

EXPERIENCING URBAN SCHOOLING: THE ADJUSTMENT OF NATIVE STUDENTS TO THE EXTRA-CURRICULAR DEMANDS OF A POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAM

James Ryan

Department of Educational Administration
The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario
Canada, M5S 1V6

Abstract / Resume

This study describes the experience of post-secondary Native students as they adapt to life in a city. Problems associated with housing, family, finances, and racism generate considerable stress for these students, which in turn, impedes their ability to succeed in their program. Three potential solutions to these problems are then reviewed.

L'étude décrit l'expérience des étudiants autochtones d'enseignement supérieur face à leur adaptation à la vie urbaine. Les problèmes du logement, à la famille, des finances et du racisme donnent naissance à beaucoup de stress chez ces étudiants, et cette pression entrave leur capacité à réussir dans leurs programmes. L'auteur examine trois solutions possibles des problèmes.

For centuries now North America's Native people have found themselves adapting to social conditions imported by Europeans.¹ At first such adaptations were minimal. Many groups simply incorporated what was thought to be the superior technology of the Europeans into their living patterns and continued to live their lives as their ancestors had done for years (see Ryan, 1988). These marginal changes did not last long, however. Within a few short centuries the sheer numbers of Europeans, along with the liberal use of their technologies, decimated game animals and other resources upon which Native groups depended for their livelihood. Because they could now no longer sustain themselves in traditional ways, Native people had no other choice but to adopt, and to adapt to, political, economic, and moral conventions that differed considerably from those which they had practised for centuries (Ryan, 1988, provides a recent example). Native people were forced to take up residence in sedentary communities and Reserves, pursue wage labour activities, conform to the demands of organized work, and abide by a whole host of regulations set down by various levels of non-Native government. Adjustment to Euro-Western ways has been an arduous process, the products of which are all too visible. Perpetual unemployment, poverty, family strife, welfare and drug dependencies, and despair are often the norm rather than the exception for many of Canada's Native people.

To cope with these realities, many Native people have looked to formal education (see, for example, National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). Schooling, many believe, has the capacity to equip Native people with the knowledge and skills required to get along in today's world. Ironically enough, formal education, conducted as it is within a Euro-Western tradition that controls the conditions for learning,² may also require substantial adjustment on the part of those Native students who attend, an adjustment that may have a decisive impact on their ability to do well in these programs. This is true even of those programs that cater to Native students.

The study outlined here describes Native students' experience of the circumstances associated with their participation in an on-campus university program. It examines first and foremost their experience of city living and documents how the adjustments associated with this experience influence their studies. While numerous studies have addressed the Native urban experience (Burt, 1986; Leibow, 1989; Shoemaker, 1988; Graves, 1970; Mucha, 1983, 1984; McCaskill, 1970, 1981; Clatworthy and Hull, 1983; Dosman, 1972; Moronis, 1982), the issue of temporary student migration to cities on the part of Native people seeking to expand their educational horizons, and the subsequent impact on their capacity to apply themselves to their studies, has received scant attention. By filling this gap, I hope to provide insight into the learning experience of these Native

students, not only for the benefit of the increasing numbers of Native people who are travelling from their home communities to attend educational institutions today, but also for those who are responsible in some fashion for designing programs that may or may not be tailored for Native people. The article is organized in the following manner. First, I describe the research setting and methods. Next, I recount students' experiences of city living and illustrate how they impede their ability to succeed in the program. Finally, I discuss the issue of urban adjustment and explore three possible solutions to the problems faced by Native students in cities.

Research Setting

The study here focuses on a one year entry level program designed to equip Native students with the skills to succeed in a Nursing degree program, and a four year Nursing degree program that these students attend once they complete this one year program. In particular, it centres on the thirty-five Native students who attend the preparatory year and the degree program. The students, all of whom are women save two, vary with respect to age, previous education, work history and family status, and with the exception of a handful, have travelled from communities in the more northerly regions of Canada to attend this on-campus program. Most of these students have children and spouses whom they invariably bring with them when they come to the city. The city in question is small by North American standards. Although there is a small contingent of Native people residing there, most residents are of European descent.

While this program has achieved a measure of success, it has not been without its difficulties. On the one hand, most Native students have been able to make it through the qualifying year. On the other hand, however, the majority encounter substantial difficulties in the first year of the degree program. In fact, all but a few experience failure of one sort or another. Of the twelve students who entered during the first year of the program, for example, only two have proceeded on schedule: both are now in their fourth year and preparing to graduate. Most of the remaining students have repeated either courses or years.

Methods

This paper describes just one aspect of a larger study which looked at the experience of these students in a more general way. Consequently, at the outset of the study we did not overtly seek to explore the issues associated with city living, other than to follow up on literature sources

pointing to the fact that “support” (Falk and Aitken, 1984; Jeanotte, 1982; Lin *et al.*, 1988; Kulig, 1987) and “cultural differences” (Guilmet, 1981; Greenbaum, 1985; Philips, 1972, 1983; Dumont, 1972; and Deyhle, 1983, 1986) might have some influence on how these students approached their studies. Nevertheless, it quickly became apparent as we talked to students and instructors that the experience of adjusting to life in this community played a significant role in the way Native students dealt with their school work. Once we recognized the centrality of these issues, we specifically targeted them for exploration.

A research team of three investigated these issues over the course of a school year, from September to early May. We scrutinized various documents, sat in on selected classes, and talked to people associated with the program. While documents such as course outlines, and classroom observations did yield some important information, the most valuable data were acquired by talking to students and instructors of the program. We conducted in-depth interviews with all students with the exception of four (with whom we were unable to make a connection), instructors of the preparatory program, and those who instructed Native students in the first year of the degree program.

When the data collection phase ended, transcripts of taped interviews, along with selected information from course outlines and classroom observations were analyzed, subsequently organized around themes, one of which included city living, and written up. Participants were then given the opportunity to read and to comment on the final written accounts. I eventually incorporated a number of insightful comments from these people into this manuscript.

City Living

For many of these students, especially those who have lived in isolated northern communities, moving to live in a community like the city often requires a radical change in lifestyle. Consequently, these students have to cope with much more than what will be a novel experience at the university. One student, for example, observes that she has had to adjust “not only academically, but socially because you carry all sorts of things [with you].” Students are forced to adjust immediately to what many find to be not only a bewildering, but a threatening environment. For some, their first introduction to the City can be frightening. Jina, for example, recalls that “it was kind of scary when I first got off the plane and I didn’t really know where to go. I didn’t know anyone here in the city.” But even when Jina and others eventually figure out where they want to go, getting to those places

presents yet more problems, at least in the initial stages of their move. Jasper tells us that

It was difficult at first. I didn't know anything about the town. I didn't know how to get around. It was really hard for me at first—just getting around. I didn't know which buses to take to come to school and I didn't have a place to stay.

Although getting around the city remains time consuming for some, the majority of students eventually find their way around both the city and the university without too much difficulty. Most of these students, however, must deal with problems of a more serious nature, problems which cannot be overcome as quickly or as easily. The more salient of these difficulties include finding and keeping suitable accommodation, handling family concerns, managing finances, and dealing with racial discrimination.

Finding Accommodation

The first order of business for all students is finding a place to live. Unfortunately this is the point where a number of students run into their first major obstacle. Suitable houses or apartments are difficult to find in the city at the best of times. Consequently, those with families or those who simply don't know how to locate and rent a place find themselves saddled with a formidable undertaking. But even for those who know what they are doing, obstacles invariably arise. One woman who had a little more experience in these matters planned ahead, coming to the city a month before she was to begin classes. Despite this foresight, the woman, her husband, and four children were frustrated in their attempts to locate suitable accommodations, and inevitably were forced to live out of the back of their truck.

We came in August and brought a load of furniture up. We were looking for a home and had the Home Locator phone number. They kept wanting to settle us in South Side and I kept wanting to go to North Side. We didn't find a place so we put our furniture in storage and went back home. Then we came back on September 3. That meant we had a week to settle in, and get the children settled into school. What happened was... we lived out of the back of the truck, practically the whole week.

An inability to find suitable living accommodations dictates that students make adjustments in their living arrangements. Jill, for example, was forced to leave her children behind because she was unable to find an appropriate place to live.

Finding a suitable house or apartment can also be complicated by discriminating landlords. Many Native students have faced situations where they are told on the phone that accommodation is available, only to be

informed when they show up in person that it has already been claimed. Different students react to these situations in different ways. Janice, for example, will not accept such treatment. If she suspects that she is being treated unfairly she will phone back, and confront the offending landlord. She says

[Sometimes when] looking for an apartment they [the landlord] will say “no not right now”. [I’ll call back later] and they’ll say “yes” [that they do have an available place]. [Then] I’ll say, “I was just there an hour ago and you said there wasn’t any”. It just makes me mad...[so I tell them that] “I could go to human rights, so show me the apartment.” Then they show me the apartment. I found out that aggressiveness can get you somewhere.

Most Native students, however, are considerably less forthright in asserting their rights, and would not consider making an issue out of these sorts of situations. Housing woes do not end, however, once students and their families find accommodation. Difficulties associated with housing continue to plague them. Even those without families are not immune. One single student, for example, has had to move three times since coming to the city. For some, housing problems go from bad to worse, as Jane tells us:

It took me about five weeks to find a place. Then I had to give the first and last month’s rent. Then I moved at the end of December because I didn’t like the landlord. Then I couldn’t find a place. On January 2 I found a place on the second floor above a drinking bar. I find it really hard plus the rent is expensive.

Students who are forced to move for one reason or another may have to settle for inadequate housing because they do not have the time, energy, or resources to seek out better accommodations. These unsuitable living conditions can bring on any number of unexpected hardships, as one student tells us.

For three months now I’ve lived in a motel. The apartment in which we were living developed serious plumbing problems involving ours and another unit. We didn’t think we’d have to wait this long to move back in. We’re staying at the Seaview [Motel] in a two-bedroom unit. There’s supposed to be a kitchenette but there’s only a frig. We hate living there. But I don’t drive so I can’t get around to look for another place, and when I get out of school I don’t have time to look for another place. The motel is too small and the children don’t eat good meals like they used to...We have two children, a boy who is three and the little girl is one year. I had trouble with the boy a

couple of weeks ago. I was putting the little girl to bed and he went outside. I didn't hear him go out and when I came into the living room he was gone. I found him up at the General Hospital. He had crossed Cumberland Street (a main thoroughfare) all by himself. I was scared to death.

Tending to Family Concerns

Family concerns retain a high priority for students throughout their tenure. Students may bring with them as many as six children and a husband as well as other members of their family. Jacinta, for example, has two relatives living with her, along with her husband and four children. Both children and spouses more often than not have difficulty adjusting to life in the city, and their troubles invariably have an impact on the nursing student. Moreover, the mantle of leadership frequently falls to many of these students, and as a result, they find themselves having to shoulder much of the responsibility for the family's adjustment to this new environment.

Many of the children of these students have grown up in a milieu where rules and social conventions vary substantially from those they encounter in the city. These children (and their parents) learn through experiences, which may not all be pleasant, what practices are not condoned in this new setting. They often find, much to their chagrin and surprise, that activities in which they had regularly participated in their community and had virtually taken for granted, are considered inappropriate in this new setting. One woman's children, for example, would take to her neighbour's trees, much to the consternation of the neighbour. Their mother's pleas to refrain from this practice did not make complete sense to the children, and as such, the request was not entirely heeded. The children's actions, in turn, led to a deterioration of relations with the neighbour, and proved to be a continuing source of anxiety for the parent.

These children face many other obstacles. Confronting racial discrimination is perhaps the most unsettling. Dealing with this phenomenon may be especially difficult for those children who come from communities of exclusively Native people where they have never experienced this sort of thing before. The children do not all respond to prejudicial behaviour in the same way. Some submit quietly to taunts and abuse, while others fight back. Indeed, fighting in the school yard is a common occurrence for those who stand their ground, but conflicts of this nature can lead to serious consequences. In one case, a student called in help after her eight year old boy didn't come home after school. The searchers looked for hours until they finally located the boy, devastated and in tears, inside a huge truck tire at a tire store. He had been placed inside the tire hours before by other

children who had then abandoned him.

These children also experience difficulties associated with language barriers and the mastery of the school curriculum which may be associated in part with those same language problems. Many children also miss their relatives and friends. Because of these problems many Native children don't like living in the city, a state of affairs with which most of these students must cope. Jean is just one of many parents who describe their children's distaste for the city.

My oldest child doesn't like it here. He says there are too many strangers. He likes the Reserve better. Maybe it's just that he doesn't know anybody. Whatever the reason, he doesn't like it.

Students' children are not the only ones who have difficulty adjusting to life in the city. Spouses, virtually all of whom are male, have at least as much trouble with the move as the children do. Husbands frequently assume a radically different role within the family. Where a man might have been the provider when they lived in the community, he is likely to assume a more domestic role in the city. While some are able to take on the tasks associated with this new role, others seek to escape their predicaments through alcohol or other means. Such escape mechanisms tend to significantly disrupt the family and generate considerable anxiety for the Native nursing student.

There are few students in the program, however, who do not support dependents. Even so, strong families ties may at times get in the way of their school work. Jina, for example, travels a considerable distance each weekend to be with her family, a habit that is seriously affecting her ability to keep up with her studies. Many students—both those with dependents and those without—must also face the omnipresent spectre of tragedy that seems to follow many of these people around. Students are constantly dealing with catastrophes of various sorts striking family members. Because of the close nature of the extended family such things as the death of a relative—a situation that seems to occur with uncommon regularity—can be most troubling to students.

Managing Finances

All students must cope with limited financial resources. Even though they do receive some government assistance, it is always a struggle for those who must depend exclusively on this amount to get by. Some students are forced to look for additional sources. Jolene, for example, has had to take a part-time job to make ends meet, a move that has decreased the time she is able to devote to her already heavy school work load. She

maintains that the job

helps me financially, though. I had too many bills. After I paid my bills I was left with \$20.00 and what can you do with \$20.00? The bills won't wait until I graduate to get paid.

Joanne relates that out of her \$1000 monthly allowance, she must pay out \$300 for day care, a rate, incidentally, that is lower than some of the other students in her position pay. Out of the \$700 that is left she must pay for rent, food, clothing and many other incidentals. Joanne feels badly that she is not in a position to give her four year old daughter more. As she says, "It's pretty tough on both of us. I can't provide many of the things she wants."

Life is difficult enough operating on a shoe string budget. It becomes almost impossible, however, when the allowance cheques do not arrive on time, a phenomenon that occurs regularly, as Joan notes.

I'm good at handling the finances, except when my Education Assistance doesn't come in. That's happened a few times and that put a lot of strain on my studies. The last cheque I got was on December 23 and the next one I got was February something. We're supposed to get one every month. Some of the instructors will understand [when we can't meet deadlines], but others [including creditors] will not.

When funds run out these people have to take drastic action. Justine had to go so far as to place her children with Children's Aid because she didn't have enough money to provide for them.

We were here for the month of September, and I had to place my children in Children's Aid. The money that we had, I had to make it stretch for the month of September. So we were running out of funds paying for the room, so I placed the kids in their care.

Confronting Racial Discrimination

As mentioned above, racial discrimination plays a part in the lives of most Native people who are in or associated with the program. But this uglier side of life also surfaces at times other than when people are looking for accommodation or when children are in the school yard. Joan, for one, feels such discriminatory behaviour everywhere. She says that

There's a lot [of discrimination] in the city. There's always been. They think that all Natives are the same. One drunken Indian is the same no matter where you go. It's the same attitude anywhere you go.

Julie, as well, has noticed discrimination in the time that she has been in the city. She tells us that

Yeah [people around here discriminate against me because I'm Native]. Or because you don't fit the stereotype, they think well she's different. She's not one [of us]. You know you run into that. But I've been called a squaw. I've never been called a squaw before [this].

Native students react to this phenomenon in different ways. Many either do their best to avoid situations that have a potential to generate prejudicial behaviour, or do not acknowledge that such discrimination is taking place. One student, for example, maintains that "I've always kept my distance from people that I think are like that." Another insists that she always looks to the positive side of things, either ignoring or interpreting behaviour of this nature in other ways. On the other hand, a few students take a more aggressive approach to this sort of behaviour. Jean, for instance, maintains, "I fight back so I don't have a problem. They might discriminate against me behind my back but they won't do it in front of me." Most students, however, simply do not have it in them to respond in this manner.

Julie claims for example, that "People told me to fight back, but I just couldn't. I'm not that type of person." Jane tries not to let such incidents bother her.

You know I can't be bothered with things like that. I just don't let it worry me either. Like I usually just keep quiet and don't say anything.... It's always been there. But what can you do about it? I mean that's the way it is.... But you can't let it get to you. You just can't.

Perhaps the most typical reaction to this phenomenon can be captured in the following student's description of her reaction to a particularly unsavoury comment.

I just turned my head the other way and kept on walking with my head up and my shoulders straight.

Anxiety, Time, and School Work

These and other concerns, which preoccupy these students in ways quite apart from their schooling affairs, have a substantial impact on their studies. Confronting the realities of city living generates first, a considerable amount of anxiety on the part of students, and second, reduces the time they are able to spend on their school work. Such endeavours as looking for housing can produce considerable stress, as Josselin tells us.³

People told us it was hard to get a house. I didn't know it was that hard and it was hard. It was very stressful. There were

times when I was just so upset and frustrated I was ready to fall apart.

Indeed problems associated with these domestic situations inevitably spill over into the classroom. Jasmin, for example, states that

When you have personal problems it really gets mixed up with your schooling. I'm having a really hard time with a really bad personal problem right now. I don't take it to school with me, though. But it's real tough sometimes to sit in school and try to concentrate.

Jill in fact goes so far as to say that what she refers to as outside influences are the major impediment to her and her friends' success in the program.

It's mostly the outside influences [that impede] your schooling. I think every one of us could achieve the goal of being a nurse. I know we could make it, but there's other things besides school that affect our lives.

While sources that originate outside the university milieu may in themselves generate impediments to success in the program, they also take up a considerable amount of the students' time. Time spent with domestic concerns cuts into the time students are able to spend on their school work, a factor which is crucial in a program that allows students only a certain amount of time to master a very demanding curriculum. As would be expected, this state of affairs produces even more problems for these students.

The spectre of tragedy that seems to follow many of these students around both consumes a substantial amount of time and generates anxiety. Students often do not have the time or the desire to do school work when tragedy strikes. Jina, for example, is only one of many who at one time has had to face situations of this sort. She says

Sometimes I don't feel like doing it [school work]. Like different things happen in my life. Like tomorrow I have to go to a funeral, and I have an exam tomorrow I have to study for. And all this time I just couldn't [study]. It was a relative of mine that died. So I don't know how I'm going to make out on my exam tomorrow.

The priority that most of these students give to their families dictates that resolving family problems may come before their studies. As such, many students are unable to put in as much time on their school work as they would like. As Jean maintains, "I think I should have put more into it [her studies]. I've got a family and home, and it's really hard." But even those few who do not have families must put time into coping with problems associated with city living. Because of the serious nature and number of

these problems, it is not surprising, then, that such concerns will take away from time spent in the classroom, from doing assignments, and from studying for tests and exams. Even for those who meticulously arrange their time, there are often not enough hours in the day to accomplish what they must do. Juanita, for example, tells us

I'm busy all the time no matter what I do. I have a schedule for every day and even then I fall by the wayside because I don't have enough time. Most Native students have children so that makes them even busier.

Despite the fact that many of these students have difficulty putting in as much time as their non-Native counterparts, most make courageous efforts. Time spent on school work, however, means time away from family, and this can take an additional toll on students. Many students experience feelings of guilt because they are not able to spend as much time as they would like with their families. Jillian is only one of a number who is plagued with feelings of guilt. She says

I feel guilty when I'm not home, so I try to spend some time with them [family]. Last year one of my sons said that I was spending so much time at school and I was never home. I guess that's on my conscience too.

Students like Jillian are in a no-win situation because there is not enough time to go around. Most certainly, those who do succumb to family pressures of this sort will have difficulty putting in the time necessary to succeed at their studies.

Native Adjustment and the Colonial Legacy

The adaptive strategies and reactions of Native people to city living are well documented. In the United States, for example, various scholars (Burt, 1986; Leibow, 1989; Shoemaker, 1988; Graves, 1970; Mucha, 1983, 1984) have described Native migration from Reservations to cities in the wake of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) sponsored programs from the 1950s through to the 1970s. Movements of this sort in Canada have also been reported. McCaskill (1970, 1981), Clatworthy and Hull (1983), Dosman (1972), Moronis (1982), for example, describe the migration to, and adjustments of, Native people in such cities as Vancouver, Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, and Toronto. These studies, like the one conducted here, highlight the anxiety Native people experience as part of this process, brought on by hardships associated with housing, racism, finances, as well as a host of other factors. What becomes evident in these treatments and in other efforts to provide some theoretical groundwork for this phenome-

non (Hall, 1987; Moronis, 1982), is that Native migration, acculturation, and adaptation differs from the process through which most immigrants or migrants go through.

While this difference can be attributed to a number of factors, I will cite the two which I believe to be the most salient. First, Native reactions to life in the dominant society are shaped by the socio-historical context (Hall, 1989) within which they live, and in particular with respect to city living, the “fresh-to-mind history of colonial subjugation” (Moronis, 1982:196). Today Native people must take a back seat to Euro-Westerners whose values take precedence over traditional Native values in a land where Natives were once masters. The nature of this domination (one which Natives as well as Blacks and Hispanics in North America have experienced) has in turn given rise to an attitude among the dominant group that regards these people as inferior (Cummins, 1986). Unlike most immigrant groups—“voluntary minority groups”—who freely choose to come to North America and to live within a new cultural framework, Native people—an “involuntary minority group”—have no choice but to live by social conventions which both implicitly and explicitly devalue their cultural heritage (Ogbu, 1987). While this devaluation of Native heritage (and people) shows itself in Native communities, it becomes more visible in cities where interactions with non-Natives are more intense. This depreciation may take many forms. The most extreme form manifests itself in outright racial discrimination.⁴ In such cases individuals and groups display an active and purposeful resentment of minority groups such as Natives. Calling a Native woman a “squaw” would certainly qualify as overt discrimination. A second form is not quite so obvious, yet perhaps more common. It is practised both by so-called tolerant and intolerant people when they implicitly devalue individuals or groups because of the ways in which they differ from mainstream Euro-Western norms. These situations occur on a regular basis, and no doubt, most often when those committing the offense do not recognize that they are doing so. Unfavourable reactions by teachers to Native children who are unwilling to speak out in front of their classmates, or curricular choices that ignore or distort Native heritage and history constitute just two instances of these sorts of normative judgements. While these nursing students here generally do not display the extreme behaviour of the skid row residents Moronis (1982) describes, the reality of the colonial legacy nevertheless places a stamp upon each and every one of these people, which they all feel and which makes relations with non-Natives in the city that much more difficult.⁵

A second factor that distinguishes Native migration and adjustment to city living from that of other immigrants, according to Renaud (1967), is the existence of comparatively isolated and homogeneous Native Reserves

and communities. Immigrants are to a large degree cut off from their native land and the influence of its traditions.⁶ Consequently, their cultural traditions tend to slip away as the years go by, and subsequent generations are likely to identify more with local values and traditions. Native communities, on the other hand, have acted as enclaves that have, to a point, fostered elements of Native traditions over the years. As such, Native traditions continue to resist incorporation into the dominant culture in North America, and to persist even under the powerful onslaught of the dominant Western values and practices.⁷ This persistence, coupled with the fact that Native people have the opportunity to return to their communities at will—an option many, including students, take advantage of—provides Native people with a living tradition with which many continue to identify and by which they may live. Tragically, however, it is the inclination of many Native people to identify with their own tradition—devalued as it is by the dominant group—that continues to make life difficult for them in the city (and elsewhere).⁸

Three Alternatives

While the entry level portion of the program described here does assist Native students to cope with some aspects of the Nursing degree program, it can do little to alleviate the anxiety generated and the time consumed as students attempt to cope with city living. This is unfortunate, as these so-called outside influences would appear to affect the ability of these students to succeed in the program at least as much other factors, such as the capacity to master concepts. The situation described here is not unique, however. Hundreds of programs across the country require Native students, particularly those interested in pursuing post-secondary education, to travel to and reside in cities, and although there are few studies that address this aspect of the educational experience, those that do, point to the difficulties of city living (Treftin, 1986).

What then can be done to assist those Native students who wish to pursue post-secondary education, and in particular, various forms of professional education like nursing? Even though the problem of Native participation in the process of formal schooling transcends the realm of education itself (e.g. racism), I will restrict myself here to reviewing alternatives that deal just with the structure of education programs themselves. Indeed it is the structure of modern education, situated as it is within a Euro-Western tradition which takes for granted institutional control over the conditions for learning, that is responsible for many of the problems which these students face. Because educational institutions have the prerogative

to decide, among other things, where, when and what students are to learn, Native students, particularly those pursuing forms of post-secondary education, must travel to central locations in order to participate in this process.

Those interested in helping Native students overcome the difficulties associated with situations like the one described here can pursue one of three types of solutions. The first is to leave the structure of the program essentially intact, and provide measures that are designed to compensate for the type of difficulties encountered. Providing limited forms of financial assistance, housing, child care, and counselling for academic as well as personal matters would seem to be the most obvious steps that could be taken. Most institutions would likely find this route the most attractive. It is relatively inexpensive, and just as important for these institutions, leaves the organizational structure intact. Such solutions, however, are only superficial, very much like prescribing a band aid for a ruptured appendix. Such moves do little to address the roots of the problem, and, outside of a few individual cases, are likely to have little, if any, impact.

A second option would involve limited alterations to the present structure. More specifically, changes of this sort might see changes to the space and time parameters commonly associated with educational institutions. Programs of this sort are currently in existence, some designed specifically for Native students. Distance education programs, for example, such as Brandon University's BUNTEP and Memorial University of Newfoundland's TEPL, give students the opportunity to take courses in or near their home community, thereby avoiding the trauma that inevitably accompanies a move to a different sort of community. Distance education programs also have the capacity to be more flexible in their time demands. It would seem that under less rigid time constraints students are better able to deal with other priorities when they arise, while continuing to pursue their studies at other more convenient times.

Distance education or other programs that provide alternatives to rigid time and space conventions, however, will not provide all the answers. High operating expenses, and difficulties incorporating all components of programs—including, for example, the internship segment of nursing—will continue to pose problems for advocates of such programs. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that more flexible time and space arrangements will have the desired impact on students, particularly students such as those discussed here. Family commitments and problems remain a way of life for many Native people both in their home communities and elsewhere, and although time (and space) demands may be made flexible, there will inevitably be a bottom line to which students must adhere. Finally, it must be acknowledged that the effects of institutional time and space demands are only one of a multitude of problems that impede the success of Native

people in their educational pursuits. While adjusting time and spatial parameters of formal education may alleviate some of the hardships and difficulties experienced by these students, such a move in itself will not solve the problems that many Native people experience with Euro-Western forms of education.

A final option, unlike the previous two, would see fundamental changes not only in the structure of the programs but in the very nature of education itself. In others words, this third solution would see a new beginning. Such a move would require, first and foremost, that Native people assume complete control of the education of their own people. Only with freedom from intrusive government intervention can Native people shed the vestiges of Euro-Western rationality that have thrown so many obstacles in their way, and draw upon their rich cultural heritage for solutions to their present problems. Because of their unique history, Native people are in a position to develop meaningful and lasting solutions because they, in ways few others can, are able not only to recognize and challenge disfunctional components of the current system, but also devise novel and imaginative alternatives. With control Native people would have the opportunity to construct new and different relationships between, for example, potential learners and knowledge, or between education, communities, families, and individuals. The biggest challenge resides, however, not necessarily with acquiring physical control of this process, but with the capacity of Native people to shed the Euro-Western rationality that continues to penetrate thinking and to obstruct inventive approaches to education. If Native people are able to free themselves from these ways of thinking, then the potential for generating new modes of being through novel structures is endless.

Notes

1. This study was made possible by a grant from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.
2. In contrast to the way many Native groups approached teaching and learning in the past, most formal educational institutions today control, for example, where and when learning is to take place, and what is to be learned (Longstreet, 1978; Philips, 1983).
3. Scholars such as Trueba (1989, 1987), Mehan *et al.* (1986), Rhueda (1987), King and Ollendick (1989), and others have documented the devastating impact which excessive stress has on minority students in school.
4. This is not to reduce racism to merely a form of depreciation: the causes and visible effects of racism are much more complex than such a reduction would suggest. The point I am making here is that such depreciation shows up in practices of racism.
5. Unlike the residents of skid row, these students have, to an extent, bought into the system, and as such, take these negative evaluations much more seriously.
6. Even so, there are some ethnic communities which thrive in the midst of North American cities, and to a degree, keep alive some elements of their heritage.
7. Although traditional practices continue to slip away, elements of such practices continue to persist. See, for example, Ryan (In Press).
8. A strong identification with one's own minority heritage may have positive effects, provided of course that this identification is a positive one, a situation that happens all too rarely with involuntary minority people (Natives, Blacks and Hispanics). Cummins (1986) notes that those who identify strongly and positively with their heritage, even in the face of the dominant society's devaluation, are likely to do better with their studies than those minority people who identify less positively with their heritage.

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