

## Editorial

# Big Pictures and Paradoxes

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Native education is a field in which things are often not what they seem. There are apparent contradictions between policy and action and between objectives and outcomes. The word *paradox* is a summary description that captures the field so appropriately that we offer here a fifth definition of the word in the dictionary entry.

Here is paradox. During the past 25 years the demographic changes in Native education appear to reflect dramatic improvement. That improvement has been

**par'a-dox** (par'a-doks), n. [F. *paradoxe*, fr. L., fr. Gr. *paradoxon*, neuter of *paradoxos*, adj., fr. *para* beside, contrary to + *doxa* opinion.]

1. A statement or tenet contrary to received opinion or belief, often with the implication that it is marvellous or incredible; sometimes with unfavourable connotation, as being discordant with what is held to be established truth, and hence absurd or fantastic; sometimes with favourable connotation, as a correction of a vulgar error.

2. A statement or proposition which on the face of it seems self-contradictory, absurd, or at variance with common sense, though, on investigation or when explained, it may prove to be well founded or essentially true.

3. Paradoxical character, condition or quality. PARADOXY.

4. A phenomenon that exhibits some contradiction or conflict with preconceived notions of what is reasonable or possible; a person or agent of perplexingly inconsistent life or behaviour.

5. Native education in North America during at least the 25-year period preceding 1992, and more than likely continuing for some time into the future.

Adapted from Oxford University Press. (1971). *The compact edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* Vol II, p. 2072. Oxford: Author.

hard won, and it is not an exaggeration to say that some people have given up their lives to the struggle. It has not been enough. Demographic description cannot capture individual experience, and as Cora Weber-Pillwax (1992) points out, to perpetuate a system that so traumatizes and alienates a kid that he sits in a classroom and eats his shirt cuffs is to perpetuate a form of child abuse. The paradox is between gross measures of improvement and the individual lived experience of too many children.

Here is another. The hallmark term of the past 25 years is some permutation of "Indian control," and hundreds of bands have begun operating their own schools. Yet during this period of "devolution" an overwhelming majority of First Nations children have been registered in non-First Nations educational institutions. There is paradox enough in that observation. It is compounded by the realization that despite whatever non-Native governments profess about their agenda for First Nations control, the real agenda remains what it has been for the past 120 years, containment and social control.

It is not only governments that create paradox. Local institutions can articulate a good-sounding policy but

then define the terms of administration of that policy so that the intent of the policy is violated. Another major paradox is that in the face of concerted institutional effort all over North America to deal with matters of equity, racism thrives here.

As illustration of paradox in the big picture, I am going to refer you to a few short publications that are archival, artifactual, or examples of the current state of Native education. The first set of sources is the product of government-sponsored data collection and commentary, the second source is this issue of *CJNE*, and the last is a book, a case study of government involvement with one Indian band in Alberta.

*Government-sponsored data collection and commentary.* The big picture is often sketched with descriptive statistics. ERIC has published a summary of the commissioned papers from the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force (Cahape & Howley, 1992). In it, Hillabrant and associates remark on the lack of an accurate and comprehensive descriptive data base in this field. Their article and 19 other summaries of studies draw a fairly clear and bold-outlined big picture of the current state of affairs in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

It is more difficult to find comprehensive data for Canada. One reason is the number of categories for Native people, a legacy of the government's appropriation of the right to define who is Native. For example, in Canada a few people are recognized as "status" Indians by the government on the strength of some earlier marriage to a male Indian, but have no First Nations ancestor nor any cultural or personal affinity to any First Nation. At the same time, there are others who are monolingual in a First Nations language, who know no other culture, and whose ancestors are all Indian, but they are "legally" not Indians. This fits at least one definition of paradox.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) provides some fairly current information for Status and Treaty Indians, though this is always more comprehensive about people living on reserves. Statistics Canada publishes piecemeal information about off-reserve First Nations populations (e.g., MacDonald, 1991), but until results of the 1991 Census are analyzed, even generalized statistical indicators of how Canadian non-status Indians and Metis are faring are only informed guesses.

The big picture of the political context since the late 1960s is the story of the movement toward self-government and band control of schools. One set of descriptive statistics shows increasing Native fiscal management and increasing responsibility for the operation of schools. The trend to band operation of schools has taken place in a larger context of devolution, which is supposed to mean Indian control. INAC claims that by 1990, 74.5% of all Indian and Inuit program funds were administered by Native governments or organizations, and that by 1991 proposals for First Nations self-government were at various stages of development for 178 bands—not an impressive proportion of the total (INAC, 1991, pp. 66-67, 70-71).

Despite the dramatic movement to band-operated schools, another generalization of statistical data shows that Native people are increasingly attending non-Native institutions. An example of improvement is in First Nations participation in postsecondary education in Canada. In 1970 fewer than 500 Indians attended Canadian universities, and the number grew to almost 6,000 by 1985 (Armstrong, Kennedy, & Oberle, 1990). Total Canadian Indian postsecondary enrollment in 1990-1991 was 21,300 (INAC, p. 39). A corollary in K-12 was that by 1990, the

national Indian high school dropout rate had crept down to 75% from almost 95% in the early 1970s (Armstrong et al., 1990), and almost half the children living on reserves completed high school without a break (INAC, 1991, pp. 36-37). However, proportionally more Indians drop out of university before completion, and on average Indian people with degrees earn one third less than non-Natives with degrees (Armstrong et al., 1990).

Another change is that more Indian children are going to school: of the 92,018 children resident on reserves and eligible for K-12 attendance, 91.4% are enrolled, in contrast to only 72.4% in 1961. Of those, in 1991 9% attended federal schools, 44% band-operated schools, and 47% provincially operated schools (INAC, 1991, p. 43). However, half a million aboriginal people in Canada live *away from* reserves, 45% of them 19 years old or younger (MacDonald, 1991, p. 3). Of course the overwhelming majority of the 220,000 eligible to attend school have no access to Native-operated schools. In total, that means that approximately 75%-80% of First Nations children in Canada attend non-Native schools.

In the United States, in a political context of "self-determination," which is at least superficially consistent with the Canadian talk of self-government, between 85% (Hillabrant et al., 1992, p. 7) and 90% (Nichols, 1992, p. 31) of Indian K-12 students attend state or local public schools, with the rest in private schools or schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

You might see paradox in the big picture in the trend to increasing Native participation in non-Native educational institutions on the one hand, and a political movement to Indian self-government and self-determination on the other. Neither the trend nor the political movement precludes the other. The government offers figures that appear to indicate Indian control, but because so many First Nations people are enrolled in non-Native institutions it might appear that First Nations people and governments can exercise responsibility in education in only a minority of cases. We might leave it at paradox if we look only at big pictures, or fail to note that "control" is not necessarily coincident with school administration or fiscal management.

*This issue of the journal.* Some articles in this issue demonstrate that control and operation are not the same thing. Denis Hall's discussion of band-operated schools adds to an ongoing appraisal of the current model of band operation of schools. His argument contributes to the emerging consensus in the literature: band operation does not translate to band control. Control is a separate issue, and control for the most part remains in the hands of the federal government.

Other articles provide evidence that Native children's attendance in schools in non-Native jurisdictions does not preclude Native responsibility and control in Native education. Edmund J. Danziger, Jr.'s description of Indian children from Walpole Island, Ontario attending an off-reserve secondary school is a good example of how an individual's initiative, along with Indian community support, effects a measure of Indian influence—and control—in a cooperative venture in education. Cora Voyageur describes an unusual situation in Alberta where a band provided land and other resources for the establishment of a county school on the reserve, which was initially attended by a majority of non-Native children. Her focus is not control, but she describes how the county's own policies and the non-Native community's responses seem to have taken the spirit out of the cooperative enterprise. Voyageur's case history of the exodus of non-Natives from the school is an interesting example of a step toward local control.

Peggy Wilson uses the concept of culture conflict to describe a situation that is common in Western Canada's middle-latitude towns: Indian children do well in band-operated schools, but when they transfer to non-Native high schools teachers document the Indian students' social and academic failure. Those children drop out. I have seen too many of those kinds of schools. Relief for the thousands of children in that situation should be one of the highest priorities in education, but more rhetoric about control will only create a more clearly defined paradox. The non-Native school in British Columbia that Jim Wilson describes is different. It has a model innovative program in which computer technology celebrates a First Nation's heritage. A related issue is raised in Patrick Brady's discussion of Ontario provincial school boards and Indian education authorities.

Collectively the articles illustrate one way to resolve the apparent contradiction between the movement toward First Nations control and increasing First Nations participation in non-Native educational institutions, by describing the domain where effective control is gained and maintained: it appears that policy and politics can elaborate a context for Indian control, but that effective Native control comes only when individuals effect that control locally.

Celia Haig-Brown's retrospective of research work in a First Nations education centre explores orders of paradox in which the macrosystemic issue of control is clearly related to personal and individual experience as researcher.

The examples cited so far demonstrate that there is no necessary coherence between principle, as articulated, and action. One of the best examples is in discussions about equity. Olive Patricia Dickason, a contributor to this issue, is a respected Metis scholar, one of three Native women whose lives and careers are described in the film *The Learning Path*, which is reviewed in this issue. The university where she is professor of history is currently involved in public discussion, often acrimonious, about equity in appointing staff. The administration and the faculty in which she serves have spent time, money, and personnel resources to commit themselves to an action plan to ensure equitable hiring for women, visible minorities, aboriginal people, and handicapped people. This spring the same administration argued before the Supreme Court of Canada that it should have the right to force Professor Dickason to retire because she is over 65. The university's public argument is stated in terms of classes of people, not in terms of the individual case. If the issue is equity, that is a paradox: why is discrimination against a group defined by age less offensive than categorization based on sex or race? The university seems to maintain that discrimination based on categories of sex, handicap, and race raise moral issues, but that age is more appropriately a legal issue. They have argued that such discrimination is justified in terms of some other common good, thus using the same argument that in times past gave preference to married men. By removing discrimination based on age from the moral discussion, the university can publicly station themselves on high moral ground, demonstrate their political correctness, and institutionally bully old people. I do not think anyone has suggested that the university's consideration of a First Nations appreciation of age has any place other than as an ethnographic datum in an anthropology course. The more cynical among us might explain the paradoxes involved by suggesting that the university's moral position derives from the threat of loss of federal funding if it is not seen to deal with equity issues along axes defined by the federal government.

*The case study.* One of the best examples of paradox is to look at the policy articulated by the Canadian government about First Nations control and devolution, and then to read John Goddard's *The Last Stand of the Lubicon Cree*. Control and containment describe the story of the past 50 years, which ends with a description of a 1989-1991 classic government divide-and-conquer tactic.

The book has been widely reviewed in the popular press and the most common response is bafflement or incredulity, then recognition of a consistency of intent. MacGregor (1991), in his review in the *Montreal Gazette*, said that he thought Goddard might be misinterpreting or distorting events: "I kept looking for signs that the author was onesided, partisan.... Could the government's side be better presented or justified?" (p. T2). But his final judgment was that the account of how the Lubicon Band of Northern Alberta was "hoodwinked, deceived, swindled, cheated, manipulated, bullied, coerced and disinherited by a succession of Canadian administrators up to and including the present government" (p. T1) is even and fair, and "not the work of a propagandist" (p. T2). Lowey's (1991a) favorable review was followed with a news item that INAC had directed that Goddard be denied further access to departmental information (Lowey, 1991b). You may be inclined to agree with anthropologist Bennett's (1991) review in the *Toronto Star*:

Even those of us inured by long experience to the dissimulation, cant, and arrogance of governments with respect to native people will be shocked by John Goddard's harrowing account of the struggle of the Lubicon Cree for simple fairness. It is a tale worthy of a third world dictatorship, a story of bureaucratic repression, of brutal indifference to suffering, of legal harassment, of the razing of villages, of strong-arm tactics and gross contravention of fundamental principles of law. (p. H15)

Picard (1991) in the *Globe and Mail* faulted Goddard for not providing an analysis, "except for an oft-stated but largely unsubstantiated conspiracy theory," of "how such a flagrant violation of human rights could persist for so long" (p. C3). The only reviewer to challenge Goddard's account, Gunter in *Western Report* (1991), ignored the substance of Goddard's argument and his more serious charges and accused him of distortion and selective use of data. (If you are wondering how seriously to take Gunter's review, you may get a sense of the editorial tenor of that publication by flipping through that same issue and looking at McGovern's [1991] article in which it is implied that there is a worrisome tendency for "advanced" academics to promote paedophilia.)

Goddard tells of Malcolm McCrimmon, who came from Ottawa in the 1940s to travel through the Treaty 8 area of Northern Alberta, and who apparently made his own rules to remove more than 700 people from the Treaty Indian rolls. Many of us have witnessed such arbitrary exercise of personal administrative power by local officials. In the early 1950s, petroleum development was picking up on land claimed by the Lubicon Cree, and McCrimmon advised the Alberta government, despite a copious archive of 50 years of documentation, including a treaty, that the Lubicon Cree did not exist as an Indian band (pp. 21-31). Goddard describes how the community of Marten River, in the same general area as the current home of the Lubicon, was destroyed 25 years ago, some members watching their homes being bulldozed, unable to remove their belongings (pp. 32-41). Goddard's account of current government tactics of duplicity and arbitrary exercise of power in dealing with the Lubicon Band, and of the government's lying outright to the United Nations Committee on Human Rights, are entirely credible to anyone with

long experience in Native education. Such a reader's response, unfortunately, is one of recognition.

*Conclusion.* Before leaving the discussion of paradox (and recalling the great line from Lily Tomlin's search for intelligent life in the universe: "If I hear about one more paradox I'm going to scream!") we should be able to take some lessons from our recognition of apparent contradictions in this field. Perhaps the first is that while focusing our efforts on large-scale change and working for policy change are important in that those things contextualize our work, the changes that matter come about because of action, informed by principle, on the part of individuals in local, face-to-face interaction. Another lesson is that the ethos that informs the principles for action should be First Nations ethos, articulated in First Nations' terms: they seem to be recognizable by people of good will whatever their background, and incomprehensible to those who are venal and self-serving.

#### Note

<sup>1</sup>Full length papers should be available shortly from ERIC/EDRS by writing or phoning them at 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, VA 22153-2852, Telephone 1-800-443-3742. You may phone or write ERIC/CRESS User Services, P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325, Telephone 1-800-624-9120 for document numbers, or check local subscriptions to ERIC. The work cited here, the summaries, is available from the West Virginia address, for US\$10.00.

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