

**TEACHING ON THE RESERVE:
A NON-NATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate my final project to my wife and family. They have provided me with support and encouragement when I was discouraged, frustrated and felt like giving up. I am grateful to Dr. Townsend for his never ending “get at it” encouragement and the love of learning he brings to his classes. I owe a great deal to Carillon Purvis, who was always ready to answer my questions and guide me in the right direction. An eternal thanks to Mom and Dad who believed in my potential. Finally I would like to dedicate this project to all those individuals who work in a reserve setting and are striving to provide the best possible education for their native students.

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to reflect back on my eleven years spent teaching in a native education setting. Over half of my teaching career has been spent in native elementary schools. I hope to provide some insight into the working conditions under which teachers labor in a First Nation's system.

Personal experiences will be interwoven with incidents drawn from all the schools in which I worked. The paper looks at six different aspects of reserve education. Some deal with local school situations. Others deal with the school division as a whole and some present issues that affect the school as well as the division.

The first section looks briefly at the history of Native Education, my teaching experiences before coming to Alberta, and my introduction to teaching on the Blood Reserve. The second section will look at the similarities and differences among three schools and school divisions. The third section looks at the contracts under which all teachers, new and returning, have to provide their services. It also deals with issues such as the negotiation process, length of contracts, and some of the terms of the collective agreement. The fourth section focuses on administration, the decision-making process as I have experienced it, and its effect on teachers, programs, and students. The fifth section looks at several of the problems and misconceptions that are associated with native education, and native teachers. Reference is made to student's assessment and achievement. Section six looks at possible solutions to the problems discussed in section five. In the final section of the paper I will try to bring together many divergent thoughts and viewpoints.

Some of the situations described in this paper have affected individuals, whole staffs, programs, and students. They have had a direct bearing on the shape and direction of native education. It is my hope that by writing this paper I can give a little glimpse

into what teaching is sometimes like on the reserve, so that the reader might have a better idea of the challenges and rewards that there are in teaching in a native education system. The situations discussed in this paper pertain only to the school systems in which I have taught.

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Introduction

The signing of the various treaties by Canada's Native people marked the end of traditional education for them and the beginning of a new era. Price (1991) notes that at the treaty negotiations the chiefs asked that their children have the opportunity to learn new ways of survival in a rapidly-changing environment. For the chiefs, this did not mean loss of Indian cultural traditions. This opportunity was seen as a way to gain the benefits of a different tradition through learning from the non-Native society. Price further states that the Canadian government and the churches, however, clearly had something else in mind. They intended to absorb Indian children into the "civilized" Christian society of small farmers. The results of these efforts are well documented and include physical, sexual and mental cruelty, loss of language and loss of culture.

Conditions for the education of native children remained generally inadequate for well over one hundred years. In 1973, the National Indian Brotherhood put forward a proposal to the federal government that would see the control of education pass into the hands of Canada's native people. The federal government eventually agreed to the proposal. Band councils were to have full or partial control of education on their reserves. Native parents would have a voice in how their children would be educated. In due course, three Native education systems in Southern Alberta, located on the Blood, Peigan and Stoney Reserves, gained control of their school systems within one decade, with the Bloods gaining control in 1988. It was with this school board, the Blood Tribe Board of Education, that I accepted my first teaching position in a Native controlled education system.

I grew up in Hamilton, Ontario where I graduated from high school. I obtained my Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education degrees from the University of P.E.I. I started teaching in P.E.I. in the fall after graduation. I taught at the grade six level in all subject areas. I spent four years teaching on the Island. Most of the schools in which I taught were in small rural communities.

I moved to Manitoba, where I taught at a provincial school located on a reserve. The school population was made up of Metis students. Their parents shared many of the same beliefs as the parents in Alberta. They felt the federal school system was not meeting the needs of their children. They broke away from the federally run Indian Affairs school and asked the provincial government to build them a provincial school. I taught there for three years. Next, I accepted a teacher/principal position in a small farming community in southern Manitoba. I stayed at that position for another three years.

My next move brought me out to Alberta. I applied for a teaching position advertised in the newspaper and soon found myself being interviewed for a position on the Blood Reserve. During my interview it was explained to me why it was important for Native people to control their own education systems.

The first reason given was that there was a growing movement towards self-control and self-determination. Secondly, it was felt that the school system under the Department of Indian Affairs was not meeting the specific needs of the children. The third reason given was that with local control parents would have more input into what was being taught to their children. I was told it was important to have traditional values, customs, and beliefs integrated into the school program. Finally, the Blood Tribe educators said, with local control it would be easier for the community to decide who would be teaching their children. The staff would be working for the school system rather than the federal government.

My nine years of teaching in provincial school systems (P.E.I. and Manitoba) did not prepare me for the new experience of teaching in a Native educational school system. The first move taken by the new education authority was to release almost all of the Indian Affairs staff. Only a few were kept on. The slate was wiped clean and a new era had begun. My adventure had begun too.

I didn't get off to a very good start. I assumed the interview was at the Board Office address in Standoff, not knowing that Board Office was actually located about twenty kilometers away at Red Crow College. The interview committee consisted of about nine people. They represented the Education Board, Chief and Council, and the three school principals. I was surprised, to say the least, when several of the members were introduced and their last name was the same as mine. Later I would find out that Fox is the name of one of the largest family groups on the Blood Reserve.

At our first staff meeting the principal took me aside and explained why I had been invited for the interview. Apparently when my application was received the school board thought that I was a tribal member who they had somehow lost track of over the years. My name had helped me to get the job.

As a way of introducing the new staff to each other we were divided into pairs. The objective of the exercise was to interview each other and then introduce our partner to the rest of the staff. My partner was Patti Fox, who was the wife of chief Roy Fox. I introduced Patti first and then it was her turn. She stood up and introduced me as her long lost cousin from Ontario. It was a great icebreaker and made me feel a part of the staff right from the start.

The nicest part of those early years was the sense of friendship and unity that developed. This was due in part to the fact that as a staff we were growing together. It was our responsibility to overcome the various difficulties that faced us and to shape an educational system that the people were counting on to lead them into the future.

Differences & Similarities

The three Alberta native school divisions in which I have worked are similar in many ways. All three schools offer instruction in their native language. All three schools where I worked had female Native administrators and there were very few male teachers at the elementary level. Native teachers are employed in all the schools. The schools faced similar problems, the major concern being the low reading and mathematics

abilities of the students. They teach the same Alberta curriculum and even use the same Provincial Achievement Tests to evaluate how their students are doing.

There are a few differences as well. In the Stoney and Peigan schools, grades K-12 were housed in one building, while on the Blood Reserve the elementary students were in two separate and distinct schools. The students of the Stoney Reserve have been able to maintain their native language and are able to speak it fluently. English is spoken in the classroom, while elsewhere the students converse easily with each other in their native tongue around the school. The other two reserves have not been able to maintain their native language to any great extent. It is taught to the students as a second language. These second language classes start with the kindergarten children and continue into the upper grades. In Bocket the grade four, five, and six students are divided up according to their ability to speak the Blackfoot language. The educational system on the Blood Reserve has instituted a Blackfoot Immersion program, starting in Kindergarten, in an attempt to increase the number of members who will be able to speak the language fluently in the future. Hopefully the students will be able to speak fluently one day.

I've found that students in the three schools are pretty much the same, although they do have their differences. Attendance in my classes at Napi's Playground Elementary School in Bocket and Saipoyi Elementary School in Standoff averaged in the low to high eighty percent range. Attendance at Morley Community School in Morley averaged thirty-five percent for the year. Despite all the efforts of the teachers, elders, counselors, and administration little could be done to encourage the students to attend school.

At the other two schools, some efforts seemed to be effective. For example, all students with perfect attendance for the month at Saipoyi received a five-dollar reward. In Bocket, the names of all the students with perfect attendance were entered into a draw. One winner was selected from division one and one winner from division two.

Each student received five dollars. During the last three years at Brocket the students with perfect attendance at the end of the year each received a bicycle. The first year there were only a couple of students who qualified. The second year saw seven students reach the goal and, this past year, there were over a dozen students who were able to achieve perfect attendance.

Why the difference between Brocket, Standoff and Morley? I think there are two possible explanations. The first can be found in the reward system used by the different schools. At Saipoyi all students receive their five dollars at an awards assembly the first Monday of the month. The students have placed a high value on receiving their reward. Perfect attendance is reinforced every month at the awards assembly. Student gratification is almost immediate.

At Brocket only two students receive a monthly reward for perfect attendance. Although not every student receives the monthly reward, the reward at the end of the year is an incentive enough for an increasing number of students to strive for perfect attendance. The year-end goal is reinforced at each reward assembly and by the two bicycles on display at the main office.

For perfect attendance at Morley students receive a pencil and certificate. At the end of the year all the students with perfect attendance receive a trip to Calloway Park. In my opinion the students here have placed very little value on the rewards. It is not worth their while to strive for perfect attendance. If the reward system were to change to something that the students valued, then the number of students achieving perfect attendance might increase.

Parent involvement could be another possible explanation for the difference in attendance figures at the three schools. It is my opinion that the parents at Saipoyi and Brocket demonstrate a greater interest in their children attending school than do the parents of the children at Morley. Reasons for this may vary but the teachers I worked with in each school all seemed to accept that it was so.

There is also a difference in the number of native teachers on staff at the three schools. At first, Saipoyi had a total of twenty-two teachers of whom only three or four were native. The stated goal of the Blood School system is to have an all-native staff when it becomes possible. Over the years there has been a change in the number of native teachers at the school. Today there are six teachers at the Saipoyi School who are not native. In both Napi Elementary School and Morley School the majority of the staff are still non-native teachers. I think that on the Peigan and Stoney Reserves having an all- native staff or a majority of native teachers is not a high priority. However, I think both systems do need to have more native teachers, especially male teachers, to provide more positive role models for boys and youths in the schools.

Contracts

Contracts! Everyone needs a contract, everyone wants one! Probably the single most important concern most teachers in reserve schools have relates to their contracts. Both the Blood and Stoney Boards have used the contract system from the beginning. The Peigan School Board is in the process of changing from an “indeterminate term” contract to short term contracts. The number of years of service teachers have already given to the board will be used to determine the length of any new contracts they receive.

The contract system is clearly most beneficial to the education authority. It allows the school board several options. The board decides who gets a new contract and who does not, and the board decides what the length of the contract will be. For example, when I first started with the Blood School Board I was given a one-year contract. This was followed by a four-year contract. My last two contracts were for two years each. In addition, the school board does not have to give reasons for letting a contract expire. Generally, once a teacher’s contract has expired his or her services are no longer required and the teacher leaves the employ of the Board. The board cannot lose. There is no hassle, no tenure, and no wrongful dismissal cases unless (as happened with the Blood

Board and Peigan board in the 1990's) the Board "fires" teachers whose contracts are still in effect.

This places teachers in a very strange situation. If they are not willing to do what they are asked to do, at the end of the contract they can be just let go. I have taught under this system for the last eleven years, and it is not a very pleasant existence.

The months preceding contract renewal are very stressful. In some cases we would not find out until the middle of June, if we had a job for the next school year. Recently this has changed for the better with those staff who are to be released receiving their termination letters in early or mid-May. Every teacher in the school is virtually in the same position. All reserve-school teachers know that eventually it could and probably will happen to them. It is very difficult to try and keep such a thought from interfering with teaching duties and a sense of commitment. The contract system creates havoc with a teacher's personal life. Teachers in reserve schools can never really make any long range plans. With most school systems, if teachers are doing their job, they can plan for a long career within that system. They can plan for the future. In the reserve system, teachers cannot plan beyond the length of their contract. There is no such thing as job security.

Negotiations

The negotiation process in reserve schools is another of those influences on teachers' lives that differs greatly from most such processes in the public school system. Usually both sides in any normal negotiations sit down at the bargaining table and work towards a middle ground that is acceptable to both parties. It didn't work that way on the reserve. On the Blood Reserve each school has teacher representatives who are supposed to represent all teachers in contract negotiations. These representatives sit with their counterparts from the board.

Each year the teachers were supposed to make recommendations to their school representatives to be put on the negotiation table. After the first few years we had a

difficult time getting the teachers to make suggestions, because they felt there wasn't any point asking for anything.

In the early years these meetings had followed much the process that I had thought they should. Both sides did give and take a little and then chose a middle ground that both sides found to be fair.

The first time the new superintendent sat in on the negotiation process I felt the process change. The stated purpose was to see how negotiations went, but the teachers were reluctant to speak and the "process" soon became one of the board telling teachers what contractual conditions would be for each year.

Apathy set in very quickly as the teachers came to realize that for the most part the negotiation process was one-sided. Teachers were willing to settle for whatever was offered. They did not want to rock the boat. An aspect that figures into the situation is the fact that there was no unity amongst teachers. This was by design. Teachers had no representation with the Alberta Teachers Association. We had no legal recourse when it came to negotiations. If there was something that the school board added to the contract that teachers didn't agree with, there was little teachers could do about it. To protest or to make waves could mean termination when your contract was up.

After that we saw changes made to the collective agreement without any input or agreement by the teachers. One year, teachers on the Blood Reserve found two new clauses in their contracts. The first required teaching staff to have completed one hundred hours of community service by the end of the school year. Interpretation of what constituted community service was pretty well left up to the teacher. As a result, coaching, fundraising, and inviting students home for a few hours were all used to fulfill this requirement.

The second new clause required classroom teachers to maintain an eighty percent attendance average. The responsibility for having students at school became that of the teacher and not the parents. Staffs were very upset over these two clauses. It was felt

that a teacher could only do so much to get a student to school. Letters home, phone calls, home visits, and conferences could be used to encourage parents to send their children to school. The bottom line is that if a child is in a home environment, that for one reason or another does not or will not ensure attendance at school, then the teacher's hands are tied.

Staffs were particularly distressed because they saw these changes as a way for the school division to have grounds to terminate a contract. If it is in the agreement and a staff member does not meet such a requirement, losing one's position becomes a real possibility. It was also the way they had been inserted into the contract, without any staff input, that was really upsetting. Yet there was very little resistance to these measures because teachers were afraid to complain. There seemed to be no means available to teachers to fight the inclusion of these terms into the contract. As a result these two items remain in the collective agreement today.

A further example of a challenging way in which a native school board dealt with staff took place on the Peigan Reserve. The Peigan School board had a unique contract up until this year. Teachers with the board had an indeterminate contract, which, basically, gave them a lifetime position. Suddenly, without warning, it was announced that for the 1999-2000 school year there would be a new contract. The length of this new contract would initially be based on the number of years a teacher had served with the division. The school board had arbitrarily decided to do away with the old contract for one that was more in line with the kind of contracts used by other native-controlled school boards. The teachers were told that they had to sign the new contracts or face the possibility of losing their positions. Several teachers consulted with lawyers about the legality of the board's position. Some of those disputes ended up in the courts.

Teachers working in reserve schools seem to have no legal standing as a group. On one of the reserves we were only allowed to be Associate Members of the Alberta Teachers' Association. There wasn't any group solidarity, either. We often felt we were

individuals without any legal protection. These feelings, combined with fear, caused many teachers to accept their new contracts. They believed that if they didn't sign they would lose their positions. It was a take-it-or-leave-it proposition. They knew the school board could always find teachers to take their places.

Notification

It has been both sad and instructive for me to learn how some teachers find out about their future with a band-controlled school board. One example took place at a staff meeting near the end of the school year. In the staffroom, a group of teachers were discussing assignments for the upcoming school year. Grades and student numbers had been listed on the board by the principal. Beside these two columns were the teaching assignments for the following year. A teacher noticed there was a name on the board that should not have been there. The name was erased and the name of a new staff member was put in its place. This was the "official" notice of termination. There was no explanation of why this happened. Probably it was an oversight by administration. The teacher's reaction was one of shock. It surprised everyone. Most felt that it was not handled in a very professional manner.

The next incident happened to a friend of mine. One evening he was reading the classified section the paper looking at the teaching positions. He noticed an ad for a position with his school board that looked similar to his. He phoned other teachers who held similar positions to his with the board and discovered that they were all returning in the fall. The position being advertised in the paper was his. That is how he found out that his contract was not being renewed.

In my own situation other staff members knew that my contract was not being renewed before I did. It was my wife who told me about it. One of the staff members at her school mentioned that she was sorry to hear that I wouldn't be returning in the fall. About a week later I received my official letter from the head office notifying me that my services would not be needed the following year.

It seems to me that there are serious problems associated with this kind of school board behavior. There isn't any regard for the feelings of the individual. A disproportionate share of control of the education system lies in the hands of a superintendent or a few school board members. One teacher commented that this style of management puts staff on the defensive and breeds distrust. I know that on several occasions I was warned not to say too much to certain teachers because my comments would make their way back to the superintendent.

Decision-Making

Based on some of the decisions that I have seen made on the reserves, I have sometimes been unsure about how the different systems operate. At times they seem to be almost dysfunctional. All jurisdictions have an elected chief and council who have representatives that are responsible for the school system. The school board is made up of individuals who have an interest in the educational system and have stood for election. Currently, Native superintendents are heading up two of the school divisions to which I refer in this paper. I think that the system breaks down most often because of miscommunication, little consultation, and poor legal advice.

When it comes to termination of a teacher's contract the board needs to make sure it is acting legally. It cannot afford to make mistakes that result in lawsuits. All members who have a vested interest in the educational system must have input into that system. This includes Chief and Council, Board members, Parent Advisory Committee members, parents, administrators, and teachers.

At one time, Blood Tribe Education had estimated that there were approximately one thousand five hundred native students attending school off the reserve. A decision was made to attempt to get these students to come to school on the reserve and increase the funding base by doing so. Incentives were offered to the students who came to school on the reserve. It was decided to provide elementary students with approximately thirty dollars to buy running shoes and high school students with about fifty dollars towards the

purchase of running shoes. In 1995 the division had a student population made up of approximately six hundred and forty students in the elementary schools and another five hundred students in the middle school and high school. Based on the above figures, the cost of providing money for purchasing running shoes totals almost forty-five thousand dollars. During the last ten years this incentive has cost the school board almost five hundred thousand dollars. The student population has increased only slightly during this period of time. I personally believe that the money could have been used in a more productive way.

How can Native communities attract students back to their schools? In my opinion parents will look at the types of programs being offered, the quality of education offered, the teachers that are in the school, the administration of the school and, finally and most importantly, whether or not their child will be safe in the school. During the first couple of years at Saipoyi the staff struggled to implement an effective discipline policy. We were told flat-out by several parents that they wouldn't send their students to our school because they believed it wasn't safe.

I often stated to some of my colleagues that if we suspended or expelled the students causing the problems, parents would see we were serious about making our school safer, and start sending them back. It took several attempts before we developed a discipline plan that appeared to work. Our enrollment remained stable and then grew gradually.

Many of the staffing decisions made over the years seemed to make it increasingly difficult to provide the kind of school environment parents said they wanted. I know that staff turnover rates are fairly high, for a variety of reasons. For examples, teachers leave to accept positions elsewhere, or for personal reasons, or they are transferred to another school within the system, or they don't have their contracts renewed, or they are simply fired.

Still, the greatest number of changes that occurred at Saipoyi School had to do with the staff. Of the original twenty teachers who started when band-control came to the Blood Reserve in 1988, there are now only three teachers remaining. During my nine years we had four principals, two assistant principals, and two superintendents. There were four music teachers, four physical education teachers, three librarians, and three counselors. Those of us who stayed saw thirty other teachers come and go. This large turnover rate did not help produce the continuity of instruction and continuity of curriculum that makes an effective school. The other two schools have also seen staff changes, to a slightly lesser degree.

Many reserve students look for the school to provide some stability in their lives. One of the prerogatives of a central administrator in reserve schools is the selection of staff. Staffing decisions are very important to the effectiveness of a school, to morale, and to the achievement of school goals. In my experience I have seen how staffing decisions can work against school success. Let me illustrate what I mean.

My teaching background is as an elementary generalist. My usual assignment has been at the grade four to six levels. Yet, one year, when our physical education teacher did not have his contract renewed, I was assigned his position to teach physical education and to run the resource room. The following year my assignment changed to physical education and computers. I had no previous experience teaching in either of these subject areas.

For one of my colleagues, staffing decisions had an even more drastic effect. Our elementary school had a very successful band program. The band had won awards at various competitions and had performed at a variety of functions. We were very proud of the band's success. The administration wanted to extend the program to the high school. The music teacher was told that his time would be split between the elementary school and the high school. The teacher did not have any input into the decision making process; he was told that was the way it was going to be. He explained to me that he

enjoyed the elementary students and that he didn't want to go into the high school, but he had no choice in the matter. This decision meant increased travel time for the teacher, and an increase in his workload. Those high school students who had attended our elementary school had already had exposure to the music program, while students from other elementary schools had none. The students already in the high school had no previous experience with a band program. This further compounded the problem when they were mixed together at the high school.

This move also affected the other staff and students at our elementary school who were sorry to see this teacher have his assignment changed. It affected the program at our school because this teacher also served as a resource teacher. After a short period of time, he left the system. I had a very good relationship with this individual and we had often talked about starting our own private school. When he left the school system that is exactly what he did. The final result was that students lost a very good teacher and the band program at the elementary school and the high school disappeared.

Blake and Morton (1964) developed a grid to explain organizational leadership. One axis of the grid shows concern for people and the other axis concern for production. Using the example of the music teacher I would characterize the leadership style of the administrator, in this particular case as falling along a 9,1 pattern on their grid. This pattern is located in the lower right corner of the grid and depicts the administrator with: (a) little concern for subordinates or other people in the organization and (b) intense concern for getting things done.

In yet another instance, our yearly camping trip to Camp Impeesa had been scheduled to start on Monday morning. As the grade six teacher I was to be there. That same Monday morning I had a job interview scheduled with another school division. I discussed the conflict with my principal and was given permission to go to the interview and meet up with the campers afterwards. My arriving late would inconvenience no one. I arrived at Camp Impeesa about fifteen minutes after the school bus had arrived.

The superintendent somehow heard about my interview. The next week I received a letter from the superintendent accusing me of not being up front with the school board by going to this interview and informing me that my absence would be considered leave without pay for one day. I was instructed to submit the required leave without pay form. I wrote back explaining that my actions had been above board and that I had already received permission from my principal to attend the interview. No further action was taken.

One of the elementary schools where I was employed had a very good computer lab. A staff member had been selected to receive extra training in computers in order to enhance the program. It was of great benefit to our students to have a qualified individual working with them. Later this teacher transferred to the high school and we lost his valuable knowledge and experience. The end result was that the computer lab was broken up and dispersed among the classrooms. Most teachers at this time did not have great computer skills and the equipment was used mostly, if at all, to reinforce Math and Language Arts skills and to play games. Several years later the school purchased new computers and the computer lab was put back in place. Unfortunately there was no plan to train a staff member so that the lab could be used to its best advantage. Again it was left up to individual teachers to teach their students about computers. The success of this method depended on how confident and competent the teacher was in conducting the computer class. Each class would receive a different level of instruction, if any at all. To use the computer lab properly, it would have been in the best interests of the students to have an experienced computer teacher instruct the students.

One year our school was faced with the problem of tardiness by staff members. Several attempts to curtail the problem by memos, meetings with staff, and speaking with the individuals involved failed to resolve the issue. At these meetings with staff we were never asked for our possible solutions. Eventually, it was decided that everyone would have to punch in and out. Staff members that I talked to felt that we were not being

treated as professionals and that the majority of us were being inconvenienced because of the actions of a few. The problem did not end there. Someone would punch in for those who continued to arrive late. Senior administrators then decided that teaching staff would have to sign in and out on a sign-in sheet, while the non-teaching staff still had to use the time cards.

I think that one way to create resentment in a staff is to leave them out of the decision making process, especially when the plan of action has a direct affect on them. An easier solution would have been to document those individuals continuing to arrive late, then follow an appropriate course of action to end it. They could have been put on notice that continued tardiness could result in their possible dismissal. As it is, the situation has never been remedied and staff members still sign in and out.

Not all decisions made by central administration have had what I would call negative effects. The superintendent on the Blood Reserve has done a commendable job of improving the educational facilities there. A new elementary school was built in Lavern to replace an outdated one. Construction of a new middle school, housing grades five through eight, was completed a few years ago. A major retrofit of the high school has taken place as well. The school board was also able to move into a new building of its own with the completion of their new facility. Plans are currently underway for either the retrofit of Saipoyi Elementary School or the construction of a new facility. The Blood people can take pride in the fact that they have modern facilities and equipment. The school board also makes every effort to keep modern computer equipment in the schools. The implementation of a Blackfoot Immersion program has also been put into effect in an effort to prevent the further the loss of their native language.

These accomplishments are the result of well planned research, studies, negotiations, and communication. These are just a few examples of how good decisions have helped to improve the school system on the Blood Reserve. It would appear that with careful planning and consultation effective programs can be implemented.

Problems/Misconceptions

When reserve teachers get together, discussions usually revolve around the problems that we think are unique to our situation. Topics that frequently come up include discipline, student enrollment, the financial situation, politics, misconceptions about native education, and student achievement.

Student Enrollment

One of the native school divisions with which I was employed estimated there were approximately one thousand of their own native students who were not attending school on the reserve. One interesting aspect of native education in Canada is the fact that native students can attend school where ever they want. For example, in southern Alberta, native students from the Blood and Peigan reserves can attend school in Cardston, Fort MacLeod, Pincher Creek, and Lethbridge.

The reasons being given for the large number of students attending school elsewhere are nearly always the same. Some relate to real problems and some are based on misconceptions that create problems. They include a lack of discipline and safety at the schools, a belief that education at the reserve schools is different and inferior to the education available in the public system, and a belief that teachers on the reserve are not as good as those in the public system.

Each school with which I have been associated has had a discipline policy in effect. In fact, at Saipoyi Elementary School, we spent several years revising and improving the discipline policy. I have found discipline at any school requires the cooperation of all concerned. It begins in the classroom with the teacher and students. The teachers have to be able to maintain discipline in and around the class. But parents, too, need to be supportive of the discipline measures that the classroom teacher and school have implemented. I have often seen the case where parents have undermined the authority of the teacher by not supporting disciplinary actions.

The following anecdotes are representative of hundreds of similar stories that reserve teachers can tell about discipline. The first incident revolves around a planned field trip to Edmonton, that I helped chaperone. While we waited for our bus to arrive at the school, four students manage to slip away from the group and enter one of the portable classrooms where a substitute teacher was conducting a music class. The students disrupted the class by running through, shouting and swearing. The chaperones decided that these students would not be allowed to take part in the field trip. With the support of the principal, all the parents were contacted and the situation explained. Thinking that the matter had been resolved, the main body of our group started off in the school bus. Two of the chaperones stayed behind to ensure the four students would be picked up by their parents and taken home. They intended to catch up with the main group as soon as possible.

The school bus was just north of Airdrie when the other chaperones caught up with us. The first thing that I saw as the van passed us were two of the supposedly suspended students giving the finger to the students on the bus as they passed by. Everyone aboard the bus was wondering what had happened to allow the students to come on the field trip.

It seems that when the parents arrived at the school they immediately met with the principal. They were able to convince the principal to change the earlier decision to suspend the students from the trip. I feel that when the principal reversed the original decision, discipline at the school was undermined and the wrong kind of message was sent to all the students.

The second incident involved one of my students and occurred just before a scheduled field trip. The student had taken a can of pop and deliberately poured it into my top desk drawer. I informed him that he would not be allowed to go on our field trip the next day. Before the end of the day his father was at my door reprimanding me for punishing his son too harshly and demanding that he be allowed to go. I felt the father

totally ignored the actions of his child and sent the wrong message to his son. This time, however, I had the support of the principal and the boy did not go on the field trip.

School counselors and principals have an important role to play in discipline procedures. This past year on the Peigan Reserve I had the opportunity to see how supportive these individuals can be when it comes to discipline. Both were involved in the process, so much so, in fact, that the number of students being sent to the office dropped dramatically. Both are native educators and take their job seriously. They take an active part in the discipline process. They have adopted a hands-on approach to discipline. They meet with the students, hold conferences with parents, are visible around the school and take part in outdoor supervision. When necessary, the counselor would sometimes take students home immediately if there was a serious need to remove a student from the school.

I have had principals who have spent the majority of their time ensconced in their offices and the students very rarely see them except when they are in trouble. In the Napi's Playground Elementary School teachers know that they are to handle the everyday problems that normal kids present at school. Rules are reinforced every Monday morning when we hold our assembly. When needed, the school also holds healing circles with the students to discuss problems and situations in order to maintain discipline. In the healing circle students are encouraged to voice any concerns that they have about school or what is happening to them at school. If a student does not have anything to say that is also acceptable. We also encourage them to express how they feel about things that are affecting them.

In this school it was the first time that I had experienced a healing circle and I was impressed at how effective it was. Students who normally would not contribute two words about school would suddenly open up and express how they were feeling. Very often their comments would bring tears to the eyes of both students and teachers. Staff members were also encouraged to contribute their feelings and concerns. Quite often

students only hear a teacher's reaction to a situation and never get to hear how a teacher feels about his or her students. Accordingly, these meetings also gave the students and teachers an opportunity to understand each other a little bit more.

In Morley Community School, on the Stoney Reserve, an elder-in-the-school program has been implemented. The elders are employed full-time at the school and are available to the teachers as resource people and counselors, and to assist with discipline. Students can be sent to see the elder for counseling about their conduct in school as part of the discipline process. In this situation students come to realize the role that the elders have in their society. Respect for their position in the culture and the fact that they know pretty well everyone's parents is a great help. I found this was a very effective measure, involving the elders in the education of the students and getting them into the schools where their knowledge and experience could be used. The elders emphasize the traditional values and beliefs of their culture. The elders also help develop a liaison between the home and the school.

In reserve schools, the superintendent can also play a role in the school's discipline policy, not always with the best of results. I have seen several situations occur where the superintendent has become involved in an issue that should have been handled at the school level. Often it has occurred because parents have made a direct request to the superintendent to deal with a school situation.

There is a certain "chain of command" in education that needs to be followed in order that conflict can be resolved fairly. If a parent has an issue with the school, whether it concerns discipline or some other matter, it should be dealt with at the school level first. The parent needs to talk with the individual or teacher involved to settle the matter. If a satisfactory solution can't be found one-on-one, then the matter should be taken to the principal at the next level. If the issue still cannot be resolved it can then go higher, to the superintendent and, perhaps, the Board. If the superintendent intervenes

too soon in the process then the school's authority, especially that of teacher and the principal, can be undermined.

When parents perceive what to them is a general lack of discipline or are concerned about their child's safety they are naturally going to sent their child to a school were they feel the environment is safer. During my first couple of years on the reserve we were going through growing pains as the educational system grew and developed under band control. We had a policy of accepting all students who wanted to attend, and I believe that as a result, in the early years, we did lose some students. We continued to work on discipline, constantly revising our policy until we came up with what I believe was an effective policy. Discipline did improve over the years. I have always believed that if you can show parents you are serious about discipline and safety in your school, then the parents will feel comfortable about bringing their children back. Unfortunately misunderstandings concerning discipline at school are very difficult to dispel.

Native Education and Teachers

The second issue concerns the misconception that the Native educational system is inferior to the public system. Many critics do not understand that the native school boards require us to use the same Alberta curriculum as the public system, and that we have to teach to the same standards as the public schools. Alberta Education conducted school evaluations at Saipoyi School in 1992 and 1997, both of which were quite favorable.

This issue encompasses concerns about the quality of teachers. Somehow the idea has come about that teachers teach on the reserve because they are not good enough to teach elsewhere. This was brought home to me just after my contract had not been renewed last year. I was sitting with a group of reserve teachers and we were discussing my search for work and lack of success. The teacher across the table quietly raised his hand behind his head with two fingers in a v-shape, symbolizing two feathers, and then

proceeded to stamp his forehead with a closed fist. The meaning was quite clear; I was “marked” as a teacher who could only teach on the reserve.

Yet teachers on the reserve have to meet the same qualifications as other teachers in the province. The Blood Reserve probably has a higher percentage of Native teachers with a Masters’ Degree in Education than any other school system in Alberta. There are exceptional teachers and poor teachers in both the reserve and the public educational systems. One advantage the reserve educational system has is that it is easier to release poor teachers than it is in the public system, but it is also easier to release good teachers for reasons other than professional performance. Teacher evaluations seem to be used to get rid of teachers rather than to improve a teacher’s performance in the classroom.

Working conditions in reserve schools are basically the same as they are in provincial schools. The one big difference is the level of stress we work under. The situations our students come from seem to be compounded because they live in such a close-knit community. All the problems of life on the reserve - the drugs, the alcohol, the crime, the abuse and neglect that some of the children have to face, as well as their living conditions - seem more pronounced because of the closeness of the community.

Politics

Politics sometimes plays an important role in education on the reserve. The reserve is a closed system. What I mean by this is that there are few outside influences to interfere with what goes on inside the reserve. It is like having a country within a country. The only outside body that does have much influence is the federal government. Throughout the reserve the strong family and clan ties that developed centuries ago are still evident today. In spite of all the problems and difficulties the people are face with, families still tend to unite to face their challenges. In the school you can always find students who are in the care of grandparents, or aunts and uncles, for one reason or another. It is not uncommon to find cousins in the same class, students who are related to the teacher, and teachers who are blood relatives or related by marriage. This closeness

can, and often does, pit family groups against each other when certain issues arise. Due to the diversity of the population in the public school system such conflict is not nearly so common. On the reserve, the names of elected officials may change, but the blood ties still remain. Unfortunately the conflict that occurs between parents is sometimes brought into the school. Children sometimes bring the attitudes of their parents with them to the school, and what was a disagreement between a group of adults surfaces as hard feelings between their children.

On this subject, Brian Frank, of the Blood Reserve, wrote a Personal Opinion article in the Lethbridge Herald. In it he stated that the idea and concept of a democratic education system on the reserve has quickly degenerated into a system wrought with jealousy, blacklisting, scare and control tactics, nepotism and rule by the few for personal gain. (Appendix A)

In my experiences on three reserves, the issue of family ties and elections constantly spills over into the education system. Families and friends unite over educational issues that are also political in origin. The hiring and firing practices of the education board, and the releasing of certain teachers, has drawn frequent protests by way of letters and petitions, but decisions too often motivated by personal and political considerations continue to effect the lives of reserve school teachers and, in turn, students.

Finances

The health of any educational system depends in part on how healthy the finances are. The federal government provides the funding for the reserve schools. Last year our funding was based partly on the nominal roll, the list of name of all children registered in our school. When native students attend school off the reserve it translates into a lot of lost funding.

The Peigan School Board is looking at trying to change the financial agreements that it has with the public school boards. Board members would like to see a system

whereby they would receive partial funding for students who start the school year off in the public school system but transfer to the reserve school system part way into the school year. Currently funding is allocated to the reserve schools based on the nominal roll at the end of September. If students enter the reserve school after this cutoff date the money allocated to the schools they were attending at the start of the school year stays with their former school board. If the Peigan proposal comes to fruition, the balance of the funding remaining for those students would come with them to the reserve school. The same would hold true for students leaving the reserve school to attend a public school. This appears to be a fair and equitable solution to part of the funding problem, but opposition could be strong. Under the current agreement public school divisions get to keep the funds allocated for a student as long as that student leaves the system after the nominal roll deadline. For the reserve school this puts an added strain on their resources. I can't see a school division giving up the current system for a system that would see a drop in its revenue.

Whatever ways are used to fund the system, educational funding needs to be spent in a more efficient and productive manner. The case concerning new running shoes is but one of many inappropriate uses of public funding. I am sure that school staffs could have found a better way to spend that money in areas that would have improved the educational system.

Over the last eleven years I have seen all three native school divisions in which I worked deal with lawsuits. Most, it appears, have been brought by teachers whose contracts have been terminated. Most often, the teachers have won their cases. For one school division it meant having to do without much needed supplies for the next year, and not being able to fill a needed position. In all cases there seems to have been a lack of understanding on the part of the boards of education regarding procedures for releasing an employee from a contract. The money spent defending the school division and the cost of settling has been a very large and unnecessary waste of public funding.

One of the school divisions with which I worked had to reduce its staff by over five positions because it had based its needs on a projected student enrollment that failed to appear. Teachers, support staff and elders had to be released by the board. Plans to increase enrollment had never gotten beyond the earliest stages, yet the system did its staffing and budget planning based on the most optimistic projections.

In order to increase enrollment, reserve schools need to get involved in advertising their success stories. They have to sell themselves if they hope to draw students. As well, they must become more responsible and disciplined in the handling of their financial matters. They need to look at acquiring all the financing from Indian Affairs that is due them, look at alternate sources of funding, and try to reach a more equitable funding arrangement with the surrounding school divisions. With adequate funding, effectively managed reserve schools can face their challenges with greater confidence and a better chance of success.

Student Achievement

The last major topic in this area I would like to look at is student results on the Provincial Achievement Tests. In my opinion very few students are able to achieve the acceptable level on these tests. It is a concern that I feel needs to be addressed and rectified. First of all there is a great deal of controversy over the usefulness of these tests and any other kinds of tests for native students. Butterfield (1994) wrote that the reliance on standardized achievement tests may hinder native students because (a) students whose language background in non-or-substandard English may read or interpret tests incorrectly and (b) students' cultural values may discourage competitive behaviors, which can put these students at a disadvantage. Nichols (1991) reviewed the educational literature and summarized the findings from the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force hearings. He concluded that public school reliance on standardized-testing might hurt Native-Americans. The same conclusion could be reached for native school reliance on these kinds of tests in Alberta.

Nichols believes that more authentic indicators of learning are needed to measure American Indian (AI) and Alaskan Native (AN) educational progress. The term “authentic work” describes tasks that students consider meaningful, valuable, significant, and worthy of one’s efforts. By this standard, students are challenged to master essential tasks, instead of recalling basic facts. This style of learning is well suited to many tribal groups that respect an individual’s ability to learn from experience, without constant supervision and correction.

What factors influence a student’s achievement on these tests? Gilliland (1986) listed eight socio-cultural factors as potentially responsible for the poor academic achievement of Indian students.

- differences between native cultures and school cultures
- ignorance of native cultures among school staff
- differences between students’ and teachers’ values
- differences in native students’ learning style
- poor motivation of native students
- language differences of students and teachers
- students’ home and community problems
- inappropriate use of tests with Indian students

As teachers on the reserve we are asked to teach the Alberta curriculum and to administer the provincial achievement tests as well as any other form of standardized test senior administration chooses. Brescia and Fortune (1998) assert that achievement tests should be used in four ways to make decisions about individuals: as a survey of attainment in content area; as a diagnostic instrument to identify individual strengths and weaknesses in a content area; as a readiness indicator to determine if an individual has

attained prerequisites to continue study in a given content area; and as a performance test to estimate the degree of learning of a body of content.

In order to understand the problems faced by Native students we need to look at how they acquired their knowledge in the past. Bourdeaux (1995) records that before the European conquest of the Americas, almost all native people used performance-based assessment. The traditional method of acquiring skills and knowledge took place informally. Elders and relatives passed down knowledge and skills about survival and culture.

Brescia and Fortune write that testing students from backgrounds different from the culture in which the test was developed magnifies the probability of invalid results. Sources of error arising from differences among the two cultures include: lack of compatibility of the languages; differences in experiential backgrounds of the students being tested from those for whom the test was developed; and differences in affective dispositions toward handling testing environments between the groups of students.

Native students have to overcome other obstacles when it comes to test taking. McDiarmid (1972) notes the role that poverty, health and nutrition, social conflict, language, and test motivation play in the interpretation of test data on Indian children. The major factors were found to be language and test motivation. There are also a variety of other factors that play a part in the success of students. One of the most important is parental involvement and support. This raises several questions about the home environment. Is it a healthy environment? Is it a single parent family? Are the children looked after by their relatives? What kind of a role do the parents play in the education of their child? Do they take an active part in their child's school life? What is their level of interest in education? How have the experiences of parents (e.g. residential schooling) affected their attitudes toward education and, thus, the attitude of their children?

Butterfield & Pepper (1991) feel the inclusion of AI/AN parents in school improves parental attitudes and behaviors as well as student achievement, motivation, self-esteem, and behavior. Germaine (1995) believes increasing parental involvement reduces cultural discontinuity between home and school.

In spite of everything that our students go through they still have to write provincial achievement tests. Invariably there are a few students who are able to do well on these tests. Each year I have noticed this appears to be true. However, for the vast majority of students, the end result is failure.

I believe part of the problem has to do with the tests themselves. I realized this year, for the first time, that the provincial tests do not really test the student's knowledge of the material that was taught during the course of the school year. The tests focus on the student's ability to interpret the questions. Reading comprehension, vocabulary skills and reasoning skills are required in order to do well. Most native students in the school in which I have taught have had poor reading and comprehension skills, in most cases they are anywhere from two to three grade levels behind in their reading skills.

I have included results from the Provincial Achievement tests that demonstrate the general discrepancy between native student results and the overall provincial results (Appendices B and C). I have looked at the Achievement Test Multiyear Report Grade three and Grade six 1995-1997 to show the gap between the two sets of results. Permission was granted to use the test results as long as the name of the school was not included in the paper. I was not a teacher at this school when these Provincial tests were written.

The grade three result in English Language Arts show the native students to be significantly below the provincial averages in Reading, Writing and Total Test scores. On the Reading portion of the Language Arts tests, thirty percent of the forty-six students in this school achieved an acceptable standard over the three-year reporting period. The provincial results show an average of eighty-five percent of the students province-wide

achieving an acceptable standard. On the Writing portion of the test, an average of sixty percent of the native students achieved an acceptable standard, compared to the provincial average of eighty percent achieving the same standard. Total test score comparisons show, on average, thirty-eight percent of native students achieved an acceptable standard, while the provincial average was eighty-five percent.

The grade six scores basically reveal the same results as the grade three scores. On the Reading portion, an average of thirty percent of native students scored in the acceptable range, compared to eighty percent in the province as a whole. On the Writing section, thirty-four percent of the native students achieved an acceptable score while the provincial average shows eighty-two percent of all students reached the acceptable range. The overall test scores reveal thirty-three percent of native students made the acceptable standard, while eighty-three percent of the provincial students reached the acceptable standard.

This short example demonstrates some of the challenges that native educators must face.

Solutions

In this portion of the paper I will focus on the problem of student achievement on standardized tests and succeeding in school. There are a variety of factors that can influence the success of students in school. It should be noted here that references made to AI/AN students could also be applied to Canadian Native peoples.

The first factor is the influence of the home environment. If the parents of a child have vested interest in the success of the child then they will provide a home environment that is conducive to learning. Watson, Brown, and Swick (1983) note that of great importance in the lack of motivation to learn is the indifference or disinterest of Indian parents in the education of their children. Some parents feel that they are obliged to turn over their children to the schools, which they regard as alien institutions, completely separate from their home life. What goes on in the school is out of their hands and of no

concern to them. Consequently, these parents offer little encouragement to their children to do well in school and show very little interest in what they are learning. When this occurs the teacher becomes the first line of defense.

Fuchs and Havighurst (1972, 1983) found that teachers of Indian children need systematic training to help them take account of the socio-cultural processes operating in Indian communities and classrooms. Teachers should learn about American Indians in general and particularly about the tribe within which they will teach. As far as I know the Blood Tribe Education Board is the only one that requires its teachers to have courses in Native Education. Teachers who lack courses are required to complete six credits in this area within a certain time period. The Blood Tribe Board also encourages those teachers who are interested to take a Blackfoot language course.

Butterfield (1991) explains that since the number of Native educators remains inadequate, non-Native personnel need training to work more effectively with increasingly diverse student populations. Research shows a high correlation between educators' sensitivity, knowledge, and application of cultural awareness information and students' successful academic performance. In-depth, sustained multicultural training leads to the development of attitudes and skills needed to work with culturally diverse groups in general, and AI/AN students in particular. Teacher preparation programs should help non-Native teachers become aware of the lifeways and world views of Native people by developing an appreciation for Native history, language, culture, and spiritual values.

Pavel (1995) looked at Indian values, attitudes, and behaviors and the educational considerations that have to be made in light of these characteristics. He found that repeated practice, peer coaching and continuing administrative support help sustain change efforts system wide. The bottom line is that teachers need to become aware of who they are teaching. Villegas (1991) recommends that teachers respect the learning capability of all students and, thus, maintain high expectations for all children.

I noted earlier how the shift from the traditional way of learning to the modern way had come about. In order for satisfactory teaching to take place teachers need to change how they teach in order to accommodate native learning styles. Cox and Ramirez (1981) make the recommendation that teachers use direct observation and classroom experience for instruction that takes account of learning styles. Their field-tested process has six steps:

- 1) Assess students' preferred way of learning and the ways in which student behaviors change from situation to situation.
- 2) Plan learning experiences that incorporate the students' preferred ways of learning.
- 3) Implement the learning experiences that were planned.
- 4) Evaluate learning experiences in terms of attainment of conceptual or other goals.
- 5) Plan, and implement student participation in learning experiences the student has previously avoided.
- 6) Continue to provide familiar, comfortable, successful experiences, as well as to gradually introduce the children to learning in new ways.

There are several things that can be done to bring about more successful test taking results. Regarding achievement tests, Brescia and Fortune (1998) state that one should make certain that the students have been instructionally exposed to the content of the test and have had the opportunity to apply this content, that they have had experience taking the test; are test-wise and able to understand instructions and time requirements; that the test is to be or was administered at a time similar to when it was normed; and that the test has Indian norms.

Following along these lines, research further indicates that alternative methods have to be found in order to be able to accurately assess student learning and achievement in reserve school contexts.

Bourdeaux (1995) writes that performance-based assessment is regaining wide acceptance as a method to evaluate learner success. The increased use of performance-based assessment may help give AI/AN communities more legitimate evaluations of Native learners' knowledge and skills.

Performance-based assessment directly examines student performance on specific tasks that are important for life. Some forms of performance-based assessment include student portfolios, student performances, teacher observations, interviews, and self-assessments, work sampling, group assessments, and extended tasks. Bourdeaux (1995) concludes that standardized testing is no longer universally accepted as the one best method for determining learner success. He also believes that the teaching and learning process for American Indian and Alaskan Native learners will improve as curriculum and assessment become more culturally relevant.

The final report of the White House Conference on Indian Education (1992) contained several resolutions stating that those educating AI/AN students should use culturally appropriate alternative assessment instruments. The final report of the U.S. Department of Education's Indian Nations at Risk Task Force (1991) recommended that school officials and educators use appropriate evaluation and assessment information. In doing so, they can improve instruction and help students explore the connection between knowledge gained in school and success in life.

If change is to come about as suggested, dramatic changes in the methods used to teach Native students will be required. Devita (1970) is on record as saying that in order to achieve a balanced program in a Native school, staff must be willing to phase out traditional views of education which may be inappropriate and replace them with new instructional and curriculum arrangements that maximize student potential and growth.

A continuous ongoing in-service program must be established. The purpose should be along two lines: (1) The how-to-do-it capability, with emphasis on new content and methodology and, (2) the development of positive professional attitudes towards innovation and change.

Alexander and George (1981) believe that effective staff development is key to comprehensive program implementation. When this is acknowledged and planned for, effective programs emerge. When it is not, little changes except the external elements that demand the initial effort.

Student improvement begins in the classroom. The studies previously cited show what is necessary to implement these changes. Often their first requirement is for teachers, to develop a change in instructional methods. Bennett (1985) encourages the use of all modes (visual, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic) when teaching concepts and skills. He asserts that teachers need to be acquainted with the culture that they are teaching in, as well as the learning styles of their students.

Another aspect that is involved in the successful development of change in the school is the school climate. This encompasses a wide variety of influences. It involves the teacher, the classroom setting, and the general atmosphere of the school. Teachers contribute a great deal to this atmosphere and to the school identity. In order to have this sense of identity the school needs a stable staff. It is unfortunate that there is an extremely high turnover rate in reserve schools. During my nine years in one school with a staff of approximately twenty teachers I observed nearly thirty teachers and four principals come and go. Native students, perhaps more than others, need a sense of constancy in their lives. I see the type of school that can be most successful for native students as a kind of "family". It is in such a setting that most students will have a greater chance for success.

In order for the system to function properly and to make sure it doesn't become complacent there have to be a series of checks in place. Growth must be constant and

comprehensive, focusing on the continued improvement of teachers, methodology, curriculum, and student achievement. The Bureau of Indian Affairs' (1998) Effective Schools Team (BEST) initiative has developed measures that could serve as systemic indicators in the evaluation of Native education. These are: (a) criterion-referenced tests (teacher made tests); (b) portfolios of student progress, such as writing samples; (c) extracurricular participation rates and increases in the variety of such activities; (d) increased attendance and graduation rates; (e) decreased vandalism rates; (f) increased ability of a school to keep students and staff; (g) implementation of new curriculum initiatives; (h) increased participation by parents and community members; and (i) staff development and facilities improvement. If band-controlled reserve-school education is to succeed it must be willing and able to adapt fairly quickly. If not, the future looks bleak.

Final Thoughts

All is not doom and gloom for Native education. Some steps have been taken and are being taken that can contribute to success in future. New facilities have been built and the issues of funding and ways to increase student enrollment are constantly being explored.

Efforts have been made to record the experiences and knowledge of the elders, both in book and video format. At Saipoyi School, on the Blood Reserve, the week starts off and closes with Circle Time. An elder is invited into to the school to burn sweetgrass and offer a prayer. The elder has the opportunity to speak to the students about whatever he or she feels is important for the students to hear.

The teachers on the Blood Reserve have to incorporate as much native material into the curriculum as possible. The school system is giving parents an opportunity to enroll their children in a Blackfoot Immersion or in a regular Blackfoot language program.

Pavel (1990), although talking about non-Native school system, makes note of the need to increase the number of Native administrators and teachers who are tribally enrolled. The presence of Native people in school leadership positions brings a much-needed positive role modeling and training in how to design programs for Native students. All school divisions mentioned in this paper employ Native educators, and their numbers are increasing. All the schools that I have taught in have had Native administrators. Unfortunately, there is still a shortage of male teachers, Native and non-Native, in the elementary schools.

Schools are addressing the issue of poor reading skills by implementing new programs, such as Companion Reading and Assured Reading Level, at the lower elementary level. Opportunities are being provided for students to enroll in summer camps that focus on Language Arts, Science, and Computers skills. Students are encouraged to participate in Science Fairs, both at the school, Treaty Seven Science Fair, and local Science Fairs. Parents are encouraged to take a more active interest in what is happening at the schools.

I feel there are several areas that need to be improved upon in order to improve the educational systems on the reserve. The first is in the area of student achievement. There are several ways to tackle this situation. Plans need to be formulated to educate current and future parents and future on the importance of reading in the home. Parents need to introduce children to the reading process by reading to them while they are still in the home. Research needs to be conducted on the most effective methods or programs to teach Language Arts that will suit the needs of our students. This will involve money, time, research, changes in teaching methodologies, and pilot programs in which to implement recommended changes. It will require teacher in-services and retraining. I feel that the earlier we reach all children the better our chances for success. School boards will have to loosen the purse strings in order to provide the necessary programs, training, and resources.

The second area that will help with program continuity and stability in the schools is longer contracts for teachers. What is the point of developing long range objectives and goals for the school and the students if half the staff or more will not be there from start to finish? A contract length of five years would be reasonable. It would allow staff to implement necessary changes to the curriculum and to evaluate student progress.

In order to solve the problem of declining enrollment the schools need to sell themselves to the parents. They must publicize the good things that are happening at the schools. Saipoyi Elementary School publicized their name changing ceremony. The visit by Howard Rainer to the school and the community was a big community event and there were large turnouts at all the activities. Napi's Playground Elementary School took advantage of their Green School Campaign to gain publicity for the school's recycling program. A winning Science Fair project combining computer technology with native use of the buffalo also garnered the school more publicity.

Teaching on the reserve can be stressful at times. Having to deal with politics, family rivalries, interference and intimidation, as well as contracts is all part of the package. Many of these things need to be put aside by all parties concerned so they can all focus on the common good. Parents, elders, elected officials, teachers and administration have to work together in order for the system to be successful.

Just as there are stressful times, there is also a lighter side. For example, during one of our monthly staff meetings, we were having a heated discussion on whether students should be allowed to wear their baseball caps in school or not. We couldn't reach a decision. In an attempt to break the deadlock one of the native staff members stood up. In a serious voice he addressed the staff. He suggested students had the right to wear baseball caps inside because it was a part of their customs and culture. We had a good laugh as we tried to visualize the early native people moving across the plain sheltering their eyes from the sun with their baseball caps.

I enjoy working with Native students and have always been able to get along with my colleagues. One of the important things I have to remember is to be flexible. I have always taken the teaching assignment that has been given to me. I was once given notice that I would be teaching grade six, and not grade four, the night before school was to start! Last year my teaching assignment was almost changed from grade six to grade eight days before the start of the second semester. Things happen at the last minute and you have to be prepared to go with the flow.

In one of my courses we had to describe ourselves as teachers. I remember that I selected a young tree to represent myself as a teacher. This was to symbolize the fact that I was still growing as a teacher. I think it would be better to be a willow tree and bend with the wind, than to be a firm oak tree only to be uprooted or split by a strong wind. I have learned to accept the things that I cannot change. I would say to any teacher, if the opportunity arises to teach in a Native education system, grab it. It will be a learning experience and it will help you to grow.

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Appendices

Appendix A	Personal Opinion
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Appendix A

Children in the middle of Blood education mess

Now that a new Grand Chief has been elected to the Assembly of First Nations, talk from this leader, Phil Fontaine, has again led back to the demand that First Nation groups and leaders be involved in high-level discussion concerning legislative, constitutional and division of power.

I agree that first nations do need to be more involved in these talks. Self government is the key phrase and what this means is probably quite complex and difficult to understand. Does self-government simply mean the abolition of the Department of Indian Affairs? Does it mean the recognition of individual tribes as sovereign states? Does this phrase equate to more powers to native leaders, and in turn the added responsibility to be more accountable and approachable?

In fact from my perspective, self government is being thrust upon native leaders little by little with mixed results. While I cannot give an accurate assessment of the entire ongoing process, I can relate through first-hand experience what this may bring about if the native people do not demand more accountability and response from the so-called leaders.

The Blood Tribe was granted control of education about eight years ago. What started out to be an idea with great promise and hope has instead evolved into a nightmare for parents, educators and most sadly, the children.

Tribal control of education was supposed to involve control and evolution of native education by putting the destiny of our children's education directly into the hands of the parents. By the election of a recognized school board that was formulated and required to abide by the rules and regulations of a legal society, a democratic and open link to education of our children was supposed to take the place of government control.

This idea and concept has quickly degenerated into a system wrought with jealousy, black-listing, scare and control tactics, nepotism and rule by a few for personal gain. Many qualified and exceptional teachers have been dismissed or have left and almost all of these teachers relate stories of the horrible treatment, stress-filled working conditions and the constant threat of dismissal and reprimand by senior executives.

Additionally, the school board on the reserve is almost unapproachable when parents or staff request a hearing to resolve matters. Silence, threats or avoidance are usually the responses given to concerned individuals or groups. In my dealings with school systems and boards outside the Blood Reserve, I am treated with respect, courtesy and dignity. The parents and their desires definitely do carry weight as it should be since ultimately the parents do con-

trol the boards through the democratic election of boards to make decisions and formulate policy on behalf of the tax-paying public.

Not so in the Kainai Education Board. Parents, staff and the general public are made to feel that they are inferior and should keep the business of running the education system to the board and executive.

except when election time comes around.

Also, the level of education is definitely sub-standard. Although no fault of most of the teachers, students are caught in the middle of the whole mess. Administration at most reserve schools is so focused on empire building, isolation tactics and travel planning that the basic needs and assessment of the children's education are ignored. Most high school graduates of reserve schools need to attend upgrading classes in order to qualify for programs at the secondary school level.

Administration and the KEB cannot seem to separate personal feelings from educational and administrative processes. People are afraid to speak out to bring about the desperately needed changes and as a result, these people are allowed to administer and govern with little or no checks and balances. They answer to no one but themselves.

My wife and I seldom go shopping or to social functions without meeting someone who has or knows of someone who has been adversely affected by the goings-on in the Blood Reserve school system. My children are enrolled in the Lethbridge Catholic system, and we are very happy with the education they are receiving. In fact, when my wife was teaching on the reserve, a policy requiring that all native teachers enroll their children in KEB schools was introduced.

Teachers were advised that they would not be offered contracts unless they agreed to this policy, regardless of personal circumstances or wishes of the teachers involved. Fortunately for parents who were native and teachers, this policy was withdrawn due to the huge opposition and its unethical nature. What this illustrates is that this board, and the administration can be made to listen and abide by the wishes of the public, if a united and strong stance is taken by the citizens of the Blood Reserve who are clearly fed up and dissatisfied with how the present system is run.

I think that band control of our programs is good so long as the control is within the boundaries that it was initially set up for. The damage that has been caused to the education system, the parents, present and former staff and mostly the children needs to be stopped as soon as possible. An overhaul at the administrative and board levels is desperately needed.

PERSONAL OPINION

By Brian Frank

Appendix B

Achievement Test Multi-Year Report Grade 3, 1995-97 Written in English*

	English Language Arts						Mathematics					
	1994-95		1995-96		1996-97		1994-95**		1995-96		1996-97	
	Sch	Prov	Sch	Prov	Sch	Prov	Sch	Prov	Sch	Prov	Sch	Prov
Number Writing	13	39794	11	39178	22	40384	13	38061	11	37022	22	37982
% Not Available	5.6	4.4	0.0	3.5	0.0	3.1	5.6	2.2	0.0	2.1	0.0	2.4
% Excused	22.2	2.1	8.3	2.6	15.4	2.8	22.2	2.0	8.3	2.6	15.4	2.8
	Total Test						Total Test					
% Acceptable	38.5 -	82.8 -	36.4 -	86.0 +	40.9 -	87.2 +	61.5 -	90.6 +	72.7 =	91.1 +	45.5 -	92.6 +
% Excellent	0.0 =	13.0 -	0.0 =	19.8 +	0.0 =	13.6 -	0.0 =	19.2 +	9.1 =	19.2 +	0.0 =	21.2 +
	Writing						Knowledge					
% Acceptable	46.2 -	75.7 -	72.7 =	82.2 -	63.6 -	82.2 -	46.2 -	92.9 +	81.8 =	91.0 +	40.9 -	93.9 +
% Excellent	0.0 =	12.2 -	0.0 =	14.1 -	4.5 =	11.1 -	0.0 =	24.5 +	27.3 =	27.5 +	4.5 =	31.9 +
	Reading						Skills					
% Acceptable	23.1 -	82.8 -	36.4 -	85.1 =	31.8 -	87.6 +	61.5 -	88.5 +	72.7 =	90.9 +	50.0 -	91.6 +
% Excellent	0.0 =	27.3 +	0.0 =	33.4 +	0.0 =	33.2 +	7.7 =	23.4 +	0.0 =	22.7 +	0.0 =	22.9 +
Total Test Mean (%)	47.1	64.4	46.0	66.8	49.5	68.1	56.4	75.3	60.4	74.9	40.9	73.8
Total Test S. D. (%)	10.5	15.5	11.9	15.2	14.0	14.0	19.2	17.0	19.6	16.4	18.0	18.0

* For these achievement tests, 85% of Alberta students writing the test are expected to meet the Acceptable Standard and 15% are expected to meet the Standard of Excellence. School and jurisdiction targets should be set locally in relation to provincial standards. Caution must be taken when making direct comparisons between the results from one year and those of another year, as the policy regarding the makeup of the group of students included in the results, the curriculum, and the standards may have changed over time. See the other side for guidelines for making comparisons across years.

** The 1994-95 results for students in French Immersion programs who wrote in French are no longer reported in this table.

+,-,= The percentage of students meeting this standard is significantly above (+), not significantly different from (=), or significantly below (-) expectation for the province. Significance is not calculated when fewer than five students wrote the test.

See the other side for "Guidelines for Interpreting the Results of Achievement Tests".

Appendix C

Achievement Test Multi-Year Report
Grade 6, 1995-97 Written in English*

	English Language Arts						Mathematics					
	1994-95		1995-96		1996-97		1994-95**		1995-96		1996-97	
	Sch	Prov	Sch	Prov	Sch	Prov	Sch	Prov	Sch	Prov	Sch	Prov
Number Writing	23	39428	17	40475	14	41036	26	36240	19	36379	14	38764
% Not Available	14.8	5.5	26.1	3.5	0.0	3.0	7.1	2.2	17.4	2.2	0.0	2.4
% Excused	0.0	1.7	0.0	2.8	17.6	2.7	0.0	1.7	0.0	2.9	17.6	2.8
	Total Test						Total Test					
% Acceptable	21.7 -	81.4 -	35.3 -	84.3 -	42.9 -	84.2 -	7.7 -	62.1 -	21.1 -	85.4 -	28.6 -	87.7 -
% Excellent	0.0 =	11.1 -	0.0 =	15.2 =	0.0 =	15.5 +	0.0 =	19.1 +	0.0 =	23.5 -	0.0 =	24.4 -
	Writing						Knowledge					
% Acceptable	26.1 -	78.8 -	47.1 -	84.3 -	71.4 =	84.3 -	19.2 -	84.8 =	31.6 -	87.7 +	64.3 -	92.9 -
% Excellent	0.0 =	13.7 -	0.0 =	15.0 =	0.0 =	15.6 +	0.0 =	24.0 -	0.0 =	26.3 +	0.0 =	31.3 -
	Reading						Skills					
% Acceptable	17.4 -	78.9 -	29.4 -	80.5 -	42.9 -	80.8 -	0.0 -	90.8 -	31.6 -	83.8 -	14.3 -	82.5 -
% Excellent	0.0 =	19.7 +	0.0 =	25.1 +	0.0 =	28.1 +	0.0 =	22.6 +	0.0 =	27.8 +	0.0 =	26.1 +
Total Test Mean (%)	36.5	63.8	47.1	66.8	54.0	68.5	33.8	68.5	42.8	72.0	37.2	66.2
Total Test S. D. (%)	13.1	14.5	11.4	14.0	8.2	13.9	11.3	18.4	13.0	18.0	11.6	16.0

	Science							Social Studies						
	1994-95**		Form A 1995-96		Form B 1995-96		1996-97	1994-95**		1995-96		1996-97		
	Sch	Prov	Sch	Prov	Sch	Prov	Sch	Prov	Sch	Prov	Sch	Prov		
Number Writing	25	38040	18	23480	0	14758	14	38592	25	37960	19	38325	14	38553
% Not Available	10.7	2.5	21.7	3.1	N/A	1.6	0.0	2.7	10.7	2.6	17.4	2.4	0.0	2.7
% Excused	0.0	1.9	0.0	3.5	N/A	2.1	17.8	3.0	0.0	2.1	0.0	3.0	17.8	3.1
	Total Test							Total Test						
% Acceptable	0.0 -	83.2 -	16.7 -	85.6 +	N/A	0.1 -	14.3 -	77.2 -	12.0 -	79.4 -	21.1 -	78.0 -	21.4 -	77.8 -
% Excellent	0.0 -	19.1 +	0.0 =	22.6 +	N/A	14.0 -	0.0 =	19.5 +	0.0 =	13.5 -	0.0 =	16.3 +	0.0 =	17.2 +
	Knowledge							Knowledge						
% Acceptable	8.0 -	84.9 =	27.0 -	84.8 =	N/A	64.5 =	42.0 -	82.2 -	20.0 -	83.6 -	26.3 -	79.5 -	28.6 -	80.1 -
% Excellent	0.0 =	24.2 +	5.6 =	30.8 +	N/A	21.2 +	0.0 =	20.3 +	0.0 =	20.8 +	0.0 =	21.6 +	0.0 =	21.8 +
	Skills							Skills						
% Acceptable	4.0 -	82.1 -	22.2 -	85.3 =	N/A	78.1 -	14.3 -	73.2 -	8.0 -	75.7 -	15.8 -	76.8 -	0.0 -	76.3 -
% Excellent	0.0 =	22.1 +	0.0 =	24.5 +	N/A	17.3 +	0.0 =	15.7 +	0.0 =	13.9 -	0.0 =	19.1 +	0.0 =	20.6 +
Total Test Mean (%)	32.9	68.6	36.6	68.4	N/A	62.4	39.4	61.2	30.7	59.7	37.2	64.0	41.4	65.2
Total Test S. D. (%)	8.9	16.4	12.8	17.2	N/A	15.6	10.0	15.8	8.8	16.2	11.4	18.2	7.0	17.6

* For these achievement tests, 85% of Alberta students writing the test are expected to meet the Acceptable Standard and 15% are expected to meet the Standard of Excellence. School and jurisdiction targets should be set locally in relation to provincial standards. Caution must be taken when making direct comparisons between the results from one year and those of another year, as the policy regarding the makeup of the group of students included in the results, the curriculum, and the standards may have changed over time. See the other side for guidelines for making comparisons across years.

** The 1994-95 results for students in French Immersion programs who wrote in French are no longer reported in this table.

+, =, - The percentage of students meeting this standard is significantly above (+), not significantly different from (=), or significantly below (-) expectation for the province. Significance is not calculated when fewer than five students wrote the test.

See the other side for "Guidelines for Interpreting the Results of Achievement Tests"

Appendix D

Selected Readings in Native Education

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