

LEARNING FOR SELF-DETERMINATION: COMMUNITY-BASED OPTIONS FOR NATIVE TRAINING AND RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

THE INTERNATIONAL STRUGGLE FOR INDIGENOUS SELF-DETERMINATION

Throughout the globe indigenous peoples are fighting for the right to exist as distinct peoples and to prosper in their own cultures and traditions. The struggle for indigenous self-determination continues in the Americas, Australasia and Africa, and has taken many forms. The stakes are vast in human terms, the hostile forces formidable.

The past decade has witnessed many important gains in this international struggle. Canadian and American Indians, for example, have developed effective political organizations to represent their interests in society at large. In Australia, aboriginal groups have taken control of local health care and have created delivery systems appropriate to the needs of their people.

However, the forces hostile to indigenous self-determination have also made gains during the same period. Intensified pressure has been exerted by imperialist institutions on the traditional lands of indigenous peoples. Large-scale resource extraction, in particular, has resulted in massive social and environmental devastation in many parts of the world. In some countries, especially those in Latin America, indigenous peoples must, every moment of every day, wage the most fundamental battle of all - the right to live. Continued economic recession and the ascendance of governments opposed to the legitimate aboriginal rights of indigenous peoples in both rich and poor countries will ensure that these hostile forces will not abate in the foreseeable future. Indeed, the struggle may become even more difficult and demanding in the years ahead.

THE PROMISE OF COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVES

What reasons are there, then, to be optimistic that the global struggle for indigenous self-determination will ultimately be successful? We do not presume to be able fully to answer such a complex question. However, we have found evidence for considerable optimism in Canada which may be of interest to activists and students of indigenous struggles elsewhere.

The reasons for our optimism are to be found in the vitality and creativity of the struggle at the local community level. It is at the local level, on reserves

and in Metis communities, that Native peoples in Canada have been developing new and more appropriate ways of advancing their collective interests. More specifically, the Canadian experience demonstrates that two areas in particular - training and research - have served as fertile ground for the emergence of some especially creative, local-level initiatives directed towards native self-determination.

It should be noted that the potency of locally-based training and research methods for community problem-solving and mobilization has begun to receive international attention. A recent issue of the German journal, *Adult Education and Development*, for example, carries articles on community-based adult education for and by indigenous peoples in Australia, Chile, Sweden and Thailand.¹ Case studies on community-controlled, or "participatory", research in indigenous communities in Peru, India and Canada have appeared in international publications as well.² The Canadian experience, therefore, must be viewed within the context of this broader, global experience.

NATIVE STUDIES AND THE NATIVE MOVEMENT REFLECTION AND ACTION

The purpose of this special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* is to present a sample of the experience in community-based training and research for native self-determination in Canada. This sample is meant to illustrate some of the breadth and texture of this experience; it is not, however, intended to be exhaustive. The experience is so dynamic that any reflection on it is almost necessarily historical. Nevertheless, the articles selected for inclusion here constitute some of the best and most current analysis available to a public audience.

Regular readers of the *Journal* may be struck by the non-academic style of some of the articles which follow. Most have been prepared by activists rather than by scholars but readers will find that the articles are no less precise, rigorous or critical in their analysis or their style. Some readers may, in fact, especially enjoy the sense of immediacy and action orientation of these selections.

In our view, however, a broader point must be made here. Providing an ongoing forum for reflection on past action and for the development of new action strategies by native people is quite properly an important role of Native Studies as a discipline. It seems as if the use of Native Studies as a means of reflecting on political and social action taken by the native movement has declined in recent years. Resources are simply too scarce, and the demands of the struggle ahead too great, to permit this to continue. We hope that this collection of articles will, in a modest way, encourage others to reflect on the activities of the native movement and to feed this analysis back into the movement in a spirit of solidarity, mutual support and dialogue.

PEDAGOGY AND POLITICS: THE METHODOLOGY OF PAULO FREIRE

One of the common features of all of the articles selected for this issue is

their direct or indirect debt to the methodology of the Brazilian adult educator, Paulo Freire. Freire, who developed his approach in the rural areas of the Third World, is well-known for his support of the liberation struggles of colonized peoples. His approach to the education of adults has been variously termed a "pedagogy of the oppressed", "education for critical consciousness", and "the practice of cultural freedom."³

It should be made clear that we are not suggesting that the situation of native peoples in Canada is directly comparable to the oppressed classes in the nations of what is called the Third World, although there are many parallels. The nature and extent of the penetration of capital, the elaborate ideological apparatuses, and the particular class structure of Canadian society are important factors which set the case of native people in Canada apart from the colonized peoples of underdeveloped nations.

However, the methodology of Paulo Freire has been important enough in the Canadian experience that it serves as the underpinning to all of the articles to follow, and as such, it bears brief mention here. What is the methodology of Paulo Freire? First, Freire affirms that all education is political; that is to say, education may be used to liberate or to domesticate. Much education in Canada, Freire would say, is of a domesticating kind in that its ultimate purpose is social control.

What is required is a radical departure which recognizes that learning must begin from the reality of the learner and from the concrete, daily struggles in which the learner engages. Freire advocates, moreover, the *collective* production of curricula by the learners in dialogue with a facilitator. Power relations between the facilitator and the learner must be ones of equality. Only then can true dialogue occur. Freire takes the method one step further when he argues that meaningful learning can only be achieved when collective analysis is linked with collective *action*. This completes the cycle of learning.

Another phrase used by Freire is the "culture of silence." Here he is referring to oppressed peoples who are illiterate - in the political as well as the written sense and who, in his words, must learn to "name their world." Paulo Freire's methodology therefore places emphasis on what he terms "generalized words" or "themes" which codify critical meanings in the lives of learners. Group discussion is stimulated through the collective "decoding" of these themes, and strategies of action flow from these discussions naturally. Very often visual means of representing these themes are used, such as photographs, drawings or even videotapes.

The selections in this issue of the *Journal* make use of many of the concepts and methods developed by Freire (although the terminology varies considerably). The intent is not to deify Freire: he would certainly not agree to that in any case. Yet it is important to recognize the methodological commonalities in this sample of experiences in community-based training and research undertaken by native people in Canada.

THE ISSUE OF CULTURE

Although the articles in this issue address the concept of culture in the

Freirian sense, for the most part they do not venture beyond this point. With the exception of the contribution by Joe Couture, the selections do not explore in detail aspects of native traditions and culture unique to native people in Canada. As Vachon has cogently pointed out, native political responses are deeply influenced by native culture.⁴ The importance of this issue is clearly recognized by indigenous leaders throughout the globe. In his address to the Third General Assembly of the World Council of Indigenous People, George Manuel suggests that the most important task facing indigenous people is the revival of their ancient indigenous ideology. "From time immemorial we have had our own ideology. It is strongly linked to our indigenous religions. To strengthen and implement our ideology we must bring our religions back to life."⁵

We are convinced that a community-based native movement is a prerequisite for a culturally-based native movement because essential aspects of traditional native culture, such as a unique world view based upon a stewardship for the land as expressed through native elders, are to be found at the community level. It is to this end as well that we have prepared this special issue of CJNS. However, a culturally-based native movement is profoundly different from the movement we observe and work with today.

We believe that the issue of culture is at the heart of the struggle for self-determination of native people. Indeed much of the misunderstanding and intransigence of government and Canadian society generally described in the articles in this volume result from the fact that we really do not take seriously (even if we say we do) the traditional cultural viewpoint as it is expressed today. When we speak about Indian culture we are accused of trying to turn the clock back to an outmoded past of moccasins and igloos; of taking a position based on unreality and naivete. We, therefore, inevitably approach issues exclusively in terms of Western political culture. It can be argued that this is the case even for some native political associations which appear to have adopted organizational structures and functions more akin to Western models than traditional native cultural values.

For Canadians (even those who are sympathetic and involved with native people) the political question is obvious: it is that of social justice, understood in the sense of respect for human rights generally and, in the case of native people, of their aboriginal rights and their right to political self-determination. It never occurs to us that, for traditional native people, the political question might be a different one. Vachon has observed recently that:

Native people do not raise the social question uniquely or even primarily in terms of rights and social justice, but in terms of duties, responsibilities and consciousness. The problem today, in their view, is not primarily the lack of respect for the rights of man, but the lack of consciousness that man has of the role that nature has assigned to each thing in life, the forgetfulness of his natural place, the ignorance of the "spirits" of things.⁶

As Manuel suggests "... Our ideologies and religions respect all life... even as

man has life, air and sun have life, trees have life, deer and moose have life. Our religions teach us that Mother Earth is the giver of all life, including our own life "7

The implications of developing the link between traditional native culture and training and research remain a relatively unexplored area although, as the Couture article points out, culturally-based training employing humanistic and experiential methods has been occurring in Alberta for several years. A central feature of this training is the extensive use of the skills and expertise of native elders.

It is our intention only to raise the issue of culture here. It remains a fundamental responsibility of practitioners of community-based training and research and those involved in Native Studies to explore the dimensions of this issue and its implications for the broader struggle for indigenous self-determination.

THEMES

The case studies in this volume arc, in one sense, extremely diverse, ranging from the political consequences of a cancelled training workshop in the arctic to a literacy program in downtown Toronto. Indeed, the reader will be struck by the richness and variety of educational experiences occurring in native communities. At the same time, a number of common themes emerge from the selections and bear brief mention here.

Consultants and Educators as Learners.

The role of "outside" consultants and educators in the research and training programs described in this volume emerges as a central issue for social and economic development in native communities. This is because the authors are primarily practitioners more concerned with building an indigenous capacity for collective analysis and action and the generation of new knowledge by people in the community than with scholarly research or conventional educational practices. In this process the consultant and members of the community participate jointly as actors in a mutually inter-dependent venture which Lockhart terms die "insider-outsider dialectic." Consultants, in their role as researchers, contribute knowledge of the functioning of institutions of the larger society as they impinge on native concerns while community members provide expertise in defining the issues and in culturally and behaviourally appropriate ways of addressing them. Together both groups search for methods of linking resources to communities to solve development issues, Lockhart describes this dialectical process as it operated in a tribal association research project in Northwestern British Columbia. Sometimes the consultant's contribution is in the form of technical knowledge, Jackson and McKay report on a participatory research project on a reserve in Northwestern Ontario. They illustrate how native groups can effectively utilize the technical expertise of a group of consultants to develop and control new knowledge to solve community problems.

in an educational context, Witham describes an experiment which applied Freire's methodology to a Native Studies class at Trent University. In this experience instructors and students shed their conventional roles to participate as equals ("teacher-students" and "student-teachers") in order to facilitate a dialogue whereby both can critically analyze their situation in order to "transform their world." Similarly, Henson argues that a non-authoritarian dialogical approach is critical for the success of an urban adult literacy project for native people, and further, that instructors must be part of, or, at least aware of, what is occurring in the native community in order to use that knowledge to assist students in finding personal support and services available to help them. In these roles consultants and educators learn and develop along with the community through the educative process. Over time, by building new understandings and realities, and by contributing to the overall struggle, they come to be no longer considered outsiders by the community.

Indigenous Expertise and Control of Knowledge.

A related theme which is implicit in all the selections pertains to the "insider" side of the dialectic. Members of the community are viewed not as passive consumers of outside expertise, but rather as active partners in a learning process. In conventional research and training programs knowledge is often treated as a commodity which is the legitimate monopoly of a specialized profession. It is assumed that only those trained in that profession can produce it. As Tendon points out, "... ordinary people are not considered knowledgeable or capable of knowing. Therefore, decisions affecting ordinary people are shown to be based on 'expert' knowledge and any attempts by ordinary people to counter these decisions are labelled as 'uninformed'"⁸

The case studies in this volume begin with very different assumptions. There is recognition that, before the arrival of the Europeans, indigenous peoples possessed a viable culture which utilized ways of knowing how to construct a satisfying society. Today native people are searching for ways to use these traditional processes in the development of their present communities. Indeed, as Couture demonstrates, much of the history of native training in Canada is closely linked with the revitalization of traditional ways generally.

Them is, therefore, increasing recognition that community "ownership of the problem" is essential for the success of community-based research and training. This implies undertaking programs in a culturally appropriate manner, with communities assuming responsibility for such areas as setting goals, design, management, delivery and results of projects. This approach recognizes that knowledge is at the core of the issue in research and training. This is particularly true today as the production and transmission of knowledge is becoming increasingly sophisticated and complex. Knowledge is fast becoming the single, most important basis of power and control. Control over knowledge is, therefore, critical to the success of the native movement. Native people must work toward assuming control over the process of knowing and acting.

Jackson and McKay aptly illustrate the importance of community control over technical knowledge in native peoples' efforts to gain political and econom-

ic control over their communities. The Castellan paper describes native peoples' attempt to gain a measure of participation in the formation of a national Indian health policy. These efforts are examples of applying indigenous expertise to the fundamental goal of building a community capacity for generating knowledge (often with the resources of native directed outsiders) to solve social and economic problems.

Role of Government.

No minority group in Canada is more involved with government than native people. From the administrative implications of the Indian Act at the local level to an almost exclusive reliance on government funding of the national political associations, native people are inexorably linked with government in their struggle for self-determination. Many of the articles in this volume document the implications of dependency on government funding. In some cases the funder in fact presents the greatest difficulty for maintaining the integrity of the program. Stiles, for example, details the political ramifications of government intervention in cancelling a native training workshop in the Northwest Territories. Ironically, this attempt to stifle native self-expression backfired by paving the way for a confrontational situation and a considerably more radical learning experience than could have ever been hoped for in the original training event. The cancellation effectively brought together native groups from across the north to challenge the existing authority of government.

Similarly, Hurly discusses the effects of government influence in a community media project in Northern Saskatchewan. He provides an analysis of several factors which contribute to the failure of government sponsored social programs including: a lack of understanding of northern issues by southern bureaucrats, the inherent segregation and elitism of bureaucracies in situations involving marginal groups, the necessary compromises due to political constraints on various areas of public policy, the dilemma of workers who identify too closely with community concerns in potential violation of government policy, and limits inherent in depending on government funding for independent social action. Community projects must, therefore, constantly be aware of the agendas of government funding agencies whose interests in preserving the status quo runs counter to the interests of the native movement in developing skills and knowledge to bring about changes in the forces causing their exploitation and oppression.

THE NECESSITY OF A LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE

As the articles in this issue of the Journal illustrate, many innovative project initiatives in native training and research have been stifled, undermined, defused, delayed or simply eliminated by forces hostile to native self-determination. The strength of such forces should never be minimized, this would constitute a profound strategic mistake. However, it would also be a serious mistake to view

the struggle for indigenous self-determination only in terms of projects and programs.

In the case of the Canadian experience, there has been considerable progress made on many fronts since native people began to organize themselves to gain a measure of local autonomy in the 1950's. The small victories have been cumulative; the momentum of the movement has been built on the creative efforts of thousands of native activists and community residents across the country. The struggle must, therefore, be viewed from a long-term perspective, a perspective which begins with decades and moves across centuries, and encompasses the work of the broadest range of local communities as well as regional and supra-regional organizations.

If we are to learn fully and accurately from experiences in community-based training and research, it is imperative that we employ such a perspective. This amounts to nothing less than recovering the history of training and research within the native movement in Canada and other indigenous movements elsewhere. If we fail to devote sufficient attention to this task, the lessons of history will be lost and this, quite simply, the struggle cannot afford.

A CALL FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE

Although current efforts in community-based training and research by native groups in Canada are rich and point to some very exciting future directions, there continues to be far too little analysis and documentation being undertaken by participants in this work. The native movement can benefit in substantial ways by increased reflection on its action, and Native Studies has a central role to play in encouraging and providing a forum for such reflection.

Furthermore, the demands of future struggles make imperative a *new level of critical reflection*. Greater precision and frankness in analysis of matters relating to the native movement will be needed, though some parties may be caused discomfort. However, the long term benefits will be of greater value when measured in terms of more effective action strategies and tactics. A new era of critical discourse is essential to the new era of indigenous struggle which is now upon us.

Finally, a note of caution must be sounded to non-Canadian readers. The experiences described in this issue cannot be separated from their social and political context; they are rooted in forces and structures of contemporary Canadian society. These forces and structures differ widely from those of other nations, particularly in the Third World. It may not be possible to employ the approaches discussed here in other contexts without inviting personal or collective risk.

Nevertheless, this material has been assembled in solidarity with the international struggle for self-determination. We would be interested in hearing from groups who have found this special issue useful in their own work, and to continue an ongoing dialogue on these important matters.

Guest Editors: Ted Jackson,
Don McCaskill,
Budd L. Hall.

NOTES

1. See *Adult Education and Development*, 17, 1981. available from the German Adult Education Association. Department of International Cooperation. Rheinallee 1, 5300 Bonn 2, Federal Republic of Germany
2. On Peru and other Latin American countries, see especially Vio Grossi, F., Gianotten, V., and de Wit, T (eds.) *Investigation Participativa y Praxis Rural* Lima, Peru: Mosca Azul Editores, 1981. On India, see Fernandez, W. and Tandon, R. (eds.) *Participatory Research and Evaluation: Experiments in Research as a Process of Liberation*. New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1981 One Canadian case study which was received international exposure is Hudson. G., Participatory Research by Indian Women in Northern Ontario Tribal Communities, *Convergence*, 1-2, 1980, available from the International Council for Adult Education, 29 Prince Arthur Avenue, Toronto. Ontario, M5R 1B5.
3. Recent books concerned with the methodology of Paulo Freire include Mackie, R., (ed.) *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo Friere*. London: Pluto, 1980 and Barndt, D. *Education and Social Change* Dubuque. Iowa: Kendall Hunt, 1980. Freire's own most recent major work is *Pedagogy in Process: Letters to Guinea Bissau*. New York: Seabury. 1978
4. Vachon, R: "Political Self-Determination and Traditional Native Indian Political Culture," *Monchanin*, 12 (3). 1979. 39-55.
5. Manuel, George: "Address to the Third General Assembly of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples". Canberra, Australia. April 1981. in *Adult Education and Development*, 17, 1981, pp 39-42.
6. Vachon. p. 47.
7. Manuel, p 40.
8. Tandon, Rajesh: "Participatory Research in the Empowerment of People" *Convergence*, Vol XIV. No. 3, 1981. p. 24