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Article abstract

This paper examines forms of consciousness and resistance displayed by Native adult learners in a community college setting. These are examined in the context of the college's "takeover" of what was once a Native education department conceived and constructed by a Native political group. Current forms of consciousness and resistance within the college take the form of contestations over meaning rather than contestations over power. The paper suggests that inter- and intragroup variations in forms of consciousness and resistance are linked to forms of symbolic capital such as linguistic competence displayed by the students. Such a variation, it is suggested, may have implications for community development and the move towards self-government.

Forms of Consciousness and Resistance in Native Adult Learners

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Cet article étudie les formes de conscientisation et de résistance démontrées par les étudiants adultes autochtones dans une école. Ces formes sont examinées dans le contexte de la prise en charge par l'école de ce qui était auparavant un département d'éducation couçu et mis sur pied par un groupe politique autochtone.

Les formes actuelle de conscientisation et de résistance au sein de l'école prennent la forme de contestations sur des significations plutôt qu'à l'endroit du pouvoir. L'article suggère que les variations dans les formes de conscientisation et de résistance sont liées à des formes de capital symbolique telle que la compétence linguistique démontrée par les étudiants. Une telle variation, il est suggéré, peut avoir des implications pour le développement communautaire et pour la démarche vers l'auto-détermination.

This paper examines forms of consciousness and resistance displayed by Native adult learners in a community college setting. These are examined in the context of the college's "takeover" of what was once a Native education department conceived and constructed by a Native political group.

Current forms of consciousness and resistance within the college take the form of contestations over meaning rather than contestations over power. The paper suggests that inter- and intra-group variations in forms of consciousness and resistance are linked to forms of symbolic capital such as linguistic competence displayed by the students. Such a variation, it is suggested, may have implications for community development and the move towards self-government.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines a community college's apparent conviction that Native education, which is presented as a form of appendaged inclusion to a generic curriculum, is a social gift rather than an inherent right to be controlled by Native people. To use Freire's term, the curriculum has become "domesticated" (Freire 1973) and, thus, neutralized. It has been rendered apolitical. Following Carnoy, such an act would be considered a form of cultural imperialism which colonizes and dominates rather than liberates (Carnoy 1974). In the following discussion I will look at the process by which this was effected.

The college's position emerged as a result of several conflicts with Native faculty and members of the now defunct Grand Council Treaty #9 organization (hereinafter referred to as G.C.T.#9) which operated out of Timmins, Ontario during the late 1970's and early 1980's. The organization moved its headquarters to Toronto and now operates under the name of the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation.

It was the executive of the G.C.T. #9 organization, spearheaded by Andrew Rickard of Moose Factory, who, in 1979 drew up "An Agreement of

Understanding Establishing a Working Relationship" between G.C.T. #9 and Northern College of Applied Arts and Technology. To my knowledge, this working relationship was never signed. In spite of the apparent lack of signatories, this tenuous working relationship was to culminate in the creation of a Native Department. The college was to provide administration and curriculum development as well as to provide "...structural guidelines for curriculum, financial assistance and a curriculum writer who was to process, research and organize material for print." Finally, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities was to "...provide certification for the programs."¹ Certain members of G.C.T. #9, as well as the newly created Native Department's Native staff, were to..." define content, methods and objectives and to implement the process of the program."²

By the late fall of 1983, this rather tenuous relationship culminated in a convoluted, ideological quagmire. The Native Department's Native staff believed that their teaching style and their curriculum were to be closely connected to community development, self-government and local control. They aimed for a close fit between bush-oriented social relations of production, curriculum and classroom teaching styles. The college's notion of Native education, on the other hand, had evolved out of their commitment, during the early 1970's, to provide programs to the western James Bay communities. Such programs included carpentry, small motor mechanics, B.T.S.D (Basic Training For Skills Development), band management, small business management, goose camp management, tourism, drug and alcohol abuse counselling and potato farming in Attawapiskat. These courses were, and still are, referred to by the college as "curriculum packages". These curriculum packages originated in diverse places: in the western provinces such as Saskatchewan where they were tried on Indians; in southern Ontario or in northern U.S.A. cities, or with a combination of urban Indians. The point is that very few, if any, of the "packages" had local, grass-roots input. Such packaged curriculum is of the sort that the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, refers to as "banking education" (1973). The banking metaphor uses such terminology as *delivery*, *package*, and *deposit*. The college's metaphors were at odds with the initial Native Department and G.C.T. #9's metaphors. The latter's correspondence with the college's administrators included words such as *collaboration*, *mutual*, *conference*, *bilateral*, *consultation*, and *interaction*. Ideologically, the college, by way of its banking metaphors and its paternalism, presented Native

education as a *social gift* whereas the college's Native staff and the executive of G.C.T. #9 regarded the Native programs, replete with "native content" as an *inherent right* to be used for the purposes of promoting and solidifying local control, community development and self-government. By 1983, after the ensuing power struggle over ideology and meaning between the college's Dean and Native staff, the college's paternalistic conviction and its control over funding resulted in the demise of the Native Department and the subversion of its ideological intent and grass-roots constructed meanings. As a result, "Native education", as promoted by the college, became something generic without a cultural fit. As far as the Native staff members were concerned, "Native education" had become incongruent with their needs.

The college's "takeover" demanded a form of consciousness and social relations more akin to the college's reconstituted, generic, "Native" curriculum. The presentation of a generic, pre-packaged, "Native" curriculum was based on the assumption that Native students were a rather homogeneous group. In the same manner, college faculty and administrators tended to see Canadian Natives, as a whole, in rather generic or homogenous terms. Differences which did surface were seen in terms of deprivation theory: the majority of Natives were seen to be deprived of the "best" we have to offer since our "best" didn't filter down to them. Other school systems or, more likely, their culture or their enculturation process had deprived them or had not been successful in the filtering-down process; the college, by way of its open-door policy, is seen by college administrators and faculty alike to be the last bid in the filtering-down process. A small minority of Native students or Native people in general, are seen as having benefitted, somewhere along the way, from the filtering-down process. This appears evident in the way these individuals act — that is, like non-Natives. The latter were seen to be more manageable administratively as well as ideologically. For the former, who did not quite fit this schema (to use Piaget's (1977) term), a mode of rational management ideology within a general paradigm of deprivation theory was instituted to force the fit. In its takeover and control of Native education, the college, in fact, began, systematically, to engage in the production and consumption of college-constructed meaning *vis a vis* Native curriculum. An ideology based on the college-constructed logic of a technocratic, rational positivism became the source of subtle forms of domination. In the balance of this paper I attempt to reconstruct and analyze the fol-

lowing: the way Native students, in subsequent years, came to be the consumers of college-constructed meanings for Native education; how the imposition of college-constructed meaning was implemented within a paradigm of technocratic, rational positivism; how inter- and intra-group variations in native student consciousness and resistance both challenged the existing status quo as well as maintained it, by contributing to their own domination; and, finally, how forms of consciousness and resistance over meaning, played out in the everyday classroom situation, formed a microcosm of the wider context of Native societies and the struggle for self-government and the contestation over meaning in that domain.

FORMS OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND RESISTANCE

My interest in applied anthropology of education, and my desire to write a Ph.D. thesis on the political aspects of Native adult education, led me to Northern College and its newly formed Native Education Department at the South Porcupine campus, near Timmins, Ontario, in the fall of 1983. I found, among both the Native students and Native staff, considerable inter- and intra-group variation in ideological and political consciousness and resistance. Among non-Native faculty who taught Native adult learners in programs such as social work, child and youth work, early childhood education, recreation, business etc., the ideology and understandings pertaining to Native students was college-defined and fairly uniform: Native students were there to learn generic business skills, social work skills, early childhood education skills, etc. It was assumed that a generic presentation of curricula (applicable to all learners, in spite of cultural differences) could, if necessary, be amended by the individual practitioner in the field. In other words, it was assumed that Native students would be able to apply and/or amend generic curricula to their cultural requirements by virtue of the fact that they're Natives. Just as the college presented or forced a fit between seemingly incongruent social relations and those social relations of production necessary for a bush economy, the Native students were also required to force an incongruent fit between college-constructed meanings and their field-placements in a Native bush-economy setting or an urban Native social service setting.

Non-native staff and non-Native management at the college tended to see two types of Native students: Native students who had "overcome"

their culture because it had deprived them in socio-economic and ideological terms and those students who were still deprived due to their culture and who required remedial help by way of a rational management ideology culminating in remedial language labs. The latter were seen to be deprived of the symbolic and cultural capital which had not filtered down to them from the dominant Euro-Canadian society. Much of the non-Native staff and non-Native middle management's energy was devoted to ensuring that this latter would receive the dominant, Euro-Canadian society's cultural capital for the purposes of forcing them to fit into the college-constructed meaning of what Native education should be. This was not to be accomplished by way of force or restraint. Instead, it was constituted through what Pierre Bourdieu (1979) calls "symbolic violence". Symbolic violence is committed by symbolic power which..."imposes a definition of the social world that is consistent with ruling-class interests" (ibid, 80). The college's takeover of the Native Department in 1983 served the Dean's purposes of needing to control federal monies for federally sponsored Native students and monies from the Quebec Cree Schoolboard sponsored students. It was the Dean's conviction, at the time, that the Native Department staff was overspending and not capable of handling their budget efficiently. For the Dean, who was also an accountant, such alleged, wasteful overspending on the part of the Native Department did not sit well with his need to manage a college which was running a half million dollar deficit. Also figuring in the equation was the fact that some non-native programs in Applied Arts had very low enrolments. Having to pay a faculty member a relatively high salary for a class of three to five students was, as far as the Dean was concerned, not cost effective. The solution was to incorporate the Native Department into the Applied Arts Division. In so doing, monies from federally-sponsored students and Quebec Cree-sponsored students could be redistributed within the Applied Arts Division and thus save or keep non-Native programs and certain faculty afloat.

Resistance to the Dean's "symbolic violence" came from the Native Department's non-Native director as well as from the Native faculty. The former, who had considerable experience in "delivering" pre-packaged curriculum to the coastal communities of James Bay, often entered into shouting matches with the Dean. The interchange between these two men consisted of contestations over the control and dispensation of Native department monies, and over

Native classroom teaching styles which the Dean saw as incongruent with the "generic" College teaching styles. Resistance to the Dean's symbolic violence by the Native staff consisted of various forms of subversions: for example put-ons, by watching the Dean's attempt to take over a Native class to show Native students and Native staff just exactly how one conducts a class in the conventional College style with straight rows rather than circles and sweetgrass ceremonies. In this situation, the Dean tried, in vain, to get the class to respond to his direct questions. Having felt frustrated by the Native students' refusal, he would leave, convinced that there was something innately wrong about the Native students' inability to respond to his direct questions. When he left, jokes in Cree and laughter about the Dean's antics ensued. The Native students and Native staff members felt assured that the Dean would not attempt to teach them a second time. Other forms of Native staff resistance included taking a class to the cafeteria or outside the college building to conduct sweetgrass ceremonies; coming in late in the morning or not at all; phoning in sick; leaving on a plane on Friday evening and phoning in on Monday morning to say there was a flight delay; using the excuse that you had to be away to conduct a sweatlodge ceremony (middle-management always fell for this since they had no recourse but to allow a holiday for a religious ceremony); phoning in to say that you had a flat tire and would be late for class; feigning illness and leaving during the middle of the day; convincing the Dean that you had diabetes, and feigning illness due to diabetes. The ultimate form of resistance, (though some would interpret this as dysfunctional), came about when Native staff members began resigning just before Christmas of 1983.

One of my chief informants was an Ojibway staff member by the name of Harold Sault. Harold or "Buddy" died about two years ago but while he was a staff member at Northern College, he attempted to resist the Dean's symbolic violence and symbolic power in all the manners described previously. Harold, who was instrumental in the founding of the Union of Ontario Indians in 1968 and quite adept at the political power game between Natives and those non-Natives with symbolic power, was unable, in the end, to overcome the Dean's symbolic violence. Had Buddy solicited the help of G.C.T. #9, his counter hegemonic activity and his subversive style might have received support. Individuals in the G.C.T. #9 executive such as Andrew Rickard might have come to his aid. Buddy did not, however, solicit G.C.T.

#9's help. He did not because he was angry about the fact that the G.C.T. #9 organization had opted out of the Union of Ontario Indians during the middle 1970s. He took this personally and, therefore, did not solicit their help. He was also of the conviction that northern Crees, unlike near-north and southern Ojibways, were rather apolitical or were not conflict oriented so why bother soliciting their help? Hence, his fight with the Dean and college middle-management was a solitary one.

Although the Dean and his exercise of symbolic violence greatly troubled Buddy, it was to be some of the Native students who, he felt, subverted his own counter-hegemonic activity and, thereby, contributed to their own domination. Who were these students? Bourdieu (1979) would have defined these students as those who came to the college with an already pre-existing *habitus* or internalized competencies. Such competencies or cultural and symbolic capital, gained from the dominant society and internalized, prepared these students for the eventual accommodation and assimilation necessary in the college setting. As far as the college non-Native staff and the Dean were concerned, these were the students who had "overcome" their deprivation implied in the *habitus* of the Native societies. Unlike their counterparts, these students had learned or internalized the *habitus* of the dominant society. In terms of college standards, they tended to be competent in their written and verbal skills; they came to class on time; they asked questions in class; they spoke with non-native and native staff outside of class; they phoned in to say they were ill; they said thank you and please; they made appointments to see staff rather than coming at any time; they dressed in clothing other than "Native student denim"; they were verbose and wrote elaborate essay answers; they were apt to call a staff member Sir, Mr. or Ms.; many appeared to have books at home and engaged in reading at home from time to time; they appeared more serious about their studies and engaged less in jokes, teasing and put-ons. Most of these students were urban, southern Ojibwas, Iroquois, and Metis as well as northern Crees who had had considerable southern, urban high school experience. This group represented about 20% of the native student population in 1983. This percentage appears to be similar in 1991.

A larger percentage (80%) of the Native student population were Crees from both sides of James Bay who had very little urban experience. These students were defined by non-Native staff and middle-management as having very little of the Euro-Canadian

society's *habitus*. Their English linguistic competence (written and verbal skills) were deemed to be substandard by college standards; they were deemed to be seldom on time and used coming late as a form of resistance; they didn't hand in assignments on time; they didn't ask questions in class and were very reticent outside of class as well; they didn't let a staff member know if they were ill; they stayed away for no apparent reason and when asked why they were away, a reply of "personal problems" was common; they didn't say please and thank you; they didn't make appointments to see staff but, instead, asked very indirect, cryptic questions whenever it suited them. This usually took place, to the consternation of non-Native staff, in the hallways, cafeterias, wash-rooms etc.; their essay answers appeared cryptic; they called staff members by their last names (not out of disrespect but out of habit in their home communities); according to non-Native staff, these students never read much, nor did they have much reading material at home; they were not serious about their studies and teased and joked too much. These students, who were seen to be deprived of the dominant society's *habitus* were, to use the medical metaphor, "prescribed" at least eight hours of basic communication and language competency labs. In other words, much of their time was spent in remedial English classes and labs. For this group, remedial English was presented as the great equalizer. The dominant society's *habitus* could be gained, as a social gift, by way of the reading, writing and interpretation of text. It was through the presentation of the dominant society's *habitus*, by way of text, that these Native students were to be made more manageable or "domesticated". The dominant society's *habitus* came to be presented as a neutral, apolitical social gift. It was meant to present itself as a social equalizer under the guise of rational management science and domination.

In his classroom teaching, Buddy had avoided the reading, writing and interpretation of text as much as possible. Instead, he relied heavily on oral tradition as a teaching style. He began his classes, to the consternation of the Dean, with a sweetgrass ceremony. Desks and chairs were put aside and he and his students would sit on the floor in a circle to discuss contemporary and traditional Native cultures and issues. After about a month of observation, from September 1983 to November 1983, I noticed that most of the southern Ojibway, Iroquois, Metis and urbanized Cree faction were becoming perturbed. They began to ask Buddy if they should have some

books and whether they should also be taking notes. To both questions, Buddy replied in the negative. After several weeks, some of this faction went to the Dean to complain that they might not have notes to study from for the upcoming Christmas examination. The Dean, who had already been at odds with Buddy, was delighted with these would-be Native student allies. These students, as far as the Dean was concerned, supported his conviction that the Native Education Department should operate with more "conventional" teaching styles i.e., with desks, straight rows, an instructor at the front and the dissemination of knowledge through the reading, writing and interpretation of text. Buddy was able to forgive the Dean's apparent ignorance of Native needs but he was unable to forgive the Native students. As far as Buddy was concerned, these Native students had contributed to the demise of the Native Education Department as well as to the demise of Native control of the Native department. At the same time, Buddy saw them as having contributed to their own domination and the domination of the larger group of Cree students as well.

One wonders what function or resistance the larger group of Cree students performed in this scenario. Their forms of consciousness and resistance were akin to what Scollon and Scollon (1981) call a "bush consciousness" as opposed to a "modern consciousness". The former term summarizes a range of behaviours and social relations such as reticence or taciturnity, indirectness, eye contact avoidance, direct conflict avoidance and other orientations attributed to the Cree and the generalized Subarctic Native cultures (see also Darnell 1991; Dieleman 1986; and Preston 1976); these are closely related by the term "bush-consciousness" to a hunting-trapping-fishing mode of production. These learned social relations and bush competence are acquired within a localized mode of production and are carried by Native students in the form of a *habitus* to the college. In the college setting the *habitus* of "bush-consciousness" is seen as dysfunctional and incongruent with the needs of post-capitalism and the smooth operation of the college. Here, being reticent and indirect is viewed as dysfunctional. One is required to "speak-up", "ask questions", engage in small-talk, and be on time. Although learning the dominant society's *habitus* allows one (or seems to allow one) to accumulate and internalize the dominant society's cultural and symbolic capital which may be converted to economic capital, one must not use the newly acquired *habitus* to challenge the *status quo*.

As the conflict between the Dean, Buddy, the Native staff, and the acculturated Native students ensued, the majority Cree began to react and resist in the forms they knew. They relied on their "bush-consciousness" to see them through the escalating conflict; they refrained from coming to class; they "disappeared" and they quit. In other words, their response was a rather traditional one. They saw the conflict, as did Buddy, in moral terms: the southern and urbanized students had been too boisterous and too loud; they had talked about their instructor to a stranger (the Dean); they had not given Buddy a proper chance — they should have cleared matters with Buddy first. This would have been proper bush etiquette. This would have been bush competency. Instead, the southern and urban students, through their "modern consciousness" way of operating had "bad heart" i.e., they had acted immorally. According to Scollon and Scollon (1981), these students, who displayed forms of the modern-consciousness style, would have achieved this style through the "essayist" mode i.e., through the literacy process. To learn to read and write in the "essayist" manner is to learn, according to Scollon and Scollon (1981), a new pattern of discourse. This new pattern of discourse develops the capacity for a new reality set and, I might add, a capacity for a new conflict style. The majority of the northern Cree students were unwilling to polarize the conflict. Instead, their resistance style was very similar to their discourse style; they gave only partial clues. The receiver of these partial clues is supposed to engage in an interpretation or a hermeneutic of the partial clues. Once the receiver fills in the field, as it were, the receiver of the message, who has been the victimizer or the wrong-doer, is then to right the wrong. If the receiver is too stupid to pick up on the partial clues then the relationship can't be an important one and there is no longer any use in trying to save it. To the majority Cree group the relationship and harmony was important. To the other, more acculturated students, the rational aspect of the relation appeared more important.

I must caution the reader at this point. I do not aim to suggest by way of Scollon and Scollon (1981) that a neat dividing line exists between bush-consciousness and modern-consciousness. On the contrary, there are students who display behavioral characteristics across the spectrum — various levels of consciousness (see Freire's (1980) *Education for Critical Consciousness*). There are also students who are able to fluently "code switch" between bush-consciousness and modern-consciousness. The ability to do so appears to be related to competency

in the language and *habitus* of both the Euro-Canadian society as well as one or more of the Native societies with a localized, bush-oriented mode of production. The number of students who are competent code-switchers, however, is small. They tend to be students in their late 30s to late 40s who have acquired some of the dominant society's *habitus* by way of residential school but, who, upon returning from residential school, also returned to a community which still had a bush mode of production intact. It is interesting to note that the "code-switchers" (about 5-10%) of the Native student population tended to side with Buddy and were also liked and admired by both sets of students. These individuals often acted as "go-between" or culture brokers between the two groups. Unfortunately, they were unaware of the acculturated students' intent to complain to the Dean; hence their competencies as code-switchers had not been called upon.

CONCLUSIONS

Both Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (1979) and Louis Althusser's notion of the educational system as the "Ideological State Apparatus" *par excellence* (1971) provide the researcher in educational matters with tools for understanding how education, controlled by the dominant society, acts silently in its transmission of ruling class ideology. The function of schools, according to these French reproduction theorists, is to implement the acceptance of the dominant ideology by presenting education as a social gift and as the great equalizer. According to these theorists, the Subject has very little recourse but to be reified and subsumed within the hegemonic claws of the Ideological State Apparatus. So much for the dialectic and so much for a theory of resistance! I suggest here that small forms of conflict and resistance were and are continuing to be played out in the hall ways and classrooms of the college. In the long run, however, the Native students lack power. Conflict and resistance continue to be over **meaning** rather than **power**. Conflict over meaning alone, domesticates the real conflict which should be over power which the larger Native student faction does not have. The Native Education Department was meant to be for them, not for those with a considerable pre-existing, filtered-down *habitus* from the dominant society. The subversion of this intent becomes evident when a large majority of the larger Cree faction are marked for failure in an institution which has appropriated their cultural meaning, reconstituted it, reproduced it and then offered it back

as a social gift in the form of text the interpretation of which requires remedial English labs.

For the small, acculturated group of Native students who benefit from their pre-college acquired *habitus*, the college meanings continue to be congruent and they continue to achieve academic success. For the majority of the Northern Cree students, however, the meanings are not congruent. They either blame themselves for their "failures" or they resist by dropping out, making jokes about management and certain staff members, or by being absent. They know that much of their resistance is aimed at remedial English classes. They struggle with these classes as well as those other classes which require essay answers; they attempt to deal with low marks and failure in this area, and they try to delay having to do these classes by making two-year programs into three-year programs. The college in fact benefits from this, since the student will be a funding unit for a longer period of time. These students know that they will need the oral and written skills to survive college life and to obtain a degree but they feel that it should be done at a pace they can handle and that it should be taught by individuals who understand their culture.

The struggles and resistance over meanings must, I feel, become struggles over power and resistance to current college power. Unfortunately, the real basis for that power lies with the executive of the *Nishnawbe-aski* Nation (formerly G.C.T. #9) who began the process of forming a Native Education Department at the college in 1979 but who did not do subsequent studies or monitoring. In the meantime, the contestations over meaning continue and all that can be hoped for are small victories within a larger failure (Willis 1978).

If anything, the Native students have come to realize that the college and the contestations, which have occurred, and are still continuing within the college, represent a microcosm of what has occurred at the national level. Here too, the contestation is over meaning i.e., the meaning of self-government. As of late, the federal government would like to present self-government as a social gift when, in fact, it is an inherent right. One needs to consider which meaning and whose meaning the concept of self-government will be. One also needs to consider which Native people will benefit from self-government and who will lead them. Contestations over meaning might well continue among their own ranks unless the general Native population, and not just their leaders, feel empowered.

NOTES

1. Structure and Roles Pertaining to a Working Relationship Between Grand Council Treaty Nine and Northern College of Applied Arts. Grand Council Treaty Nine, Timmins, Ontario, 1979.
2. Northern College consists of the following campuses: South Porcupine, Moosonee, Haileybury, Kirkland Lake and Kapuskasing.

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