INDIGENOUS PEOPLES'
EXTENDED FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS:
A SOURCE FOR CLASSROOM STRUCTURE

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ABSTRACT. This paper explores the nature of indigenous extended family relationships and determines its potential for designing new classroom structures in bicultural schools. The nature of indigenous family relationships is illustrated from the works of a Cree-Saulteux author, a UN human rights lawyer, a Pueblo education consultant, a Maori policy writer, and the writer's own experience in a Maori bicultural school using family-based relationships. All contributors advocate examination of indigenous family relationships as a source of educational reform. The children in the family-based bicultural classes had fewer late, absent, and dropout behaviours than comparable students in mainstream classes.

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article analyse la nature des relations dans les familles élargies autochtones et détermine le potentiel que cela présente de concevoir de nouvelles structures scolaires dans les écoles biculturelles. La nature des relations dans les familles autochtones est illustrée par les oeuvres d'un auteur cri-saulteux, un avocat des droits de l'homme de l'ONU, un conseiller en éducation de Pueblo, un rédacteur de politique Maori et la propre expérience de l'auteur dans une école biculturelle Maori fondée sur les rapports familiaux. Tous les collaborateurs affirment que l'examen des relations dans les familles autochtones est une source de réforme scolaire. Les enfants des classes biculturelles fondées sur les rapports familiaux affichent un moins grand nombre de comportements de retard, d'absentéisme et de décrochage que les élèves comparables dans les classes du courant dominant.

Despite many recent changes in the educational processes of indigenous children, the majority still receive their education in traditional mainstream classrooms. In these classrooms, children are selected for particular rooms based on age and grade. A single teacher controls them, and parents, other community adults, and siblings have little influence or involvement in their education (Hampton, 1995; Schaef, 1987). As well most of these classrooms are structured to value individuals who will be able to stand on their own two feet and compete in

the world. Indigenous values and the interpersonal relationships that arise from these values such as cooperation, connectedness, and inter-dependence receive little emphasis in these contexts. Indigenous chil-dren from these classrooms frequently have negative self-image, poor attendance, and less social and academic success (Erickson, 1987; McCarthy, 1990; Trueba, 1988).

Educators frustrated with these results ask: How were indigenous chil-dren taught in traditional cultures? Is there a different social structure that provides a better fit for indigenous students? Are there programs available that expand outwards from central indigenous values through to indigenous social processes such as extended family relationships?

Although a few inner-city schools are developing family groupings in classrooms, programs based on key indigenous values and extended family relationships are minimal. The purpose of this paper is to explore the nature of indigenous extended family relationships and determine its potential use for designing new classroom structures. The author of this paper aspires to communicate better understanding between cultures.

BACKGROUND

The exploration of indigenous, school-based family structures should be placed within the wider context of indigenous peoples' dilemmas. After years of representation by indigenous peoples to overcome cognitive imperialism, the United Nations declared 1995 to 2004 as the Decade of World Indigenous People (Battiste, 1996). "Cognitive imperialism denies people their language and cultural integrity and maintains legiti-macy of only one language, one culture, and one frame of reference" (Battiste, 1996, p.17).

The **Cultural Restoration of Indigenous Peoples** (a summer institute, held at Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, July 1996) was part of a United Nations supported incentive. Its purpose was to create an understand-ing of processes leading to cultural oppression and then articulate a process for healing or restoring the cultures and languages of oppressed people. The Institute came into being because "cultural restoration is an emerging and urgent global, interdisciplinary, and multicultural issue" (Battiste, 1996, p.14). The intensive ten-day program included author readings, accompanied by artistic performance and exhibitions to complement the lectures, discussions, and talking circles. The broad range of indigenous viewpoints varied by location, occupations, gender, and age. Contributions were made by Australian-Aborigine, Maori,

Hawaiian, and North American indigenous people who were associated with the arts, education, law, medicine, and politics. Moreover, indigenous female voices were strongly articulated and the art work of indigenous children and prisoners was displayed. The speakers shared strategies to ensure the rights of indigenous peoples to have authority over their own affairs and to recognize the legitimacy and viability of their values and institutions. The outcomes from the Institute are important to all people who value justice and human rights, and are concerned with damage to the environment and the loss of indigenous knowledge.

As a white, middle-class, male teacher-educator, coming to grips with a lifetime of interactions with indigenous people, this institute offered me a fresh opportunity to examine indigenous school and teacher-education reform within the wider scope of the humanities. Indigenous connections to law, linguistics, medicine, spirituality, and the arts were explored. The variety of disciplines represented and the various modes of expression captured my thoughts and excited my feelings. One emotional example is when my own intended comments froze in my throat after a participant masking her face with a bandanna announced that she was on the barricade and I was the enemy. I chose to express myself in writing instead of speech. The ten-day experience enabled me to link four contributions to the theme of indigenous peoples' extended family relationships with my investigation of this topic in New Zealand. This theme of indigenous peoples' extended family relationships and its relationship to classroom structure will be developed in the two parts that follow.

First, this paper traces the nature of family relationships discussed by four indigenous people: a Cree-Saulteaux author, a United Nations indigenous rights lawyer, a Pueblo educational consultant, and a Maori educational policy writer. These institute speakers represented indigenous people from many lands. They spoke of their need for healing, creating remedies for healing, indigenous knowledge as a source for healing, and protecting and respecting indigenous knowledge. They developed the theme that family relationships, in need of repair, are based on community beliefs about child-rearing, and personify inter-relatedness. They promote the development of a pedagogy to overcome loss of language, learning, and family unity.

Second, the paper presents discoveries from my own experience in a bicultural school founded on Maori values with family-based, social relationships. My description of the program is based on interviews with

parents, trustees, teachers, and an administrator as well as observations in four bilingual classrooms, the staff room, a summer camp, and a student assembly. I provide examples of the web of family-based relationships within the school. I chose the bilingual classes following a *New Zealand Education Gazette* (19 Feb., 1996) report. In a Maori language survey of six cities in the Auckland and Wellington regions, the Gazette researchers found that Maori parents, when asked about their preference for Maori as the medium of instruction, "56% opted for a bilingual primary school model" (p.1).

PART I.
INDIGENOUS FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS: PERCEPTIONS FROM SASKATCHEWAN, AFRICA, NEW MEXICO, AND NEW ZEALAND.

Below are excerpts from four speeches given at the Cultural Restoration Institute which I have selected and annotated. They were chosen to highlight the importance of family relationships among indigenous peoples. The sequence shows family breakdown, notes possible causes, and suggests reasons why family relationships are essential to indigenous education reform.

Prison, passion and pride

Janet Acoose, a Saskatchewan author, who highlights the need to revitalize family relationships, asks for understanding and solutions to family breakdown. She illustrates the dilemma faced within her own family over several generations, shares her pain, and pleads for a better future for the next generation. She says:

> One time I went to see my brother. He was in a penitentiary for murder. And he said to me, 'You know there are some people here from the university and I wanted to ask them if they knew you. I wanted to say my sister is a lecturer at the university, do you know her?' And he said, 'but I didn't think that would be very good, because I thought that I would bring shame on you and dishonor'. That's the everyday. I still have uncles and cousins who get in trouble everyday. It's hard to go through seven years of university with trouble everyday, thinking you're doing something for your people – your family, the ones closest to you. So you have to ask yourself, what am I doing this for? It doesn't seem to be doing any bloody good.

> The thing I want to say about healing is this: my brother and my relatives can get out of prison any[day], and [get] all the self-help programs in the world that the prison programs have to offer. But they don't do any bloody good because they come out to the same sick environment that they grew out of. What do they do? Bring them back to the same environment. It's

not just our community, it's other communities, its mainstream society.
We're affected by it.

Things affected us. People influenced us. Significant institutions influenced us. The thing I know about is my family and how I grew up. I talked about the communities I grew up in, the residential school I attended, the abuse I saw. Not in my generation only, but in my parents' generation, in my koochums' generations and in their parents' generation. Yes the things that happened to us have not been nice. They're not polite to talk about.

But we will encourage our children to grow up healthy. We have to look outside ourselves, our communities and institutions like this where we can teach people to be proud of who they are. (Acoose, 1996)

This Cree-Saulteaux speaker portrays her personal tragedy, making us understand how mainstream institutions have devastated indigenous families for over four generations. Unless changes are made institutions will continue to destroy families. Acoose challenges us to create healthy environments for current and future generations of indigenous children.

Child-rearing, relationships, and world view

The next excerpt shows the importance of child-rearing involving the extended family and community illustrated in an African setting. Barsh says:

The first stage is developing respect. Respect is a difficult word to translate. In indigenous languages it is closer to love and intimacy, not awe or fear but. . . what we learn by being cuddled, cooed over, and enjoyed by other people. It's learning to do that with your younger siblings and with other people as a child. It is an important developer of relationships.

Barsh (1996) explains an indigenous model of the world. In it children are close to other human beings and secure in relationships that they can depend on. A well-loved African bush child is compared to the child who has to fight for love from her parents, who is isolated from kin and community in a city environment. Barsh is struck by what the different children look like.

In the bush, the three-year old [children] are bright, seeing, creative, full of enthusiasm, and at the same time respectfully listening to what adults were saying. The children were building their world, their values from their kin around them. They were building a very rich and happy world of all of this knowledge of relationships with people they love.

But as soon as you got to town, the kids were looking down. Well nourished, but they had lost something. In principle, they were the same society, the same culture, the same clans living in this very stark alien

> *environment with depressed unhappy parents who had lost their reason for living. The kids were frightened because all the love around them had dissipated. All that was left were objects. . .*
>
> *Fundamental to understanding what to do through relationships with children is recognizing the tremendous differences in the way in which child rearing shapes children's view of the world. It affects their ability to deal with trauma, their resilience, their ability to get through it, to find a path out. And ultimately, as adults, how they will treat each other and treat their own children. (Barsh, 1996)*

Barsh (1996) calls for family and community involvement in child rearing, a call which has implications for parenting, training, and nurturing in daycare and early childhood programs. It has implications too for support of single parents, and parental involvement in pre- and primary schools.

An ecology of indigenous education

Cajete (1996), a Pueblo, advocates an educational process founded upon traditional tribal values, orientations, and principles, while simultaneously using the most appropriate concepts, technologies, and content of mainstream education. He summarizes (Cajete, 1996) "an ecology of indigenous education," using the phrase "we are all related" (p.164) to show how the context of North American Indian education is wider than mainstream education because it includes the physical, spiritual, mythical, and social worlds.

In his elaboration of these multi-dimensional contexts he demonstrates that the relationship among these worlds is the cornerstone for tribal, community, and personal identity. The community is also the place for teaching, learning, expressing feelings, being connected, and for developing intimate social structures that build human relationships. He suggests that elders and siblings should also act as teachers and that the techniques of teaching are nothing without the essence of the family. Finally he concludes that it is in "the day to day practice of life through community relationships that found community spirit and lay powerful foundations for the indigenous values of vision, purpose, reciprocity, support, and benefit" (p.174).

Protecting and respecting indigenous knowledge

Maori educator Graham Smith (1996) reiterates the notion that indigenous family structure is a key element in rebuilding indigenous education. He notes that the three pillars of Maori school reform are to

alleviate the loss of language and culture, alleviate the learning crisis, and develop schools as family units.

Smith describes how the reforms in New Zealand education arose from Maori parents who wanted to reverse the Maori crisis statistics related to school dropouts, and the number of Maori youth who filled jails and overflowed health care facilities. Additionally, the parents wanted to overcome the deficit theory which proposed that Maori people are the problem. In his presentation, Smith identified six intervention elements for educational policy reform: (1) that they support parents' rights to have a say and take action in the education of their young; (2) that they maintain their distinct identity, culture and language; (3) that they train Maori teachers and use teachers and elders to maintain cultural and language traditions; (4) that they mediate socio-economic and home difficulties; (5) that they design classrooms and schools after an extended family structure; and (6) that they base all their plans, action and vision on Maori values.

Several outcomes arose from Smith's reform principles. They promised in New Zealand a collective responsibility for education. The children in the school were everyone's responsibility. Parents agreed to come to meetings and help with the cultural development of all children. Siblings were responsible for assisting their family members and peers. Moreover, discipline was a shared responsibility among students, teachers, parents, and elders.

Consequently, language nests (pre-school Maori language nurseries) developed. Based on Maori values, language, and culture, they provide total immersion preschool programs for children from eighteen months to five years. They give Maori youngsters an opportunity to retrieve and support their language and culture. From these language nests Maori-oriented primary schools developed which included both immersion and bicultural models. Similar programs at higher levels of education are increasing across New Zealand because the graduates from these language nests, and their parents, want to continue the culturally sensitive pattern of schooling. These school choices appear to be one of the more successful attempts to reflect indigenous peoples' aspirations, traditions, and needs.

Applying the stories: A beginning of healing

What can we conclude from the narratives of the four indigenous contributors? All four advocate that educators examine indigenous family relationships as a source for educational reforms. Specifically, as

one indigenous adult, Janis Acoose, looks back from the raw edges of her current experience, educators share her understanding of the breakdown of the indigenous family and the urgent need for institutional change that would restore the balance of family relationships. The next commentator makes us realize how differences in child-rearing practices affect a child's view and ultimately an adult's view of the world and ability to cope with the challenges of life. This discussion underscores the importance of community and kin involvement in the nurturing of pre-school children. It suggests that educators need to provide more than food and shelter in pre-schools.

Cajete (1994), in his talk and writings, beckons us to "Look to the Mountain." He wants us to focus on the big picture, to consider multiple layers of relationships, and to return to an indigenous ecology of education. He advocates that educators consider, as contexts for education, the relationships among the spiritual, mythical, physical, and social realms. He wants indigenous children to establish their tribal, community, and personal identity by recognizing that they are related to all things. He considers that the community is the best place for learning and teaching, that elders and peers should share in teaching, and that the family structure is an essential element of education. These ideas are particularly useful for developing curriculum themes.

The final contributor, Graham Smith, reviews the aims, interventions, and outcomes of Maori programs. He echoes other indigenous peoples' calls for restoration of indigenous language, culture, learning, and family unity. These policies and practices are appropriate starting points for other indigenous groups initiating culturally based programs.

Part two of this paper, a case study of a bicultural and bilingual program, shows what the family-related results, causes, curriculum, and policies of part one look like in actual practice. Research methods are outlined, then classroom observation notes are used to show how various elements of indigenous extended family relationships portrayed in the institute narratives of part one play out in four bicultural classrooms.

PART 2.
EXPLORING THE NATURE OF A MAORI BICULTURAL PROGRAM
THROUGH CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

To support the ideas presented in part one above, I present case study findings of a Maori bilingual primary school (Smith, D., 1996). The school reflects the needs and principles enunciated by the four contributors in part one. Bilingual in this context means that the children in four classrooms of this ten-room school receive and practise Maori in

their morning activities and instruction. In the afternoon, instruction is in English. Moreover, a Reading Recovery (Clay, 1972) program operates to assess and provide individual tutoring for students who have trouble reading English. This program alleviates parents' fears that receiving instruction in Maori inhibits their offsprings' level of English. While afternoon instruction is primarily in English, speakers use Maori when natural opportunities arise.

To gather data for this case study the school administrator, a school trustee, two parents, other adults, a student teacher, four mainstream teachers, two language aides and the four bilingual teachers were interviewed. They shared perceptions based on continuing close contact and actual experience in teaching bilingual classes. I documented classroom relationships by observing language aides and bilingual teachers using Maori language and culture. Instruction about Maori culture arose naturally from the class interactions and groupings as much as from the content of the curriculum. Culture was what they were doing, rather than sharing ideas from books (Barsh, 1996).

The four bilingual teachers initially welcomed me into their classrooms for a half day (four half-days). These initial visits were followed by one to two hour-long follow-up observations. As well, informal observations continued in the staff room, on the playing field, and at a camp-site. The interview and observation data were tape recorded, transcribed to a computer disc, then collated and analyzed for emerging themes. All participants read copies of the manuscript describing their program. They provided edits and interpretations during several drafts of the paper.

Elements of family relationships that have been carried over into the structure and interaction within classrooms are described in my observations below.

Class placements

On the surface these children appear to be assigned to classrooms according to age and grade. The new entrants and year ones gather in one end of the rectangular room. However, a second group of year twos and threes occupy the other end of this open area classroom. Several times a day the classes combine for peer reading and writing or other shared work. As well, at the start of each morning, one of the classes leaves the building to join another older group. For example, the year fives link with the new entrants and year ones for oral Maori. They say morning prayers and exchange morning greetings with all children and adults present.

Assuming family identities

The children call each adult aunt or uncle. Adults use respect in responses to the children.

Shared teaching responsibility

Then each child recites his or her personal genealogy. If children waver, they get help from a peer, sibling, aide, teacher or other adult. A brother may whisper over a sister's shoulder or a teacher takes a child by the hands to rehearse the information until the child is ready to turn and deliver.

Developing self-identity

Each person present recalls the name of his or her tribal leader who led their group across the ocean, the name of the canoe, the mountain, river, or other distinguishing tribal land features, and then the chronology of members of their family tree.

Cooperation and gender roles

Children work cooperatively and learn from each other. The children practise an action song. An inexperienced male singer glances sideways at his peer, trying to find the precise beat to slap his chest, stomp his feet, or stick out his tongue. Similarly a female neophyte models her finger fluttering, eye-rolling, and hip twisting from a nearby colleague. The leader also leads cooperatively, either accompanying the singing with a guitar behind the performers or exhorting individuals while in the rows of dancers.

Family relationship models

Other family relationships are observed. A mother on her way to work slips in to consult with the teacher. Her toddler is scooped up by an older sibling who leaves her school work to embrace the infant. Two women preparing instructional material are introduced, by the teacher, as partners to a student teacher and the male, year-four teacher. Then he gives story readings with his own two-year-old on his knee. He informs me that he wants to model positive parenting and family unity to members of his class who come from broken homes.

A teacher consults with an aide regarding teaching decisions. The aide suggests what is culturally appropriate. She also mothers a frightened

new entrant, tells an origin myth, and facilitates Maori vocabulary
practice between pairs of students.

Parents' contributions

Parents contribute to the school by acting as trustees, becoming mem-
bers of a school support group, leading after-school programs, or taking
other roles. For instance, at the seaside camp fathers erect tents, arrange
bedding in a sheep-shearing shed, and lead a group to gather sea-
urchins; mothers prepare meals, bandage bleeding feet, and retrieve
stragglers from the showers. They also benefit from the school. They
practise computer applications while preparing instructional materials
as part of their task force work. A few parents complete young offender
sentences by doing school maintenance. They are a visible, participat-
ing, friendly presence in the staff room and other parts of the school.

DOES THE BICULTURAL SCHOOL PROGRAM FULFILL THE AIMS, INTERVENTIONS AND OUTCOMES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE?

This paper does not address how Maori culture connects and fits into
mainstream culture nor does it discuss the role of the non-indigenous
researcher as a builder of bridges between two cultures. Those thoughts
will require further exploration in another paper.

This paper shows how the Maori bicultural program fulfills many inten-
tions of indigenous peoples stated in Part 1 of this paper. In response to
the call to put Maori children in settings where they can build their
world and values from their kin around them, Maori parents envisioned
and operated the first language nests as a way of restoring Maori
language and culture at the child-rearing stage. As these fledglings
became five years of age, their parents and other Maori parents pres-
sured the government to create Maori schooling at the K-6 level.
Several schools are now offering bicultural programs at the middle and
secondary levels. A bicultural program starts with strong parental pres-
sure leading to the need to determine parents' and extended family
members' wishes about schooling.

Some limited power shifted from government to the indigenous parents
after the New Zealand government initiated site-based management
that provided each school with a lump sum of money to cover all their
needs. School staffs, trustees, and parents could establish a priority for

bicultural schools if they wished. With the finances established, they could select indigenous values such as respect, love, and reciprocity as foundations for their program. If the members of the school community could commit themselves to these values they became collectively responsible for the success of the program.

They made the use and acquisition of Maori language the first priority. The second choice was culture. They selected Maori-based curriculum and a Maori-based process of organizing classrooms and schools to enact the culture. Like the Cree-Saulteaux sister who wanted a change in the same sick environment for her jailed brother (Acoose, 1996), they wanted to transform the mainstream classroom structure to simulate the relationships within an indigenous extended family. They achieved their goal by grouping family members together and by placing older with younger children. These arrangements provided for sibling and peer teaching. In addition they fostered the family relationships by modeling with their own family members, and by giving kinship titles to all adults in (aunt, uncle).

Cultural traditions, language, and interactions were supported by employing elders as language aides and training Maori people as teachers. Parents were also welcomed and encouraged to be participants in the classes. All these indigenous adults were viewed as positive resources able to inform, inspire, support, and enhance student self-esteem.

The outcomes of these classes for increasing family unity and academic achievement will need monitoring over several years to determine the ultimate success of the program. Similarly the level of Maori language acquisition and development of thematic units involving the multiple worlds of Cajete's (1994) ecology of indigenous education will require further scrutiny. The school principal, however, has reported fewer late, absent, dropout and transient students from the bilingual classes than in comparable mainstream classes. These children attained positive identity and social success. In the words of the Reading Recovery teacher who provided individual tutoring for these students "the children have spirit and are happy with themselves." Educators who want their indigenous students to share identity as a people and care about each other and their world might consider using this family-structured, bicultural model. Let the arms of a family reach out to encircle your students.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I am a non-indigenous teacher educator with nine years experience supervising and instructing indigenous and mainstream students at the undergraduate and graduate level. For 27 years I interacted with indigenous people as a high school teacher, community theater playwright and director, and Peigan friendship board member. I offer these ideas in the hope of creating more equitable and successful schooling for indigenous people. (smithd@duke.usask.ca)

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