

defective children were not educable; Adelaide Plumtre, a teacher and school board trustee, head of the committee on dull, normal and retarded pupils in the public schools, who was inspired by Pittsburgh's trade schools in 1927 and led the effort to bring the model to Toronto; and Marion Monroe, who convincingly and scientifically separated reading disabilities from general intelligence and provided guidelines on remedial instruction.

But while giving attention to all the people who actively campaigned for changes in special education, this book stresses the importance of social movements and academic expertise as they shape ideas about intelligence, health, and learning. Older ideas which see disabled people as perpetually broken and in need of constant fixing are still around, while new ones about inclusion are being championed by passionate educators, influenced by different social movements with a different academic understanding of human capacity. While the focus of this book is limited to a specific place and time, the ideas and debates it analyzes and illuminates continue to shape discussions of special education today.

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Jane Griffith

Words Have a Past: The English Language, Colonialism, and the Newspapers of Indian Boarding Schools

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For nearly one hundred years, tens of thousands of children from Indigenous communities across Canada attended boarding or residential schools funded by the Department of Indian Affairs and operated by many of Canada's largest Christian denominations. Those possessing even a passing familiarity with Canadian history know that the aim of these schools was to erase Indigenous culture and assimilate Indigenous children into the broader Canadian population. What many people do not know is that a significant number of these schools published a record of their activities in newspapers that were produced as part of their own industrial training programs. Today these same newspapers promise to open new perspectives on this tragic chapter in Canadian history and perhaps even aid in contextualizing the challenges that face Indigenous peoples in the twenty-first century.

Jane Griffith's book, *Words Have a Past*, makes a significant contribution to our understanding of both Indian boarding schools and the newspapers they published in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Reading these newspapers as part of the evidentiary record is an enormously complex task that requires immense methodological sophistication. In the hands of a lesser historian such an undertaking could have easily degenerated into a hopeless muddle. Griffith's book, by contrast, yields page after page of careful and nuanced insight.

Griffith focuses on six English language newspapers published at five different schools: Shingwauk Industrial Home in Ontario (*Our Forest Children*, 1887–90 and the *Canadian Indian*, 1890–91); Battleford Industrial School (*Guide*, 1891–99) and Regina Industrial School (*Progress*, 1894–1910) in what would later become Saskatchewan; Rupert's Land Industrial School in Manitoba (*Aurora*, 1893–95); and Kitamaat Home in British Columbia (*Na-Na-Kwa*, 1898–1907). The first four of these schools were industrial in nature—meaning that they existed in part to teach technical skills to students such as farming, blacksmithing, carpentry, and in the case of these particular schools, printing. Kitamaat, on the other hand, was quite different. In addition to the fact that it boarded girls only, the school was smaller, taught different skills, and was located in a geopolitical context marked by a different colonial history. What all these schools had in common, however, was that they published a school newspaper—a fact that was largely dependent on several variables including having access to a knowledgeable instructor on staff, a willing principal, some financial support, and a means to obtain inexpensive (typically second-hand) printing equipment.

Griffith's book is organized thematically—around language, time, and place—rather than as a series of case studies. Though, as she admits, that carries the danger of flattening the differences between the newspapers and the settings in which they were produced, the unavoidable fact remains that the overarching colonial project embodied in and enacted by these newspapers was one of cultural homogenization. Griffith maintains that her analysis is intended both to maintain and destabilize these categories—just as recent scholars now argue that the English language functioned both as a means of cultural dominance *and* as a tool of liberation among Indigenous peoples in North America. This is an excellent example of the methodological sophistication of the book. Griffith employs these distinctions and currents of analysis to interrogate these newspapers in remarkably insightful ways. Her analysis, moreover, seeks not so much to uncover what newspapers deliberately left out—the negative evidence of sickness, death, and abuse—but instead to vitalize what they tell us on the surface by asking what was openly celebrated; what kind of narratives were constructed and promoted; how students complicated, subverted, and resisted such narratives; and, not least, how these writings might be juxtaposed to other forms of contemporary Indigenous writing.

The crux of the evidentiary problem, as Griffith frames it, is the “tension between a school's voice and a lie” that saturates these documents (1). On the face of it, these newspapers were simply a means of spreading propaganda and, though perhaps valuable to a limited degree in constructing histories of colonial administrations and the self fashioning these schools undertook at an institutional level, they are useless as windows into the lives and views of actual Indigenous students. As Griffith demonstrates, however, that view is far too simplistic. “These newspapers,” she contends, “have the potential to contain institution-imposed narratives *as well as* the possibility of a veiled poetry of resistance” (2). Building on the groundbreaking work of Robert Warrior in his 2005 book *The People and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), Griffith reads these texts both

“with” and “against the grain” in order to distinguish overt meanings from subversive currents that challenge colonial narratives in subtle but often unmistakable ways.

Importantly, Griffith does more than mine these newspapers for information. She also takes them as objects of study in their own right. “Students were almost always the labour behind nineteenth-century boarding school newspapers,” she writes, arguing that for this reason, “the material conditions under which these newspapers were produced matter just as much as what the text says” (24). Griffith thus pays close attention, not only to the content of the newspapers, but also to their paratextual elements, mastheads, photographs, page layout and architecture, article juxtapositions, as well as material that sheds direct light on individual student printers, typesetters, authors, and the activities that took place in the printing programs themselves.

Griffith’s book will be of great interest to Canadian cultural historians, Indigenous scholars, as well as historians of the book. Indeed, reading these newspapers shines a welcome and at times surprising light on areas sometimes left in the shadows by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission precisely because they give voice to missionaries, inspectors, Indian agents, principals, teachers, and bureaucrats—all of whom contributed to a past that framed colonialism as natural and innocent. As this book amply demonstrates, Indigenous students shared a world with these figures; they were not simply passive consumers of colonial ideology; their languages and cultures were not extinguished; and they did not merely exist in environments constructed by others. On the contrary: they actively shaped those environments and their newspapers as readers, as writers, and as printers.

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Dawn Wallin and Janice Wallace (eds.)

Transforming Conversations: Feminism and Education in Canada since 1970

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In her 2002 book, *To Speak is Never Neutral*, feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray argues that the mechanics of language, and by extension culture, have been so heavily formed under normalized auspices of masculinity, that language itself “lacks the creation, the affirmation that says: I live” (2).¹ Though she is primarily referring to the use of French and English, she maintains that the binarist basis of language is prescriptive and forecloses the possibility for discourses of *becoming*. From a feminist understanding, this means that speaking and writing oneself into being is not only an act of resistance, but a necessary undertaking to change the institutions we inhabit.

In Wallin and Wallace’s *Transforming Conversations: Feminism and Education in Canada since 1970*, the underlying theme of speaking/speech resonates with Irigaray’s

1 Luce Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral* (Routledge, 2002/2017).