COMMUNITY

The early 1970s, Wyatt suggests, were a time of "renaissance" in Native Canadian Indian language and culture, evident in the "rebirth" associated with the "transformation" of Mt. Currie (British Columbia) school into a "locally controlled Native institution."[1] Through interviews, Watt studied "changing role relationships"[2] between School Board and faculty, revealing "concerns in common with community education ventures across North America."[3]

"Unique to the Native community," Watt concludes, "is the integration of contemporary Anglo and traditional Native role relationships,"[4] – mirrored in her emphasis upon "the overriding concern about appropriate balance between traditional native and contemporary non-native culture"[5] - registering a moment that recedes in more recent scholarship, wherein more aggressive proposals predominate (see, for instance, research brief #4). In contrast, Wyatt regards the audience of this research as "parents" – Native and not – "wishing to create for their children schools which incorporate minority cultural traditions and values."[6] In an earlier study,[7] Wyatt documented the first three years (1972-75) of the school, during which time, she suggests, a programmatic synthesis of traditional Native and non-Native culture was accomplished, thanks in part due to the retention of "traditional patterns of authority."[8]

Among the curriculum elements emphasized were (1) seasonal and cultural activities as well as job and life skill preparation, (2) training for rodeo, gardening and the trades, and (3) the teaching of Native language. Non-Native elements were incorporated during implementation, Wyatt suggests, and a "gap" opened between Native Board members and faculty members.[9]

Wyatt interviewed both concerning program development, implementation, and role relationships, focusing on three areas: the Native cultural curriculum, the Lil'wat language curriculum, and community involvement.[10] What became clear is that there were parents who disapproved of Native culture in the curriculum**;** sensitive to these parents, administrators felt obligated to follow the provincial curriculum. Teachers complained that they did not have enough Native curriculum materials to implement the Board's directives; moreover, they felt they lacked guidance and resources to develop such materials.[11] Since 1978, these materials have been developed, including a Lil'wat language curriculum. Orality has been emphasized, especially in kindergarten through Grade 3 (if acknowledged in every grade level); written materials were to be added "slowly."[12]

While Wyatt judged the "achievements" to be "considerable," this is a view not shared by those she interviewed, who, she records, "tended to emphasize overall weaknesses rather than specific accomplishments."[13] That "gap" between faculty and Board would seem to be to blame, what Wyatt characterizes as "role confusion" and

lack of "communication,"[14] but also in play was feeling "ill-equipped to respond to issues in curriculum development."[15]

Twenty years later, "integration" remained a key curriculum concern. Employing ethnography – a research method borrowed from anthropology and, by the beginning of the twenty-first century, widely employed in curriculum research in Canada and elsewhere – Yatta Kanu studied mainly non-Aboriginal public schoolteachers' (10 teachers in three public high schools in Winnipeg) perceptions of this integration. All expressed openness to the integration of Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives into the school curriculum - "teachers reported that on their own they had collected Aboriginal curriculum materials, paid guest speakers, and attended workshops on Aboriginal education to increase their understanding"[16] - but that that little or only moderate integration was achieved: the curriculum "remained largely Eurocentric."[17]

Challenges to integration included (1) teachers' insufficient knowledge[18] and classroom resources; (2) racist attitudes of non-Aboriginal staff and students; (3) school administrators' tepid support for integration; and (4) a certain "incompatibility" between school "structures" and some Aboriginal cultural "values."[19] Kanu concludes with ten recommendations for "guiding successful integration," among them the provision of strong school leadership and provincial support (ensuring extensive curriculum research and development).[20]

The concept of "role" appears again in a 1981 publication focused on "the salient events of the first year of local control, and the manifestations of what is here called "role shock," which evidently had a powerful negative effect, resulting in organizational malfunction."[21] Role shock occurs, King suggests, when expectations of professional conduct are contradicted by events, specifically by delegitimizing judgements by others, leaving "an increasing sense of personal inadequacy which is threatening to psychological stability," followed by "strained communications, withdrawal, and incipient paranoia."[22] The organization – in this instance a federal Indian Day School – became dysfunctional.

Dissatisfaction with federal control led to demands for local control, King reports, coinciding with federal policies designed to support "cultural development activities among Indian groups," enabling "this band"[23] to establish a Cultural Education Centre that included attention to curriculum development designed to revitalize native language and culture. Reactions to these developments at the school King characterizes as "defensive," as educators, he continues, "resisted suggestions for major reformulations of curriculum or school operations," relegating Indigenous language and culture to supplementary curricular positions, to be studied once, "the basic curriculum imperatives were accomplished."[24] Hostility ensued, followed by a renaming of the institution "Community School," committed to "education for life in this community," designed to be "identity-enhancing" through study of Indigenous language and culture.[25] Students would emerge from Grade 8 valuing school and

"equipped to make decisions about whether to continue living within the reserve community or 'outside.'"[26]

It was at staff meeting, King reports, that "discrepancies among expectations began to emerge," as teachers – now "prepared to accept almost any kind of new definitions of structure" – were "dismayed to find … nothing in the way of operational definition for the school structure, community wishes or needs, or curriculum expectations (beyond the earlier cited general statement about 'education for life in this community')."[27]

Teachers should know what to do, members of the Education Committee-School Board assumed.[28] Teachers were "sent off" to figure it out "organization" and "procedures," but "consensus" was difficult to achieve, triggering reversion – despite proposals for "family grouping," "learning centres," "integrated curriculum" - to already extant **"**age-grades, subject designations, time-tables and teaching schedules," with the proviso that teachers would use afternoons "working out" patterns as problems emerged.[29] This failure produced "role shock,"[30] and apparently for school board members too, as they then prescribed the regular provincial public school curriculum," a "considerable disappointment" to both teachers and Education Committee members.[31] Alongside "deep pride in native heritage," King reports, is a "strong work ethic and individual success-achievement motivation," persuade many that only "conventional schooling" represented the "pathway to success."[32]

COMMENTARY

Here we glimpse earlier moments in Indigenous curriculum studies, allusions to struggles over curriculum control, tensions between Indigenous leaders and non-Indigenous teachers and parents, cracking open the concept of community, at least insofar as that term connotes if not consensus at least shared concerns. While the concern for role – associated with professionalism abstractly and classroom practice concretely – is no doubt sincere, does it also redirect tension from concrete persons to abstract ideas? Perhaps "role shock" also signifies the clash almost inherent in cultural incommensurability, specifically as it reverberates in our teaching and scholarship. (These "commentaries' – preliminary notes really, very much open to revision in light of critique and future study – can register a certain role shock, as they resignify scholarship, moving it from one context to another, a project some will criticize as "Eurocentric," although I point out that scholarly publication bears in very its form traces of European-descent cultures.)

There is also here a glimpse into the assumption that cultural acknowledgement in the curriculum can encourage student success. From "self-concept"[33] to "identity"[34]

this idea has circulated in curriculum studies (and not only in Canada) for decades, the idea that even in an alien and antagonistic culture, success (in culturally specific terms as well as mainstream academic and economic terms) can be encouraged (if not ensured) through the curricular affirmation of cultures excluded in the secular economistic (non)culture post-modernity installs. Were "success" so simple.

After reviewing this brief, Kiera Brant-Birioukov (the lead research assistant on Indigenous curriculum studies) wrote me: "Whereas the 1970s were indeed a time of 'renaissance' and 'transformation' of Indigenous education, it was less a spontaneous and feel-good equity move; it was a consequence of the Indian day/residential schools closing across the country from the late sixties onwards (with Mt. Currie's closure in 1973). I'm wondering if this abrupt shift from a residential/day school discourse accented 'role shock' even further, as it was like the dropping of a bag of marbles that communities were left to pick up once the Feds and churches pulled out."

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ENDNOTES

[1] Wyatt 1985, 250.
[2] Wyatt 1985, 250.
[3] Wyatt 1985, 250.
[4] Wyatt 1985, 250.

[5] Wyatt 1985, 252.
[6] Wyatt 1985, 251.
[7] Wyatt 1977.
[8] Wyatt 1985, 251-252.
[9] Wyatt 1985, 254.
[10] Wyatt 1985, 257.
[11] Wyatt 1985, 258.
[12] Wyatt 1985, 260.
[13] Wyatt 1985, 260-1.
[14] Wyatt 1985, 263. These terms may understate the situation, as later Wyatt (1985, 266) reports "all teachers … question[ed] the authority of the Board."
[15] Wyatt 1985, 264-5.
[16] Kanu 2005, 54.
[17] Kanu 2005, 56.
[18] Unclear, Kanu (2005, 57-58) reports, was whether non-Aboriginal teachers' lack of knowledge was simply insufficient information or in part an "active resistance." Also in play was the question of cultural appropriation; Kanu (2005, 59) notes teachers' "lack of confidence due to not having what they called the right to teach Aboriginal cultural knowledge."
[19] Kanu 2005, 57. Kanu (2005, 62) named three: 1) school vs. Aboriginal time, 2) talking circles precluded by large classes, and 3) "reluctance" to intervene in others' behaviour.
[20] Kanu 2005, 65-66.
[21] King 1981, 57.
[22] King 1981, 57-58.
[23] King 1981, 59.
[24] King 1981, 59-60.
[25] King 1981, 61.
[26] King 1981, 61.
[27] King 1981, 65.
[28] King 1981, 65.
[29] King 1981, 65-66.
[30] King 1981, 69.
[31] King 1981, 70.
[32] King 1981, 73.
[33] For example, Berliner and Biddle (1996, 296, emphasis added) state that "affiliation, *self-concept* as a learner, and motivation to achieve all seem to be higher when a student is in a smaller, more intimate environment." (That did not seem to be the case at Mt. Currie School.) But "the child's self-concept will never match up to his own being," Sarup (1992, 65) suggests.
[34] Pinar, 2015, 174.