

# Taking Responsibility: What Follows Relational Accountability?

*Stan and Peggy Wilson and Students in the First Nations  
Graduate Program*

*University of Alberta, Department of Educational Policy Studies*

---

As this edition of *CJNE* goes to print, we are thrilled to announce that the first three graduates of the First Nations Graduate Education Program at the University of Alberta are crossing the stage at Convocation Hall to receive their master's degrees in Education. What a gift it has been to work with them. They have paved the way for many new Aboriginal administrators and educators. Tracy Friedel, Noella Steinhauer, and Patricia Steinhauer have accepted the challenge to move forward as responsible educators who will live and work in their home communities. To them, and to all First Nations educators, we offer a challenge.

The devastating effects of attempts at forced assimilation have left their mark on many First Nations communities. All too many are in a state of complete dependence with no belief or hope in their own collective will or ability to make substantial change. Other communities struggle on by depending on short-term funding for programs initiated outside their own environment. A deep-rooted psychology of poverty permeates and is evidenced in squalor, apathy, internal squabbling, substance abuse, teen pregnancies, dysfunctional parenting, political power struggling, poor social skills, and perpetual grieving. In fact the effects of colonization run so deep that they have in many cases produced complete communities of dysfunction.

As they progressed through a program designed to espouse an Indigenous world view while housed in a hierarchical—western—European system, Tracy, Noella, and Patsy attempted to decolonize their own educational training. They have struggled to unlock the shackles of colonization and in doing so have had to struggle with their own guilt at having worked for many years as educators within an often oppressive system. While respecting a sense of relational accountability, they have struggled with reporting the findings from their research—findings that they felt might be construed as negative by the unknowing reader. And finally they have come to terms with placing their research findings into perspective. Like many competent and caring educators before them, they will become the educational brokers who will take responsibility for connecting relational accountability to relational responsibility. Taking responsibility always involves taking risks. One of the risks is the act of teaching openly about the negative effects of colonization in our educational system and in

our communities. It means as well that we must at some point stop blaming and start creating change. This change is already taking place in communities and settings where First Nations educators can see beyond the surface, can analyze the symptomatic behaviors, and can recognize the reasons for present conditions. These educators have already stepped away from the system that once bound them, the system that originally created the chaos. In its place they have created something new. They see clearly, take bold risks, and draw on the wisdom of uncolonized Elders. They do not simply use provincial curricula in an attempt to reshape them for their needs; they create new curricula.

Responsible First Nations educators know that band-controlled education should not simply mean a change of location. It must mean a change of philosophy, a change of curriculum, a change of teaching methodologies, a change of content. If these basic premises are not dealt with openly and strategically, how can the attrition rate or the rate of satisfaction be any different from what it was before First Nations assumed management responsibilities? Patsy and Tracy and Noella face an awesome future. Our love and respect goes with them as they return (with new tools) to their respective communities.

\*\*\*

We will be on sabbatical leave for the 1999-2000 university year. Celia Haig-Brown has graciously agreed to guest edit the Fall/Winter 2000 edition of *CJNE*. Manuscripts can either be sent directly to her at York University, or to our office at the University of Alberta where they will be forwarded to Celia.