

NATIVE STUDIES
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**NATIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SMALL BUSINESS
MANAGEMENT COURSE: AN EXPERIMENTAL PARTNERSHIP
BETWEEN A NATIVE ASSOCIATION AND A UNIVERSITY¹**

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"The government must adjust its policy and practices to make possible the full participation and partnership of Indian people in all decisions and activities connected with the education of Indian people."

National Indian Brotherhood,
Indian Control of Indian Education, 1972

INTRODUCTION

The past decade has witnessed significant changes in the approach to Native education. Native groups and governments have recognized that glaring socio-economic inequalities continue to exist in Native communities and that conventional educational efforts have, by and large, failed to meet the educational needs of Native people. Nowhere is this inadequacy more striking than in the area of social and economic development training programmes. And nowhere is the need more pressing as Native people begin to assume increasing control over their own affairs. In recognition of this situation a recent government study called for a long-term community-based socio-economic development strategy for self-governing Indian communities.

The resources and time required for communities to prepare themselves for the acceptance of new responsibilities and duties have never been recognized or understood. Many programmes have floundered because of this deficiency. The Indian programme should be aware of the need to provide support and assistance to enable them to include the required preparation as an essential

ingredient in their community plans. Bands should also consider it as a factor in determining the rate at which they can assume governing responsibilities (Beaver, 1979:84).

The report goes on to emphasize that "development has to evolve from the skills, organization and discipline that are *indigenous* in the society" (Beaver, 1979:50). Similarly, a Parliamentary Task Force on Employment Opportunities for the 1980's stressed the need for Native involvement in the planning and implementation of programmes designed to meet their needs. The Task Force recommended an Indian controlled community-based approach to economic development and training.

There should be an Indian economic and employment strategy as well as an Indian education and training strategy developed principally by the Indian people themselves in consultation with the government departments concerned (Allmand, 1981:100).

It is obvious, therefore, that a new approach to Native training requires formulation. It must be an approach that is culturally appropriate and community-based involving Native people from the design of curriculum through to the implementation and management of courses. This necessitates the development of new and creative links between Native associations and educational institutions as partners in the education ventures. Universities and Community Colleges need to develop the capabilities and the will to enter into this partnership which includes expertise in Native education and flexibility with regard to administrative arrangements and selection and accreditation of students.

This paper reports on the two years of operation of such an educational programme, the Native Economic Development and Small Business Management course jointly sponsored by a Native economic development association, Ontario Native Alliance Five2 and Trent University. The course resulted from an economic dilemma which is typical in Native communities. That is, a community group which receives funds from a government agency such as the Department of Indian Affairs or the Local Employment Assistance Programme to establish an economic enterprise to provide jobs for local people is faced with two difficult choices. Because of the lack of skilled people in the community, they either hire a non-Native person to manage the enterprise providing little benefit for the local people or, the more common route taken, try to manage it using untrained local people. The latter choice inevitably leads to failure as was the case in two Native Alliance Five projects: a snowshoe factory in Whitney and a canoe manufacturing plant in Burleigh Falls. These experiences led to a recognition that only a long-term solution which entails the training of their own people in economic development and small business management skills can lead to the economic viability of their communities.

THE COURSE: PEDAGOGY AND POLITICS

In 1980, Alliance Five established an Action Committee with a mandate to

field a course in Native economic development and small business management by the fall of 1981. An initial step was to engage faculty from the Department of Native Studies at Trent University to assist in curriculum development and course organization. From the beginning several assumptions were made by both Alliance Five and the university personnel in order to ensure that the course truly reflected the training needs of the Native community.

1. Course Development

It was clear from the outset that university faculty developing curriculum were employees of the association and, as such, were required to report to the Action Committee. At regular points in the process of developing course curriculum, the Action Committee convened one-day workshops for its membership where course objectives were established and curriculum elements reviewed in terms of their relevance and appropriateness. An Alliance Five member reported that "these meetings were very important in making sure the course met the real needs of our people and that all of us kept the original goals in mind" (Jackson, 1982:2). This process established the norm of Native "ownership" of the course that would continue throughout.

2. Selection Process

The second assumption emerged from the planning workshops. Alliance Five locals expressed the desire that graduates of the course return to their communities to apply their newly acquired skills for the economic benefit of the community. This concern was operationalized, in part, through a selection process which was closely linked to Native Alliance Five and its locals. Two priorities were established in the selection of students; to select students who had good prospects of successfully completing the course and, if possible, to open up training opportunities for at least one candidate for every participating local affiliate of Native Alliance Five. The selection process involved a two-step admissions procedure (Ontario Native Alliance Five, 1982:49-50). First, a local selection panel interviewed each candidate in their community. Members of the Alliance Five local or Band Council were included on the interview team, as well as one representative each from the Native Alliance Five executive, Trent University and the instructional staff. Second, the latter three representatives screened all the applications and made the final selections. Four, equally weighted, selection criteria were established and all candidates were ranked by the local interview panels. The criteria were: past experience (particularly work experience), formal education (minimum of grade 8 standing), community involvement (leadership activities, volunteer work, etc.) and a residual subjective assessment of interviewees based on such criteria as perceived motivation, commitment to return to the community and support of the local or reserve. The political implications of the heavy involvements of the local communities and Native Alliance Five executive were a source of controversy for the course as will be discussed later.

Using this process twenty-two students from Metis and non-status Indian communities, as well as Indian bands across Southern Ontario, were admitted into the course in September, 1981. All told, seventy individuals had applied. A year later in the second year of the course, thirty-six (of 160 applicants) were selected.

3. Integrated Curriculum

It was clear that a distinctive curriculum needed to be developed if the course was going to succeed in meeting the adult Native learners needs. One of the most important factors which made the task difficult was the diversity of backgrounds of students in terms of age, academic skills, leadership experience and confidence level. No pre-packaged economic development or business course could hope to take into account the unique social, economic, academic and cultural situation which characterizes the situation in Native communities in southern Ontario. Indeed, it was the belief that personnel in Native Studies, with their experience in Native education, could assist in designing an appropriate curriculum. The curriculum which emerged from the development process described earlier resulted in the establishment of a course which involved 80 hours of classroom instruction per week for 51 weeks. There were five components to the curriculum: personal development, academic skills development, community economic development, small business management and training-on-the-job placements.

The six weeks of personal development were integrated into the year's work through a number of workshops which utilized experiential methods to meet the learning goal of facilitating the kinds of personal growth necessary for participants to become successful managers. It was recognized that, for some students, major self-image changes might be required to go from the role of being disadvantaged to the role of being managers. A second goal of the personal development component of the course was the formation of participants into a group which developed norms, built trust and provided mutual support. To this end sessions focused on such topics as interpersonal relations, communications, group building, problem-solving, feedback, giving presentations, confidence building and leadership skills.

Six weeks of classroom work, plus weekly evening tutorials, made up the academic skills development component of the curriculum. It was designed to enable students to improve their reading, writing and math skills. Business communications, business mathematics and other practical skills were included. The course contracted with Sir Sandford Fleming Community College to supply the instructor and educational resources for this section of the curriculum.

The community economic development component was designed to provide students with the skills to carry out feasibility studies of needs and resources for economic development in Native communities, the researching and writing of economic development proposals and the identification of suitable financing sources. In this section, various business models were examined and government funding agencies were invited to speak on their requirements. Students also

spent a week in their home communities researching local economic development priorities, then returned to the classroom to prepare proposals based on the community findings.

The largest segment of the course, 19 weeks, was devoted to Small Business Management. Topics in this component included accounting, book-keeping, the management process, marketing, personnel management, business law, production management, office procedures, business structures, and financial planning. A unique aspect of this section of the course was a week long workshop on "Native Culture and Business" designed to explore with Native Elders and business people the relationship between Native heritage and traditions and business development and practice in Native communities.

The final curriculum component involved 11 weeks of training-on-the-job placements spread over seven months. The goal of these placements was to provide students with the opportunity to gain practical experience in helping to manage businesses related to their interests.

A group of educational consultants were contracted to carry out a thorough evaluation of the first year of the course. Their findings indicated that overall the programme had been a success for the nineteen students who received certificates of achievement from Trent at the end of the course.

In summary, as evaluators we have determined that the programme has been basically successful in realizing its short-term goals. The training-on-the-job supervisors who were interviewed judged fourteen of the nineteen year-long participants as competitive applicants for assistant manager or management trainees positions. These results support our view that a clear majority of the students developed small business management skills. Several reports of participants returning to their communities to give economic development leadership are contained in this document (Davie, 1983:2).

The evaluation reported a number of important strengths of the programme including: the selection of course components relevant to course goals and participants' interests, the ability of the staff to adapt curriculum materials to student needs, and the increased social and economic impact of course participants on their local communities. On the other hand a number of concerns also emerged including: the need for increased integration of course components, especially personal development, a tightening of the supervision of training-on-the-job placements and the development of more adequate student assessment procedures (Davie, 1983:83). It would appear, then, that the course developed a relatively successful vehicle for providing training to Native people. A flexible wholistic approach which addressed the personal and cultural, as well as the academic dimensions of learning, combined with the utilization of a variety of pedagogies including practical experience in businesses, as well as continued student involvement in their home community, accounted for the success of the curriculum.

4. Co-Management of the Course: Education and Politics

Perhaps the most innovative aspect of the course was the partnership that developed between Native Alliance Five and Trent University as they undertook to co-manage the programme. Indeed, one of the strengths of the programme lauded by the evaluators was "the basically effective functioning of the Management Committee" (Davie, 1983:82). The Management Committee reflected the goal of Native control of the programme. It was composed of five voting and three non-voting members. Three of the voting positions were held by Native Alliance Five representatives. Two voting members were from Julian Blackburn College, the Continuing Education Faculty of Trent University. The three non-voting members were the Course Co-ordinator, an educational consultant from Trent and a student. It is a testament to the co-operative spirit which generally existed on the Committee that all decisions taken during the first year of the course were unanimously agreed upon.

At the same time a number of important themes emerged from the functioning of the Management Committee, particularly in the second year of the course, which resulted in the partnership being somewhat precarious at times. The situation stems from the coming together in a reciprocal relationship of two groups with the common goal of providing quality training but with widely diverging knowledge bases, reward structures, vested interests and constituencies. On the one hand Trent University, as an educational institution, is committed to a variety of educational norms such as objectivity in student selection, student involvement in educational decision-making and academic freedom. It also receives the most tangible and substantial rewards for hosting the course in the form of generous institutional overhead allocations and staff salaries. Despite these benefits, however, the Trent administration was not actively involved and informed in the management of the course during the first year. It would appear that the course, not being part of the mainstream of university functioning, attracted little attention. This was a source of much concern for Native Alliance Five and the situation changed substantially during the second year of the course.

On the other side of the table, the representatives of Native Five, a political association, were at a very different place with regard to the course. While they shared the overall educational goals of the course, their positions as representatives of a political constituency sometimes diverged from Trent's. For example, conflict arose with regard to the issue of the fairness of the selection of students. The heavy influence of Native Alliance Five and its locals in the selection process resulted in allegations of political bias. Similarly, Alliance Five, in an effort to control access to financial and personnel information, used its majority vote to limit student access to the Management Committee in the second year of the programme. Another source of discontent for Native Alliance Five was the lack of tangible benefits accruing to their organization from the course. Their rewards for sponsoring the course were limited to prestige and political legitimacy. The situation was, to some degree, rectified in year two when members of local Metis and non-status Indian communities were hired as field workers for the

course.

A final potential dilemma for a Native political association involved in a training programme deserves mention. It involves a kind of political schizophrenia that characterizes the position in which the association finds itself. The training of a group of Native people in economic development and small business management will result in the creation of an infrastructure, a new cadre of skilled leaders, in Native communities. These community leaders potentially pose a threat to the existing political leadership through the exercise of their newly acquired knowledge and skills. Several instances of this occurred as graduates returned to their communities and challenged political decisions made by the Native Alliance Five executive.

For Trent the present structure of the management partnership also holds some potential difficulties. A serious implication of the fact that, in controversial decisions, the University can always be out-voted means that the only meaningful final political option available is to withdraw its sponsorship of the course, thereby destroying the programme.

Despite these problems, there was unanimous agreement that the co-management model functioned well. The overall commitment to the goal of providing a quality training programme that paid more than lip service to Native control of the process, an ideal that was fostered from the outset of the course, was sufficient to motivate all parties to carry out the negotiating and compromising necessary to maintain the programme. Indeed, this management partnership was one of the most unique and outstanding features of the course.

5. Funders Agenda

Developing and sustaining a course which involves extensive community involvement and a specially developed curriculum requires financial resources over and above the costs of a pre-packaged economic development or small business management course available from community colleges. Course funding in the first year originated from three sources: a private foundation, Canada Manpower Training Programmes (C.M.T.P.) and the Local Employment Assistance Programme (L.E.A.P.) The success of the first year resulted in the latter two agencies assuming total responsibility for the funding. The first year's budget was approximately one half million dollars, nearly two-thirds of which was allocated to student wages. This large proportion of the budget resulted from the concern that a major factor in the failure of Native educational ventures in the past had been the financial pressures suffered by participants forcing them to drop out. Therefore, the standard C.M.P.T. training allowances were "topped up" by L.E.A.P. allocations to ensure adequate financial support. The budget increased to just under one million dollars in the second year of the programme. The increase reflected the larger student enrollment, from 22 to 36, and an increase in the staff complement of the course.

The generous financial support provided by the funders helped ensure the success of the course but two serious problems inherent in the funding procedures should be raised. The first relates to the short-term nature of the fund-

ing. The year-to-year allocations result in a situation of constant uncertainty as to the continuance of the programme making it difficult to attract staff and make long-term commitments to the Native community.

A second related problem entails the criteria that government agencies use to define the success of an educational programme. The expectations of funders are often out of line with those of the sponsors of the course. For the former, success is inevitably defined in terms of employment placements after graduation. Future funding depends on the course being able to demonstrate a significant proportion of students employed in economic development activities or business a short time after completion of the course. Thus, the three criteria of success imposed upon the evaluators included: employed full-time or part-time at employment intended by course goals; providing community leadership in economic development; and undertaking further education to prepare for future service to the Native community.

The current economic situation with its intolerably high rates of unemployment for Native people make such narrowly defined conditions for funding prohibitive. In order for Native people to acquire management positions, they must have access to investment capital to develop the economic ventures for which the course has trained them. At present, there is no mechanism for developing such long-term economic development projects. Despite these limitations, fourteen of the nineteen graduates met the criteria for success outlined above.

CONCLUSION

The development of community-based training programmes for Native people is a necessary priority for the full development of Native human resources in the future. A large potential market for courses similar to the one described in this paper is indicated by the large number of Native organizations and government departments from across Canada which have requested information on the project. Many Native organizations and communities are shifting their focus of concern toward economic development, business enterprises and the creation of a base of revenue independent of government grants as they assume increasing control over their own affairs. It is well understood that to accomplish this goal a pool of Native people trained in a wide range of social and economic skills will be required and that creative new partnerships will have to be established with appropriate educational institutions. This partnership will entail changes in conventional roles of both the Native associations and educational institutions as they attempt to develop relevant training programmes. The success of the Economic Development and Small Business Management course for the past two years has demonstrated the appropriateness of a wholistic curriculum as well as the effectiveness and viability of a course with a management structure operated jointly by a Native community and a university. This evidence that a philosophy of "co-design" and "co-management" can be operationalized successfully has provided the basis for a more ambitious educational venture. A recent \$300,000 grant from a private foundation has

enabled the establishment of a Native Training Research Institute at Trent University to provide a wider range of programmes to meet the training needs of Native people.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Dr. Ted Jackson, co-ordinator of year I of the course, for his assistance in the development of the ideas in this paper. This paper was originally presented to the Canadian Ethnology Society and Society for Applied Anthropology in Canada meetings, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, May 10, 1983.
2. Native Alliance Five represents twenty-four Metis and non-status Indian communities in southern Ontario.

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