

Reflective Evaluation and Development: Two Labradorians Work Toward a Productive Evaluation Model for Aboriginal Educators

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Una atjigengitunik nunakKatigengitunik Kaujisannik âkKisuigutauvuk piusiugunnatumik Kimiggotaugunnatumik NunaKakKâsimajunik ilinnia-titsijiuKattatunik tungavigillugit âkKigiattausimajuit atullugit malillugit âkKigiagutausimajuit aulatsigiamut angijummagimmik atullugit atjiliugutet tigusiigiamik ilinniaviup illugusingani ilinniajuKatillugu. Tamâgitigut ilisimajuk Inuk ilinniatitsijik ilinniatitsitillugu Kallunâtitut amma ilisimatsiangituk Inuktitut uKausiwik ilinniatitsijik âkKisuigiatillugik nâmmagijamit ilinniatitsinigiKattatâgik atullugik. KaujisanniujuK tigollaigutauvuk pigumajaujuK asiangutitsigiamik Kanuk NunaKakKâsimajuit ilinniatitsijet kamagijauKattamangâta, kiumajotigillugu nâmmangiluadlatumik ilitagijauKattaningita NunaKakKâsimajuit ilinniatitsigiamut piusiKaKattaningita ilitagijaungiluadlaKattaningita sakKititsiKattamangât ikillivalliatuinnaninginnik NunaKakKâsimajuit ilinniatitsijigalait. Uvanga Kinugavunga IsumagijaujuK KimiggujuKalluni kamajuKajutsauninganik tamâgitigut ilitatsigunnagajattumik amma nâlalluni Nuna-KakKâsimajuitilinniatitsinimmi piusigiKattatanginnik. Ilagiallugu, allavunga Kanuk atulluni atjiliugutinik ilinniavimmi atuinnaKattisigunnagajanninganik takutitsigiamik iliggusilet atjigengitunik ilinniatitsigiamik piusiKaKattamangâta. (Labrador Inuktitut translation by Tôrngâsak Cultural Centre, Nain)

This ethnographic study develops an alternative model for evaluating Aboriginal educators based on adaptations made to conventional clinical supervision with a strong reliance on the use of videotape to document classroom activity. Both an experienced Inuit educator practising in English and an inexperienced Inuktitut language educator make adaptations to suit their teaching styles. The study documents the need for changes in the way Aboriginal educators are evaluated, arguing that the lack of recognition of Aboriginal teaching styles contributes to the shortage of Aboriginal educators. I propose reflective evaluation and development as a starting point for developing an evaluation process that would both recognize and honour Aboriginal educational practises. In addition, I document how using a video camera in the classroom provides insights into culturally diverse teaching styles.

L'étude ethnographique dont il est question ici propose un nouveau modèle d'évaluation des enseignants autochtones, modèle faisant appel, d'une part, à des innovations par rapport aux stages supervisés habituels et, d'autre part, à une vaste utilisation de la caméra vidéo afin de mieux décrire les activités pédagogiques. Un enseignant inuit d'expérience exerçant sa profession en anglais et un enseignant novice de langue inuktitut apportent les modifications qu'ils jugent nécessaires en fonction de leurs styles d'enseignement. L'étude met en évidence le besoin de changer les modes d'évaluation des

enseignants autochtones, car, selon l'auteur, le manque de reconnaissance des styles d'enseignement autochtones contribue à la pénurie d'enseignants autochtones. L'auteur propose une évaluation réflexive comme point de départ de l'élaboration d'un processus d'évaluation qui reconnaîtrait et mettrait en valeur les méthodes pédagogiques autochtones. Il explique en outre comment l'utilisation d'une caméra vidéo en classe permet de mieux comprendre les différences culturelles dans les styles d'enseignement.

INTRODUCTION

Any educator graduating from an Ontario Faculty of Education in 1993 will find the prospects for employment in their home community grim. Federal and provincial funding reductions have, for the first time in a decade, led to practising educators losing their jobs. Inevitably the new recruits will turn to the *Globe and Mail* "Careers" page and be drawn by the opportunities in the North and on Indian reservations.

Concurrently, the vast majority of Aboriginal students who enrolled to become educators last year will have dropped out by year's end, despite a severe shortage of Aboriginal educators in their home communities. Menton (1990) estimates the drop out rate for educators-in-training at Arctic College, Northwest Territories, to be in excess of 50%. Although the education system has for some time been aware of the urgent need to have more Aboriginal educators working with Aboriginal students, shortages of qualified Aboriginal educators persist. Archibald (1986) calculated that if the Aboriginal population had been proportionally represented in British Columbia in 1974, there would have been 1,300 Aboriginal educators. There were 26. The education system seems unable to enlist many Aboriginal candidates and those few Aboriginal educators that pursue a Bachelor's degree quit with predictable regularity. Why is this?

Although the number of Aboriginal educators in the system is abysmally low, Aboriginal educators also face "the danger of being evaluated out of the profession" (Lipka, 1990a, p. 40). We may soon lose the few that we have unless we recognize their needs as professionals. And just as the lack of successful students exacerbates the lack of role models for younger students, the lack of successful Aboriginal educators makes the road for new ones increasingly difficult. For the most part, they remain professionals who are minorities in their own culture, as they practise surrounded by southern-based colleagues. And if they dare to venture farther afield, to teach in a mainstream setting, they risk becoming a curiosity. The Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) celebrated placing its first regular classroom educator in the Vancouver School District in 1986, just seven years ago (Archibald, 1986, p. 44). This is cause for celebration for NITEP—one of the most successful Native teacher education programs in the country. In Canadian society as a whole, however, it is surely cause for dismay that so few mainstream students will be enriched by the perspective of a Aboriginal educator. Perhaps part of the problem is the manner in which we

have been evaluating Aboriginal educators, which at worst has removed educators from the system and at best has left them feeling isolated and inadequate. My purpose in this article is to develop an alternative model of evaluation for Aboriginal educators, one that would honour the fundamental characteristics of successful Aboriginal education—peer learning, a strong oral tradition, and a holistic approach to learning—and which would attempt to be inclusive rather than exclusive, stressing a high level of educator independence and relying on the educator to direct the process. I refer to this process as reflective evaluation and development.

The need for new and different approaches in Aboriginal education is well documented. Couture (1987) maintains that “the application of holistic approaches . . . is not only . . . plausible and feasible, but necessary” (p. 186). Flanagan (1986) reached three conclusions after 15 years of working in Aboriginal education: Natives learn differently than non-Aboriginals; standard curriculum is a hindrance; and Aboriginal education should be holistic (p. 41). Philips (1983) maintains that “surprisingly little attention has been given to the teaching methods used in teaching ethnic minority children. . . . It is as if we have been able to recognize that there are cultural differences in what people learn, but not how they learn” (p. 133). Lastly, Archibald (1986) maintains that “programs in which Aboriginal people have been actively involved in the planning . . . have shown the greatest success” (p. 33).

Reflective evaluation and development is an attempt to involve Aboriginal educators throughout the teaching process. This model presumes that the purpose of evaluation is to foster growth in a teacher’s practice. It also presumes that such growth can only occur in areas where the educator is personally ready for change. Reflective evaluation and development may be a step in the shift “from a position where ‘scientifically’ derived knowledge about teaching was deemed superior, to a circumstance in which artistic and intuitive knowledge may have claim to be equally appropriate” (Smyth, 1987, p. 15).

Reflective evaluation and development represents a further broadening of the evaluation spectrum. Originally, evaluation of educators focused narrowly on summative issues. Gradually it expanded to include formative methods. Clinical supervision suggested a shift of control of the evaluation agenda, from the supervisor to the practising professional. It maintained, however, strict definitions of process. Finally, reflective evaluation opens the door to examine issues of concern to the educator, addressed through a variety of means that suit a particular context, namely, the educator’s classroom and unique concerns. In my study I took the position that if Aboriginal educators think and learn differently this would be reflected in their practise. Indeed, I found that many problems experienced by Aboriginal students are now re-emerging in Aboriginal teaching training. And in response to the continuing lack of success of Aboriginal students in mainstream schools, Lipka (1990a) suggests “we have been looking in the wrong places for solutions” (p. 9). Lipka maintains that for decades we have been ask-

ing why Aboriginal students have difficulty learning, yet rarely considering the educators delivering the instruction and their methods. Instead of asking why Aboriginal students cannot learn, we need to ask why we cannot or will not teach Aboriginal students in a manner yielding results in which both parties can take pride.

Education, to a large extent, involves the transfer of values from one generation to the next. Whether or not we care to admit it, much of how and what we teach reflects our values as a predominant culture. Stairs (1992) alerts us to the dangers of assuming a common value base. In Inuit culture, for example, the hunter attempts to become a genuine person by his actions which “integrate the material, animate and social environment” (p. 18). Aboriginal educators, in their efforts to inculcate children to become “genuine people,” often find their methods in conflict with the fragmented, subject-based curriculum that marks mainstream educational practice. If we have reached the stage where we recognize that Aboriginal children learn differently, it seems reasonable then to presume that Aboriginal adults may teach differently than their southern counterparts and that this different teaching style needs an opportunity to develop in a supportive environment. If evaluation of Aboriginal educators is to be productive, it must provide a method acceptable to Aboriginal educators which concurrently encourages them to grow professionally. As Annahatak (1985) suggests, “Inuks should not have to give up being Inuit just to be successful” (p. 1). Reflective evaluation and development may take us a step in that direction.

THE STUDY

Reflective evaluation and development was developed with the participation of two Aboriginal educators from northern Labrador. We used as our starting point the clinical supervision model (Este, 1984; Goldhammer, 1969; Lovell & Wyles, 1983; Smyth, 1984). In 1973 Cogan described clinical supervision as a process in which “colleagues work supportively with each other in dialoguing, proposing hypotheses and analyzing their own and each other’s teaching” (cited in Smyth, 1984, p. 3). Although clinical supervision is not at the centre of the mainstream education system, I chose it as a starting point because it offered a respectable and recognized methodology from which specific adaptations could be made as the participants felt appropriate. This study embraces the philosophy of clinical supervision in that it values “the importance, dignity and worth of individual teachers” (Smyth, 1984, p. 3). And in practice clinical supervision “provides outside help for the teacher, including observation and analysis of teaching . . . in which the teacher has full control of, and responsibility for, the teaching learning situation” (Lovell & Wyles, 1983, p. 170). Unlike in clinical supervision, however, the requirement to narrow the focus to one specific aspect of a teacher’s practise was absent. Nor was the demand to break down the process into distinct stages closely followed. To this process we added Lipka’s (1990b) reliance on

videotape, to capture not only the dialogue, but the movement of the students, interactions between students and educator, and the whole package that education simply refers to as “a lesson.” We thus began what we hoped would be a productive process which Stairs (1991) refers to as “cultural brokerage,” to which educators “bring the value systems of their communities concerning what is important to learn and how is most appropriate to learn it” (p. 287). My goal was not so much to present yet another model, but to provide a means by which the successful methods of practising Aboriginal educators could be both honoured and analyzed.

A recurring theme emerged from Lipka’s (1990a) study using videotape with Yup’ik educators in Alaska. “What aboriginals interpreted as a good way to work with aboriginal children, high noise level, familiar and close, the caucasian teacher perceived as a lack of control in need of positive behaviour management” (p. 16). Yet Caucasian educators had difficulty not only respecting this differing style, but simply recognizing it, even at a superficial level. When Caucasian educators were shown that the Yup’ik educator had the students sitting down and listening with no verbal cues, Lipka reports, “It is possible that the caucasian teacher believed that what occurred was magic and had nothing to do with the teacher. They simply did not see how he did it, hence he was lucky” (p. 20). It was this magic that we wanted to uncover, not so much because it was “magic,” but because it represented a fundamentally different way of relating to the students, one not recognized (literally or figuratively) by current evaluation methods.

For an evaluation system to be effective in an Aboriginal context, it must provide a means by which Aboriginal educators’ skills can be recognized and it must also provide an opportunity for professional development of the participating educators. We need an evaluation system, therefore, that does not depend on supervisory personnel dropping in for a few days into unknown territory, as is so often the case in isolated Aboriginal communities. If successful teaching is grounded in the context of the community, then the evaluation must also draw from this vein. Stairs (1992) maintains that “Native research cannot be ostensibly stripped of the cultural value context within which it takes place” (p. 6). In addition, Archibald (1986) notes, “programs in which Native people have been actively involved in the planning . . . have shown the greatest success” (p. 33). Reflective evaluation and development is an attempt to put these ideas into practise.

THE PARTICIPANTS

The study involved as participants two Aboriginal educators, Lisa and Carol. Lisa brought to the study over a decade of teaching experience, an Arts degree and a teaching certificate. She had experience throughout the primary and junior divisions (kindergarten to grade 6) and was excited about assuming a kindergar-

ten position after several years in the junior division. Lisa taught in English. The second participant, Carol, was a former classroom assistant who was in her third year of teaching Inuktitut and was working through her teaching qualifications as time allowed. In this sense, Carol was much more representative of the typical Aboriginal educator who had taught first and only subsequently acquired teaching qualifications. In addition, Carol was juggling the stress of full-time teaching, three young children at home, and frustrations about teaching Inuktitut in a school environment that she knew would never lead any students to fluency.

I discussed the basic format of reflective evaluation and development with Lisa and Carol several weeks before my arrival, and introduced the concept of four stages of the process derived from clinical supervision (preobservational conference, observation, analysis, and postobservational conference). It would be left up to the participants, however, to deviate from this framework where they felt it necessary. During the first week we met individually and in a group to discuss the process and to deal with any hesitations the participants had. We worked out schedules to have the video camera in the room several days before beginning the cycles of observation. Over the course of the next three weeks we worked through two rounds of reflective evaluation and development together. Both participants made significant changes to their initial outline in efforts to exact what they needed from the process and to ensure that reflective evaluation and development served their needs.

Lisa's Experience

Lisa began by examining her application of discipline. She was concerned that a few students monopolized her time and that academically needy students paid for this imbalance in her practise. "I know myself . . . sometimes I . . . if there's a behaviour I don't want to see I'll let some kids do it and then I will suddenly decide that's enough and not put up with it any more. I don't even let them go near some things sometimes," Lisa said. "Later on I'll end up yelling at them and then I think, Lisa, how were they supposed to know you were going to draw the line there?" she added. We identified two students of concern and proceeded to the observation stage. As we viewed the tape the next day, Lisa immediately began to make qualitative observations about her lesson. Lisa was surprised to note that it was not the original two that were monopolizing her time but a third party, Harry. "I can't believe how much I was talking to Harry," she said. Lisa quickly realized that her perception of what was going on in the classroom was far from the reality revealed in the videotape. Lisa began to note the quality of the interactions she was having with other students. "Raymond and Chris, yes, but it was different with Harry compared to Dylan. The things I was talking to Dylan about were totally different." While still in the first round Lisa summed up her astonishment at what the videotape revealed: "I can't believe I talked to Harry 21 times, oh my god! I was always at his desk. Gee, I must watch that."

Lisa proceeded almost immediately to the second round, taking no more than a few moments to set the agenda for the second round. She wanted to find out what Harry was doing or needed to monopolize her so successfully. The concern about the original two students had been spontaneously dropped. One hallmark of clinical supervision, that initial apprehension quickly gives way to enthusiasm and a desire to exact as much as possible from the process, was apparent.

In the second round we focused on the nature of the contact Lisa was having with Harry and other students. I noted whether each contact was instructional or disciplinary and timed the exchanges as Lisa requested. The results of the second round were just as fascinating for Lisa and me. Her contact with Harry was 75% instructional and 25% discipline. "It seems to me you are helping him three times and disciplining him once. That's not a bad ratio, is it?" I asked.

"No, it's not, you are right. Maybe it's more in my head than it's actually happening," Lisa replied.

"Maybe Harry just needs a lot of help. Maybe he's the kind of kid you started out worrying you weren't getting to enough," I suggested.

"I think that's true" Lisa said.

Although Lisa had come full circle, from worrying about not getting to kids to realizing that the ones who were getting her time were indeed the ones who needed it, it was an important confirming exercise for Lisa. She finished the process feeling confident in her new role. She has seen for herself that it was working. "Maybe I'm doing okay" she concluded, in an enormous understatement.

Carol's Experience

Carol brought a totally different perspective to the study. Without the university background and with numerous unanswered questions about teaching, Carol had a thousand problems to solve and was determined to use reflective evaluation and development as a means to this end. We began discussing her problem of sustaining the interest of the grade 8s in the Inuktitut program. "I see them only two times each six days and they just don't listen." She continued, "I'm running out of things to say. Sometimes I think maybe I repeat myself over and over. Is it too much?" Carol was concerned about the whole lesson, from delivery to content to relevance. I naively suggested that perhaps I could track the conversation and pick out differences between those students who were involved in the lesson and those who were drifting away. Carol accepted this suggestion but also continued to pose broad questions. Carol continued to pursue knowledge in a holistic manner, weighing any new learning in relation to many aspects of her practise.

"That would be fine. I need some ideas. I'm just not happy with the lesson. Maybe we could look at the tape together?" she suggested. One essential element of reflective evaluation and its clinical supervision base is that both participant and collaborator view the data individually, supposedly free from the other's

bias. Only after this do they meet to discuss their observations. Carol wanted none of this. She had questions to ask me every few minutes in the tape and was not about to view the whole lesson in isolation. Carol's implicit assumption that learning was a cooperative venture was evident. This seemed particularly relevant since I had only a rudimentary understanding of Inuktitut—the language of the lesson.

“That’s fine, if we looked at the tape together you might be able to tell me where you are beginning to feel uncomfortable and we could see how to remedy that,” I said.

“Yeah, that would be good. I’ve tried going on without them and they just get really lost,” Carol said.

As we got further into the discussion about the lesson. Carol articulated her frustrations at trying to teach Inuktitut twice in a six-day cycle. We discussed how futile this was because the students never retained enough over the four-day break. But we also took time to discuss positioning the chairs to have eye contact and numerous other strategies for engaging the students in an oral lesson. Carol travelled from room to room to teach and consequently inherited a different classroom every 40 minutes.

In addition, we talked about involving elders from the community and stressing the use of the language in an everyday context. Carol absorbed the ideas with enthusiasm.

“At least you are giving me some ideas. Now I have something to work on. Even if we could just get them to listen better,” said Carol. Carol is close to what Stairs (1991) referred to as the “reconstruction” stage in her practise, in which “Native teachers integrate at least some aspect of schooling back into their culturally valued processes of learning, exemplified by an Inuk educator who takes his class out into the community to help elders with repairs and getting water in exchange for legends and stories” (p. 289).

As Carol wrestled with whether she was going too fast or too slow, whether the students were listening, and whether the whole process was of any value, she was extremely candid in her remarks. “Another thing is, because I only have 40 minutes I try to push it and I go along with the ones that understand it easily and I am leaving too many of them behind.” One can only guess whether this is strictly to Carol's credit or whether the process of reflective evaluation and development played in role in producing such pragmatic insights.

“That’s interesting. I mean, I don’t know, but did the tape help you to see that?” I asked.

“It’s obvious from the tape,” she remarked.

Carol was seeing things about her practise that I simply could not identify. I had fallen victim to crediting “magic” in Carol's class, just as the Caucasian educators in Lipka's study could not see or understand the dynamic evolving between the Yup'ik educator and the students. Whether my blindness was due to cultural differences or simply to not understanding the lesson as intimately as

Carol did is perhaps a moot point. What is important is that Carol was making real progress in her practice and that the process of reflective evaluation and development played a successful role in that growth.

REFLECTING ON THE PROCESS

All of this was a means to an end beyond reflective evaluation and development per se. I was interested in how the participants felt about the process, whether they felt they had learned anything, whether they would change anything in their practise after working through reflection evaluation. How would they compare it to other evaluations of their work? Was it a valuable process to them as practicing Aboriginal educators?

Traditional evaluation of educators tends to be linear. Although the pass/fail grid has now softened to include such terms as “needs improvement” or “developing well,” the linear element remains. There is an assumption about the evaluation process that educators can be successfully placed on the line.

Clinical supervision, though embracing many holistic and educator-directed evaluation aspects that I was seeking, still encourages educators to focus on one particular aspect of their teaching and to continue to narrow their focus as the process continues. In this sense it can be seen as a coil, tightening around a particular concern in an educator’s practise.

Reflective evaluation and development, however, can be seen more as a web in how it relates to the teacher’s practise. Educators can begin at any point, focus and refocus, and feel free to move about in discussion about their practise as theory is bounced against practise. They can weigh their actions against each other, just as Lisa realized that more time on discipline meant less time on instruction. Just as artists often use a mirror to gain a new insight into their unfinished paintings, educators can view and review the videotapes from many perspectives, improving their practise and honing their skills where they see new possibilities.

Reflective evaluation and development provides a means by which Aboriginal teaching practices can both gain recognition and develop. By altering the power relationships from one of top-down decision-making to collegial development of successful Aboriginal teaching that meets the needs of Aboriginal students, this process can be seen as a starting point for the evolution of genuine Aboriginal schooling. Taking her/his lead from the participant, the colleague, whether an administrator or another educator, can help the participant work toward improving his/her practise.

CONCLUSIONS

Reflective evaluation and development allowed both participants in my study to see areas of their practise that needed work. For Carol, articulating her frustra-

tions about working conditions, lack of training, and the futility of trying to teach Inuktitut in 40-minute blocks twice a week were important milestones. In addition, absorbing new ideas about classroom organization and receiving encouragement to try some of her hunches left Carol feeling the process was very worthwhile. "You get to see what's happening in your class and you juggle it all in your head. The tape lets you see the stuff happening and you think, Oh yes, I remember that, I was thinking about this then, or whatever." The true value of reflective evaluation and development can only be fully realized if Carol's concerns are then carried back from the grassroots of the classroom to the designers of the program at the university or board offices. Carol left the process hungry for change and asserting that, "It doesn't matter why it works if it works." Whether or not one agrees with this philosophy, it demonstrates Carol's satisfaction.

For Lisa, the opportunity to confirm that her actions are on target and to reflect on her new role as kindergarten educator were both refreshing and valuable. In her nine years in the classroom this had been her first chance to reflect seriously on her work. "It makes you think about all that stuff you talked about in university but forget after a few years because you get caught up in what you are doing day to day," she said. Not only did Lisa benefit from reflective evaluation and development, but so too did her students. She discovered, much to her credit, that Harry was not a "hard case."¹ He was, in fact, merely a student who needed a lot of help. Ironically, that is where she began, wondering if she was helping the kids who needed it most. Lisa admitted to feeling the same horrible pit in her stomach that most evaluations induce. "At first I thought, oh god, he's going to come into my classroom. He's going to sit down and write down all these things I have to change. But then you just handed me the information I asked for." She added, "I don't know how to explain it, it really gets you thinking."

Although it is still at the development stage, reflective evaluation and development may be the framework for an evaluation model that allows for a different approach in Aboriginal education. To this point there has not been a model that embraces and encourages Aboriginal participation. From my study the use of the videotape appears crucial; for one, it draws on the strong Aboriginal oral tradition, but just as importantly, it allows educators to see their work less through someone else's eyes and more through their own interpretations. Educators are free to attach their own meanings to the actions on the tape.

Despite the participants' and my own early reservations about operation of a video camera in the classroom, it caused virtually no interruption in classroom activities. In over six hours of classroom taping there were only two instances of students playing to the camera and both occurred as the students left the room. Like ghetto blasters, computers, and calculators, a video camera almost immediately becomes part of the furniture.

I suggested earlier that this tentative model of reflective evaluation and development can be seen as a web. Weber (1964) described humans as "animals

suspended in webs of significance they themselves have spun” (p. 111). Reflective evaluation and development may be a strand in a new web of significance in Aboriginal education and teacher education. Couture, an Aboriginal educator and thinker, maintains that “Canadian universities are largely responsible for training professional teachers for all levels of teaching, and it is at these institutions that new thinking and the development of additional competencies are urgently required” (1987, p. 186). Perhaps reflective evaluation and development can provide a concrete means by which Aboriginal educators can articulate their needs and demonstrate their competencies. Putting practice ahead of theory would certainly be an Aboriginal way of working our way to solutions in Aboriginal educator training.

NOTE

- ¹ In the descriptive vernacular of Adlavik, “hard case” refers a person who is particularly difficult to get along with. Although recognizing that the individual (hard case) has poor social skills, the term concurrently confers to other members of the community the responsibility to involve that person.

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