Introduction

I start the “Introduction” to this important collection of essays by acknowledging First Nations and Aboriginal peoples of Canada for the space and location from which I am writing my thoughts and ideas into text. This is important especially since from time immemorial certain spaces and territories have come to be and are continually represented by colonizing practices. I will also do something unconventional for an “Introduction” to an edited collection. In this piece, I will not undertake specific discussions on the individual pieces in the book. I leave that to the various sub-themes/section in which each chapter appears. My goal here is to simply reflect in a broad sense on some general ideas that guide the direction of this book. It has been such an honor and privilege to edit this reader on Indigenous Philosophies and Critical Education. As an educator who has always striven to broach critical and oppositional knowledge, such moments allow for the sharing of ideas and for the opportunity to learn about multiple perspectives. Most of us are driven by an intellectual desire to diversify our academies in terms of actual physical bodies, knowledge representation, and the politics of pursuing social and educational change. Our intellectual and political projects acknowledge, validate, and legitimate Indigenous knowledges and philosophies as ways of knowing in their own right. Unfortunately, there are times when one wonders whether the present academy may ever be able to shed the chains of its past. Hence, is the goal to “transform the academy” or to “replace the academy”? (see also Kempf, 2010). I am speaking of a past which has presented particular hegemonic ways of knowledge production, validation, and dissemination and also given currency and legitimacy to certain bodies and practices. While reminded of the Fanonian exhortation of the limits of particular oppressed and colonized bodies seeking validation and acceptance in colonial spaces, I am also moved by a “pedagogy of hope” to have a newly transformed academy (see Dei, 2010).
Perhaps it is important for me to clarify from the onset why I chose as the title of this collection *Indigenous Philosophies*. I see Indigenous knowledge as philosophy, specifically as a body of Indigenous social thought embedded with critical, oppositional, and resisting knowledge and counter narratives for decolonization. In other words, Indigenous knowledge as a body of Indigenous thought has located itself contrapuntal to dominant knowledges, in that, the Indigene reveals itself through resistance, as counter-hegemonic and as tangential to conventional knowledge systems. I position philosophy as a body of knowledge central to the epistemological framework, one that accords discursive authority, power, and privilege onto the pedagogue. My claim is that (Western) philosophy as an epistemology has been historically granted a certain academic identity that endows precedence onto philosophy as a particular classification of knowledge and simultaneously locates the Indigene to the periphery of knowing. My concern with philosophy (especially Western philosophy) is not about removing philosophy as a canon, but to question the positioning/authenticity of the episteme, which reveals itself through a particular historic primacy that at the same time forms colonial relations with the “Othered” discursive episteme.

In effect, if we are to take up this trope of philosophy, philosophy must not only be about being European. Philosophy must be revisioned and rearticulated through the embodiment of different peoples, through different geographies. Philosophy in a sense then constitutes the human condition, that is, the mode of thinking, an orientation of thought imbued through all peoples alike. Philosophy, as a discursive category neither is apolitical nor does it occupy an ahistorical space. Knowledge production is not an innocent or neutral project. Every process of knowledge creation, validation, and dissemination is about the embodiment of politics. This is where Indigenous knowledge as philosophy becomes important. It challenges the normative of particular forms of knowledge while also articulating a particular politics of decolonizing dominant knowledge. I am also contending that conventional knowledge production is a hegemonic instrument which works to form colonial knowledge that reveals itself as the all-knowing universal body of knowledge.

An important academic goal is to understand on-going contestations in knowledge in the search to engage everyday social practice and experiences as well as the social barriers and approaches to peaceful human co-existence. There is a need for new, counter/alternative and multiple knowledge forms in diverse social sites to provide critical understandings to individual and collective political action. The role and importance of Indigenous knowledges and philosophies in the promotion of multi-centric paradigms are increasingly being claimed and contested. Some questions are in order: What accounts for the resurgence in Indigenous knowledges and philosophies in the academies? How does the complexity of Indigenous philosophies contribute to promoting a subversive pedagogy for educational and social change? How can we, as educators and earners, draw on the myriad intellectual traditions and philosophies of knowing to understand the nature and dynamics of imperial power relations as a necessary exercise in social, political, and intellectual liberation? This reader is an attempt to pull together ideas concerning Indigenous epistemologies (e.g., worldviews, paradigms, standpoints, and philosophies) as they manifest themselves in the mental lives of persons both from and outside the orbit of the usual Euro-American culture. The book engages Indigenous knowledges as far more than a “contest of the marginals,” thereby challenging the way oppositional knowledges are positioned, particularly in the Western academy. Subsequently, this book is a call to recognize and acknowledge Indigenous knowledges as legitimate knowings in their own right, and not necessarily in competition with other sources or forms of knowledge. The project offers an opportunity for the critical thinker to continue on a de-colonial/anti-colonial intellectual journey in ways informed by Indigenous theorizing.
We place Indigenous knowledge and philosophies within the terrain of contemporary critical intellectual traditions that articulate emancipatory discourses for particularly colonized and oppressed subjects. The recognition of Indigenous knowledge as legitimate in its own right requires that we rethink the spaces that are currently in place for nurturing and sustaining a healthy multiplicity of knowledge in the academy. We would argue, then, that we not only have to decolonize existing spaces but create new non-hierarchical spaces of knowing. We cannot ask hegemonic/dominant spaces to simply make room for other knowledges to co-exist. The politics of de-centering spaces and dominant knowledge requires that we rethink new ways of creating spaces that allow for a centrality of multiple knowledge systems to contend with the asymmetrical power relations that currently exist in educational settings. If we fail to contest power, then the liberal and neo-liberal relativist stance, and to some extent, post-modernist tendency of heralding/insisting on spaces for all voices, ideas, and standpoints to be heard can only be seductive and end up actually affirming the dominance of particular forms of knowledge. Currently, not all knowledges have the same power and influence in our academies. To say that all knowledge comes to a level playing field is limiting.

What is Indigeneity and what are the possibilities of Indigenous knowledges in creating a different understanding of education that holds the promise and possibility of excellence for all? As noted, the binary tensions between so-called Western science/scientific knowledge and the Indigenous knowledge system are unproductive for learning, especially if it is acknowledged that we are dealing with multiple systems of knowledge and that no one body of knowledge can claim superiority over another. If a distinction must be made in knowledge systems, the focus should be on the processes of differentiation that set knowledge systems apart in their epistemic and philosophical emphasis, as well as on how power dynamics shape the production, interrogation, validation, and dissemination of knowledge systems, both internally and globally. The romanticization and de-contextualization of knowledges are concerns for both Indigenous and Western science knowledge. Historically, the privileging of Western ways of knowledge is accompanied by the tendency to impose such knowledge on others, while simultaneously denying or subjugating traditional/Indigenous knowledge systems. In a sense one can argue there has been a corresponding glorification of Western knowledge systems.

Currently, Indigenous and oppressed peoples are reclaiming their cultural knowledges and asserting their legitimacy in many spaces. It is clear the academy is no exception (see Abdi & Cleghorn, 2005; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999; Wane, 2009; Waterfall, 2008; among many others). However, despite the fact that Indigeneity and Indigenous knowledge constitute a growing field of study in the academy, the relationship between Indigeneity and Indigenous knowledge is often merely assumed rather than theorized. Indigeneity is a claim to identity, history, politics, culture, and a rootedness in a place. It is about a socio-political consciousness of being as a knowing subject. It is also about an existence outside the purview of colonial encounter and the colonizing relations as over-determining of one’s existence. Indigeneity is about how a body/subject is defined by self and group—a definition of an existence outside and resistant of that identity, which is more often constructed and imposed by the dominant. The politics of claiming Indigeneity in a so-called transnational context allows one to construct an identity that is beyond what is constructed within Euro-American hegemony. Consequently, to claim and reclaim an Indigenousness or an Indigenous identity is a political and decolonizing undertaking. The values, worldviews, and epistemes that govern such Indigenous existence and how we come to know and understand our communities, are appropriately termed “Indigenous knowing/knowledge.”
RE-CONCEPTUALIZING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE/PHILOSOPHIES

Indigenous knowledge is primarily about epistemology. Like every body of knowledge, Indigenous knowledge has its own ontological, conceptual/philosophical, methodological, and axiological groundings. Indigenous knowledge is science, philosophy, and practice of knowing about one’s existence as not conscripted and scripted by simply a colonial and colonizing experience. It is also about understanding the nature of social reality as real (i.e., materially consequential for the body) as well as meaningfully in physical and metaphysical realms. Indigenous knowledge speaks of the inseparability and inter-dependence of selves and the collective. It heralds the mind, body, and spirit connections and connectedness of society, culture, and nature in the ways we come to know about ourselves and our worlds. It is based on a cosmological understanding that the elements of the universe are interrelated and intertwined (e.g., the mental, physical, spiritual, material, political, and economic). We cannot simplistically atomize and particularize the everyday living experience. The everyday experience and the social world are not always subject to the certainty of knowing. Indigenous peoples’ use of their cultural knowledge system is derived from living in close relations and appreciation of nature and society. Hence the Indigenous knowledge system usually would comprise the understanding of the successful ways by which people deal with their environments and surroundings.

Culture is seen as critical to knowledge production. In fact, cultural paradigms shape knowledge; the role of local culture(s) in producing multiple ways of knowing is salient. The advancement of any one cultural perspective cannot be universally applied and/or seen as superior to other perspectives. This is the basis of the critique lodged by Indigenous knowledge regarding the ways in which hegemonic knowledges (e.g., Eurocentric ways of knowing) often masquerade as superior and “all knowing.” Indigenous knowledges also affirm that there are cultural continuities as well as cultural discontinuities in a people’s experiences. Knowledge does not necessarily leave the body with a relocation. Knowledge can reside in cultural memory and can be called upon/recollected to deal with contemporary pressing problems in different contexts. The belief is that all knowledges are shared and accumulated across time and space.

A culturally grounded perspective helps center Indigenous peoples’ worldviews. It also helps local (oppressed) peoples to resist the dominance of Eurocentric perspectives/knowings. When reclaimed and affirmed, Indigeneity and Indigenous knowings provide intellectual agency to marginalized, colonized peoples who then become subjects of their own histories, stories, and experiences. The Indigenous philosophical tradition provides a space for colonized and oppressed peoples to interpret their own experiences on their own terms and understandings, rather than being forced through Eurocentric paradigms. The politics of Indigenous knowledge production is to (re)construct an Indigenous identity rooted in place, culture, history, and politics.

Indigenous knowledges cannot be romanticized as they are also embedded in power relations. To claim “Indigeneity” is to validate and work with Indigenous knowledges. The claiming of Indigenous knowledge is not about denying others their cultural knowledge. Given that Indigeneity and Indigenous knowledge are connected to time and place, there is no denial of their embedded intellectual politics. Historically, all groups can claim an Indigenous past and history in so far as it is outside the realm of a colonial domination and the colonizing experience. The time and space dimensions to Indigenous knowledge merely speak to the contextual basis of knowing and the fact that all knowledge is first and foremost local and needs to be situated in appropriate cultural and political contexts.
As already alluded to, knowledge exists in cultural memory and experience. Indigenous knowledge is embodied in the ability of the self and collective to call on history, cultural memory, politics, myths, stories, heritage, and traditions as important sources of knowledge. This is why discussions of Indigenous knowledge must always reference history, culture, place, social justice, colonialism, decolonization.

The Indigenous landscape articulates an Indigeneity which must be understood in terms of the society, culture, and nature nexus. Such Indigeneity is about a spiritual and spiritualized view of human existence. Indigeneity cautions that the material and non-material aspects of life cannot be dichotomized, and neither can we evade the power issues of knowledge making, validation, and dissemination. Given that knowledge “borrows” and learns from other ways of knowing, Indigeneity is about resistance to domination and colonization and a welcoming of “strangers” into existing communities. Indigeneity is not simply about rights (e.g., who has rights to a place) but more so about our individual and collective responsibilities to ensure the existence of a sustaining community. The issue of responsibility means owning up to the knowledge we produce and allowing such knowledge to compel action to bring about social transformation and change.

Questions of race, class, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, language, religion, and spirituality are also central to discussions of both Indigeneity and Indigenous philosophies. Every knowledge form is demarcated by questions of social difference. Knowledge is power and the asymmetrical power relations are structured along lines of difference. Therefore, such differences construct multiple ways of knowing. But this understanding also implies that there are political and social contexts for knowledge, and that these subjects produce knowledge to make sense of social existence from particular standpoints. The body is also implicated in how we come to know and interpret the world. Our histories, politics, identities, social experiences, cultures, and subjectivities position us to know differently. We speak from particular contexts, out of particular experiences, and within specific, yet interconnected histories and social locations (see also Hall, 1991).

Local cultural knowledges are gendered as in cultural festivals and expectations of gender, around social norms and morals, traditional folkloric practices and the meanings embedded in oral stories, proverbs, fables, and tales. Certain traditional knowledge speaks directly to youth (e.g., rituals about age sets in African contexts). In most Indigenous communities we also learn the respective roles of women and men in safeguarding local cultural resource knowledge. In a pertinent article, exploring the relationship between conservation of biodiversity, Indigenous knowledge systems, gender and intellectual property rights, Quiroz (1994) highlighted gender aspects of Indigenous knowledge. She argued that Indigenous people have sustainably managed their environments for centuries, with women playing a key role in preserving biodiversity. Women possess an intricate knowledge about their environment that is distinctive from men’s knowledge. Unfortunately, such gendered aspects of knowledge (and women’s knowledge in particular) are often ignored by male-biased social science research. The author also notes that Indigenous peoples in general, and women in particular, are not adequately compensated when their own knowledge is collected and utilized by Western researchers and companies. Due to their low social status in many cultures, women are increasingly disadvantaged when dealing with issues of intellectual property rights.
For Indigenous peoples, concern over the continued loss of their identities, cultures, traditions, and histories has prompted a renewed interest in their philosophies of thought. As already alluded to, such knowledge has never been frozen in time and space. They are continually relied upon in everyday challenges of human survival. Despite foreign influences and ever-changing trends of modernity and post-modernity, Indigenous knowledges have remained dynamic and evolved with contemporary challenges. In Indigenous communities, such knowledges can be found in their story forms, songs, myths and mythologies, fables, tales, folklore, riddles, and parables. They can be found in other forms of material culture, such as symbolic ornaments and body ware, and the meanings encoded in cultural artifacts. They can also be found in local cultural resource knowledges and practices associated with traditional pharmacology/plant medicine, farming technologies and agricultural methods, environmental management, soils and vegetation classification, arts and crafts, cultural norms, belief systems, social organization of families and kin groups, cultural festivals, and cultural products (e.g., weaving, pottery, poetry, folklore, music, as well as ornaments creatively fashioned from Indigenous materials). Through the power of oral traditions, we witness the flowering of a truly Indigenous literary tradition with succeeding generations of Indigenous communities. Music, drumming, dancing have been exceptional communication modes.

To reiterate, these knowledge systems do not stand apart or as distinct from Western science knowledge. Grassroots development approaches working with local knowledge have integrated different systems of thought. Knowledge is “Indigenous” to the extent that it works within the prism of local cosmologies that are localized in specific understandings of the society, culture, and nature nexus or interface. Difference is central to understanding Indigenous communities and knowledge forms. However, unlike hegemonic ways of knowing that sow the seeds of myriad forms of xenophobia (i.e., fear of the unknown or tendency to treat the unknown as undeserving), Indigenous communities (and particularly their ancestral knowledges) were rarely afraid of the strange and new. These communities and their knowledges actually welcomed strangers. But the local community was also careful not to allow influxes of different traditions and cultural practices to simply overwhelm them. (This is why most Indigenous peoples are often cautious of so-called modern influences that go a long way to devalue their cultures, heritage and histories.) Over time, local/Indigenous communities incorporated the new into the old, made over the old practices and ideas to serve the needs of the community. This speaks to the dynamism of Indigenous knowledge, and it attests to the fact that such knowledge is powerfully ingrained in local community thought and practice. Indigenous knowledge of medicinal plants (which includes information of the different kinds and functions of plants) has developed on the basis of careful observations and experimentation in local habitats. These knowledges go way back into ancestral times, and they are continually subjected to daily improvements and adaptations. Such a body of knowledge about traditional pharmacology is often contextualized on the community’s historical experience with local health and illness situations and has been confirmed by their common usage and societal norms. In effect, it constitutes a collective traditional knowledge that cannot be conveniently dismissed.

Indigenous knowledge also recognizes the important role of local peoples in preserving ecological balance and biodiversity. There are customary laws (e.g., cultural taboos, rites, and rituals) governing individual and community use and relationships to social and natural environments. These
customary practices and belief systems are a form of built-in protection mechanism for over-exploitation of natural resources. Local ecological sustainability works when Indigenous peoples maintain ownership status of their resources, where they can freely adopt local strategies of conservation, regeneration, and distribution and control of resources. To think otherwise is an insult to the integrity and intellectual resource knowledge of Indigenous communities. Although such practices of local food trends and 100-mile diets may be popular and seemingly new and innovative, these principles and practices pre-date the modern North American state and indeed emerged out of experience and consideration of the local environment and the food system.

Castro-Palaganas, et al. (2004) have rightly argued that “new development paradigms brought about by globalization and information technology have threatened Indigenous knowledge systems” (p. 1). The dominance of so-called modern science knowledge has largely led to an untenable situation in which Indigenous knowledge is ignored and neglected. With this trend, the authors continue “many Indigenous peoples find themselves in a transitional stage, facing the demands of an evolving and intrusive modern world but their knowledge and practices are still rooted in the traditional lifestyles of the past” (Castro-Palaganas, et al., 2004), especially in such as project planning and implementation. From time immemorial many Indigenous communities have used their own locally generated knowledge to change and to improve their circumstances (e.g., local governance and natural resource management). If local people have long plotted their own destiny, it is important to question why their knowledges are being dismissed in contemporary challenges of charting new paths for development?

Many challenges confront a critical study of Indigenous knowledge. These need to be carefully examined and engaged as our strategies for preserving and promoting such knowledge systems may actually end up leading to the (mis)appropriation of local cultural resource knowledge and heritage. For example, the capturing, documentation, and storing of such knowledge in a systematic way is not without problems. To whose benefit is such an undertaking? How and when do local peoples get to decide on the key issues affecting their lives? What happens to Indigenous knowledge when it is transformed into such codified ways from its orality (see also Dei, 2000; Domingo-Morales, 2002)? How do we include Indigenous knowledge in the modern development planning process as central building blocks of local development practice? As Castro-Palaganas, et al. (2001) note, there is little information readily available to guide project planners in using traditional knowledge. Besides, most development interventions have failed to induce Indigenous people to participate because of the absence of instruments and mechanisms that enable them to use their own knowledge.

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES, EDUCATION, AND THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

The focus on Indigenous knowledge has a politics that envisions a system of education in Indigenous traditions and philosophies. Indigenous philosophies are founded upon and express thoughts about the ways of life, traditions, and cultures of Indigenous peoples, from which all learners can, and do, benefit. For example, in an earlier work, Chinn (2007) evaluates Indigenous practices positively and critiques the absence of locally relevant science and Indigenous knowledge in the school curricula. Indigenous knowledge is about a way of life. With this reading, the author identifies local issues of traffic, air, and water quality which should be addressed, and the development of lesson plans, utilizing Indigenous prior knowledge, place, and to a lesser extent, culture, to pinpoint challenges of
curricular development. The author’s findings suggest that critical professional development, employing decolonizing methodologies articulated by Indigenous researchers, is critical. A methodological implication is the development of a framework for professional development which is able to shift science instruction toward meaningful, culture, place, and problem-based learning, relevant to environmental literacy and sustainability. Let me briefly focus on the pedagogic, instructional, and communicative significance of folklore and proverbs as Indigenous philosophies for educating youth. In Indigenous philosophies, spirituality and folklore are infused into everyday activities such as planting, fishing, burials, and religious and ceremonial events. But folkloric production (as in proverbs, story forms, folk music, dance, art, etc.) is about the totality of a people’s experience, a way of life that speaks to the cultural, political, economic, social, and spiritual interconnections of human life and/or psycho-existential existence. Pedagogically, folkloric production can be taken up in the education of the learners. The study of Indigenous knowledge can help illustrate the ways folk culture can be positioned as a creative response to centuries of colonial oppression and exploitation. In documenting folklore as a creative response to colonialism, we can better understand the history of colonial oppression and how local folk culture emanated out of the creative imaginations of oppressed peoples.

Indigenous knowings, embedded in local religions, folklore, celebrations, healing practices, food preparation, oral tradition, pageantry, and work activities, all reveal local understandings of the connections of society, culture, and nature. Indigenous African and Diasporic cultural media, such as folk music and dance, Ananse stories, etc., can serve as useful tools for teachers. Folklore and proverbs contain a profound richness of the thought processes and language of Indigenous peoples. They constitute important communicative tools by reinforcing the epistemic saliency of peoples whose epistemologies are often devalued or negated in the formal educational arena. A careful examination of the richness of ideas carried in such cultural productions gives readers a critical insight into the moral fabric of the community. As Onuora (2009) also notes, the fact that rich proverbial sayings are usually uttered in particular contexts, along with specific explanations, makes it all the more useful as a communicative tool which teachers could use to impart invaluable lessons about the world as seen through the eyes of folk peoples. Proverbs invoke a psycho-spiritual consciousness which combines old and new strategies of addressing ongoing colonial and anti-colonial struggles. Local cultural knowings can be identity devices that shape the Indigenous consciousness of self and environment (John, 2003).

The narrative tradition of folktales can help create awareness about the political concerns of the people within a given locale. Folktales in a post-colonial and ante-colonial context also convey relevant political meanings. This provides a key resource for academics and researchers conducting research on identity formation within the context of the nation-state. Importantly, it makes explicit the connection between nation and state politics as they manifest in folkloric cultural expressions. The vitality of the art of story-telling as a legacy of Indigenous African ancestors is often conveyed in proverbs, fables, and tales. These offer an important pedagogical and communicative tool in the study of language and literature, and they relay important lessons of local history, experience, and ontological perspective on life. The retention of African cultures in the Diaspora shows the cultural continuity in knowledge systems. Indeed, Ananse stories narrated in Diasporic contexts are of importance in a social studies curriculum, as they impart lessons about work attitudes, humans, and their surroundings (see Klein, 1995; Pollard, 1985; Walter, 1966). The continuity of culture and cultural memory itself functions as a signifier of the vitality of African culture in the Diaspora today.

As educators at the classroom, administrative, board, ministry/department, regional, and feder-
al levels debate questions of community integration, whole child education, multiple intelligence–based instruction, differentiated instruction, environmental education, and holistic pedagogy. Indigenous knowledges bring much to offer in all these areas. Understanding the learner and the teacher as embedded producers of community, who are as well produced by that community, the notion of schooling as part and product of the community is possible. Indigenous conceptions of the learner who never walks alone, and who indeed is accountable to the world around her (including the environment) address a number of the issues raised earlier. Further, as teachers and administrators struggle to understand their students and create relevant individualized approaches to instruction, the community has for too long been overlooked as a source of understanding and knowledge about its children. Educating the whole child is impossible if s/he is understood as divorced from a particular socio-cultural (and we might add environmental) context. Looking toward critical approaches in education, Indigenous approaches and knowledges are key to solving the “impossible” challenges facing educators today.

THE QUESTION OF CRITICAL INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGIES

As we seek to engage Indigenous knowledges as part of multiple ways of knowing, the question of how we secure/access such knowledge is crucial. A recent collection dealing with Indigenous and critical methodologies is helping to advance the course of Indigenous philosophy. To make a difference such methodological approaches must be anti-colonial in posture and challenge conventional assumptions that undergird Western social science research methodologies (see Smith, 1999). This book adds to the debate by highlighting the basic principles and ideas regarding Indigenous philosophies as anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-imperialistic. We must engage issues of responsibility and appropriation of knowledge as essential dimensions of critical social research. As much as bringing a critical gaze, locating the self, identity, and politics and affirming complicities and social responsibility are important, Indigenous research approach is about strengthening the capacity of local Indigenous peoples to undertake their own research. Indigenous research method poses some key epistemological questions and methodological concerns on critical/Indigenous research. The epistemological considerations of domination studies, conceptual and methodological issues of anti-colonial and anti-racist research; critical social research and the questions of power, difference, identity, and representation in knowledge production are all relevant to fleshing out the boundaries of Indigenous research and dominant social research.

The worth of a social theory should be judged both on its philosophical groundings/merits, as well as the ability of the theory to offer a social and political corrective. Researching Indigenous philosophies and undertaking an Indigenous research agenda must have both an academic and political component. In an Indigenous research approach, our concern is not a more conventional research agenda, using research simply to “generate knowledge about a group of (people),” or seeing our participants as “objects of knowledge.” By its nature, an Indigenous research methodological approach is an activist research agenda that focuses simultaneously on ways that research allows local peoples to claim discursive agency and authority over their own lives and experiences, and which can point to discourses of resistance so as to transform the current social existence. Such a research methodological approach works with local peoples to offer their own perspectives on events, experiences, and developments in ways that can challenge dominant conceptions of everyday world and social existence. The ethical and political tensions in forging a productive Indigenist activist research
agenda are part of the process of claiming multiple ways of knowing, if we are to challenge the dominance of particular ways of knowing (see Bhavnani & Davis 2000 in another context). An Indigenist research approach is itself “evolving” while in the field, rather than “moving from one predetermined step to another” (Fine & Vanderslice, 1991, p. 208).

INDIGENOUS AND SPIRITUALITY AS RESISTANCE: ASKING QUESTIONS

Resistance as part of the creation of new futures/visions of education and society is a long physical, material, metaphysical, and emotional struggle. For many of us it begins by claiming and reasserting our Indigenous identities. As mentioned earlier, for educators in general we need to develop new pedagogies anchored in our myriad identities, particularly spiritual identities. Reasserting our Indigeneity must embody the essence of ancestral knowing and geographies of cultural memory. Pedagogies of resistance (including claiming spirituality by asserting the importance of the learner’s spirit) must be directed at helping young learners overcome the de-spiriting aspects of schooling (e.g., depersonalization of the learner, spirit wounding, and the everyday “humiliation rituals” including Othering of bodies) (see also Sium, 2010). We cannot disconnect ourselves from our surroundings, cultures, histories, and heritage. We must act on the basis of our history and spirituality (see also Asante, 2003).

Meaningful and genuine educational change starts with the exploration of the self of the learner. This means exploring the body, mind, and soul nexus. Conventionally, education has tended to fragment the self/learner, separating the body, mind, and the soul. To initiate change we must re-center the soul and the spirit. Spirituality as has been noted (see Smith, 1999) remains one of the clearest points of difference between Indigenous knowledge systems and Western systems of thought. Spirituality is relational and holistic and it is about a relationship with “nature, cosmos and the universe” (Mazama, 2002, p. 225). For the Indigenous scholar in the academy claiming spirituality is a form of healing, redeeming oneself and embarking upon a revolutionary journey to make the self whole again (see also Reid, 2010).

For many Indigenous and colonized peoples the politics of reclaiming and affirming our Indigenous and local cultural knowledges is a recognition of the importance and relevance of such knowledges in their own right. Yet, we also maintain that such knowledges have a right place in our academies to be shared with all learners. Therefore, in this final section of my Introduction I want to sound off a few cautionary notes as we seek to study Indigenous knowledges in the academy. There are significant challenges as to how we teach and instruct on Indigenous knowledges. Effective teaching calls for a full understanding and conceptual grounding in the systems of thought and bodies of philosophies that constitute “Indigenous knowings.” So questions about who the teachers will be, who the students are and why, are very important. Furthermore, we must ask whether Indigenous teachings allow for an intellectual space for colonized and marginalized bodies in our classrooms to reclaim identity, history, culture, and space.

As we all welcome and encourage moments and pedagogic spaces to claim Indigenousness so as to subvert hegemonic knowings, we must also affirm the particularities and the shared connections of the colonial experiences among oppressed, colonized, and Indigenous peoples everywhere. There is an important caution here: In broaching Indigenous knowledges how do we avoid hyper-localization? As we make clear the local specificities of all knowledges we must also highlight the shared commonalities of Indigenous knowledges everywhere. As educators we must avoid the reproduction of colonial and re-colonial pathologies rolling out in Indigenous and anti-colonial
instructional and pedagogical methods, strategies, and practices. We must meaningfully introduce Indigenous knowledges without trivializing these knowledges in the (Western) academy. We must also note the class, gender, racial/ethnic, and social difference dimensions in Indigenous knowledges. No knowledge is class, gender, race, neutral. There is always the danger for cultural custodians of knowledge to perpetuate particular patriarchal gender, class, ethnic, race, and sexual ideologies. Tradition can be invented in the service of power and oppression. Claims of Euro-modernity continue to impact the dynamics of Indigenous knowledge. As knowledges interact with each other, we see the appropriation of Western forms of modernity that may be problematic. Personally, I have always struggled with some current claims to African Indigeneity that I see as rooted in Western modernity. For example, to understand African spirituality is to distinguish such knowledge forms from syncretic religious practices. Claiming the “Indigenous” is not an end in itself. It is simply a means to an end, that is, decolonization. In effect, we must seek to repair the damage caused by colonialisms and colonial relations to all local cultural knowledge systems. Indigenousness is a search for wholeness and the repair of spiritual, emotional, physical material damage to oppressed communities through colonial practices.

I conclude by revisiting questions raised at the beginning. Can the academy “change its ways”? What are the possibilities of Indigenous knowledges co-existing in the Western academy? What capabilities (e.g., resources and spaces) exist in the academy for this to happen? Admittedly, we cannot simply make Indigenous knowledges fit into the “Eurocentric metaphorical box” by simply transforming the box into what it is not through deconstruction or reconstruction (Giambrone 2010, p. 13). What we can and should do is create a new box from the beginning and/or push for the co-existence of multiple centers of knowledges. Contributions in this book offer lessons on many issues in this Introduction. Indigenous philosophies shape the theory and practice of education (broadly defined), and help stem the tide of spiritual “dis-embodiment,” particularly of learners. Indigenous knowledge forms in global and transnational contexts point to the pedagogic, instructional, and communicative implications for decolonized education. Some individual contributions begin with a brief overview of processes of knowledge production, interrogation, validation, and dissemination in diverse educational settings. There is an interrogation and critiques of theoretical conceptions of what constitutes “valid” knowledge and how such knowledge is produced and disseminated locally and externally. A particular emphasis is on the validation of non-Western epistemologies and their contributions in terms of offering multiple and collective readings of the world. Among the specific topics covered are the principles of Indigenous knowledge forms; questions of power, social difference, identity, and representation in Indigenous knowledge production; cultural appropriation and the political economy of knowledge production; Indigenous knowledges and science education; Indigenous knowledges and development in times of change and modernity; and the question of Indigenous spirituality as bedrock for transforming the academy. The book utilizes case material from diverse social settings to understand different epistemologies and their pedagogical implications. Indigenous knowledge is thus defined broadly as local cultural resource knowledge and the Indigenous philosophies of colonized/oppressed peoples.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to Marlon Simmons, Ph.D candidate, and Dr. Arlo Kempf in the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto for reading and commenting on drafts of this chapter.