Introduction

Education as a Cultural Activity: Stories of Relationship and Change

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Ce numéro spécial vise deux objectifs: d'abord mettre en lumière le développement de l'éducation chez les autochtones du Canada, lequel semble indiquer un mouvement optimiste au-delà d'un passé tragique; ensuite, démontrer comment les négociations associées à l'éducation chez les autochtones nous permettent d'approfondir notre connaissance de l'éducation comme activité culturelle. Le présent numéro comprend cinq articles axés sur les relations établies et les changements apportés dans cinq contextes autochtones canadiens différents: les Cris et les Attikameks dans le Grand-Nord québécois, les Inuits du Labrador et de l'île de Baffin, et les Micmacs-Malécites des Maritimes. Ces articles examinent sous divers angles la créativité culturelle des autochtones pour ce qui est du développement de l'éducation: la langue et les contenus, les méthodes pédagogiques et les processus de négociations culturelles, le fondement des valeurs et de la vision du monde, et les notions d'identité personnelle et culturelle. Les contextes sont mis en relief afin de faire ressortir les dimensions particulières de l'éducation chez les autochtones; les préoccupations reposent sur la survie physique et culturelle des peuples autochtones; l'analyse des perspectives englobe la dynamique de la rencontre entre les aborigènes et les cultures de l'extérieur ainsi que la nature de l'évolution culturelle. L'éducation chez les autochtones constitue un projet continu qui ne saurait être compris uniquement à partir de l'intérieur ou de l'extérieur.

"We are concerned to write the anthropology and the history of those moments when native and intruding cultures are conjoined. Neither can be known independently of that moment." (Dening, 1980, cited in Borofsky, 1987, p. vi)

OVERVIEW

This special issue has two aims. The first is to highlight Aboriginal[1] educational development in Canada at a time when relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations are increasingly receiving recognition and serious attention here and worldwide. The second is to demonstrate the richness Aboriginal encounters with formal schooling bring to our understanding of the essentially cultural nature of education, moving beyond the unsituated and ahistorical universalism of the Western educational tradition. We use five stories from diverse

Canadian settings (with several international comparisons) to serve both pur-poses, very much in the spirit of the "First Nations: The Circle Unbroken" video series reviewed by Beynon in this issue. We hope our contributions to "telling many stories adds to the body of knowledge belonging to the people and invites others to share in the joy, confusion, pain, anger, or humour that accompany change" (Williams, 1993, cited in Beynon, this issue of *CJE,* p. 196).

Having passed through tragic decades of government- and/or church-dominated Aboriginal education openly geared to assimilation, centred in violations of the residential schools, educators have been wrestling with issues of "Indian control of Indian education" since the milestone declaration of the National Indian Brotherhood in 1973 (for background, see Barman, Hébert, & McCaskill, 1986, 1987, and a forthcoming third volume in the series). The issues are complex, beyond the dichotomy of "inside" Aboriginal control versus "outside" domin-ation, since schooling has been pivotal, in the terms of our epigraph, in the conjoining of Native and intruding cultures, and Aboriginal education cannot usefully be approached from either cultural perspective alone. The authors in this issue see ongoing change through a process of cultural negotiation between Aboriginal communities and the Western educational tradition, a process through which a rich diversity of Aboriginal "ways to go to school" is emerging despite great obstacles (see Stairs, in press, and Lipka & Stairs, 1994, for a recent collection describing Australian, Mexican, Alaskan, and southwest American as well as Canadian Aboriginal education settings). Despite the continuing need for vigilance and struggle by and for Aboriginal peoples, society's growing con-sciousness of inequities among social groups generally, and the politicization of Canadian Aboriginal peoples in particular allow the careful optimism of a cul-tural negotiation perspective.

Beyond movements of social conscience and Aboriginal self-determination, "mainstream" attention to Aboriginal education may well reflect a sense of malaise over current educational practices, a growing awareness of voids and dis-tortions in North American culture — whether ecological, social, or spiritual — and a new appreciation for relevant Aboriginal cultural resources. The stories presented here are of relationship, of creative cultural work in Aboriginal edu-cation in which both insiders and outsiders are changed. These are not bounded studies about Aboriginal schooling, but reports of ongoing highly participatory research by inside outsiders practicing collaboratively with Aboriginal educators in their communities as teachers, teacher-educators, program developers, lan-guage specialists, and in one case as a long-term researcher (for pioneering examples moving toward such insider-outsider participatory relationships, see the work of Wax, Wax, and Dumont [1964/1989] with the Pine Ridge Sioux and of Wolcott [1967/1984] with British Columbia Kwakiutl). Although they do not lack propositional analysis of culture and education issues (see especially Sarrasin), these articles are generously narrative in exploring the ongoing meaning-making and changing perceptions both of the authors (see especially Douglas and Robin-

son) and of community members (see especially the direct transcriptions in Leavitt and Robinson, and note the outsider-insider co-authorship of McAlpine and Herodier). Nonetheless, direct Aboriginal voices concerning the cultural negotiation relationship are largely missing from this collection, and serious work lies ahead in creating more appropriate forms and forums for expression of these voices (e.g., McLaughlin, 1993).

A most significant aspect of this group of articles is that collectively they offer multiple levels of focus on Aboriginal educational development. Experience shows us that no single dimension — political, pedagogic, linguistic, socio-psychological, or otherwise — is the answer to understanding or negotiating Aboriginal education. Although each contribution to this issue spans a range of dimensions, we can, as a first orientation to the complexity of Aboriginal education dimensions being discussed, identify each article with a primary focus, as follows, in order of presentation.

PREVIEW: THE PAPERS

Language and Content

McAlpine and Herodier focus on maintenance of the Cree language as the driving force behind Aboriginal educational development. In fact, their work goes beyond their title, "Schooling as a Vehicle for Aboriginal Language Maintenance: Implementing Cree as the Language of Instruction in Northern Quebec," to the renewal and reshaping of the language as school, furthering earlier work by the church, emphasizes development of the writing system, standardized grammars and dictionaries, and literacy materials for both young students and adults. In many places, including Australia and the United States, Aboriginal education is still subsumed by the rubric "bilingual" education. Certainly community spokespersons in the Cree communities of northern Quebec appear to equate the development of Aboriginal schooling with preservation of their language. Underlying the concern with language, the critical importance of the community's will in continuing educational development is a strong theme of this article. The equally critical importance of insider community teacher roles in a teamwork development process is a second underlying theme. Cultural interaction patterns in the classroom are also mentioned generally, with closing comments on moving toward Cree ways of teaching and learning. The authors' primary focus here, however, rests at the language and content level, linked to very broad-based outcome-oriented goals reflected in their emergent evaluation steps — a focus one might label the "what" of Aboriginal education.

Teaching Process and Evaluation

Robinson shifts the educational development focus almost entirely to the teaching processes of Aboriginal educators — a shift to the "how" level. He demonstrates

an evaluation model, concentrating on process rather than outcomes, that serves as a means of recognizing the styles and collaboratively mentoring the development of Aboriginal teachers. Through both verbal interaction and shared observation surrounding videotape technology, what was considered the "magic" of an Aboriginal teacher's classroom management becomes a description of alternative ways of teaching. Robinson clearly portrays his own role in the collaboration and his changing approaches in response to the development needs of two Labrador Inuit teachers with very different career histories. Transcript exerpts from the reflective evaluation process with these two teachers provide an exceptionally direct insider perspective to the account. The interaction is seen as compatible with Aboriginal as compared to conventional formal education through being non-standardized, non-directive, non-judgemental, and perhaps most dramatically, non-linear. Robinson's holistic analogy of a web in which a teacher can move around, between theory and practice, versus an instrumental coil tightening a-round particular concerns and objectives, aptly summarizes his contribution.

Community Values and Roles

Douglas looks through a wider-angled lens at the setting in which she describes Aboriginal educational development, and focuses on the relationship between the school as an institution and its high Arctic community. Her contextualization is not just geographic and historical, but ranges from the physical domination of the school building to the differences between life in the settlement and out at camps "on the land," to decision-making steps and collective values. Essentially, she describes a community of meanings under negotiation — a shift to the "why" level of Aboriginal education. Her examples of inconsistencies and confusions between roles in the community and roles in the school poignantly convey this level of cultural negotiation. Should elders be paid for instruction they are traditionally expected to offer, and if not, are they legitimate and full participants in the new institution of school? Douglas suggests the community at this stage has choices between a movement toward community control, in line with certain Navajo examples (e.g., Holm & Holm, 1990), or a decision to split education in-to two distinct domains — Aboriginal and mainstream Western — in line with an Australian model (Harris, 1990). In closing, however, she envisions the possibility that negotiation may gradually lead to the community's articulation and practice of its own unique partnership with schooling and thus maintenance of the cultural balance required for survival.

Cultural and Linguistic Evolution

Sarrasin integrates the "why" level of meaning and worldview with "how" issues of Aboriginal and Western teaching processes in relation to the "what" of language and content. His ultimate cultural negotiation focus might be labelled

"who" at both individual and cultural levels. In a final strong statement resulting from careful analysis of Harris's (1990) two-domain and "giant role play" theory of Aboriginal education, Sarrasin affirms the third element in biculturalism — the new individual/cultural synthesis emerging from the encounter. He points to certain cultural fusion points and emphasizes both the pedagogically and the culturally creative potential of Aboriginal education. The unique relationship of the Atikamekw with Western education in the terms of francophone Quebec is globalized into a valuable reflection on linguistic and cultural evolution generally. Initially, he clearly distinguishes between bilingualism and biculturalism, with a review of Aboriginal language immersion models and the dual sociolinguistic and pedagogic rationale for the current Atikamekw pattern. Although he begins with a focus on language maintenance and renewal, and a push toward Aboriginal language literacy tools, as in so many communities, Sarrasin digs deeply into the underlying cultural negotiation issues. As he observes, Aboriginal education is an ongoing project in each context, not a practice ready for implementation.

Identity and Literacy

The final author, Leavitt, explicitly focuses his account at the "who" level, connecting life history to the education of Aboriginal community members and teachers, and implicitly places identity at the core of Aboriginal educational concerns. In terms of both method and ultimate purposes, he elaborates the dialectic between collective and individual identities and ways of learning that may distinguish Aboriginal from conventional Western epistemologies. In fact, he extends this "who" analysis into three dimensions: self (autobiography), other (biography, a form only recently under negotiation in Aboriginal contexts), and the collective. Other authors also recognize the significance of identity issues in Aboriginal education (e.g., the several mentions of self-identity by McAlpine and Herodier), but this multidimensional development is an important contribution.

The comparison between the "autoformación" of unschooled Aboriginal Bolivian women and the university-based Micmac-Maliseet teacher-education students allows Leavitt to make powerful observations about the relationships between formal and informal learning and the creative possibilities of "mixed ways" — observations complementing Sarrasin's and others' cultural negotiation perspectives. As does Robinson, Leavitt openly describes his own collaborative and learning role in both settings and provides extensive direct narrative in the words of the students. Writing is the working medium of the relationships Leavitt describes, the "what" and the "how," but here Aboriginal language per se is not the exclusive issue (much work was done in the second languages of English and Spanish), and literacy is approached as a cultural practice — often incorporating non-Western collective modes — rather than as a skill. Further, we see in this ongoing work the constructive making by students dominating the instructive

receiving prevalent in conventional formal schooling — another emphasis in Aboriginal learning traditions significant to many stories presented here.

REVIEW

As guest editor, and speaking on behalf of the contributors, I hope readers will find this issue of general as well as of specialized interest, and perhaps of some inspiration. Particularly, I hope these articles convey the importance of Aboriginal schooling in providing lessons on the cultural nature of education, and add to our shared knowledge about relationship and change in Aboriginal contexts.

In the Preview of levels of focus, from "what" to "how" to "why" to "who," there is no intention of hierarchy — all levels matter in the continuing saga of cultural negotiation between Aboriginal and other peoples of this country. Aboriginal language materials connect with personal and collective identity, pedagogy connects with community decision making, and teacher evaluation connects with cultural values and worldview.

Just a few words about the issue's subtitle — "Aboriginal Settings, Concerns, and Insights." Setting is clearly an essential starting point, in that place and moment generate unique encounters and attention to particular dimensions of the negotiation between schooling and Aboriginal life. Concerns settle on Aboriginal survival — physical and economic, linguistic and cultural, personal and collective. Insights lead us into dynamics of the "conjoining" of Native and intruding cultures with which we began, the creative third element of biculturalism, through which both Aboriginal and Western peoples mutually have much to give and to gain. "Neither can be known independently."

NOTE

[1] The term Aboriginal is currently most widely favoured for referring to the indigenous peoples of Canada. The term First Nations is also common but seen by some as exclusionary to non-status and Métis people. The term Native remains widely used in the United States but is becoming less accepted in Canada.

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