A Study of Education in Context*

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"In marked contrast to the historical emphasis upon Euro-Canadian decision making and authority over Indian education dating back to the 'discovery' of America, today's Indian pupils, particularly in British Columbia, may now attend schools whose entire governance is in the hands of their own parents and relatives."

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In 1949 there were sixteen British Columbia status Indians enrolled in grade 12. By 1985 this enrolment had risen 31.5 times to 505. Over the same time, the British Columbia status Indian on-reserve population had risen from 23,881 to 39,067, a 1.6 fold increase. Thus, proportionally speaking, the increase in grade 12 enrolments is considerably greater than the increase in the population from which the grade 12 students are drawn. The problem is to provide a plausible explanation for this apparent change in enrolment since 1949.

The reason for this examination is that grade 12 enrolment patterns have apparently changed so recently that as late as 1976, Brooks observed that "studies examining the academic achievement of Indian children yield what is now a familiar and dreary statistic. Clearly, we have not been successful in this regard, yet there are few answers available" (p. 192). In 1967 Hawthorn reported one "dreary statistic," in a national survey of Canada's Indians, as a 94 percent failure rate. That is, the grade 12 enrolment of 1961 was 6 percent of the grade 1 enrolment of 1949. In British Columbia (the focus of this study), the indicated failure rate of Indian pupils for the same period was 96 percent. That is, according to Hawthorn's method of calculation the grade 12 enrolment in British Columbia was 4 percent of the grade 1 enrolment of eleven years previous. Hawthorn's figures, for Canadian society in general, showed a failure rate of

* In his second article for this collection (for the first, and for a profile of him, see pp. 48-61) Dr. Atleo provides an extract from his doctoral dissertation which discusses the very important issue of education policy as it relates to the heritage of the First Nations.

only 12 percent. The observed large increase in the grade 12 enrolment pattern of status Indians in British Columbia between 1949 and 1985 requires that an up-to-date analysis be performed.

To set the stage for an updated analysis, it is useful to examine how Hawthorn and others explained the Indian educational failure which they observed. This explanation leads to an explanation of the theory of context.

Explanations of Indian Educational Failure and a Theory of Context

In the past, the most common theoretical explanations of Indian educational failure focused on the differences of culture, broadly speaking, between the Indian and non-Indian (Erickson, 1987; Ogbu, 1987). Indian pupils fail in school, it was initially maintained, because of cultural deprivation. Since there are a variety of definitions of culture, this paper will assume that one culture may be defined by contrasting it with another culture. Lévi-Strauss (1963) wrote of such contrasts as "significant discontinuities." For example, the group-oriented values of one group may be said to be a significant discontinuity from the individually oriented values of another group. The former group places a higher value on group goals, while the latter group places a higher value upon individual goals. The general definition of culture by Lévi-Strauss has the advantage of not being bound by a specific context and may be applied to comparative cultures even as they change and evolve.

Historically, in Indian-white relations, the task of defining culture meant references to language differences, belief differences, behavioural differences, skin colour differences, and so on, but today these differences seem to have evolved into a degree of uniformity and to have become blurred in some cases. Some Indians today may speak only English, hold similar beliefs to those of non-Indians, behave in a fashion similar to non-Indians, and even have a skin colour that is not distinguishable from non-Indians. Yet "significant discontinuities" between the Indian and others are implied in the use of the phrase "Indian culture," even when some of the formerly significant discontinuities such as language and beliefs may not be as significant as they were in the past.

Nevertheless, if historical roots are considered part of culture, then an Indian culture is certainly different from other cultures whose historical roots may be from other lands. The importance of historical roots is based upon the assumption that fundamental beliefs about life are transferred from one generation to another. Moreover, when the fundamental beliefs about life become assumptions of culture which are not usually articulated

(Lane, 1967), the transfer becomes automatic and largely unconscious. It is perhaps in the area of the assumptions of culture rooted in the distant past that the Indian of today may differ even if other cultural differences seem to be blurring into "insignificant continuities" as opposed to "significant discontinuities."

During the 1950s the perception that Indians had an impoverished culture was of course an historical legacy of European notions of cultural superiority. Hence, it was theorized that because the Indian was impoverished in culture he or she must begin school with an apparently insurmountable handicap. "Impoverished in culture" referred to a lack of Euro-Canadian culture within the Indian. Hawthorn reported that, during the 1950s, non-Indians did not expect Indians in general to develop socially acceptable skills along the same lines as whites. The implication was that the Indian lacked the meanings of Euro-Canadian culture and this type of impoverishment led to maladaptive social behaviour, Indian educational failure, and so on.

Then it was thought during the 1960s that Indians did not have an impoverished culture after all, and so the reason for their lack of achievement in school was now thought to be caused by cultural discontinuity (Hawthorn, 1967; Ogbu, 1987). Leslie Gue (1974) characterized cultural discontinuity in terms of value differences. For example, the Indian may hold group goals as being more important than individual goals, while the non-Indian may hold individual goals to be more important than group goals. Both held the same range of goal values, but each put a different focus or emphasis upon these goal values depending upon what was considered more important.

Subsequent explanations of Indian educational failure are variants of this cultural discontinuity perspective. More (1986), for example, suggests that Indian pupils in general have different learning styles from others. Learning styles are culturally determined. Therefore, an Indian pupil encountering an alien learning style in a classroom suffers cultural discontinuity. More's perspective is strengthened by other observations of remarkable and basic differences between the Indian worldview and western man's worldview. DeFaveri (1984) holds that the Indian worldview is characterized by oneness with the universe while the western worldview is characterized by individualism and isolationism. The former worldview holds that everything is related and connected in some way, while the latter worldview may recognize holistic subsystems within the universe yet tend to the opposite view that reality is not necessarily made up of related or connected parts. Brumbaugh (1963, p. 136), philosophizing about this

phenomenon in education, has said that while the "separations [of reality] are useful, even vital" they have been overdone and "ignore the basic character of the experiential continuum." In contrast to the separations of reality which might be argued to be characteristic of the western worldview, the Indian worldview is characterized by wholeness, connectedness, and interrelationships (Kluckhohn, 1949; Bryde, 1971; Sealy, 1973; DeFaveri, 1984; Berger, 1985; Friesen, 1985; Kelly & Nelson, 1986; McCaskill, 1987). More's suggestion, therefore, is that teachers of Indian pupils should attempt to suit their teaching style to the Indian learning style, which has been affected by assumptions of the wholeness and interrelatedness of reality.

It is no great step to move from the view that a minority culture is different to the view that the minority group is genetically inferior. A theoretical view of genetic inferiority formed part of the rationale for the "impoverished in culture" view of the 1950s (Erickson, 1987) and dropped into disuse as such views became unacceptable in the seventies. It has recently resurfaced, however, in the view that the Indian is right-brained and therefore deficient in language function. Chrisjohn and Lanigan (1986) assert that no reliable data exist "to conclude that such a deficit is indeed present in Indians" (p. 55). In another paper Chrisjohn and Peters (1986) draw the following conclusions:

> We suggest that the neurological and neuropsychological evidence is nowhere near conclusive at this point, and that the performance patterns of Native American children do not necessarily reflect a "right brain dominance" of the Native Americans. As of now, the "right brained Indian" has to be considered a myth rather than a scientifically valid fact. (p. 62)

It could, of course, be argued that other pupils from different cultural backgrounds have entered the Canadian school system, apparently with the same kinds of handicaps as the Indian, and have not failed as completely as the Indian has failed, and that therefore it is reasonable to assume that if no other plausible explanations about Indian educational failure are available then the possibility that the Indian is genetically inferior may be entertained. The present study does not accept this argument and examines the possibility of a plausible perspective other than that of genetic inferiority to account for Indian educational failure.

This perspective of Indian educational failure views it from a theory of context. This theory assumes that there is a relationship between an individual and the society in which that individual lives. If the relationship is characterized by a negative orientation of society towards that individual, then the theory of context holds that that individual will be negatively

affected. For example, if society rejects an individual socially, politically, and economically, then that individual may respond by committing suicide, behaving in unacceptable and deviant ways in order to survive, or by emigrating to another country if possible. On the other hand, the theory of context holds that when society accepts an individual socially, politically, and economically, then that individual may respond by behaving in socially acceptable ways. The assumed relationship between an individual and society is also argued to apply, in general, to the relationship between society and a minority group.

An important aspect of the theory of context is that it forces a shift in the focus of any discussion about Indian educational failure from the differences between the Indian and non-Indian to a focus upon similarities between the Indian and non-Indian. Where the focus was formerly on "significant discontinuities" between the Indian and non-Indian, it is now on what may be termed "significant continuities." Although the Indian and non-Indian may differ culturally in terms of historical roots and in terms of special legislation about Indians, they are nevertheless similar in other respects. For example, they share the same country and form parts of the same Canadian society. Whether Indians profess an affinity for western civilization or not, they nevertheless demonstrate a tacit acceptance, at least of its material benefits, by living in modern homes, driving modern cars, and generally enjoying all the modern conveniences. In addition, many Indians can be found participating in society today in a variety of unskilled, skilled, and even professional jobs, attending schools whose curriculum is mainly Euro-Canadian, attending various Christian churches, taking advantage of modern recreational facilities, and generally striving to do well within rather than without Canadian society. Even those Indians who may openly reject western ways and values can find no escape from minimal participation in Canadian society by their need for money, medical aid, and so on.

Yet in spite of the tacit acceptance and the apparent similarities between the two groups, the Indian position in Canadian society is more of a propinquitous than a volitional nature. European civilization came to North America by colonization and thus became an inevitable and fixed context for the local Indian. The position of the Indian in such a case is referred to as an involuntary one by Ogbu (1987). It is an involuntary position within Canadian society in the sense that the Indian's minority position was, and is, not by choice. Involuntary minorities are thus contrasted with voluntary minorities who immigrate. Ogbu found that voluntary minorities tend to do well in school, in contrast with involuntary minorities who

tend not to do well. He cites such examples as the Buraku minority in Japan who do poorly in school but do well when they emigrate to the United States; the minority Koreans in Japan who do poorly in school but who do well when they emigrate to the United States; the Mexicans born in the United States who do poorly in school while their brothers born in Mexico tend to do well when they emigrate to the United States.

Gibson (1987) also found, in a case study of first-generation immigrant Punjabi pupils in California, that they tended to do well in school even in the face of social and linguistic difficulties. These and other like studies are said to indicate a relationship between the voluntary and involuntary nature of minorities and their academic achievement and failure. What is brought to the fore by such interpretations is the consideration of the relationship among the individual, society, and the education system. John Dewey (1938) said that the purpose of education is not only to "graduate out of" school but also to "graduate into" a meaningful society. Dewey's stated purpose of education is for a student to graduate out of a local school into a larger society which, rather than providing insurmountable challenges and opportunities, says to the graduate "you have a place with us if we find you acceptable and you find us acceptable."

In such a case, where society and student-graduate find themselves mutually acceptable, it may be said that the student has graduated into a meaningful context. Dosman (1972) would define this relationship between an individual and society as inclusion. As the word suggests, inclusion refers to an acceptance by the dominant society of an individual or minority group. Exclusion is therefore the opposite and indicates a form of rejection by a dominant society of an individual or minority group. In the case of exclusion, society may now say to the graduate, "you have no place with us because we do not find you acceptable even if you find us acceptable."

Another author, Adler (1982), maintains that when minority students can see no hope of securing meaningful jobs for themselves through education they will not be motivated to work hard or to do well in school, because they see no purpose in graduating into a society which offers no hope of meaningful or gainful employment. What Dewey and Adler may refer to as a meaningless context because of rejection by a dominant society seem to be the same conditions as those which Frideres (1974) calls racism against a minority and Dosman (1972) exclusion. That is, when the majority culture or society engages in various means of oppression such as refusing access to quality education, refusing access to good jobs, refusing access to political opportunities and so on, such activity may be perceived by the minority as racism and exclusion which may contribute to their per-

ception of the larger society as being an oppressively meaningless context.

Although Barman, Hebert & McCaskill (1986, 1987) would agree that Indian educational failure is an unfortunate Canadian legacy, they would also agree that changes are currently taking place in Indian communities. These changes are perceived as part of a worldwide movement of colonized people everywhere demanding freedom from, and equality with, their colonial masters, and it may or may not be significant that these changes taking place in Canadian Indian communities coincide with increasing grade 12 enrolments among British Columbia status Indian students.

This demand for freedom in Canada is being expressed as a demand for a form of self-government by Indian people. Although Indian self-government is still an unresolved constitutional issue, one of its expressions is Indian control of Indian education (Adams, 1974; CEA Report, 1984; Cummins, 1985; Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1986, 1987; Battiste, 1987; Diamond, 1987; Douglas, 1987), the definition of which also remains an issue. Nevertheless, Indian control of Indian education is finding an expression in practice where educational decisions formerly made by others may now be made by Indian people.

In marked contrast to the historical emphasis upon Euro-Canadian decision-making and authority over Indian education dating back to the "discovery" of America, today's Indian pupils, particularly in British Columbia, may now attend schools whose entire governance is in the hands of their own parents and relatives. Where Indian pupils formerly looked to non-Indian administrators for educational direction, they may now look to their own parents, who may be involved as members of the Indian school board, or as Indian principals, Indian teachers, Indian school counsellors, or as Indian political leaders, for educational direction. In 1987, an Indian Affairs computer printout indicated that 184 bands out of 196 in British Columbia had decided to assume control over some or all of their educational programs. There is considerable variety in these programs. The range includes one Indian-controlled provincial public school district (School District No. 92), twenty-six Indian-controlled elementary schools, ten elementary-secondary schools, and fifty-two Indian-controlled kindergarten-nursery schools located on reserve. Although not completely staffed by Indians, and perhaps deliberately so, all of these educational programs are definitely marked by Indian decision-making. Such educational systems, by and large, have remained essentially Euro-Canadian in terms of organizational behaviour and organizational structure, as well as in curriculum content, but those in authority over the structure and content have changed.

In sum, this discussion of explanations of Indian educational failure suggests an examination of Indian education in terms of a theory of context, not so much because traditional theories are necessarily incorrect, for traditional theories do provide some reasonable rationale for Indian educational failure, but because traditional theories are based upon the assumption that the only source for possible answers, as determined by the dominant society, is found in the object of educational failure. For example, the traditional theory of cultural deprivation emphasizes the importance of Euro-Canadian culture and devalues the importance of Indian culture. That is, this theory does not entertain the possibility that part of the answer to Indian educational failure may lie in the value of Indian culture for Indian people. The theory of cultural discontinuity and its variants are inadequate explanations of Indian educational failure for basically the same reason. By contrast, the theory of context allows us to seek explanations for failure (and, of course, success) in the nature of the relationship between a dominant and a minority society rather than in the inability or unwillingness of one group to conform to the imposed values of another.

Based upon the perspective of the theory of context, the following hypothesized relationship is proposed. Inclusion (social, political, and economic) is expected to be positively associated with academic achievement as measured by increasing enrolment into grade 12 while exclusion (social, political, and economic) is expected to be associated with no increases in academic achievement as measured by enrolment into grade 12.

Research Method and Design

This is an ex post facto study of archival data. These data are of two kinds, the first amenable to statistical treatment, the second not so amenable. The first kind of data consists of the numbers of status Indians in British Columbia enrolled in grade 12 each year from 1949 to 1985. The second is the indicators of contextual conditions, external and internal to schools. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis identifies the study design as a marriage of two research approaches. Empirical data is analyzed within a qualitative context. While it is easy to see the grade 12 enrolments as the dependent variable in such a study, it is not so easy to see the contextual conditions as independent variables as in a true quasi experimental study. For this reason, the terms "dependent variable" and "independent variable" are avoided.

A major assumption of this study is that a society may have distinctive prevailing characteristics that can be identified. Identification may be

based upon views that are commonly held and actions that are widely practised in that society. For example, if it is commonly held by a dominant society that Indians are "lazy" and if, at the same time, employers of that dominant society, in general, refuse to hire Indians (Hawthorn, 1967) then that dominant society may be said to have the distinctive characteristic of prejudice which is manifested by the practice of economic exclusion.

Another major assumption is that enrolment into grade 12 equates with academic achievement. This assumption includes the implication that the students are in the normal grade 12 age range in an academic grade 12 class as opposed to an alternate or special grade 12 class.

Analysis of the Provincial Enrolment Data

In this section are presented first the raw data on grade 12 enrolments of status Indians, second the results of applying time-series analysis to the raw data, and, finally, an analysis of cumulative enrolments and periodic averages.

The Raw Data

The presentation in figure 1 on page 113 represents the grade 12 enrolments of B.C. status Indians from 1949 to 1985 in proportion to the on-reserve populations over the same time. In order to examine the apparent trend in the graph, the data were subjected to a time-series analysis.

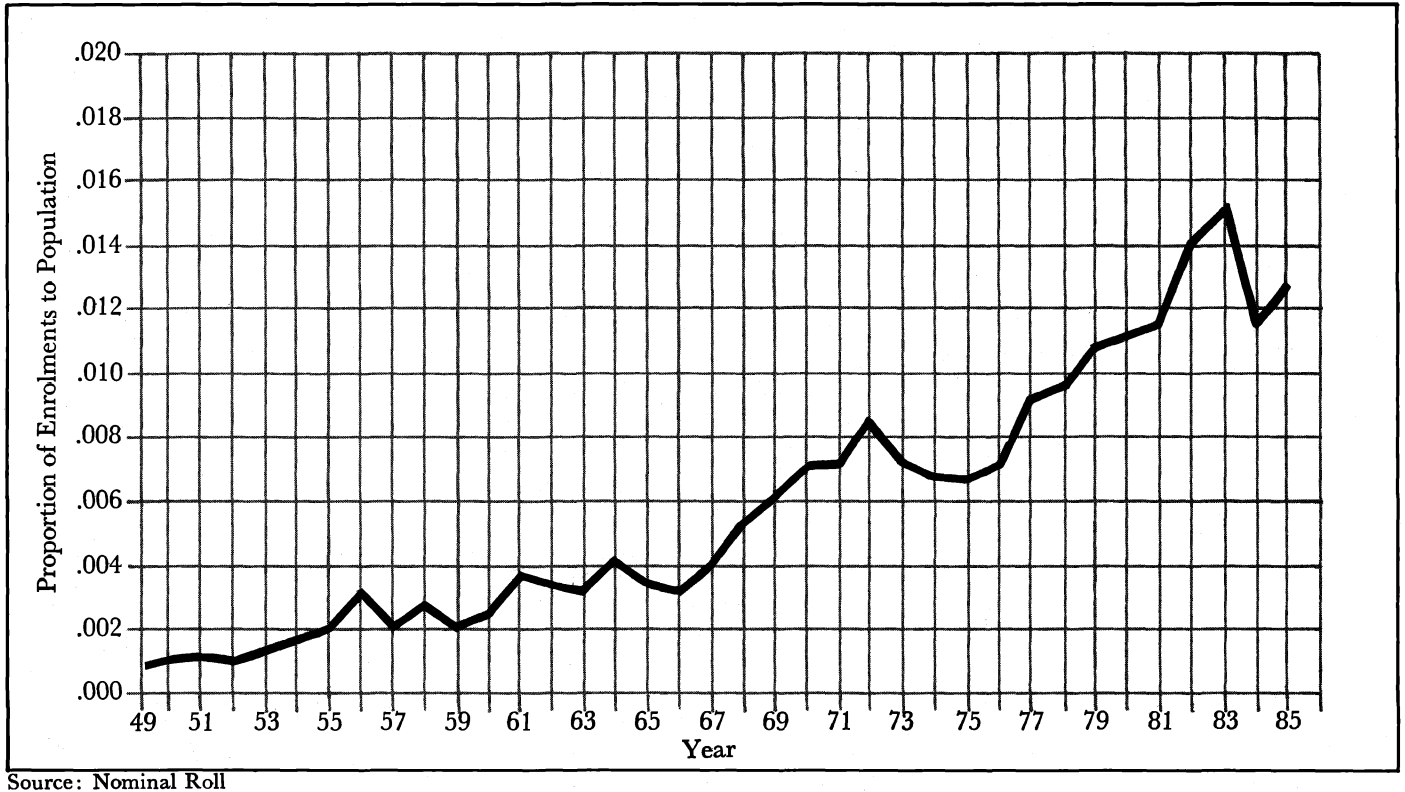
The Analysis

The average proportional change in grade 12 enrolment between 1949 and 1981 was .0003363 students. If the average change is calculated for each successive year it will be found that the estimated average grade 12 enrolment change during the 1950s ranges between seven and ten students, while during the 1960s and 1970s it ranges between eleven and thirteen.

The years 1982-1983, in contrast, yield an estimated and significant increase of .0003320 over and above the estimated average of .0003363. This represents an estimated change of twenty five students for 1982 and 1983. From 1949 to 1981 grade 12 enrolments varied in its average yearly change by seven to thirteen students. Then in 1982 and 1983 the average yearly enrolment change jumped to an average of twenty-five students.

Analysis of Cumulative and Average Figures

Although the time-series analysis shows statistically significant enrolment increases and a statistically significant intervention effect, it is felt that an



Source: Nominal Roll

FIGURE 1

Grade 12 Enrolments of Status Indians in British Columbia, 1949-1985

TABLE 1

Grade 12 Status Indian Enrolment in Proportion to the On Reserve Population in British Columbia: 1949 to 1985

Year	Grade 12 Enrolment	On-Reserve Population	Proportion Enrol/pop
1949	16	23,881	.00067
1950	24	22,857*	.00105
1951	30	22,222	.00135
1952	23	23,958*	.00096
1953	32	24,060*	.00133
1954	42	25,926	.00162
1955	57	26,147*	.00218
1956	84	26,087*	.00322
1957	49	26,064*	.00188
1958	69	26,135*	.00264
1959	60	30,869	.00194
1960	75	31,962*	.00235
1961	120	33,083*	.00363
1962	114	34,164*	.00334
1963	114	35,281*	.00323
1964	155	36,272*	.00427
1965	132	37,256	.00354
1966	112	35,081	.00319
1967	140	33,474	.00418
1968	171	33,061	.00517
1969	195	32,157	.00606
1970	232	32,573	.00712
1971	232	32,496	.00714
1972	288	33,339	.00864
1973	241	33,702	.00715
1974	226	33,617	.00672
1975	220	33,060	.00665
1976	230	33,164	.00694
1977	312	33,888	.00921
1978	324	33,717	.00961
1979	366	34,204	.01070
1980	384	34,807	.01103
1981	408	35,704	.01143
1982	526	36,895	.01426
1983	578	38,002	.01521
1984	441	38,673	.01140
1985	505	39,067	.01293

Note: the * indicates interpolations for the years when a census was not taken. Each interpolation is an estimated average between the known populations. Also, the on-reserve populations for 1949, 1951 and 1954 are estimated from on-off reserve totals.

alternative method of analysis may help to support, strengthen, and further clarify the significance of the results of the time-series analysis. The alternative method proposed involves an analysis of cumulative enrolments and periodic averages as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Cumulative Grade 12 Enrolments (academic years): 1949-1985

1949-1961	1961-1973	1973-1985
561	2005	4256

24 year average = 1283 per 12 years vs 4256 per 12 years

The cumulative total for the first 24 years, 1949 to 1973, is 2,566 grade 12 students, while the cumulative total for the final 12 years is 4,256. If the first 24-year cumulative grade 12 enrolment total is averaged, the result is 1,283 students per 12-year period. Therefore the final 12-year cumulative total of 4,256 grade 12 students is 3.32 times more than the average of the first 24-year cumulative grade 12 enrolment. Although no specific statistical significance is attached to these numbers they do help to clarify, for those who have only used, hitherto, the ordinary least squares method of analysis, the nature of the enrolment trend by roughly confirming where the greatest areas of significance occurred.

Discussion: Hypothesized Relationships with Context

It was predicted that inclusion (social, political, and economic) was associated positively with academic achievement as measured by increasing grade 12 enrolments. The time-series analysis indicated that the grade 12 enrolment pattern did show significant increases between 1949 and 1985. The agreement between the cumulative grade 12 enrolment data and the results of the time-series analysis is in the placement of the greatest number of enrollees in the enrolment series. Both types of analysis place the greatest number of grade 12 enrollees in the final 12-year period between 1974 and 1985. Since the final 12-year period overlaps the 1970s and 1980s, which have been identified as the periods of relative inclusivity, the prediction that there is a positive association between academic achievement as measured by increasing grade 12 enrolments and contextual inclusivity is tentatively supported by both the cumulative enrolment data and the time-series analysis.

Moreover, the first 12 years in the enrolment series record the lowest grade 12 enrolments, and this finding is associated with the identification of the 1950s as being more exclusive than the 1960s. Similarly the 1960s, which is identified as a period of transition, with elements of inclusion in it not found during the 1950s, is related to the relatively higher grade 12 enrolments as recorded in the second 12-year period shown in Table 3 below. The assumption here is that the higher grade 12 enrolments of the 1960s are related to the inclusive elements of the period rather than to the exclusive elements. The table associates the social orientations of each time period with the cumulative grade 12 enrolment total of those periods in order to show the associations between them.

TABLE 3

Cumulative Grade 12 Enrolments in 12 Academic Year Periods: 1949-1985 in Relation to the Social Orientation of Each Period

1949-1961	1961-1973	1973-1985
Exclusive	Transitional	Inclusive
561	2005	4256

In conclusion, the theory of context may be said to be tentatively supported. Since the completion of this study, the theory of context has been found to be useful in other areas. For example, in the issue of repatriation of cultural heritage where historical conditions must be taken into account, the theory of context provides a model by which sound policy may be developed.

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Fourth World

Mechanical, performed by rote
Such schooled repetitions of thought
And offered to ignorant armies
Of twice lost seekers

1969 and Chrétien were authors?
And architects grand?
Creating a chorus of voices?
They tore our throats open for all to see?

We now have understandable songs?
And sing in your slop trough temples?
Every note is tailored to your scale?
Your speaker should mark my tempo?

Fourth World was authored by one of our
Own, a Shuswap, George Manuel.
He came from our soil and returned
And countless before raised arms to fight

A footnote in your dry mouth, *Fourth World*
Is warmed food in my hungry mind.

Michelle

At the university conference
"Indian Education Today"
White teachers from residential
And day schools discussed our lives

And a drunk Indian reverend
Danced his cannibal dance
Ashamed, he then put on
A white mask to preach

But Michelle you move young
And naive and brave and
Innocently honest
You . . . you stood erect

Your voice was sure
Your confidence obvious
Your mouth firm
Your thick round lips set proudly

The human colour of your complexion
Caught my eyes
And I turned to watch you talk,
To hear you show your mind

You spoke your own language
Straight and full of emotion
You spit your words in imitation
Of their style

You heated up the day
And showed many teachers themselves
Your cheeks glowed
Brown rounds against white walls

You were a residential school teacher
Talking Nicola, ignorant, rigid, domineering
Your straight black hair hung over
Your youthful shoulder, soft

And when your skit was done
You let them free of their guilt
Your every move was grace itself
Not calculated to have its effect

And when you were through acting
Your voice began to hum peacefully
And grew ever deeper
A natural resonance replaced its edge

Leaving the discussions we sought
Each other on the grass
And in the woods
Near magnificent decaying spirits

Inside the conference
You were the face of nature.
Outside, a supernatural power.
You were somehow too real to me

Your voice and way of talking
So peaceful and easy to remember
Carried me as far as you let it
I lost control and surrendered all

When you smiled your cheeks
Pulled up and creased the corners
Of your soft inviting eyes
Their black, the warmest colour I'd known.

We were meant to cross paths
To meet at this queer intersection
You knew that and moved so well
I didn't and walked like a newborn.

You took me to the park
And walked my legs off
You laughed so beautifully
I cried behind your back

And you quit school
For the movement and then the
Street
And you sold yourself short

You sold yourself

And blocked up your veins
With white powder dreams
Before the next time
We met.

And I loved till eternity
When the sun rose again
Our camper shelter
Toured us past endless love

And years later at a treatment centre
You met my sister and wrote me
You're a mother now
And I'm a father . . . of sorts

For a long time I tried halfhearted
Attempts to reach out to you
And you the same
Small efforts without reward

These days my heart warms
Now and then at the thought
Of you and I on the grass
Or in the woods