

CHAPTER 8 Community, Culture and Control: Themes for the Social Services in Northern Communities

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As noted in Chapter 1, a theme which pervades many discussions of social services in the North is that services are designed in the South, and implemented in northern communities without regard for northern realities. This lack of fit is exacerbated by the fact that the professionals in charge of implementation have received their education in southern universities. Their understanding of social problems and social programs has been largely shaped by their professional education. Kim Zapf has provided a telling critique of professional education for northern practice in Chapter 3.

Yet Andrew Armitage, an acknowledged expert in child welfare, concludes his review of the Champagne/Aishihik Child Welfare Project by stating that it is in the very forefront of child welfare practice. Dr. Alan Pence, one of Canada's leading authorities in day care, comes to a similar conclusion about the Yukon Day Care Strategy. Dr. Andrew Farquharson, a key figure in the self-help movement in Canada, notes that the Spence Bay project in the Northwest Territories represents a "creative blending of formal and informal helping resources as a way to meet the needs of people living in a remote northern community".

How then to explain the contradiction? First, it must be acknowledged that the projects reported here were selected because they were successful. Hence they may not represent typical programs and practice in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. In the absence of a comprehensive review they may well represent exceptional rather than usual practice. However, regardless of their possibly aberrant nature, these programs have been acclaimed by leading academics. The objective of this chapter is to explain the existence of successful programs in the supposed backwater of professional practice in Canada. Flowing from this exploration, a second objective is to determine if rural and remote communities are particularly suited to exploring aspects of policy and practice which enhance social services in all communities.

Politicians Set the Pace

Perhaps the primary reason for the success of northern programs is the leadership provided by territorial politicians. Magee Miller makes this point in her response to the Zapf chapter:

It is no longer appropriate to portray the North as a land where dominant white southern-trained social workers administer to submissive northern native people. In the Territories social work practitioners are accountable to and regulated by the Territorial Government. The government is elected by northerners and reflects a native and non-native population mix.

Alan Pence applauds the Yukon Territorial Government for its leadership in day care. Pence notes that most provincial governments have shrunk from taking a policy position on day care, but have become mired in lengthy and largely unproductive debates:

By clearly establishing that the parameters for discussion focused on "what must be done to provide the best possible care" rather than on "is there a problem?" or "should government do something?", the government was able to solicit specific concrete input from the public and to translate that input into focused activities and policy directions. The failure of child care in Canada to move from its position as a major societal concern to a priority for new and effective policy development has been the failure of governments at all levels to focus the discussion on the doable rather than on the debatable.

Political leadership was also evident in the Champagne/Aishihik project. Sharon Hume notes that

At the time of signing the agreement the Minister of Health and Human Resources was a Native woman with close ties to the Champagne/Aishihik Band. Her interest in and understanding of the needs of Indian children and her commitment to improving Indian participation and control of decisions affecting First Nation people created rather immediate impetus and accountability for Departmental officials to "produce". As well, the Minister and the Department were working within a larger Government vision of citizen participation and consultation in Government decision-making.

From this admittedly limited number of projects it seems apparent that political leadership is a key factor. Politicians elected to the territorial governments are acutely aware of local needs and of the necessity to deliver services in a way that respects cultural norms and

traditions. Thus Margaret Joe, a native Minister of Health and Human Resources was an early and enthusiastic supporter of the Champagne/Aishihik project. Her awareness of the need for change in child welfare services for aboriginal communities was deep and extensive. It is difficult to imagine a native person holding the office of Minister of Social Services in one of the provinces and providing the kind of leadership supplied by Ms. Joe.

A second important aspect of policy-making in the North is that the context in which the process occurs is relatively clean and uncluttered. The policy-making process usually consists of five stages: initiation, formation, execution, implementation and evaluation. In all of these stages governments responsible to a relatively small and homogeneous constituency will experience less difficulty than will governments where the voting public is large and disparate in its interests. Hence the policy-making process in the territories can be smooth and efficient. However, an efficient policy process does not ensure that progressive social programs will be developed. Such an outcome requires a commitment to build programs which will meet the needs of communities in a culturally sensitive fashion and which will enhance the capacity of local communities to govern and manage social programs. This commitment appears to be in place in the Yukon and Northwest Territorial Governments.

A convincing case can be made that rural and remote communities in the Yukon and N.W.T. are better served by their governments than are similar communities in the provinces. For this reason the contention of many writers that northern communities lack power may be overly simplistic. Certainly the territorial governments do not have the clout of provincial governments in determining the fate of the nation or in arguing for their share of resources. But within the territories small and remote communities get their share of attention simply because they are small and remote! As Miller points out, most territorial politicians represent these communities.

By contrast the most neglected rural and remote communities may be in provinces like British Columbia and Ontario where power is concentrated in the South and the interests of urban centres dominate provincial policies.

Community Control

The federal and provincial governments have shown a great deal of interest in the concept of community control. They have commissioned studies such as the Hastings Report on Community Health

Centres (1972), the Mustard Report of Health Councils in Ontario (1974), the Castonguay Nepveu Report in Quebec (1976) and the Foulkes Report in B.C. (1973). Some provinces have delegated responsibility to communities. In Ontario the Children's Aid Societies are organized on a county basis and administer the provincial Child Welfare Act. Similar child welfare agencies exist in urban centres in Nova Scotia and Manitoba. Quebec made the most comprehensive effort following the Castonguay Nepveu Report, by integrating health and social services on both a local and regional basis. Yet according to some observers of the Quebec scene, authority remains concentrated in the hands of provincial politicians and bureaucrats (Leseman, 1984). Despite interest in the concept and the few examples noted here where some form of community control has been implemented, social services in Canada are designed and delivered by departments or ministries of provincial governments.

Cassidy's review of the meanings of community, of citizen participation and control and of national and international forces which affects communities reveals that community control contains both positive and problematic features. Community control can result in "acute localitis" where elites dominate to the exclusion of other interests (Montgomery, 1979). Some rural communities have become so self-contained that they reject the values and standards of the larger society. One particularly distasteful example of a community with its own standards and values is the South Mountain area of King County, Nova Scotia. Despite relatively close proximity to the city of Acadia and affluent sections of King County, South Mountain became a closed community characterized by poverty, poor housing and standards of behaviour which sanctioned incest, and the sexual exploitation of women and children (Beltrame, 1985).

Community control contains two distinct advantages. The first is that communities can tune the social services to meet their particular needs. Thus communities can develop culturally appropriate services. Where communities also manage health and education programs they can decide on the extent to which these programs will be offered through integrated or specialized agency structures. The second advantage is that community control opens up spaces for citizens to participate in the process of government. By so doing they acquire knowledge in and experience about the difficulties encountered by governments at all levels in making choices among competing priorities. Experience in developing and managing social programs enables citizens to become more knowledgeable about social problems, their complicated etiology and their resistance to solution.

Perhaps the most conspicuous examples of successful projects in community control have been those developed by First Nation Bands and tribal councils. Certainly Sharon Hume and Andrew Armitage accord high praise to the Champagne/Aishihik Project and its success is replicated by bands in other provinces (see among other sources MacKenzie & Hudson, (1985) and Wharf, 1989). In addition, the examples of Children's Aid Societies, multi-service centres in the Ottawa/Carleton and Toronto regions, and the short-lived community resource board experiment in British Columbia, argue that the advantages of community control are by no means restricted to First Nation communities (Clague, Dill, Seebaran & Wharf, 1985). The full potential and the extent of the limitations of community control have yet to be explored, and rural communities provide a most appropriate location for investigating and evaluating various models of the concept.

Two reasons are suggested. First, these communities are small in terms of population, geographic size and the number of social service agencies. Community control in a rural community is easier to conceptualize, easier to plan and easier to implement than in a large urban centre. A second reason was noted in the introductory chapter. The small number of key politicians and professionals can converge their interests and initiate action, and as the Yukon Day Care Strategy reveals, politicians can consult with citizens on the direction and shape of a new policy.

For both of the above reasons community control may be most viable in small communities. The Yukon Territorial Government is now in the process of determining if and how social and health services should be integrated and placed under the some form of community control. While not an easy task it is manageable in the Yukon, but poses formidable problems in provinces characterized by heterogeneous populations and a mix of urban and rural centres.

It must be acknowledged that the tax base of local communities is insufficient to fund the social services. Resources are required from senior levels of government. Hence control over social services by communities cannot be complete or total. To refer again to the Arnstein ladder discussed by Frank Cassidy in Chapter 2, a desirable and feasible rung for Canadian communities is that of delegated authority. Delegation of services such as education and hospitals has been in place for some time in most provinces and a similar delegation could occur with regard to the social services.

The next section of this chapter takes up the discussion by Zapf, Miller and Cossom regarding the need for changes in the education of social workers. Again, it is noted that social work education is selected for discussion because this profession has made the most committed effort to design curricula for northern social realities.

Zapf's chapter contains two major criticisms of social work education. First, he contends that ecological theory which serves as the structural base for the general practice of social work is inappropriate for practice in northern communities. Indeed, the extent of his criticism is such that it calls into question the suitability of the generalist approach to practice. Second, Zapf criticizes the absence of information on topics of significance in the North. Chief among these gaps are information about aboriginal peoples, their culture and the impact of white domination of the North on the politics, economics and lifestyles in the North. Miller and Cossom agree in part with these criticisms. However, they make plain their opinion that a generalist approach to practice including as it does skills in working with individuals, groups and communities, is the most appropriate practice methodology for northern practice. They argue that ecological theory should be discarded as the theoretical framework of generalist practice, and a supporting rationale for this position is outlined below.

The ecological perspective has made an important contribution to social work. Nevertheless, it neglects the place of power and its distribution in society and hence does not take into account how the structures of society are responsible for creating conditions of advantage for some people and conditions of disadvantage for others. People who live in advantageous situations are labelled as successful and hard-working, whereas disadvantaged people are seen as incompetent or just plain lazy. In fact, individuals play an important but not all-encompassing role in creating the conditions in which they live. This understanding is crucial in order to appreciate how public issues of poverty and homelessness are created and sustained.

A convincing case can be made that social work students should be as familiar with the phenomenon of power and how it works as they are with human growth and behaviour. The study of power can inform practice by analyzing its distribution in all relationships and groups. Such examinations typically reveal that those who hold power usually favour the status quo. More importantly, the views

and preferences of the powerful determine if change will occur and the direction of change. This generalization holds at all system levels, from families, groups and communities to the province and the nation. The first recommendation for an appropriate social work curriculum for northern and rural practice is to give priority to the study of power and how its distribution affects people in rural and northern communities. A second change recommended here is to include feminist theory as an integral component in a revised social work curricula. The majority of social workers and the clients served by social agencies are women, and yet this crucially important aspect of social work practice has been given little attention. In a trenchant critique of the ecological perspective and its assumption that there is a goodness of fit between individuals and their environment Gould argues that "being a woman in a sexist society introduces such a potent intervening variable that any assumption of confluence between individual and societal good is an unwarranted conclusion". (Gould, 1987, p. 348)

A third required change is to revise courses on social work practice and the planning of change. At the present time such courses emphasize an orderly, rational process of problem-solving guided by an expert in the planned change process. Rarely do they address the "irrational" aspects of planned change—the contributions of owed favours, personal relationships, the sudden availability of resources, among other factors. Change at all levels usually proceeds in a "muddling through" fashion whereby small changes occur in an incremental, sometimes planned, but often accidental or fortuitous fashion (Lindblom, 1968). Nor do such courses typically explore in sufficient detail varying interpretations of rationality. For example, the values and priorities of politicians are based on their determination to stay in power and be re-elected. Plans based on such values often conflict with those built on analyses of economic and social needs. Bruce Doern captures the point nicely:

Far more often than is warranted, the politician, as he approaches political policy-making, is viewed as being fuzzy, unsystematic, and ad hoc. With respect to the exercise of setting goals and choosing among alternative goals, the change of being unsystematic may be very true. If, however, as I often suspect, the charge is based on little or no appreciation of the problems of securing social acceptance and compliance, then it needs to be said that the politician is not unsystematic, but rather is dealing with a different system of behaviour and political values. (Doern, 1972)

Thus the recent decision in British Columbia to establish a University of the North in Prince George has been criticized as irrational by

many in the post-secondary educational system—in fact, not only irrational but a complete waste of money. But the decision takes on a decidedly different hue when viewed from the perspective of the Social Credit government anxious to shore up its fading political fortunes and from the perspective of citizens in Prince George and surrounding northern communities. For these citizens, southern B.C. has been favoured too long and it is eminently rational to transform post-secondary education in B.C.

A final suggestion for revising social work curricula is to include an examination of social movements in Canadian society. The labour, women and First Nation movements are of particular relevance since workers, women and First Nation residents form the bulk of the clientele served by social workers. While the study of social movements would at one time have been severely limited by the lack of scholarly works, such is not the case today. A rich literature exists on the women's and labour movements and one is beginning to emerge for the First Nations (Wharf, 1990).

Mention of post secondary institutions in the North leads to the second Zapf criticism that social work education does not contain information about northern realities. The point is valid, and it may be that community colleges in the Yukon and N.W.T. can play a leadership role in providing courses on aboriginal lifestyles and government, and on the politics, economics and social aspects of life in the territories. Such courses could be taken on an in-service training basis by all newly arrived professionals in the North: teachers, nurses, police officers, child and youth care and social workers. Ownership by northern colleges would be empowering for the North and would represent a shift from the current domination in educational programs by post-secondary institutions based in the south.

One emerging development in social work education holds distinct promise of improving programs for northern practitioners. The Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work is currently exploring the need for and feasibility of a distance education program for the North in order to enhance access to baccalaureate education in social work for northern residents. If a new B.S.W. program could be built around the reforms suggested above it would not only enhance access but provide relevant education for northern practice.

A Concluding Comment

The overall objective of this special issue is to present examples of innovative programs in the North and in so doing examine further

the potential of rural communities to assume a leadership role in developing and designing the social services. It is not suggested by any means that these communities possess an adequate and effective set of social services. As Miller reminds us, the lack of both financial resources and professional staff continues to plague the territories. But the chapters in this edition provide some beginning support for the argument that rural and remote communities need no longer be seen as professional backwaters. Indeed, as the Champagne/Aishihik and the Yukon Day Care Projects demonstrate, social policies and programs developed in the North can be innovative. In particular, these programs have the potential for exploring and evaluating the benefits and the liabilities of community control.

However, the view that northern communities lag behind their southern counterparts is most most frequently expressed with regard to the skills and knowledge of professional practitioners. This perception embraces all human service practitioners be they nurses, teachers, physicians or social workers. The view is not without foundation. Professionals frequently come to the North as freshly minted graduates, and many stay just long enough to acquire sufficient experience to enable them to return to an urban centre. Further support for this contention is provided by the lack of specialists in rural communities, and by the absence of continuing education and professional development opportunities.

Yet despite the frequent turnover of staff and despite the absence of resources, the chapters in this volume attest to the imagination and resourcefulness of professional staff. Kamin and Beatch are psychologists who have abandoned traditional therapeutic styles of intervention and instead function as community developers, and as trainers of indigenous people. Their approach to helping arose out of necessity since it is impossible to staff mental health programs in communities like Spence Bay with fully trained professionals. Even if it were feasible, such a staffing pattern would be inappropriate if it ignored Native customs and traditions. In their community development approach Kamin and Beatch have respected local mores and have explored the feasibility of using indigenous people as helpers. The same argument can be applied to the Champagne/Aishihik Project. These examples suggest that professional practice in the North is not superficial or out-of-date. Rather, and particularly when combined with the assistance of academics, northern practice has the potential to provide leadership by exploring aspects of practice which will benefit practice in all communities.

It is perhaps this blend of the academic interested in the North and the professional who has made a commitment to practice in the

North for a considerable period of time that will enable rural and remote communities to exercise leadership in designing and delivering social services. Academics with an interest in northern practice can review programs, raise pertinent questions and place the programs within a context of emerging developments in the literature. In some instances, such reviews may call for change. In other instances reviews may confirm that the approaches are at the cutting edge of professional practice. Thus the evaluation of the Champagne/Aishihik Project concluded that the community-based and family-focused approach to child welfare adopted in this project was at the very forefront of professional child welfare practice. The confidence-building and legitimization provided by positive reviews will do much to eliminate the myth that all practice in the North is second rate. Indeed, the examples of innovative practice reported in this volume provide a useful start in demolishing this myth. They suggest that linking practitioners and academics in a very deliberate and continuing fashion represents a promising strategy for improving practice in the future.

To quickly summarize, this chapter has developed the argument that northern communities can provide leadership in the social services in two important ways. First, to provide information about the concept of community control. Which services and programs can be most appropriately governed and delivered at a community level? Should all human service programs, health, education, recreation and social services be integrated and offered through a single administrative structure? If not, what combination of the above should be gathered together and which offered under separate and specialized auspices? What form of governmental structure, municipal or regional government or local authority type of government is most appropriate? At the present time Canadian policymakers possess little empirical evidence or even systematically recorded information to guide them in decisions about the concept of community control. It is suggested here that northern communities afford a natural laboratory for exploring the benefits of and limits to community control.

A second contribution concerns practice and in particular the interventions of professionals such as social workers and psychologists. The shortage of professional personnel in the North demands the use of indigenous helpers. Yet, as noted by Andrew Farquharson in his commentary on the Spence Bay Project, the extent to which professional and indigenous helpers differ in terms of knowledge and skills and the extent to which they can work together in a complementary fashion is only dimly understood. Northern practitioners

can make a distinctive contribution to practice theory by continually exploring and examining the similarities and the differences between professional and indigenous helping.

These contributions to policy and practice will not be easy to realize. They will require that policymakers and practitioners give continuing attention to experimentation and to evaluation, and in a crisis-ridden and crowded work schedule these are aspects of work that are easily forgotten. Yet the projects reported here suggest that the North attracts practitioners who are curious and imaginative, and who with some effort can incorporate experimentation and evaluation into their day-to-day practice.

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