



Resistance and Renewal Revisited

A research project by Celia Haig-Brown

The Inspiration

In her exciting SSHRC study *Education as Regeneration*, ethnographer Celia Haig-Brown revisits projects and places from her academic past to study the developments that have taken place over the last 20 years. One of the case studies, entitled *Resistance and Renewal Revisited*, took Prof. Haig-Brown and her niece Tsilhqot'in filmmaker Helen Haig-Brown back to the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in the interior of British Columbia.

The Project

In 1986, Celia interviewed 13 former pupils of the school for her Master's thesis, which was turned into the award-winning book *Resistance and Renewal*, one of the first accounts of life in residential schools from Aboriginal perspectives that frankly depicted the harsh school environment that was intended to eradicate Native culture. However, over the years when she returned to visit in the community, Haig-Brown encountered the children and grandchildren of her original interviewees, who were proud to tell that they were becoming fluent in Secwepemctsin, the Shuswap language of the interior of BC. Prof. Haig-Brown was intrigued and began to ponder what had happened to her other interviewees, their families and particularly their relationships to schooling and education broadly defined. Revisiting her original project, Haig-Brown has been investigating the ways that education in its many forms is being used by Aboriginal people to revitalize and regenerate Indigenous knowledge. This approach is particularly interesting as the residential schools were a horrific experience for many of the students; nonetheless many of their children continue to see education as a strength, have extricated the good of schooling and are using it to regenerate language and culture. They are also returning to traditional values through incorporating different forms of learning, going beyond the conventional school building and curriculum, and working with children in intergenerational groupings on the land to allow for learning experiences that resonate with Aboriginal understandings and Indigenous knowledge. As part of her research, Haig-Brown has conducted extensive interviews with the families of former residential school pupils. One of the former students is Helen Haig-Brown's mother. As an award winning documentary filmmaker, Helen uses the medium to explore and communicate the resilience of First Nations cultures. The interviews form the basis for two films which capture not only the interviewee and his or her reactions, but also the surroundings and the state of the community itself. Disseminating the research findings in this form allows for much greater access to the research results.

The Impact

Initial findings have shown that the children and grandchildren of residential school survivors remain committed to education in a variety of forms. Traditional values recreated in a contemporary context inform this commitment to regenerate languages and cultures so long denigrated in Canadian society. These results may inspire other communities to take seriously the impact of language loss and the possibilities for recovery.

More Information

The first film is being distributed by V-tape and available in the YU Library. It premiered at the World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education in Melbourne, Australia. A second film is in progress.