

Spirit of the Island: Manitoulin's People  
Stories of Indigenous-Settler Historical Dynamics

*Ezhi-minidoowang Minis: Minidoo-wining Bemaadizijig Wiin E-zhi-kendaang  
gaa-zhiwebizid nji Anishinaabewid-Gaa-bi-daajig gaa-bi-zhi-gijigdoowaad*

Gathering Three:  
'Colonialism Evades Ontario's Education System' – Author's Notes'



by Dr. Rhonda L. Paulsen

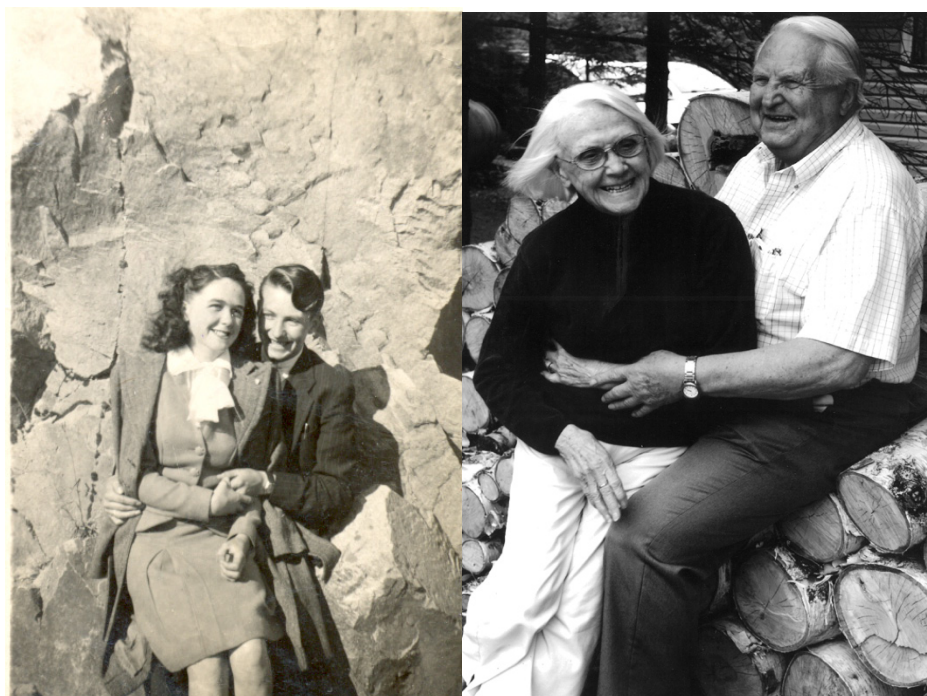
with Anishinaabemowin Translators Elder Shirley I. Williams-Pheasant and Isadore Toulouse



*Lovingly dedicated to my mom and dad,  
Ronald Oscar and Elizabeth Patricia Paulsen*

*Ezhi-zaagigwaa ndoo-minaajaak Ngashi miiniwaa noos,  
Ronald Oscar miiniwaa Elizabeth Patricia Paulsen*

*Affectueusement dédié à ma mère et à mon père,  
Ronald Oscar et Elizabeth Patricia Paulsen*



1947 - Terrace, British Columbia      2010 - Manitoulin Island, Ontario

To honour the life of my most amazing dad, 1930-2014  
and in loving memory of my dear son Joey, 1982.



*Wii-mnaadendamong noos-ba bemaadiziwinim gaa-moonji gchi-twaawid, 1930-2014  
miiniwaa wii-menjimenmog ngwisen-ba gaa-zhi-gchi-twaawendamog Joey-ba, 1982.*



*Pour rendre hommage à la vie de mon père, un être exceptionnel, 1930-2014  
et à la mémoire de mon cher fils Joey, 1982.*



*First Nations, Metis, and Inuit pedagogy aim to create a safe and respectful learning environment for all students and teachers alike.*

*Due to the nature of the material shared in this book, you may encounter information and perspectives that are new and that challenge views of community, society, spirituality, history, and contemporary situations.*

*This may create a sense of confusion, discomfort, or pain. As you proceed through reading our stories and the supportive data, we encourage you to contact the teacher, counsellor, or First Nations, Metis, Inuit representative at your school or district school board.*

*Please do not think you need to cope with reactions on your own.*



### STUDENT CENTER – GATHERING THREE



*Dominion Bay*

*photo by E. J. Thippawong*

*“You cannot cross the ocean,  
you cannot discover new horizons,  
if you are afraid of losing sight of the shore.”*

*author unknown*

### Learning Outcomes ~ upon completion of this gathering, the student will be able to...

1. Develop a deepening awareness of learning environments that support diversity.
2. Analyze how issues of colonialism have impacted Indigenous people.
3. Explore different learning and teaching methods in relation to student success.

## **Conflict and Resolution in Education**

In order to deliver the vision of reconciliation through education examined in Hanah's research above (*Colonialism Evades Ontario's Education System*), the Ministry of Education in Ontario is taking steps to demonstrate an understanding of the impacts of colonial history, including implementing processes that incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing throughout the Provincial curriculum. These approaches rely on building opportunities for open and honest dialogue. This dialogue must permeate every level of education: from school board decision-making and curriculum development; communities of Elders, parents, educators, and leaders; teachers' and librarians' professional development; members of the staff at schools; to classroom instruction and assessment. As Hanah's research emphasizes, enveloped within this dialogue is honouring the local knowledge of the land on which we live. And as Stephanie Roy, Director of Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute (Manitoulin Island), maintains: "Colonialism is not an event of the past that is disconnected from the present. It continues today" (personal communication, 2018).

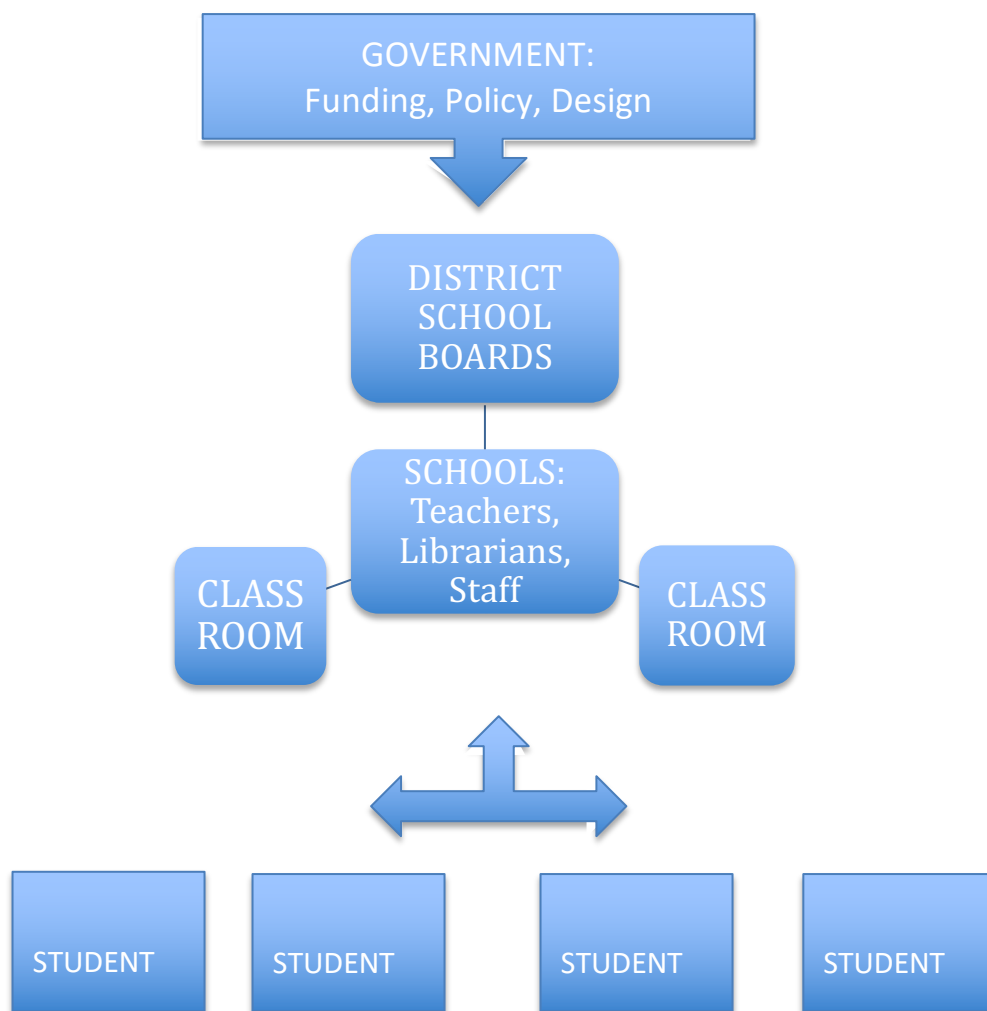


### Conflict in Education

The diagram below, 'Hierarchical Educational Paradigm', depicts how the mainstream educational system is a hierarchical institute for learning. The flow of decision making, policy development and implementation processes, and funding begins at the government level flowing through the Ministry of Education. The final decisions on curriculum content, testing and assessment, and funding distribution is passed to district school boards across Ontario.

There are little to no variations for the different regions of the province, which results in all students across Ontario being instructed through the same lens in both the curriculum and assessment tools. Also, the 'Hierarchical Educational Paradigm' demonstrates the disconnect of students, who are arranged in rows that face the teacher. Thereby students are intentionally limited in making personal connections through social interactions which is critical for human life span development that fosters well-being, such as learning from each other's varying experiences and sharing commonalities. Students are taught 'at', not 'with'.

#### HIERARCHICAL EDUCATIONAL PARADIGM

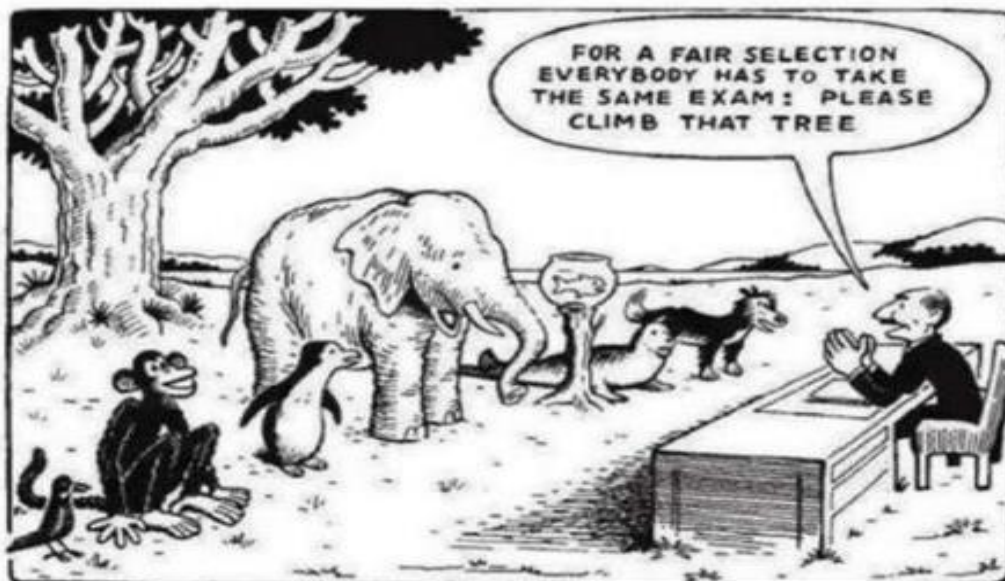


*Paulsen, R. L.*



A conflict arises in curriculum content and assessment practices that paint all students with the same brush, although students number in the thousands across the vast regions of Ontario. Testing a student's ability or aptitude through a tool using information students may never have been exposed to or that is not relevant to their culture, is not efficient or accurate. Doing so can skew statistics, the data from which decision makers are guided for future educational development.

For example, using exercises such as maneuvering one's way through subway systems (applied to geography, math, and literacy) for students in the north or remote areas in southern regions would be as fair as using exercises for students in large cities on how to respect animals' territories and life cycles to hunt for your food. After all, Sobeys' grocery store is not available to all Ontarians down the subway line and open 24/7. The results of the assessment are not always fair because the curriculum does not always relate to the students' culture(s), lived experiences, and teachings received – assumptions put aside.



## Our Education System

*previously published, author unknown*

Indigenous students share their experiences of generalizations within the mainstream curriculum and school environment:

- *“In the city people say that: ‘They come from a reserve, they’re not going to know as much as we do in the city.’ But we were able to compete when people said we can’t compete. So, we broke a few stereotypes right then and there.”*
- *“I took all advanced courses, and unfortunately a lot of Native people don’t take advanced courses, a lot of them you’ll find in the general level. But all I was looking for at the time was that I was going to get good marks and prove to whoever, I don’t know who I was trying to prove it to, but just to prove that somebody from the reserve is going to go to university and is going to do what they want to do.”*
- *“In my paper, I talked about what I thought of racism in the school. What I said was that racism shouldn’t even be there, that everyone deserves a chance in life. You know, to be their own self and not be thrown away just because of who you are and what you do, or where you’re from.”*
- *“I wasn’t taught any of my culture at home or at school. At school, it was even more separated.”*
- *“School was never important to me before. I guess part of the reason was that I didn’t really know myself, I didn’t know where I was coming from. That’s the whole part about our traditions. It’s a cultural conflict.”*
- *“I would like to keep my traditions and learn more about them and have a career too. Not as separate things.”*
- *“I don’t know if there can be a merger of culture in today’s society, so that you can still get somewhere. Being able to participate in a ceremony isn’t going to get you into university, you know what I mean? But, at the same time, being able to participate in ceremonies is probably going to make you a better person – because you feel more complete in who you are.”*
- *“Tradition. It’s who you are.”*

Holistic education is learning by interconnecting and ensures that knowledge is not separated from the spiritual (such as ceremonies and cultural traditions), nor is it deconstructed into



segmented disciplines. An early study on inter-cultural learning styles describes holism in education:

Native people approach an issue as it relates to all the other aspects of the person's life and this helps them to see where it fits with the whole. The individual begins to understand the existence of the issue, how it relates to the rest of her or his life and through this awareness, it is hoped that resolutions can be formulated by the individual (Powell 1996: 30).

Conversely, the 'Hierarchical Educational Paradigm' is a model of centralized education that creates a disconnect for students – from their communities, culture, languages, shared histories, and self-identity. Students are recipients of the final decisions passed down in the classroom. The school becomes a tear in the community fabric, which needs to be mended.



### Resolution in Education



*photo by E. J. Thippahawong*

*"Tell me  
and I will forget.*

*Show me  
and I may not remember.*

*Involve me  
and I will understand."*

*author unknown*

Resolution in education reflects traditional education - schooling becomes a venue through which there is fluid communication between all facets of the school and community. Reciprocal discussions and open dialogue for decision making that is based on consensus (i.e. not based on 'who wins') can provide mutually respectful focus of collective energy. In a reciprocal relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members, educators, and students, an education system that empowers all students and highlights students' success can include more than core competencies. Instead, a wider understanding of the world can be achieved that helps students and educators tackle the complex problems unfolding in our natural environment and societies.



### Personal Inquiry

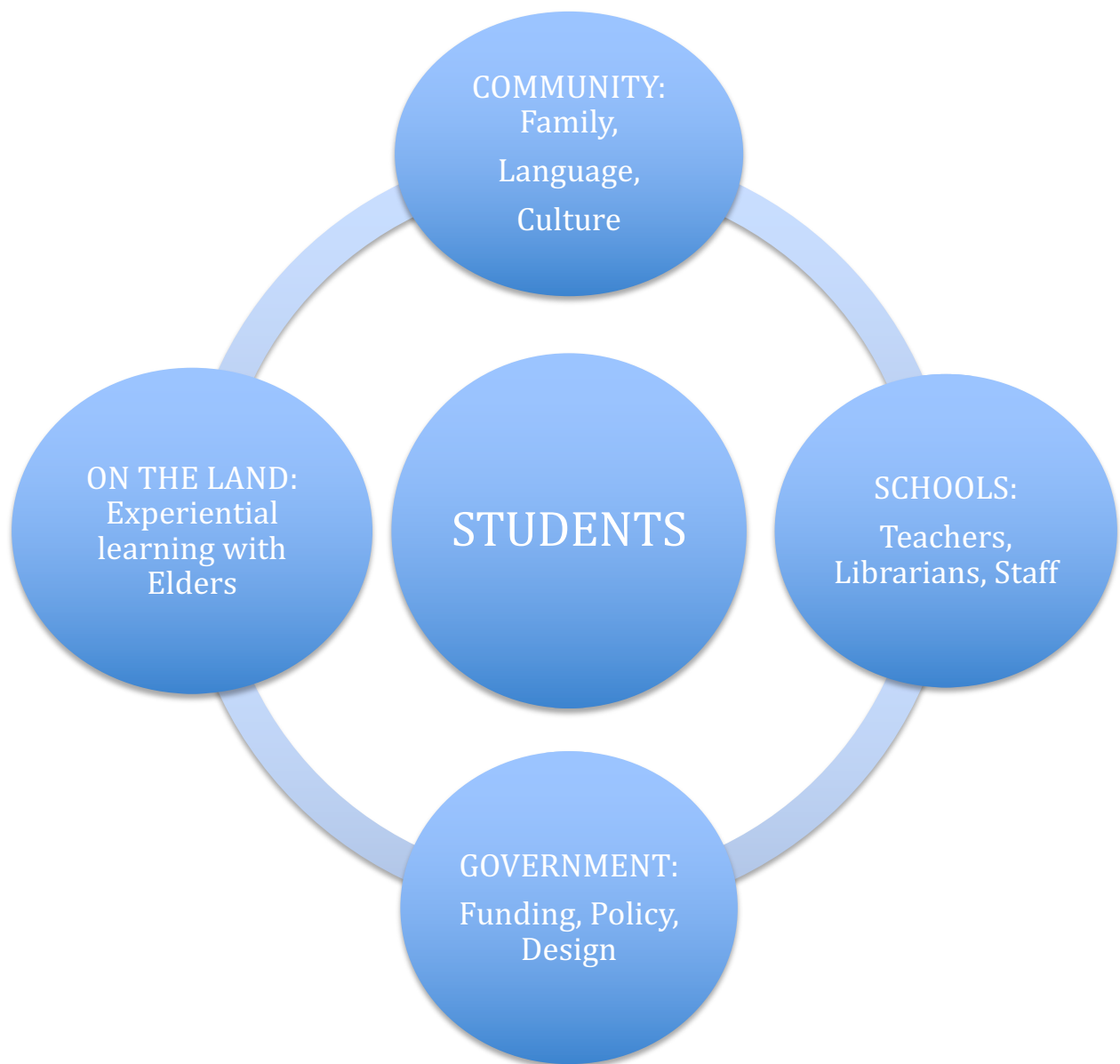
1. In your opinion, do you think it is fair to have your intellect and ability assessed on your answers to questions that contain information you have not been taught in school or have been exposed to in your life experiences?
2. What impact(s) do you think receiving 'labels' (i.e. outside perspectives of your identity) would have on you? Consider how your own concept of self-identity could be impacted *and* how others may perceive you through those labels.



The 'Holistic Educational Paradigm' diagram (below) incorporates a shared responsibility of recognizing diversity, even the diversity among Indigenous and non-Indigenous students since there can be differences within each culture, just as there are between them. Students are at the center of the circle, clearly situated as receiving support and interaction in a fluid dynamic with community, family, Elders, teachers and librarians, school staff,

administrators, and government. The student is recognized as a unique individual which supports their personal concepts of self-identity and self-esteem, while being part of a larger whole.

### HOLISTIC EDUCATIONAL PARADIGM



*Paulsen, R. L.*

## Traditional Indigenous Education

Traditional Indigenous education, in the broadest sense, can be defined as experiential, sharing, and holistic. This is evident in that early Indigenous educational methodologies could not be confined to an institutionalized system. In fact, prior to colonization by the European Settlers there were no formal institutions for education. Teaching responsibilities were delegated to parents, grandparents, and Elders. Learning was achieved through participation in activities involving members of one's family and community, which enhanced kinship and promoted communal bonds as well as mutual rapport between generations (Battiste 1996; Cajete 1994; Filion 2011; Kirkness 2000; Kulchyski 1999). One Elder shares the education and training for Medicine People:

*You know when they're born that that's their role, their function in life. Medicine People nurture. You start teaching them at a young age what the different barks and plants will do for them. The white doctors go to school for eight or nine years, but our people go to school their whole lives for it. That's traditional.*

The ethics of Indigenous pedagogy teach the young to respect the Elders' knowledge and wisdom, realizing the weight of experience, honesty, and insight in the Elders' stories. In order for knowledge to not be separate from experience, nor wisdom separate from the spiritual, Elders stress listening, observing, and waiting (Manitowabi, E., Lecture 2001). It is believed that this way the answer will come to them. One Elder relates a personal experience in this regard:

*One of the things our children are losing: I was taught to be still and now the kids are so hyper you can't keep them still. But that was one of the things in our culture – we were taught to be still and to listen.*

Another Elder describes traditional education as...

*beginning in the home, it is mostly observational. Children look at adults and learn about things through observation and doing things with adults.*

Teaching through experience was traditionally accomplished by family and Elders sharing their experiences and knowledge with children and participating in activities together, such as nature walks, building things, and hunting and fishing (Manitowabi, E., Lecture 2001). Such experiential learning can be incorporated into contemporary curricula through Elders coming into the schools and students going into the community. Anishinaabe students share their perspectives:

- *“Now I’m doing both. I’m getting the tools to live in society and at the same time I’m learning who I am. And I’m doing this even through school.”*
- *“I’d like to take more programs and just learn more about myself. I’d like to learn about the traditional medicines and the language. I think if they taught the traditions at school it would be a big help for all the kids to know where they came from and to learn their own languages. That would be nice.”*

The most prominent example of teaching through sharing experiences is when Elders tell their stories. Stories, not text books, form the principle mode of passing knowledge from one generation to the next. This process is valued because it strengthens intergenerational ties and connects the cycle of life; stories connect the listener to the storyteller and thereby they both become involved in the lesson. It is also maintained that stories hold the essence of the lesson that is not on the surface. This develops the ability of the listener to use their imagination and seek possibilities beyond the stated. The listener can take the story with them; it has become theirs in the process of lifelong learning. One Ojibwe Bachelor of Education student suggests:

*Just apply daily examples and things they can experience throughout their lives. See if they can apply the teachings to the culture. Let them see who they are, not only in relation to their class mates but to all people. That’s totally what I’m aiming for. It seems like a dream right now. It’s going to be great I hope!*

## Resources

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## Gathering Three : 'Colonialism Evades Ontario's Education System'

### 'Waapshkiiwedjigewin gaa-bi-zhi-dbaaziidang'

#### Video Credits

Contributor's Story: Hanah Howlett McFarlane

Author's Notes: Dr. Rhonda L. Paulsen

Anishinaabemowin Translators:

Elder Shirley I. Williams-Pheasant and Isadore Toulouse

'Hierarchical Educational Paradigm' and 'Holistic Educational Paradigm':

Dr. Rhonda L. Paulsen

Oil on canvas 'Walking in Birches' banner: Laura L. Thippawong

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