Rosemary Foster
University of Alberta
and
J. Tim Goddard
University of Calgary

Case Studies From the Edge: Leadership in Ethnoculturally Diverse Northern Canadian Schools

Recognition of the role played by culture in the formulation and exercise of educational leadership is developing (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996; Heck, 1996, 1997). *Culture* in the sense used here refers to more than the idiosyncratic climate of the school and includes the broader societal culture in which the school is located. In ethnoculturally homogeneous populations it is possible to identify the interactions between social and institutional realities. Less understood is the role and impact of societal culture on educational leadership exercised in the context of ethnoculturally diverse communities. Such is the nature of the communities that comprise Canada's north, defined as the area coterminous with the boreal forest region south of the Arctic (Bone, 1992). Here many school administrators might be considered *sociocultural imports*, drawn from southern, white, middle-class, Eurocentric communities to serve in arenas that have little resemblance to those from which they are recruited.

The present study investigates educational leadership, policy, and organization in select northern Canadian schools and seeks to identify, examine, and explain educators', students', parents', and community members' perceptions and expectations of educational leadership. A secondary question is: How are leadership and culture in northern schools intertwined?

Theoretical Framework
Building on our earlier individual and collaborative work, we have framed this research program in a paradigm grounded in critical pragmatism (Macpherson, 1996, 1997; Maxcy, 1995a, 1995b). Our research, through its approach and analysis, addresses issues of power, voice, ethnocultural diversity, and social interactions. Elsewhere (Goddard & Foster, 2001) we have termed this a critical constructivist approach.

Methodology
The research reported in this article focused on four northern schools, two in Saskatchewan and two in Alberta. All had significant Aboriginal populations as part of their student enrollment. Following Stake (1994, 1995), we used a collective case study that was instrumental in nature and emergent in design (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Merriam, 1988). Data were collected through 36 in-depth individual interviews and eight focus group interviews, direct obser-

Rosemary Foster is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Education. She can be reached at ryfoster@ualberta.ca.
Tim Goddard is an associate professor in the Graduate Division of Educational Research. He can be reached at goddard@ucalgary.ca.

vation, and field notes, supplemented where appropriate by document analysis. Data were collected over an 18-month period. In order to allow for individual differences and the diversity of experiences, the interviews and focus group sessions were semistructured.

Emergent Themes and Interpretations

From the analyses to date we have identified and constructed a number of emergent themes. These themes are grounded in the respondents' differing perceptions and expectations about the role of designated leaders in the educational process. The themes can be grouped into three clusters.

1. *The goals and purposes of the school.* There appears to be little consistency of expectation with respect to the role and purpose of the school. At the community level there is a prevalent belief that the school should imbue local cultural norms and beliefs. Conversely, educators in the schools perceive a need for the school to prepare students for the outside world. These tensions are exacerbated by differences in insider-outsider perceptions of the role of the principal in acting as either a filter or a bridge between the two world views.

2. *How the school will be governed and managed.* There appears to be little consistency in stakeholders' perceptions of effective school leadership. The school administrators are caught between the press for community involvement in governance issues, as decreed by policy papers on a regional or provincial level, and the community-held notion that principals are paid to manage and lead the school effectively. Issues of local control of education, of decentralized decision-making and financial flexibility, and of the very structure of elected local and regional school boards are contested notions in the communities.

3. *How and how far the school adapts to the local cultural context.* It is apparent that stakeholders not only perceive differently how the schools adapt to their specific cultural contexts, but also differ in their expectations for such adaptation. Some see the schools as a means for children to acculturate to the majority-culture world and economic system. Others, however, perceive the schools as the repository and propagator of cultural and linguistic knowledge for the community. The implications of these differences are played out in decisions about the language of instruction, the curriculum content offered, and the scheduling of different courses.

These overarching themes emerge in a broader context of legislative, political, economic, social, and cultural uncertainty. Leaders in northern schools are required to navigate dissonant communities of understanding and practice.

Potential Effect of these Case Studies

From our analyses to date it is possible to show how both the idiosyncratic societal culture of the community and the majority societal culture of the country at large can be separated into two dimensions, the *lived* and the *learned*. Further, each affects the various stakeholder groups in the school differently. In the northern communities discussed here, all the principals are members of the white, Anglo-European majority culture. They can be categorized as *living* in that dominant culture and *learning* in the minority culture of the community.

In contrast, almost all the parents and students are members of the minority First Nation or Métis cultures. As such, they are *living* in the minority culture and are *learning* in the dominant culture. These findings suggest that among stakeholders in these northern schools are multiple and often conflicting perceptions. In particular, we argue that the belief is widespread among northern educators that dominant Western notions of schooling and leadership are preferable, and that this belief often is in conflict with the student, parent, and community expectation that the school adapt to the cultural reality of the local community.

Through our ongoing research we hope to understand better the complex interactions between national, local, and school culture and the effects of these interactions on leadership in northern schools. Further, it is our intent to use these findings to build a context for a discussion with the potential of raising questions that urge practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers to consider how educational leadership might address issues of power, voice, and equity in these ethnoculturally diverse schools.

References

Bone, R.M. (1992). *The geography of the Canadian North*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.

Glesne, C., & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. White Plains, NY: Longman.

Goddard, J.T., & Foster, R.Y. (2001). The experiences of neophyte teachers: A critical constructivist assessment. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17*, 349-365.

Hallinger, P., & Leithwood, L. (1996). Culture and educational administration: A case of finding out what you don't know you don't know. *Journal of Educational Administration, 34*(5), 98-116.

Heck, R.H. (1996). Leadership and culture: Conceptual and methodological issues in comparing models across cultural settings. *Journal of Educational Administration, 34*(5), 74-97.

Heck, R.H. (1997, April). *Conceptual and methodological issues in investigating principal leadership across cultures*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago.

Macpherson, R.J.S. (1996). *Educative accountability: Theory, practice, policy and research in educational administration*. Tarrytown, NY: Elsevier Science.

Macpherson, R.J.S. (1997, April). *Building a communitarian policy of educative accountability using a critical-pragmatist epistemology*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago.

Maxcy, S.J. (1995a). Beyond leadership frameworks. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 31*, 473-483.

Maxcy, S.J. (1995b). *Democracy, chaos, and the new school order*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Merriam, S.B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Stake, R. (1994). Case studies. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 236-247). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.