EDUCATING INNER-CITY ABORIGINAL STUDENTS: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTION AND PARENTAL SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT. This paper presents a case study that describes how poverty affects inner-city Aboriginal youth in one Canadian context. The paper shows why integrated school, home, and community interventions are needed. It profiles an elementary school which is meeting these challenges through instruction by a dedicated staff that celebrates Aboriginal values and encourages parental and community involvement. Finally, the paper calls for government support in combating poverty. Schools aid youth through education, but poor families need help to overcome unemployment, unsuitable housing, and the constant student mobility that arises from these unsatisfied needs.

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article présente une étude de cas qui décrit l'effet que la pauvreté peut avoir sur les jeunes autochtones au coeur d'une ville canadienne. L'auteur démontre pourquoi des interventions intégrées entre l'école, le foyer et la communauté s'imposent. Il brosse le tableau d'une école primaire qui s'efforce de relever ces défis par le biais d'un enseignement dispensé par des enseignants qui glorifient les valeurs autochtones et qui encouragent la participation des parents et de la communauté. Enfin, l'auteur demande l'aide gouvernementale pour lutter contre la pauvreté. Les écoles viennent en aide aux jeunes par l'éducation, mais les familles pauvres ont besoin d'aide pour surmonter le chômage, les mauvaises conditions de logement et la mobilitée constante des élèves qui résulte de ces besoins insatisfaits.

Despite the promise and considerable progress of empowered educational opportunity for Aboriginal youth through Band control of Indian education, 75 to 80% of First Nations children in Canada attend urban schools run by non-natives (Urion, 1992, p. 3). These children face not only the educational cross-cultural differences of language, culture, values, and learning styles, but frequently the added challenges of inner city survival as they cope with lack of food, shelter, warm clothing, safety, and stability. Their risks include lack of identity, low achieve-

ment, dropping out of school, and criminal activity (Levin, 1995; Martin, 1991). In spite of Canada's growing achievement in creating Aboriginal curricula, resources, and programs, and in preparing teachers of First Nations ancestry, it is evident that students and schools still face many challenges. The purpose of this research study is to identify the challenges of at-risk Aboriginal youth, in an elementary school. My goal is to describe the school and to show how culturally appropriate instruction and parental involvement are used to educate these Aboriginal children. Finally I compare the findings with the research literature and suggest societal implications.

Personnel in inner-city schools strive to make a positive difference in the lives of these children. But educators preparing teachers for these sites need to know the problems such children face, the effective interventions educators use, and the social conditions that perpetuate the difficulties. The research on child poverty and at-risk children offers some insight, but the case for Canadian Aboriginal youth in an elementary school needs examination.

Organization of the paper

Following my introduction I outline the context (researcher background, school building description, and school profile) and case study procedures. Next, under two findings and discussion themes, I explain how instruction is adapted (enhancing Aboriginal identity, identifying social values and managing classrooms), and how parent/school relations (poverty and social challenges; attracting, maintaining, and experiencing mutual benefit with parents) evolve in the school. Literature related to these themes is matched with findings and discussed. Finally, I pose questions about poverty that remain unanswered by governments and society.

CONTEXT

Researcher background

I am a middle class, non-Aboriginal male who, through many years of work in education, has sought to honor cultural diversity and support educational equity for all. My commitment to Aboriginal education arises from interactions with Cree, Inuit, Peigan, Métis, and Maori people during 27 years of teaching experience, and 10 years as university instructor, field experience supervisor, and researcher (Smith, 1998). This study builds specifically on my previous research which proposed

that indigenous peoples' extended family relationships are a model for classroom interaction (Smith, 1997).

THE SCHOOL PROFILE

School building

One block from the pawn shop stands the old red brick, three-story school, with dished stone steps hollowed by fifty years of scouring feet. Holy Rosary (pseudonyms are provided for the school and respondents) looms up between a rectangular gymnasium extension and small school yard. As I step onto the grounds, a crowd of waiting Aboriginal students swing on the fence rail, stare curiously, or smile in greeting as I ascend the stairs to the front door.

Once through the door, I pass by walls bearing health, welfare, and school notices for parents and children – evidence of integrated social services centered in the school. My eyes are drawn to posters and verbal slogans celebrating Aboriginal people living successful lives. "Tansi," "welcome," a message written in Cree, contributes to the enhancement of Aboriginal identity. As I sit at the main hall picnic table, I experience the meaning of the word in friendly exchanges with students, staff, and parents. Information from their conversations highlights the school features profiled below.

Students
Enrollment: 260 students (99% Aboriginal)
Economic status: poor (need food, clothing, and transportation funds)
Mobility: 15% turnover (last January 39 new, 39 left)
Attendance: 85% yearly average
Teacher/pupil ratio: 1/20
Graduates: all grade 8s the previous year (the first time)

Teaching staff ethnicity
Teachers: 10 Aboriginal, 5 non-Aboriginal

Other staff & volunteers (all Aboriginal)
Pre-school: 1
Community Coordinator: 1
Community Services Worker: half time (attendance liaison)
Nutritionist: half time
Parents' Council President: 1 (full time)
Parent Kitchen Helpers: rotating half time

Programs

Regular: K-8 provincial program

Pre-school: ages 3-4

Cree: taught as a second language like core French

Nutrition: breakfast, lunch provided for all who want it

Clothing: operated by parent volunteers who gather, alter and distribute clothing as needed; available for students first, then siblings, and then family members

After-school: dance troupe, crafts, fitness, recreation

Community: parents' council; parents drop in for coffee, to use the phone, read the daily newspaper, attend the monthly feast, or engage in recreation evenings; local business partnerships provide service (beauty school demonstrations) or goods (day-old doughnuts, or T-shirts donated by a provincial insurance company to students with perfect attendance)

Communication: community health/welfare/school notice board, biweekly newsletter, phone messages, home visits

Additional funding

Provincial: community school allotments partially fund teacher associates' salaries, a community service worker, a nutritionist, student transport, after-school programs, local curriculum development, and honoraria for elders and outside speakers

Fund Raising: parents' council members and other parents run bingo & garage sales and seek donations from individual or community sponsors

Child poverty research indicates that instructional methods and parental involvement contribute to educational success. Knapp, Adelman, Needels, Zucker, Turnbull, Marder, & Shields, (1991) argue that economically poor, minority culture students should not receive less challenging curricula, low teacher expectations or teacher emphasis on behavior management (Anderson & Pellinger, 1990). Instead, effective instruction should teach critical thinking, and use scaffolding, peer tutoring, cognitive coaching, students' prior knowledge (Reynolds, 1993, Slavin, 1997), and accommodate students' social needs (Levin, 1994).

The profile shows that this school identifies and satisfies many of the students' school and personal needs listed in previous research. It supports positive Aboriginal identity through posters, staff ethnicity, Cree language instruction, drum dancing, and invitations to elders to contribute their knowledge. It has increased the number of school graduates, and records an 85% annual attendance pattern, but student mobility continues to be a difficulty. Despite positive efforts by the school, the economic reality of many of the families it serves remains virtually

unchanged. The need for systematic analysis and response to Aboriginal child poverty beyond the school level will be reviewed later in this paper.

The school provides pre-school, after-school and evening programs for students and parents, and regular K-8 provincial rather than remedial programs. It also relates to student lives through locally developed curricula.

Finally, the profile itemizes how parental involvement is developed through the community coordinator and services worker, the parents' council president, the community drop-in center and other community/school functions. Involvement is maintained through multiple communication methods. Parents and community members actively work for the school.

PROCEDURES

Because I supervised and consulted with an Aboriginal intern and his cooperating teacher twice monthly from August through December, I was a known entity and accepted by the staff in the school. My circular face scabs (mole removal sites) and soft suede coat also gave me rapid access to the students by provoking their curiosity. They pressed in, inches from my face studying the scabs, asking, "Were you in a fight?" "Are those cigarette burns?" Fingers stroked the fabric of my clothes and, as one small cheek rubbed down my suede back, a voice asked, "Are you a Santa?" The trust of staff and students enabled me to use semi-structured interviews and researcher observations to understand the challenges faced and interventions used in an inner-city school. Pseudonyms provided confidentiality for all participants.

Two building administrators, three teachers, a community coordinator, a community services (attendance) worker, two parents, and the president of the parents' council were interviewed. In the one-hour interviews, the ten (8 Aboriginal, 2 non-Aboriginal) inner-city school informants shared their school life experiences. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that personal narratives are preferred research methods because they are effective in capturing emotive as well as cognitive features of experience and that they are useful as tools for interpreting past and present events. As a method the open-ended stories were less threatening to my informants than more formal interviews. The informants also asked me to take notes rather than use a tape recorder.

I observed teacher/student interactions in hallways, three classrooms and in the offices of the community coordinator, the 'time out' teacher associate, and the home services worker (attendance officer). Encoun-

ters in two school assemblies, around the hall work table, and in the lunch room with parent volunteers provided more rich data.

During the four-month research period, I described the building, constructed a school profile and entered, tagged, coded, and collated all data under two themes (Adapted Instruction and School/Parental Involvement). I confirmed interview data by triangulating findings with several interviewees, and by comparing interview data with researcher observations. Additional data were obtained from field notes written following my participant observations as lunch room or reading teacher helper.

I shared several drafts of my findings with my sources and incorporated their suggestions for revisions, follow-up observations, and interviews. During the analysis and interpretation phase, I compared my findings to the research literature, and two Aboriginal colleagues from my university reviewed and edited the cultural dimensions of my manuscript.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Adapted instruction

ENHANCED ABORIGINAL IDENTITY. I discovered that teaching values, classroom management, and reinforcing Aboriginal identity were much discussed aspects of instruction. Most informants identified aspects of a culturally responsive pedagogy (Villegas, 1991) such as rituals, teaching methods and messages supportive to Aboriginal cultural background. Aspects included round dances, feasts, sweet grass smudging, conducting Aboriginal talking circles to support exchange of ideas, learning by trying things rather than being told or shown on a blackboard, and displaying Aboriginal artifacts. Culturally supportive poster messages on classroom, office, and hall walls included: 'accept one another, respect and honor our elders,' and 'the voice of our land is our language'.

In accord with Aboriginal educator Eber Hampton's (1995) proposal that Indian education should be based on Aboriginal thinking and communication styles, the school attempted to maintain at least one Aboriginal language by offering instruction in Cree. Because the students came from seven different First Nations language groups, the dominance of Cree language and customs with little reference to other Aboriginal groups was viewed as a problem by some informants. The

community coordinator planned for the inclusion of projects and curriculum supporting other Aboriginal groups when funding was available (Interview: V 84).

In addition, staff ethnicity contributed to student respect for self. As most of the staff and volunteers were Aboriginal, they provided positive role models for the children. Their shared experiences and actions reinforced Aboriginal identity, self confidence, and world view. The principal noted that "teaching here involves schooling, cultural, and spiritual components (Interview: P 40)".

Aboriginal spirituality was highlighted in the expressions of staff, student, and parent pride in their after-school drum dance program. In my late afternoon instruction around the circle of the drum with other novices, the instructor's spirituality became clear as he explained that the creator gave him the gift of music and connections with that spirit while drumming so that he could serve others, provide a loving environment, and teach respect for the drum and drum sticks as living spiritual things (Interview: D 228-231).

The importance of spirituality also became clear through the multiple references to hiring a school elder. The respondents wanted a spiritual elder who would provide leadership, counseling, and education to sustain believers and to inform students and parents who didn't know or follow Aboriginal spirituality (Interview: P 50; E 78; V 96; HW 185).

Hampton (1995) also highlights Aboriginal spirituality and values needed to redefine Indian education. His list includes strong group bonds, individual freedom, and concern for the welfare of others.

SOCIAL VALUES. Gaining trust, building self-esteem and, as defined below, having respect were school values repeatedly mentioned.

> I mean taking pride in yourself, doing to others as you want to be treated, listening and learning from others, and owning up to what you've done (Interview: HW 181).

Teachers advocated high academic and management expectations, explaining that when teachers have low expectations, students will also have lower expectations of themselves. They added that because the lives of these children are unstructured their success depends on teachers and a school that provides order (Interview: B 130, 140, 146; P 14).

Val, a middle-years teacher, wanted his students to have knowledge, compassion, understanding, and respect for the Aboriginal way of life.

He believed that reinforcing traditional Aboriginal values in instruction was more important than 'throwing in' Aboriginal stories (Interview: B 141).

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT. Because teachers contended with erratic behavior and occasional aggression, they balanced high management expectations with compassion for the stressful lives of their inner-city students. They expected them to be in their desks ready to work but knew that some arrived at school after a night of hunger, exhaustion, disappointment, drinking, or violence. Several teachers informed me that the children are particularly vulnerable after 'money days' when parents receive welfare payments or as holidays approached when a child's hopes are high and easily dashed. Val reinforced desired behavior in students by 'praising loudly and correcting softly' (Interview, B 139).

I saw the staff adapting instruction to cope with the effects of adverse life experiences. When students were unable to work in the classroom, they would 'cool down' with an aide in a time-out office, seek counseling with the community workers, or meet with an administrator. In two of my office observations the misbehaving students became calm and responsible as the counselor probed to understand the causes of misbehavior (Observation: V 117; HW 193).

Teachers handling student challenge in their own classrooms displayed patience. For example, rather than force compliance when some students refused to participate in an aerobic routine for the Christmas concert, the teacher continued working with the willing while frequently inviting those on the sidelines to join when they were ready. At the Christmas concert the following week, all class members participated. Giving children responsibility for choosing when to participate seemed to be a successful strategy (Field Notes: Dec. 11, Dec. 17).

When I asked why the teacher decided to give children the freedom of choice, she explained that knowing there was little structure or control in many of the children's lives at home, finger pointing and laying blame would not work. She said, "To manage I follow my elder's advice and treat children like smaller adults (Interview: HW 179)."

Aboriginal children appeared to act like little adults. I observed older siblings safely escorting their younger relatives to and from home, and cross-grade groupings of grade fours tutoring the reading of grade ones.

(However, one Aboriginal colleague from the university, reviewing a draft of my manuscript, stated that while treating children like smaller

adults can be effective to achieve short term goals, over time this responsibility may be overwhelming and destructive to child creativity [Interview: AE 201].)

School and parent involvement

Observations and interviews with teachers, administrators, community workers, and parents showed that educating in this school is a multi-dimensional task requiring the involvement of parents and community. Because many of these children live in poverty, school-based adults must attend to the physiological, safety, social, and educational needs of these children. Attributes of poverty identified by the informants included the physical need for food, clothing, shelter, and lack of money for transportation.

The researchers of children at risk advocate school, home, community and societal-based interventions (Johnson, 1997). Interventions include: parent involvement, parent education, pre-school education, increased use of recreation facilities, crime prevention, and integration of health, social work, and education (Behrman, 1992; Gagné & Robinson, 1995; Johnson, 1997; Knapp, Turnbull & Shields, 1990; Slavin, Karweit, & Madden, 1989).

POVERTY. Canadian children are classified as poor if they live in urban families of four with incomes less than $30,800 or in single parent families with incomes less than $14,300. Being Aboriginal increases the risk of being a victim of poverty. The National Council of Welfare estimates (1993, p. 25) that up to 50% of Canada's poor children are of Aboriginal ancestry.

The two school administrators defined poverty as 'when staying alive and having enough to eat is top priority' (Interview: P 2) and 'doing without' (Interview: B 13). They suggested I see how school, parent, and community partners function in the free breakfast and lunch program. While assisting in the lunch room, I first observed parent volunteers locating and delivering out-dated food. Then the nutritionist explained how she uses the food:

> We get the day-old buns from the major food chain stores. If they are too dried out, I save them for turkey stuffing.

> We buy what we have to but we get as many donations as possible. Today we have cucumbers and cantaloupe from a fruit wholesaler and this left-over party tray with sectors of cubed cheese, sliced meat, and tomatoes (Interview: N 402).

Under the nutritionist's direction, the parent volunteer and I filled buns while our mentor prepared salad and fruit for each child who needed a lunch. At noon, a student from each room arrived to pick up a plastic basin of food for the classmates who had signed the daily food-wanted list. Parents also prepared the oatmeal breakfast.

Lack of warm clothing was another common concern. I observed many children in worn, oversized garments selected from the basement clothing room. The staff chose to dress casually. The community coordinator explained, "I try to relate to parents. . . . I don't wear high heels and a dress; instead you see me in a T-shirt, slacks and moccasins (Interview V. 81)."

The principal and home worker linked lack of money for transport to poor pupil attendance. And late one afternoon, I saw the president of the parents' council provide the bus fare from the bag stored in the waist band of her slacks for a stranded child. The child lacked the means to return home (Field Notes: Sept. 24).

Several informants stated that lack of transportation also troubled parents and eroded the connections to their extended families. They explained that as few parents have cars, a staff member may be asked to drive them to appointments. Moreover, poverty denied family members the means of transport to visit across the city or out to a rural reserve. Thus family ties and support networks are disconnected and individuals often find themselves isolated in a location with no means of returning home (Interview: V 85; B 133; HW 166).

Similarly, while explaining the large annual turnover of students, the principal noted that poverty causes pupil mobility. He observed that if parents can find work or cheaper accommodation elsewhere they leave the district (Interview: P 6).

SOCIAL CHALLENGES. Parent, teacher, and janitor comments, and my observation of children hiding in the school after hours, showed that some students see the school as a safe, positive place and prefer it to the streets or their own homes. Although the school provided staff who visit homes and programs to try to keep them safe, the informants linked poverty to child criminality. They suggested that the student used to traditional reserve life suffered inner city culture shock because the street and their own Aboriginal culture are not the same. Consequently, teachers have to accommodate both Aboriginality and the inner-city world of family violence, drugs, and prostitution. For example, parents and teachers have to balance pride in the increasing number

of graduating students with an awareness that 6 girls in grades 6-8 work the 'stroll'. They add that some of the students aged 11 or 12 also hang out on the 'baby corner' and get involved in the sex trade. A parent seeking answers from students for these student choices was told, "There is nothing to learn at school that is needed in our life style (Interview: E 62)."

When I asked for possible causes for choosing such a life style a teacher and parent speculated:

> The Aboriginal culture has a different structure for child rearing from ours, in which parents, extended family, and other community members act as parents. As some children live with several different adults, the children may live unsupervised lives. This may leave the door open to social problems (Interview: P 46).

The excerpt illustrates the need to help inner-city parents understand and respond to street and Aboriginal cultures. It may show that parents know what to do but lack the skills or options to avoid undesirable choices. It may also indicate that life skills training should be offered as an educational option for some parents.

> The worst thing was pulling out the community police. Now the crime is back up. When we had a policeman all the kids knew him and crowded around when he came to the school. The families knew him and they would tell him what was happening when he was trusted (Interview: E 61).

The second quotation underscored the importance of integrating police liaison and other services with the school. The withdrawal of community police showed how lack of municipal government support for poor children contributed to low school success.

PARENT/SCHOOL RELATIONS. Checkley (1998) states that schools should use a family-centered approach where parents and community members are respected, supported, and treated as equals who use the knowledge, skills, and goals of their partners (p. 4-5). Other researchers recommend preschool and integrated social services as community programs (Nettles, 1991; Levin, 1994; Smith, 1997). Robertson (1994) encourages educators to build partnerships involving community, schools, and parents. She explains that because poor children are the offspring of poor parents, poor parents must be helped along with their children.

In line with previous research (Archibald, 1995; Levin, 1995; Checkley, 1998; Nettles, 1991; Knapp and others, 1991, Smith, 1997) this school

had mutually supportive parents and teachers. For example, when the principal gave his annual report, or considered hiring new staff, the parents offered their input and they also approached him with their ideas (Interview: P 10; E 69). Nevertheless both parties wanted to increase the number of involved parents.

ATTRACTING PARENTS. Incorporating parents as school partners involves attracting, maintaining, and experiencing reciprocal benefit. A major challenge is showing respect and gaining the trust of parents who have been so traumatized by childhood experience with residential school staff that they will not be a part of their child's education (see J.R. Miller's *Shinwauk's Vision*, 1996, for a detailed description and assessment of the experience of Aboriginal children in Canadian residential schools). Below, the principal described an initial difficulty in overcoming the intimidation of parents. Next, the parents' council president explains their need for a low profile.

> Many parents have had bad school memories. They experienced prejudice and were poorly treated in residential schools. We try to break down the barriers of the past that separate us (Interview P 22).

> They have to feel welcome and comfortable before they begin and the parents who help often don't want a title with their volunteer jobs; they're shy. They prefer to help out on the sidelines (Interview: E 72).

Methods of decreasing discomfort and attracting parents included:
- a staff preparing pancake breakfast for parents.
- once-a-month, soup and bannock meals;
- night programs in cooking, crafts, baby-sitting and volleyball,
- selling tickets for motivational speakers,
- viewing the school dance/drum troupe,
- using parents as gym instructors,
- parent council sponsored activities and drop-in center.

These approaches are supported in the literature. Edmonton inner-city principals recommended similar methods for encouraging parental involvement (Johnson, 1997).

MAINTAINING PARENT CONTACT. The community coordinator who works with inner city parents and families maintained constant contact with the parents by phone calls and a bi-weekly newsletter. Parents frequently dropped in to see her. She also visited homes and offered long term help to the parents who were easily discouraged, unassertive, and lacking in

initiative. For example, she suggested that a grandmother control her grandchild's excessive TV viewing by keeping the set in her bedroom. As other research (Berhman, 1992; Johnson, 1997), she provided vocational information to parents. Parents then helped graduates and school drop-outs gain entrance to other schools (Interview: V 89-91).

EXPERIENCING MUTUAL BENEFIT. The parents and community used the school as a retreat and resource center featuring drug awareness programs, counseling, and referrals to other agencies. For example, a bruised parent with a black eye, hiding from her ex-common-law husband, sought refuge in the building. The staff let her stay until they could make arrangements for her with a shelter for abused women. A parent observed, "The staff do what they can" (Interview E 75).

When asked, "Is the school's function to serve street people as well as kids?", the principal replied, "As we are Catholics, helping the community is the school's function" (Interview: P 47). This broadened view of educating, also supported by research (Nettles, 1991; Checkley, 1998; Levin, 1994), may explain why new staff and intern teachers find the social and personal dimensions of this school a challenge.

The principal outlined parental involvement. He said that 50 to 60 parents attended the annual general meeting, more that 200 appeared at the last Christmas concert, and parents who used the pre-school usually continued sending their children to the school. The K-1 parents were most involved, then the supportive parents of all grades, and outings on buses were usually assisted by five to six parents, ready, willing, and able to help (Interview: P 24).

Interviews and observations showed that the parents' council president was the most involved parent. As a 19-year unpaid volunteer, she altered clothing, served breakfast, listened to children reading, and directed the use of the money raised by parents. She, her parent's council, and a small group of 10 dedicated parents operated the community clothing room. A different group of unpaid parents, who didn't help inside the school otherwise, ran the $16,000 a year bingo games every second month. The proceeds procured equipment, books, community meals, drumming regalia, special events and class items.

The principal also noted that the school and he had been accepted by the elders, parents, and other community members. Furthermore, if he made a mistake they were forgiving and gave him a second chance (Interview: P 50).

As seen in the profile and findings Holy Rosary supports most child poverty and at-risk literature by using interventions that enhance the education of Aboriginal youth. The profile shows: a school mission that supports diversity, a school staff, and parental volunteers that reflect Aboriginal ethnicity, and programs and materials presenting First Nations' perspectives. The findings emphasize the use of teaching strategies reinforcing high expectations, Aboriginal identity, social values and classroom management. As well, findings highlight parental participation in the school, links with student personal/cultural context, integration of social services, and pre-school and parent education.

This school is part of a positive growing trend in Aboriginal education. Battiste & Barman (1995) note, "First Nations [education has] begun to move from models of colonial domination and assimilation to those that are culturally, linguistically, and philosophically relevant and empowering" (p. x). One favorable example comes from the Canadian Education Association study of Canadian exemplary high schools. From 260 school nominations 3 of the 21 selected for their success served Aboriginal students (Haig-Brown, Archibald, Regnier, & Vermette, 1995). These included a school in Saskatchewan (Haig-Brown and others, 1995), in Manitoba (Archibald, Haig-Brown, Kirkness, Olson, Cochrance, & Friesen, 1995) and in the North West Territories (Maguire, McAlpine, Graves, Leebe, & Ishibashi, 1995). An examination of the University of Saskatchewan's ITEP (Indian Teacher Education Program) graduates showed similar favorable results. Since 1973 over 600 Aboriginal students have earned Bachelor of Education degrees; these graduates teach in schools across Canada; they administer 40% of Saskatchewan band-controlled schools, and more than 70 graduates have been enrolled in, or have completed, university graduate school work (Murawsky, 1999).

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Despite much success, what does this study tell us about the ability of schools to be a powerful influence in the lives of children? It seems to suggest that systematically intervening within a school is a necessary but insufficient response to the problems these children face. Battiste and Barman (1995) state "social stress in Aboriginal communities, indicated by high level of poverty . . . could not be diminished solely by a new educational system," (p. x). The school community helps students in many ways. But the scope of the examination needs to be widened to encourage transformation at other levels. There needs to be

reciprocal concern and action among schools and all levels of govern-ment. Systematic analysis and response to the underlying problems of child and family poverty needs to be constructed at the school board, municipal, provincial, and national government level.

This view is reinforced in the literature. Levin (1995) notes that schools are only a part of the struggle for a more humane world. Coleman and LaRocque (1990) conclude that teachers' responses to poor children's needs are constrained by school, district, and state or provincial policies. And Johnson (1997) suggests that poverty inter-ventions and funding should move beyond schools to include commu-nity needs, government agendas, and social policies.

The Economic Council of Canada(1992) report shows that Canada spends a relatively small proportion of its wealth on income support for the poor compared with other industrialized countries (p. 9). Conse-quently, Holy Rosary, despite considerable gains, continues to face the challenge of short-stay students who follow their parents in constant moves to seek affordable housing or employment.

Lack of government will and policy may be attributed to the lack of a strong lobby group with the resources to push for action. Also, many educators and policy makers think that expecting schools to provide more social services to deal with poverty downplays the curriculum and instruction function of schools (Levin, 1995). Nevertheless if society truly wants to bring about educational reform it must make eliminating child poverty an important education issue at all levels.

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