ARTICLE

Disrupting marginality through educational research: A wayfinding conversation to reorient normative power relations within Indigenous contexts

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Abstract

This article explores Deborah Stone's (1997) work regarding the types of language (specifically: symbols, numbers, causes, interests, and decisions) used to define and portray policy problems; and provides insightful discussion of the dynamics/complexity of such language within the context of an Indigenous educational initiative called the Pimacihowin Project. In becoming fluent in this type of language a researcher can learn to view educational policy problems from multiple perspectives. Stone's work questions the ontological status of our own analytic concepts and reflects upon moral relativism. This analysis of insights gained from Stone's work adopts a moral perspective, one grounded in social justice. Exploration of locally developed educational programs such as the Pimacihowin Project can provide great insight into culturally responsive pedagogy that is rethinking education, disrupting marginality, and meeting the needs of the communities that they serve.

Introduction

Education has played a significant role in creating, maintaining, and more recently challenging the power relations positioning the dominant relations of the global north over the global south. Colonial powers have left a long legacy of educational paradigms within the colonised territories of Canada. This legacy is reflected within the language and perspectives that have been used in examining policy problems, including those within the education system. As teachers we strive to implement evidence-based culturally responsive practices; however, there has been "a relative silencing of Indigenous voices in the research literature" (Mellor and Corrigan, 2004, p.49). As educational researchers we need to examine the perspectives developed through the language of the polis (i.e., body of citizens; Stone, 1997) in order to re-evaluate our practices. We have a collective responsibility to engage in ethical educational research privileging Indigenous[1] voices and experiences (Heppner, 2020). Research does not occur in a vacuum, which is why we need to examine the cultures and environments it is situated within. Wayfinding is the way in which we engage with, and understand, those contexts. Disorientation is a common occurrence as we enter into unfamiliar locations/experiences.

> "Getting lost and finding our way is a process, and often those initial orientations drive our view of a place. Disorientation is a necessary part of getting to know or understand a location. The way it begins to color our interaction with a space, is important to becoming interested in and invested in the space. Wayfinding provides a way to connect these disparate observations into a cohesive whole that can in turn color the act of research. Those…disorientations will colour our perception of a location as we conduct research. Wayfinding pushes for reorientation." (Strantz, 2016, p.23)

Thus, in the spirit of engaging in a *wayfinding conversation* this article seeks to disrupt marginality by rethinking and challenging the language/perspectives that are implicit within our historical experiences with Aboriginal people; and discusses how privileging Indigenous voice through research in Indigenous educational contexts can assist us in *finding our way* as we engage in research guided by the advice from Indigenous Elders to "*do it in a good way*" (Ball and Janyst, 2008, p.35; emphasis in original).

In the book, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*, Deborah Stone's (1997) analysis of policy offers considerable insight for those studying 'potential impact' and 'implications' of an educational initiative. The choice of the word *paradox* immediately alerts a reader to the self-contradictory nature of policy and sets the stage for adopting a critical perspective. Stone's work is used as the foundation for the analysis in this article because she rejects the misguided notion that educational policy/programs can be framed by rational, analytical, and scientific methods arguing that this approach ignores our moral intuitions and emotional feelings. Morals and emotions play a significant role in the way people view a situation as one thing rather than another (therefore drawing attention to one objective at the expense of another). Discussion of insights gained will be situated

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[1] Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. (2019) defined the following terms:
-*First Nation(s)*: "a term used to identify Indigenous peoples of Canada who are neither Métis nor Inuit" (p.8).
-*Aboriginal Peoples*: the "plural noun, used in the Constitution Act 1982 [and thus offensive to some groups], includes…First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples…" (p.7).
-*Indigenous Peoples*: a "collective noun for First Nations, Inuit, Métis and [the term that is] growing in popularity in Canada" (p.11).

within an educational initiative, the Pimacihowin Project, in order to discuss Stone's ideas within a meaningful, real-life context.

The Pimacihowin Project

The Pimacihowin Project has been developed from within the community to address community needs of a First Nation reserve located in a central province in Canada. Culturally, the people of this First Nation have strong ties to local Metis and speak the Willow Cree language. Traditional activities (such as hunting, fishing, and traditional ceremonies) are practiced, as well there is considerable involvement in recreation and sporting activities. In 2015, it was noted that 326 homes were on-reserve and that 159 new homes were needed over the next 20 years.

It was this need for housing that first inspired the Pimacihowin Project. Sheldon Couillonneur (president of the project and Superintendent of Treaty Six Education Council) identified a 'First Nation housing crisis' as 'the why?' of the initiative (Couillonneur, personal communication). This need was reaffirmed in the First Nation's community development plan indicating a need for new housing and renovations on current housing due to flooding over the past five years. Couillonneur combined this community need with a community priority of preparing the youth for work success (i.e., training for jobs, building capacity in current employees, providing training and post-secondary opportunities, helping members access trades and labour markets, etc.). In fact, Pimacihowin is a Cree word meaning 'to make a living' (Pimacihowin Project, 2015).

The Pimacihowin Project (2015) is a fully integrated program that uses modular programming to educate and train youth (ages sixteen to twenty-one) who are interested in pursuing a career in the trades industry. They are provided with instruction in carpentry, electrical, plumbing, welding, mould remediation, window installation, and general home renovation. Using a mobile unit (consisting of a van, trailer and necessary tools), "youth travel within the First Nation providing a community service to members dealing with poor housing conditions, mould exposure, and inadequate living conditions" (Pimacihowin Project, 2015, p.2). The renovation jobs within the community are prioritised via collaboration between the project director, the housing coordinator, and the public works director.

With a focus on collaborative partnerships and local community engagement, the Pimacihowin Project is a unique educational initiative. The grass-roots approach allowed for the community to shape the direction of the program and focus on community needs, while building capacity and self-sufficiency. The Pimacihowin Project Inc. (2015) noted that, "Since the implementation of this project the youth have shown increases in attendance, engagement, and completion of modules" (p.2). Examination of such a program would offer considerable insight into culturally responsive education (i.e., education that is grounded in local culture and that emphasises the reciprocal relationship existing among an educational community; Nicol, Archibald and Baker, 2013).

Due to the political nature of Indigenous education in Canada, Deborah Stone's (1997) discussion of the paradox of policy (represented by symbols, numbers, causes, interest and decisions) recommends that we carefully examine how issues in the polis may be represented; and more specifically what insights might her descriptions, dynamics and complexity of constructs offer to someone studying

'potential impact' and various types of 'implications' of an educational program or initiative such as the Pimacihowin Project. Thus, this article will examine these complexities.

Policy Paradox: Implications for Research

Stone (1997) describes how problems are defined within politics and provides insightful discussion of the dynamics and complexity of each of the constructs discussed. The constructs she explores refer to the type of language used to define and portray policy problems, more specifically: symbols, numbers, causes, interests, and decisions. An examination of each of these in turn as it applies to the Pimacihowin Project provides insight into the exploration of the potential impact of this educational program. It is important to note that Stone's work questions "the ontological status of our analytic concepts" (as cited in an interview with van Ostaijen and Jhagroe, 2015, p.130) and reflects upon moral relativism. As Stone herself puts her particular normative criteria into her own research, and indeed encourages her students "to find and explore their own moral values and to exert them and to be true to themselves in the work that they do" (as cited in van Ostaijen and Jhagroe, 2015, p.131); so too must this analysis of insights gained from Stone's work adopt a moral perspective, one grounded in social justice.

Symbols

Stone's (1997) discussion on symbols deals with the words and literary devices used in politics to define problems. Symbols are anything (e.g., action, object, event, etc.) that stand for something else (e.g., a particular idea or quality, etc.). The power of symbols lies in their ability to capture the imagination, shape our perceptions, and suspend scepticism. "Those effects are what make symbols political devices. They are means of influence and control, even though it is often hard to tell with symbols exactly who is influencing whom" (Stone, 1997, p.137). According to Stone (1997) there are four aspects of symbolic representation that are especially significant in defining policy problems, these are: narrative stories, synecdoches, metaphors, and ambiguity.

Narrative stories

Stone (1997) revealed that definitions of policy problems typically have a narrative structure; "that is, they are stories with a beginning, a middle, and an end, involving some change or transformation. They have heroes and villains and innocent victims, and they pit the forces of evil against the forces of good" (p.138). Stories are advantageous in politics because "their drama is emotionally compelling, and sometimes blinding" (Stone, 1997, p.134); they can "hold a powerful grip on our imaginations and our psyches because they offer the promise of resolution for scary problems" (Stone, 1997, p.137). In reviewing historical representations of Aboriginal people in the Canadian news media (between mid-19th and late 20th century), Harding (2006) identified "an epic struggle between forces of good (White people) and evil (aboriginal people) [and] that this meta-narrative has informed relations between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people since first contact" (p.233). According to Stone (1997), two broad story lines are predominant in policy politics: stories of decline (variants include the story of progress-is-only-an-illusion and the story of stymied progress), and stories of helplessness and control (which include the variants conspiracy story and blame-the-victim story).

Stories of decline generally read like this: "In the beginning, things were pretty good. But they got worse. In fact, right now, they are nearly intolerable. Something must be done" (Stone,1997, p.138). In studying the potential impact of the Pimacihowin Project, the research methodology must be grounded within a sociocultural framework. Vygotsky (1978), founder of sociocultural theory, recognised the sociocultural influence on learning and argued that development is embedded within specific historical, cultural contexts. Knowledge is seen as being constructed at the intersection of socially situated activity, individuals, and culture (Vygotsky, 1978). Bruner (1987) observed that Vygotsky's educational theory "is a theory of cultural transmission as well as a theory of development. For 'education' implies for Vygotsky not only the improvement of the *individual's* potential, but the historical expression and growth of the human culture from which Man springs" (p.1-2; emphasis in original). Therefore, the sociohistoric implications of forced assimilative education on the Indigenous people of any First Nations must be understood, and it represents a story of decline. In short, Indigenous people lived for thousands of years in Canada, each band/tribe with their own rich spiritual, cultural, educational practices, and languages (Battiste, 2013). However, with colonisation, Indigenous students have been subjected to a forced assimilation plan – their heritage and knowledge suppressed and disregarded by the education system for more than a century (Battiste, 2013). The lasting impact of colonialism and the (re)education efforts of residential schools underscore all current education practices involving Indigenous peoples in Canada (Malec, 2014). Education has not served Indigenous people well, as is evident by the considerable achievement gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (e.g. Alberta Education, 2008; Saskatoon Public Schools, 2013).

Stories of helplessness and control often read like this: "The situation is bad. We have always believed that the situation was out of our control, something we had to accept but could not influence. Now, however, let me show you that in fact we can control things" (Stone, 1997, p.142). The narrative variants of conspiracy story and blame-the-victim story warrant greater examination within the sociohistorical context of Indigenous education. Stone (1997) explained that conspiracy stories "always reveal that harm has been deliberately caused or knowingly tolerated, and so evoke horror and moral condemnation" (p.143). Battiste (2013) asks that we,

> "Imagine the consequence of a powerful ideology that positions one group as superior and gives away First Nations peoples' lands and resources and invites churches and other administrative agents to inhabit their homeland, while negating their very existence and finally removing them from the Canadian landscape to lands no one wants." (p.23)

The endings of these stories take the form of "a call to wrest control from the few who benefit at the expense of many" (Stone, 1997, p.143). We can see this story played out as Indigenous people have called for sovereignty (the inherent, absolute right/power to govern; Alfred, 2001), self-government (ability to act independently and govern their own internal matters; INAC, 2015), and self-determination (the right of Indigenous people to determine their political future and to freely pursue their economic/cultural development; Frideres and Gadacz, 2001). Control over education is integral to the cultural and linguistic survival of Indigenous people (Harding, 2006). Studying the Pimacihowin Project

can provide insight into an educational initiative attempting to redress assimilative educational practices and engage in the process of decolonising education.

Blame-the-victim stories move us "from the realm of fate to the realm of control, but locates control in the very people who suffer the problem" (Stone, 1997, p.144). For example, a teacher in the Solomon et al. (2005) study (examining racism and white privilege) commented that,

> "As a white male … I grew up believing that if someone works hard then they will be able to achieve almost anything. I assumed that people who achieved little were fully responsible for their situation, ignoring the fact that not everyone in this society starts off on the same playing field. I did not take into account that members of the dominant society are privileged and that others have been disadvantaged." (p.154)

"Cultural chauvinism" is often embedded within policies, such as Aboriginal child welfare practices; and despite much advocating for change by Indigenous people and supporters, policy continues to "fall back on old stereotypes, such as *aboriginal-as-victim*" (Harding, 2006, p.225; emphasis in original). Stories of control hold the assertion that there is choice (Stone, 1997). Choices are, however, effected by the harsh social conditions that face Indigenous people living within marginalised communities (Lund, 2006).

Applying Lund's (2006) recommendation to unlearn our own racism can offer insight into studying an initiative such as the Pimacihowin Project. O'Neil Green et al. (2007) suggested that in gaining awareness of our personal values, assumptions, and biases regarding diverse populations or issues pertinent to the study we can improve our cultural competency. Peshkin (1988) noted, "one's subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed" (p.17). He recommended actively seeking out our own subjectivity as the research data is being gathered; to be "aware of it in process, mindful of its enabling and disabling potential" (p.18). The stories of the Aboriginal Peoples in Canada are emotionally compelling. Harding (2006) noted that, "In the future, one of the greatest challenges for aboriginal people and proponents of a social justice is ensuring that everyone's story is told and that the historical context of important issues is sketched in" (p.231). Studying the potential impact of the Pimacihowin Project will ensure that the success stories are told, and areas for future successes explored.

Synecdoches
A *synecdoche* is a figure of speech in which a whole concept is represented by one of its parts. According to Stone (1997), this is a common form of symbolism in politics where "examples are offered up as 'typical instances' or 'prototypical cases' of a larger problem" (p.145). Stone (1997) noted that the synecdoche is a politically useful strategy because it enables a problem to be seen as concrete, reducing the scope of the problem and making it more manageable. This enables a personal connection as individuals are then able to identify with the people or the problem situation. In an interview with Ostaijen and Jhagroe (2015) Stone commented that,

> "people have a self-interested side and an altruistic side…Altruism is a very important value for people, and there is a deep emotional urge to help other people. And if we can't express that through politics, we don't connect with political life." (p.132)

Stone (1997) cautioned, however, that the synecdoche "can suspend our critical thinking with its powerful poetry. The strategy of focusing on a part of a problem, particularly one that can be dramatized as a horror story, thus is likely to lead to skewed policy" (p.147).

In studying the implications of a program such as the Pimacihowin Project, a researcher must be cautious in attributing, for example, all successes to impact of the program itself. There are many factors that contribute to the success or lack of success of any initiative. Human behaviour is dynamic, multifaceted and highly contextual (Merriam, 2009). Guba and Lincoln (1981) warned that readers can mistake a study as a complete account of the phenomenon under study: "That is, they tend to masquerade as a whole when in fact they are but a part – a slice of life" (p.377). However, the results from a case study, for example, can "at least in part *shed light* on a larger class of cases (a population)" (Gerring, 2007, p.20; emphasis added); and are performed with the purpose of "*drawing lessons* in the form of conclusions that apply beyond the single case and explain other outcomes in addition to the one studied directly" (Ruzzene, 2012, p.99; emphasis added).

Metaphors

A metaphor is a word or phrase for one thing that is used to describe another thing in order to show/suggest an implied comparison. According to Stone (1997), metaphors used within politics not only draw comparisons "but in a more subtle way they usually imply a whole narrative story and a prescription for action" (p.148). She draws attention to Rein and Schon's term "normative leap" in describing the jump from a metaphor's description to prescription; and "because policy metaphors imply prescription, they are a form of advocacy" (Stone, 1997, p.148).

A metaphor recently used by Indigenous people to indicate the importance of education to their communities (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2008) was made by Chief Barry Ahenakew: "Education is our buffalo. It is our new means of survival" (as cited in Christensen, 2000, p.xi). However, a significant question was asked by Mombourquette and Bruised Head (2014): "What should that buffalo look like?" (p.107). A considerable amount of research calls for culturally responsive education (e.g., Berryman et al., 2014; Castagno and Brayboy, 2008; St. Denis, 2010) but the specifics have not been described well in the research literature. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) revealed that, "despite the painful experiences Aboriginal people carry with them from formal education systems, they still see education as the hope for the future, and they are determined to see education fulfil its promise" (p.434). A study of the Pimacihowin Project could provide insight into what the buffalo looks like in terms of a culturally responsive program in the trades.

Ambiguity

Stone's (1997) final feature of symbols, and the one she deems as most important, is ambiguity: the "ability of statements, events, and experiences to have more than one meaning…It allows people to agree on laws and policies because they can read different meanings into the words" (p.161). Stone (1997) refers to ambiguity as "the 'glue' of politics" (p.161). The power of ambiguity lies in that it "enables the transformation of individual intentions and actions into collective results and purposes" (Stone, 1997, p.157); it unites individuals who, for different reasons, would benefit from the same policy.

A seemingly innocuous term provides an example; that of "best practices" in education. There is no contestation that quality education is needed to address the "woefully inadequate" (Berryman et al., 2014, p.12) learning outcomes for Indigenous youth. Indeed, a collective cry for effective education has occurred for many different reasons (e.g., social, economic, etc.). However, the term begs the question: best practices for whom? Ball (2004) commented that,

> "Indeed, the jargon of the day promotes the ideal of "best practices," as if there might be models of training or services that can be transported to varying contexts with the expectation of "best" outcomes regardless of the state of readiness, resources, values, or goals of people in each new setting." (pp.458-459)

Researchers (and educators) must become aware of the many promising practices in education that "reflect the diversity of human experience, individual and collective goals, and social ecologies rather than searching for 'best practices' with universal applicability" (Ball, 2004, p.459). Chandler and Lalonde (2003) suggested that the knowledge and practices of Indigenous communities be shared laterally (i.e., from one community to another), rather than incorporating the typical top-down Euro-western arrangement. They noted that,

> "a careful assay of community successes and failures would make it possible to identify and hopefully enlist a wide variety of unrecognized and underutilized cultural resources…this would go an important distance toward determining what really counts as 'best practices' that are worthy of 'exchange.'" (Chandler and Lalonde, 2003, p.5)

In studying the circumstances and implications of the Pimacihowin Project, the intent of the research would be to represent the perspectives of the people involved in, or impacted by, the project. A rich description of the case could encourage this lateral exchange of Indigenous knowledge and success stories. Stake (2005) commented that it is the reader of the case study who determines what can be applied to his/her context. The researcher portrays his/her own understanding of events and relationships and "the reader, too, will add and subtract, invent and shape – reconstructing the knowledge in ways that leave it…more likely to be personally useful" (Stake, 2005, p.455). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the reader of the study seeks to make application elsewhere and knows "the sites to which transferability might be sought" (p.298). A careful examination of successes and challenges of the Pimacihowin Project could identify cultural resources that may be utilised within other Indigenous communities.

Numbers

Stone's (1997) discussion on numbers is about the language of counting; outlining how counting is political and by what means numerical strategies are used in defining problems. It is common to define a policy problem by measuring it; in fact, "Most policy discussions begin with a recitation of figures purporting to show that a problem is big or growing, or both" (Stone, 1997, p.163). However, as Stone (1997) noted, there are "many possible measures of any phenomenon and the choice among them depends on the purpose for measuring" (p.163-164).

Counting requires choices about categorising; that is, deciding what to include and exclude (Stone, 1997). In compiling results from statistical sources, Berryman et al. (2014) reported that only 22% of

the residents of Saskatchewan who identified as Aboriginal have a high school certificate or equivalent (a 4.9% percentage point difference from Saskatchewan residents not identified as Aboriginal). These numbers seem absolute; indeed in "our profoundly numerical contemporary culture, numbers are symbols of precision, accuracy, and objectivity" (Stone, 1997, p.176). However, Stone (1997) argues that "no matter how small and precisely defined a category is, it still masks variety among the objects or people or events it includes" (p.166). For example, the numbers do not take into consideration students who want to complete high school but are unable to do so because they cannot find childcare. Some Indigenous youth choose not to participate within western educational systems (e.g., Navajo youth dropped out of school as a strategy of resistance against the pressure to conform; Deyhle, 1995). Chandler and Lalonde (2003) report that it is common for social scientists to endorse a "'monolithic' view…by mistakenly imagining that it is possible to capture the diversity of a whole province's or country's aboriginal life in a single (often statistical) gaze … [and that a] summary statistic actually tells us nothing about any particular group or community" (p.3).

As Stone (1997) mentions, measuring "social phenomena differs from measuring physical objects because people, unlike rocks, respond to being measured" (p.177). This brings to mind the issue of bias within research. Knowing that he/she is being measured can change an individual's social behaviours by creating reactive effects (e.g., participants may present atypical behaviour, withhold information, or show themselves in the best possible light) (Angrosino and Rosenberg, 2011). "Measurement provokes people to 'play the role' and to present themselves as they want to be seen" (Stone, 1997, p.178). In addition, measurement may be linked to penalties and benefits and thus both participants and/or the researcher/measurer may manipulate the results (e.g., funding for the participants' program are dependent upon positive results, or the measurer may be rewarded for not finding too many instances of violations in a regulated firm). Understanding reactivity is important in research as it is an inseparable characteristic of social measurement (Stone, 1997).

Stone (1997) noted that when something is measured it creates awareness and people tend to take more notice of it and can lead to the desire for change. She gave an example where curricular reforms were the result of surveys of illiteracy and tests of students' knowledge. Indeed, the presentation of statistics describing the persistently low levels of educational attainment and income levels of Indigenous people in Saskatchewan in Berryman et al.'s (2014) study set the stage for such a call for reform. The Pimacihowin Project has been presented as a success story of reform and holds promise for future success. However, there exists a great deal of ambiguity in deciding what to 'count' when exploring implications of an educational program (e.g., What should be measured? How should it be classified?). Pimacihowin Project (2015) stated on their website, "Since the implementation of this project the youth have shown increases in attendance, engagement, and completion of modules" (p.2). In looking at the question of 'countability' one studying the program could certainly graph increases in attendance and completion of modules (being aware that other factors may affect these increases); but there is debate over whether it is possible to measure student engagement, and if so, whether current practices are valid, reliable measures (e.g., Parsons and Taylor, 2011).

Causes

Stone's (1997) discussion about causes is about the language used in defining problems based on cause, effect, and responsibility. Causal theories are stories of how a problem came into existence and they implicate control; "they locate responsibility and blame and assign the moral statuses of victims and perpetrators" (Stone, 1997, p.134). The sociohistoric landscape of colonial history represents a causal story of the plight of Indigenous people in Canada which is briefly summed up by Harding (2006):

> "In 1857, *An Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of the Indians* set the tone of the relationship between aboriginal people and Europeans that persists to this day. This legislation defined aboriginal people as 'wards' of the state – that is, consigned them to the status of children. Along with a number of other earlier colonial laws and policies, this law was incorporated into the 1876 *Indian Act*, which has governed the lives of aboriginal people to the present day." (p.226; emphasis in original)

Stone (1997) noted that in the "polis, causal stories need to be fought for, defended, and sustained" (p.202). An examination of the socioeconomic conditions of Indigenous people in Canada revealed "a level of development more closely resembling that of a third-world country" (Kendall, 2001, p.44). The causal factors associated with this underdevelopment are numerous and complex, including loss of land and sovereignty, lack of education, cultural genocide, and job market discrimination (Kendall, 2001). However, taking unemployment for example, some people assume that joblessness and resulting poverty of Indigenous people is "a reflection of inherent laziness and welfare dependency" (Kendall, 2001, p.45). Upon closer examination of Labour Force Participation Rates (percentage of individuals either working or actively seeking work) participation rates are not significantly different between Indigenous people and other Canadians; what is different is the lack of available employment opportunities (Kendall, 2001). Does the cause lie with the individual or with society at large? Harding (2006) noted that people often unhinge the present from the past and decontextualise the circumstances of the challenges Indigenous people face. Stone (1997) demonstrated that "there is choice in politics about which elements in a causal chain to focus upon" (p.216).

According to Stone (1997), public acceptance of a casual story is strongly influenced by the way it is framed in the news. Harding's (2006) examination of Canadian news revealed that the media play a significant role in disseminating racist ideology and in maintaining white dominance in Canada. He reported:

> "While devoting considerable attention to reporting on the extreme circumstances in which many contemporary aboriginal people live – poverty, alcoholism, crime, and suicide – news media simultaneously eschew any analysis of the socio-political context of these living conditions and the impact of Canada's long history of colonialism on aboriginal people. By unhinging the present from the past in its coverage of contemporary aboriginal issues, the news media perpetuate damaging stereotypes of aboriginal people and create a supportive environment for state structures and practices that reproduce material and social inequality between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people." (Harding, 2006, p.206)

Causal theories, Stone (1997) observes, do more than convincingly demonstrate cause, effect, and responsibility. Stone (1997) discusses four uses of causal argument. First, they can either protect or

challenge an existing social order (i.e., set of rules, institutions, and interests). This is illustrated in Harding's quote explaining how the media propagate stereotypes. Second, in identifying causal agents blame can be assigned and responsibility delegated for fixing the problem and compensating victims. An example of this is the government acknowledgement of harm and compensation settlement for survivors of residential schools (INAC, 2010, 2016). Third, causal theories can "legitimize certain actors as 'fixers' of the problem, giving them new authority, power, and resources" (Stone, 1997, p.209). This role is exemplified by Mr. Sheldon Couillonneur, president of the Pimacihowin Project, who tackled the issues of housing crisis and student engagement; and who advocated for, and acquired, support and grants for the program. Fourth, new political alliances among individuals who perceive themselves to be harmed by the same problem can be created. This can be seen in the alliances and knowledge sharing of Indigenous people on an international level as they address the impact of colonisation on the educational outcomes for Indigenous youth (Berryman et al., 2014).

In applying Stone's (1997) discussion of causes to research investigating the potential impact of the Pimacihowin Project it is useful to review her quote from Aristotle, "Men do not think they know a thing till they have grasped the 'why' of it (which is to grasp its primary cause)" (as cited in Stone 1997, p.188). Causal theories are efforts to control understandings and images of difficulties regarding the problem definition. As recommended by Stone (1997), "Good political analysis [and indeed good research in general!] must attend to all the strategic functions of causal interpretation" (p.208).

Interests

Stone's (1997) discussion regarding interests is about the language of politics where problems are represented by two sides with competing interests. In the language of politics, interests are the active side of effects (effects being the existing consequences of actions, whether we are aware of them or not); interests, then, are "the result of people experiencing or imagining effects and attempting to influence them" (Stone, 1997, p.210). In politics, effects become important when they are translated into demands. Political scientists often differentiate between objective and subjective interests: "Objective interests are those effects that actually impinge on people, regardless of people's awareness of them; subjective interests, are of course, those things that people believe affect them" (Stone, 1997, p.211).

Stone (1997) asks that we consider how one would define an objective interest. One approach presumes that we can identify objective effects of a policy/situation (i.e., what happens to people as a result of an action/policy) and thus ascertain which actions/policies would serve people best. However, this "narrow idea of objective effects is problematic, because one person at one moment is affected by innumerable objective conditions, each of which has multiple effects" (Stone, 1997, p.212). Applying this to research, it must be noted that due to the complexity and situational context of human behaviour issues of reliability (i.e., the extent to which research findings can be replicated) is problematic within the social sciences (Merriam, 2009). As previously mentioned, research participants' actions may be influenced by the presence of the researcher; however responses can also be shaped by "factors within subjects themselves such as fatigue, motivation or anxiety, duration of recall, mood, attention span, state of health and whether or not they are in pain" (Brink, 1993, p.36). The social context within which

the data is gathered may also shape the participants' responses as individual behaviour varies with social circumstance (e.g., participants may provide different information in a group setting than when alone with the investigator) (Chenail, 2011). Rather than using the term 'reliability' qualitative researchers identify consistency or dependability as important (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Wolcott (2005) argued that, "fieldworkers do not try to make things happen at all, but whatever the circumstances, we most certainly cannot make them happen twice" (p.159). Thus, rather than attempt to replicate findings, qualitative researchers strive to show that the results are consistent with the data collected and are therefore dependable (Merriam, 2009).

Another approach to "defining objective interests is to identify essential human needs and assume that it is always in a person's interest to have those needs met and against his or her interests to have them denied" (Stone, 1997, p.212). And yet another approach is called "rationality under freedom [which] defines objective interests as what a person would want or prefer if he or she had experienced all the alternatives and were free to choose" (Stone, 1997, p.231). To illustrate challenges with these definitions we can look to the idea of education. Howe's (2011) study of educational completion rates of Indigenous residents in Saskatchewan revealed that higher education is associated with higher life-time earnings. Education might be objectively in a person's best interest, but not everyone would agree. For example, a young Navajo youth in Deyhle's (1995) study who "was in the top 10 percent of her class…turned down two college scholarships to stay home with her family on the reservation" (Deyhle, 1995, p.404). The youth explained the difficult choice she had to make:

> "If I go to college, I will get a job in the city and then I won't come back very often. When am I going to have time to spend with my grandmother learning about my culture? I feel that kind of resentment towards school. I feel cheated out of my own culture." (Deyhle, 1995, p.404)

Multiple variables might cause issue in the tightly controlled conditions of an experimental study. However, within qualitative research investigators see the value in discussing evolving issues and often make "'virtue of necessity' by actually trying to take advantage of serendipities and emerging problems. Thus, in addition to acknowledging issues, authors also explain how certain trade-offs and compromises could still have some value in the context of the research project" (Gibbert and Ruigorook, 2010, p.730). While studying the potential impact of an educational initiative, adaptability must be embraced and the lessons learned valued. Van der Wey (2001) noted that seemingly serendipitous experiences (occurring for her in a First Nations setting) can become meaningful events and provide the impetus for further learning.

Stone's (1997) examination of interests also includes discussion on representation: "the process by which interests are defined and activated in politics" (p.215). Stone (1997) notes the dual quality of representation: "representatives give expression to an interest by portraying an issue, showing how it affects people and persuading them that the portrait is accurate; and representatives speak for people in the sense of standing for them and articulating their wishes in policy debates" (p.215). The idea of representation has implications for research. Sandelowski (1986) stated that, " 'elite bias' is a particular problem in qualitative research because subjects who act as respondents or informants in studies are frequently the most articulate, accessible, or high-status members of their groups" (p.32). Creswell

(2007) noted that the less articulate, shy interviewee may provide insufficient data; representation, however, is necessary as it gives 'life to interests' (p.216).

Is it possible to determine objective effects of the Pimacihowin Project? As Stone (1997) remarks, "there is choice about which effects of any situation to focus upon – and we cannot focus on them all" (p.217). A detailed discussion of methodology used will define terms and measures and provide a rationale as to why these were chosen (Merriam, 2009). A clear chain of evidence is required to bring the reader from the initial research question to the conclusions drawn at the end (Gibbert and Rigrok, 2010). Qualitative research methods offer "a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon" (Merriam, 2009, p.50). Details of specific experiences (and their inherent subjectivity) with the Pimacihowin Project will afford insight into broader phenomenon related to the development of culturally responsive education.

Decisions

Stone's (1997) discussion on decisions revolves around how decisions made within politics are based on ambiguous, self-interested goals that are presented in such a way as to offer only one feasible option (e.g., various alternatives are not mentioned, focus is on one part of the causal chain while ignoring others, etc.). van Ostaijen and Jhagroe (2015) noted that Stone's work "focuses on policy and politics as cultural bargaining over values and ideas, instead of a rational process of decision-making" (p.127). Stone (1997) observed that the rational-analytic model (i.e., state explicit/precise goals, consider all possible alternatives and related courses of action, evaluate costs and benefits of each course of action, decide upon the course of action that will maximise total welfare) is seldom seen in politics; and that "portraying a problem as a decision is a way of controlling its boundaries: what counts as problematic and what does not, how the phenomenon will be seen by others, and how others will respond to it" (p.243). She recommends as audience or analyst (and we can include educational researcher) to always be on the lookout for Hobson's choices: when presented with an either/or 'free choice' to make, there is often only one thing being offered.

Stone (1997) identified that in decision-making "the way we think about problems is extremely sensitive to the language used to describe them" (p.249). Words influence people's evaluation of the world and are used within politics to control people's evaluation of policy alternatives. For example, Harding's (2006) examination of news language revealed that the "active biological racism of colonial times has given way to a passive and sanitized ethnocentrism characterized by a creed of 'identical treatment' which emphasizes equality of opportunity and cultural pluralism, while denying the existence of contemporary racist practices, attitudes and outcomes" (p.206). The decision to provide identical treatment is often seen as the solution to the problem; however, as Harding (2006) discusses, this ideology requires that "the past be unyoked from the present" and that in "exhibiting general *amnesia* about colonial history and its connection to the current state of affairs" (p.229; emphasis in original) (e.g., extreme socio-economic conditions) a response of denial of racism by modern elites is typified and embedded in terms of tolerance and equality. Dion (2005) noted that politicians and teachers continue to "resist an understanding of history that positions Aboriginal people as human agents actively resisting oppression by dominant Canadian society" (p.34).

As historically decisions have been made *for* Aboriginal people it is hardly a surprise that Canada's Aboriginal people,

> "are often suspicious or mistrustful of problem definitions and solution strategies that are invented in Ottawa or even in New York City … [and] lobbed into some aboriginal community from distant capitals, or parachuted down from some ivory tower …. Knowledge invented elsewhere and rudely transplanted root and branch in someone else's backyard is often and rightly understood to be a weapon wielded by those who have it against those who must suffer it." (Chandler and Lalonde, 2003, p.5)

The Aboriginal Capacity and Research Development Environment programs established within many Canadian provinces proposed the incorporation of Kirkness and Barnhardt's (2001) four 'r's – respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility – for developing academic initiatives and conducting research with Indigenous people (Ball and Janyst, 2008). Decisions regarding educational programs and research activities must take into account the principle of participation, "*Nothing about us without us*" (Ball, 2016, p.1; emphasis in original). As Ball and Janyst (2008) state:

> "Researchers must demonstrate new forms of engagement that restore power to Indigenous people in their dealings with mainstream institutions and individuals in the dominant culture, recognizing the rights of Indigenous peoples to make decisions regarding their children and families and to control the flow of information from them to researchers and from research to the public." (p.34)

Graveline (1998) asks that all educators "need to continue to challenge the Western paradigms that guide today's educational systems; continued resistance needs to be mounted" (p.39). As Stone (1997) explained, every action has unlimited consequences and there is no natural or correct way to decide upon which ones to evaluate; "Selection of what to include is both arbitrary and strategic. By simply including enough negative consequences to outweigh the positive ones, one can throw the decision one way, or reverse it by drawing the boundaries of consequences differently" (p.253). Thus, researchers studying educational initiatives such as the Pimacihowin Project must do so with awareness, collective responsibility and accountability (Kovach, 2005). Cree scholar, Kovach (2005) remarked that, "we can only go so far before we see a face – our Elder cleaning fish, our sister living on the edge in East Vancouver…our little ones in foster care - and hear a voice whispering, 'Are you helping us?'" (p.31). The overarching goal is to engage in ethical research with respect and integrity. Sharing the findings of such research will honour Indigenous "values of respect, kindness, and giving back to the community" (Kovach, 2009, p.140) so that it "can assist others" (Kovach, 2009, p.11).

Conclusion

In light of Stone's (1997) analysis it is evident that a blame-the-victim story represents the construct of student engagement within Indigenous education *(symbols)*. Raham (2010) stated that the "high school graduation rate for the Aboriginal lags 28% below the national average" (p.4) (*numbers*). Some see this as "a reflection of inherent laziness" (Kendall, 2001, p.45), others as a struggle against debilitating assimilative school practices (Berryman et al., 2014) (*causes*). The impact of disengagement becomes substantial as students enter the labour market:

"For those who enter the labour market, engagement is also a critical outcome. Many employers are less concerned with their workers' academic credentials than they are with whether they can work well with others, contribute new ideas and align themselves with the goals of the organization." (Willms, 2003, p.56) (*interests*)

Parsons and Taylor (2011) noted that even with the ambiguity and inherent difficulty in defining and measuring student engagement "as a leverage point for improving and transforming education" (p.28) it is still worth the effort. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD; 2006) stated that, "What happens today in education [i.e., educational decision-making] profoundly influences the lives of individuals and the health of whole communities for decades to come" (p.11) (*decisions*).

Taking into consideration Stone's analysis regarding the complexity and ambiguity inherent in the use of symbols, numbers, causes, interests, and decisions in the polis, we cannot accept the notion that there are objective criteria to measure that are external to the context. The rallying cry for 'evidence-based' educational research promotes a positivist position (the ideology that the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of an objective observer; Burrell and Morgan, 1979). In an interview, Stone commented that evidence-based research is important "if evidence means knowledge and understanding" (as cited in van Ostaijen and Jhagroe, 2015, p.133). Stone recommended that interpretive approaches to research (e.g., in-depth interviews, focus groups, participant observation, etc.) will allow researchers to "find out how people 'make meaning', how they interpret their own and other people's behaviour and the events that occur around them" (as cited in van Ostaijen and Jhagroe, 2015, p.133). Those adopting an interpretive paradigm seek to "understand what it is to be human and what meanings people attach to the events of their lives" (Grant and Giddings, 2002, p.16).

To conclude, the central theme of Stone's (1997) discussion of symbols, numbers, causes, interests, and decisions is that, "there is no universal, scientific, or objective method of problem definition" (p.134). Each of these constructs can be seen as social constructions of conflict. In becoming fluent in these languages a researcher can learn to view problems from multiple perspectives; and in doing so, "one can achieve an understanding of problems that is more comprehensive and more self-conscious and explicit about the values and interests any definition promotes" (Stone, 1997, p.135). Stone believes in "democracy with a small 'd'—the idea that all voices need to be heard, so get those voices at the table" (as cited in van Ostaijen and Jhagroe, 2015, p.131). An exploration of educational initiatives such as the Pimacihowin Project may provide great insight into culturally responsive education that is meeting the needs of the community that it serves. As researchers we find ourselves amid the stories we construct as we strive to make sense of our fields of study. Wayfinding conversations offer a means of locating ourselves, and indeed, provide a way to disrupt marginality by reorienting our perspectives regarding normative power relations within Indigenous contexts.

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