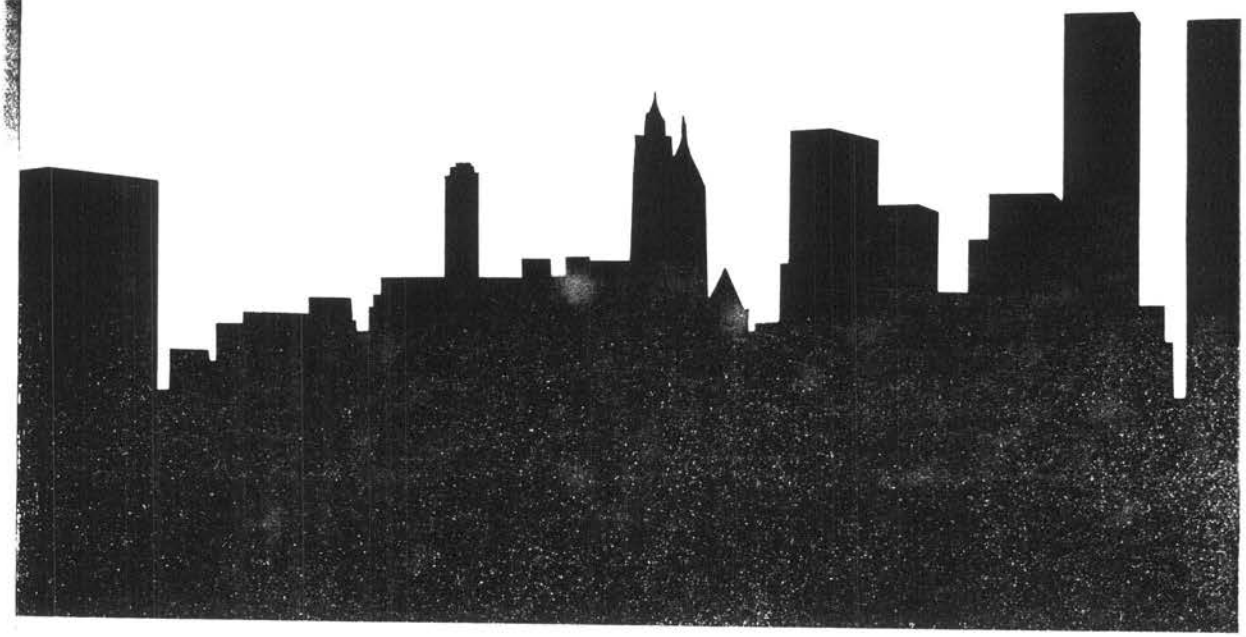
# Native people in urban settings

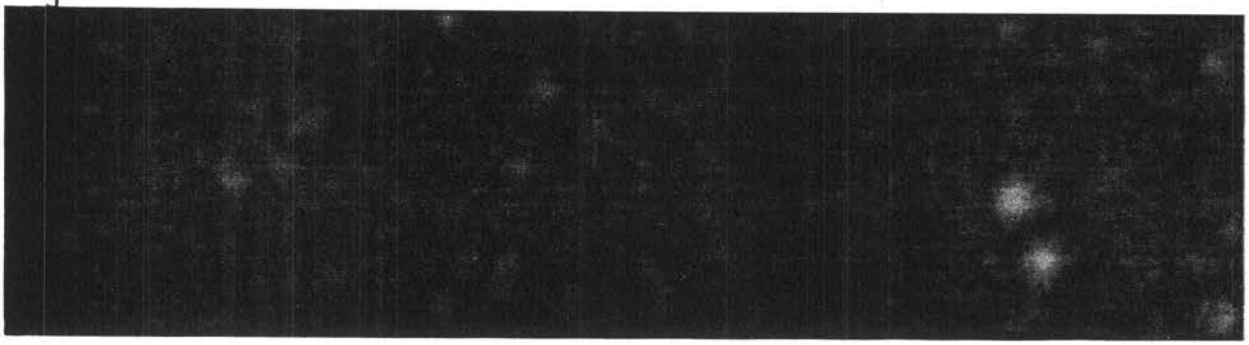


# Native people in urban settings

## Problems, Needs and Services

By Frank Maidman, Ph.D.

A Report of the Ontario Task Force
on Native People in the Urban Setting, 1981.



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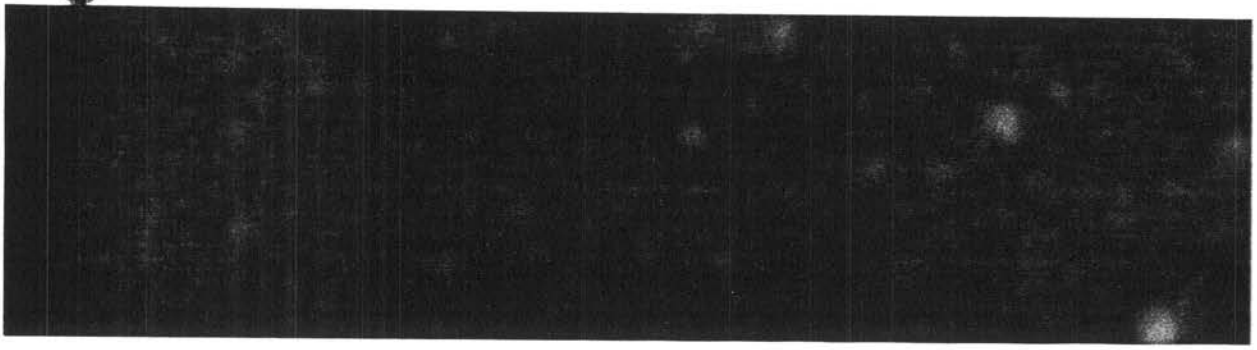

# Preface

This is the first public report of the Ontario Task Force on Native People in the Urban Setting. The report is a compilation of research undertaken by the joint government/Native Task Force and reflects aspects of the situation of approximately 3,000 Native people who participated.

In addition, the report presents a general analysis of government and community services being provided to the respondents. In an honest attempt to avoid the broad generalizations that have historically colored provincial government/Native relations, the research findings represent the situation of the respondents, and should not be regarded as representative of the reality of the total urban Native population. The report reflects fairly, however, the problems of urban Native respondents in gaining access to, and using, community and government resources.

In the four years since the research was undertaken, there have been unforeseen constitutional, social, political and economic developments in the urban constituencies, which are not evidenced in the analysis of the data.

In order to be placed in a realistic perspective, five major characteristics of the Task Force research process must be recognized.

1. The demographic characteristics of the urban Native population are not consistently identified in relation to Indian-Metis specific differences.
2. The research sample of urban Native people interviewed during the research was heavily biased toward status Indians.
3. The "participatory research" aspects of the research program were not completed, in that it proved financially impossible to have the collected data verified by the participating communities.
4. The political status and concerns of urban Native people were not clearly identified in the data collection and were consequently minimized in the analysis of the data.
5. In the development of the Task Force research design, the subsequent significance of aboriginal and/or constitutional issues was not foreseen and is therefore absent from analysis of the Task Force findings.

Having expressed these concerns, the Task Force participants wish to assert the value of this report. Although the respondents have been aware of, and have articulated for many years, their problems, unmet needs and service requirements, the report succeeds in documenting them in a way that is objectively useful.

Should this exercise initiate positive co-operative policy, program and legislative change, the value of the Task Force research process will far outstrip the shortcomings outlined here.

As participants in the Ontario Task Force on Native People in the Urban Setting, we look forward to Era II of the project. In the context of continued co-operation, the Task Force partnership reaffirms our commitment to completion of the Task Force goal: that of improving the quality of life for all urban Native people, through self-identified social, economic and political change.

James W. Ramsay, Chairman
Barney Batise, Chairman

*Steering Committee*
*Ontario Task Force on*
*Native People in the Urban Setting*

sociological factors. Native respondents, however, clearly see social conditions as causing alcohol abuse among their people.

**A point that was consistently made throughout Task Force studies was that alcohol abuse should be viewed as a symptom of urban Native social conditions, particularly in the areas of unemployment, limited education, inadequate housing, and discrimination.**

Alcohol abuse was also seen to result from peer pressures and the lack of social and recreational opportunities for Native youth. A number of negative consequences of alcohol abuse were identified: fighting, involvement with the law, removal of children from the family, violence, and personal and family crisis. Finally, many Native organizational staff members, discussing the problems of Native women and youth, commented on the prevalence of alcohol abuse.

*People don't respect it when you try to quit drinking — they tease you. It's good to have someone with you.*

*When you have nothing to work for, you figure, "what the heck."*

Of particular note is the possible circular effects of alcohol abuse on other urban Native respondents' problems, particularly unemployment, negative public images and discrimination, and trouble with the law. It is known, for example, that most Native legal infractions involve alcohol-related crimes (Task Force Literature Review).

## Cultural Awareness

Previous writings have noted the desire for a Native identity among urban Natives in Ontario and across Canada. Signs of this desire are: Native events, newspapers, cultural awareness programs, strong desires for Native children to learn their own languages, participation in Native organizations, visits to reserves for cultural activities, etc. Accompanying these activities is the notion that it is not an easy task to retain a sense of being Native while living in an urban environment.

Despite the variation in Native cultural background, there was a considerable need expressed for cultural awareness. This concern takes a number of different directions in urban Native thinking. On the one hand, for many Native respondents, a good quality of life involves the continuation of such traditional practices as powwows, Native crafts, drumming and dancing, eating traditional Native foods, and observing familiar spiritual values. There is, as well, strong support for the recovery of Native heritage through opportunities for learning Native history, language, and cultures. Of equal importance, though, is that *non-Native society* should reflect an awareness and a sensitivity to Native culture and traditions. This shift would require more than attitudinal changes, although they remain important in themselves; over one-fifth of Ontario residents apparently hold negative images of one kind or another (Price, 1978). Fundamental *structural* changes and reinforcements are wanted, such as broader-based inclusion of Native studies in school curricula and elimination of negative images from the mass media. Human service organizations were criticized for their lack of cultural sensitivity in both their service criteria and staff-client relations. More will be said about this, and suggested solutions, in later sections.

The importance of cultural awareness to Native respondents is reflected in the weight it received, along with such basic needs as housing, employment, and education. There were two sets of findings. One was drawn from Native agency staff sample responses and the other from community sample responses. When asked to identify the most serious needs still unmet in their communities, 15 per cent of the staff responses identified those related to the enhancement of cultural awareness, particularly:

- children and youth programs,
- community friendship and resource centres,
- dancing and drum instruction,
- language classes,
- Native arts and crafts,
- pride and self-awareness,
- spiritual and traditional needs information.

(... Key Informant Study, 1981)

When non-staff members of the Native community were asked to name the most serious problem facing themselves or other Native people in their community, nearly one-quarter of the over-all sample gave answers related to cultural awareness and Native identity. In northwestern locations this statistic exceeded 40 per cent. In particular, these people made the following points:

- that there was a lack of Native culture and programs to enhance Native culture;
- that knowledge of a Native culture was lacking;
- that in some communities there was limited interest in cultural awareness by Natives;
- that additional barriers to the development of a Native culture were: the educational system,

which transmits non-Native values; the general difficulty in maintaining culture in the city; and the difficulty in knowing the true meaning of cultural awareness by Native and non-Native people.

(Urban Natives and Their Communities, Vol II)

Native agency staff responses reinforced these findings, raising further concerns about the social, political, and economic problems in developing cultural awareness opportunities.

- Friendship centres are heavily involved in serving the socio-economic needs of their people and have little time or resources for building cultural awareness.
- The goals of Native cultural-awareness programs and activities are not clear. Should they emphasize traditional Native culture or build an emerging culture, which bridges the old and the new?
- Although financing is a problem, there is considerable apprehension over sharing control of Native cultural content with government. On the other hand, a lack of government support is viewed by some as a sign that government is encouraging assimilation rather than a strong Native community.

In meetings with Native agency staff, 14 out of 20 meetings involved discussions of cultural awareness issues ( ... Key Informant Study, 1981).

What are the implications of cultural awareness for Native people? A content analysis of some lengthier and more thoughtful discussions revealed the following themes:

- The twin themes of cultural and identity "loss", which threaten the "survival" of an indigenous people.

*For Native people in the city, staying Indian is very difficult. If you don't stay Indian, socially, in your leisure time, you become nothing and fail.*

- The importance of cultural awareness and the *psychology of pride* and *identity*.

*Cultural awareness is important to the Native students to help retain self-identity.*

- The importance of cultural awareness to the individual's *goals* and *purposes*.

*Indian people need to find out who they are; it can help them find out what they want ...*

- Native cultural awareness can help them make *contributions* to society.

*Only by remembering who we are (culture) and gaining knowledge of academic skills (education) and personal care (health and nutrition) can we live in the modern world with the pride and confidence to contribute positively.*

- Cultural awareness is interdependent with other facets of Native life.

*There can be little long-term improvement in Native family life, employment, etc., until there is a broad and profound basis for cultural pride and personal identity.*

- Language is an important part of cultural awareness.

*Strong self-identity is crucial to one's life, and intimate familiarity with one's culture, particularly language, is the key to this identity.*

As a result of the considerations in this and lat sections, two hypotheses may be advanced:

- that lack of cultural sensitivity in the dominan institutions makes it difficult for Native peopl to avail themselves of urban resources;
- that one solution to the alienation, problems, and frustrations experienced by many Natives the recovery or reinforcement of Native culture.

This last hypothesis should *not* suggest that the recovery of Native culture has *only* problem-solving values, for it is clear that cultural awareness is important for its own sake. Nevertheless, it also seems true that the *meaning* of cultural awareness is becoming increasingly complex for many Natives, while providing some basic stability to lives otherwise under stress.

## Discrimination

The paper, Strangers in Our Own Land, identified

**discrimination against Native people as a significant factor in impeding their integration into urban communities.**

This observation was confirmed in Task Force studies.

What are the areas of living in which a sense of discrimination occurs?

The Task Force survey shows that discrimination is most likely experienced when trying to obtain housing or employment, in involvements with the justice system, and in the educational system.

Also mentioned, but less frequently, were instances of discrimination encountered in social welfare and other agencies, retail and financial institutions, health care systems, public facilities, and government discrimination between status and

staff, and consulting with Native people; these measures were particularly recommended for the employment offices, programs for drug and alcohol abuse, the school system (Native teachers and counsellors), family services, social welfare office, the judicial system and services to senior citizens;

- improvements in the *access to information*, particularly about programs and services in employment, housing, cultural awareness, recreation, preventative health care (particularly nutrition), and family life.

In addition to these, *other changes* to improve access to and use of resources were:

- quicker and more open access to housing and housing programs through reduced prejudice and discrimination, removal of local politics from the selection process, more flexible eligibility criteria, shorter waiting periods;
- integration of youth services;
- improvement in the access to educational programs and services through financial aid and housing for out-of-town students, and more flexible entrance criteria to training programs;
- equal job opportunities through the reduction of discrimination.

A number of general themes are suggested in the details of resource needs as listed in Figure 9.

These themes cut across all functional areas and will now be enumerated since they provide bridges both to general policy-development and to the discussion of future directions in a later section.

- *Cultural awareness and sensitivity*: the enhancement, within Native and non-Native communities, of awareness and respect for Native culture, heritage and culturally-influenced behaviors; changes required in individual knowledge, skills and attitudes, as well as in institutional service organization practices.
- *Additional programs, services and material resources:* particularly in housing, cultural awareness, drug and alcohol abuse (north), social welfare, recreation and day care.
- A more even *balance between* programs specializing in *crisis intervention* and *rehabilitation*, *and* those oriented towards *prevention*. This is particularly true in drug and alcohol services, family services, health care, youth services, and the judicial system.
- *Training*: including specific job training, upgrading, and general life skills (budgeting, home ownership, preventative health care, child-rearing).
- Improvements in the *circulation of information* about programs.
- *Financial assistance*, and the general provision of more affordable resources in housing, social welfare, recreation, training and education.

**Figure 9**

**Urban Native resource needs identified by Task Force research**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. **Housing** | |
| • *more housing: decent and reasonable* | • *emergency or short-term housing programs* |
| • *financial aid: home repair, maintenance; low interest loans* | • *special residences for students, elderly, women, men single-parent families* |
| • *low-rent housing and housing programs for low income people* | • *increased awareness about existing government and other housing programs* |
| 2. **Employment** | |
| • *jobs for men and women* | • *information concerning service and jobs* |
| • *retraining: upgrading, job training and life skills* | • more adequate funding for Native organizations to enhance training and job opportunities |
| • job and career counselling for adults and youth | • financial assistance for training |
| 3. **Cultural awareness** | |
| • *language classes* | • *opportunities for practising traditional activities (arts, crafts, drum, dancing)* |
| • opportunities for spirituality and elder involvement | • opportunities to share information about different Native life styles |
| • Native studies in school curriculum, and other ways to promote non-Native sensitization to Native culture | • opportunities for learning cultural heritage and developing pride and self-awareness |
| • cultural resource centres | • cultural awareness programs for youth and children |

Figure 9 (Cont'd.)

**Urban Native resource needs identified by Task Force research**

| | |
|---|---|
| 4. **Drug and alcohol abuse** | |
| • *preventative work: education about drug and alcohol abuse, the possible relationship to health and nutrition* | • *more programs in some geographical areas* |
| • individual and group counselling | • follow-up and rehabilitation programs |
| • special facilities for women, youth, inmates | • assessment centres |
| 5. **Education** | |
| • *Native studies (also mentioned in resources to enhance cultural awareness)* | • *alternative Native schools* |
| | • adult education, upgrading, on-the-job training (also mentioned in discussions of employment needs) |
| 6. **Family life and childhood** | |
| • *family counselling* | • *Native foster and adoptive homes* |
| • *family life education: particularly parenting skills, hygiene, nutrition* | • information on child placement, child welfare rights, available services |
| • improved health plans and care | • family crisis-intervention services |
| • public information on Native problems | |
| 7. **Social welfare** | |
| • *alternatives to welfare* | • *financial increases or supplements, particularly for those in transient or crisis situations* |
| • supplementary counselling or educational services: counselling, social work, crisis counselling, life skills training, parenting skills training, employment offices | • priority to families in supplement programs |
| | • material assistance: housing (e.g. hostels, residences for transients or those in crisis, subsidized maintenance), clothing. |
| 8. **Youth** | |
| • *leadership training and development* | • *drop-in centres* |
| • *organized recreation* | • *counselling in drug and alcohol abuse* |
| • opportunities for interaction between youth and elders | • life skills programs |
| | • follow-up counselling services |
| • Native-oriented programs in a variety of areas; employment, recreation, cultural awareness, etc. | • life awareness speakers (e.g. ex-criminals, unemployed) |
| | • employment services and work projects for youth |
| 9. **Recreation** | |
| • *more diverse recreational opportunities* | • recreational programs to reflect Native cultural and social needs; traditional dancing and drumming; clubs and programs for Native women, seniors; cultural and historical identity seminars and workshops; national Native recreation and competition |
| • training opportunities for Native leadership in recreation | |

Figure 9 (Cont'd.)

**Urban Native resource needs identified by Task Force research**

10. **Women**

- *day care*
- counselling
- financial aid
- crisis centres
- housing for Native women students
- *alcohol abuse services*
- rehabilitation
- Native women's groups and centres
- job and employment services

11. **Health and nutrition**

- *opportunities for preventative measures, particularly education and information about nutrition*
- traditional Native foods and herbal medicines
- *increase and improvements in health facilities and the means of access to them, particularly in the north*

12. **Justice**

- *improvement of Native Courtworker Program through additional staff, expansion of juvenile and family court, staff training, and the development of procedures to assure client access.*
- *adequate after-care for rehabilitating Native ex-inmates*
- improvements in employment opportunities and training
- alternatives to prison (e.g. community service fine options)
- information about rights, the justice system, service resources

13. **Senior citizens**

- *more programs for elderly (e.g. homes for the elderly)*
- *medical services*
- *transportation: cheap, emergency information*
- housing: low-rent homes, senior citizen apartments, home maintenance assistance
- nutritional advice
- *opportunities for involvement in the Native community (interaction with young Natives to enhance cultural awareness: social and recreational activities*
- *home assistance services: nursing, social workers, Native homemakers, meals-on-wheels.*
- financial assistance
- resources to strengthen Native family unit.

## Conclusions

The main points of this section are:

1. Although there are many Native and non-Native organizations providing various services in cities and towns of high Native concentration, these are apparently insufficient resources to meet the needs and demands of Native service users.
2. Additionally, the current programs are not providing their services in the most effective way.

An explanation of the possible *reasons* for service *ineffectiveness* is the next important task. This is pursued in Section Five.

# Appendix II: Native Ideas on Self-Help Changes

While many Native respondents have a sense of hopelessness because they have been needy for so long, or their hopes have been dashed so often, there still exists a strong and deep feeling among many that getting together and getting the right information will lead them closer to solutions. The self-help suggestions running throughout the interviews and meetings cover all the areas of concern from housing to discrimination. Suggestions include such simple acts as getting together to talk, and complex tasks such as a Heritage Day holiday. Many ideas present themselves as new ideas in some localities and well established programs in other places.

The following self-help suggestions are presented from the perspective of the people with the needs. Some live in towns and cities with Native friendship centres, and some do not. While this affects the nature of some suggestions, the intent of the speaker is communicated as closely as possible.

The 154 activities or projects listed below are first divided into major categories of need. Within each need category, there are further subdivisions. The first set of activities are those that can be done with little or no group organization or gathering of resources. The second is mostly based on the time and energy of those who will benefit, but in some cases, other people and resources are necessary. The third set of projects within each need category are suggested activities for organized groups.

**Cultural awareness**

*Activities calling for individual or informal group resources:*

1. Set up a drum group.
2. Form local women's group to share cultures and solve problems.
3. Get involved in the Windsor Multicultural Centre.
4. Get Native elders involved in teaching group.

*Activities requiring only Native resources:*

5. Write and perform a theatrical play focusing on Native life style.
6. Set up cross-cultural programs with several tribes.
7. Have more Native gatherings (from a city without a friendship centre).
8. Have traditional Native activities (e.g. powwows).
9. Have cultural gatherings in the wilderness.
10. Get a newsletter going to let people know of Native events (a very strong sentiment in Windsor).
11. (Reactivate MNSIA local or) start other Native culture and rights organization.
12. Get Native elders involved in teaching young.
13. Get elders to teach classes in Native culture.
14. Get elders actively sharing talents in the community.
15. Develop courses in Native language instruction.
16. Teach treaty history, trapping, fishing, wild rice production.
17. Younger people should learn their language and learn about traditional ways of life.
18. Set up a network for obtaining traditional Native food and supplies.
19. Set up a Native food co-op (supply food at discount prices) and also supply a place to buy traditional Indian food and supplies.
20. Give a workshop for cultural awareness open to the public.
21. Set up public Native awareness programs. Show films on Native culture, issues, etc., and invite guest speakers, e.g. Xavier Michon, Richard Lyons.
22. Set up a powwow for the summer and invite the whole community and tourists.

*Activities using only Native resources to set up a liaison with non-Native groups and institutions:*

23. Spread cultural awareness through the school system with local Native people doing displays.

*Activities organized by local Natives seeking the cooperation and/or resources of a provincial or federal Native organization:*

24. Have heritage programs; for example, the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College's program.
25. Arrange for films to be made by Natives.

*Activities organized by local Natives seeking the cooperation and/or resources of a provincial or federal non-Native organization:*

26. Windsor should have a friendship centre for cultural purposes and for social services.
27. A special Native Awareness Day throughout the whole educational system to promote cultural awareness about Native history, culture, etc.

*Suggestions to organized groups that they organize projects and activities:*

*Local Native organizations:*

The Native centre should do the following:

28. Offer courses on old ways and on other Native nations.
29. Have evening and weekend programs in Native culture.
30. Arrange for young people to visit elders.
31. Have a homemaker's course to teach traditional cooking.
32. Have more dances.
33. Have community programs for non-Natives.

Roles and Responsibilities of Those Teaching or Interacting with Children:

The following list was presented by faithkeepers, elders and traditional people of the Haudenoshanee, for those who have responsibilities for teaching, working or interacting with children. They are not meant to be a definitive list but are presented to encourage all who interact with children to examine their own attitudes when addressing the Creator's special gift.

1. Teach the children in ways they can comprehend, don't overload them.

2. Teach the children in the ways of nature, so they will be able to identify and understand the ways of nature, step by step.

3. Teach the children about plants, animals, etc., so that they know they are alive and respond to affection and other such emotions as humans do.

4. Teach the children that all is sacred and has a spirit.

5. Teach the children that the extinction of one kind of life whether a plant, fish or animal means that the extinction of many other types of life will follow.

6. Teach the children the thanksgiving address and explain it to them in a way they will understand irrespective of their age.

7. Teach the children they are the Haudenoshaunee, Anishnawbe, etc. and to recognize themselves as such an not as "Indian" people.

8. Teach the children to respect all life - people, nature, grandfathers, elements, etc.

9. Teach all who have contact with children that they have the responsibility to practive discipline where young children are concerned.

10. Teach the children to learn from their experiences so that they will understand and reason why things happen they way they do.

11. Teach the children values and traditions and teach all who have contact with the children that these are better understood when taught at home.

12. Teach the children to learn from the elders. Don't exclude the children from sessions with the elders, they listen and learn easier from someone other than their own relatives.

# VALUES, CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS OF THE MI'KMAQ NATION

BY

MURDENA MARSHALL, B.ED., ED.M.

# Introduction

In every nation, tribe or a group of people there is a set of rules which that certain group functions by. These set of rules can come in forms of values, customs and oral traditions. In some nations these are known as code of ethics. Under one or more of these titles, a society recognizes and utilizes these modes to better themselves to function within their own world. It is from these rules that one can become useful and productive as an individual within their own tribal world. It is from these rules that one's perspective on world views are so unique.

In the Mi'kmaq world, these set of rules are known as oral traditions. It is from these oral traditions that one can view the world through the window of tribal consciousness. It is through this window that our behaviour has been governed, a behaviour which is acceptable within our own tribal world. It is crucial that we are accepted in our world initially. It is vital in order for one to survive in this world, to learn these set of rules that have been given to us by the Creator.

Since our traditions, our knowledge of Mi'kmaq history and our secrets of life are oral, these set of rules which govern our daily activities must be taught by our elders. No one actually learns by verbal knowledge but one learns through observation all during

your lifetime. As you grow to adulthood you will have experienced most if not all of them. As you go through life you are exposed to certain situations which calls for a certain rule to monitor one's behaviour and also the behaviours of others.

In the Mi'kmaq world the philosophies of these rules are not considered important during your childhood. As you mature you begin to rationalize the philosophies yourself. Sometimes as an inquisitive child you may feel a certain rule is irrevelant to the positive contribution of your well-being, then you must no doubt ask questions. An elder will take time to listen to you as to why this certain rules seems worthless to you. In all cases you will be listened to and your case will be aired. The elder will point out all the instances where this particular rule has worked in his lifetime and your case doesn't stand firm with all the positive attributes constituted for thousands of years by the usage of this rule. In all cases, your doubt will be transformed into newly acquired knowledge.

These set of rules which I believe should be termed "Oral Traditions" are the foundations of our tribal consciousness. It is the feeding ground of tribal epistemology. It is the beginning and end of Mi'kmaq life. Without these set of rules we would not be any different from all other human beings and we would lose that uniqueness of being Mi'kmaw. We would lose that ability to perceive the world from a diverse perception.

There are many in numbers than what is listed in this writing. Since the author is Mi'kmaw, there has been much contemplation whether tradition should be broken by recording them on paper or whether they should be left as they have been for generations. The advice of the elders was sought and it is with their wish and blessings that they are to be recorded. Their rationale at the time was to give the teachers in schools the opportunity to relay these sacred messages to our children. There is great appreciation expressed by this author to the wisdom of our elders, without their understanding, this would not have been possible. The general feeling of the elders is that they are pleased to have these sacred messages be recorded by a Mi'kmaw therefore the fear of misinterpretation is not present. These are being recorded with the intent of spreading Mi'kmaq wisdom and to preserve and strengthen tribal consciousness in our youth, the Mi'kmaq of the future.

# Values, Customs and Traditions of the Mi'kmaq Nation

by
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## 1. The Spirit is Present in All of Nature.

Given the Mikmaq view that all things in the world have their own spirit, and all things must work in harmony with each other, Mikmaqs show respect for the spirit by extending certain rituals to our interaction with nature. Just as we send off the spirit of our dead with proper rituals and ceremony, we extend a certain amount of recognition of the spirit of the tree, animal, plants and elements we disturb for our own use. When we cut a tree for basket weaving or a Christmas tree, take roots from the ground for medicines or our lodges, there are gestures we must follow to keep our minds at ease. We do not apoligize for our needs but accept the interdependence of all things.

## 2. Respect for the human spirit from birth to death

In the Mikmaq world, all things have their own unique spirit. The trees, the water, the birds, the animals, and our children all share equally in the Great Scheme. Having their own individuality, these creations must learn their place in the world through their interaction with it and the guidance of their elders.

In the daily lives of Mikmaqs, children become part of the adult world by being an active listener and participant in it. They are included in all activities of the community, seen at all social functions. Children are encouraged to search, explore and discover their world.

Often we are accused of not disciplining our children, but discipline in Mikmaq society is different than in the dominant society in methods and practice. We use more indirective methods than directive teaching. We would rather encourage the child to observe, explore, and make judgements using their observations to reach a conclusion. In cases where a wrong has been done to another either another child or a family by a child, restitution must be made by that child. In this way the child is very much aware of his wrong doings

and usually will never forget that incident or the events that led up to it.

3. Respect for Elders

Mikmaq society holds this value with the highest esteem and considered most important of all. Elders not only hold the knowledge of our ancestors, they have the language through which the knowledge must be imparted to the youth. Their years of searching, listening, experiencing, and understanding all that is bodily, emotionally and spiritually possible, grants them the wisdom and strength needed by our youth to become good Mikmaqs. Elders are the keepers of the sacred lessons of tribal and global harmony for all living things within the environment.

4. Mikmaq Language is Sacred.

We believe our language is holy and sacred. The Creator gave it to the Mikmaq people for the transmission of all the knowledge our Creator gave to us and for our survival. Our language has its origin in the Maritimes, in the Land of Mi'kmakik, and it is here that it must remain to flourish among the people or we become extinct. The sacred knowledge within our language provides wisdom and understanding. It focuses on the processes of knowledge, the action or verb consciousness, and not on the nouns or material accumulation. It has no curse words, but rather only words to describe all of nature. When one wants to curse or damn anything or anyone, they must use the English language.

5. Sharing

Being Mikmaq gives the unique ability to have an eagle's viewpoint of sharing of yourself, your resources, your time, your knowledge, your wisdom freely without being asked or expecting anything in return. This value is universal among all Native people. The reciprocal giving and sharing enables all people to survive equally. This sharing is expressed in daily life in daily dialogues among Mikmaqs, sharing stories of self and others, reconfirming the spirit of the Mikmaq. Mealtimes are open to all who come and denial of food as polite gestures is discouraged.

6. Death is as natural as birth.

The concept of death in the Mikmaq world is as natural as birth and is talked about daily in the home. In the large Mikmaq network of people, death occurs frequently, and most Mikmaqs go to the wakes and funerals no matter how far away they appear to be. If a Mikmaq dies in a distant city, they are sent home to their kin where they will be given the proper final rituals for entering the spirit world. Children are encouraged to visit the wakes in the homes of the kin, to ask questions, and to experience the grief and the sociability of the group. Because death is accepted as a part of living, we are frequently reminded that we are here for a short time; therefore, one must make the best impression on others.

7. Individual Non-interference

This is one concept that baffles non-natives the most. They cannot understand how one can be counselled if there is no verbal direction to take. A Mikmaq counsellor will use the metaphorical approach instead to show another Mikmaq how a situation and the consequences occurred. Making one aware of behavior and consequences of another enables one to see the patterns of similarity and provides necessary information to make judgements accordingly.

8. Respect for the Unborn.

In the Mikmaq language there is no word for fetus or embro. From the time of conception, a baby is called a Mijuwajij (baby). A mother's behavior and attitude are important elements during the growth of that child, so certain precautions are taken and certain behaviors are expected of the mother.

9. Aging is a Privilege.

The older one gets, the wiser one becomes and the more respects one accrues. When a person receives the title of an Elder, s/he is called "Ami" (our grandmother) or "Ami tey" (our grandfather). In this respected position, elders are the teachers of our children in everyday life as well as the spiritual life. They are the orators whose knowledge about Mikmaq life and history are critically important to our present and future.

10. Spirituality

Native Spirituality is rooted in the world view of the Mikmaq people, reinforced by the deep faith and beliefs of our elders. It maintains their vision for this world, and provides hope in the next. It provides security and peace to the person, and is evident in the soft, accepting nature of our elders. While our elders are Catholic, the old traditions and customs associated with our traditional spiritualiy are now blended. Elders have a special ability to make one be pleased with himself because there is no anger in the way they teach.

11. Belief in the Supernatural

Mikmaqs have learned about the two worlds from their Creator and how one can obtain knowledge, wisdom, or powers from the other world. Supernatural powers are thus transmitted through special endowed people who can go between the two worlds. One, however, goes for good (Kinap) while the other goes for evil (Npuoin). Both are able to overcome the most difficult feats and are greatly feared, especially the npuoin. Kinaps were males who used their powers for the well-being of the society. Our language tells us that that there were no female Kinaps, since the word "kinape'skw" (female Kinap) does not exist, although there was known to be a "Npuoini'skw".

12. Humility and humor

Mikmaq have their own unique sense of humor. They can withstand any wrongdoings, misgivings, and shortcomings brought on by another society, or a quality amongst themselves, and be able to laugh about it. We are accept our own fallibility by laughing at ourselves and poking fun at others. No human event is so serious that does not include humor, stories and jokes. Mikmaqs can take a situation which might seem hopeless and transform it into lively piece of conversation complete with the jokes and puns.

13. Labeling: Understanding the Spirit

First impressions is important to a Mikmaq. What spirit that persons carries will become known immediately to the Mikmaq greeters. Such a spirit in a person may become known through his behavior, clothing, body language or speech, and immediately the

Mikmaq will know this spirit and thus name it, giving a unique name to the person which may stay with him through life or be short-lived. This labelling is a process common among Mikmaqs, and accounts for the many unique names given to individuals.

14. Sweet Grass Ceremony (Pekitne'man)

Sweet grass is sacred and is kept in all Mikmaq households. Fresh sweet grass incense lingers in the air all the time. In earlier days, Mikmaqs burned braided sweet grass as an offering to the spirits. The elders have had great respect for sweet grass as evidenced by their respect for it and giving it special presence in their homes. They advise us against misuse of the sweet grass other than for baskets or pekitne'man.

15. Indian Time

Time is known in the tribal Mikmaq world as the biological rhythms of nature. It is not clocked in a linear spiral, but is known as a space with no beginning and no end. Thus, when our people meet, the meeting begins when the people greet each other and begin the long curious explorations of each other and their families and kin. Elders believe that there is a time for every thing and that time will be right and known when it approaches, for instance when your body tells you it is hungry or tired.

16. Time for Healing

There is a time set aside for healing all pains, physical and mental. When a misunderstanding develops within a family or group, one of the persons in the dispute will leave the household and seek refuge in the extended family. S/he will be given shelter and will not be pressured to go back and make amends immediately. Instead, ample time is given while s/he makes a mental evaluation of the situation. Judgements are reserved for those involved. When the anger has subsided on both sides, s/he will make the first move and try to be reinstated in the household.

17. Child Care

On a reserve or a village, children are visible everywhere. Each adult had and still have that obligation of keeping an eye on children and warn them of potential danger. That danger may be in the form

of an approaching stranger, thin ice, an on-coming car, or an animal. It is one's duty to make an effort to protect all children. It is also appropriate to scold or lecture children other than you own when you see them doing something wrong. Children who speak or understand the Mikmaq language know when a stranger who speaks to them in English is not be trusted and they will turn away from the stranger.

18. Ritual for Death and Dying

When a person is dying or even dead, Mikmaqs believe that person should not be left alone. One does not come into the world alone, and therefore, should not be left to die alone. Since light was given at birth, so also at death there is light, signified by a candle that remains lit and lights left on to help you in finding the path to the Spirit World (wasoqnikewi). All the family members are encouraged to go to the hospital and be with that person. Each member of the family must seek peace (apiksiktuaqn) with the dying person even if one feels that there is no ill feelings between them. Elders feel that it is important one enters the Spirit World completely at peace with everyone and everything.

19. Rituals for Mourning

While a person is dying and on threshold of death, elders will tell the people in the room to reserve their tears until the person has passed on to the Spirit World. They feel that the dying person will have an easier time making that transition if tears are not shed. When the person has finally expired then tears flow freely. Everyone, men included, are encouraged to cry. Elders tell us that the only thing that will help will be to cry and to cry until you cannot cry anymore. Once the tears are gone then you will have an easier time coping with death.

20. Richness of Body Language

Mikmaqs and Native people, in general, have the ability to use non-verbal signals to warn of danger, to signal indifference, to ridicule and to give directions. Most people know the signals since they have used them or have seen their parents use them. Some signals are universal among Native people and some are unique to a tribe. Without uttering a word, a Mikmaq facial expression can ridicule or express feelings and laughter will be spontaneous.

## 21. Honoring Ceremony for Elders (Pestiewa'ltimk)

This ceremony was celebrated in conjunction with the annual Christmas season. In the years gone by, elders were honored during the days from Christmas Day on through to January 6 or the Feast of the Three Kings. Since Noel came from the Christmas day itself, all the Noels would be honored first, followed by second day of honoring all of the Stephens since this day was also the Feast of Saint Stephen. All male members of the village or reserve would be honored. The honored person's family prepared a feast for the entire community, and the community brought a gift of a cross upon which a gift of a tie, shirt, or scarf might wrap around the cross. The food was abundant and it was an ideal time of year to rest from hunting. A different name was honored each evening so eventually everyone of these names, regardless of age, had the opportunity to be honored.

## 22. Ceremony for Individual Accomplishment (Wi'kipaltimk)

This honoring ceremony is intended for people of different ages to honor individual accomplishments or feats. It is performed when a young boy has made his first kill, whether animal or fish. His household prepares a feast, cooking what he has brought home for food. The entire village or neighborhood is invited. The young boy sits at one end of the table and watches as the elders eat what he has provided. Each elder that comes in brings a small gift for the youth. The young boy does not eat but only enjoys the company and the compliments of his good hunting skills. In the contemporary sense, this ceremony is now used to honor educational accomplishments or acquiring a position.

## 23. Dreams

Our Creator advised us at our beginnings to listen to our dreams, and thus for ancient millenniums, our people have been able to interpret their dreams and understand what knowledge they bring. Some dreams had no meaning while others cautioned or provided guidance. No dreams were taken for granted and each one was carefully analysed for a possible message from the Spirit World. While this is a skill fast disappearing from our Nation, it is still maintained among some of our elders. There are those who have the ability to see the meaning and content of the dream and provide valuable assistance or guidance.

24. Ability to Function in Separate Worlds

In order for Native people to be happy and productive during their lifetime, they must be able to function in what is perceived as the two and sometimes three worlds. One must be productive and happy in his tribal world, but also one must also be able to accept and live harmoniously with all his brothers and sisters on the earth, including those in another society. Thus it is important then for our children to learn of other cultures and peoples, recognizing that they are not forced to be part of those environments but do so from choice. Education offers that realm of knowledge and choice. The Spirit World thus is the other realm that we must come to know, accept, and from which we seek guidance and nurturance.

25. Customs and Beliefs Affecting Women

The female of Mikmaq society is a powerful force, well-recognized among its people. She is a strong force for transmitting the values, culture and language of the people since she is the main agent of the culture. In every Mikmaq unit there is a strong female presence. The power of the woman and the cycles of her body are so strong, they could affect the spirits of the male so as to diminish his ability to hunt or fish. Certain customs are thus followed by women: they must not ever step over a male's legs, or his fishing pole (smkwati), his bow and arrows, his gun, or anything else associated with hunting and fishing.

26. Customs for Visiting

When an elder visits a home, it is generally understood that the visit is meant for that gender to which that elder is. If a male elder visits, the wife may leave to give the elder men privacy in their conversations. The same procedure holds for a female visiting the home.

27. Belief in a Forerunner

Elders have the ability to distinguish a forerunner from a coincidence. The message of an pending death is represented by a bird, an animal, or a peculiar incident. Some elders can even name the individual who will die because of the message they received. When the elder is visited with a forerunner, s/he will not become

frightened or feel threatened. It is a very spiritual foretelling and is well-respected among our Nation.

28. Feeding of Grandfather (Apuknajit)

The feeding of Apuknajit is a time of giving thanks to the Spirits during the most difficult time of winter. It is a ritual which is performed on January 31. When darkness has settled, food is put out into the night preferably on an old stump or near a tree and offered to the Spirits. In days gone by, eel skins and fish heads were offered. An elder would lead the family to a stump, give thanks for surviving thus far and ask for additional assistance until spring.

29. Behavior modification of children

Not all children's behavior was corrected by modeling and metaphors. Children on certain occasions needed something more concrete than words to correct their behavior. This is a time when the parents will ask the child to go into the bush and select your switch (npisoqnn). The indication at the time is that the child is going to be disciplined with it. The psychological effect in securing your own form of punishment is sometimes greater than the actual beating itself. Most of the time parents would consider your efforts and obedience in going into the bush and together with a stiff lecture as sufficient for any misbehavior, although if you had the misfortune of being switched then you will never forget the misdeed that warranted such punishment.

30. Respect for Food

The rituals for food, food preservation and behavior while eating that are rigidly reinforced. First, food is sacred and as such we bless ourselves before we eat to give thanks and offer respect to food. Secondly, one is never allowed to play with food or throw food around. One is never permitted to sing, play games, or use any abusive language when referring to food. Food similarly was never put into a fire, but always returned to nature. It was also not wasted, and each person took only what they could consume.

# NATIVE CHILDREN IN TREATMENT: CLINICAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ISSUES.

Terrence Sullivan.

ABSTRACT: Five consecutive admissions of status Indian adolescents to a children's mental health program are reviewed from their initial apprehension by child welfare authorities. A review of the high incidence of Indians in care in Canada follows along with an argument that the child welfare authorities in Canada are devaluing native culture, and assisting the process of social disorganization in Indian communities. Some innovative approaches to this problem initiated by native people are reviewed along with a sketch of native/white differences in family systems and child rearing. Some implications of these issues in working with accultrated native children who have grown up in white alternate care facilities are discussed.

"An Indian youth has been taken from his friends and conducted to a new people, whose modes of thinking and living, whose pleasures and pursuits are totally dissimilar to those of his own nation. His new friends profess love to him, and a desire for his improvement in human divine knowledge, and for his eternal salvation; but at the same time endeavour to make him sensible of his inferiority to themselves. To treat him as an equal would mortify their own pride, and degrade themselves in the view of their neighbours. He is put to school; but his fellow students look on him as a being of an inferior species. He acquires some knowledge, and is taught some ornamental, and perhaps useful accomplishments; but the degrading memorials of his inferiority, which are continually before his eyes, remind him of the manners and habits of his own country, where he was once free and equal to his associates. He sighs to return to his friends; but these he meets with the most bitter mortification. He is neither a white man nor an Indian; as he had no character with us, he has none with them." *

## INTRODUCTION

In 1979 there were about 70,000 registered Indians in Ontario comprising 1 per cent of the provincial population. When the total population of all self identifying natives and Metis are considered, the figures move closer to 300,000. For purposes of this paper,

* From a report by early New England Missionaries quoted in Swanton, 1926, p.502.

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unless otherwise indicated, discussion will be limited to status Indians as defined in *The Indian Act*, since they are the only people reliably identified in reported data. When discussing non status Indians, I will use the term native people.

Before 1950, government policies, attitude and practice toward Indians were repressive and custodial and communities were administered rather than self-governed. Currently, 573 "bands" are organized across Canada, with an average membership of 525 individuals. Bands are the social organizational unit currently recognized by government for purposes of federal regulation and assistance. The special legal status of Indians is currently delineated in Canada's old constitution, *The British North American Act* and *The Indian Act* of 1951. *The Indian Act* introduced measures designed to increase self regulation and local government in band councils, and the "Indian Agents" have gradually disappeared from the reserves over the last 20 years.

Except in the north, Indian bands are located on rural reserve lands set aside for their exclusive use through treaty arrangements. There are now 2,242 separate parcels of land for a total of 10,021 square miles and the land base has been fairly stable for about 20 years. About 65% of all Indians live in rural or remote communities. About 30 per cent live off reserve in major urban centres.

Indians in Canada are a race apart from the larger population with separate legal status and cultural heritage. They speak 10 different languages and 58 dialects across the country and use of the languages appears at least stable. There has been a major increase in cultural expression and political activity over the last 20 years and Indian associations are making active representations to all levels of government. The social and economic conditions of the Indian population are poor compared with those of the larger Canadian population.

Over the course of the last 20 years there have been some advances in the treatment of the Indian population, particularly in granting bands increasing responsibilities for self-administration and local self-government. However, in spite of the best efforts of federal and some provincial authorities to reinforce the cultural uniqueness of Indian status, a major social problem is at work across the country. This problem serves to devalue Indian cultural practices, disrupt and erode family and community ties and contributes to the social breakdown and disorder on reserves.

Across Canada, disproportionately large numbers of Indian children are finding their way into white alternate care facilities through initial interventions by provincially mandated child welfare organizations which remove them from their communities. Five consecutive admissions to a children's mental health centre are reviewed in Appendix A of this paper. In each of these case summaries, hundreds of pages of child welfare notes, foster care and adoption notes, juvenile court reports, psychological and psychiatric

reports were examined. Excepting for the initial apprehension and adoption histories and one psychiatric assessment in the case of Lana, identifying a cultural identity confusion, there is a virtual denial and ignorance of the importance of their Indian status. Little importance seemed to be attached to their Indian status, excepting value laden assumptions of neglect and deprivation in infancy and early childhood.

After reviewing the apprehension, adoption and placement histories, it is clear that little consideration was given to: (a) the cultural values of the Indian community; (b) the role of the extended Indian family in providing care for children; (c) the importance of stability and cultural identification over dislocation and displacement in considering "the best interests" of the child; (d) the importance of early Indian child rearing, cultural bonding and visible racial differences in the placement, care and treatment of these children; (e) the impact of their removal and accultration on the larger Indian community.

## INDIAN CHILDREN IN CARE

Because of the recent rise in fertility rates, approximately 40 per cent of the Indian population in Ontario are children under 16 (Louks & Timothy, 1981). Mortality rates for 5-19 year old Indian youths are 3 times the national average with violent deaths accounting for one third of these. In the 15-24 year range, suicide is about 7 times the national average (I.A.N.D., 1980). The Ministry of Community and Social Services recently reported that of all "hard to serve" children in Ontario, Indian children constitute the largest racial group second only to Caucasians. There are large numbers of children entering mental health settings who initially entered the white serve community through the doors of Children's Aid Societies. It is a tribute to our cultural ignorance, that accurate statistics are not kept on Indian children in mental health settings, nor 'crossover statistics' on children moving between child welfare settings and mental health or correctional settings.

In 1980 there were 1,045 Indian children in care in Ontario. This constitutes 10% of the total number in care, ten times the white national average. In Northern Ontario the population of children in care jumps to 19%. A conservative estimate puts financial costs of services to Indian children in Ontario alone at close to 6 million dollars (Louks and Timothy, 1981). The Indian population is 1.3 per cent of the Canadian population, but the average percentage of native children in care across Canada is about 20% of all children in care. In some provinces such as Manitoba, where the Indian population represents 15% of the total population, the number of native children in care is a staggering 60% of all children in care (Hepworth, 1980). Of these children in care, many have experienced massive uprooting. In 1978 in Manitoba,

27 Indian children were placed in other provinces and 63 were placed in the U.S.A. for adoption!

Hepworth's study also points out that once admitted to care, children of native ancestry are less likely to be returned to their own parents or to be placed for adoption. When placed in a foster home it is likely to be a white family. This trend continues today in spite of clear evidence that Indian children fostered or adopted by white families experience more pervasive problems than their reserve counterparts (Berlin, 1978). The actual number of Indian children adopted has increased five fold across Canada since 1962, and more than three quarters of these adoptions are by white families.

Why are there so many Indian children in care in Canada and what is the significance of these large numbers? In part they speak to poor social and economic conditions of Indian family life, and they also speak to the over zealous activity of child welfare authorities using culturally biased structures and values to "help" Indian children. Hudson and McKenzie (1981) have outlined three of the traditional arguments to explain this problem. The first argument, from a human and social development model, sees Indian child neglect stemming from jurisdictional disputes which result in inadequate provision of personal social services such as family counselling, alcoholism treatment and traditional child welfare services. Johnston (1981a, 1981b, 1981c) has succinctly outlined the jurisdictional disputes, and how federal-provincial bickering has resulted in large regional disparities in services, poorly conceived, and poorly regulated child welfare practices with Indian children. This issue was also clearly acknowledged in the Hawthorn Report:

> ". . . the special status of Indians, and more importantly the policies and practices which have affixed themselves to that status, have had the effect of placing barriers between an underprivileged ethnic minority and welfare services which they need . . . the assumption that . . . reserves were federal islands in the midst of provincial welfare activities have had the unfortunate effect that basic provincial welfare activities have ignored and bypassed reserve Indians." p. 316.

The second argument, an anthropological one, argues that value differences in child caring between native and white societies regarding sharing, permissiveness, discipline, time, verbalization, stimulation, achievement, etc. lead to cultural conflict. Indian children and parents are caught between the old and the new and may then react with passivity or hostility. The attendant social disorganization often leads to the conclusion that interventions must be designed for the native assimilation of white culture and white parenting values. The third explanation attributes a cause and effect relationship between socio-economic conditions and parenting ability. The high incidence between socio-economic conditions and parenting ability. The high incidence of poverty, alcoholism,

poor housing, education, nutrition and welfare dependence leads to a sense of powerlessness, despair, alcoholism, family violence and child neglect. Solutions from this economic argument range from improving the Native economy to job retraining, housing and education programs.

As Hudson and McKenzie point out, these three arguments lead to solutions which are essentially order/assimilationist in nature, i.e. that native peoples must adapt to the larger white culture and values through a social service system designed for whites by whites. In this respect, the child welfare system has been, and continues to be, an agent in the colonization of native people. This colonialism is subtle and pervasive. The child welfare authorities devalue the cultural practices in the Indian community, and impose white standards of "fitness", "improper", etc. This action is overwhelmingly approved and sanctioned by the white community, as is any intervention in the name of "protecting" children. This cultural colonialism reflects attempts at 'normative' controls and forced accultration of the Indian community, fosters dependency on white child welfare authorities for the care of children, erodes family responsibilities and fragments Indian communities. To the extent that native values are ignored or depreciated, and white standards imposed, contemporary child welfare authorities practice the same cultural imperialism as the early missionaries in their zeal to "civilize the savage".

The authorities across Canada, as the Hawthorn report suggests, have acknowledged some responsibility for regional disparities tied to jurisdictional disputes. However, even considering paternal best interests, and a vocal commitment to multiculturalism, they have alternately fostered and neglected a child welfare system which acts as an agent of cultural imperialism in Indian communities. The U.N. General Assembly's *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* guarantees to all children the right to a culture. How then can we support a child welfare system that results in large numbers of Indian children and families who are essentially denied this right?

The *Ontario Child Welfare Act* requires that the best interests of the child be tested on the basis of the merit of the plan of care proposed by C.A.S. compared to the event of the child remaining with his/her family. In our 5 case reviews retrospectively, one would be inclined to come out in favour of the children remaining with extended family in the native community.

Removing children from Indian families exacerbates already existent problems of alcoholism, welfare dependency, crime, unemployment, emotional duress, and social disorganization (McCormick-Collins, 1952). This practice also likely results in increased adult charges and convictions associated with child abuse which might otherwise be quietly dealt with by responsible band authorities. Removing children certainly adds to the breakdown in the extended family system. In some regions, family breakdown

seems to be the key variable in high rates of Indian suicide (Fox and Ward, 1976).

Every culture places its hopes, aspirations, traditions and eventually its community responsibilities with its children. To the extent that Indian children are removed and cultural ties with native origins are devalued or severed, the child welfare system is an agent of cultural imperialism. There are good arguments that other parts of the accultration process have robbed Indian families of some of their parenting skills, and eroded the traditional value base of much of Indian child-rearing practice.

Until recently, large numbers of Indian children left home at a young age for most of each year to attend residential schools in distant white urban communities. With this shift from the traditional milieu to the white residential school, the child was removed from the family at a time when he/she was becoming able to assume some responsibilities for the household and younger sibs. In residential schools traditional values were overtly and covertly devalued, and the children who attended were provided with a confused model for parenting. Their parents were also left with a restricted parenting experience. These children of the residential schools are now having their own families.

The residential schools thus robbed many Indian children of first hand modelling of Indian child-rearing practice and put them in conflict with family (Wintrob, 1969). The health system developed an early pattern of moving Indian children to foster homes or large urban medical facilities for extended periods. This practice of separating children from the traditional parenting role model, as Hudson and MacKenzie point out, may be in large measure responsible for many native child care problems since both parents and child are left with restricted skills in traditional parenting. The existence in Indian families of significant and real "neglect", "risk" or "abuse" is not at issue here. It exists in native families on reserves and in the city. The question is who defines "risk" or "abuse", and who is responsible to deal with native children. As Andres (1981) notes in relation to child welfare legislation:

> "It is useful to recognize that the Act contains many words that must be understood to have a special cultural meaning that is not intelligible to all cultures. Words such as "proper", "competent", "unfit", "normal", "improper", are not clearly defined; their meaning is relative and only implied on the way of life and the values of the dominant white society," p.34.

## TOWARDS INDIAN CONTROL OF CHILD WELFARE.

The order/assimilationist approach to Native child welfare has failed. Attempts to provide a universal egalitarian system of child welfare, based upon Euro-Canadian standards are neither practical

(because of legislative and regional variations) nor desirable in a society where the special constitutional status of Indians is to be respected. Indian family life and child-rearing are different from white children in significant ways which will be discussed shortly.

The child welfare system must move towards a conflict/pluralistic approach which recognizes the importance of cultural differences, cultural bonding, and does not devalue native peoples or traditional native child rearing. Ryan (1980) notes that the majority of the literature on Indian child and family welfare focuses on the negative aspects of the Indian family. Witness for example, Brownlee's (1960) blatantly condescending and patronizing analysis of Indian childhood problems, replete with ethnocentric value-laden statements about Indian culture. Reasons (1977) has outlined how Canadian policy is currently shifting in the corrections field towards a conflict/pluralist view that acknowledges differences between natives and whites, and sensitizes workers and program development to these cultural differences to optimize prevention and rehabilitation strategy. In child welfare, this movement is slow and fragmented.

In July 1981, the first legally mandated Indian child welfare organization was introduced in Brandon, Manitoba by the Dakota-Ojibway Child and Family Service. This program is controlled and staffed by Indian people. More recently, in February 1982, an Indian child welfare agreement was signed in Manitoba. The Manitoba agreement, a landmark decision, was arrived at through a tripartite process involving authorities from federal and provincial agencies and the Four Nations Confederacy. Through this agreement and numerous subsidiary agreements currently being drafted, Indian tribal and regional councils will be delegated authority for the development and delivery of on-reserve child welfare services. While the legislative base for this child welfare agreement is still the *Manitoba Child Welfare Act*, training programs will incorporate the fostering of traditional beliefs, values and customs into the preventative and treatment approaches. To the extent that Indian authorities will be responsible for their own child welfare, this is a large step toward a conflict/pluralist approach. That the ultimate test for apprehension is legislation designed for the white majority, the agreement represents a compromise of sorts, a progressive variation on the order/assimilationist approach.

The most daring approach to the child welfare system has been made by the Spallumcheen Band in British Columbia (Johnston, 1981c). This 300 member band had lost 100 children to child welfare authorities over the past 30 years. In 1980 the band council unilaterally passed a by-law declaring its authority with respect to child welfare. After a noisy lobby and protracted struggle with provincial and federal authorities, the band has succeeded in gaining legal authority and the financial resources to deliver their own child welfare services. Control over foster and adoption place-

ment still rests with the local C.A.S. but contact with off reserve children in foster homes is maintained by Indian child care workers to preserve links to the community. To date about 10 children have gone AWOL from their foster homes and returned to the reserve themselves. In Ontario, the 1979 review of social services to Indians *A Starving Man Doesn't Argue,* pointed out that all Ontario Indian bands were served by 23 Children's Aid Societies, no bands delivered their own service. The report outlined the need for more Indian involvement in the planning, control and delivery of child welfare services to Indians. The province now has an interim plan to fund a number of pilot projects such as the Rainy River Project (Hudson, 1980) which are designed to develop on-reserve native involvement in child welfare matters, and greater input from Indian communities in planning children's services. The long term strategy includes a tripartite negotiation to develop a range of services on reserves in a co-operative manner between child welfare agencies and Band Councils. This represents a step forward, but in Ontario, the 'protection' of native children remains with the local child welfare agency and the Ministry, not with Band Councils. In Ontario the responsibility is not shifting directly to Indian authorities, but rather shared with child welfare agencies who in effect supervise Indian authorities. The *Ontario Child Welfare Act* does not recognize any party or group other than a duly appointed and regulated Children's Aid Society as competent to deliver child welfare services. On this issue of control and standards, Hudson and McKenzie note:

> "The consistently articulated position of child welfare authorities has been to support the principle of general, more universal standards of child care (as they define these) which are applicable across cultures . . . the argument that only properly authorized child welfare workers should be allowed to make judgments on child care matters has been a frequent excuse to discourage the development of community child welfare committees with decision-making powers within the province. It is now more commonly accepted that differences in child rearing practice and standards do exist in some native homes which may represent residues of past cultural practices or specific responses to white society. Permissiveness in a native family, or absenteeism from school, may create certain problems, but it does not necessarily imply a lack of parental caring or control over the child. It follows then that the application of objective standards including the specification of physical facilities, material possessions . . . and lifestyles consistent with the patterns of the dominant society, guarantees discriminatory judgements that are identical to those of the early colonizers . . . the growth of 'native homes for native children'

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> movement has been severely inhibited by the rigidity of physical standards required . . . in the licensing of foster homes . . . control over such standards belongs primarily to the cultural group affected as they will be best able to observe, understand and articulate their required norms in relation to child care." p. 87.

In February 1982, a natice response in Ontario took the form of a less radical version of the Spallumcheen band's approach. Starting with a well organized lobby, two Indian bands near Brantford, Ontario took out 325 memberships of the 508 voting memberships in the Brant Children's Aid Society, with a view to electing a slate of six Indians to the 28 member Board of Directors. This very responsible move towards Indian representation and input in child welfare delivery was initially thwarted by the C.A.S. who halted the election and dismissed one of the organizers on staff on the grounds that "special interest" groups should be prevented from controlling the Board. In a county where Indians comprise 10% of the population, this action can only be seen as prejudicial and bigoted, and after another noisy lobby, the Indians were elected and the officer reinstated. Ontario, host to the largest provincial population of Indians, continues to promote the order/assimilationist model in native child welfare, through the supervision of native workers by local C.A.S's.

The optimal arrangement with respect to native child welfare would be to grant Indian communities the legal mandate and resources to develop their own standards for child and family programs. In the U.S.A. the *Indian Child Welfare Act*, proclaimed in 1978, goes a long way to solving the issues of standards by using the prevailing socio-cultural standards of the Indian community in fostering arrangements (see Miller et al, 1980). It also serves notice to the Indian authorities during apprehension proceedings, and allows bands to intervene in the proceedings and monitor the state court's performance regarding the application of the Act. While regional initiatives are currently underway in Canada, there is no unifying piece of legislation comparable to the American one. The whole issue of native rights with respect to child welfare is currently building some lobby momentum for inclusion in the new Canadian constitution, and this may prove a possible point for nationwide unification of cultural rights respecting native child welfare.

## A SKETCH OF NATIVE/WHITE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES.

It would be presumptuous to attempt a comprehensive description of significant differences between native and white communities as they bear on child and family issues. This is because of the variance among regional groups across Canada and because of variations in current Indian consciousness of traditional child-

rearing practices, their roots, rituals and meaning given the erosion of these traditions and values through accultration.

The tribal, familial and child-rearing practices of Indians find roots in their early history, economics and traditions. Eriksen's (1950) early contrast of the child-rearing practices of Sioux or Dakota, a plains people who had a tradition of nomadic hunting, and the Yurok, a mountain-inhabiting fishing tribe, illustrate some of the child-rearing differences between tribes of American Indians. While distinct regional practices do exist, our discussion will be focussed on those aspects of Indian child-rearing and family life that now may be considered "pan-Indian". To the extent that inter-tribal gatherings and inter-tribal respect has grown out of necessity in the last century in Canada and the U.S.A. so has pan-Indian culture.

## Family Structure and Life Span.

The social organization of Indians into bands is based upon early tribal organization. Aboriginal Indians lived in extended family bands found in hunting-gathering peoples generally. Bands were often headed by a powerful old man, an elder, who was often a shaman (Boggs, 1958). By the end of the nineteenth century, the economic pressures associated with the fur trade and the advent of the white man brought bands together more frequently, increase inter-band transfers, while retaining the existence of bilateral patrilocal and matrilocal extended families in the band structure. Boggs has reviewed how the accultration process has blurred the traditional sex roles, led to greater marital instability, and weakened the extended family system. The extended family system is often poorly understood by service professionals who are trained in the Euro-Canadian tradition of the nuclear family unit. Indian family systems are extended and typically include several households. This aspect of lateral extension into multiple households also includes the incorporation of significant non-kin as family members, as Red Horse (1980a) has detailed. The extended family structure is easily observed in small remote communities and Red Horse argues that these systems may extend over large geographic regions and interstate boundaries. For urban and metropolitan areas, family structure is often replicated long distances from the home reservation, and is highly influenced by the informal incorporation of non-kin in some of the family roles.

The value orientation of Indian families and life-span contrasts with the Euro-Canadian nuclear family. The orientation of Indian families demands lateral-group relational behaviour and life span interdependence in contrast to the autonomy/independence focus of the nuclear family model. Instead of an increasing reliance on self-competence, individualism and autonomy, Indian self-reliance is enmeshed in a web of interdependent, rational behaviour. Red Horse argues that the Indian life span can be broken into three phases: 1. being cared for; 2. preparing to care for; 3. assuming care

for. These phases are not locked to age, but rather to family or cultural role. This concept of care denotes cultural and spiritual maintenance as well as physical and emotional needs fulfillment. Ego identity in the nuclear family is satisfied through the achievement of independence and individual achievement, resulting in eventual retirement with self responsibility apart from the family mainstream. In the extended family system, ego identity is satisfied through interdependent roles enacted in a family context, resulting in the special status of elders in relation to children. They are responsible to transmit a world view reflecting the wisdom of years. Red Horse (1980b) identified elders as the key people in the renaissance of traditional values in the 1980's. It is they who are the keepers of traditions such as naming rituals, secret initiations, and the spiritualism that underlies traditional Indian culture.

Given this extended family systems orientation, it is not surprising that observers of Indian psychology find that the concept of individual personality has little meaning in Indian language or thought, where the individual is recognized only in relation to the greater whole of tribe and culture (Strauss, 1977). This essential difference in community and family structure is reflective of the Indian pantheistic view that man is part of a delicate balance in a universe where all natural elements and living creatures interact and are interdependent.

A key theme in the Ontario Social Services Review *A Starving Man Doesn't Argue* was the implication that the white emphasis on individual and personal social service was feeding the welfare dependency of Indians (currently nine times that of other Ontarians). The level of intervention clearly needs to be shifted to a community development strategy that recognizes the band and extended family first and gives them the responsibility and resources to provide their own services.

## Child-Rearing, Discipline and Welfare.

A frequent charge of neglect of Indian children in native families stems from the observation that Indian parents often provide little care or concern in the form of direct interaction, that they are in essence too laissez-faire with their children, to the point of neglect. It is certainly true that the disruption of major adult roles and sex roles through accultration has resulted in decreased interaction between children and their parents (see Boggs, 1958). To charge that they are laissez-faire, however, is to miss a significant difference between Indians and whites.

Use of a cradleboard with young infants in many communities in Northern Ontario can hardly be described as laissez-faire. The infant is tightly wrapped to keep warm and carried on mother's back facing away from her. In this way, the mother conveniently carries her baby around without much direct interaction or handling.

The restriction of free movement gives rise to conflicting speculation about its effect on development. Some Indians insist it helps to develop self control from an early age. Moral training often takes the form of indirect interaction including warnings, withdrawal of food and attention, and use of scolding and shaming. These experiences of enforced fasting, withholding attention or affection contrast with reward and punishment parenting of Euro-Canadian children. These *disciplinary* measures, in former times were meant to prepare the child for adolescence and its long solitary dream fast. Here the dream was pursued that led to supernatural helpers, the primary means of all life's values. This ritual of the dream fast in many ways was one of the most salient Indian life experiences and constituted a major rite of passage into adulthood. This tradition of respect for the supernatural and altered states of consciousness may in part speak to the widespread tolerance of alcoholism in Indian communities.

Play with infants and humour with young children in pan-Indian. Most Indian infants were traditionally fed on demand, although rocking the cradleboard or dropping a plaything often preceded feeding. Early observations of children from one to three years describe continued infrequent verbal interaction and gentling of children by rocking; older children were given simple tasks to perform and they accompanied adults quietly, watched tasks performed and then tried on their own (Boggs, 1958). The parent often offered little help or comment, but perhaps gave a sign that amounted to a nod of approval. The developmental sequence from infancy forward was to foster the continuance of feelings and to decrease displays of emotion. This characteristic stoicism of Indians is often misread by whites as limited emotional response or lack of feelings.

The principle of non-interference in many of the activities of children is based on the idea that children are instructed about right and wrong, but must learn by modelling and internal spiritual development at an early age. As Andres (1981) noted:

> "Indian parents regard spiritual training as a major task . . . intellectual accomplishment by itself is regarded as less important. Since children are believed to possess spiritual and magical qualities, 'inner awakening' comes before full maturity . . . there is an unborn and sincere search for enlightenment in every youngster, and this search must be allowed without any interference." p. 46.

The provision of kinship obligation also has a worthy tradition in the provision of care to children should parents fall ill or die. Red Horse (1980a) has reviewed the ritual of naming ceremonies. The age at which the ritual is performed varies from tribe to tribe. Family members such as uncles, aunts or grandparents are most often selected as namesakes, although highly trusted non-kin may also serve. Namesakes are meant to assume major child-rearing

responsibilities, and regular contact is expected. These responsibilities include an obligation to care for the child should illness or hard times befall parents, thus providing an inbuilt social insurance that does not undermine parenthood. This feature of built-in 'foster parent' is similar to the Christian tradition of godparents and ensures for the child's welfare through the extended family and kinship system.

This sketch of the "non-interventionist" Indian approach to child-rearing, and the concept of developing self-control from the cradleboard of infancy foward is, of course, an idealized picture of child-rearing principles that stems from traditional practices of subsistence activity and active spiritual indoctrination. Traditions such as the dream-fast have disappeared along with the subsistence activities of hunting and gathering, and so have some of the traditional roles of mother, father and extended kinship. Where then in 1983 does one draw the line between the residues of non-interventionists parenting and frank neglect and impoverishment?

The essential thesis of this paper is that in order to reclaim their children, Indian communities should decide where non-intervention ends and where neglect begins. Indians need to meet the challenge of reorganizing the social roles necessary to ensure extended family and band responsibility for child welfare, and the promotion of distinct and culturally meaningful child-rearing traditions.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS

Given this picture of Indian child welfare, child-rearing and family traditions, what can the helping profession do? The first challenge is to withdraw from the direct provision of social services and assist local Indian communities in their organizational, political and resource struggle to develop and deliver their own services. Social service professionals can inform themselves of some of the long traditions and values in the Indian approach to life as well as the native realities of the 1980's. They can assist band leaders and elders in their struggle to retain, develop and transmit these traditions to native communities. They can assist in training native addiction counsellors on how to combat white man's disease, alcoholism. They can assist whenever possible to bring the responsibilities and resources for native communities back into their own hands. This process has already started in the innovative Manitoba program, but it will take the united efforts of the whole Indian nation to halt the large scale apprehension of children across Canada. The shape of Canadian Indian policy will be reflected in pending amendments to our new constitution, and many of us wait anxiously to see if the condescending attitude of recent years will give way to an enlightened and pluralistic recognition of the rights of Indians to their own culture and their own children.

We are still left with an immediate problem, as the child welfare machinery begins a slow, disjointed move towards Indian control of and responsibility for Indian children. What can we do with the hundreds of Indian children that are floating in and out of child welfare, mental health and correctional facilities, who possess little cultural identification or affiliation? These children, who Patrick Johnston refers to as the "fallout" of the child welfare "scoop" of the 60's and 70's are typified by the high-intervention cases reviewed in Appendix A of this paper. These are the children who have become "apples" (red on the outside, pink or white on the inside) through the best intentions of child welfare authorities.

Perhaps our first task is to encourage and foster linkages between these children and the native community. This can best be accomplished by contact with an Indian worker who can establish contact between the child and local Indian Friendship Centres, and where possible, his community or origin. This activity will require developing the co-operation of foster families, and other adults currently responsible for the child's care. For the City of Toronto, host to one of the largest child welfare organizations in North America, there is *one* native child welfare worker. Those of us working in services to difficult youth must enlist the help of native workers to acknowledge and foster the youth's Indian heritage. Where possible, formal links to Indian community groups must be established and supported. The "contract" worker model at Central Toronto Youth Services has begun to hire native workers for this task and will hopefully assist this process of cultural repatriation. To the extent that programs and professionals enlist the co-operation of native people in the cultural reclaiming of their children, we can begin to halt the process of cultural colonialism that brought these children to our care initially.

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# CAUSES AND PREVENTION

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## SECTION ON NATIVE MENTAL HEALTH

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Editors

Nancy
Many thanks for your support
and encouragement over the years.
Jane & Ann Bland

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Dr. Clare C. Brant

My topic this morning has already been covered extensively in the last couple of days by speakers previous to me. The essence of what I want to say is that mobilization of community resources is the only way that you are going to reduce the pain of psychiatric disorder and psychological distress in your communities. If you wait for the paratroopers, being either Medical Services or Indian Affairs, to do it for you it will just not happen. Several attempts have been made, notably in the Moose Factory Zone. It was established by Dr. Gil Heseltine and myself in 1974 as one of the first Outreach Programs in the north. Up to that time the complaints from the local Band Councils and the community leaders were that they had a lot of very crazy people there and they were killing themselves and each other at an alarming rate; do something, do something. We went up there in an attempt to do something and during the 11 years that program has been in operation I feel that we have made every mistake possible and so are deemed experts in this field of Community Mental Health because we have done everything wrong and now know what one shouldn't do. We are often asked to serve as consultants to other outreach programs notably McGill and sometimes McMaster. One of the things that we have learned that if you parachute a psychiatrist who is allegedly the most capable person to deal with mental disorder into a community, he will sit in the Band Office or in the Clinic tapping his fingers on the table and not have any business at all for a year, two years, and perhaps three. Because the psychiatrist has no credibility whatsoever among the Indian people, he is seen as an extension of the police and is one more attempt at government control of Indian behaviour and the Indian mind.

He is even more treacherous because he wants not merely your money, your land, your children and your soul, he wants to

control your mind as well,and as such is properly seen as a treacherous person that one should steer clear of.

We have learned and had a great deal of difficulty and resistence to, mobilizing the community resources, of going in and saying "who is doing the work here already? who are the wise people whom one consults when one has a personal problem?"

They just don't tell you right off the bat, they have to get to trust you so they know that you are not going to root those people and humiliate them and tell them that they are quacks and demonic. You have to hang around the communities to find out who the actual leaders and wise people are and you have to have patience and time to do that but anybody who doesn't have patience and time should not be dealing with Indians in the first place.

So, having found who the community leaders are, who the gogetters are, and who the spark plugs in the community are, you have to get them together. Find out what the actual difficulties are because they may be completely different from the reported difficulties. Find the difficulties by finding the people who are in the know and then make a plan using your community resources which are your people in the community already while the psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers serve merely as the consultants to facilitate getting done what the people there already know needs to be done.

This is what happens in forms of psychiatry, as a matter of fact, with the possible exception of severe psychotic disorders such as manic depressive psychosis and schizophrenia. The patient already knows before he comes to my office what he needs to do. He does not know how to do it and his motivation is somewhat lacking in going through the

painful process of achieving the goal that he has in mind but usually he knows. He comes in with a drinking problem; he knows he should quit, to harp at him to quit is merely adding to his frustration at the inability to do so.

I want to run through very quickly, things you have already heard but this is a Reader's Digest version of recognizing suicidal behaviour.

There are no known absolute indicators of impending suicide but here are some suggestions. These factors put people in a high risk group. Whether or not you should go along with a lasso and incarcerate these people who carry a high hisk is a matter of debate. Their civil rights will not allow that. We, however, feel that they do not have liberty and freedom to end their own lives that this is an intervention we can, and should, make.

1. **Previous history of suicide attempt.** This is usually present but do not be tricked into ignoring the severity of the condition if the person has never made a suicide attempt. Only 80 or 90% of them actually have, the others have not thought about it before and have given no indication whatsoever that they are going to do it. That is a reversal of what you heard yesterday, most of them have suicide attempts in their past histories and that is a very dangerous situation. Don't ignore the seriousness of the situation if there hasn't been a suicide attempt. Perhaps the person has never been in such a great crisis before and perhaps the person has never resorted to that method of dealing with it, even if he has been in a crisis before.

2. **Strong family history of coping with stress by depressive or suicidal behaviour.** That is to say, the way we solve problems is our own resources, our own previous experiences, but our previous experiences consist of the experiences of our relatives, friends, and community. So that if we come

from a high risk family we are likely to resort under extreme pressure and stress to the problem solving techniques of someone else in our family, such as suicide.

3. Recent loss of love object, separation, divorce, or death. Now I would expand that somewhat. This is taken out of a cookbook, Freedman and Kaplan, our Bible of psychiatry. It can be any other recent loss of love, status, or money.

Native people are particularly vulnerable to humiliation and respond to loss with humiliation; everyone does, but Native people more so. This is something that is not generally known because it is so difficult to express and to grasp. It took me about 4 years to grasp the difference between shame and guilt. White people operate their conscience on the basis of guilt and Native people operate on the basis of shame. We could probably have a weekend seminar working out the difference between those two. But humiliation, as in the Oriental cultures, for us is a terrible thing and a thing which may tip the scales; private or public humiliation may tip the scales in the favour of the wish to die versus the will to live.

4. Increasing distress over a chronic physical illness. I don't think that is different in white people compared to Indian people. People who have chronic chest disease and cannot do anything, can't smoke anymore, who have diabetes and are beginning to have their limbs amputated, who are restricted in their physical activities, etc. don't have much joyfulness out of life and perhaps even are a burden to their families.

5. Social isolation. This brings in loss of job status that I was talking about earlier: lack of connectedness with the rest of the world. There was a sociologist at Western who was wanting to do a sociological study of hermits. He

thought that would be a good PhD thesis for one of his students so he waited for 15 years and could not find a hermit. There was nobody who was not connected to somebody in some affectionate way. There probably are hermits, people who live completely and utterly alone and wish no other human contact but they are so rare as not to be found over a period of 15 years. Social isolation is a very terrible thing for human beings. I keep sheep and I know it is for them. They will not stay in a pasture by themselves, even if you are getting them read to take to the veterinarian, they raise such a ruckus that they have to be with the rest of the flock right up to the last second that you load them into the van.

6. **Previous history of aggression or marked mood swings.** That speaks for itself. People who act out their aggression are likely to turn the aggression on themselves.

7. **Talk of death or worthlessness.** As was noted yesterday, the one young girl had made six declarations of her intent to do herself in and they were ignored. There is a myth that if you talk about it, you won't do it. That is not true nor is it true that the person who doesn't talk about it isn't going to do it. Most of the people will talk about it, 80 - 90% , then you have a small percentage who never mention it. They carry that great burden of painfulness around with them and as Dr. Chrisjohn told you yesterday when you ask them how they are feeling or if they are in trouble they will answer "nothing that I can't handle".

8. **Extra-familial conflict with feelings of rejection.** That is job difficulties, or neighbor difficulties, or trouble with one's peer group or gang.

**Then the 9th one which I consider the most important one for practitioners and front line people is the sudden loss of**

feeling, as if the person were already dead. I heard this explained in another way which had more meaning to me and I'll try to explain it to you to see if it also has some value and meaning.

There is a continuity among the three phrases, I was, I am, I will be. I was yesterday, I am today, and I will be pretty much the same person tomorrow. My friends and family may view that as either a blessing or a curse but it is the truth.

Now when you are talking to, and this what we do with people who have suicidal thoughts, we talk to them interminably, for me about an hour but the frontline workers perhaps 90 minutes, two hours, and someone mentioned the other day 4 hours, but during that time one gets a sense that there is no "I will be". They don't say it but it produces in the therapist or in the interviewer a sense of impending doom, and that doom comes from the realization of one's own mortality.

The fact that I am going to die someday, not right away, and it's not something that I think about very much or feel very much but in speaking to the seriously suicidal patient, one is reminded of one's own future inevitable irreversible death and one gets this feeling of impending doom, a feeling that one's self is going to die. Staying rational, you know that you are not going to die so that the feeling is being generated by this person who is very seriously ill and you should use that as a predictor of the seriousness of the situation. Whenever anyone produces that feeling in me, I hospitalize them or get them hospitalized as quickly as possible.

10. Attempts to straighten out one's affairs and that is being more generous than Indians are as a rule, often giving

away one's favorite possessions, things like guns and hunting boots which the person is going to need if he is going to live another season. Straightening out one's affairs, telling parents or sibs that they will have this or that "after I'm gone".

There was a doctor who committed suicide in London a couple of years back and he went back to his office on Sunday to fill out his OHIP cards so that all his billings would be done. Someone should have smelled a rat when he was working on Sunday on his OHIP cards.

11. **Sudden lifting of on-going depression for no identifiable reason.** This happens in the hospital when you admit someone, you put them on Elavil, and you expect them to recover over the next month and two or three days later they say "I'm fine doctor, I just feel great, I can go home now, I feel like going back to work." This is the person that you put on constant observation because he probably has decided that he is utterly hopeless and the humiliation of having been locked up has tipped him over into the decision of commiting suicide and he will by that guileful route, get out of hospital to do himself in.

Now the assessment of the actual attempt.

1. **Evidence of preparation** - accumulation of pills, writing of a death note is extremely significant and straightening out of one's affairs.

2. **Isolation of the attempt.** Is the person setting him/herself up to be rescued. Does the lady take the pills an hour before her husband is to get home from work or does she rent a motel room and tell the proprietor of the hotel not to bother because she is tired and she wants to sleep all weekend. The isolation is very important and the likelihood of being rescued is very important.

3. The patient's, not IQ, but sophistication plus the method used. Did he/she think it would be lethal. If you had a nurse who took ten Valium tablets you would not take that as a serious suicide attempt, but if you had an unsophisticated housewife who did not know anything about drugs who took 10 Valium tablets you could consider that an extremely serious suicide attempt.

Another point that I wanted to make was the ambivalance of the suicidal state and it is a scale balanced with the will to live and the wish to die. It seems with the blinders that these very depressed, sometimes alcoholic people have that they are unable to see all the factors which would make them have a will to live. That is your job as counsellor, not forcefully, not interferingly, to recite or ask them what their will to live is, or what are the reasons that they should stay alive but you have tip that scales over into the life side and also discuss with them their wish to die and ther reasons sometimes. Don't pooh pooh them and don't say "that that is ridiculous, you shouldn't feel that way". To them that is a very serious situation that they are in and you should give them the indication that you are willing to take it seriously and to understand the reason why they feel that way. But as I say continue to try to tip the scales with your conversation or with whatever you put into the interview in terms of the universal will to live.

The top diagram is another method of demonstrating what ambivalance means, to me anyway, having two contradictory ideas, wishes or feelings in one's mind at the same time.

It is illustrated by wanting to live and wanting to die both at the same time. It is illustrated on the left by someone who has died and this was taken off a photograph out of a book, on the left there are hesitation cuts, the person before he or she made the big slash at the bottom, made

those little nicks but he didn't really want to do it. He wanted to see what it felt like and was probably wincing as this was occurring but finally made the big cut. On the right, there is no hesitation cuts at all and this was in fact not a suicide, it was murder. Somebody who was murdered in that way and set up as a suicide.

I hope you are not expecting a lot of wise words about the networking system. Bea Shawanda is the person to do that and I could never do a follow up on the presentation that she did yesterday.

First of all I want to bring you all greetings from Caroline Attneave who is the grandmother really of this organization. She is one of the founding members but her health has not been well in the last couple of years and she has not been able to come out to our meetings, a great loss to us because she has considerable clinical experience dealing with Native people. She is a Delaware who taught at Harvard for awhile and now she is professor of psychology and of Native Studies at the University of Washington at Seattle. I had the opportunity when I spoke to her to invite her here and she asked me to say hello to all of you, wish you good luck in your careers, and she assured me that since our next meeting is in Vancouver that she will be there with bells on and two artificial hips.

She perhaps did not invent the networking system but she described it in an interesting way and it is so simple. It is like Kleenex; why didn't I invent Kleenex?

The networking system takes mobilization of your community resources. Don't wait for Gabriel or Indian Affairs, or Health and Welfare Canada to come and solve your problems on the Reserve because you are going to wait a very long time before that occurs. Mobilization of the community resources

is the ticket and that can be done as simply as purchasing an answering machine from Radio Shack, for less than $150 now, and putting it in the Band office so that it answers the phone after hours. During the Band Office hours the staff can do this for you and put the person in distress onto the Crisis Line. You have to have about six trained volunteers in the community who are able to recognize suicidal behaviour. You can teach them or we have some other methods of transferring this knowledge.

These Crisis lines operate in most large cities where people in distress can call a number and get to talk to somebody. I think it is a small investment but you do need a minimal amount of training for the volunteers who are willing to talk to the people because they are ambivalent. If they only wanted to die, they wouldn't call anyone and tell them about it.

The volunteer has to be able to recognize the fact that this is a very serious suicidal patient and perhaps get them evacuated or hospitalized if the fear of impending doom is produced in the therapist or the person on the phone.
I'm not promoting Radio Shack, it is just that they have the cheapest equipment available which is reliable enough for this kind of work. Stick it in the Band Office. Get six people who will give their numbers to the machine and program it once a day with a different volunteer's number on it. You may already have 7 or 8 people in the community who are already trained. At Rainbow Lodge I imagine there are 8 or 9 people on staff, several of whom might be willing to be on the Crisis Line and perhaps this system is already in place.

# Micmacs probe need for survival school

By Clifford Paul - Micmac News

**SYDNEY** - Parents and band education authorities expressed the need for the establishment of a Micmac survival school in a panel discussion hosted by St. Anthony Daniel Elementary School, February 2.

The purpose of the forum intended to establish an effective means of communicating expectations. "We expect certain things from native students and we want to know what the parents expect from the school," school principal Roy Gallivan said.

Panelist Pauline Bernard, Director of the Membertou Little Chiefs Centre, said in order for Membertou students to pick up their lost language, a Micmac Survival School must be established on the reserve.

Bernard said a Survival School will promote and preserve Micmac culture, language and values. "It could teach the native student to survive the present day," while maintaining the Micmac language. "It will promote self-esteem and a strong Micmac identity."

Bernard said the present education system is in need of more Micmac parental input, the formation of a native parents association, and consultation for accurate historical portrayals.

Union of Nova Scotia Indians Director of Advisory Services, Dan Christmas, said he was one of the first students from Membertou to attend the school. "When I grew up in the provincial system, it felt as though my Micmac uniqueness was stripped away."

A member of the panel, Christmas says his expectations as a Micmac parent would include what Micmac students begin to learn about themselves.

Christmas presented his son's social studies scribbler to the forum attended by the parents, teachers, and band education authorities. He points to a question asking: Who is Christopher Columbus? Answer: He was the Italian explorer given credit for discovering America. What did he find? Answer: Plenty of trees, water, land and animals. "Where's the aboriginal people?" Christmas asked. "I looked through the whole scribbler. I couldn't find anything on Micmacs."

Christmas presented the school with a reference book geared for grades 4-6. "It could give my child a sense of identity, of who he is."

In all, Christmas said he is very satisfied with the quality of teaching provided at the school. "We can do better. Twenty to twenty-five percent of the students in the school are Micmac."

Panelist Elizabeth LaPorte spoke of communication. "An ongoing concern is to establish an effective two way communication between parent and teacher," the band education liaison said. "How can parents be made to feel comfortable in dialogue with the school and teachers?"

LaPorte listed apprehension, poverty, isolation, bad experiences and other factors as barriers to communication. "There are many reasons why parents don't come to the school," she said. "But the barriers have to be demolished." LaPorte suggested home visits by the teachers or the establishment of a separate parent/teacher meeting on reserve.

Ruth Christmas, a longtime member of the band education committee and former band councillor, said it was 25 years ago when she and Bernard promoted discussion on placing Membertou school children in the provincial school system. "I think it's the best move we ever made - putting our kids in provincial schools."

Christmas said she and Bernard both had problems over the years, problems with parents. "We couldn't drag them from home and bring them to talk with the teachers. I think the teachers have to come to the reserve."

Christmas said young parents should take an active role in education of their children. "It's time for new mothers (and fathers) to come in and form a new committee" to meet the needs of their children in modern day education.

The question and answer period turned into a talk on the Micmac language and its survival in Membertou.

Micmac elders Helen Martin and Caroline Marshall said it would be difficult for a child to learn the language if English is spoken at home. "Parents have to start at home," Martin said. "I learned to speak Micmac when I was 14 years old. I only spoke English until then. It's never too late to teach a child."

Marshall said in order for children to speak Micmac they need total immersion in the language at home.

Through the course of the meeting, the school received the important links to much needed Micmac language and cultural materials to improve the quality of education provided by the school.

"We are serious," Gallivan concluded. "We are committed to improving. We will zero in on the self-esteem and culture," but something has to be done on both sides of the language issue.

# OUR SCHOOLS OUR SELVES

A Magazine for Canadian Education Activists

On Strike:
Toronto Teachers and
Saskatoon Profs

Labour's Message in
Nova Scotia Schools and
down at Queen's Park

The Free Trade Ratchet

## Saskatoon Native Survival School

## A Feminist Agenda for Canadian Schools

## School Wars: BC, Alberta, Manitoba

## Contracting Out at the Toronto Board

# Acting and Taking Care of People at the Saskatoon Native Survival School

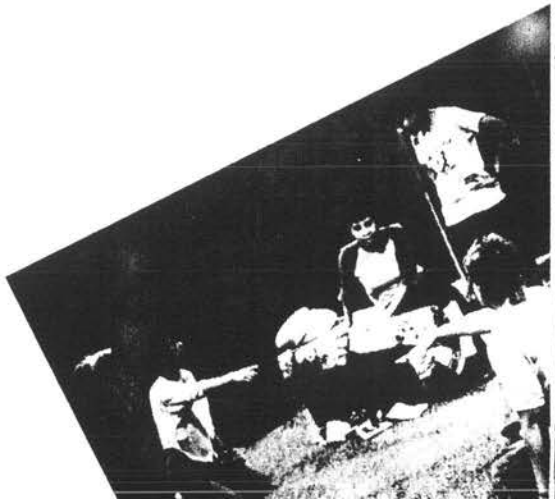
Photos by
Becky
Mackie James

Part 1

## Indians 'R' Us
## The Experience of a Survival School Pedagogy

*Robert Regnier*

John — Are you doing this work again? (*Indicates her studying*)
Carrie — Yeah, it's my work.
John — All you ever do is your damn homework.
Carrie — It's something I promised to do.
John — I want you to quit school.
Carrie — No. I'm not going to quit school. It's a promise I made to my grandfather.
John — You never spend any time with me. I hate that. You don't even seem like my girlfriend anymore.
Carrie — I'm here for you John. I'm here every day for you.
John — Yeah. You're always doing this work all the time. (*He slams his fist on the table.*)
Carrie — But I am here for you all the time, John.
John — I want you to quit, and I mean it.
Carrie — No! I'm not going to quit, and I mean it.
John — (*He slams her book on the table.*) I'm leaving.
(*John exits. Carrie stands to watch him go, then returns to her desk, where she sits, head in hands.*)

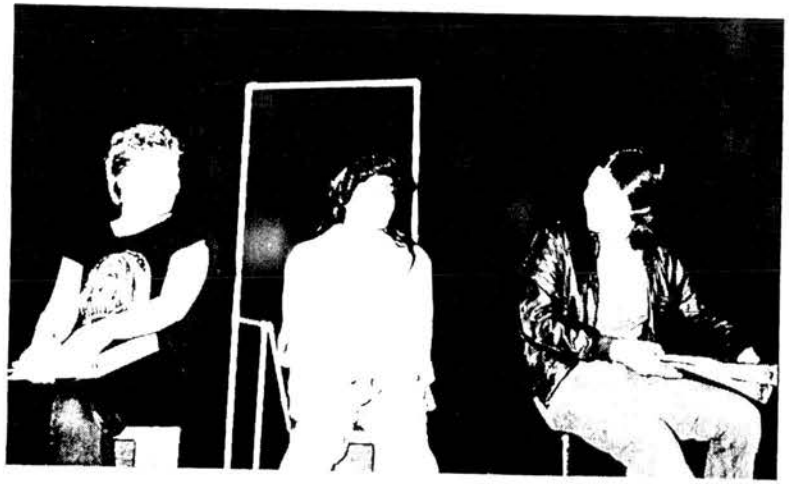


This scene is from **Indians 'R' Us**, the seventh annual collective inprovisational play presented by Saskatoon Native Theatre actors at the Saskatoon Native Survival School. It presents one of the many struggles urban native students see themselves going through to obtain university education. It confirms a dream many have denied. And it confronts streaming structures that destine almost all native students to remedial, terminal, exceptional, vocational and technical programs. Survival School students improvised and scripted this play in response to a television report that portrayed Indian youth in downtown Saskatoon as kids without "goals or purpose in their lives". The play emphasizes the often unnoticed "history of academic success" among Indian people in their struggle against racism and poverty.[1]

The play's heroine "begins at a dead end" and travels the "rocky road" of decisions about child care, custody arrangements, alcoholism, drug abuse, relationships with men and the demands of family to achieve her dream of a university education — a dream of many generations of Canadian native students.

More than any other place in Canada, Saskatchewan has failed to achieve this dream. The provincial per capita native population is the highest in the country, and the urban native dropout rate has been pegged, in a recent study, at 93%.

For six years, Kelly Murphy, a teacher at the Saskatoon Native Survival School, has worked to develop a pedagogy that will seriously







touch the lives of these native kids — kids for whom regular schooling has been a disaster. Alongside the Survival School Parent's Council, she's helped create the Saskatoon Native Theatre with this new pedagogy at its centre. Much in the same way as Paulo Friere developed his cultural and literacy circles, Murphy's revolutionary appproach to teaching was created through much intensive practice and experimentation. It proposes a liberating education constructed upon the liberating and humanizing possibilities within urban native youth culture, social class realities and academic aspirations. This pedagogical project, developed through "story circles" and "collective improvisations" advances each year though continual experimentation — a process we'll be looking at in more detail in Part II.

## Making The Play

The production of **Indians 'R' Us** was both a play and an experiment in teaching. This year's innovation was exploring students' experiences as young children. It was no easy task. Fourteen to seventeen-year-old streetwise native boys, who take pride in macho images, do not lightly discuss their childhood vulnerabilities. And any local native girl, who played at being a child, risked the prospect of being ridiculed into social oblivion.

The breakthrough in the play is attributed to a story volunteered during one of the "story circle" sessions. One student told how at a party he had made light of a friend's depression about his break-up with a girl friend. He later discovered his friend attempting to commit suicide, and, instead of joking and being a tough guy about it, he took the chance of extending compassion and support. This personal struggle was seized upon by the circle participants, and they started to focus on what it meant to be a man and that in turn let them be more open to an understanding of childhood. Kelly Murphy explains: "When Terry told this story in the story circle, three of the boys in the group volunteered and did an improvisation of it. The circle went on to discuss the difficulty for many males to show support and vulnerability. The session affirmed that it was not less manly to suffer the pains of loneliness or to show tenderness and compassion. The story liberated others in the session to play the role of children, and the story became incorporated as a scene in the play."

In the hours of improvisational sessions which preceeded the

play, students did not just think theoretically about childhood and manhood. They reflected upon their individual and collective childhoods, improvised versions of childhood experiences to one another, and re-created a language for talking about and redeeming their childhoods. Kelly animated their considerations through questions and directions: "What would he feel like? Why would he feel that way? What could you do? How do you communcate support? How do you convey understanding? Where would you stand? Stand there. How would you move? Try it. Does it work? What works? What would you say? What else might you say? When would you say it? Try it. Try it again. Do you think this or that would work? Try it again. Try it again. What would you change? Change it. Try it again. Again this way. Do it. Good.. How could we develop this scene more substantially. Ok, we'll try it again tomorrow."

By the time the workshops are done, students have not just thought abstractly nor have they just learned techniques. They have explored ways to think within social situations. In this way they develop a practical social imagination to help face the social reality outside the school. And they construct a liberating community with one another. As they tell their stories and improvise their views of social reality within the security of the circle and under the direction of a co-liberating teacher, they see and receive creative social support from one another. Beyond the discussion of community, students actually build community among themselves. And they begin to live the way they act.

This pedagogy is very different from the commercial "critical-thinking" packages, which abstract such thought from the realities of culture and social class. It is also distinct from progressive educational approaches for social change that separate theory from practice, reflection from action and community from school.

## Nailpolish and Childhood

Kelly recalls how the addition of nailpolish to the pre-play Medicine Bag Circle workshop became a vehicle for introducing childhood realities into the play. In the Medicine Bag Circle each student selects one of several objects — a piece of snare wire, a can for cooking tea, a piece of calico cloth, a diaper — from a bag located in the centre of a circle and recounts an event or occasion the object reminds them of.. Students create improvisations and a collective story





based on these stories. "The student who picked it, told the story of how as a child she painted her mother's feet with nail polish while she slept. The play **Indians 'R' Us** begins with children who find a bag of bottles of nail polish. In their playfulness and creativity the infants, neglected by their crashed-out mother, paint her feet and a happy face on the window as they wait for their father to return home."

Throughout the play Survival School students introduce difficult decisions to be made about child care and custody in both agonizing and redemptive moments. In one scene, a young woman, who has received her Commerce degree and now works on the economic development of reserves, shows up looking for her daughter.

Sheila — Margarie, this is Leanne.
Leanne — I'm your mom..
Margie — My mother? (*To Sheila*) But I thought you were my mother.
Sheila — I am your mom.
Leanne — She's just your step-mother.
Margie — Why wasn't I told about this?
Sheila — Steven thought it was best you didn't know about it. (*To Leanne*) Steven and I need to talk about this and so do Margie and I, so I think you'd better leave. (*Hands Leanne her briefcase, pointedly*)
Leanne — Fine, I'll go. Margie, I'll be seeing you again. (*To Sheila*) And I might be seeing you in court. (*Exit*)
Sheila — Margie, we need to talk. Let's sit down. (*They sit facing each other.*) Sometimes people have to make a decision they don't want to make. You too are going to have to make a decision you don't want to make. That decision is: If you want to live with me, that's fine. If you want to live with your mom, that's fine too. You don't have to make that decision now. You can make it anytime.

This Saskatoon Native Theatre play, like earlier ones, is more than stories and improvisations. It is music, light, choreography and culture dramatized in public performance. It can capture authentic humour and tragey, dreams and fantasies of native youth whose voices have been silenced by poverty, racism and indifference and have not been represented in the popular media nor the school curriculum.

There is a character in this play who has appeared in five or six Survival School creations.. He is a cabdriver, a narrator, who connects many scenes in the play and points out "our common understanding of

life as a journey". "The cabbie", says Kelly, "is the character, the driving force, the ubiquitous mover, the 24 hour jockey in the lives of the urban poor".[2] He introduces Scene VII, after the heroine Carrie commits herself to getting a university education. He cautions the audience about what the decision will mean. "Fasten your seatbelts. There is a rocky road ahead. Unclear vision, confused reflexes make this vehicle unsafe. The potholes are bottomless. Some passengers get out and walk. Don't take your eyes off the road for a moment."[3]

## Building a School

Kelly Murphy initiated and spearheads this way of teaching urban native youth. She previously taught pre-school children in Zambia's shanty town Liberty Schools, situated in old motorless school buses. She has developed and taught English as a Second Language programs for refugee students in Saskatoon. In 1988, she won the Hilroy Fellowship of the Roy G. Hill Foundation from the Canadian Teachers' Federation "in recognition of initiative and professional enterprize displayed in the successful application of an important educational innovation."

Ruth Smillie, an actress, presently Director of Catalyst Theatre in Edmonton, worked with Kelly, who had no previous theatre experience, to develop the project's concept and to introduce dramatic skills in the first years of the program.

The work these women have done at the Saskatoon Native Survival School reflects a broader struggle to advance academic and culturally-based education programs within the Survival School movement as a whole. This movement has been active in Canada since 1976, and there are now five Canadian Indian Survival Schools: Kahnawake Survival School (adjacent to Montreal), Wandering Spirit Survival School in Toronto, Plains Indian Cultural Survival School in Calgary, Spirit Rising in Vancouver, and, of course, the SNSS.

The Saskatoon Native Survival School began operations in September 1980 and has expanded from an original Grade 7 to 10 program with 3 teachers and 45 students to include Grade 12 and 130 students by 1987. The 14 staff include 7 classroom teachers, a principal, vice-principal, librarian, cook, secretary, janitor and pupil service worker. In 1987, plans were announced for a major renovation to the existing 1928 building to add a high-school gymnasium, laboratories





and additonal classrooms. Over the years, a curriculum-developer and teachers have designed provincially-accredited high school courses in English, Social Studies, Cultural Arts and Survival Skills with substantive Indian components and perspectives. Cultural activities include a daily morning sweetgrass ceremony, visits and sessions with elders, an annual cultural camp, feasts, and indiginizing the curriculum.

Besides addressing the need for appropriate academic and cultural programs, the Survival School Parents' Council insisted the school be able to respond to the various social crises its students would face: homelessness, incarceration, alcoholism, drug abuse, suicide and unemployment. They wanted a school that recognized their realities. In one year, for example, 72 out of 77 students lived in single-parent families, in group homes, with one another or with relatives rather than in two-parent family arrangements. The school now offers a free hot lunch for students who do not have regular meals, and the pupil services worker assists students with family services, welfare, medical attention, Indian Affairs, the courts, housing, and income.

## Building A Theatre

The production of **Indians 'R' Us** reflects a new optimism and self-confidence built upon the previous collective creations at the school. **Uptown Circles** (1983) follows the life and struggles of a young native man through depression in bars and prison to spirit growth in traditional Indian religion. **Papihowin: Laughter Tying Our Lives Together** (1984) centres on urban native youth, who, in their attempts to escape the city, have to come to see that the reserve is not the golden refuge they thought it would be. They encounter an alcoholic father, who out of fear, shot the Thunderbird — an animal spirt that was going to give him a vision of his destiny. One of the youths assumes the role of the traditional Cree "Contrary" and, through ridicule, helps his father face his fear, find laughter and re-encounter the Thunderbird. **Street Zone** (1985) is about a spirited struggle — involving gang warfare — to resist the coercion and threats of a pimp and her thugs, who were pressing students into becoming hookers. Superman and an alien spacecraft were projected into the play as the only means of resolving the problem. The play was presented at the 1985 Winnipeg **Bread and Dreams Festival** of the Canadian Popular Theatre Alliance where it received standing ovations to sellout crowds two nights in a row. In

**Family Violators Will Be Towed Away** (1986), four sisters run away together without being apprehended or institutionalized. Leaving their parents, they are able to resolve their problems. **Troubled Spirits** (1987) is about the mythological trickster who moves from the animal world of the gopher, bear and bird to assist young people confront an alcoholic chief and start their own school on the reserve.

In each year's program the workshops draw upon valuable resources to ensure quality work. Maria Campbell, author of **Halfbreed**, worked on the very first play and brought the Medicine Bag practice into the workshops. Tanto Martin, an Indian actress seen in the recent film **Loyalties,** acted with the students in the first plays. Tom Bentley-Fisher directed **Family Violators Will Be Towed Away** in 1986, and Duane Favel, an extremely versatile native actor, acted with the students in **Street Zone**. More recently Toronto maskmaker, Trish Leeper, did two sets of workshops at the school. John Lazarus, a Vancouver playwright, who works on theatre for adolescents and whose plays have focussed on the problems of young people, worked at the school for three days in the spring of 1987.

The production team for each play includes Kelly as Animateur, a General Manager, Stage Manager, Technical Service Worker and Production Assistant. Sheila Crampton is the stage manager. She trained at the National Theatre School and at a mime school and has worked in theatre for eight years, working especially with young people. Ruth Cutland, the General Manager of Saskatoon Native Theatre, is also the Chairperson of the Parents Council of the school. She did workshops in the first three years, travels with the group, makes many arrangements and shares fundraising for the annual production with Kelly. That fundraising takes them to the Saskatchewan Drug and Alcohol Commission, OXFAM-Canada, Secretary of State and other groups and individuals.

The Native Theatre at the Survival School has established a consistent standard of performance that people want to see. Kelly is invited to do workshops for many groups including the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, the Prince Albert District Chiefs, various reserves, Northern Lights School Division, and the Saskatchewan Drama Association. Demand for performances far outstrip their ability to provide them. Some performances provide wonderful opportunities for the students. In 1987, for example, the Native Theatre performed for a second time at the Canadian Popular Theatre Alliance festival. This





international festival included a group from India (that dealt with black marketeering, bride price and dowry), an Inuit group that represented their people's hunting herds being disrupted by NATO flights, a Jamacian troup that dealt with their heritage of racism and colonialism, South African players who told the story of Steve Biko's last days, and a group of Nicaraguans expressing the emerging identity of a liberated people.

Kelly remembers how after travelling twelve hours to the festival, they were kept awake by Nicaraguans singing songs in their room. By the next day relations had improved dramatically. "When we got up (about noon), the Nicaraguans were up and were interested in us. With my twenty words of Spanish, I began to introduce the kids to them. The kids broke through the language barrier right there and invited the Nicaraguans to share a meal with us.. They came along, and we became very close. We were sharing songs, games and stories. They came to our show. We spent many late hours trying to translate their songs into English. When we came to say good-bye, there were many tears. That connection at a human, emotional and artistic level was so potent and so intense and so rapid."

## The Last Word

At a picnic of the **Street Zone** actors in 1986 I asked the cast members in a taped interview, "What has this drama project done for you?" Lisa Nanaquwetung, the lead actress in the play, said: "The difference it made to me was we never used to know each other. We never used to chat with each other. I think it made us better friends. We wouldn't even be talking to each other.... It keeps you busy. When there were rehersals and practices we would always (otherwise) be at the mall. You just waste your time over there. You stand around. Somebody comes around and asks you if you want a couple of joints. It took us away from most of that."

Milton Wapass said: "People come out with feelings they never had before."

Notes:

1. Kelly Murphy, "Indians 'R' Us — Background", **Four Collective Creations,** Saskatoon Native Theatre, Unpublished Manuscript, 1988, p. 5
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 17.

*Robert Regnier was once the principal of the Saskatoon Native Survival School and currently teaches in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon.*





Part 2

# Story Circles: A Method of Acting and Taking Care of People

*This is a description of how the drama program at the Saskatoon Native Survival School works. It is based on* ***Story Circles*** *by Ruth Smillie and Kelly Murphy.*

"I was standing at the bus stop. Everything in my life wasn't going right. Mom was drinking again. She was having a party. I didn't want to go home. I started to walk. I walked for a long time. Then I was on the bridge. I was looking at the water. I wanted to jump. Then I saw Kohkum in the water. She was calling, "Awas! Awas!" (Go away! Go Away!) I ran."

Martine is twelve. She wrote this story at Saskatoon's Native Survival School. Martine is a survivor – of alcoholism, poverty, poor parenting. She is surviving not only because of her own inner strengths, but also because of the remnants of native culture that still remain. It is Martine's Indian grandmother who turns her away from suicide. The spirit of Kohkum surrounds this little girl. It protects her.

These small stories emerge every day at the Saskatoon Native Survival School. But they do not emerge spontaneously. They are gently sought after. They are nurtured into creation, and then they are worked with to give the story teller something back from her story.

The teachers call their method "Story Circles". But it is much more than a group of students sitting around telling stories. It is disciplined method of teaching literacy and acting. It is a craft. It requires mastery. It has standards. It is demanding. And it is relentless in its belief that the students will learn if they speak about their own culture and their own experiences.

The pedagogy draws on the work of the great Russian drama teacher Constantin Stanislovski in which observation, mood, purposeful action and spontaneity are the key to telling a story using improvisational theatre techniques. It also draws importantly on the Indian studens' experiences of traditional winter story telling sessions. It differs from creative drama which explores imaginary situations and beings, and it differs from creative movement which subordinates character and story to skilled body placement. One of the central purposes of this method of teaching is to get students to reflect and act on their own experiences.

The students who take part in the Story Circles are preparing for admission to Grade Nine. They are tested before they begin the drama program and after it ends. For six weeks, four days a week, two hours a day they work at language arts. Every child who has emerged from the program has improved in language skills, some of them dramatically. The teachers administer the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, Brown Level and a multitude of other tests if particular teachers or school boards require them.

Here is a description of the method, drawn from Smilie and Murphy's **Story Circles**.





## The Warm-up

In front of you are twelve young people. They are suffering from some or all of the following problems: alcohol and drug abuse, poor nutrition, sugar addiction, lack of sleep and extreme muscle tension. In short, they are physcial wrecks. They also do not like organized physical activity. They do not like the idea of a warm-up. But they understand that this is one of the many things in their drama workshop that is non-negotiable.

The warm-up should last for 10-15 minutes. You can adopt many different kinds of warm-up, for instance a kind of mild aerobics done to cassette made from the Top 40. It includes jogging and keeps the student's heartrate up for the time it takes to do some cardiovascular good. Sometimes games replace or add to the aerobics.

## The Story Circle

The core of the teaching method is the story circle, made up of students and teachers. The group sits on the floor in a circle: announcements are made; information shared; the plan for the session is introduced. The "Story Circle" emerges as a daily ritual. It always follows the same structure: one person initiates a story with a phrase or sentence; the next person repeats the phrase or sentence, then adds to the story and so on around the circle until everyone has contributed. Within the structure variations are added, such as providing the first and last line of the story, adding a twist to the plot, or introducing objects to stimulate ideas. But the ritual of moving clockwise around the circle, repeating everything that has been said before adding to the story, having the story begin with one person and end with that same person, always remains the same. Sometimes the circle begins to act out and work improvisations with the story.

The story circle is the critical exercise in developing the group's collective story-telling and skills. The students develop tremendous listening skills and learn to feel at ease speaking in a group. They become aware of their collective power to create and share stories.

At the end of each workshop session the group sits in a circle on the floor. The day's activities are reviewed.. Plans are made to contact absentee students and the contribution of each member of the circle is affirmed.

## From Story Circle to Improvisation

Here is how improvisation works. After the story circle ends divide the class into groups of four to six. Each group sits together in a circle and retells the story.

Direct the groups to break down the story into units and assign a title to each.

Write the "Five W's" on the blackboard: Who? What? When? Why? and Where? By answering each of these questions the students will be able to place each of their units.

Each group outlines the action for each of the units. One person in each group should record the scenarios. Then one actor decides on the objective for each unit.

The groups need time to rehearse their improvisations. Then each group presents its work to the rest of the class.

For instance, Martine divided her little story that begins this article into "units of action".

Unit I: Trouble at Home
Unit 2: Running Away
Unit 3: Kohkum

Then several students cast themselves as Martine's mother, the other people at the party and Kohkum. Martine played herself. She outlined the situation for the other actors. They improvised the units several times, and here, briefly, are the results.

Unit 1: Trouble at Home

All of the actors were in mask. The mother and the adults were drunk. Martine was sitting on the floor trying to do her homework. She gives up. She begs her mother to stop drinking and send everyone away. The mother tells Martine to leave her alone. Martine leaves.

Unit 2: Running Away

Martine stands by the bus stop. The bus stop is a woman wearing a 'white face" mask standing with her back to Martine. Martine cries and holds onto the bus stop for support. The woman in the 'white-face" mask remains rigid and unmoved. Martine starts to walk.. She comes to the bridge.. She looks into the water. She considers killing herself.





Unit 3: Kohkum

Martine stands on the table that represents a bridge. Slowly, her Kohkum appears and yells at Martine to go away.. Martine runs.

The Actions

Actions are used to record an improvisation. By writing down exactly what a character was doing at a given moment in a unit, the actors are able to rehearse and build on their work through a clearly-defined process.

The actions for Martine's units were broken down this way:

Unit 1: Trouble at Home

| Martine | Mother |
|---|---|
| I watch the party | I greet my friends |
| I open my book | I revel in the good times |
| I try to concentrate | I knock over a drink |
| I read | I laugh |
| I give up | I play with my friends |
| I go to my mother | I try to ignore Martine |
| I plead | I put her down |
| I withdraw | I dismiss her |
| I leave | |

Unit 2: Running Away

| Martine | Bus Stop |
|---|---|
| I go to the bus stop | I ignore Martine |
| I look for help | |
| I give up | |
| I weep | |
| I walk | |
| I see the water | |
| I consider | |

Unit 3: Kohkum

| Martine | Kohkum |
|---|---|
| I see Kohkum | I see Martine |
| I panic | I fear for her |
| I run | I order |

The character's objectives provide the emotional colour and motivation for the playing of the action. Some of Martine's objectives were: I want the party to stop; I want to escape from the pain; I want to get away from the vision. The only real objective Kohkum had was a desire to save her grandchild.

## Keeping Faith in the Process

In teaching the Method, don't rush or cheat the process in favour of getting on with a performance. The benefits of the Story Circle are language skills, confidence, group skills and self-esteem. These grow out of the process, not the performance. If a performance grows out of a clearly-defined methodology, it will enrich the process as a whole. But if steps are missed or abbreviated in favour of doing a play, all the benefits of the workshops will be at risk.

Nor is the process allowed to continue if the acting out of units is not clear. A prisoner, for example, is filing the bars in his cell in an attempt to escape. The actor can "slur" the action by not focussing on the filing. Or his action can be "uncommitted", as when he stops to listen for the guard and only "shows" us that he is listening instead of really using his sense of hearing to listen for footsteps or the sound of keys rattling. The action can also be "unclear" or muddy — unconvincing to an audience, who are not entirely sure what the actor is doing.

Once the unit is acted effectively "twitches" can be added. The students repeat the units with a twitch (like pulling an ear lobe, brushing hair away from the eyes, etc.). They make the twitch obsessive and continuous. They also must have an objective: eg. the prisoner's objective — I want to be free. They re-perform the units without announcing their actions. With the tritches in and with the emotional force of their objectives. The action is stopped immediately if any part is unclear or if the students forget their twitches.





There are a number of exercises throughout the course. An exercise like "Difficulty with Small Objects" might have two students acting out shopping for blue jeans where each one is trying to fit into the tiniest pair of jeans they can find. We have people pretend they are other people. Wayne Gretsky talking with Peter Pocklington about his trade, a bag lady, Madonna ... anyone or any situation that the students are interested in.

Vignettes of daily life begin to emerge out of these exercises A party in a car at a drive-in movie is wrecked by the presence of a little brother from one of the kids, who has to babysit continuously. All of a sudden baby brother gets locked in the trunk of the car ... the resentment of kids who have too much responsibility for other kids. As the improvs move along, more and more events reflect the daily life of these native kids — full of fights, bravado and drugs.

## The Medicine Bag Circle

We move closer to daily reality with the exercise of the Medicine Bag Circle.

In this exercise the students bring objects from native folklore, the traditional medicine bag or simply items which will remind them of their own childhood. They are placed on the floor in the middle of the circle and each kid picks an item and tells about it. There is no teasing or joking about the Medicine Bag Circle. Each student is to be supported and encouraged. They start their stories with these phrases: "This makes me think of ..." or "This reminds me of ...".

When all the stories have been told the students keep the objects for the remainder of the session. Then they have five to ten minutes to record their stories in their journals. During this time, teachers review the stories told in the circle and divide the students in small groups of five or six kids. They also keep records of each story. This is important because the acting of the stories may be done over and over. These are also the most heartfelt stories. If some big boy has told a story about his "soother" to ten of his classmates, one had better be serious about remembering it. It's likely it took a good deal of emotional courage to pick the item and tell the story in the first place.

Then the stories are acted out. Comments are directed to clarifying the stories rather than discussing the acting merits of the improvisations.

There are other circles: animal circles where each person is given the name of an animal according to the kind of physical and emotional qualities that person might share with an animal being.

There's lots of fun making masks and dummies which helps bring out the kids' sense of expression too.

## Acting and Taking Care of People

What seems so extraordinary about experiences at the Saskatoon Native Survival School is not the quality of the acting — because making actors of these kids wasn't the highest priority — but the quality of the group experiences. From very hesitant beginnings, the students transform themselves into confident, caring human beings who are as much concerned with one another as they are with the performance.

The idea and sound man, Donald, was a good example of this. Donald fed music to the actors throughout rehearsals. His mind was constantly searching for different tapes, different themes, titles for the plays and sound effects. But he was also taking care of people. If someone missed a session, or more seriously a rehearsal, Donald was





on the phone or he'd go and visit the student at home. He would pace about the school checking to see that the cast was sticking around for rehearsals.

This was a student who could not articulate what he thought when he first came into the group. He stumbled over words and backtracked in descriptions.

When he became involved in drama, he had to develop his story telling skills so the stories behind the plays came across clearly. He had to remember key lines and jokes in each scene. Because he wanted things to go so well, he memorized pretty much everyone else's lines and jokes, as well as his own. He remembered set changes, personal props and refinements of blocking and choreography. His standardized test scores in the area of Reading Comprehension went from 6.8 to 9.1 in four months.

It is people like Donald who give energy to the group and inspiration to continue. Most Survival School students live tough lives, and it has been very difficult for them to do anything in an organized fashion. But they have shown tremendous tenacity and great courage in baring their lives and taking responsibility to create something successful for themselves.

After the final performance of a collective play, one very hesitant young fellow came up to his teachers and said:

> "All my life I thought it was inevitable that I'd be nothing but a skid row bum. But then I got into drama. And when I was out there in front of all those people, and they were listening to us — really listening — I realized that maybe I didn't have to turn out that way after all."

**Story Circles** is available from the Saskatchewan Teacher's Federation, 2317 Arlington Ave., Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. It costs $8.40

# Part 3

## My Survival School And What It Means To Me

*Sheila Baldhead*

I was born in Wakaw and I grew up on the One Arrow reserve near Duck Lake. We moved to Saskatoon thirteen years ago because there wasn't any running water or any sewage system, and there was a problem with heating on the reserve. Even now, only some houses have those things.





In Saskatoon I've gone to Wilson, Victoria, Prince Philip, and now, the Survival School. I was going to Holy Cross this September, but I didn't get along with the students. They were snobby. They thought, "Oh God, an Indian, give us a break." So I didn't like it. I didn't have any friends at all. I felt lonely, and it was frustrating trying to go from class to class trying to find my way around. It was a big school. There were only a few Native students there. So my brother and I, we changed schools.

In one of the other schools I went to, I had this friend ... I went to her house and visited her for a couple of hours. Her Mum and Dad were there. When I came home she phoned me and said her Mom told her she didn't want me to come to their house anymore. I asked her why, but she wouldn't give me an explanation. I went to her house and asked her Mum, "Why don't you like me coming to your house?" She didn't say anything.

I wasn't mad at her, but I wanted to ask her face to face. I just couldn't see why I couldn't come over. Just because I'm Native or a different colour. I can't believe that just because you're Black or Chinese that they have something against you. We're all the same inside.

At the Survival School, we're all the same colour. Some people speak Saulteaux and other Native languages. It doesn't matter the way you dress or how your hair looks. They accept you. When you go to a white school, they tend to look at you like "Look at that sloppy Indian." Me, I try to make sure I'm not sloppy, but they think I am anyway. I want to say to them, "Hey look, she's dressing okay. She's just another person." It doesn't matter how you dress so long as you come to school clean. It's your personality they should think of or if you're good.

We say it's like a big happy family going to this school. You get along with everybody, and the teachers are there if you have a problem. The school also gives you a little push along the way. They guide you to getting more education.

From the school's drama project I learned to communicate with new friends and meet new people. I like acting and waiting for people to applaud. That was a good feeling. There were people watching and saying what's going to happen next in the play and sitting on the edge of their seats.

Another reason I like the Survival School is that here I learn Cree. When I was in other schools, I used to take French. I feel better

taking Cree because I can speak to Mum and Dad in their language. When I was a child Mum and Dad spoke Cree to us, and we used to speak it on the reserve. But when we moved to the city I lost all my Cree. We spoke English all the time. My parents still speak Cree, and now I'm trying to speak it to them again.

I think getting a good education is important. I want to get a really good job, which will support me and help me in the future. My goal in life has always been to be an RCMP officer. I'd like to help out students with their problems. I just like to help people. Some Native kids have done crimes, and if a Native person was helping them it would be good, because that person would be more understanding of these kids.

I think Native people are slowly moving up in what they do with their culture. People are interested in Native culture and wonder what this has to do with that. This school makes me proud of my culture and being an Indian. Look, these are Native students. Look what they're doing.

*This story by Sheila Baldhead will be found in a book of photographs and interviews of SNSS students and their families by Becky Mackie James, who did the photographs accompanying the above article. The book will be published by Fifth House in Saskatoon in the fall of 1989. Becky Mackie James now works out of Regina.*



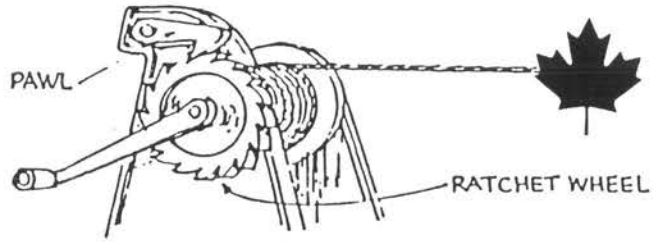
# The Free Trade Ratchet

## What Does It Mean For Canada's Schools?

*David Clandfield*

A new school year is well under way and national elections are in the offing in both Canada and the US. The rhetoric is heating up again on the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement.

**ratch.et** (rach'it) *n.* a wheel or bar with teeth that strike against a catch fixed so that motion is permitted in one direction but not in another.




**ratchet wheel** a wheel with teeth and a catch that permits motion in only one direction. (from *Gage Canadian Dictionary*)

# Mikmaq Cultural Camp

## Philosophy

The expression of the Mikmaq language and culture is a manifestation of the gifts given to us by our Creator at our beginning:

When the Mikmaq people awoke, naked and lost, they asked the Creator: "How shall we live?" Our Creator taught us how to hunt and fish to survive, how to cure what we took, taught us about the medicines in the plants and they would bring us back to health. Our Creator taught us about the Constellations which would keep us from being lost at night, and about the Milky Way, the path of the dead into the Spirit World. Our Creator taught us all that was wise and good and then gave us a language by which we would teach our children how to live and survive forever. Our Creator taught us to pray, to sleep and to listen to the animals that would come to us in our dreams, for they would deliver us advise from our Creator. Then our Creator told us of the presence of two worlds separated by a cloud that open and fell at intervals, the good, firm and believing at heart would be able to cross through the two worlds unscathed but the bad, weak and unbelieving would be crushed to atoms.

It is the philosophy of our Mikmaq elders to continue the teachings, beliefs, values and skills of our Creator through the language and in the context of our community in order that we will continue to survive. In these modern days, the need for traditional skills are superior to modern fragmented knowledge which is self-destructive.

The Cultural Camp is an attempt to provide children with continuous learning and experiences that will help shape their tribal consciousness and bring them closer to their elders and the earth.

In this regard the camp operated on Chapel Island with approximately 70 children from each of the Cape Breton Reserves and Afton. The limited housing made it difficult to take any more that these although there were many who applied but could not be taken.

There were two adults for each 15 children, in housing and activities. Approximately 20 adults served as resource people, cooks, boatmen, teachers, and helpers during the two weeks at the Camp.

In the first year, children stayed 5 days, went home for the weekend, and came back for another 5 days. In the second year, students remained on the island for the full 10 days.

Food preparation was done on the island by Mrs. Jeanette Denny (the Grand Captain's wife) and her family. They provided 3 main meals each day and in-between snacks for everyone. Without running water and electricity, this was quite a bit of work. The cook thus got paid the most.

The day started with wake-up, round-up, and breakfast. After prayers in Mikmaq would be held in the Chapel on the island. These included lessons of the prayers and some lessons on how to read Mikmaq.

Children were then divided in several small groups and ushered to various events. Some were sent to nature study, where they would learn about the woods, the environment, tracking lessons, and about our relationship to the earth and the world. Others would go to basketmaking with Mrs. Margaret Johnson, a renowned elder and basketmaker. She helped students to make their own baskets, told them stories and share the wealth of experience with them. In another camp was waltes game playing, learning the counting, the patience and endurance of this game performed from time immorial by their ancestors and elders. In another camp was elders who told stories, listened to questions, and share the wisdom of our ancestors. Medicines, crafts, games, history murals, nature walks and exploration, and prayers predominated the time on the island. In addition, children swam, learned canoeing, boating, water skiing, and had water and swim lessons. A nurse was hired to be on the island too as there was constant need for her with scraped knees, cut toes, sore tooth, etc.

It was a full 10 days of activity and much hard work. The benefits of course were in the eyes and enthusiasm of the children. Later many would remember these days and the warmth and beauty of the time.