



## *Accountability and Aboriginal Education: Dilemmas, Promises and Challenges*

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RITA BOUVIER AND BRUCE KARLENZIG

### INTRODUCTION

Ten years ago, in her introduction to a collection of essays in which various contributors focused on the state of First Nations education, Marie Battiste (1995: xiv) identified the following questions that Aboriginal communities faced when assuming control of their schools:

What goals and outcomes are important? What processes must accompany cultural and linguistic development and inclusion? What is the meaning of renewal and revision in the contemporary and traditional educational context? How do we represent our cultures in schools? Should we teach and evaluate in traditional Aboriginal ways or adopt contemporary Eurocentric models of education to achieve a diversity of goals?

A decade later, these questions continue to have relevance for parents, educators and political leaders, and not only for Aboriginal persons. Indigenous knowledge and ways of teaching and learning offer a wealth of interesting possibilities and benefits for all individuals – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – and communities (Battiste, 2000: 202). Unfortunately, for various reasons non-First Nations, Métis or Inuit governments within Canada have tended to resist acting upon this insight. Moreover, in recent years attempts to implement culturally affirming and sustainable Aboriginal education opportunities within publicly funded, pre-K-12 provincial education systems have been fur-

ther complicated by demands for more "accountability," particularly through an increased emphasis on the measurement of students' academic achievement outcomes.

### THE CASE OF SASKATCHEWAN

Saskatchewan's provincial education system represents an interesting example through which to consider how this understanding of accountability presents some important dilemmas, promises, and challenges for Aboriginal education. Compared to other provinces, a relatively high proportion of Saskatchewan's population is Aboriginal (13.5% according to the 2001 census). This proportion is growing, although recently the trend has been slowing down somewhat (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004b: 6-7). In addition, the median age (20.1 years) of Aboriginal persons in Saskatchewan is younger than in any other province. Approximately 20% of the province's school-aged population is Aboriginal (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004b: 109).<sup>1</sup> While a high proportion (82%) of First Nations students living on-reserve attend First Nations schools,<sup>2</sup> most First Nations students living off-reserve as well as Métis students in Saskatchewan are enrolled in the provincial system.

#### *Aboriginal Education and Indigenous Knowledge*

A persistent legacy of the colonization of Aboriginal peoples is that "Canada and its provincial curricula have continued to marginalize or be indifferent to First Nations peoples" as well as the educational aspirations of Inuit and Métis societies, respectively (Smith, 2001: 77; Canadian Council on Learning, 2005: 6-9; B.C. Teachers' Federation, 2002: 30). Even where efforts to introduce Aboriginal education have taken hold, provincial education systems and institutions have developed somewhat different ideas about what this concept means and how this education should be offered. In some cases, for example, a system or institution has taken an additive approach (some might call it tokenism) in which distinct subjects or courses about Aboriginal issues (e.g., "Native Studies") have been inserted into an already established and basically Eurocentric curriculum (Robertson, 2003: 552). In other cases, limited Aboriginal content or perspectives may have been graft-

ed onto one or more pre-existing courses (e.g., humanities courses, the natural or social sciences, and so on).

An alternative is to take a much more holistic position by recognizing that, rather than simply being an "add on" to the more familiar curricula and pedagogies, Aboriginal education can involve a qualitatively different and transformative process for teaching and learning. This process embraces Indigenous peoples' worldviews, social structures, and pedagogy as a legitimate foundation upon which to construct new meanings or knowledge alongside Western traditions and ways of knowing.

From this point of view, Aboriginal education is understood to be grounded in Indigenous knowledge, comprehensive and distinct knowledge systems with their own "epistemology, philosophy, and scientific and logical validity" (Daes as cited in Battiste and Henderson, 2000: 41). Like other contemporary knowledge systems, Indigenous knowledge is not an abstraction or historical artifact; rather, it is a lived experience on the part of individuals and communities who, through shared languages and ongoing social relations, continually construct, maintain, and modify their understandings of who they are and what they know (Battiste, 1998: 18; Battiste and Henderson, 2000: 49-52).

Key elements of Indigenous knowledge include a focus on relationships, patterns, and processes, particularly the interconnections and inter-dependence among all living beings (including human beings) and places.<sup>3</sup> Infused within all aspects of reality is a power or living energy that is experienced as personal, situated in place (relationships), and because of its moral dimension, sacred. With its attention to the wholeness and sacred qualities within all beings and places, Indigenous knowledge stands in marked contrast to most Western dichotomies (e.g., objectivity vs. subjectivity, the "natural world" vs. the "human world" and so on). All aspects of reality, including Indigenous knowledge itself, are assumed to be communal and shared, and involve both an individual and community responsibility to maintain reciprocal relationships and the balance or harmony that is essential to all life (Battiste and Henderson, 2000: 42-43; Smith, 2001: 80).

Indigenous knowledge sees awareness of oneself as the beginning of learning. The unexplained is respected as the great mystery and wisdom is understood to come from direct experience and reflection (Erasmus, 2002: 1; Hébert, 2000: 71). In the context of education, what

is perhaps most significant is the belief that the common good is centered not on human society alone, but on the natural environment that forms one's political and ethical community. The basic question for all learners is "How does what I have learned affect our relations (place) and existence?"

#### *Saskatchewan's Aboriginal Education Policy*

Through the years, the provincial government in consultation with various partner organizations as well as First Nations and Métis spokespersons has developed a number of policy statements that focus on Aboriginal education. The central policy (initially adopted in 1989) takes the following position:

[The Department of Learning] recognizes that the [Aboriginal] peoples of the province are historically unique peoples occupying a unique and rightful place in society. [The Department of Learning] recognizes that education programs must meet the needs of [Aboriginal] students, and that changes to existing programs are also necessary for the benefit of *all students*. (Saskatchewan Learning, 1989: 6. Emphasis added.)

This policy as well as the development of education programs and services that may result are guided by four key principles:

- 1) [Aboriginal] peoples have the opportunity to participate fully in the planning, design and delivery and, where applicable, co-management of the education system at all levels.
- 2) The education system recognizes [Aboriginal] students are the children of peoples whose cultures are, in many ways, different from those who established the school system. These differences which may include learning styles, language and worldview, must be reflected in curriculum, programs, teaching methods and climate in the schools attended by [Aboriginal] children.
- 3) There is a coordination of efforts to meet the needs of [Aboriginal] students in the communities in which they live. There is ongoing consultation and cooperation between and among federal and provincial governments and their agencies, local education and community development authorities.

- 4) Programs to improve the success of [Aboriginal] students in school are focused primarily at the school community level. (Saskatchewan Learning, 1989: 5).<sup>4</sup>

Through the years, a number of related policies have also been developed, especially with regard to community schools, Aboriginal languages, special education, and equity in education. Recognizing that, although some valuable progress had been made through the implementation of these policies, the educational needs of First Nations and Métis students in the provincial system had still not been realized, the government released a complementary policy framework in 2003 ("Building Partnerships: First Nations and Métis People in the Provincial Education System". See Saskatchewan Learning, 2003.) This framework was developed through the involvement of various representatives and other individuals throughout the educational community, including officials from the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) and the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan (MNS). It includes five basic goals:

- improved supports and educational outcomes for First Nations and Métis students;
- shared management and governance in the provincial education system;
- high quality learning programs for *all students*. (Emphasis added. Part of this goal is to ensure that "Aboriginal content and perspectives [should be] integral to all subject areas so that all children and youth gain knowledge, insight and understanding".]
- compatible and transferable practices and reciprocal relationships between provincial and First Nations schools;
- a shared and harmonious future. (Saskatchewan Learning, 2003: 4-5.)

This framework also refers to a continuum of partnership agreements and shared responsibilities among the provincial education system and First Nations and Métis authorities that either already exist or could readily be established in the province including cooperative partner-

ships, co-management partnerships and co-governance partnerships. These partnerships as well as the overall policy framework respect the Aboriginal and Treaty rights of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

#### *Implementation of Aboriginal Education Policies*

On a provincial level, implementation of the policies and framework has been uneven. Much has been accomplished in the form of partnership agreements, curriculum renewal with a focus on Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, a major expansion of the Community Schools program (including a pre-kindergarten program), the development of many learning resources pertaining to Aboriginal education, the ongoing success of highly innovative Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs, the introduction of various instructional strategies and learning opportunities at the local level, the establishment or expansion of programs and program supports (e.g., an Aboriginal Elder/Outreach program), and the facilitation of numerous professional development opportunities for teachers and non-teaching school staff members (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004a: 7-10).

Less progress has been evident, however, in overcoming the longstanding racism and systemic barriers that many Aboriginal students experience and which significantly limit their academic achievement, social acceptance, and overall success in schools (St. Denis et. al., 1998: 53-56; St. Denis and Hampton, 2002: 8-10; Battiste and McLean, 2005: 2-3; Hodgson-Smith, 2005: 17). Some teachers also have a professional development need to improve their understanding about Aboriginal education generally, as well as to acquire a greater range of pedagogical skills that would affirm Aboriginal ways of knowing, teaching, and learning (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004b: 110; Hodgson-Smith, 2005: 19; Wotherspoon, 2004: 17).

Layered into this provincial context for Aboriginal education has been an approach to educational accountability that for the most part has carefully avoided the relentless zeal for standardized testing of students, ranking and rating of schools, and teacher testing that has plagued education systems elsewhere in Canada or in states south of the border. Saskatchewan has participated in some national and international student achievement testing programs, but not to the detri-

ment of provincial or local student assessment and evaluation programs or processes.

At least, not so far. Recently, however, government officials have signalled their disappointment with Saskatchewan students' results on the tests associated with the School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The government has announced a new set of "Three 'Rs'" (responsiveness, relevance, and results) that are intended to make the education system more accountable, especially by directing more attention to instruction and student outcomes in subject areas that are associated with post-secondary entrance requirements, transition-to-work skills, and perceived labour market needs.<sup>5</sup>

#### TWO STEPS FORWARD, THREE STEPS BACK: KEY DILEMMAS AND CONTRADICTIONS OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

The Saskatchewan government's strategy is aimed at "solving" an apparent cluster of socio-economic problems. Too many students, especially off-reserve First Nations and Métis students, are not achieving at acceptable levels in subjects such as math and the sciences. Too many of these students are leaving school before completion of grade 12. Too many of these students fail to obtain gainful employment. And too many job openings, particularly in the skilled trades, will go unfilled in the future as the baby boom generation retires, leading to major difficulties in the economy.

By taking steps to make the provincial education system more accountable and by promoting the "new Three 'Rs'", the government hopes to "engage" all students in schools (if not in their education), improve the province's national and international standings regarding student achievement scores, and deal with a supposedly looming labour shortage by funnelling students, especially Aboriginal students it would seem, into certain types of employment.

#### *The globalization context*

The Saskatchewan government's approach to accountability appears to be evolving in ways that are consistent with what has already taken place in

other provinces or countries. As documented extensively in the research literature, this kind of push for ever-more accountability in education may be understood as a manifestation of much broader globalization developments that involve the privatization, deregulation, and de-professionalization of the welfare state and the incremental commodification of publicly funded education (Froese-Germain, 2005: 57; Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2004: 4-10; Kohn, 2000: 3; Sacks, 1999: 68-93).

Part of the problem is that accountability is becoming defined in fairly narrow terms that may be appropriate in a business setting (e.g., performance or achievement scores, "client" satisfaction, the ranking of institutions), but are not congruent with the goals and values of a complex public sector service that, on the surface at least, is supposed to meet highly diverse educational responsibilities and community expectations, respect and affirm students' cultures, respond to the unique qualities and needs of individual students, and nurture each student's growth as a whole person. Moreover, publicly funded education is supposed to be a shared responsibility in which students, parents, teachers, administrators, elected officials, and entire communities recognize that they each must do their part to create an educational environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. This principle of shared responsibility should be accompanied by a commitment to shared accountability, broadly defined. Unfortunately, that commitment is typically overlooked by proponents of the so called "accountability revolution" that is now well underway in Canada, the United States, and elsewhere. In this revolution, it would appear that the only people, other than students, who actually seem to be held accountable are teachers.

#### DILEMMAS AND CONTRADICTIONS

The implications of these developments for Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan are multi-faceted and may be instructive for educators in other provinces. Our view is that accountability within a publicly funded education system is always necessary, but a reductionist approach that equates accountability with tougher student performance benchmarks, standardized test results, and student outcomes is fraught with too many dilemmas and contradictions to benefit Aboriginal education (at least insofar as how this concept has been articulated earlier in this paper).

A fundamental difficulty is that the assumptions and biases that are typically integral to these accountability models (e.g., a worldview that reflects the values and beliefs of the dominant culture, an ethic of competitiveness, a standardized definition and operationalization of students' "success" or "progress", the ranking and rating of individuals and social institutions, a fragmented and technical approach to teaching and learning, etc.) are not congruent with Indigenous knowledge or the norms and values of many Aboriginal cultures. As noted by Melnechenko and Horsman (1998: 7), for example, "success in one culture may not be defined the same as it is in another. It is the different people involved in the students' education who have different views of success that constitutes its meaning. Aboriginal communities often define success as mastering a curriculum and retaining cultural heritage. A European culture measures success in school by measuring academic achievement."

Other dilemmas and contradictions that technical-managerial (Biesta, 2004: 234)<sup>6</sup> or "outcomes" accountability models pose for Aboriginal education include the following:

1. At the same time that many educators and parents have expressed growing concerns about the educational merits of the "accountability revolution" that has taken hold in a number of Canadian jurisdictions, Aboriginal education (and the comparisons between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students regarding academic achievement levels) is being used to justify the implementation of more outcomes-based models of accountability. The main rationale for the public policy commitment to this view of accountability<sup>7</sup> is that supposedly the achievement levels of Aboriginal students will improve over time, thereby enabling more individuals to make successful transitions to post-secondary programs and/or the workforce.

Two implications of this rationale are especially problematic. The first is that there seems to be an assumption that progress in socio-economic status and equity within a society are, if not solely, a result of improved achievement scores.

What this perspective minimizes or even overlooks (some might say intentionally) are the kinds of systemic factors that have constructed and perpetuated existing inequities (Kohn, 2000: 38-40). In the context of Aboriginal education, a key factor has been the historical marginalization of Indigenous peoples' knowledge, histories, and experiences.

The second implication of the rationale for a greater emphasis on academic achievement results or outcomes is that it reinforces the notion that Aboriginal education either is or should be only about the instruction of Aboriginal students. Unfortunately, the rich potential for Aboriginal education to become an important process for meaning-making and cultural bridging, and to offer an invaluable lived experience for all students – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – is greatly diminished. Instead, the focus turns towards the education of “underachieving” Aboriginal students in which the main goal is to bring these individuals “up to par” with their non-Aboriginal peers, particularly in the high profile subject areas of mathematics, the sciences, and English or French literacy/language arts.

2. The class- and gender-based inequities, along with racist assumptions found in many standardized tests and testing procedures have been well documented in the research literature (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2004: 13-14; Kohn, 2000: 36; Sacks, 1999: 113). Moreover, these kinds of evaluation tools and methods tend to examine aspects of learning that are readily quantifiable, thereby inadvertently diminishing the value of students' critical and creative thinking skills, social skills, and other learning “outcomes” that are much more difficult to measure (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2004: 11; Jones, 2004: 585).
3. A nearly exclusive focus on academic performance outcomes and results in the predominant accountability models diverts attention from learning processes and, in the context of

Indigenous knowledge, the ethical dimension of knowing. This approach also often fails to take into consideration the highly individualized and differentiated opportunities to learn that are typically evident among a classroom of students and which affect achievement levels.

4. Accountability models sometimes inadvertently create what may be understood as a dilemma of negative reports. If members of historically oppressed or marginalized population groups in a society perform relatively poorly on an accountability measure, how should those results be reported? Should negative results be reported at all? On the one hand, a report may prompt action to address the inequities that underlie the results. On the other hand, these kinds of reports may further contribute to the stereotypes and stigmatization that are experienced by the group in question, especially when the reports are unaccompanied by any critical analysis of the biases, ideological assumptions, and political motives that are associated with the accountability model being used.
5. An “outcomes” based accountability environment that is characterized by standardized student achievement testing may have detrimental consequences – intended and unintended – for teachers' professional identity and practice. This culture of testing too often leads to a relentless criticism of teachers' professional judgment and competence. It can frustrate teachers' efforts to act in the best educational interests of individual students and contribute to the over-simplification (particularly in the news media) of education, students' needs, and teachers' roles. Given the complexities of Aboriginal education, in which teachers are trying to adapt their teaching practice in ways that respect and affirm multiple worldviews, values, and norms, this is especially problematic.

Aboriginal teachers may find themselves in a particularly awkward predicament, both professionally and personally.

They are often burdened with an expectation on the part of many administrators and teaching colleagues that they are the de facto experts regarding First Nations and Métis cultures and histories and that they should take a leadership role in all aspects of Aboriginal education (St. Denis et.al., 1998: 4-6; Bouvier, 2004: 39). To resist these inappropriate and often overwhelming expectations takes considerable courage.

At the same time, however, Aboriginal teachers are given the message (sometimes none too subtly) that if they do not show leadership on Aboriginal education initiatives, no one else will. This dilemma is compounded by an accountability environment where what is "really important" are certain subjects (mathematics, the sciences, and language arts/literacy), not Aboriginal education.

For many Aboriginal as well as non-Aboriginal teachers, perhaps the most distressing aspects of the testing culture may be the negative effects on their everyday classroom activities and especially on the relationships that they form with their students. As part of their work, most teachers realize how important it is to create a learning environment in which students feel safe – physically, psychologically and emotionally – and where trust is normative. Standardized testing can undermine this sense of safety and trust when students, particularly individuals who already feel marginalized in the education system, believe that the teacher's primary role is to evaluate or judge them. It is often difficult for young people to understand the differences between having their academic achievement evaluated and being judged as persons. The problem is compounded when, as is the case with many standardized formats, the testing criteria and processes are experienced by students (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) as being fairly arbitrary, externally imposed upon the classroom, a generally unpleasant ritual, and seemingly disconnected from their future learning activities.

A related dilemma is that in this kind of environment the teachers themselves begin to feel that they are not trusted, not only by some students, but also by parents, employers, and the general public. Can teachers feel safe about their jobs when there is so much pressure to improve students' test scores and, in some jurisdictions, to rank and rate schools accordingly? Is it safe for teachers to take risks in their work, and in the context of Aboriginal education to explore different worldviews, new forms of knowledge, and alternative perspectives? Can they continue to act on their ideals as teachers – the "heart of teaching" that motivated them to enter the profession and guides their work with the whole child – when the political focus is on academic results, results, results? Are they trusted to demonstrate professional accountability by assessing their students' learning in constructive ways that facilitate further growth (Jamison, 2002: 34-37)?

Or does the culture of testing demoralize everyone who is directly involved and foster cynicism within the education system? Does it produce technocratic teachers – Aboriginal as well as non-Aboriginal – who must conform to the values and logic of functional (means-ends) rationality (e.g., technical efficiency, effectiveness, quantifiable achievement, cost/benefit analysis, specialization of roles) at the expense of the kinds of non-functional values (e.g., meaningfulness, compassion, creativity, empathy, joy) that many teachers see as essential to their work and everyday relationships with students? To adapt Weber's (1958: 182) "iron cage" analogy, are teachers becoming "specialists without spirit, professionals without heart"?

#### CONCLUSION: THE PROMISE AND THE CHALLENGE

Taken together, these dilemmas and contradictions raise some important questions about the future of both Aboriginal education and accountability processes. For Aboriginal education, one cumulative effect of these

difficulties that we have identified may be to diminish and distort its full potential. A key promise of Aboriginal education is that it can honour, respect, and in many ways protect the “wholeness” of Indigenous knowledge and Aboriginal cultures. At the level of the individual, this promise has particular significance for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students, but as we have suggested, non-Aboriginal students would also benefit greatly from having a deep understanding of this knowledge.

At the societal level, the other major promise in Aboriginal education, broadly conceptualized, is that it can point the way out of the increasingly rigid socio-economic and psychological constraints – the “iron cage” of functional rationality and instrumentality – that characterize the dominant and global economic order, publicly as well as privately funded education systems (as demonstrated by the heightened focus on “education as job training,” “raising the bar of student achievement levels” and so on) and even many aspects of personal relationships. When fully realized, Aboriginal education can offer insights into alternative values and norms, as well as different ways of experiencing physical, social, and political worlds and relating as human beings to “place” and other people.

We are not suggesting that Aboriginal worldviews and cultures are inherently superior, either cognitively or normatively, to those of other societies. Nor do we hold to a sentimental or utopian notion about the practical limitations of Aboriginal education (or any form of education, for that matter) in serving as a catalyst for social change. Rather, our point is that Aboriginal education is one important process through which individuals from very different backgrounds, especially young persons, can respectfully engage the pluralism of modern life, “create” a space between the Indigenous and Western worlds, the separation between cultures and worldviews” (Ermine, 2005: 1), and direct more attention to the inequities and complex human needs of a rapidly evolving global society.

If the promise of Aboriginal education is to be acted upon, a major challenge will be to overcome or at least minimize the dilemmas and contradictions that stem from the accountability movement. At the same time, there is a need to withstand the fairly powerful political pressures (some of which appear to have the support of some First Nations, Métis, and Inuit leaders in response to the often overwhelming inequities and pressing economic realities that Aboriginal peoples experience) that are

associated with the accountability movement and which threaten, whether intentionally or not, to reduce Aboriginal education within Saskatchewan and other provinces into becoming little more than yet another “jobs training” instrument or an elective in a secondary school curriculum. In this environment, even the appropriateness of Aboriginal curricula may continue to undergo unusually intense scrutiny and screening from officials and educators who apply the narrowly defined standards of the “accountability-as-standardized-testing” model. As some critics have noted, “this aggressive gate-keeping of ‘standards’ has repeatedly challenged the legitimacy of Aboriginal knowledge and values, imposing an assimilative cultural agenda that is both pervasive and coercive” (Castellano, Davis, and Lahache, 2000: 251).

But perhaps there is an opportunity here that still needs to be explored. The dilemmas and contradictions that we have identified pose a challenge not only for Aboriginal education, but also for the future of accountability. Other critiques of the results-oriented testing model of accountability have highlighted its shortcomings and short sightedness. The fundamental incompatibility between this type of model and the philosophy of Aboriginal education, broadly defined, lends additional weight to the questioning of what has become the dominant accountability model. Put differently, educational accountability as it is currently practiced may be facing a crisis of legitimacy. The Indigenous knowledge, values, and norms that are inherent to Aboriginal education could inform the development of meaningful alternatives that are, it is hoped, much more perceptive about the human qualities of education and the pluralism of modern societies.

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> It is important to keep in mind, however, that Aboriginal status is determined through the self-identification of students or their parents. Actual numbers of Aboriginal students in Saskatchewan will be higher than the official figures indicate since not all individuals choose to self-identify their status. It should also be noted that very few individuals in Saskatchewan self-identify as Inuit. For an analysis of the demographic changes taking place in Saskatchewan and the implications for Aboriginal education, see Carr-Stewart (2003).

<sup>2</sup> These facilities are administered, within the sphere of the federal government's jurisdiction, by First Nations or tribal councils and are part of the publicly funded provincial pre-K-12 education system.

<sup>3</sup> Meyer (2005: 54), for example, notes the following central tenets of Hawaiian Indigenous epistemology:

1. Knowledge that endures is a spiritual act that animates and educates.
2. We are earth and our awareness of how to exist with it is an extension of this idea.
3. Our senses are culturally shaped, offering us distinct pathways to reality.
4. Knowing something is bound to how we develop a relationship with it.
5. Function is vital with regard to knowing something.
6. Intention shapes our language and creates our reality.
7. Knowing is embodied and in union with cognition.

<sup>4</sup> As the policy from which the four principles in this excerpt are taken was written in 1989, some of the language and phrasing used may be somewhat outdated. For many years, the Department of Learning has had a provincial advisory committee (currently known as the Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee) that is comprised of a broad range of representatives from the educational community, including First Nations and Métis educational organizations. Among its other functions, this committee works to ensure that policy is kept current and that, through its reports and recommendations to the provincial government, new policy and program needs are addressed. (See Saskatchewan Learning, 2004a.)

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the overview of the new "Three 'Rs'" in the Department of Learning's publication, *School<sup>PLUS</sup> Progress* (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Max Weber's (1964: 117) analysis of the formal (means-ends) rationality and instrumentality that underlies the structure and routine operations of most social institutions (including educational institutions) and that characterizes much of modern life, is instructive here. Karl Mannheim extended this work and concluded that a functional rational "mentality" involves the development of generalized standards, along with a focus on technical efficiency, effectiveness, performance criteria, cost/benefit analysis, and so on, not only in the marketplace, but in other institutions as well. (See Karl Mannheim, *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction*, 1940. New York: Harcourt Brace.) What may be called technical-managerial accountability models in education are generally based, though not necessarily consciously so, upon these kinds of functional rational values and norms.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Richards and Vining's (2004: 19-20) call for strengthened standards and province-wide tests in core subjects for all students and for "the prime minister and the premiers to rethink their Aboriginal policy priorities and raise the importance accorded to education outcomes" (p. 23).

<sup>8</sup> The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2005: 1), for example, has recently announced that a priority in the area of "Aboriginal education" is "to find new and varied ways of working together to improve the outcomes of Aboriginal students in both the elementary-secondary and postsecondary education systems"

# Education's Iron Cage

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Rita Bouvier

Véronique Brouillette

Raewyn Connell

Nathalie Duceux

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Ken Jones

Bruce Karlenzig

Stan Karp

Larry Kuehn

George Martell

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Salim Vally

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