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From School in Community to a Community-Based School: The Influence of an Aboriginal Principal on Culture-Based School Development

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Abstract

This paper explores the history and processes associated with the transformation of a northern Canadian Aboriginal[2] school into a culture-based community school for its Metis, Inuvialuit and Gwichin citizens. In particular, the role of the principal, a local Aboriginal, as a leader in initiating and facilitating the transformative change is examined. The factors providing the impetus for change and processes fostering change are examined through the critical lens of Kaupapa Maori Theory, a guiding framework for transformative praxis in New Zealand Maori schools. Finally, the paper examines current developments in the area of science curriculum development and delivery within this school community that are consistent with culture- and place-based education practice and the aspirations of the community.

Introduction

Over the past few decades many examples of and principles for facilitating transformative change in Aboriginal education settings have surfaced as Aboriginal communities take action for themselves and the education provided for their children (see for example, Kura Kaupapa for Maori communities, Inuit Quajimajatuqangit for Inuit communities). As Smith (2003) contests these education interventions were initiated as 'alternative' ideas, developed as resistance initiatives commonly outside but often still within the 'mainstream' system. A good example of such resistance initiatives has occurred in Aoteoroa-New Zealand. Within the New Zealand education system, the realization that "Te Reo Maori (the language of New Zealand Maori) was in the last throes of language death" provided the impetus for Maori to prompt radical action to defend and validate their language and culture in an educational system that perennially was essentially designed to reproduce and perpetuate the aspirations of the status quo of Pakeha (white New Zealand) dominance (Smith, 1999). Of most significance has been the establishment of Te Kohanga Reo (pre-schools for Maori) followed shortly thereafter by Kura Kaupapa Maori Elementary Schools (Maori immersion philosophy and practice schools), Kura Tuarua (Maori immersion secondary schools) and Whare Wananga (Maori tertiary options). Of most significance to this study are Te Kohanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Maori Schools both established to foster higher achievement levels by Maori students and to legitimize and revitalize the reo Maori language and all aspects of Maori culture. The *New Zealand Education Act of 1989* empowers Maori communities to establish Te Kohanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Maori Schools under the following (abridged) designations: (1) te reo Maori is the principal language of instruction; (2) parents as members of the kura's (schools) management board will establish a kura charter including aims, purposes and objectives for the kura which will explain the ways in which the character of the school would be different from that of ordinary mainstream schools; and (3) kura will operate on the foundations of this charter. Over the past two decades in excess of several hundred such special character schools have been established. Although kura may exhibit these characteristics the achievement of these ends has often been bedeviled by a complexity of issues. Smith (2003) asserts that where this praxis occurs a series of transformative elements are common to such initiatives. This statement is supported by the research of Lewthwaite and Wood (2007) who identify that a complex amalgam of individual teacher and principal and school and community characteristics constrain or contribute to the

realization of the charter statements of such kura. Where successful school development has occurred in a manner consistent with school community aspirations the following principles are considered to have been the crucial change factors that have guided effective Kaupapa Maori practice in kura:

1. The principle of self-determination or relative autonomy. The issue here is the need by Maori to have increased control over their life and cultural well-being.
2. The principle of validating and legitimating cultural aspirations and identity. The issue here is the increased attention to supporting the maintenance of Maori culture and identity and, by so doing, fostering the recommitment of Maori parents.
3. The principle of incorporating culturally preferred pedagogy. The issue here is that the teaching and learning settings and practices are able to effectively connect with the life experiences and cultural backgrounds of Maori communities.
4. The principle of mediating socio-economic and home difficulties through recognizing schooling as a priority. The issue here is that improvement in socio-economic being is a promoted by improvement in educational success.
5. The principle of incorporating cultural structures which emphasize the collective rather than the individual. The issue here is that the extended family (whanau) of the child provides a collective and supportive structure to alleviate home difficulties.

Smith (2003) suggests that the principles of Kaupapa Maori praxis are likely to have the potential to be more widely applied across other societal contexts and indigenous situations, including the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. In response to this suggestion, the purpose of this study is to examine the factors providing the impetus for change and processes fostering change in a northern Canadian Aboriginal school. In particular it examines an Aboriginal principal's role in initiating and leading this change. The impetus and process for change are examined through the critical lens of Aboriginal transformative praxis as exemplified in Kaupapa Maori theory. As well, the paper examines current developments in the area of science curriculum development and delivery within this school community.

Context of the Study

Aklavik is a predominantly Aboriginal northern community in the Northwest Territories of Canada, one of Canada's three northern territories. The hamlet has a significant and culturally

unique heritage in the development of the western arctic. It was established as a trading post for the Hudson's Bay Company in 1912 to serve the Metis, Inuvialuit and Gwichin Aboriginal populations that live in the biological and mineral resource-rich Mackenzie Delta region. It was and continues to be the Canadian capital of the muskrat trade. As well, its accessibility to the arctic coast and the northern Yukon has for generations provided these Aboriginal populations with subsistence harvest access to various marine mammals, the Porcupine caribou herd and migratory bird populations. Aklavik was the home of two of the arctic's three residential schools from the early 1920s until the late-1950s, Immaculate Conception Roman Catholic and All Saints Anglican. Typical of many Canadian residential schools, both schools have been more recently publicly acknowledged as institutions responsible for a variety of emotional, physical and spiritual atrocities committed against many of their western arctic Aboriginal residents over a four decade period (National Inuit Residential Schools Healing Strategy, 2006).

A government run school was established in the late 1950s soon after the closure of these residential schools. Today, Aklavik is a community of 670 residents, most of whom are Metis, Inuuvialuit and Gwichin. The school population of 153 is 97% Aboriginal. There are ten full-time teachers. Since its inception, the school has typically had a preponderance of southern, non-Aboriginal teachers and principals. The school continues to be state-administered under the auspices of the Government of the Northwest Territories and, at a regional level, the Beaufort-Delta Education Council. Paradoxically, only some decades after the closure of the residential school, "culture-based education" is now identified by the territorial government (GNWT) as one of the foundational principles for school development in the Northwest Territories. The GNWT culture-based education policy requires the activities of organizations, including schools, in NWT communities to create, preserve, promote, and enhance their culture, including arts, heritage and language. This policy is based upon the principle that culture in all its expression, provides a foundation for learning and growth, and that the GNWT should support individuals, organizations and communities to promote, preserve and enhance their culture (GNWT, 2004). The underlying premise of culture-based education is that the educational experiences provided for children should reflect, validate and promote the culture and language of First Peoples of the NWT. These experiences should be reflected not only in the management and operation of the school but also in the curricula and programs implemented. It is anticipated that in a culture-

based education program the content, skills, outcomes and objectives should be appropriate to the cultural needs of students in the communities served (GNWT, 2004).

The underlying premise of culture-based education is similar to what is advocated in place-based education. Place-based education is rooted in place; that is, the organizing focus of the school is on the local socio-cultural, ecological setting. As Dewey (1907) stated,

> The great waste in schools, from a child's perspective, is his inability to use the experience he gets outside of the school in any complete or free way within the school itself; while on the other hand he is unable to apply what he is learning in daily life. That is the isolation of the school – its isolation from life. When the child gets into the schoolroom, he has to put outside of his mind a large part of the ideas, interests and activities that predominate in his home and neighborhood.

In place-based and culture-based education the role of schooling is to provide a secure, nurturing environment that reflects the culture of the community and promotes the participation of educational staff, students, families and the community in making decisions about learning (Funder's Forum of Environment and Education, 2001) Teaching is grounded in what students are familiar with; actualities rather than abstractions. It emerges from the particular characteristics of place. It draws from the unique characteristics and strengths of the community and, thus, does not lend itself to duplication or replication. It promotes the use of community resource people and is inherently experiential drawing upon the opportunities provided by the local context and its people. Although the processes by which schools achieve their goals might be quite similar, their aspired and achieved goals might be quite different. The goals of place-based education are inherently focused on broad, life-long learning outcomes. As an example, in the Northwest Territories the purpose of schooling, ultimately, is to work towards five primary (abridged) goals that assist in the development of students who: (1) understand, actively seek and value their own well-being and that of their fellow citizens; (2) have positive self-esteem, based on a strong sense of their own identity; (3) seek to understand and express their relationships with those aspects of their lives from which values, beliefs and worldviews emanate; (4) apply thinking and problem solving skills to their everyday lives and can communicate effectively from a broad knowledge base; and (5) interact positively with others regardless of differences (GNWT, 2007). Although the principles of culture- and place-based education are expected to underpin school and curriculum development in NWT schools, it is likely that the achievement of these ends, as asserted by Smith (2003) and identified by Wood and Lewthwaite (2007), is

potentially constrained or enabled by a variety of factors. The research outlined in this paper explores the impetus for this change and the processes influencing this change in Aklavik. In particular, the research examines the role of the local Aboriginal principal in initiating and facilitating this change.

Methodology

The methodology used in this research inquiry is the case study. Using multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative data the study endeavors to understand and explain a phenomenon; the processes influencing the establishment of culture-based education program in an Aboriginal community. The study strives towards a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action within a social system, a school (Sjoberg, Williams, Vaughan, & Sjoberg, 1991). The unit of analysis in this case study is the dominant players in the school; the superintendent, principal, teachers, students, community members and Local Education Authority. Drawing upon multiple sources of information, this case study includes a multi-perspective analysis drawing themes from the relevant players and the interaction among them. The themes generated are, in turn, compared to those cited in Kaupapa Maori Theory (Smith, 2003). Overall, the researcher seeks to make sense of the respondents' personal stories pertaining to school development and the ways in which these stories intersect (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The author sought to understand behavior from the respondents own frame of reference accepting that there were multiple ways of interpreting experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) but expecting that within these experiences common themes would be identified.

Results and Discussion

As previously mentioned a variety of data sources were used in this study. The author had been consigned by the GNWT and the Beaufort-Delta Education Council to evaluate science program delivery in the schools of the BDEC region. The initial source of information used in the evaluation and prompting this case study came from teacher completion of a web-based survey, the *Science Curriculum Implementation Questionnaire* (SCIQ) (Lewthwaite, 2001), pertaining to factors influencing science program delivery. The instrument has been applied in over 300 schools in New Zealand, Canada and Australia and has been the foundation for data collection in numerous research publications (for example Lewthwaite 2004, 2005 a,b). The SCIQ is a statistically validated 7-scale, forty-nine-item questionnaire that provides accurate

information concerning the factors influencing science program delivery at the classroom and school level in schools where the teaching of science is a regular part of a teacher's teaching duties. Four of the Likert-type scales pertain to the school environment. These environmental or extrinsic scales include Resource Adequacy; Time; School Ethos; and Professional Support. The remaining three scales relate to teacher personal attributes. These intrinsic factors include Professional Science Knowledge; Professional Adequacy; and Professional Interest and Motivation. The School Ethos scale is particularly relevant to this study as it seeks to identify the degree to which educational leadership within the school is an impetus or deterrent to school development. An example of an item relevant to this study from the School Ethos scale includes:

Item 12: The school's administration positively influences the teaching of science.

This web-based survey was invigilated under the auspice of the Beaufort-Delta Education Council to all schools in the region as a diagnostic step in gauging the state of science program delivery within the communities of the Education Council. The full details of the results of the survey are not described or of consequence to this study. What was important was the relatively high score (3.7 on a scale of 1-5) of the School Ethos scale providing preliminary suggestion that the school's administration was supportive of curriculum, in particular science, delivery improvement that acknowledged local community aspirations, a suggestion attributable to only two of the other nine schools within the region. This positive outcome precipitated the author's interest in working with this school in science delivery development. Successful curriculum improvement is largely influenced by the endorsement such efforts receive from the school administration, in particular by the principal, as they are central agents in sustaining innovations and achieving turnarounds (Fullan, 2002). It is they that carry the message as to whether a curriculum innovation is to be taken seriously (Hall & Hord, 1987).

During a follow-up visit to the community and school after two decades of having been a teacher in the school, the author became acutely aware of how this school had physically changed in terms of the cultural artifacts on display throughout the school (for example, elders photos, biographies of prominent locals, traditional motifs, cultural values statements, local historical displays). The school's interior physically reflected the culture and history of the community. As well, informal conversations with community members indicated that positive change had occurred in school management and classroom practice over recent years.

Furthermore, the community was attentive to the recent Canadian Principal Award and Aboriginal Education Leadership Award bestowed on the principal, Velma Illasiak. These events prompted the author to ascertain the nature of the changes at the school and the impetus for these changes through document analysis (School Mission statements, external reviews) and interviews with current and past teachers, community members, recent student graduates and members of the Local Education Authority. The themes emanating from these discussions associated with understanding the impetus for change and the processes influencing change were examined with consideration given to Kaupapa Maori praxis. These themes and processes will be explored in the remainder of this paper under these two headings with an emphasis on extended comments from the principal and school and community members.

Understanding the Impetus for Change

Velma was able to identify the factors that served historically as an impetus for the change from a school in community to a community-based school.

Velma's Account:

> After years of being a social worker [in Aklavik] I began to realize parents were unlikely to change, and it was hard to teach parents new tricks; they were set in their ways. They really struggle with change, and they weren't equipped to make change. So, I decided to change my focus and energy from the parents to their children. Our youth have energy; they want to learn. They are receptive to change. I have always believed in education, and that it provided a way to bring about change in the community. So I changed my career and came to the school as a school counselor. After being here [in the school as the counselor] for six months I began to realize there had to be a change [in the way students were treated and the way the school operated]. The school was not a community school. It was not our school. It didn't feel that it was ours. We had no ownership of the school. It didn't belong to Aklavik. It could have been any school down south. If I was a guest in this school does the school say anything about the community? No. Would someone know it was a school in an Aboriginal community; not just in appearance but how it operated? No. The social environment did not depict who we were, and students were switching off who they were when they come in the school. They were being labeled by teachers as bad kids but their parents and the elders knew these were not bad kids; many of them were wise kids, respected kids. The school was a whole different environment. There was a lot of disgruntlement in the community but no one was doing anything to address it. They saw there wasn't much success and that the school had little regard for the cultural values and knowledge of the community. The school needed to be reflective of the community. I asked myself who could take on the leadership of the school. I had my Aboriginal role models [here in the school] but they seemed unwilling to pick up this challenge. I don't think they were aware there was a need for change; and more importantly that the school could change. They needed to be encouraged and empowered and ultimately I took it upon myself to take further training and returned as a teacher.

These assertions were endorsed by one of her school colleagues.

An Aboriginal Colleague's Account:

> She [Velma] made a decision to work more closely with the youth but was pretty disillusioned by the way the school operated. She has a quiet determination and made it clear she wanted to see this change. I admired her for wanting to see change occur and admired her even more for realizing that no one but us was going to make that change happen.

Two principles of Kaupapa Maori Theory pertaining to the need for change are evident in these accounts from Velma's and her colleague's story. First, Velma realized that education becomes a means by which social change at the community level might occur; a core principle of Kura Kaupapa Theory. As Smith (2003) suggests mediating socio-economic and home difficulties comes through recognizing schooling as a priority; a realization that motivated Velma to change her role from social worker to teacher. Second, her motivation or the impetus for change was her realization that the situation, as it was, was inappropriate. Second, there had to be change and someone had to initiate this change. She was not willing to accept the status quo and recognition that change in the status quo had to occur as a result of her action. This awareness reflects Smith's Kaupapa Maori Theory principle of self-determination or relative autonomy (2003). Velma's response is similar to what Smith (2003) refers to as a revolution in mindset that provided the impetus for educational change among Maori - a shift away from waiting for things to be done to them, to doing things for themselves; a shift away from an emphasis on reactive politics to and an emphasis on being more proactive; a shift from negative motivation to positive motivation. These shifts in thinking are referred to by Friere (1971) as 'conscientization' or 'consciousness-raising' illustrating a reawakening of Aboriginal imagination that has too often been stifled and diminished by colonization processes. The issue here, as delineated by Kaupapa Maori Theory is the realized need by Aboriginal people to have increased 'control over one's own life and cultural well-being' (Smith, 2003) and to make choices and decisions that reflect <u>their</u> cultural, political, economic and social preferences.

Processes for Initiating and Implementing Change

Interviews with the principal, teachers and Local Education Authority members provided insight into the processes that had contributed to the school's change from a school in community to a community-based school.

Velma's Account:

> That's where I started. I needed the community to step up and help me develop that environment- so that the kids whether they are in the community, on the land or in the school- carry they same values and beliefs of who they are. That's where we started. We brought elders of the community from each of the cultural groups together to identify the distinct and subtle differences and similarities among the three cultures. We spent time taking about these and identifying the key principles we thought should be the foundation of the school based on the values of the cultures within the community. In the first year of my principalship we wanted to work towards establishing the foundations of the school based on these cultural values. This was going to become a school based on the cultural foundations of the community. These values and principles had to be the foundation of the school and their lives. At the beginning of the school year the elder group met with the teachers, and we reaffirmed these values. The elders see the value and importance of education but do not want to forfeit their culture. They want to see those two worlds fit and work together and not forfeit one over the other. The elders had no apprehension of being involved in the process. They want to see the future be better. They saw that there was rift in the community between the school and the community. Maybe they had been involved somewhat in the past but never before had they been asked to work with the principal and school strongly to bring about the changes that were necessary. They had been involved with classroom visitations but never to a level where they were going to be come a part of the solution. They welcomed that opportunity to be involved. They provide me with direction. We had to be able to see what the future would look like. By having that I knew I had all the support needed behind me. This was really a school-based initiative. I recognized that this was a community action and it was the responsibility of the community to meet that challenge. I looked for support from BDEC (the regional administrative council) maybe even leadership support to move in this direction, but basically we were on our own. Direction does come from BDEC; it is evolving. It is coming, but how do you as an administrator achieve that? It really is up to you.

Again, these actions were confirmed by members of the community.

A Community Member's Story:

> I had been involved with the school for many years. When your kids are at school you want to be involved. I enjoyed it but it was a lot of work. When Velma took over, it changed quite a bit. I had been asked before for my opinions before about things but now [with her] I was being asked to make decisions. It was mainly about how the school would operate and how people should behave, not just the students. She wanted us to be more involved and said she needed us to be involved. The DEA is in charge, but now I was being asked to give them advice about how the school should operate.

Recognizing the need for change is only the start of the change process in schools. Identifying the goal for change and the mechanism for achieving change are pivotal steps in any school development process (Cuban, 1988). Velma's comments give evidence of both of these imperatives. First, her account gives clear indication of her desire to validate and legitimate

cultural aspirations and the identity of local community, a further principle identified by Smith (2003) as common practice in Kaupapa Maori praxis. Although not detailed in this paper, Velma described the collaborative and negotiation process she facilitated with representative culture group elders in establishing the cultural values and priorities of the school that would inform and underpin the operation of the school. These include sharing, self-responsibility, love and regard for your fellow man, caring and humility, friendliness and kindness, respect and honesty and humility. All are manifest in a variety of ways within the school. As an example, "sharing is regarded as the strongest of the values in the community's cultures because it is the law that that instilled survival. Although it is not as vital in the present day, it is just as important to share with those less fortunate" (Moose Kerr School, 2001). In response to this, a variety of actions in the school show testament of this value being made manifest in the school's operation (for example, seniors using their strengths in school service with sports team management, junior classroom responsibilities, and school operation such as janitorial services). Second, she describes the structures implemented to supporting the maintenance of Aboriginal culture and identity and, by so doing, fostering the recommitment of local parents and the extended family, a further principle of Kaupapa Maori Theory. These are identified above and elaborated below.

Velma's Account

> It has been gradual steps. It has been an evolutionary process. At the beginning we established seven goals that were central to the elders and the functioning of the school. The initial goals had to be fleshed out within the school. They were not just to be words. They had to be made real in the way the school operated and how each class worked. They became the foundation for how we worked. They also provided the foundation for evaluation on an annual basis. The local community is involved in variety of ways but, currently mainly at a governance and advisory level. The DEA needs to know their role. The DEA never knew what their role was. They never saw they were in a partnership. There was little communication. The principal had the authority. He was here to do a service to the community with no guidance as how to do it. At the table this made for a rift and conflict. If the school was going to make any growth, the DEA had to be on board and be actively involved. They need to be empowered and to realize they had the potential to lead for change. They had to change their mind sets. They had to accept their role. They had to see their role. They had to rise to meet the challenge.

Of critical importance was the need to establish a shared vision among her governance team and teachers reflecting common concerns and interests of community members. Of particular importance to Velma has been the renewed commitment of community parents to reinvest in

education and schooling, a core principle of Kaupapa Maori Theory, despite their own stories of hurt and humiliation from their own schooling encounters, especially as a result of their residential school experience. Velma mentioned this has not been without difficulty. Many parents and elders encouraged to participate in discussion meetings and governance held feelings of hurt and humiliation from their own residential schooling encounters in Aklavik and needed support in overcoming these in being able to support the school in moving towards an orientation consistent with the community's aspirations.

It is likely that the means by which Velma has worked and continues to work towards a culture-based school are characteristic of good educational leaders. As suggested by Cuban (1988) a good leader is able to identify or develop and articulate achievable goals; motivate a leadership team to work towards a common goal; change and enhance existing structures to foster the achievement of goals; invest in human and physical resources; and monitor through evaluation the success of the interventions. These characteristics are quite evident within Velma's principalship approach. What makes her situation of importance is that she is Aboriginal and her school is Aboriginal. She is working with her community to develop students who reflect the mandate of public education in the NWT (see page 5) after decades of the school working relatively removed from the aspirations of the community.

Current Developments

Although the school has made significant process in becoming a culture-based school over the past few years, effort is still required to achieve what Velma envisions for the school, especially in terms of curriculum delivery and pedagogy, a further principle of Kaupapa Maori Theory. Velma's Account:

> We're just touching the surface of the cultural knowledge and teaching practices that are most appropriate for our learners. That knowledge is quickly being eroded, and we can contribute to ensuring that knowledge is maintained and built on. It's happening. The values are well along the way in being incorporated [in how the school operates], but with the knowledge we're just touching the surface. We have on-the-land programs, but there must be a deeper inclusion of that knowledge into our programs. I think we need to be more aware of that knowledge base and how it can be incorporated into curriculum. It takes time, and it's difficult to make the connections between what the NWT curricula are asking and how that can be developed in accordance with the cultural knowledge and beliefs of the community. On a daily basis there has to be inclusion and interjection of that knowledge in a meaningful way. It takes a real commitment. The delivery of programs has

> to reflect that cultural base. It just adds richness to their lives and makes them potentially so much more successful.

Smith (2003) asserts that kura in New Zealand endeavor to incorporate culturally preferred pedagogy, a further principle of Kura Kaupapa Maori. The aspiration here is that the teaching and learning settings and practices are able to effectively connect with the life experiences and cultural backgrounds of the community. Although a variety of developments give concrete evidence of the incorporation of what are perceived by staff in Aklavik to be culturally preferred pedagogy (for example, focus on local contexts and oral history; focus on first-hand experiences for students, focus on creating quiet and respectful learning environments where students are self-reliant), there is concern the educational experiences provided for children do not fully reflect, validate and promote the culture and language of the local community, especially in areas of curriculum.

In response to this Velma has encouraged the author's involvement, under the auspices of the University of Manitoba's Centre for Research, Youth, Science Teaching and Learning (CRYSTAL) to work with the school in addressing this intention. CRYSTAL is supporting the enhancement and enrichment of the language and culture of students by promoting the integration of local cultural perspective with the NWT curriculum, in particular in science. It advocates that in every subject, including science, students should learn about history, knowledge, and traditions and practice values and beliefs in order to strengthen their education and enhance personal identity (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2007). This support is response to an identified need to provide a formalized curriculum framework that is permeated with "two-way" learning experiences that would support this school community and others so interested in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut in providing educational experiences that are permeated with Aboriginal language, culture, traditions, and beliefs and designed to preserve and reinforce the Aboriginal identify of children, teachers, administrators, and community members.

Conclusion

The intent of this paper has been to describe the impetus for change and the processes influencing change for a northern Canadian Aboriginal school. In particular, the role of the principal, a local Aboriginal, as a leader in initiating and facilitating the transformative change is examined. The school's change has been examined with reference to the tenets of culture- and

placed-based education which subscribe to the provision of a secure, nurturing environment that reflects the culture of the community and promotes the participation of educational staff, students, families and the community in making decisions about learning. As well, the processes leading to the attainment of this end have been examined through the lens of Kaupapa Maori Theory, a framework that has been applied to school development in Maori kura in New Zealand. Although Kaupapa Maori Theory does not presuppose that all school reform initiatives are generalizable to the Kaupapa experience, the school described in this paper and its move to becoming a community-based school exemplifies, to a greater extent, the principles of Kaupapa Maori Theory. In the change from school in community to a community-based school there is clear evidence of the principal facilitating change according to the principles of (1) self-determination or relative autonomy; (2) validating and legitimating cultural aspirations and identity; (3) incorporating culturally preferred pedagogy; (4) mediating socio-economic and home difficulties through recognizing schooling as a priority and (5) incorporating cultural structures which emphasize the collective participation of the extended family rather than the individual.

Most significantly, the case described in this paper provides encouragement and insight for other principals and schools desiring to move towards culture-based schools, a requirement for schools in the Northwest Territories and many other Aboriginal settings. Velma's comments capture her caution and concern for schools in other Aboriginal communities faced with the challenges she faced at the start of her tenure as principal.

> I don't know if all schools can achieve this. There has to be people whether they are Aboriginal or not motivated to want to make these changes. The principal and staff need to understand the intent and know how to make this happen. They have to realize they need to change. They have to believe in the need for change. They can't be fearful of change. They can't be fearful of allowing the change to occur. They have to step-up. There is no other way. Or, things will just remain the same.

Clearly, central to the vision of this community school is a culture-based education program whose content, skills, outcomes and objectives are appropriate to the cultural needs of students in Aklavik not just for today but with a focus on broad, life-long learning outcomes. This vision is only becoming a reality through the response of a teacher from the community to the perceived inadequacies of a situation perpetuated over many years. These comments are verified by her current Deputy-Principal

She has a quiet determination to move towards her vision, a community's vision. There is a resolve to see this realized – the school included and making decisions about education in Aklavik. It doesn't happen overnight, but progressively we work towards that end. Parents call the school asking about their children's progress. Her students know exactly what she wants for them, not just for there life today but for what she wants for them tomorrow and what the community wants. It's not just for them today. Central to their success is 'learning' in the broadest sense. It's for Aklavik's future.

Endnotes

[1] The author was a mathematics and science teacher in Aklavik school between 1980 and 1983.
[2] Since this paper draws from transformative praxis among various indigenous groups; the term Aboriginal paper refers to Metis, Inuvialuit, Gwichin, Inuit and Maori indigenous peoples.

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