

A Circular Education Organizational Structure

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Native education systems require organizational structures that reflect the cultural values and traditions of Native communities in order to function to their fullest potential.

Introduction

You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. (Neihardt, 1932, p. 198)

Local control of education has generally been shown to lead toward an improved system of Native education. In 1988, the Hishkoonikun Education Authority assumed local control of education from INAC. Many new initiatives were undertaken at this time to develop an education program that meets the needs of the students and community of Kashechewan. One of these initiatives was the development and implementation of a circular local education authority organizational structure that takes its approach from traditional Native cultural values. The central focus of this structure is the students.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the development of a model for a circular local education authority organizational structure and the experience of the Hishkoonikun Education Authority in implementing this model.

You know it always makes me laugh when I hear young white kids speak of some people as "squares" or "straights"—old people, hardened in their ways, in their minds, in their hearts ... With us the circle stands for the togetherness of people who sit with one another around the campfire, relatives and friends united in peace while the pipe passes from hand to hand. (Lame Deer & Erdoes, 1972, pp. 112-113)

A Typical Vertical Education Organizational Structure

Typical community local education authority (LEA) organizational structures can be described as hierarchial or vertical in orientation. This hierarchial organizational structure is problematic in that it tends to develop class distinctions, provide an unclear focus, and reduce accountability and responsibility among the various stakeholders in education (see Figure 1).

A vertical orientation leads to a sense of some stakeholders being more or less important than others. The result of this class distinction is a lack of togetherness, except within a group, for example, teachers, support staff, Native, non-Native, and so forth.

The focus of a typical organizational structure is often dependent on the strength of a particular group, for example, chief and council, local education authority, teachers, parents, and so forth, which is in turn often related to the

degree of local control of education. Confusion, a lack of communication and isolation among the stakeholders occurs as each tries to put forth his or her own agenda.

Because accountability and responsibility are related to an individual's or a group's position in the hierarchy, the individual or group may not be as fully aware of the effect of their actions on themselves, on the group or on other stakeholders, even though these are often clearly stated in job descriptions and working policies.

A circular local education authority organizational structure was developed in an attempt to reconcile these difficulties.

A Circular Education Organizational Structure

A circular community local education authority (LEA) organizational structure signifies that all shareholders in education are dependent and related to one another within the whole. This circular organizational structure provides equality, a clear focus, and improved accountability and responsibility among the various shareholders in education.

A circular orientation bases its premise on the fact that no one individual or group is more or less important than any other because there is no hierarchy or

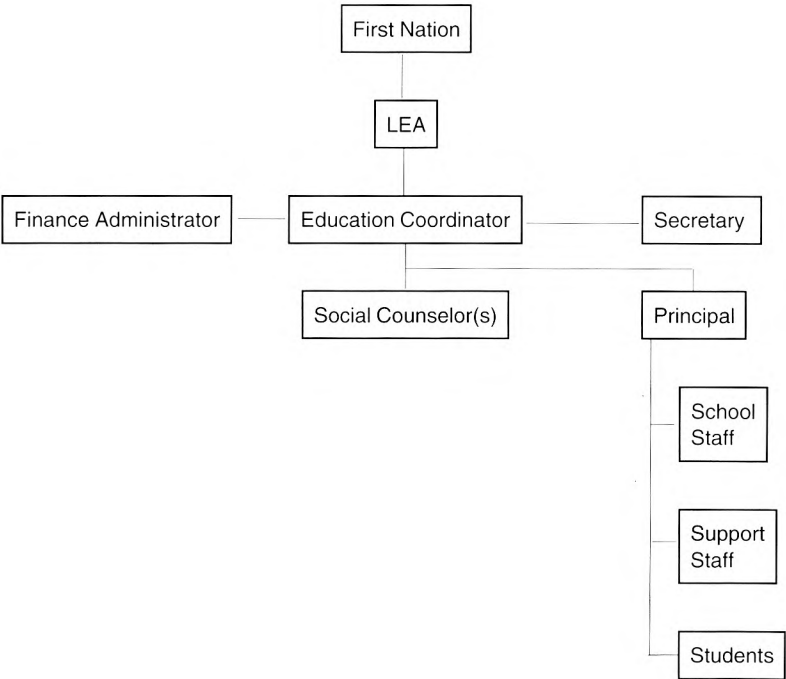


Figure 1. A typical vertical LEA organizational structure—Adapted from Mushkegowuk Council (1987).

vertical orientation. Differences do exist, but they are in the areas of abilities and skills, for example, administration (management), staff (teaching, support, maintenance etc.), parents (raising children), LEA (community derived policy making). As individual's skills and abilities grow, so do the group's skills and abilities because everything is connected. Ultimately, togetherness and cooperation are produced.

The focus of a circular organizational structure is the students. They are our primary clients. Awareness of this central focus results in a common mission, improved communications, and reduced isolation among the shareholders, for example, maintenance keeps the physical plant safe and clean, parents support education, LEA develops sound policies, and so forth.

Accountability and responsibility are heightened as the individual's and group's actions are dependent on their own, the group's, and the other shareholders' actions, for example, if a school is managed properly, then it will result in a quality education program for the students; if the school is clean, then it will be safe for the students; if quality policy decisions are being made, then the needs of the students and community will be served; and so forth. This creates an environment conducive to the success of all shareholders and an improved education program.

The experience of the Hishkoonikun Education Authority is indicative of the validity of a circular local education authority organizational structure (see Figure 2).

The Hishkoonikun Education Authority

Everything, though having its own individuality and special place, is dependent on and shares in the growth and work of everything else. (Beck & Walters, 1977, pp. 11-13)

Since the Hishkoonikun Education Authority has been responsible for education at St. Andrew's School many positive things have occurred as a result of the circular education organizational structure that has been implemented.

Significant improvements have been noted in the following areas:

- responsiveness to community needs
- realistic policy and decision making
- emphasis on education
- cooperation
- structure
- respect
- curriculum development
- curriculum implementation
- instruction
- Cree language programming
- Lifeskills/cultural programming
- academic achievement
- academic standards
- staff retention
- school maintenance
- morale

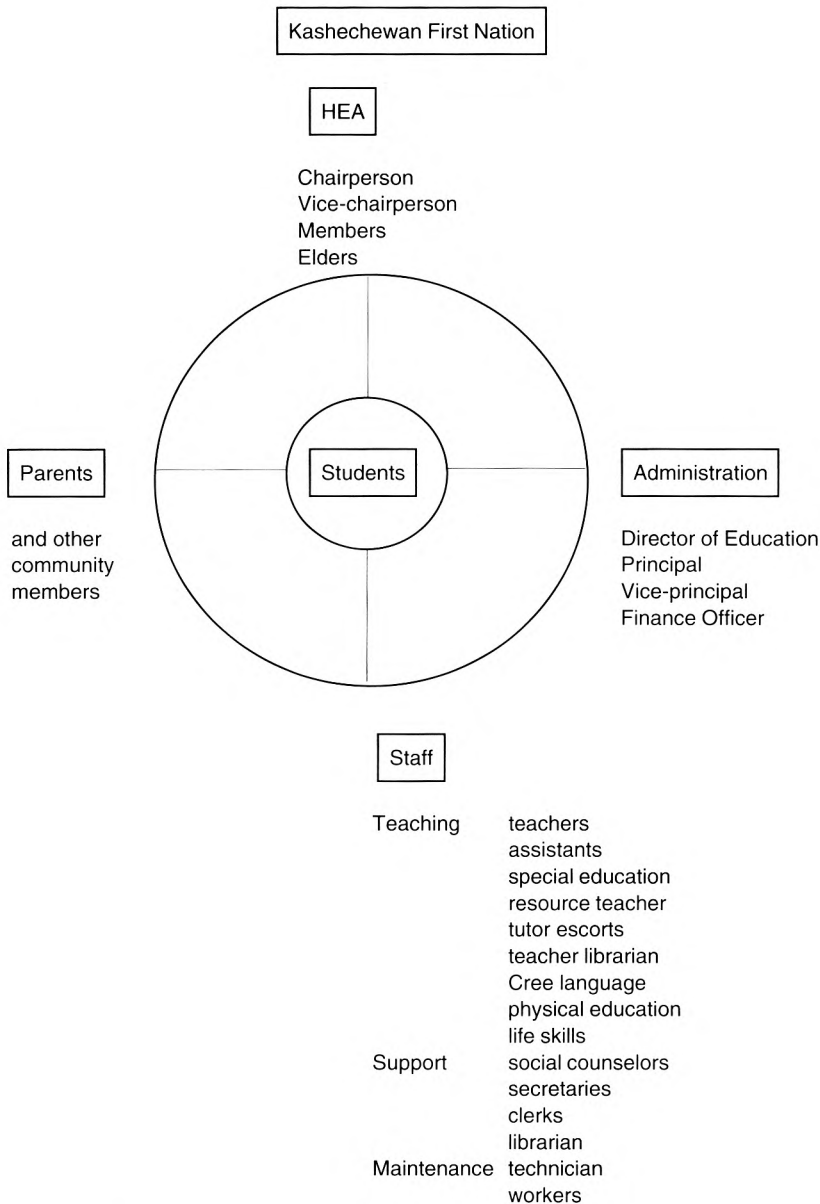


Figure 2. The Hishkoonikun Education Authority organizational structure.

- support services
- parental involvement
- parental support
- student retention
- student attendance
- discipline
- self-confidence
- pride
- self-esteem
- motivation.

Community needs have been met through realistic policy and decision making, for example, the development of an attendance policy, a discipline policy, and a school handbook for staff, parents, and students. Our attendance has averaged around 92% over the past few years. This could only be achieved through parental and community support. Our discipline has improved to the extent that more effective instruction is able to take place in an environment conducive to learning for staff and students. Our school handbook clearly states the expectations of our education program in Cree and English and is available to all.

The school is student centered and as such student work is predominantly displayed throughout the school in display cases and inside and outside the classrooms. This has led to the development of self-esteem and pride in the students and the Kashechewan First Nation and has resulted in a reduction in vandalism, damage, and graffiti inside and outside the school. Money saved in these areas has been diverted into student programming, particularly our Lifeskills program, which consists of bead/hideworking, carving, cooking (traditional and nontraditional), woodworking, spirituality (Native and non-Native), and outdoor activities.

Because of increased staff accountability and responsibility, the community as well as the staff and the students see role models working toward a common goal: the students. This has in turn increased the emphasis on education in the community.

Curriculum review, development and implementation has been organized through a cooperative five-year plan that indicates those areas of the program where financial and human resources will be allocated to the benefit of the students and the staff. So far, language arts (JK-8) and mathematics (JK-9) programs have been developed and implemented with future areas of work to include Native/social studies, art/music and environmental studies. Our Cree language program has been developed to incorporate units that respect local culture and values.

Ultimately, the Hishkoonikun Education Authority organizational structure has benefited the students the most.

Conclusion

Due to the cooperative aspect of Native life, and the Native belief that the Great Spirit is within all, all community members are considered equally worthwhile. (Hodson, 1989, p. 39)

Good things can be achieved through local control of education by using a circular local education authority organizational structure such as that used by the Hish-koonikun Education Authority that reflects the values and traditions of Native people.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the following shareholders in education in Kashechewan for their valuable comments and suggestions: Gayatri Bharadwaj, Lorraine Dalton, Wallace Fitzgerald, Earl Reuben, Archie Wesley, and Elijah Wesley.

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Band Controlled Schools: Considerations for the Future

J. Tim Goddard

Lac La Ronge Indian Band

Indian education in Canada has developed through four distinct phases. The latest, band controlled schools, is analyzed and discussed. The hypothesis is advanced that band controlled schools, while a necessary development in the 1970s, may no longer be appropriate. It is suggested that a fifth phase of Indian education, that of establishing partnerships with provincial school boards, should now be considered.

Introduction

The history of the education of Indian peoples in Canada can be arranged into four distinct phases. These are the pre-European settlement era, the era from Confederation to the late 1960s, a transitional phase, and the present. This article describes the development of the concept of Indian control of Indian Education up to the contemporary era. The article then suggests that there are three directions in which Indian education can continue to grow. One of these directions, the establishment of closer links with the provincial system, is then explored in greater detail.

Education in the Pre-Settlement Era

In the first phase, covering the centuries before European settlement, the Aboriginal peoples had an efficient system of informal education practices that transmitted the accumulated knowledge, wisdom, beliefs, and values of each First Nation from one generation to the next. These practices "centered around the teaching of the life skills, culture and customs which would prepare Indian youth to assume their future roles in their societies" (Watson & Watson, 1983, p. 1). This harmonious state of affairs ended with the advent of European settlement.

Education from Confederation to the 1960s

The second phase extended from Confederation until the late 1960s. This period was epitomized by the establishment of reserves and the formalization of education. Schools were established, through the efforts of both church and state, in an attempt to "civilize" and "assimilate" Indian peoples into the dominant Canadian society. In most societies "education and schooling are designed to equip the students to live and work in their own society" (Kouri, 1983, p. 3), a circumstance not met when Native students were being prepared to function in the white society.

The social fabric of the First Nations was being destroyed and many of the problems facing contemporary Indian peoples had their germination in this period. It is noted in one major study that "commerce, government, industry and

settlement have affected every reserve without the Indian being able to feel that he has had much part in what was happening. People and institutions with roots in a different world have called the tune" (Hawthorn, 1966, p. 7). This report led to a review of federal policy toward Indian peoples generally and Indian education in particular.

Education in Transition

The third phase was one of legislation and transition. The government White Paper of 1969 recognized the imbalance of educational opportunity that confronted Indian and non-Indian children. It proposed that Indian children no longer be treated as wards of the government but be considered as citizens of the province in which they lived. Thus the education of Indian children would become a provincial responsibility.

This proposal was rejected by the provinces, who noted that the federal government continued "to claim exclusive legal jurisdiction over Indian Affairs" (Williams, 1982, p. 12), and by the Indian people themselves, who considered the Treaty Agreements of the late 1800s as sacrosanct and wished to maintain Nation to Nation status with Canada.

Raising the issue of who should be responsible for the education of Indian children forced an examination of what was happening at that time. The National Indian Brotherhood (1972) released a study, *Indian Control of Indian Education*, that identified the issues of responsibility, programs, teachers, and facilities as being four areas in need of urgent attention and improvement (p. 4).

In Saskatchewan the federal and provincial governments had, in accordance with the recommendations of the 1969 White Paper, established joint funding agreements that required Indian children to attend provincial schools. The provincial school, however, had no special mandate to provide culturally appropriate curricula for Indian students, to consider Indian learning styles, to recognize Indian kinship systems and world views, or in any way to provide Indian parents with input into school governance. A number of issues of cultural insensitivity and manifest racism led to the establishment of the first band controlled school in the province.

Band Controlled Education

The fourth phase saw the development of band controlled schools and the gradual downsizing of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). After the first band controlled school was established on the James Smith Reserve (Hammersmith, 1973), others rapidly followed. The Lac La Ronge Indian Band opened its own school at Sucker River also in 1973, and subsequently added another six school to its education system (LLRIB, 1988). In the mid-1980s the Dene bands at Fond du Lac and Black Lake took control of their own schools (Goddard, 1988) and in 1992 the last of the Athabaskan bands severed its ties with the provincial schools (Gryba, 1992, personal communication). All on-reserve schools in northeastern Saskatchewan, and the majority of those throughout the rest of the province, are now under local band control.

Discussion

It is now time to review this concept of Indian control of Indian education as manifested through band controlled schools and examine how it has translated into the realities of the 1990s. As we move toward the new millennium, perhaps a fifth stage in the history of the education of Indian peoples in Canada will emerge.

Control implies that one has the ability to change, experiment, develop, and grow; it implies that one can identify needs and then plan and implement strategies to meet those needs; it implies that one can control income and expenditures, establish criteria for success, and have direct governance of one's own affairs. This is not the case when one refers to a band controlled education system.

The bands can manage their operational funding within certain guidelines developed by INAC, but they have no say in the level of funding received. The bands can adapt and alter curriculum to any degree, but a grade 12 certificate requires prior completion of approved provincial curricula at the grade 10, 11, and 12 levels. The bands can establish the need for additions or renovations to school facilities but must then petition INAC for the necessary funding, and must meet INAC space formulas in any new buildings. The bands can attempt to localize teaching staffs but must hire provincially certificated teachers if programs are to be accredited. In essence, bands have been given the right to control the *management* of their education systems within parameters established and monitored by the federal government. This is not Indian control of Indian education in the accepted sense of control.

There are three options open to First Nations. The first is to maintain the status quo. The second is to have access to any funding they deem necessary to run their education system, in all its aspects, in any manner they deem correct. The third is to establish closer links with the provincial system. To maintain the status quo is to maintain the current level of frustration. In many cases the band schools are old, ill-equipped, and incapable of offering the curriculum deemed necessary in the 1990s. Very few schools have proper gymnasias, science laboratories for physics, chemistry, or biology, comprehensive computer and library facilities, second- and third-language programs, special education programs, and so forth. First Nations are involved in a continual exercise of going cap-in-hand to the federal government for additional funding, but the economies of scale are such that few succeed.

To have open access to necessary funding is an unlikely future. The fiscal and political realities of contemporary Canada are such that no "bottomless pit" exists. The only way such access could occur is through band-generated revenue and, unfortunately, the necessary economic base does not exist. Such a situation would also go against the letter and spirit of the Treaty Agreements under which the federal government is obligated to provide funding for education.

Over the past 20 years the number of Indian students has risen at a rapid rate. This increase has not been reflected in equally high numbers of grade 12 graduates. Many Indian parents send their children to provincial schools in the belief that band schools serve to ghettoize Indian students. Others enroll their children in provincial schools because of a perception that band schools have lower academic standards.

Concurrently, many provincial school boards are facing declining enrollments, an aging population, and growing unrest with increased taxation levels. Schools are being closed across Saskatchewan and students are being bused extreme distances to large, impersonal institutions. There is a growing awareness in the non-Native society of Native issues, and the overt racism of 20 years ago is no longer socially acceptable.

The Future?

In light of this situation perhaps it is now time for First Nations to enter into educational partnerships with provincial school boards. The First Nations have the students and the funding (operational and capital) for their education. They do not have the facilities, the support networks, or the opportunities for students to interact closely with non-Native peers.

The provincial school boards, on the other hand, have many underutilized facilities. They enjoy extensive support services through the various branches of the provincial Department of Education. They enroll students from all ethnic backgrounds and are committed to a policy of equality of opportunity for all students. They do not have, however, access to unlimited funding or to an increasing number of students.

In any partnership the criteria of participation would be both comprehensive in scope and acceptable to both partners. This would require a great deal of discussion and negotiation. Nonetheless, some general frameworks can be identified.

First and foremost, the First Nations would require a guaranteed membership on local boards of trustees and on school boards, equivalent to the proportion of band members enrolled. They would also require Indian language programs equal in stature to all other programs and open to all students. They would require compulsory inservice sessions in cultural awareness for all non-Native teachers. They would require affirmative action hiring policies that guarantee positions to Native persons, again commensurate with the number of Indian students enrolled. The First Nations would also require continued decentralization of tuition, operational, and capital dollars through the band administrative systems and under the control of chief and band council. They would then enter into tuition agreements with the school boards. The First Nations would also want to have an influence on teacher evaluation, curriculum development, staff recruitment and hiring, the establishment of school goals and policies, and the review and revision of administrative and operational procedures.

In return the school boards would expect a guaranteed enrollment over a specific period, to facilitate planning and development. They would expect prompt payment of all tuition and other funding, in accordance with an agreed schedule. They would expect to maintain provincial standards, to apply disciplinary and attendance policies to all students equally, and to meet all provincial requirements in terms of staff qualifications, program accreditation, and so forth.

Within these general frameworks the more specific criteria, unique to each partnership, would be negotiated and developed.

Conclusion

The experiment of band controlled schools has had some impact on improving Indian education. However, the wastage of human potential is still unnecessarily high. The dropout rate is still unacceptable, as are the levels of teenage pregnancy, suicide, and incarceration in the prison system. Band controlled schools have not overcome these problems; they have simply moved them out of the mainstream and back into the reserve environment.

As Indian educators face the 21st century, it is now time to critically evaluate how Indian education should meet the new millennium. It is time to consider sharing resources and entering into partnerships with provincial school boards. Indian control of Indian education as envisaged 20 years ago has not occurred. It is time to question the whole concept of band controlled schools and to determine whether in fact they are an idea whose time has gone.

Note

The views expressed in this article are the personal opinions of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Chief, Council, or membership of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band.

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