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A DREAM SCHOOL OR A SCHOOL THAT INSPIRES TO DREAM?

CONTEXT

This text, presented during the second edition of the Convention on Perseverance and Academic Achievement for First Peoples held in October 2015, is a reflection on the theme of dream schools made by five students from the Autochthonous Education Management Training Program of Université de Sherbrooke.

These students, living in several Aboriginal communities in Quebec, have contributed diversified ideas and thoughts on how to support learning of Aboriginal students in order to lead them to educational success. Indeed, the autochthonous school context in Quebec is characterized by the coexistence of multiple identities, statuses, languages, and cultural backgrounds (Lévesque & al., 2015). The goal of this reflection by school actors already working in community schools was therefore to initiate a discussion

> **How can one reflect on school beyond its walls for Aboriginal communities?**

on the existing variable gap between the dream of a school adapted to Aboriginal students' culture and the reality experienced daily. From a reflexive approach on school, they took a critical look at the physical and organizational structure of the latter in relation to its role *for and within its community*.

This reflection also focused on legitimate questions about the role of school in autochthonous communities, and this, as an educational institution within a political, historical, and social context. More specifically, it was about contemplating the means needed to foster linkage between Aboriginal education and Western education in order to propose a dream school, more apt to sustain educational success of all students. Therefore, the thinking process covered the program to offer and on the types of pedagogy to advocate.

A PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION ON THE WORLD VIEW AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF SCHOOL

According to certain authors, any school system or any discussion about school and education takes place in a social and historical context. Two major educational traditions emerge: 1) formal education based on cognitive learning focusing on theoretical aspects of pre-knowledge; 2) informal education implying a tradition based on experiential learning (Livingstone, 2006).

Giroux (2000) explains that Western education is based on a formal learning difficult to dissociate from the intensification of market globalization. It is therefore a component in a paradigm designated as industrial in a so-called formal education. According

to Battiste (2002), formal education enhances the transmitted knowledge intended to be universal and based on mass information. This is the most common form of education in the industrialized Western world in which Quebec belongs. However, other educational paradigms are worth exploring so that we can better respond to reality and specificities of Aboriginal communities.

For Grande (2004), the foundations of Aboriginal pedagogy heavily rest on more informal, traditional Aboriginal education. It lies in an educational tradition in which knowledge is not standardized, but linked to the reality of a given environment, a territory. Aboriginal education is a continuum of different educational thoughts defined as biocentric. Therefore, it also takes into account the biophysical world in the educational relationship, as opposed to Western concepts, more anthropocentric and solely focused on human beings (Knapp, 1996). It can also be first identified in its entirety as holistic rather than linear, more particularly regarding how a problem is addressed, and then subjectively rather than objectively. In this sense, emotions are part of reading the world in the educational relationship (Battiste, 2002; Biermann and Townsend-Cross, 2008). Indigenous pedagogy closely links to a specific ecological context which, according to Aikenhead (2006), includes language classes, rules, and distinctive relationships unique to local knowledge. Local knowledge is intimately related to a given territory and to a given community.

A SCHOOL ANCHORING WITHIN ITS COMMUNITY: A PLACE IN THE TERRITORY

In Aboriginal culture, the place of the territory is well established: many authors, including Herman (2005) and Little Bear (2009), indicate that this territory is at the heart of the community's identity or that of individuals living there. Thus, how can one reflect on school beyond its walls for Aboriginal communities?

The overall reading of an environment aims at the appropriation of school features within a community. It seeks to take in account the physical and territorial characteristics of the school, including flora, fauna, and waterways. It is the same for its social and cultural characteristics, particularly with regard to ancestral and current ways of living. Thus, reading the environment aims indirectly at familiarization with

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community resources. A recent research report precisely highlights the importance to engage various bodies and individuals, of which families and the community, to enable young Aboriginals to "learn in a fluid and harmonious environment, ensuring continuity between the diverse components of the universe" (Montpetit and Lévesque, cited in Lévesque & al., 2015, p. 144).

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Imagining a dream school within the Aboriginal community consists of naming the preferred values, identifying pedagogical approaches to advocate, and this, in accordance with organizational structures that require rethinking the place of humans and material resources, while conceptualizing the most optimal way to integrate the community's cultural dimensions.

For example, the dream school for some becomes a physical organization inspired by traditional elements of the Inuit way of life and reconfigures the school and classroom spaces. It suggests a specific place devoted to culture as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 : The physical organization of an Inuit dream school

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For others, it is to rethink the school organization in a way that the school calendar reflects the realities of the environment. In this case, the school calendar is adaptable and flexible. It takes into account seasons, namely hunting seasons, as it does weather or sunshine conditions, especially for Northern populations. Concerning their dream school, the majority of students also propose educational activities related to the local culture; these would eventually lead to a curriculum open on the peculiarities of an environment and would require teaching materials representative of the local culture, taking into account the language of the community. The students' proposals lead them to rethink school beyond its current structure and to enrich the resource directory for this openness *for and within the community*.

CONCLUSION AND PROSPECTS

In order to overcome the present limitations of the various structures, hindsight and a reflection process lead us to revise school based on actual needs, including the characteristics specific autochthonous students in their respective milieus.

The exchanges generated became an invitation to escape the current framework to identify preferred values, pedagogical approaches to advocate, organizational structures both human and material to establish, always faithful to the cultural dimensions, possibly allowing members of the community and of school staff to be involved as full partners.

Therefore, rethinking the current school in Aboriginal communities while questioning the gap that can exist between customary practices and those to develop confirms the Management's role as educational leader and cultural mediator. ◂

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NOTES

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