

What is in a Voice?

A Pedagogy of Voice for Museums

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Beginning to Attune Our Ears

AMONG ITS MANY ROLES, a museum is an important site of learning for students. This presents educators and learners with an opportunity to engage in a critical reading of texts that looks beyond the most evident narrative or storyline and asks questions about the voice that speaks through these texts. This paper aims to contribute to a pedagogy of voice that can be understood in the context of a historical or ethnographic museums. But how does a museum give voice to the people and objects represented in its exhibition, and how do visitors come to hear this voice? As this paper will attempt to show, a voice is imbued with contradictions and ambiguities when it is presented as a self-representing plurality of voices that belong to a historically marginalized group.

A voice is more than the sound produced when speaking. A voice is more than the legacy of spoken words long after the speaker has gone. A voice is a product of broader social relations and cultural practices in which one is situated, and derives from historical and contemporary ways to thinking about and understanding the world. These social relations and cultural practices are conditions which both constitute and constrain a voice, limiting what it can say and how such things can be said. Similarly, the context in which a voice is situated influences how it is heard and interpreted by others.

At museums that depict (or rather, create representations of) Aboriginal cultures through narratives of Canadian and Aboriginal history, the socio-historical constitution of the voice has implications for the way a voice tells a story, and the way it is heard by visitors. When arranged in a carefully designed museum, the meaning of words and cultural artifacts of Aboriginal peoples are shifted across time and space. This shifting has the effect of translating (Sturge, 2007) and recontextualizing, which suggests the impossibility of representing the voices of the people and artifacts as they were at their origin.

The journey towards this paper began as a pre-service teacher when I heard praises of the educational programs offered by several local museums. Museums, it seemed were ideal educational sites that offered knowledgeable and engaging opportunities for student learning that

related to the curriculum. During my graduate studies, an opportunity arose to visit the *Canadian Museum of Civilization*. In passing through the exhibitions, I noticed that each artifact or text had a voice that communicated a message. At times, one clear message seemed to stand out and dominate a space, even though there were a multitude of written quotations and artifacts. I often found myself wondering: what is the story that these artifacts cannot tell me from their place in the display, from their positioning within a coherent narrative? When I looked beyond the central messages of an exhibition or display I began to question what I saw or ‘heard’ at the museum.

After graduate studies I had the opportunity to accompany several classes of pre-service teachers who looked very much like myself (white, middle class of European descent) through the First Peoples Hall at the *Canadian Museum of Civilization*. The pre-service teachers raised several concerns about teaching Aboriginal history to their students: a lack of knowledge about Aboriginal cultures, bringing in contentious historical perspectives, and even discomfort about the unintentional but nonetheless colonizing effect their words could have when endeavouring to ‘teach’ or share knowledge with students.

For me, these concerns raised fundamental issues within curriculum studies and critical education: How should we approach museums as ‘educators,’ and what do we expect museums to provide for ‘learners?’ Perhaps one answer is that museums are object-oriented places, brimming with factual information, that serve as great enhancements to the classroom curriculum. However, I favour an approach that sees museums as places of narratives that tell a carefully crafted story from which we can learn as much from hearing the story as we can from studying how and why it is crafted. As such there is an agenda for educators to be ‘learners’—as they enter museums with different expectations of how these places can allow us to learn about ourselves and others, past and present.

I advocate bringing the latter approach to realization through a ‘pedagogy of voice.’ For the purposes of this paper, pedagogy in my conception is an ongoing process of learning in which we learn about ourselves and others, in turn coming to a more critical awareness of our own relation to the social world. In its critique this paper does not intend to undermine museums as valuable sites of learning. It does contend that a critical approach to museums can enhance the educational experience by opening the possibilities of student learning to a wider range of ideas and perspectives.

Its aim is to provide a way for non-Aboriginal educators and learners to approach museum exhibitions that depict Aboriginal cultures—to navigate both the representations in the space, and to navigate their own positioning in relation to the museum space and the cultural groups depicted. The use of two common features in museum exhibitions—written texts and visual texts (objects and artifacts) will be the focus of this analysis, and provide concrete examples that are practical for educators and learners. Keeping in mind a practical way for educators to approach museum exhibitions that represent Aboriginal peoples, the exhibitions and displays highlighted in this analysis are drawn from more detailed research of the Grand Hall and First Peoples Hall at the *Canadian Museum of Civilization*. The analysis is based on a type of display that uses written and visual texts (objects). This format occurs frequently throughout the exhibition spaces, but with differing content. The findings will be used to generate a number of questions and considerations for educators.

In writing this paper, I cannot pretend that my own voice does not contribute to my interpretation of the museum exhibition, although my use of ‘we’ is not intended to imply a unified group of educators. It is unreasonable to pretend that my words belong to an impartial colourless, genderless observer. In fact, I find it fits in with the dominant narratives and voices of my society all too easily, being white, female and educated. While this is a hindrance in some respects, it is

an opportunity to interrogate and challenge the ways I have learned about myself and Aboriginal people.

Why Does Voice matter? Exploring Narratives in Canadian History

Museums play an important role in telling the story of a nation, its identity, and its culture (Davis, 2007; Davison, 2004; McLoughlin, 1999). In recent years the telling of Canadian history has generated criticism about the representation of marginalized groups, particularly Aboriginal peoples in Canada (Cruikshank, 1994a; McLoughlin, 1999; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Strong-Boag, 2004). Working towards a pedagogy of voice for museums begins with an understanding of the story that is being told and which groups are present in its telling.

Museum exhibitions are places of tension between museum historians and curators, the political agendas of museum boards and stakeholders (Davison, 2004; McLoughlin, 1999). Davison, a museum historian writing in an Australian context, argues that while a museum that is reflective of cultural plurality is desirable, political pressures often work against this. This can result in exhibitions that portray a unified narrative of history, built around heroic figures, iconic objects, and patriotic and inspirational themes, or it can lead to bland exhibitions that have been built to suit all interests and escape controversy (Davison, 2004). This view is echoed by Veronica Strong-Boag (2004) as well as Carol Schick and Verna St. Denis (2005), who agree that a conservative approach to history that tells one unified story fails to address power relations, oppression and injustice. “A discourse of ‘cultural difference’ denies the power relations on which racial privilege and inequality depend... When racism is being denied, the talk about it is easily replaced by a celebration of diversity, heroes and role models” (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 307). This version of the past is neither equipped to characterize the past nor deal with relevant questions of the present day. With museums increasingly regarded among the public as trusted sources of authority, greater scrutiny is needed to identify the historians and authors who produce the content of exhibitions (Davison, 2004).

It can be argued that museums are important sites of cultural knowledge that “serve to remind us of who we are and what our place is in the world” (Davis, 2007, p. 53). Such a view maintains that history is an important unifier that should take into account the various individuals and groups who were present, but in a way that presents one unified narrative (Davis, 2007; Granatstein, 1998). For Davis, this should be based on the Canadian nation and people, and the European civilization and cultural traditions on which the nation is founded. Moreover, Granatstein (1998) condemns interpretations of Canadian history that are critical of the past and point to injustice and discrimination, suggesting this twists the past only to serve present ends. However, many authors disagree, citing the way this ignores the history of marginalized groups (Cruikshank, 1994a, 1994b; McLoughlin, 1999; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Strong-Boag, 2004) and produces a single narrative that excludes alternate views or interpretations (Werner, 2000). Veronica Strong-Boag (2004) notes a lack of diversity represented and the absence of race, class and gender in the telling of Canadian history. While Moira McLoughlin (1999) acknowledges that these “painful silences” and “powerful absences” limit the story Aboriginal Canadians can tell about themselves in museums (p. 3). Her findings indicate that museum narratives cast Aboriginal people as the Other in a dichotomy of Self and Other. This is concerning, given the museum’s capacity to define culture and history, and to legitimize one particular interpretation while failing to account for others.

A further criticism of presenting history as a unified narrative looks to the way Canadian narratives of nationalism and multiculturalism can re-produce relations of racial domination by ignoring the salience of race, particularly between Aboriginal and white Canadians (Schick & St. Denis, 2005). Canada has constructed a national mythology of innocence, egalitarianism and diversity that depend on forgetting and ignoring relations of racial inequality that exist in the past and present.

Criticism of a more specific mode of domination that has been reflected in the telling of Canadian history argues that Indigenous voices have been marginalized, knowledge has been ignored, and oral histories have been devalued in comparison to written accounts (Battiste, 2004; Cruikshank, 2004). The privileging of written historical accounts has meant that Indigenous voices are unable to author their own histories or control their publicly recorded images and representations in museums (Cruikshank, 1994b). While written histories are increasingly viewed as interpretations that change with time and circumstance, oral histories are more often criticized for historical relativism, which by contrast elevates the legitimacy of mainstream history's truths and facts (Cruikshank, 1994a). Oral histories are only now being recognized as open-ended accounts that have the ability to embrace new insights (Cruikshank, 1994b). The challenge Cruikshank identifies for museums today is to consider how oral and written histories can coexist in ways that affirm Indigenous voices and identities through self-representation. Elaborating on oral cultures, Battiste (2004) explains that knowledge is acquired and shared collectively through experiences and relationships, rather than seen as impersonal and analytical, as in written cultures. This perspective has marginalized Indigenous literacies that are symbolic or ideographic. Today, the value of engaging with a curriculum of decolonization is recognized for the way this brings a critical awareness of the colonization bound to our teaching and learning and pushes us to strive towards new ways of knowing Indigenous histories (Ng-A-Fook, 2007).

But What is in a Voice? A Framework

The literature reveals a crucial point: that certain histories and historical perspectives have been privileged over other histories in Canada. Now I turn to the role of curricular discourses in impacting a learner's interpretation of the world and the role of the museum in guiding a visitor's interpretation of the peoples and histories depicted within.

In their work on anti-oppressive pedagogy, Schick & St. Denis (2005) call for curricular planning that brings students to an understanding of their own social positioning in relation to the production of identities through normative social and historical practices, relations and discourses of domination. They explain the need to "explore the racialized positioning of white-preservice teachers with respect to Aboriginal peoples" (p. 297) and consider the ways white students and teachers fit comfortably into the dominant images and cultural practices reflected in the school curriculum. In the discourse of curriculum, the privilege and dominance of whiteness is normalized. We can think of this discourse as constructing a lens which enables educators and students to stand at an imaginary centre and look 'out'—using this perspective to learn and make sense of their social world. Identifying, questioning and deconstructing the discourses that form this lens is a task of anti-racist scholarship and has relevance to the aims of a pedagogy of voice for museums, as museums are a place where the narratives of history and curriculum intertwine and work on a number of levels to guide a visitor's interpretation.

When we think of museums as places of interpretations, we must look at the systems of representation therein which contribute to a visitor's impressions of Aboriginal cultures. Valda Blundell (2002) argues that museums and tourist sites are designed with the assumption that visitors want an authentic experience of Aboriginal culture. This encourages visitors to project their culturally shared way of understanding the world onto another cultural way of understanding the world. These shared understandings are known as systems of meaning according to Hall (1997) and come to seem natural or self-evident in one's own culture. Systems of meaning can persist without question as they reinforce perceived racialized and cultural differences.

This translating of one system of meaning onto another is a particular concern in public museums that exhibit a non-dominant culture. It is encouraged in museum displays in the following way: Cultural objects are perceived to have cultural value simply because they have been chosen to be part of that display (Lidchi, 1997). Written texts or descriptions are included to help visitors interpret the objects. While this is helpful and arguably necessary, the written texts direct visitors toward certain cultural understandings and *not* others (Lidchi, 1997). Moreover, the written explanation is produced by the museum at the time an exhibition is created, rather than by the object's creator. Thus a shift or translation across time and culture occurs between the origin of a cultural object and the interpretation of that object. A visitor's interpretation is specific to the historical and cultural place in which they are situated and their way of understanding the world. In other words, the broader social, political and economic practices that inform what is written (Werner, 2000) and how it is interpreted.

Considering that written (and spoken) words are of great importance in constructing museum narratives and carrying them through multiple spaces, Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1991) helps us to understand whose words are given importance in a museum exhibition. He explains that broader social conditions allow certain speakers to access certain language. This presupposes a set of social relations in which a speaker is situated and which determine the authority or legitimacy conferred upon that speaker. If we think of the museum as a speaker—producing narrated written descriptions that accompany the cultural objects displayed within, then the written descriptions hold the legitimacy of the museum. We can call the voice of this speaker a dominant voice. However, other speakers and voices are *invited* to share the museum space, whose words are attributed to someone from outside the museum (i.e., an Aboriginal person or group). These voices too, are assumed to have a certain degree of legitimacy in the museum, which can mask the power imbalance between the museum and the cultures it chooses to exhibit. Thus, the social world is a place of struggle between the dominant and the dominated, where one's words are a reflection of one's situation and the limits of acceptable speech are drawn (and redrawn) (Butler, 2008).

The idea that there are limits to acceptable speech—limits to what it is deemed appropriate for certain voices to say—indicates that not all voices hold equal power. There are silenced voices. As educators and learners, when we enter a museum exhibition, particularly an exhibition depicting a marginalized cultural group, we must immediately attune our ears to the silences that lurk between smoothly crafted narratives. As Megan Boler (2004) argues, what is said is as important and troubling as what is not said. Codes of conduct and civility reproduce relations of domination by moving the focus of structural inequities into the realm of social interactions (Mayo, 2004). Here, the speaker becomes the focus of attention and can be limited to speaking in the correct ways on the correct topics. When we think of the range of topics and the scope of discussion inside a museum exhibition, particularly for an Aboriginal speaker, the limits of what can be said become the oppressive relations of domination, thus making the idea of self-representation very problematic.

bell hooks (1988) elaborates on silence and speech that is silence. For the oppressed, speaking is a form of resistance that challenges the politics of domination that would otherwise render one voiceless. For her,

moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance...that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice. (p. 9)

Assumptions of authenticity surround the oppressed voice, creating racially biased expectations that imply one static, unchanging voice. It becomes easy to speak in ways that are compatible with the dominant group, describing experience through language, existing images, ways of knowing, and frameworks that reinforce domination. Speech must not be disturbing or threatening if it is to be accepted (hooks, 1988). However, engaging in liberatory speech means working not to speak in a way that is consistent with the colonizer's imagination. For hooks, "appropriation of the marginal voice threatens the very core of self-determination and free self-expression for exploited and oppressed peoples" (p. 14). To effectively begin asserting one's voice is to make known the experience of exclusion and subordination through one's own words. In the museum, this means hearing Aboriginal peoples through their own vocabulary on their own terms, not only through language, but also through oral traditions, art and symbols.

The following sections will explore voices in a museum exhibition. It will discuss how educators and learners can become more aware of where their own voices are situated relative to those voices in a museum exhibition. Attention will be paid to ways different voices exist in the same space, and how this quiets or silences some voices. Finally, it will discuss the importance of being aware of absences and omissions as part of the pedagogy of understanding voice.

Inside the Museum Exhibitions

The Canadian Museum of Civilization is an architectural feat, large and imposing from the outside with no less grandeur greeting its visitors on the inside. As visitors enter the massive tranquility of the *Grand Hall*, which is the first of two permanent exhibitions devoted to the telling of Aboriginal history, they need only willingly suspend disbelief to feel that they have entered another world. At first, there is a breathtaking expanse. From the top of the tree canopy and the tops of totem poles visitors descend into a Pacific coast Aboriginal village filled with natural light and lush green foliage. A line of rustic houses stands centrally to represent a seaside nineteenth century village and their every detail is life-sized. Even the glossy main floor area mimics water next to the seaside village. Every few minutes the call of a lone bird breaks the silence. From the moment a visitor enters this space it speaks to them while sending messages of realness and authenticity. The totem poles are clearly labeled to indicate that they are original artifacts. The line of rustic houses is constructed by teams of Aboriginal carvers using the same methods and materials used a century ago. The aura of authenticity that this recreated setting projects is something that should always be kept in mind as critical educators so we are not seduced by it. Instead we should be reminded of the possibility of authenticity in the scene before us: The reconstructed village is pristine and vacant. We don't see it full of people and chaos or muddy from the pouring rain. If this initial introduction to Aboriginal history in Canada tells us anything, it is that what we will find in the coming exhibitions hold more layers to uncover and

stories to be told than what meets the eye.

Who speaks?

The first section of the analysis will focus on the voice in written words. It will take us into the Coast Salish house, which is the intended starting point for the exhibition, as it is nearest the entrance and its description greets visitors with the word ‘Introduction.’ Inside the Coast Salish house there are large panels of written text on bright red backgrounds, photos of Aboriginal people on the walls, and various artifacts on display in glass cases.

There are two types of speaker presented in the written texts of the Coast Salish house. Some written texts are presented through a seemingly anonymous narrator who carries the storyline and tells visitors about a certain group of people, the items and traditions that are significant to their culture. Much criticism has focused on museums in Canada relying predominantly on an anonymous narrator to speak for Aboriginal peoples (Cruikshank, 1994; McLoughlin, 1999). The specifics of identifying this narrator is not the point to dwell on as long as the museum is regarded as a place of authority (Davison, 2000) with the knowledge and expertise to represent a certain group of people. What is important is the guise of neutrality that the narrator creates by being positioned as a more distanced third party and uttering factual statements about the culture and history being exhibited.

In contrast, the second speaker whose quotations and descriptions are interwoven throughout this space is an Aboriginal person who is often named and whose words appear in quotations to contextualize or describe something. These are personal accounts, rich with emotion, experience and detail. On one level both types of speaker have a distinct voice: the anonymous narrator framing discussions through which Aboriginal speakers can take part; the first person accounts of Aboriginal speakers invoking a voice of self-representation. However, self-representation in this situation is greatly problematized. Each phrase is *chosen* and is inescapably linked to the museum’s power to make decisions about the narratives that will carry through their exhibition. So while words can appear to be spoken in a voice of self-representation, much of their essence of self-representation is washed away. Two wall panels in the Coast Salish House, both titled Xwe Nal Mewx (translated Coast Salish) illustrate the difference between quoted text and narrated text. A quoted text states: “There’s a lot of sadness in the hearts of the elders because the resources aren’t there any longer. That’s the real crying feeling in our elders.” (Diane Modeste, Cowichan, 1992) (Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1993). A nearby narrated text states:

The arrival of the Europeans was devastating—causing dispossession, disease, death—but the Coast Salish were always adaptable people, able to cope with seasonal changes and social pressures. Today they constitute the largest group of First Nations people in British Columbia, with fifty-four organized bands and a steadily increasing population in excess of 15,000. (Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1993).

The latter quote which is rich for analysis will be revisited in more detail in a later section.

Also prominently situated in the Coast Salish House, another panel of written text, greets visitors with these words:

We declare and affirm our inalienable right to aboriginal title, and aboriginal rights to the land, the mountains, the minerals, the trees, the lakes, the rivers, and the streams, the air and other resources of our lands. We declare that our aboriginal title and our rights have existed from time immemorial, exists at the present time and shall exist for all future... We have maintained our freedom, our language and our traditions from time immemorial. (Coast Salish Declaration, 1988)

This passage is taken from a Coast Salish Declaration (1988) and might make perfect sense to a visitor who is familiar with rights discourse and agrees with equal rights for all. I read this and immediately associate concepts of rights and freedoms to my childhood learning about the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is taught in the spirit of providing equality to all and the willingness to believe this is brought into practice. By making this association I read part of my own voice into the Coast Salish declaration and make an unconscious assumption that the concepts have the same significance. However, my familiarity is situated culturally in a time and place that attributes great importance to rights. In my context concepts that seem like common sense may be completely unfamiliar to a Coast Salish person who just stepped out of time immemorial. Further, when I read part of my own voice into this text I am bringing my own history to it, and my life experience of equality, which may be very different than a Coast Salish history, in that my belief in having certain rights is not born out of struggle.

It appears that the Coast Salish people have chosen their own words for self-representation in this text. Yet, the shared meanings reflected in this text are derived from a Western system of thought and are closely tied to the dominant language of liberal democratic principles. The language used in this text was either borrowed or given, both of which are problematic if this is intended to be a self-representation. It raises two questions: To whom do these words belong? And if these words belong to someone other than the speakers, then whose voice is actually guiding the meaning behind these words? Elaine Showalter (1985) refers to this as a “double voiced discourse,” where the subordinate group must always speak through the language of the dominant group that controls the forms through which ideas and beliefs can be articulated (p. 264). It is the language of the colonizer being used by the colonized and as such the voice of the Coast Salish people to speak in their own words cannot be the (only) voice that emerges from this text.

A visitor’s ability to read these words and come to an understanding of what they mean for the Coast Salish people is also influenced by what is contained in the surrounding display. In this space, the words are chosen such that a visitor is directed towards a version of history in which Aboriginal peoples have maintained their rights, freedoms, language and traditions over an infinite period of time. Werner (2000) would find the absences in this text concerning because they omit a history in which freedom, language and tradition were taken away and have struggled to re-emerge and gain recognition.

Recognizing one’s own history when encountering a representation of another cultural history is part of pedagogy. When this exhibition is approached by a critically conscious visitor, an enormous learning space is opened up, wherein one can learn about their own self in relation to Aboriginal cultures. The pedagogy of voice is part of this learning process where a visitor comes to a deeper understanding of how their own voice (experience, ways of understanding) comes to bear on their understanding of the exhibited culture and how the voice(s) of the exhibited culture are in part expressions of the voice of dominance and institutional power (the museum).

What Do We See?

Making sense of cultural artifacts is influenced by the surrounding space such as its design, contents, and layout. It can be difficult for a visitor to grasp the cultural significance of objects that belong to another culture unless the object is accompanied by some written description (Davis, 2007). Adding written description is necessary and problematic at the same time (Lidchi, 1997). In the *Grand Hall*, written descriptions of objects vary from listing only the time and place of an object's creation to more lengthy descriptions describing the use and cultural significance of the object. While descriptions can help visitors to understand the cultural significance of an object, they can also serve to fix and control its meaning, closing off the possibility of other interpretations (Barthes, 1977; Lidchi, 1997; Werner, 2000).

One space in the *Grand Hall* is the Tsimshian House. When we enter the Tsimshian House and see a collection of artifacts and culture objects neatly arranged in glass cases, we believe the artifacts must have some cultural significance. The cases contain rows of masks, and other artifacts, their descriptions inside sparsely located guidebooks that offer a varying range of written description. The interior of Tsimshian House is stated to be a handmade replica reflective of the mid-1800s. While the construction of this space may reflect a Tsimshian House, the interior provides little context for understanding the many artifacts that are presumed to have cultural significance. Each object is numbered and corresponding booklets can be found to the side with descriptions that vary from a few words to a paragraph in length. A choice was made to create the Tsimshian House as an exhibition that emphasizes cultural objects. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the unfamiliar visitor.

The question arises: How does a visitor from a culture where written language is dominant come to understand the cultural significance of Aboriginal objects? If a collection of objects from my own home was one day on display in a museum—what items would find their way into this collection? What would enable a visitor to gain an understanding of my life, my culture and how these objects were important? I think of my laptop. When it is powered off, not connected to any networks, it becomes one of several objects on my desk and the diverse functions it serves in my life—for communication, work, entertainment and learning—are not accessible. It becomes a static object. Similarly for the cultural objects in the exhibition—they too become static. In a literal sense, they remain motionless behind a glass barrier. As a visitor I cannot see the context in which a mask is used, and I cannot see the type of food being prepared in the bowls and other seemingly culinary tools. There is a story in each object that cannot be told and a voice that I cannot hear. Coming to a realization that my ways of knowing may not be enough to help me understand the *symbolic* meaning of the objects and the stories weaved through colours, textures and graphics can be intimidating. However, a visitor who at first struggles to see beyond a collection of objects must recognize the places of pedagogy that open up in this very moment and step forward, rather than giving up. Exploring a pedagogy of voice leads us to ask ourselves how we can attune our ears and our minds to hear those voices that are quiet to us. A first and humbling step is to acknowledge that there are important voices, telling meaningful stories that we have learned not to hear. (Such an admission has applications that extend beyond the museum, into our classrooms, but that is for another discussion.) When passing through museum exhibitions, I like to ask: What is the exhibition telling us? And in turn: What is the exhibition *not* telling us?

Listening for Silences

The ideas of silence and omission emerge from the museum analysis and warrant further discussion. What is said must take place within the limits of acceptable speech if it is to be effective or heard by others (Bourdieu, 1991; Butler, 1997; hooks, 1988). This implies that there are certain topics that are appropriate for discussion in certain situations. Recalling the two exhibition spaces, we can look at how the past was presented such that themes of conflict and colonization, and the connection of these to present day consequences is diminished.

In the Coast Salish house there was acknowledgement of past injustice against Aboriginal peoples. A written panel reads, “the arrival of the Europeans was devastating—causing dispossession, disease, death...” These are strong words. They are not quantified, nor do they speak to specific atrocities or the experience of enduring dispossession, disease and death. Instead, these words are mediated by what comes next: “but the Coast Salish were always adaptable people able to cope with seasonal changes and social pressures.” Perhaps stated another way disease, devastation and death can be known as seasonal changes and social pressures. Or perhaps, the former part of this paragraph was left without further explanation in favour of ending the statement on a more positive note. Either way, the third person narrator in this text glosses over enormous injustice and in doing so omits the voices of the Coast Salish people and prevents them from speaking about the past in this way.

It could be argued that these omissions are intentional because the exhibition is not about re-visiting injustices of the past. However, omissions are important. If speech is not to be silenced it must acknowledge oppression and injustice (hooks, 1988) or it risks masking and ignoring racial inequalities and relations of domination (Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Strong-Boag, 2004) that render these Aboriginal voices to a position of continued subordination.

A Pedagogy of Voice in Professional Practice

Exploring the museum and the idea of ‘voice’ has raised a number of pedagogical concerns. Voice can be closely tied to speaking (through written texts) wherein an anonymous narrator is imagined to have the authority to write a truthful account of history. However, speaking does not always mean that one’s voice is heard, nor heard alone. Words and discourses may be borrowed, appropriated or given, and their meanings transposed or blended in the process. Therefore, hearing voice does depend on who speaks in written texts, but not always. An important aspect of voice is its link to the constitution of identity through language, visual representation and objects.

It is important to remember that each text has been selected to fit the themes of this exhibition, and as Lidchi (1997) mentions, narrows and legitimizes the interpretation. What becomes representative of Aboriginal peoples and culture, past and present, is not a snapshot of everyday life, but rather a carefully selected photograph or quotation that depicts an Aboriginal person or links a cultural object to a traditional way of life. By creating these representations (the idea of) an authentic Aboriginal culture is *created*, rather than captured. This is deeply problematic. On one level, if the meaning of an object shifts across space and time such that a visitor interprets it differently today, is it somehow less authentic? Can one re-create something that is authentic? I suggest that while museums can effectively create a convincing idea of authenticity, this is in fact, impossible. It is important that as critical educators we do not passively accept these representations of Aboriginal culture as authentic, because in doing so we do not listen for the voices

that struggle to be heard and we discredit those voices that have been omitted. On another level, could those voices and accounts of Aboriginal histories that deviate from the museum representations be considered inauthentic? The museum tells a story about Aboriginal cultures that fits together, providing continuity between exhibitions. But what about the omitted accounts that would tell another story? These may be troubling voices that cause discomfort and contradict or condemn dominant ways of interpreting the world. Do these unheard voices deserve a space in public museums, or is there a risk that certain perspectives are misleading and need to be screened out? For example, there are many who denounce the voice of Holocaust deniers by citing an array of very strong factual and moral arguments. However, would there be a similar response of outrage if one denied that the treatment of indigenous peoples in North America was also a holocaust or genocide, as some have suggested (Neu & Therrien, 2003; Annett, 2002)? Or does mainstream history relegate the perspective of this voice to the margins enough that it can be minimized or overlooked in accounts of Aboriginal history? This example means to illustrate that when faced with the question of which voices to include we may perceive some perspectives to be misleading. At the same time we must also be mindful of ways that dominant modes of thinking are misleading through the exclusion of voices that lie on the margins.

Perhaps the closest thing we can have to an authentic account of Aboriginal histories in Canada is one that is acknowledged as ‘messy’ and does not anticipate that authentic voices speak for themselves and know definitively who they are (Lather, 2009). Rather than leaning towards authenticity we should lean towards the differences of perspective that shake us from the comfort of familiar ways of thinking. As we develop an awareness of less heard voices, we can learn to listen and begin to ask about their story and interrogate the reasons why they were silent to our ears for so long.

A pedagogy of voice in museums means looking at the voices that are granted space to speak in exhibitions that depict Aboriginal cultures and looking at the way words are chosen and situated. Do other voices compete for the same space? Who sets the tone and what does each voice bring to the overall exhibit? A critical educator will consider who has been invited to speak in the exhibition spaces. It can be argued that there is physically not enough space in an exhibition to include all points of view and all voices. It would not be unreasonable to say this task is impossible. However, this indicates that the museum exhibition space itself poses limitations on the notion of self-representation for Aboriginal groups. I contend that there are both physical and ideological limitations that restrict what a voice can say. Those physical limits may be encountered through the amount of exhibition space available or through the choice of display techniques—as illustrated by that static and neatly arranged artifacts in the Tshimshian house. The ideological limitations of the space take us back to the political tensions of creating a museum exhibit and remind us that the museum as a place of power sets limits of acceptable speech, directing which topics can be spoken of and which topics are diminished. As Werner (2000) says, the values and assumptions embedded in texts encourage readers to take their world for granted without questioning how this serves certain groups more than others.

A pedagogy of voice sees educators and students engaging in forms of critical education. When speaking of critical literacy Elizabeth Quintero (2007) advocates, “a process of constructing and critically using language (oral and written) as a means of expression, interpretation, and/or transformation of our lives and the lives of those around us” (p. 202). This statement captures the essence of a pedagogy of voice in that it looks both inward and outward. Inwardly, bringing learners to an awareness of their own voice, where it is situated relative to other voices. As we have seen, a pedagogy of voice is about understanding the limits and the possibilities of ways of knowing and opening us to new ideas and perspectives while revising and reinventing

the old. In this way we transform ourselves and our interactions with others, whether those interactions take place in person or through their texts and objects as displayed in a museum. Outwardly, linking the learning that occurs in a museum to the world outside the museum can bring educators and learners to a fuller understanding of the sites of dominant power and social relations that shape the present day.

About the Author

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