance and alternative visions of schooling and education that is richly informed by the interplay of history, culture, identity, and the politics of knowledge production. In re-visioning schooling and education for marginalized youth, the paper identifies and operationalizes the policy implications of what is characterized as seven (7) main domains of an inclusive schooling approach to ensure successful educational outcomes for all youth:

a) 'Representation' (i.e., visual, knowledge and physical); b) 'Language'; c) 'Family/Community and School Partnerships'; d) 'Co-operative Education'; e) 'Equity and Values Education'; f) 'Indigenous/Community Knowledges'; and g) 'Spirituality'. Among the pertinent question engaged in the discussion are: How do notions of identity, culture, and history inform knowledge production and schooling in North America?; and, what are the possibilities of a decolonized/anti-colonial approach to Euro-American education drawing on youth and educators' cultural resource knowing?