

# **NATIVE LITERACY PROGRAMMES: TWO CASE STUDIES IN IMPLEMENTATION**

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## **Abstract / Resume**

Two Aboriginal organizations in Toronto, Ontario, initiated literacy programs for urban Aboriginal residents. Each organization had a very different client base, one dealing largely with newcomers from rural areas, the other with Aboriginal women. The author reviews the implementation of the program in these different settings and comments on their success.

Deux organisations autochtones à Toronto en Ontario ont commencé des programmes d'alphabétisation pour les habitants autochtones urbains. Chaque organisation visait une catégorie particulière de gens: l'une concernant largement les nouveaux venus des régions rurales, l'autre les femmes autochtones. L'auteur examine la réalisation du programme dans les deux organisations et fait des observations sur le succès du programme.

"It comes down to this. You can't gain power unless you have your centre first. To know where you are at. Education is the dressing on the cake, but you have to have the inner drive and understanding. You have to use the inner power you have. You need focus and commitment to understand, learn and teach. You have to have it in your soul - to believe it, to understand it and then to teach it. That is the kind of education I understand" (Dave Munroe, learner).

## Introduction

The Ontario Government inaugurated the Ontario Community Literacy (OCL) grants program in 1986. Under the aegis of the Ministry of Skills Development, two Native organizations in the city of Toronto implemented literacy programs to serve the urban Native population. For purposes of confidentiality both organizations requested that their names not be revealed. They will be referred to as Organization "A" and Organization "B". The purpose of my research was to look at the problems they faced and their successes in the implementation process.

The research took the form of active participation, participant observation and interviews. I began by taking the ten week tutor training course conducted jointly by the two organizations during August and September of 1987. Throughout the fall of 1987 I interviewed the Directors of each program in person and on the telephone to obtain data on the implementation processes and problems faced by each organization. I found the Directors open and extremely helpful, and I owe them my thanks and gratitude. They invited me to attend discussions between tutors and learners which allowed for an open exchange of ideas and problems.

Any research project such as this will encounter certain difficulties. A major problem arose when the majority of learners attending the two programs didn't want to be interviewed. Most of them were too shy even to attend the open discussion groups between tutors and learners because of feelings of inferiority. Only one learner was willing to be interviewed for the study. He is not only a learner in the program, but also works as a counsellor in a Native service organization, a half-way house for alcoholics. His perspective, both as a learner and as a counsellor who refers clients to the service, was invaluable. Without his assistance and impressions, the research could have been compromised.

I also surveyed some of the literature concerning literacy, especially in Native populations, and material on problems in Native education as a whole in Canada to gain an understanding of the client population and the problems they would be facing. Unfortunately, little research has been

undertaken in the field of Native literacy in North America, and as a result the literature available is inadequate.

## Historical Background

According to Frontier College (Webber, 1983:13), approximately one-quarter of Canada's population is either illiterate or functionally illiterate. Among this group Canada's Native people are disproportionately represented. The extremely high rate of illiteracy among Native populations can largely be attributed to certain federal and provincial government policies concerning the education of Native peoples, and the legal framework of federal legislation which governs Indian concerns in Canada.

Under the provisions of the *Indian Act*, the Department of Indian Affairs is empowered to establish, or to enter into agreements to have established, schools for Indian children. Historically, education for Indian and Inuit children who lived on Reserves or in settlements was undertaken by religious institutions, mostly in residential schools. Children were removed from their homes each fall and taken to the nearest residential school. Because distances were great and transportation systems inadequate, most parents did not see their children at all during the year. It was sometimes even difficult for children to spend their summers with their families, and many lived in the boarding schools year round. This led to an alienation of the children from their families and from traditional ways.

The practice of the schools up until the mid-twentieth century was to educate Native children in the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic in order to train them to be workers in non-Native society. Boys were trained as labourers or farmers and girls were taught household skills to train them as domestic servants. Many of the schools were singularly unsuccessful in producing adults with any useful training. In a book about his own residential school experience, the Ojibway scholar Basil Johnston notes that:

St. Peter Claver's existed for two reasons. One was to train Indian youth for some vocation: tailoring, milling, blacksmithing, shoemaking, tinsmithing, painting, carpentry, baking, cooking, plumbing, welding, gardening, sheep and swine herding, animal husbandry and poultry care. Alas, while there were some accomplished chicken farmers and shoemakers, no graduate went into business; the trades for which we had been trained were rendered obsolete by new technology. The school's other purpose was to foster religious vocations by frequent prayer and adoration. But all the prayers, masses, novenas and benedictions could not overcome the natural resistance of most boys to a career in holy orders. The school

produced neither tradesmen nor priests (Johnston, 1988:26, 27).

The use of Native languages or customs was forbidden and children were often victims of beatings if they spoke their own tongue. This system was not just instituted by chance, but was the policy of the Federal government in order to eliminate the customs and traditions of the Native people. It was the avowed policy of government to assimilate the Native people as quickly as possible by removing the children and educating them in "White" ways. Priscilla Hewitt describes her first encounter with a residential school:

...my next major memory is of the residential school. We are sent to the Brantford Mohawk Institute. It seems that the house allotted to us on the reserve is too small, so the Indian Agent, in his wisdom, decides to send those in our family who are of school age to residential school. I am only five years old. That doesn't matter. The Indian Agent represents Indian Affairs and they make our decisions for us... Now the only time I see my family is when I spot my brothers in the large dining room at mealtime. My mom wants to visit us, but the Mush Hole is a long way from the Reserve and she has no way to get back and forth. We all have to speak English here because it would interfere with our education if we spoke Ojibway (Hewitt, 1988).

The legacy of this repressive system has left the Native community with large numbers of illiterate adults who are often very distrustful of formal education. Even children who attended local schools found them foreign to their own culture. Throughout the provincial and federal systems almost all teachers were non-Native and untrained in Native culture, whereas teachers in the sectarian residential schools were often not even trained teachers. The Hawthorn Report clearly summarized the situation of Indian children in the schools:

...the atmosphere of the school, the routines, the rewards, and the expectations provide a critically different experience for the Indian child than for the non-Indian. Discontinuity of socialization, repeated failure, discrimination and lack of significance of the educational process in the life of the Indian child result in diminishing motivation, increasing negativism, poor self-images and low levels of aspiration. Until some compromises can be made by the school and the Indian and non-Indian communities, the impasse will remain and the sense of worth of the Indian student will remain low, inhibiting adequate academic achievement (Hawthorn, 1967[2]:130).

All of these factors have led to a population that is undereducated and, as a result, underemployed. Frideres noted that: "In 1971, the number of

Indians between fifteen and nineteen who had reached secondary school was almost five times lower than the national average" (Frideres, 1983:163). The problems encountered in the educational system have had a negative impact on the social structure of Native communities, where, over time, a culture of poverty and of deprivation was generated.

Hamadache reports for UNESCO that:

...the poor retention rate of educational systems continues to be a disturbing problem with many children failing to complete the full cycle of primary education. It is virtually inevitable that those whose education has been shortened or is qualitatively inadequate will very soon relapse into illiteracy, especially if they are living in an illiterate environment (Hamadache, 1986:11).

He goes on to note that: "Throughout the world illiteracy principally affects the least privileged groups, frequently as an accompaniment to poverty" (*Ibid*:12). It is clear that the Native population of Canada fits into both of these categories.

The federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), which has had the responsibility for Indian education under the *Indian Act*, has never been able to allocate sufficient resources, nor has it had sufficiently farsighted policies to remedy the situation. As a result, more and more Indian Bands are taking over their own educational systems. Barman, Hebert and McCaskill stated:

Progress in the direction of Indian control has nonetheless occurred, as Battiste and Persson document. Individual bands have been encouraged to take over full or partial administration of reserve schools operated by the Department of Indian Affairs. By the early 1980's, 450 of the 577 Indian bands in Canada had done so. As well, by 1984, 187 bands were operating their own schools, almost half of them located in British Columbia, the others primarily on the Prairies. In 1983-84, just a fifth of the Indian children in school were attending band-operated schools. Most of the remaining federal residential schools have been closed, to be replaced either by local schools or by the provision of boarding facilities at nearby integrated institutions.

...Change has gone beyond the elementary and secondary levels. Adult education programmes have been established in many communities. As of 1985, sixty-five cultural education centres offered programmes in Indian languages and cultures (Barman, Hebert and McCaskill, 1986:16, 17).

Among the adults who had left school prior to these changes the legacy of illiteracy and undereducation still needs to be addressed. The proliferation of adult education programming, which up until recently emphasized Native language and culture, now is moving into popular education and literacy. In addition, despite the greater degree of control over education being exercised by the Bands, there is still a substantial rate of high-school drop outs. The problem is exacerbated by the continuing out-migration of young adults from the Reserves and rural communities to the urban centres. They move in order to find jobs. However, because of their disadvantaged educational status, many Native people find themselves having great difficulty finding and keeping employment.

To try and address these problems, Native communities have been experimenting with various methods to assist the undereducated adult population in upgrading skills and education. Literacy programs have recently been implemented to promote self-reliance among urban Native populations.

## What Is Literacy?

The notion of literacy has changed greatly over the last few decades. The term once meant, and still means to some, the ability to read and write. However, most modern educators see literacy as much more than the ability to read, write and do simple arithmetic. The implication now is that literacy implies a range of life skills and an increased ability to make decisions and to evaluate situations. The United Nations in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

UNESCO defines functional illiteracy in its broadest terms:

A person is *functionally illiterate* who cannot engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development (Hamadache, 1986:14).

The work of Paolo Freire (Freire, 1972) in popular education in South America, educating the peasant populations in Brazil to take control over their own lives and futures, indicates the degree to which understandings of literacy have expanded over time. Freire makes some astute observations about the result of colonization and paternalism, both ills that have afflicted Native Canadians. In one of his books he refers to the internaliza-

tion of oppression. He notes that:

Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything - that they are sick, lazy and unproductive - that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness (Freire, 1988:49).

This internalization of the process of invalidation is one that Native Canadians are beginning to deal with on a significant scale. The emerging leadership is educated, politically knowledgeable, and most importantly, cognizant about the forces that have been at work over the past few hundred years to oppress and suppress their rights as human beings. Their battle to win self-determination will free all Canadians. As Freire notes: "It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors" (1970:42).

Freire characterizes learning to read and write as an "act of knowing" (1985:49). Freire's work in education has encompassed not only the whole person but the community at large. As an "act of knowing" it becomes empowerment for the individual and the community.

## **The Philosophy Of Organizations "A" and "B"**

The two Native organizations discussed in this paper established their programmes based upon the definitions of literacy expounded by the United Nations (above) and Canada's Frontier College. Frontier College states:

The well developed human being can take part in society and maximize control over his life and environment. With the skills to survive meaningfully, to assert his rights and protect his interests, a person can escape the bewildering and often times demoralizing life on the fringes of society.

Frontier College considers education a principal factor on the road to the liberation of the individual and society. It regards education as a key to helping people become better equipped, active participants rather than vulnerable and passive observers of life in the mainstream.

Education, thus conceived, though including basic skills, means more than reading and writing. Education, thus conceived, means true literacy (Webber, 1983:9).

Both organizations "A" and "B" work with learners at all stages of development, from basic literacy skills to college and university preparation. Each student is on an individualized program geared to the student's own stated objectives. Learners are encouraged to set achievable goals and then to evaluate their own success.

The following statement of philosophy is from their tutor training manual:

The Native adult literacy program is a learner centered program. Our teaching is based on the needs and interests of the learner rather than on any pre-set teaching curriculum.

The learner is encouraged to set his or her own goals and to work toward them. It may be important to the learner to get a driver's license, or to read a book to his or her child, or to simplify household chores such as shopping or cooking, or to read about other important issues that effect their daily lives. It is the tutor's responsibility to help the learner achieve these goals.

We believe success leads to more success. This is the basis for community development as well as the foundation for Native self-determination. Every lesson should leave the learner with some knowledge that he or she didn't have before. This could be reading back his or her own story, knowing the meaning of a new word, or coming to understand their rights in relation to their landlords, employers, the law, the medical system and virtually every institution in society. Most importantly, literacy will enable our people to participate more fully in Native self-government.

Sharing is the basis of the Native philosophical outlook on life. Our program assumes that the tutors are here because they wish to share their literacy skills with Native people who in turn will share their experience and insights with the tutor. People learn best in a situation where they are respected and encouraged. Your belief in your learner will give him or her the confidence to make progress. We however recognize that everyone is responsible for their own learning. No matter how much you want to help someone, you can only give the learner the tools, the experience, and the resources. They must do the learning (Tutor Training Manual, 1987).

This is not just a statement as to what value literacy has to the individual, but what literacy can mean to the community as a whole. There is no doubt whatsoever, that one of the foundations of successful self-government will be an educated population able to form the infrastructure

necessary to the development of self-reliant, self-governing Native communities.

## Organization "A"

This organization has had over a decade of experience in dealing with the most disadvantaged part of Toronto's Native population. It is located in the heart of "skid row" and is a continual hive of activity. This centre serves a number of functions. It offers inexpensive meals daily to large numbers of clients (mostly male), is a drop-in centre, offers a counselling service, holds Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and refers clients to other agencies.

Many of "A"'s clients are newcomers to the city from rural Reserves. They have yet to adjust to the problems of urban living and often find themselves at a terrible disadvantage. They suffer from the usual culture shock one would expect among rural migrants to the urban centre, as well as the other cultural problems suffered by Native migrants to the city. Discrimination and difficulty in finding jobs are major problems, as well as the difficulty of finding decent affordable housing. The fact that many of these individuals are also functionally illiterate or undereducated also compounds the problem. Another client group who use the services of "A" are recent releases from the correctional system. It is these groups of individuals who form the bulk of the client base for Organization "A"'s Literacy Program. They also draw clients from other Native organizations in the city.

Organization "A" is headed by an elected Board of Directors, drawn primarily from the Native community. The members of the board are unpaid volunteers. There are only a few paid staff members as financial resources are extremely limited. The bulk of the work done at "A"'s centre is done by volunteers from both the Native and non-Native community. "A" has some problems finding sufficient volunteers to keep all their programs moving along smoothly. This is a problem they share with many agencies who depend upon the decreasing number of community-spirited citizens who are not otherwise employed or willing to donate their free time.

Organization "A" began its Literacy Program in the spring of 1987 with a \$40,000 grant from the Provincial Ministry of Skills Development, under the Ontario Community Literacy Grants Program. The Director of the program, a paid employee, is a M<130>tis from the United States. She worked in collaboration with the Director of the program at Organization "B" to develop a curriculum and to conduct jointly run tutor training courses. It should be noted here that the Director of Organization "A"'s program seems to be a very dedicated individual who is currently working on a Ph.D. in

anthropology at the University of Toronto.

At this point in the story of Organization "A", it should be noted that an unstable internal political situation was impacting on the ability of the Director to implement the literacy program. At the Board of Directors election in 1986, a new board, composed primarily of local Native clients of the centre, was elected as a result of a well-planned campaign masterminded by a non-Native anthropologist who felt that the previous board was not representative, despite an exemplary record of service over ten years. The new board created problems for the infant literacy program from the start.

Initially, the Board appropriated \$4,000 of the \$40,000 grant for "unspecified" reasons. This left just \$36,000 to cover the design and implementation of the program. After payment of the Director's salary, \$12,000 remained for materials, tutor training, curriculum development, administration costs, rental of space, and learner recruitment (through advertising in Native newsletters and liaison with other Native organizations).

The Organization tried to deal with the financial constraints in various ways. In addition to sharing the tutor training costs with Organization "B", they also attempted to operate out of their existing location. However, it proved to be very inadequate. There was not sufficient privacy for the learners and tutors and interruptions were constant. The atmosphere was not sufficiently conducive to learning. The role of the organization in dealing with people in crisis made the environment a very turbulent one. As a result, tutors began to take learners to their own homes for sessions. This was an untenable situation and the director recognized that this was putting severe constraints on the implementation of the program. The experts who had run the tutor training programs had emphasized that tutors should *not* take their learners home. Therefore, the Director began to look for alternate locations in which to hold sessions.

Because of the lack of viable space, only 7 out of 20 trained tutors had been matched with learners by late fall of 1987. The program came to a virtual standstill. While these problems bogged down the program, the internal political difficulties facing the organization came to a crisis. The organization's supporters and employees split into two opposing groups. In addition, allegations of misappropriation of funds resulted in bank accounts being frozen until the problems could be worked out. Unfortunately, the funds from the Ministry to cover the literacy program were included in the general fund and were thereby made unavailable to the Program Director.

During that winter, the Director had searched for alternate funding and had arranged to rent a church basement in which to hold tutoring sessions. The rental fee was paid by the Director herself. She hoped to be able to

continue the work already started, although she recognized that the chances of success in the short run were limited at best. She was, at that time, attempting to obtain furniture and other necessary supplies from charitable organizations, with only limited success.

Another problem in the implementation of the program arose when the collaboration between Organization "A" and Organization "B" broke down. For the first six months of their respective programs they had been working relatively well together in the recruitment and training of tutors. However, disagreements between the two Directors led to a complete separation of the programs in the early fall, putting further strain on the finances of both groups, not to mention the strain on the goodwill between the two organizations. This type of situation typifies a political instability common in Native organizations.

It should be noted at this point that the Director of Organization "A", although apparently willing to co-operate in this study, was in reality difficult to reach. She cancelled numerous meetings and promised data and information that she did not deliver.

In summary, it should be noted that the Literacy Program of Organization "A" suffered numerous implementation problems. Most of their problems were not due to flaws in the design of the program but rather the political situation faced by the Director as a result of the internal crisis. Her attempts to rectify the problems by searching out alternate funding and support had not born fruit at the time the study ended. Further research would be needed to determine the long-range effects of the political crisis on the implementation of the literacy program.

## **Organization "B"**

Organization "B" has offices in the inner city area known as Cabbage-town. They rent the basement of a modest building on a busy street. The location is in the hub of an area commonly used by the city's Native population. The client population of this Organization is quite different from that of Organization "A". This group caters to the problems of Native women and their families. It was formed as a collective in response to the needs of young Native women who required assistance in job searching and in skills development.

The organization recently went through an organizational change and adopted a simple hierarchical structure. All employees and volunteers now report to an Interim Director. This new structure was necessary to eliminate a conflict which was hampering the effective functioning of the old structure, one which was more open and based upon consultation and consensus-

style decision making. It is interesting to note that when the organization attempted to operate along the co-operative, consensus lines of traditional Native culture, they were unable to do so. Over two centuries of assimilation and acculturation into Euro-Canadian ways of thinking and ordering life have had a tangible, and, it could be argued, negative effect upon Native life.

Organization "B" is small; the only paid employees are the Director of the literacy program and her assistant. The other six employees of "B" are trainees covered under a government grant. Most work at the organization is done by volunteers, who are Native and non-Native women, all committed to the work being done by the group. The outreach programs at the centre are geared primarily to Native women, although the literacy program is offered to any members of the Native community who wish to avail themselves of this service. Organization "B" has established a network of referring agencies among eleven other Native community organizations and Canada Manpower. In addition they network with other organizations offering literacy programs and are continually looking for ways to improve their program.

The bright basement location for Organization "B" is an adequate venue for holding tutor training sessions and for tutor/learner meetings. The basement has windows, being only partially below ground, and is pleasantly furnished. The ambience is welcoming and friendly. Part of the growing success of this literacy program is due to the availability of this space in which to hold classes.

Like Organization "A", "B" began its program in the spring of 1987 with a grant of \$40,000 from the Provincial Ministry of Skills Development, under the Ontario Community Literacy Grants Program. The Director of the program, a Native woman originally from Northern Ontario, began a simultaneous process of curricula development, program design, recruitment and tutor training, recruitment of learners, and networking with other organizations. The Director found this to be a difficult process, but not overwhelming. Her assistant cannot devote all her time to the program, although she is a full-time employee of the Organization. She spends about one third of her time working on the literacy program and the rest doing other duties, such as organizing other projects, managing the office and publishing the bulletin.

The Director's training and background as a teacher of English as a second language stood her in good stead in the early development stages. However, she was trying to run the program at "B" while also teaching adult education in a formal educational institution. She was unable to keep up with both jobs and confided that it was difficult to choose. Shortly before the conclusion of this study she resigned from "B". She was replaced by one of the Native tutors who is university trained. I regret I did not have a

chance to work closely with the new Director, as she seemed to have a lot of energy and enthusiasm to bring to the position.

At the end of the study, "B" had eleven registered learners and most of their tutors were working. Of the eleven learners, nine were continuing, one had completed her goals and one had dropped out. All learners were at different stages, from university entrance level to basic reading and writing. The first Director estimated that learners remained in the program from two months to one year.

The first Director of the program was most helpful. She provided me with materials and allowed me to tape discussion sessions between tutors and learners. We met several times and had lengthy conversations about the program, its problems and successes. Her evaluation at the time of her resignation was that the program was a success. Although the program was still small, it seemed to have considerable potential. She felt as long as funding remained available they would be able to maintain their momentum.

## **Ontario Community Literacy Grants Program**

Both Organizations "A" and "B" were funded under the Ontario Community Literacy (OCL) Grants Program, developed by the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture. The program is administered by eleven Provincial ministries. The number of departments involved and the nature of this program makes it both complex and rather inflexible. Native organizations or communities seeking funding under this program turn to the Ministry of Skills Development for their funding. As program implementation for both organizations was totally dependant upon this funding source, it is important to take a look at the structure of the OCL Grants Program.

The stated purpose of this literacy program is to:

enhance the development and delivery of community-based adult basic literacy programs and services for Ontario residents:

- for whom a lack of literacy skills has been a barrier to participating fully in society, and
- who have been unable to benefit from the existing institutional delivery system (Province of Ontario, 1986:1).

In order to qualify for a grant under this program the organization must be community-based, not-for-profit, and operating under a board of directors. The program must take place in one region or municipality and comply with the following regulations regarding the delivery of the program:

- take place in an informal atmosphere;
- in locations convenient to the participants;

- at convenient times;
- with instructional methods and content relevant to participants' lives, experience and aspirations;
- effectively free or at minimal cost to the users.

The Province considers most programs as on-going, although funding is discretionary and organizations must apply on an annual basis. (But note that both organizations in the study reported they were told to anticipate a cut back in funding in their second year of operation.) The application process is a complex one, requiring extensive documentation, including a complete and detailed description of the organization, its proposed program in great detail, full disclosure of finances, budgets, and job descriptions, etc. After the first year, complete evaluations of the previous years work are also required.

The sheer volume of forms that need to be submitted can be daunting to small, community-based organizations, and any mistakes made could cost the group its chance at a grant.

The responsible Ministry then evaluates the applications to determine the level of funding deemed sufficient. The guidelines published by the OCL Grants Program gives the following criteria (Province of Ontario, 1986:5) used for this evaluation:

- identified needs and priorities in a given region/community;
- geographic area served;
- potential number of users;
- scope of programs and services delivered;
- number of individuals served;
- whether other organizations are serving the same constituency or carry out similar functions in the same geographic area;
- provincial priorities related to ABL (Adult Basic Literacy), to be identified annually;
- the length of time the organization has been in operation and its track record in delivering ABL programs and services;
- accepted norms in the community and the literacy movement regarding salary and operating costs;
- the total requests and resources available.

Organizations "A" and "B" come under Stream B of the program which funds start-up projects for special target groups such as Native people. In order to maintain project funding, both organizations must demonstrate the following (*Ibid.*:6) in addition to meeting the criteria noted above:

- demonstrate the commitment and the capacity to implement the project;
- demonstrate support from the constituency which will benefit from the project;
- subscribe to the intent and spirit of the Ontario Human Rights Code; and
- demonstrate its ability to operate as a responsible organization or seek a trusteeship arrangement with another established, responsible organization.

In this section it is possible to see where Organization "A", in particular, could run into trouble if it doesn't solve its internal problems quickly.

Overall, the program fills a need. Ontario has been experiencing a rising rate of school drop-outs and therefore increasing numbers of functionally illiterate or totally illiterate adults. There is obviously a need for a new venue for those who, for a variety of reasons, are not being served by mainstream education. Marginalized groups, such as Native people, are one such group.

The educational system available to Native people is of very uneven quality. Some Reserves have taken control of their own schools, whereas others are under provincial jurisdiction. There is an ongoing problem getting well-trained teachers to go into remote areas, and communities too small to have their own schools are still having to send their children out to board in larger communities. Some parents in very small communities refuse to send their children out and try to undertake the teaching duties themselves, with variable results. Another factor in this situation is that many teachers are unfamiliar with Native cultures and often misunderstand behaviour. Discrimination in mixed schools against Native children is well-documented. All these factors have combined in Ontario to produce an undereducated Native community. Therefore community-based organizations are taking advantage of the Ontario Community Literacy Grants Program to try to redress the inequities.

The Province also has a vested interest in educating marginalized sectors of the population if one examines the numbers of dollars going into welfare services for undereducated and unemployed citizens.

## Implementation Problems

Both organizations shared a number of common problems in the implementation of their programs. They come under the following broad categories:

### 1. Recruitment of Tutors

The majority of people who responded to the call for tutors were non-Native women. The organizers had hopes for a more positive response from the Native community. According to the Director of "B", the result was that the tutor-training course had to be supplemented by more sessions on Native culture. The potential tutors were warned they would be facing fairly difficult cross-cultural barriers to overcome. There has been an on-going marketing effort to try to recruit more Native tutors, but one of the key problems is that those members of the Native community who have the training and education to undertake this type of volunteer work are usually already working to capacity on various other projects. The need for trained, educated individuals with time to contribute is critical and the resources few.

### 2. Problems Faced By Tutors

Many tutors reported facing certain common problems:

- coping with learners not showing up for sessions;
- feelings of failure and inadequacy when facing some of the learners who had many problems, such as alcoholism or drug abuse;
- some non-Native tutors felt very nervous, didn't know how to handle the cultural differences, e.g. becoming used to silence, non-verbal communication methods, a more circular way of reasoning (rather than the linear scientific mode of the Western culture);
- some tutors felt that life-experience differences were more difficult to overcome than cultural differences;
- tutors complained it was difficult to set a program that would meet a learners needs;
- tutors asked for more reference materials, such as a bibliography of grammar books;
- tutors felt that the matching of tutors to learners was one of the most critical aspects of the Director's work. If a match were not good it could completely scuttle the possibilities of a successful learning situation. It was felt that the learner should not be older than his/her tutor if at all possible, as most Native people would feel awkward with a younger teacher.

### **3. Recruitment of Learners**

Both organizations networked with other major Native organizations in the city and with Canada Manpower to recruit potential clients for the programmes. Recruiting learners proved to a more difficult process than any of them had anticipated. Both Directors reported the same information, that is that the legacy of mistrust of education, and the feelings of inferiority and inadequacy which are the lot of most illiterate people, are hard barriers to overcome. If one adds the discrimination faced by Native people this becomes an even more powerful reason to keep individuals away from literacy programmes. Even if an individual does agree to sign up for a programme, getting him or her to come and keeping him or her coming is a difficult process. Individuals needing the service have to overcome fear and feelings of alienation to take advantage of the opportunity. Referring agents have to work hard to encourage individuals to attend. Once the individuals are in the programme the tutors have to be sensitive to the non-verbal signals of the learner and be very encouraging and positive.

### **4. Problems Faced By Learners**

Many learners bring with them more handicaps than illiteracy into the programmes. More than 50% suffer from alcoholism or drug abuse. This puts a tremendous strain upon their capacity to study and learn. My learner respondent talked about this issue as follows:

It takes an alcoholic three years to be able to function normally again after quitting drinking, before the brain can absorb knowledge and the memory is functional. Even after one and a half years they still get muscle spasms. One man I know, after over a year later, says his memory is returning and he is looking to go back to school.

The implications for this are tremendous. Most tutors are not sufficiently trained to deal with the problems of alcoholics and should work with them in tandem with experienced counsellors. Again, my most knowledgeable respondent spoke to this issue:

There are lots of educated people out there who are not using their education. They also need counselling with the education, so they can put the education to work. If there are problems with abuse or alcohol they need help; learning to read and write is not enough. They also need direction, to know what they can do with the education.

Learners suffering the effects of substance abuse may make the decision to go back to school and get help, but are under a great strain to try to keep the commitment. My respondent elaborated on this:

The problems are many: financial, commitment, abuse problems, identity problems. As soon as they know who they are they are willing to take the first step. They have to deal with the old pains to regain their identity. Learn to be truthful with themselves. <193>They have to think about how to get money for rent, supplies, transportation and food, also for extra and 'vices'.

It is difficult for the learners to cope with learning the discipline needed to be successful and to overcome their daily frustrations with the learning process. It is obvious that the problems of the learners are many and the trained personnel to deal with these problems are few. This could ultimately have an impact on the type of clientele in the programmes. There may be a natural elimination of those too difficult to handle, due to lack of tutors with whom to match them. A follow-up study would have to be done to see the impact of learner problems on the implementation of the programme as a whole.

## **5. Funding Problems**

Both organizations anticipated cut-backs in funding after the first year. Rumours in the Ministry of Skills Development were being passed on down the line that the Provincial Government was going to cut back on the whole programme. This had both Directors investigating other sources of supplemental funding.

In addition, the policies of the Ontario Community Literacy Grants Program, being quite stringent, would make it difficult for these small organizations to qualify for sufficient funds in their second year unless they demonstrated the successful implementation of a viable program. Organization "A" in particular faced a difficult task with regards to renewal of provincial funding. Its internal problems had impacted on the programme so severely that they ran a great risk of losing provincial support, unless they could prove they have been successful in some quantifiable way.

Even at the beginning the Directors of both organizations had said that their funding was inadequate to the task. Neither organization was able to hire sufficient staff. The collaboration between "A" and "B" which helped relieve some of the financial strain on both organizations at the beginning, ended because of conflict before even two tutor groups had been trained. This then put each organization on its own, thereby straining already limited funds. The long-term prognosis of success based upon an assumption of availability of funds from this government source only is problematical for both organizations, but especially poor for "A".

## 6. Prognosis

### Organization "A"

"A" has quite a number of problems to overcome. During a recent election for a new Board of Directors, a new slate, proposed by the Literacy Programme Director, was elected and seemed to be getting things under control again. Funds were expected to be released by the new year. However, even if "A" solved all of its internal problems in time to save the program, it had lost months at a critical point early in the implementation process and many of its tutors and learners had grown disillusioned and left the programme. It would take a great effort on the part of the Director of "A"'s Literacy Programme to salvage sufficient clientele and tutors to retain provincial government funding.

The Director of "A"'s Literacy Programme also spent a great deal of time looking for alternate funding, so much so that she felt her other duties were being neglected, to the detriment of the programme. However, I should note here that the Director of "A"'s programme is a most determined and talented individual. If anyone can keep the project afloat, she can.

### Organization "B"

The prognosis for "B" seems to be healthier. Because "B" has not had to struggle with the financial and political problems facing "A", its programme had been able to move along at a steady pace, slowly increasing the numbers of people being served. Although staff time was limited, still the minimum requirements were being met. "B" would be able to present a fairly healthy report to the Ontario Community Literacy Grants Programme when it re-applies for funding. This augers well for continued provincial support.

However, "B"'s Director is aware that provincial monies are not enough; for the Programme to succeed over the long term, alternate funding is necessary. This was being investigated as the study concluded and the Director was optimistic that sufficient alternate funds would be obtained.

The Directors of both programmes said they felt the time spent in searching out alternate funding was taking them away from what they felt was the most important job, that of matching learners to tutors and supervising the program. They were both quite open about the stress brought about by the uncertainty concerning finances.

Overall, the Literacy Programmes of both organizations face uncertain futures due to the unreliability of funding. However, as long as they can keep getting funding, they should be able to continue in their work. As noted

above, "A" had some difficult problems to overcome, but had the potential to succeed. "B" had had an easier time of it and should be successful in both the short and the long term.

## Conclusion

The problems faced by small non-profit, community-based organizations trying to implement community service programs cannot all be addressed in one short study. I have tried, in this study, to show how two such organizations, using limited human and financial resources, put into operation literacy programmes to serve a real need in their community.

Without determined leadership neither programme could have been launched successfully. The amount of paperwork and legwork it takes to source out funding for such programmes is daunting. Keeping the funding is equally difficult, and subject to the vagaries of governments and other sources.

It is too early in the life of these programmes to foresee the future with any great degree of accuracy. It is probable, however, that they will both be successful in the future. The factors which are in their favour are the determination, hard work and faith they have in their programmes. Factors which may mitigate against success are the problems of funding, staffing and the chronic political instability of some Native organizations over time. In the case of the two organizations reported above, "A" has been in operation over ten years, but is also politically unstable. "B", although only operating for less than three years, seems to have stable leadership.

The power of people who want to change their future is considerable. As Marlene Brant Castellano has stated:

Ordinary people are capable of generating the knowledge necessary to guide their actions (1986:50).

These fledgling programs amply illustrate that sentiment, and with hard work and commitment will be successful in their endeavours.

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