

*Perspectives on Local Control of Education
With a Future Orientation:
A View From First Nations*

SETH AGBO
Lakehead University

ABSTRACT: In 1972 the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) issued a landmark document, *Indian Control of Indian Education* that brought a new beginning to First Nations education throughout Canada. There has been a remarkable increase in First Nations-controlled schools since 1975. This paper traces the historical background of the Canadian government's education policy for First Nations and uses a First Nations reserve community as a point of reference to examine First Nations' viewpoints on local control of schooling and how to mobilize for the solution of problems concerning school governance. The paper addresses the following specific issues: (a) powers the government of Canada bestows on First Nations in the control of their school system, (b) powers community people perceive they possess in the control of education, (c) the actual structures that the community employs in the control of education, and (d) First Nations top priority needs in school governance and suggested specific strategies for dealing with each of the priority needs.

RÉSUMÉ: En 1972, le Syndicat des Autochtones du pays a publié un document de référence intitulé "*Indian Control of Indian Education*" dans lequel est expliqué un nouveau départ dans l'enseignement des autochtones canadiens. Depuis 1975, les Premières Nations ont apporté une attention toute particulière à la gestion du système scolaire. Dans cet article, l'historique de la politique que le Gouvernement canadien a appliquée dans l'enseignement des Autochtones, est retracé. À partir d'une de leurs réserves, qui est le point de référence, une étude est menée pour récolter les opinions des habitants sur l'administration de l'enseignement et le moyen de recruter un personnel adéquat qui saura résoudre les problèmes liés à la gestion du système. L'article soulève les différents points suivants: (a) le pouvoir que confère le Gouvernement canadien aux Premières Nations sur la gestion de leur propre système scolaire; (b) Le droit à l'enseignement pour les membres de la communauté; (c) Les structures utilisées aujourd'hui par la communauté pour gérer l'enseignement; (d) Des stratégies spécifiques

proposées afin de traiter les besoins par ordre d'urgence tout en sachant que l'administration du système scolaire est la première des priorités des peuples autochtones.

The present study, carried out in Green Lake, a small fly-in reserve in Northwestern Ontario focuses on First Nations perspectives, opinions, and attitudes about issues concerning local control of First Nations schools.¹ What it really means to First Nations to control education is the theme of this paper. The paper documents First Nations perspectives and describes how First Nations mobilized themselves for the solution of the problems concerning school governance. Because of the exploratory and action oriented purpose of this study, the study drew on a participatory research approach and collected data through document analysis, participant observation, interviews, and what Thies (1987) calls "a mode of ongoing participation of Aboriginal people" and "a method of research-in-dialogue with communities" (p. 8). The paper addresses itself to specific research questions pertaining to school governance and educational control such as: (a) What powers does the government of Canada bestow on the people of Green Lake Reserve in the control of their school system?, (b) What powers do the Green Lake people perceive they possess in the control of education?, (c) What are the actual structures that the community employs in the control of education?, and (d) What do the community residents consider as top priority needs in school governance and what are their suggested specific strategies for dealing with each of the priority needs?

Historical Background of First Nations Education in Canada

As a backdrop to understanding the enormous influence that history exerts on present-day First Nations education in Canada, it is necessary to have first a previous and historical view of First Nations history and government policy as they relate to the education of First Nations. Giroux and Freire (1987) attach great importance to historical memory in that it explains how oppression comes about and allows room for practical action that naturally leads to confrontation of the ideological and political conditions that caused such oppression. Concurrently, the critique of the effect of history on Canadian First Nations' attitudes has been well formulated in Battiste and Henderson's (2000) proposal for *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage*, and recently in 2002 Friesen and Friesen introduced a volume on *Aboriginal Education in Canada: A Plea for Integration* that sets out to unravel the complexities of indigenous history, philosophy, and epistemology

and their importance to mainstream Canada. Agbo (2002a, 2004) documents how teachers and school administrators can effect social and educational change among First Nations by recognizing the unique place of Aboriginal epistemology and how it can be used for theorizing and conceptualizing education for First Nations children.

The history of First Nations schooling in Canada corresponds to the history of First Nations people (Matthew, 1991). Prior to the arrival of Europeans in North America, traditional First Nations education was in the form of oral histories, teaching ceremonies, stories, apprenticeships, and responsibilities of family life. This form of education generally prepared children for all aspects of adulthood (Barman, Hébert, & McCaskill, 1987; Friesen & Friesen, 2002; Hampton, 1995; Matthew, 1991; Peshkin, 1997). At this period First Nations were self-sufficient, self-governing with existing economies, traditions, and lifestyles (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Friesen & Friesen, 2002; Lipka, Mohatt, & the Ciulistet Group; Matthew, 1991).

However, the arrival of Europeans increasingly exposed First Nations communities to new forms of education, technology, and different religious beliefs which seriously reduced the ability of First Nations communities to remain socially, economically, and culturally independent (Barman et al., 1995; Matthew, 1991). Christian missionaries and the federal government developed a policy to annihilate First Nations cultures through the schooling of children and to assimilate First Nations into the dominant society (Lipka et al., 1998; Lomawaima, 1994; Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993). As Wotherspoon and Satzewich write: "missionaries and state officials readily employed schooling as a means to destroy traditional First Nations cultures and promote the assimilation of aboriginal people" (1993, p. 116). As a direct outcome of the educational emphasis on assimilation, "the federal government and religious organizations unilaterally set down purposes for the schooling of First Nations people which denied the full expression of First Nation culture or recognition of their rights as First Nation people" (Matthew, 1991, p. 15).

As early as the beginning of the 17th century, Jesuits made the effort to provide residential schools for First Nations students in New France. By the mid 19th century, Egerton Ryerson suggested a system of boarding schools that would provide training in religion and basic skills for First Nations children in Upper Canada (Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993). The system of boarding schools, which became known as residential schools, was to be undertaken as a joint venture between

government and churches of Upper Canada. The residential schools became the major pattern of education for First Nations children in Canada (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993). Contemporary researchers have expressed the residential education system in vastly changed and still changing concepts about its effects on First Nations (Battiste & Henderson 2000; Lomawaima, 1994; Matthew, 1991). Acceptable has seemed the idea that the residential schools became significant for their adeptness in isolating First Nations children from their mother tongue, traditions, culture, beliefs, and attitudes and the "academic disciplines and educational systems were complicit with Christian domination and religious oppression" (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 97).

Speaking to the effect of the residential schools on First Nations, Battiste and Henderson contend: "In most situations, the Europeans terminated Indigenous languages and beliefs – but they never destroyed the human need for harmony that tied language and belief together" (2000, p. 81). By and large, the administrative structure, the organization of the curriculum, the instructional methods and materials, and the standards used to judge performance continued in most cases to be extensively influenced by the Canadian federal government's policy regarding First Nations (Friesen & Friesen, 2002). Thus, the activities of the residential schools can be seen in the light of how they were closely linked with the *Indian Act*. This means that as a repository of assimilation, residential schools increasingly made education "synonymous with forced assimilation or 'civilization' " (McCarty & Watahomigie, 1998, p. 71). So, in its most blatant forms, the politicization of residential schooling has meant using education as a vehicle to assimilate First Nations children (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Lomawaima, 1994).

The trend of First Nations control of education is inextricably linked with the trend of First Nations self-government. First Nations in Canada possessed self-government, as well as education long before the coming of Europeans (Cassidy & Bish, 1989; Friesen & Friesen, 2002). Since the advent of European occupation of Canada, Canadian governments treated First Nations governments in a variety of ways. As Cassidy and Bish (1989) write: "Canada has attempted to deal with, separate, accommodate, absorb, limit, mold, and replace Indian governments, but it has never been able to fully ignore or do away with them" (p. 3).

When, in 1876, the Canadian Parliament passed the *Indian Act*, the legislation that embodies all existing laws concerning First Nations in

the provinces and territories, First Nations governments became susceptible to the management of their affairs by the government. The *Indian Act* was to acknowledge First Nations way of life and at the same time assimilate their governments and their people (Cassidy & Bish, 1989). However, as one could see, the Act was controversial from the onset in that to acknowledge a people's way of life and assimilate them at the same time were not compatible. The Canadian government introduced the concept of electing chiefs who would be responsible for carrying out government powers in the process of assimilation. Therefore the impasse caused by the failure to acknowledge First Nations' way of life and rather to continuously insist on their assimilation into the Euro-Canadian way of life has, since the 19th century, pervaded every feature of the relationship between First Nations and the government (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Boldt, 1993).

By the close of the 1960s, there was increased evidence that the Canadian Government's policy for First Nations was an abysmal failure and could degenerate into profound long-term social and economic implications for the welfare of Canada (Boldt, 1993). It also became evident that the government's policy of assimilation via education was isolating more and more First Nations people from the dominant middle-class majority culture rather than bringing them into it (Cassidy & Bish, 1989). It became apparent that Canadian Indian policy had crumbled as First Nations people continuously resisted all efforts to haul them into the Euro-Canadian frame (Cassidy & Bish, 1989).

Although most Canadians noticed the rapidly deteriorating economic situation of First Nations with its corresponding devastating social consequences, no serious attention was given to the situation by the government until 1967 when Hawthorn released a report which clearly depicted the shortcomings of government policy for First Nations education. The now famous Hawthorn report became an official document that clearly spelt out the failure of the policy of assimilation. The report based its main recommendations on three assumptions: (a) that educators of First Nations children could modify the established school system to meet First Nations students' needs, (b) that it should be possible for First Nations people to maintain their culture and identify themselves with it, and (c) that First Nations people would continue to depend upon western economy and its technology. Accordingly, the Hawthorn report did not advocate a radical change, but a change that would better accommodate the First Nations child in the existing school system. More important was the social consequences of

the report in First Nations communities. The crusade for First Nations self-government began to develop into a movement that aimed at becoming a force to reckon with within the federal system (Cassidy & Bish, 1989). Certainly, the government of Canada needed a new policy for First Nations.

As direct outcomes of the Hawthorn report and the ensuing First Nations movement, the federal government responded by issuing a new policy on Indian affairs. The new policy, the White Paper, was publicized in 1969 by then Minister of Indian Affairs, Jean Chretien. One of the main themes of the White Paper was to abolish the appellation "status Indian" that is, those legally recognized as First Nations as a result of the *Indian Act*. In other words, the government contemplated repeal of the *Indian Act* and from then onward disassociating itself from its unique relationship with First Nations. Apparently, one of the relationships that the federal government might want to discontinue was its involvement in First Nations education (Paquette, 1986).

The Canadian First Nations community responded instantly by becoming more united than ever towards self-determination. The unity behind self-determination has had a profound effect on the relationship between the Canadian government and First Nations, which constitutes a basis for school governance. As a synthesis of this rapprochement, Cassidy and Bish (1989) contend: "Self government has been asserted as a fact to be recognized, not as a path to assimilation" (p. 10). For First Nations, self-determination is to protect their special status in Canada and to establish an independent authority to govern First Nations. One element of self-determination, according to Cassidy and Bish (1989) has come to imply "doing it the Indian way" (p. 10). An equally strong element has led to "press Canadian federalism to expand its bounds to accommodate another reality, a third force, a third order of government" (Cassidy & Bish, 1989, p. 10). The phenomenon being described is the relationship between First Nations governments and the Canadian federal government. Arising from this, one would propose that self-determination means power transfer from one nation to another nation – from the Canadian government to a First Nations government, each First Nations band representing a government.

In retrospect, then, it is not difficult to see that First Nations opposition compelled the government to withdraw the White Paper that "advocated assimilation through Indian equality within the dominant society" immediately (Barman et al., 1987, p. 2). In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) provided an alternate policy statement to the

White Paper – *Indian Control of Indian Education* – which has become a landmark First Nations policy statement on education.

The *Indian Control of Indian Education* paper invited Canadians to learn and share the history, customs, and cultures of the First Nations people. The NIB paper provided the philosophy, goals, principles, and directions emphasizing First Nations culture. Put simply, the policy stated that First Nations people have the right to control the education of their children by exercising parental responsibility and local authority (NIB 1972, 1980). The philosophical statement in the NIB policy of education stressed pride, understanding among people, and living in harmony with nature.

Inherent in the *Indian Control of Indian Education* concept is the need for the federal government to provide training for First Nations bands that wish to control their own education. In fact, the NIB (1972) advocated a smooth transition to local control through training that “must include every aspect of educational administration” (p. 27) and that “it is important that Bands moving towards local control have the opportunity to prepare themselves for the move. Once the parents have control of a local school, continuing guidance during the operational phase is equally important and necessary” (p. 27).

The Department of Indian Affairs presented the *Indian Education Paper – Phase 1* in 1982 to support *Indian Control of Indian Education*. The Paper’s definition of control was equivocal. While the Department of Indian Affairs defined control to mean “a degree of participation” (Barman, et al., 1987), the NIB defined control to mean that First Nations people should make all decisions about education at the local level. These decisions would include educational finances and would involve all local education facilities, hiring of teachers, curriculum planning, administration, and evaluation. Thus, the NIB essentially defined *Indian Control of Indian Education* as the development of education and its administration under a local school jurisdiction. Although the *Indian Education Paper – Phase 1* identified the same areas of First Nations control as the NIB, Barman, et al. (1987) assert that the Department of Indian Affairs definition “allowed the department to move slowly, delegating programs of administration rather than policy development and real management and financial control” (p. 25). So it seems, therefore, that the issue may not be the definition of First Nations control, but the definition of the role of the Department of Indian Affairs in ensuring the delivery of First Nations control. Accordingly, Hampton (1995) argues that First Nations control

of education should mean that structures, methods, content, and faculty should be First Nations, and not merely superimposing First Nations ideas onto Euro-Canadian structures.

Treaty Rights, Promises, and First Nations Education

In order to be able to determine powers government gives First Nations people in the education of their children, it will be necessary to discuss the actual powers that government has historically had over control of First Nations education in Canada before handing over the control to First Nations. The NIB (1972) paper acknowledged the federal government's obligation towards First Nations education as specified by the various treaties and the *Indian Act*. As the NIB writes:

The Federal Government has legal responsibility for Indian education as defined by the treaties and the *Indian Act*. Any transfer of jurisdiction for Indian education can only be from the Federal Government to Indian Bands. Whatever responsibility belongs to the Provinces is derived from the contracts for educational services negotiated between Band Councils, provincial school jurisdictions, and the Federal Government. (p. 5)

The *Canadian Constitution Act – 1982* (formerly, the *British North America Act (BNA – 1867)*) specifies the extent of control the federal and provincial governments have over the education of First Nations in Canada. Section 91(24) of the Constitution specifies that the federal government exercises control over “Indians and Land Reserves for Indians” (p. 16). However, section 93 specifies that the education of each province in Canada should be under the authority of the provincial government. The *Indian Act* entrusts the responsibility for education to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). However, in Ontario, for example, the federal government has depended on the Province of Ontario to formulate standards and curriculum, and to control teacher training and qualification for First Nations schools. The main function of federal authorities is to ascertain funding levels for First Nations schools and also to maintain standards for school buildings, plants, and equipment. At first glance, it does not seem clear where to draw the line between federal and provincial control of First Nations education. Although the shared obligation between federal and provincial governments might seem conflicting and confusing, in the main, the federal government is responsible for the education of First Nations students residing on reserves. Meanwhile, both federal and provincial systems have proved themselves to be extraordinarily potent in

influencing the education of First Nations. Constitutionally, the federal government could make laws regarding education for all First Nations children. However, the federal government concentrates on students living on reserves while the provincial government is responsible for those in the mainstream Canadian schools. The federal government pays tuition fees through First Nations organizations to school districts on behalf of students who attend school outside the reserves.

When the federal government handed over the control of education to local authorities, the one thing that local authorities understood was that the federal government would continue to provide the necessary funds for education. According to Barman et al. (1987), the federal government was quick in handing schools over to local people, but the government neither provided the people with a definition of their role, nor a power base for the transfer to local control. There were also neither guidelines as to how to administer education funds nor how to manage the school system.

In what follows, I provide a methodological context for the study, which includes the research design, a profile of the research community and procedures used to gather data for the study, and the way the data was analyzed.

The Research Design

The research design for this study drew on participatory research. The Participatory Research Network (1982) documents various approaches to participatory research. These include group discussions, public meetings, research teams, open-ended surveys, community seminars, fact-finding tours, collective production of audiovisual materials, theatre, education camps, and many more. For the purpose of this paper, I drew on data collected through interviews and workshops based on group discussions. The purpose and objectives of the project determined the choice of procedures employed in data collection and analysis. The focus of this study was limited to people directly connected with the Green Lake school system. The data were collected through participant observation during a period of 18 months. Interviews were conducted with Local Education Authority (LEA) members, community leaders and people, directors, teachers, and students of the school.

The Green Lake Community and School Profile

Green Lake is a relatively small isolated First Nations reserve in the Sioux Lookout District of Northwestern Ontario. The Sioux Lookout District has over 20 small First Nations communities. Green Lake, about 2,000 kilometers from Toronto, the provincial capital, relies on the metropolitan centers of Winnipeg and Thunder Bay, which are each of about 700 kilometers away, for essential supplies of merchandise. The reserve is reached only by daily scheduled flights or by a winter road during February and March. One can fly into the reserve only when weather permits. The first language spoken in the community is Ojibwe with English as a second language.

Many elders in the community believe that First Nations have inhabited its present site for about 1,000 years. Their beliefs emanate from arrowheads found by airport construction workers and identified by archaeologists. The community people also believe that the area acted as a trade entrepôt for the fur trade in the 18th century. An early historical reference of activity on the Lake dates back to 1798. Elders also speak of a Hudson Bay post and a Northwest Trading Company agent prior to the Hudson Bay presence. In the 1930s, negotiations were generally brought about to establish a reserve on the Lake and in 1940 a section of land was surveyed and designated as a Reserve. In this period, a significant community had been established at Green Lake. Situated on the promontory of a lake that afforded easy access by Europeans during the period of the fur trade, Green Lake attained a band status, with its own chief in 1970. Before the coming of Europeans, the people of Green Lake based their livelihood on hunting and gathering.

The population of the community has grown rapidly from about 400 in 1986 to about 600 in 1995. The Green Lake population lives in 85 households with an average of about seven occupants per household. Unlike the general trend of an ageing population in Canada, the population of Green Lake is young with about 55% under age 20, and about 25% in school in the community.

The culture of Green Lake is dynamic, changing, and adapting to new times. The establishment of band councils by the government of Canada to administer First Nations communities and enforce law and order has much to do with the gradual demise of First Nations culture on some reserves (Battiste & Henderson, 2000) of which Green Lake is no exception. Euro-Canadian law has replaced First Nations' and the

values, customs, and conflict resolution ideals of First Nations are giving way to Euro-Canadian ways.

Unemployment is relatively high in the community. In 1996, there were 74 full time employees in Green Lake. Most of the full time employment in the community is at the Band office, the school, the Northern Store, and the Nursing Station, with a few more positions becoming available with road, electrical, airstrip, water, and sewage and telephone services. The only non-First Nations residents of the community are teachers, nurses, and Northern Store workers and manager.

While Green Lake seems to have many problems peculiar to most First Nations reserves in Canada, it also has a vision for the future. The community is intensely interested in developing to the maximum extent fitting to its own dream of itself as a First Nations community and wants to be able to provide for its own needs in the near future. Although Green Lake might not realize its aspiration for self-sufficiency in the near future, there might be some progress towards decreasing the usual dependence on welfare. However, it may not be possible to decrease the dependence on welfare if the population continues to grow at an annual rate of four percent over the next few decades. At the present 66% welfare recipient rate, it is difficult to see how the Band could reduce the present dependency level even if it utilizes all the available opportunities for creating employment efficiently.

Formal schooling in the community started in 1954 as an enterprise run by a local resident, William Greatspirit, its first schoolteacher.² The philosophy of the first school was mainly to teach community people how to read and write the Ojibwe language in syllabics.³ In 1973, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) took over, and provided a four-classroom block for the school to accommodate 90 students. It has since expanded to accommodate a larger number of students. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) handed the school over to band control in 1988.

At present, the Greatspirit Memorial School is a K-9 school with a staff of 12 members and a custodian. Seven of the teaching staff members, who are not of Aboriginal origin, live in quarters near the school. Apart from the kindergarten teacher, all qualified teaching staff and the principal were non-First Nation. Among the First Nations staff, are three tutor escorts, an assistant teacher, the school secretary, an education counselor, and a custodian. The highest authority at the in-school level is the principal, who is directly responsible to an Education

Coordinator. The Education Coordinator is in turn responsible to a Local Education Authority (LEA) and the community at large. The LEA is made up of five members and a chairperson. There is a band council member in charge of education, who is responsible to the Chief and Council of the Band.

The school buildings are an assortment of permanent facilities and prefabricated classrooms. The school is housed in six classrooms, two of which are in portables. There are no self-contained libraries or science laboratories, technical shops, or family studies facilities. There is a community center attached to the main school building. The community center, built in 1989, houses a gymnasium that the school uses for purposes of physical education and assembly.

Research Procedures

Although participatory research has no strict rules about methodology, its most important aspects are: (a) the genesis of the issues, (b) the functions which those concerned with the issues play in the process, (c) the focus of the strategy in the context of the moment, (d) the understanding of power relationships, (e) the possibility for organizing for collective learning, and (f) the construction of knowledge that is linked to action (Agbo, 2004; Hall, 1981). This study was intended to be practical and useful to community people in a way to enable them to seek their own ways of improving their school system as they determined the order of priority in which they held educational issues and sought ideas and suggestions for change. The Participatory Research Network (PRN – 1982) documents various approaches to participatory research. These include group discussions, interviews, public meetings, research teams, open-ended surveys, community seminars, fact-finding tours, collective production of audiovisual materials, theatre, education camps, and many more. For the purpose of this paper, I drew on data collected mainly through informal interviews and group discussion workshops.

Group Discussion Workshops

According to the PRN (1982), "Group discussions are probably the most widely used method in participatory research. They occur throughout the process, and are often used together with other methods" (p. 6). The PRN suggests small numbers of eight, 12, or 25 who meet to solve problems by sharing experiences, information, and support. For this study, a small

group of five people were targeted to form the Local Education Authority along with three others from the Band Council who were active on school affairs, to act as an advisory or reference group for the project. Basically, this group advised what to do during the course of the project. Participants were encouraged to present and discuss their own ideas especially about changes required for the community school.

Group discussions helped to pose problems, identify causes, discuss possible solutions, and evaluate actions. Group discussions also generated conditions under which people felt comfortable and free to speak. The group discussions built a sense of trust, support, and cooperation among a group of people who shared the same ideas or problems. Discussions allowed us to sustain communication and acted as productive interviews (PRN, 1982).

Research Participants

The participants of this study were made up of First Nations and non-First Nations staff and teachers, parents, community people, and band council workers. Of the participants that worked in the school, seven were Euro-Canadian teachers, one teacher of First Nations origin, and four tutor escorts, all of First Nations origin. We engaged in workshops that utilized group discussions. The data for this study came mostly from workshops and interviews. An invitation was extended to as many as 45 people to attend the first workshop but only 28 participants attended. Those who attended were the school teaching and support staff, the LEA members, and community people. During the second workshop, 32 people participated, of which 26 had attended the first workshop, and six others from the community who joined. The purpose of the workshops was for the school staff, the LEA, and community people to come together as a research team, discuss problems, and suggest solution strategies. The workshops investigated items that the group considered had contributed to, or hindered in the achievement of an effective school. The themes of the workshops reflected the perspectives of participants in relation to the problems they viewed most pressing to the school.

During each of the workshops, there were four groups. Each group constituted a research team that worked together with a teacher as secretary. At the workshops, each group focused on a problem prioritized at a problem identification phase. The groups discussed the problem and planned appropriate strategies for solution. I acted as facilitator and joined in various group discussions. The morning was spent in group discussion and the afternoon discussing group results. At these sessions,

group secretaries presented their reports for comments from participants.

The arrangement seemed to work very effectively and participants indicated that they found the exercise very interesting. Occasional disagreements that resulted in arguments made it necessary for participants to vote on issues. If participants agreed, the general secretary documented the discussions and tape-recorded them to ensure that important remarks were not overlooked. After the discussions, a summary report was produced and distributed to all participants for perusal and feedback.

Interviews

As this study involved the mobilization of community people to pose problems and find solutions, the interview process was flexible to accommodate all necessary viewpoints. The interview process was based on Freire's (1970) concepts of dialogue and problem posing. Freire argues that "Without dialogue, there is no communication and without communication, there can be no true education" (p. 81). Thus, in Freire's terms, dialogue encourages critical thinking and action. In the present study, dialogue with individuals and groups meant a process of developing conversation with First Nations people, respecting their ways of knowing and working, and thinking about reality. Open-ended questions were posed to allow participants to express unique views about schooling. A semi-structured interview guide focused on basic questions such as: (a) What do you understand by local control of education? (b) What powers do you perceive the community possesses in the control of education? and, (c) What are the actual structures that the community employs in the control of education?

Because of the cross-cultural nature of the research, an interpreter was employed to translate answers for those unable to respond to interview questions in English. All interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim as soon after the interviews as possible. The interview process allowed exploration of areas of unique participant concern or importance that might not initially have been anticipated, as well as areas of concern common to all participants. Throughout the interview and transcription process, responses were highlighted that appeared relevant or similar to other responses. I also reviewed those responses that were different from others but had particular intensity or relevance to specific issues.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of this study utilized qualitative procedures with a focus on generating meaning within a particular context (Lather, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The analysis process primarily followed two major phases in this study, namely, the collection phase, and the analysis phase. During the collection phase the data was continuously referred to, allowing reflection on data collected, and systematic field notes were compiled which were considered useful to the study. The analysis period entailed classifications, formation and testing of ideas, making connections among ideas, and relating concepts to the participatory research approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

For the interviews, I first listened to each audiotape and made detailed notes or transcription of the interviewees' responses. Responses were subjected to a coding system developed to identify each respondent and the interview questions to which they responded. Each response was separated using as guidelines the research questions for the study. The objective was to categorize each response according to common patterns, themes, or ideas that fit into the research questions.

Next, I searched for patterns, repeated themes, or views that conform to categories such as LEA, Education Coordinator (EC), Chief and Council, and so on. As the analysis continued, I recorded theoretical memos about what patterns meant, and drew from research questions and the analytic insights and interpretations which emerged. The emerging ideas and patterns were assigned categories.

Finally, final conclusions were verified by confirming and substantiating the interpretations that appeared in the data for their validity to establish some truth in the responses of participants. In order to establish and communicate meaning from the data, and, to provide conceptual consistency by grouping details under more general ideas, emerging themes and patterns were identified and labeled (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the data, Lather's (1986) four-way approach was utilized to validate alternative qualitative research approaches. Lather asserts that researchers should build triangulation, reflexive subjectivity, face validity, and catalytic validity into their research designs. First, she addresses triangulation as the inclusion in the research design of various data sources, procedures, and theoretical outlines that seek contrasting patterns as well as similarities. This research utilized various data sources, such as field

notes, interviews, discussions, meetings, and workshops. Second, reflexive subjectivity concerns an honest documentation of how the researcher's personal impressions have been influenced by the logic of the data. The methodology section (not included in the present paper) started with my personal and cultural introduction to enable the reader to understand any subjectivity of opinion that may emerge in the analysis. Third, researchers create face validity by "recycling categories, emerging analysis, back through at least a subsample of respondents" (Lather, 1986, p. 78). In this study, after typing the interview summaries, they were taken back to participants to review them and make necessary modifications. Workshop summary reports were presented to all participants to read and make necessary corrections. Further, since an interpreter was employed to translate answers of community people who could not answer the interview questions in English, there may have been a possibility for misinterpretation. In order to minimize this possibility, the tape recordings in Ojibwe were subjected to a second interpretation. In all cases, the second interpreter confirmed the translation of the first one. Finally, catalytic validity follows when there is "some documentation that the research process has led to insight and, ideally, activism on the part of the respondents" (p. 78). Catalytic validity was crucial to this study as its main purpose was to promote participants' understanding of the problems and act on the solution.

Results

There were three main perspectives that emerged from the present study: (a) community perceptions of local control, (b) the roles of community education administrators, and (c) proposals and implementation strategies for future control. The first, community perceptions of local control, concerns the extent to which the community as a whole has adequate understanding of what it means to control education and whether community members understand the powers bestowed on them by the government of Canada for the control of education. The second, the roles of community education administrators, indicates the extent to which the Chief and Band Council, the LEA, and the Education Coordinator have adequate access to relevant knowledge related to school governance, and how far such knowledge has an impact on the vital decisions taken by them affecting the future of the school. The third, proposals and implementation strategies for future control, deals with community priorities, suggestions, and implementation

strategies for the future. Put together, the general perspective that emerged from the study is a functional approach to school governance, that is, what was termed *cultural democracy*. That is to say, the core of administrative ideals that local control is supposed to promote focuses on the traditional ethos of First Nations.

Community Perceptions of Local Control

During interviews, discussions, and meetings with community people, I found that most people did not understand what it meant to be in control of a school, let alone be prepared for the processes that involve educational governance. I asked W.D., a 48-year old woman who never went to school to tell me what she knew about band control of education. Her response was typical of most community residents:⁴

I don't know how the system works. I know teachers and support staff are hired but I don't know what goes on after that. Perhaps things are changing. I have never had a teacher from the school coming to my house to ask me about the school before. I am surprised you want me to talk to you about the school.

The above response was not limited to those who never went to school. Even people working in the Band Office, the center of all control, power, and authority, gave similar responses to the same question. For example, O.C., a 32-year old woman who occupied a position of great responsibility in the Band Office stated:

I started with the band but I don't know what it really means. I guess it means they are controlling the money that comes in and they hire staff. I hope I'm right.

People who showed an understanding of the concept vaguely understood band control of education to mean controlling INAC funds, hiring, and dismissing staff. K.H., in his mid 40s, a former member of the LEA who has three children in the school and was a prominent worker in the Band Office, explained in impeccable English what he understood by band control of education:

I guess we are supposed to control everything that goes on in the school, but I am not sure what that is. At least we employ local staff, and I know the money comes to the band for buying stuff for the school. The band pays local staff, and of course fires them when they violate the by-laws. When I was appointed as a LEA member, I asked myself what the heck am I going to do?

The views expressed by the majority of respondents in regard to the meaning of band control of education appeared not to have considered the importance of the curriculum and supervision of school programs.

None of the respondents I interviewed felt that control meant a complete jurisdiction over all the areas of the school system, nor did they realize that it was the community's responsibility to ensure there an appropriate curriculum and supervision of school programs.

Nevertheless, results of this study suggest that although most respondents did not seem to understand what it meant to control the school locally, there was evidence that they understood the enormous task and complexity of school management. They indicated the awareness that it was their responsibility to amass and utilize all the resources that can make schooling better for their children. The comment by W.P., Band worker in his mid 40s which appears below was indicative of that awareness:

We're now in control and we have to do something to improve that school. If nobody does anything, nothing will happen. The problem here is nobody wants to do anything. People always expect others to do things for them. Look at D.K., he doesn't seem to care about anything. People are paid for not working. We really need to do something about that school.

An important perspective that emerged during the interviews was that the federal government did not take steps to properly transfer the power deemed necessary for decision making to the local authorities.

The Roles of Community Education Administrators

The results indicated that the Chief and Council, the LEA, and the Education Coordinator are directly in charge of running the school at the community level. The roles of the Chief and Council are two-fold. First, they give assent to decisions made by the Local Education Authority, and second, they provide the necessary political support for the implementation of the programs. The Chief and Council appoint the LEA members and the Education Coordinator. The Education Coordinator acts as the linkage between the school and the Local Education Authority.

Roles of Chief and Band Council in Education

In Green Lake, because the Chief and Council wield the administrative authority of the entire community and have jurisdiction over all decisions made by the LEA, it is possible for one to confuse their educational functions with those of the LEA. Workers of various departments I interviewed at the Band office readily expressed the notion that because the Chief and Council control every department in

the community, they were as well in charge of the school. A prominent official of the Band Office, and a former member of the LEA, V.C., thought that the Chief and Council attempt to control everything in the community.

They [Chief and Council] want to control everything and they don't manage anything well. They make us look like we don't know what we are doing. Any decision we make, there is political interference and any political interference they make costs them money. They keep on blaming people for the problems they create themselves. It's so sickening that I am planning to resign by the end of November if the situation continues like this.

However, it is interesting to note that most people interviewed, including the Chief and members of the Band Council, believed that the LEA should manage education. The following is a comment by M.E., Chief of the Band:

The LEA should totally control education. The Education Coordinator should be responsible to the LEA and they must attempt to settle all school matters. Chief and Council will not interfere in school affairs unless the LEA refers a problem to us. Chief and Council should be responsible for political stuff. We will look after the political side of the school. If the school has a problem that has to do with politics, then it's Chief's problem. You see, the contamination of school grounds is a political issue and nobody should interfere with that issue. I will be going to Ottawa on Monday to talk to the Minister.

The Local Education Authority (LEA)

As a backdrop for understanding the community people's viewpoints on the performance of the LEA, I will first present data about its expected role as stated in the documents reviewed for this study. The NIB (1972) document set forth the philosophy and rationale of *Indian Control of Indian Education* at the local level. According to the NIB, the purposes for local control are: (a) to incorporate First Nations cultures into the school system, (b) to foster greater involvement of parents, (c) to harmonize education with local development, (d) to make community people accountable for the education of their own children, and (e) to assert the right of First Nations parents to circumscribe the type of education necessary for their children. From the view of the NIB, the common ethos of local control consists of an assertion of the community will in matters of schooling and an emphasis on cultural education that fosters the identity and ethnicity of First Nations children.

The Chief and Council appoint the LEA and literally vest in it all the powers for the management of education. Among other things, the LEA is expected to control the school budget, determine education goals, and see through their achievement within a period of time. In the area of curriculum, the LEA is expected to determine and provide suitable programs, approve the subjects taught in the school, and support the implementation of all programs. The LEA is also required to hire staff and provide orientation for new staff members. In the area of support services, the LEA is expected to make necessary arrangements to transport students safely to school. Finally, the LEA is expected to develop policies for discipline, the use of school facilities and equipment, and assist the in-school administration in dealing with various kinds of school problems.

The data suggested that the most formidable task that faced the LEA was how to clearly define and identify members' powers and how to use them to benefit schooling in the community. In many cases, LEA members were not able to identify their responsibilities and limits in school governance. The study revealed that the LEA's real duties have been limited to hiring and firing staff, and providing transportation for students. Results of this study indicated that some of the problems confronting the LEA are: lack of control over the budget, lack of knowledge of issues concerned with the curriculum, and lack of effective planning, policy formulation, and implementation. During discussions and interviews with LEA members I asked them to explain how they controlled the school budget. All members of the LEA indicated that they did not know how much money INAC allocated for the school, and they also did not know the procedures employed by INAC in the allocation of funds for the school. A statement by an LEA member, S.V., is typical of all the members I interviewed. As the member stated:

The Band Manager is in charge of all money affairs for the school and if you want to know anything about school money, you better ask him. I think it is necessary for us to know how much money is in the school account at all times. It is only then that we can determine how to spend the money. We have to know how much money we use on various items such as school supplies, salaries, heating, and so forth. Right now we don't have any idea about the school budget.

Data from this study showed that although the federal government has ceded the control of education to the bands, financial and human resources for education still come from INAC. The INAC finances

education according to the nominal roll, which is, simply, the student population in the school by the last day of September of each school year. INAC pays all school support funds to the Band Council directly. The Band Manager administers both the school funds and Band Support Fund. There is no distinction between the two funds. The school arranges for its supplies through the Education Coordinator, who in turn seeks approval from the Band Manager or Council member responsible for education. The Band Manager pays all school bills. The LEA has nothing to do with school funds or school supplies. The consequence of such a budgetary mechanism is an LEA left without any mandate in the financing of the education the Band Council has authorized it to control.

Another area of concern for respondents is long term and short term planning. Discussions suggest that because the LEA does not control school funds, it is impossible for the LEA to embark on short and long-term plans. The views expressed by this former LEA member, W.A., which appear below are indicative of how the lack of control of the budget puts the LEA in an awkward position:

You're asking me about how the LEA plans for the school? Are you kidding? How can you plan when they [meaning the Band administration] want to control everything? They don't tell us how much money they have and we can't do anything when there's no money.

Discussions with community people revealed that in contrast to the present LEA model that stresses community involvement in schooling and encourages community input into the conduct of school affairs, the INAC era tended to underscore the prevalence of puppet school committees that had minimal influence in confined areas of the school program and that neither controlled funds nor had decision making authority. As local people had nothing to do with school staff and policy for the staff, the legacy of non-interference in the way teachers do their work remains. There is thus a similarity between the present LEA's conduct of school business and the erstwhile school committees. The similarity can perhaps best be understood in terms of the concentration of ownership and management of school funds in the hands of the band council, predicated upon the notion that all power belongs to the Chief and Council that are seen to have taken over the role of INAC while the LEA becomes merely a rubber-stamp. Interviews and observations revealed the LEA did not like to interfere with teachers' work. As with medical doctors who need to do their jobs without interference from lay people regarding treatment procedures, local people have always

accorded teachers a high level of trust. As a Band worker, W.M. remarked:

In this community, if nobody ever tells you anything, then it means you're doing your work properly. If you do something wrong, you will find everybody blaming you and that's where the trouble begins. Teachers have had problems here and they had to leave. Nobody bothers teachers who do their work properly. I think the teachers we've had from last year are a good bunch of people (Interview with Band worker).

When asked why the LEA does not give direction to teachers, R.S., a parent in his mid-fifties and a former chairperson for the LEA commented:

Teachers attend school for many, many years and know what they're doing. I can't tell them what to do. Of course, they know better than me. I only have a grade 8 education. I don't want to interfere with their job.

In this perspective, even though teachers expected some directions from the LEA, they never received any. From general observations recorded as field notes, it appears that the government has not made attempts to support the LEA in its control of the school:

I have been in Green Lake for 16 months and there has not been a provincial or federal education person coming into the school to view what goes on here. There has never been any concern either from federal or provincial authorities as to how the school is doing, especially as regards to quality of teaching and learning (Field notes: December 10).

Respondents within the LEA indicated that it should continue to be the responsibility of federal and provincial authorities to ensure that students receive quality education. They went as far as suggesting that the school should adopt provincial standards and either the provincial or federal education authorities could visit the school at any time to ensure the appropriateness of the quality of school programs.

The Education Coordinator

This section presents data on the role of the Education Coordinator (EC). I use the expected roles of the coordinator as stated in the documents reviewed for this study as a backdrop for the presentation of the data. The Windigo Education Authority (WEA) Policy document (1992-93) defines the Education Coordinator as "the link between the school and the LEA, and the school and the WEA" (Section 8.2.1). The policy also states: "the Coordinator will be knowledgeable about all areas of

education." According to the structure of school governance in Green Lake, the Education Coordinator is the contact and public relations person between the school, the LEA, and the WEA. By virtue of the position, the Education Coordinator, among other duties, should do the following: (a) ensure that community people are aware of school programs and involve themselves in the programs, (b) seek viewpoints from community people on school programs and carry the information on to the school staff, (c) supervise and evaluate local school support staff, and (d) assist the LEA to carry out short and long term planning.

The study revealed that within a period of 15 months, there were six different Education Coordinators for the Green Lake School. In October, the Band office terminated the Education Coordinator who started the school year (in September). The Band Office appointed a replacement at the beginning of November, and by the end of the first school term in December the new Education Coordinator had abandoned his position. The Band employed another in January, who held onto the job until July, when he took a leave of absence. An acting-Education Coordinator took the position in August and relinquished it when the Education Coordinator on leave returned to work in the middle of September. Early in October, the Education Coordinator resigned, and at the time of compiling this report, the school had been dealing with the sixth Education Coordinator in 15 months.

The frequent turnover in the Education Coordinator's position, by far the most important position in the school governance raises a number of questions. First, what are the causes of frequent turnover of Education Coordinators? When interviewed, some of those who had left the job indicated that the position created doubt and unease as they worked under conditions of uncertainty. They pointed to the overwhelming complexity of the occurrences with which they tried to cope. A noted former incumbent of the position observed that:

I feel tense and have constant headaches at work. If I were to be working on education issues alone, perhaps, I won't be feeling this way. I do mostly Band's job at that office. They call me to attend meetings that are not in any way connected with the school. I sometimes sit in for the Band Manager and prepare checks. When I get back to my office I find so much waiting for me that I don't know where to start. I will like to go back to work again if they will ask me to do only one job because I can't combine education work with other jobs.

As the Education Coordinator's office is located in the Band administration building, it is easy to regard the Coordinator as a band worker rather than a school official. As in the case of the management of the school budget, all the departments are responsible to the Band Office, and it becomes difficult to define their specific job descriptions. As the current Education Coordinator observed:

I really don't know my job definition. Sometimes I feel like a band administrator and sometimes I feel like the superintendent of the school. I'm always doing stuff around the band office and don't have time to go to the school to see what really goes on. When there is a serious problem in the school, the band holds me responsible and it's only then that the Chief and Council realize that I'm the Education Coordinator (Interview with Education Coordinator).

In retrospect then, it is perhaps not very difficult to see why Education Coordinators should have trouble carrying out their jobs. Another reason to account for the dramatic turnover of Education Coordinators may have to do with their educational background. Tracing the educational background of those who have held the position since the takeover from INAC in 1988, I found that the highest grade attained by any Education Coordinator was the eighth grade. As a result of the low level of education, Education Coordinators may simply lack the knowledge and know-how to administer the school and provide effective leadership for the predominantly Euro-Canadian teaching staff whose values are totally different from those of First Nations.

Perspectives on Local Control With a Future Orientation

The most crucial question in the study seemed to be when I asked respondents to give suggestions as to the kind of school governance that they would like to see in the future. Even though respondents admitted they did not understand the meaning of control, they all expressed that they would like to see a school administration that promotes traditional First Nations ethos by respecting the opinions of community members, while at the same time enhancing achievement for the students to become successful in mainstream Canadian society. In essence, respondents suggested a conceptual integration of traditional and modern systems in school governance. This means engendering continuity between First Nations and Euro-Canadian administrative practices. This viewpoint on school administration should not be surprising since the survival and growth of the school in a modern industrialized world lies in equipping children with the ethos required

to survive and flourish in the mainstream society. The response of 35-year old man, E.D. is representative of most respondents:

The Band Council should provide effective relationship to community people. The Band should communicate effectively with the people, for example, who are the teachers? What are they doing? What have they planned for the school? How should community people support the plans for the school? The Band Council is unable to report about the school to the people. They don't deal with the school properly. The Band doesn't inform us about what happens in the school. There should be a regulation that the LEA and the Band Council should report periodically to the people what the school is doing. They can communicate with the people through radio shows, community meetings, or newsletters. Traditionally, our culture is democratic so we need to do things by consensus. We can't have our own people running the school like the federal government. We also have to make sure that our school is like other schools in the south and that our children will be ready to compete with other children in Canada.

This is a rather interesting viewpoint and it led to the definition of the term *cultural democracy* as the mainstay of governance of the community school.

The results also indicated that to all respondents, the Band administration wields too much power in the control of educational finances. Views expressed by respondents revealed that lack of control of the school budget did not allow the LEA to plan adequately for the school in the short and long run. The data indicated that the more practical side of First Nations culture such as some beliefs and traditions of First Nations, particularly the tradition of decision by consensus, should be utilized effectively in the decision making process of school authorities. In choosing their priorities, community people indicated that there was a need to improve the level of competence of local people in the control of education. The training of the education director and school board officials for managing the school was a subject of serious concern to community people. They observed that while the education director and board members played a crucial role in determining the success or failure of the education system, in most cases, the director and board were simply not prepared to understand or cope with issues pertaining to schooling within the cultural context of First Nations.

Fundamental Suggestions for the Future

As a direct outcome of the emphasis on training and qualifications of school officials, participants suggested that the Chief and Band Council should ensure that they carefully select local school officials through a screening process. They recommended that the LEA should be elected rather than appointed and that the Band Council should leave control of school affairs in the hands of an elected LEA. According to participants, the Education Coordinator should be trained to become aware of complex and uncertain administrative situations, be prepared to adapt to changing realities of the school system and live up to the high expectations of the community, as well as possessing a reasonable level of education. The LEA should also be knowledgeable about issues concerning schooling and should become more interested and involved in school improvement. A very interesting perspective regarding the training of school administrators emerged in the present study. According to participants the training of administrators should be predicated upon the notion that administrators should be trained to understand the concept of *Indian Control of Indian Education* and in contrast to the Euro-Canadian style of administration, community school administrators should promote First Nations values and worldviews. This means that community administrators should emphasize *cultural democracy* that would assert the will of the community in running the school.

Specific Implementation Strategies for Future Control

Participants suggested that in future, the Education Coordinator and LEA should accomplish the following:

- (1) Communicate school issues to community people and update them on the progress of the school.
- (2) Adopt annual budgets for the school and set priorities for spending school money.
- (3) Advise on the school curriculum by approving programs of study and offering suggestions to meet community requirements.
- (4) Employ school staff, supervise, evaluate the job performance of all educational workers, and ensure that all employees are responsible and accountable to their job performance.
- (5) Ensure that non-First Nations staff members are properly integrated into the community by acting as an intermediary between them and community people.

- (6) Attend relevant educational courses and workshops to upgrade their knowledge about *Indian Control of Indian Education* and the governance of education in a First Nations context.
- (7) Utilize the knowledge of community elders and First Nations scholars to understand the concept of cultural democracy.
- (8) Develop a mission statement, a philosophy of education and a school policy, and assist the school in dealing with problems of discipline.

Discussion

The lack of understanding of the very concept of local control on the part of most community people, as revealed in the present study, would inadvertently mean a lack of preparedness for the proper management of the school system. The enormous powers wielded by the Chief and Council in the administration of all the departments of the community, including the school, indicates that the control of the school lies in the hands of the Band Council instead of the LEA appointed by the Chief and Council. The meshing of school funds with the Band Support Fund which leaves the LEA without any mandate in the financing and planning for education is a clear indication of the powerlessness of the LEA, and of the lack of understanding of the role of the LEA when it comes to budgeting and planning for the school. To most people the answer to this problem lies, at least in part, to some degree of decentralization of control of the school budget. If the Band Council assigned the portfolio of school governance to the LEA it is reasonable to expect that the LEA should have control over educational finances. This study therefore showed that community people see the need to end what they see as the unhelpful control of the school by the Band Council and to hand the school over to an independent, elected school board.

Another problem of school governance revealed by the study concerns the method of allocating funds for the school. Paquette (1986a) has stressed the importance of INAC allocating sufficient funds for band-operated schools. Given distance and the isolation of most First Nations schools, the nominal roll method by which INAC allocates funds for these schools seems to be improper since the allocations for school supplies per student are the same as those in the mainstream Canadian schools. The study suggests that, in allocating funds for supplies, it is necessary for INAC to consider the high cost of transporting school supplies to these communities.

The present study also indicated that one of the areas of local control that needs serious attention is the training of the local school administrative personnel. The NIB clearly spelt out the need for the federal government to provide training for First Nations bands before handing schools over to the bands but federal authorities failed to provide the training and basic services that are needed for a smooth transition. Indeed, although the study suggests that there were unqualified people in positions of responsibility, it should be the responsibility of the federal authorities to provide a bridging situation that recognizes and builds on the distinctive features of First Nations before handing over the control of the schools. Initially, the federal authorities should ask the community people to identify their needs and aspirations and how these needs and aspirations could be satisfied for the community to become reconciled to the positive effects of local control. Therefore the main problem of the hand-over was its lack of positive social and cultural orientation of both the federal authorities and the community.

Another source of dissension that was revealed in the study centers on school policy. Ideally, local control means some incremental shift of responsibility from the federal and provincial school authorities to the local people. However, the study suggests that local control of the school in Green Lake does not primarily seem to alter the web of INAC school policies. In other words, the community continues to see INAC competencies as central to school practice and continue to use its policies as the underlying model. Examination of existing school policies and discussions revealed that the governance of the school, curriculum practices, and routines still continue to resemble those enacted by the federal government. The LEA whose responsibility lies in policy formulation seems to lack knowledge at the local level from which to originate formal policy and lacks the means to communicate such a policy to the school staff. The issue involved is not merely one of the LEA acquiring theoretical knowledge in the development and implementation of policy but for the federal authorities to provide the opportunity for community people to acquire the necessary tools for shaping and implementing socially- and culturally-oriented policies that can be sustained from within, recognizing community aspirations and local resources in context and reinforcing and maximizing their contribution to student achievement. Agbo (2004) recommended that a strategy for social and cultural orientation of Aboriginal school practices should invoke an inclusive collaboration between federal authorities, Aboriginal

communities, teacher educators, and teachers in a positive and constructive way to enhance their cooperation and decision making on a collective basis.

The study revealed a high turnover in the incumbents of the position of Education Coordinator. Whereas the most common reference to the high turnover seemed to be due to the low level of education of the officials who take up the position – school leadership in a First Nation community could be more than education credentials. Doubtless, the proper management of the school requires appropriate training of educational personnel and their orientation to educational matters but such training should involve revisiting First Nations traditional knowledge as part of what is already available in the community and identifying what is significant and relevant that can help lay down a social infrastructure on which to base decision making (Friesen & Friesen, 2002). As we know, in indigenous societies, knowledge is embodied in human beings, their artistry and experiences, their memories and the collective memory of their community. One area relevant to our discussion where administrative personnel were most lacking was knowledge about *Indian Control of Indian Education*. There were suggestions from community people that it is necessary for the Education Coordinators and the members of the LEA receive some orientation before taking up their jobs. The idea is to enhance their understanding of what is important in both the indigenous and Euro-Canadian value systems that would ensure a functional balance and harmony in the governance process (see Agbo, 2004). Although the orientation could involve some nuances of Euro-Canadian administrative practices, preference should be given to the far more potent *cultural democracy*, that is, in understanding how to endow the school with a First Nations identity embodied in First Nations ethos. Respondents suggested that the elders of the community and First Nations scholars could offer the necessary orientation.

Conclusion

First Nations control of education is about three decades old. Kirkness and Bowman (1992) pointed out that there has been an increase in band-controlled schools from 53 in 1975 to 326 in 1991. It is not my purpose in this paper to challenge the idea of local control of First Nations schools. Rather, it is my intention to identify the constraints or contradictions internal to school governance and to explore the key symbolic and structural characteristics that would help to improve First

Nations schools. The results of this study carry implications for federal and provincial authorities as well as First Nations communities to understand that school improvement for First Nations “should entail a participatory effort among all those responsible for their education in redefining objectives concerning the purpose, priorities, and content of education” (Agbo, 2001 p. 54).

This study implies that the key issue vital to local control is that federal authorities should be aware and sensitive to the special attributes of the reserve schools and should focus on strengthening the local resource base, in terms of human and material resources before handing over schools to First Nations. Educational researchers and scholars of First Nations education consider the extent of local jurisdiction over education a major factor for the success of First Nations education (Friesen & Friesen, 2002; Hampton, 1995; Matthew, 1990). Jurisdiction in this case implies the need for an effectively complete First Nations control of educational governance at all levels (Boldt, 1993; Hampton, 1995). In order for First Nations to exercise full control over their schools, Hampton calls for a theory of First Nations education. Hampton asserts that “the lack of theory of Indian education not only hampers research, it also impedes the practice of education” (1995, p. 11).

But First Nations education theorizing should begin with a renewed sense of commitment on the part of federal education authorities in particular and Euro-Canadians in general to learn how to accept, understand, and profit from the forms and modes available for the production, presentation, and distribution of First Nations’ knowledge. Friesen and Friesen (2002) draw attention to traditional Aboriginal pedagogy and illustrate contexts of First Nations pedagogy as apparent in oral narratives and wisdom of the elders. They also demonstrate that First Nations have had educational philosophies since time began and that the strengths of First Nations in resisting assimilation are rooted in their traditional philosophies. Recent scholarship such as Marie Battiste and Jean Barman’s (1995) edited book, *The Circle Unfolds*, is a good example of Aboriginal educational theorizing. All stakeholders of First Nations’ education should be familiar with this important work and take full advantage of its educational ideas. First Nations could also set out schooling practices in their own terms by utilizing such educational models as Cummins’ (1990) empowerment model (Goddard & Shields, 1997) for how to apply this model to First Nations schools. Friesen and Friesen (2002) call for a “united Indian front” (p. 98) for the

development of an Aboriginal system of government as well as a unique system of education. Similarly, Agbo (2002b) contends, "instead of individual bands inventing their own model of education, First Nations communities need to meet together to begin establishing dialogue and mechanisms for developing a holistic system of education for Aboriginal children" (p. 296).

Based on the results of this study, the question of who really controls the school in Green Lake becomes relevant when one considers that the sources of leadership and social support remain the prerogative of local politicians and financial support remains the responsibility of the federal government. The speculation is that the federal government should become more responsive to First Nations' school issues. Inherent in the local control concept is the need for federal authorities to learn how to generate, evaluate, select, and share vast amounts of new, timely, and *relevant* information to First Nations communities. Relevant is the crucial word, but relevant to whom? By *relevant*, I am suggesting that the information should make sense to the end-users, who, in this case are First Nations students.

Boldt (1993) observes that First Nations were never educated into the nuances and complexities of Euro-Canadian-derived management principles and therefore self-government on First Nations reserves often means replacing Ottawa-faced bureaucrats with local bureaucrats who act in exactly the same manner. Boldt's description of the First Nations band administrations rings true in Green Lake. This means Euro-Canada is able to exercise domination over First Nations through a process known as hegemony. McLaren (2003) defines hegemony as "the struggle in which the powerful win the consent of those who are oppressed, with the oppressed unknowingly participating in their own oppression" (p. 203). According to Agbo (2004), "the moral and intellectual leadership of Euro-Canadians over First Nations exercised through the school, the church, the media, and the political system actively restructures the culture and experiences of First Nations" (pp. 3-4).

The results of this study indicated that the Green Lake School continues to bear all the hallmarks of the Euro-Canadian educational system. This represents an aspect of hegemony to which McLaren (2003) terms "ideological hegemony" (p. 205). McLaren portrays ideological hegemony as "a way of viewing the world, a complex of ideas, various types of social practices, rituals, and representations *that we tend to accept as natural and as common sense*" (p. 205). That is to say, First

Nations have been made by the Canadian government to actively subscribe to Eurocentric values and objectives without being aware of the source of those values or the interests for which they exist. According to Agbo (2004), the deficiencies of the idea of “education” as handed down to First Nations by the Canadian government, with the “characteristic failure of the system to insure balance between ‘education’ on the one hand and the development and the social needs of First Nations on the other create painful experiences for all First Nations” (p. 28). This immediately raises the question of how we can mobilize First Nations and their resources at regional or provincial levels and direct school governance as far as possible towards Aboriginal identities and ideologies. Some people may argue that all First Nations are different. But ironically, the differences among First Nations should prove to be the chief sources of strength. Despite their differences in beliefs and practices, but given the vast accumulation of traditional knowledge in various fields, First Nations could identify those areas of accumulated traditional knowledge and apply them to many problems encountered in the development of First Nations. Differences in fact underscore the need for the development of an Aboriginal system of education and it is in these differences that we may find the key to many of the preconditions which govern social, economic, and political change in Aboriginal communities.

NOTES

1. Green Lake is a pseudonym. To secure the anonymity of the research community, I made sure I chose a pseudonym that does not match the name of any of the communities in Northwestern Ontario.
2. All names of persons and places used in this paper are fictitious and do not represent actual names of persons or places.
3. Certain varieties of Ojibwe spoken in northern Ontario are written in a syllable-based orthography that employs characters based primarily upon geometric shapes. The syllabary was created in the late 1830s and spread rapidly to speakers of Cree and Ojibwe. Use of the syllabary is widespread in northern Ontario.
4. The initials used in this paper do not represent the actual initials of any of the respondents.

REFERENCES

- Agbo, S.A. (2004). First Nations perspectives on transforming the status of culture and language in schooling. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 43(1), 1-31.

- Agbo, S.A. (2002a). Unstated features of cultural deprivation or discontinuity: Culture standards for administrators and teachers of Aboriginal students. *EAF--The Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations*, 16(2), 10-36.
- Agbo, S. A. (2002b). Decentralization of First Nations education in Canada: Perspectives on ideals and realities of Indian control of Indian education. *Interchange*, 33(3) 281-302.
- Agbo, S.A. (2001) Enhancing success in American Indian students: Participatory research at Akwesasne as part of developing a culturally relevant curriculum. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 40(1), 31-56.
- Barman, J., Hébert, Y., & McCaskill D. (1987) The challenge of Indian education: An overview. In J. Barman, Y. Hébert, and D. McCaskill (Eds.), *Indian education in Canada: Vol. 2: The challenge* (pp. 1-21). Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Battiste, M., & Henderson, J.Y. (2000). *Protecting indigenous knowledge and heritage: A global challenge*. Saskatoon, SK: Purich
- Boldt, M. (1993). *Surviving as Indians: The challenge of self-government*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Cassidy, F., & Bish, R.L. (1989). *Indian government: Its meaning in practice*. Lantville, BC: Oolichan Books.
- Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (1982). *Indian Education Paper Phase One*. Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Friesen, J.W. & Friesen V.L. (2002). *Aboriginal education in Canada: A plea for integration*. Calgary, AB: Detselig.
- Goddard, J.T., & Shields C.M. (1997). An ethnocultural comparison of empowerment in two districts: Learning from an American Indian and a Canadian First Nations school district. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 36(2), 19-45.
- Hall, B.L. (1981). Participatory research, popular knowledge and power: A personal reflection. *Convergence: An International Journal for Adult Education*, 14, 6-17.
- Hampton, E. (1995). Towards a redefinition of Indian education. In M. Battiste & J. Barman (Eds.), *First Nations education in Canada: The circle unfolds* (pp. 5-46). Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Hawthorn, H.B. (1967). *A survey of contemporary Indians of Canada: Economic, political, educational needs and policies*. Vol. 2. Ottawa: Indian Affairs Branch.
- Kemmis, S. (1991). Critical education research. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 5(3), 94-119.

- Kirkness, V.J., & Bowman, S.S. (1992). *First Nations and schools: Triumphs and struggles*. Toronto: Canadian Education Association.
- Lather, P. (1992). Critical frames in educational research: Feminist and post-structural perspectives. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 87-99.
- Lather, P. (1986). Issues of validity in openly ideological research: Between a rock and a soft place. *Interchange*, 17(4), 63-84.
- Lipka, J., Mohatt, G.V., & the Ciulistet Group (1998). *Transforming the culture of schools: Yup'ik Eskimo examples*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Lomawaima, K.T. (1994). *They called it prairie light. The story of Chilocco Indian School*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- McCarty, T.L., & Watahomigie, L.J. (1998). Language and literacy in American Indian and Alaska native communities. In B. Perez et al. (Eds.), *Sociocultural contexts of language and literacy* (pp. 69-98). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- McLaren, P. (2003). *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Maguire, P. (1987). *Doing participatory research: A feminist approach*. Amherst, MA: The Center for International Education, University of Massachusetts.
- Matthew, N. (1991). *British Columbia First Nations school evaluation review. A Report Prepared for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada*. B.C. Region, and B.C. First Nations Schools Association.
- Matthew, N. (1990). Jurisdiction and control in First Nations schools evaluation. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 17(2), 96-115.
- Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- National Indian Brotherhood. (1972). *Indian control of Indian education: Policy paper presented to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development*. Ottawa: National Indian Brotherhood.
- National Indian Brotherhood. (1980). *Indian control of Indian education*. Winnipeg: National Indian Brotherhood.
- Pai, Y., & Adler, S.A. (2001). *Cultural foundations of education* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Paquette, J. (1986). *Aboriginal self-government and education in Canada (Background paper No. 10)*. Kingston, ON: Institute of Intergovernmental Relations.
- Park, P. (1993). What is participatory research? A theoretical and methodological perspective. In P. Park, M. Brydon-Miller, B. Hall, & T. Jackson (Eds.), *Voices of change: Participatory research in the United States and Canada* (pp. 1-19). Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Participatory Research Network (1982). *An introduction to participatory research*. New Delhi: ICAE.

- Peshkin, A. (1997). *Places of memory: Whiteman's schools and Native American communities*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Smith, J.K. (1989). *The nature of social and educational inquiry: Empiricism versus interpretation*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Thies, K. (1987). *Aboriginal viewpoints on education: A survey in the East Kimberley region*. Nedlands, Australia: National Centre for Research on Rural Education.
- Windigo Education Authority. (1992-93). *Policy for Windigo Education Schools* (Revised). Sioux Lookout: Windigo Education Authority.
- Wotherspoon T., & Satzewich V. (1993). *First Nations: Race, class, and gender relations*. Scarborough, ON: Nelson.

Seth A. Agbo is currently Assistant Professor of Leadership and Policy Studies in Education at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada where he teaches Educational Foundations. He obtained his Ph.D. in Educational Studies from the University of British Columbia in 1996. He was a principal in First Nations schools in Canada and has taught at the State University of New York at Potsdam and at Pacific University in Oregon where he coordinated the Education and Learning program. His research interests include the socio-cultural context of education, professional development and teacher effectiveness, community-school relationships, comparative and international education, and lifelong learning and educational policy. He has contributed to several chapters in comparative and international books and has published in the *Journal of American Indian Education*, *EAF Journal of Educational Administration*, *Interchange*, *A Quarterly Review of Education*, and the *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*.

Author's Address:

Faculty of Education,
BL 2019, Lakehead University
955 Oliver Road, Thunder Bay, Ontario
CANADA P7B 5E1
EMAIL: sagbo@lakeheadu.ca

