

JSGS Workshop: Writing Book and Article Reviews

Example of a Partial Article Review

In 2008, Janet Caldwell published “A Changing Model of Aboriginal Education” in the *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*. Caldwell, a consultant and policy writer for the Government of Manitoba, argues that when seeking to govern themselves, Aboriginal people would be best advised to avoid setting up a school system and focus instead on developing home-based education. According to Caldwell, all school systems -- whether state- or band-controlled -- deny Aboriginal people the right to self-determination. Caldwell argues that although today’s curriculum is now more reflective of Aboriginal knowledge, the problems with schooling itself have not been addressed. These problems centre on the minimization of indigenous culture and the hidden curriculum of the dominant culture. Caldwell argues that a home-based education model would help Aboriginal people reach the goals of self-determination. She maintains that such a model would support self-determination in education better than schooling because, in a home setting, children would learn in an environment that nurtures strong cultural roots and circumvents negative influences of the hidden curriculum. Caldwell presents an interesting model of home-based Aboriginal education, and she is undoubtedly correct in her contention that even band-based schools are weak in teaching culture. However, she fails both to provide examples of successful home-based Aboriginal education and to demonstrate how an education at home would give students the skills that are essential in modern life.

<The middle paragraphs of the review summarize the article and discuss the positive elements of the article. They have not been included. >

Although Caldwell is to be commended for having proposed an interesting model of Aboriginal education, she provides little evidence to back up her claim that schools have ruined community life on reserve. Scholars have pointed out that, far from ruining community life, schools in fact bring communities together by teaching students units that are based on life in their region (Bear, 2005; Jenkins, 2007). Others have drawn attention to the many schools that now collaborate with community Elders to teach and demonstrate indigenous knowledge

(Hogue, 2008). By ignoring this evidence of positive change, Caldwell has weakened her argument. The article would have been much stronger if she had addressed opposing views and provided evidence to support her argument.

In making her case for home-based education, Caldwell has not explained how Aboriginal parents would support their children in their endeavors. In 2011, only 9.8 percent of the Aboriginal population had a university degree, compared with 26.5 percent of the non-Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2015). These findings indicate that many indigenous parents may not be well enough prepared to educate their own children, particularly in higher learning skills. Caldwell suggests that e-based distance learning systems could support the parents' efforts, but this is unlikely to be sufficient.

An alternative to Caldwell's proposal for home-based education could involve a combination of school and home-based experience. Under this model, students would spend half of a day learning academic subjects in school and half a day learning about indigenous knowledge from the Elders and family outings on the land. These family outings would revolve around seasonal cultural activities and support Aboriginal self-determination. Such a blended model might be a solution for the many parents who are unable or unwilling to educate their children at home. Another alternative would be small private education systems that emphasize Aboriginal culture and values. These ideas would require research and development, but they might encourage Aboriginal education for self-determination. Caldwell's Aboriginal home-based education model has definite weaknesses, but her ideas combined with other models would be worth investigating and expanding. Further research may point the way to a sustainable solution that works for Aboriginal students in a model of self-determination.

*The extract from the review is courtesy of a former student.