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## Book Review: Trickster Chases the Tale of Education

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# Book Review: Trickster Chases the Tale of Education

## Abstract

This article provides a review of the book *Trickster Chases the Tale of Education* by Sylvia Moore.

## Keywords

stories, Indigenous, Mi'kmaw, Mi'kmaq, education, trickster, Indigenous methodologies

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## Book Review

**Sylvia Moore. (2017). *Trickster Chases the Tale of Education*. Montréal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press. 184 pp. \$27.95 (Paperback). ISBN: 978-0-7735-4907-4.**

With the help of the Trickster, Crow, Sylvia Moore's *Trickster Chases the Tale of Education* weaves tales across time and place to both share stories from her doctoral research and offer new ones related to her retelling. Moore's doctoral work, based on a salmon release project with Wildcat First Nation and North Queens School in Nova Scotia, Canada, explored "the dynamics of school educators and Mi'kmaw community members working together to centre and legitimate Mi'kmaw knowledge in education" (p. 10). *Trickster Chases the Tale of Education* discusses this salmon project, offers stories related to Moore's experiences teaching a Native Studies course at North Queens School, and meaningfully incorporates Moore's reflections about what she learned during the research process. Moore effectively describes the challenging task of bringing Indigenous methodologies into colonial universities, which is reflected in her doctoral dissertation's research question: How can Mi'kmaq knowledge be centered and legitimated in education?

The book opens with Crow's story about the "Big Mess" (p. xv) of education, which is reminiscent of Thomas King's 1993 novel *Green Grass, Running Water*. Chapter 1, "The Story Begins," provides context for the rest of the monograph; Moore describes the "who" and "where" central to the stories in her book, and states her positionality as a Mi'kmaw mother and grandmother. Chapter 2, "Introducing the Research," returns to Crow's opening story, which Moore uses to describe both the rootedness of her doctoral research in the Indigenous storytelling tradition as well as how the salmon release project she studied began and developed.

Chapter 3, "A Tale: The Learning Circle," discusses the salmon release project as an example of how Mi'kmaq knowledge and traditions might be brought into and legitimized in school settings. Integrating teachings from Crow with those from people involved with the salmon release project, Moore addresses the project's work to raise and release salmon and offers a series of realizations related to the salmon and her reflections on the research. Moore explains, for example, that "through the stories that were told we were not only learning about salmon but also about one another. We were reconnecting ourselves to one another and to the Nation through our words" (p. 37).

Chapter 4, "A Tale: The Inside Out Circle," engages Moore's work advocating for and teaching a Mi'kmaq studies course at North Queens School. Moore explains that the course had to be re-thought following her realization that Indigenous knowledge cannot be substituted for another type of knowledge. Moore notes that shifting the course's priorities—for example, the when, where, how, who, and why central to the course— "turned this class—in an otherwise typical public school—inside out" (p. 75). One significant change that Moore mentions is the involvement of Elders and traditional teachers. Chapter 4 also addresses the difficulties that were associated with bringing Mi'kmaq knowledge and experiences into the classroom (e.g., resistance from students).

In Chapters 5 and 6, titled "A Tale: The Outer Circle" and "A New Tale," respectively, Moore synthesizes what she has learned through the research process. Moore answers her initial question

regarding how to center and legitimate Mi'kmaq knowledge in Eurocentric education by affirming that there is no answer. Moore states:

I was looking, as if it were a recipe that I could find. But there are no recipes, no rules, no step-by-step directions . . . It is about doing what is ethical in our lives as we share this land . . . The work is relationship work. (p. 121)

From this, Moore concludes that “the answers are in the threads of interconnectivity which, when woven together, create the story of our lives” (p. 124); this statement further reflects her realizations about the importance of storytelling and relationship building to Indigenous education.

*Trickster Chases the Tale of Education* is, overall, a strong piece of storytelling literature; however, there are moments at which the book's writing style affects its clarity. At times, Moore's writing style comes off as forced, particularly in terms of how she integrates academic literature into her reflections. For example, Moore introduces a conversation with her daughter by writing: “I relate to what Canadian author and educator, Lorri Neilson Glenn, wrote, ‘I say to Chupan . . .’” (p. 123). Moore then follows this introduction with a long quotation from Neilson Glenn. In instances like this, it is difficult to follow Moore's writing as an example of story, given its blending of academic literature and personal conversations.

That noted, the book has its stylistic strengths, too. *Trickster Chases the Tale of Education* is a very interesting and informative read. Moore's work to guide readers through her own learning journey makes the monograph read like a prolonged story, which withholds its final lesson until the end. It is thus a book one must read from cover-to-cover—Crow's jokes and all. Moore's creative uses of space, specifically the use of blank pages to represent her pauses—“Why the silence?” [Crow] asks . . . I do not know what to say or how to say it” (p. 80)—enhances the storytelling format.

Moore's explains that her doctoral dissertation aimed to “meaningfully analyze and present a narrative so that it was respectful of traditional cultural factors and had the strength to influence change in policy and pedagogical practice” (p. 91). Through her storytelling approach in *Trickster Chases the Tale of Education*, she effectively personalizes education policy. Furthermore, Moore's work cleverly calls out and challenges the expectations of colonial research. For example, when speaking to Crow she says, “I can't put spirits in a study. My research will not be taken seriously” (p. 20). However, Moore continuously incorporates teachings, dreams, and stories as relevant sources of knowledge. Moore's honesty about her knowing and unknowing makes her work relatable and valuable: “I was frustrated by my lack of knowledge, which was magnified as I became painfully more aware of how colonized my own consciousness was” (p. 83).

In addition to offering important implications for education pedagogies and policy, Moore's book offers a powerful embrace of Indigenous methodologies. Moore explains that her “first obligation as a researcher was to the Mi'kmaw Nation and to the voices of Mi'kmaw people,” though she also worked to privilege “other Indigenous scholars and theories both in framing the research and in analyzing it” (p. 11). Using narrative and storytelling methodologies, Moore uses her journals and “scholarly quotes that were insightful” (p. 13) to share the stories of her research. In doing so, she weaves together her experience with those of Indigenous scholars like Jo-Anne Archibald, Marie Battiste, Willie Ermine, and Shawn Wilson.

While *Trickster Chases the Tale of Education* is centered on Mi'kmaw education in Nova Scotia, it is relevant to other Indigenous communities both in Canada and around the globe. Following Canada's recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Moore offers her insights about how to bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges. Though Moore does not expressly use the term "reconciliation" in her book, the text seems to be doing work that is fundamentally similar to that of reconciliation by respectfully bringing together two knowledge systems. Her conclusion, that the work of bringing together these knowledges is that of building and sustaining relationships, might provide a lesson for those interested in reconciliation work more broadly.

Despite some stylistic limitations, *Trickster Chases the Tale of Education* offers valuable insights about the importance of Indigenous methodologies, relationship building, and storytelling. Its creative format allows readers to glean multiple lessons from its various stories and from the text as a whole. For those interested in Indigenous methodologies, Moore's book provides a valuable framework for how to approach narrative work and how to balance responsibility to Indigenous epistemologies with the expectations of the academy. Moore explains that her book is for "all people (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) who struggle with colonized minds" (p. 4). Together with Crow, Moore offers critical and clever insights regarding the importance of relationship building as the basis for aligning Indigenous and Eurocentric education.