

One reservation that should be noted is that it is *a* Witsuwit'en view that is presented, not *the* or *several* Witsuwit'en views. Mills does acknowledge the existence of differences of opinion and disagreements among the Witsuwit'en, but the general image presented is of a degree of Witsuwit'en consensus that may well strike those familiar with North American aboriginal communities as highly idealized.

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### **Taking Control: Power and Contradiction in First Nations Adult Education**

Celia Haig-Brown

Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1995. xiv + 288 pp. \$45.95 (cloth), \$24.95 (paper)

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*Taking Control* is a narrative-like account of what some participants had to say about the Native Education Centre (NEC) in Vancouver. The author focusses her attention on the political concept of "Indian control of Indian education," and on power and contradiction in relation to the people she interviewed at the NEC. The author says that, "this study is a critical ethnography. It is an investigation of the ways that people associated with a particular First Nations adult educational institution talk and act on their understandings of First Nations control" (p. 16).

The book's nine chapters are divided into three parts. There are five chapters in the first part, which is theoretical and methodological. There are three chapters in the second, the narrative part. The last part comprises one chapter.

Haig-Brown represents the views of her interviewees well. Indeed, the second part of the book is primarily composed of their words, and the research document was returned to them for review. However, these words seem disconnected from the theoretical perspective adopted in this, her dissertation, research. This is probably because Foucault's "power" did not fit easily into the discussions with the NEC staff and students about Indian control.

In the concluding chapter there is another unfortunate disconnection. Here Haig-Brown says, "it was I, the non-Native researcher, who found contradiction to be integral to the study" (p. 231). A primary contradiction was the struggle between the necessity of building and using an awareness of Native perspective (or being Native), on the one hand, and, on the other, the necessity of achieving the training and employment goals of the program and its funding agencies.

At several points, she mentions Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's work regarding contradiction, but nowhere in this work does the idea attain the central position it holds in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970). Freire's book is about the post-literacy stage of adult education and the generative themes in it. Early in its investigation, dialogue uncovers "the nuclei of the principle and secondary contradictions" (p. 104) around which one could organize an educational-action program. Freire says that a program based on these observed contradictions would be more likely to succeed than one based on "decisions from the top" (p. 105).

Here is where we find the disconnection between Haig-Brown's theory about power and the narrative about Indian control. The book is a report on Ph.D. research—where theory almost inevitably comes from the top—rather than a report on applied research

or educational action in a Freirean sense. This is also the crunch of the contradiction. Haig-Brown can take the concept no further than to say that it is useful to academics trying to understand Indian control of Indian education, while for Native Peoples trying to wrest control of their education from the dominant society, contradiction is a "name" for the tensions and discomfort they experience in the process. Neither her supervisory committee at the university nor the NEC Administrator could give her permission or encourage her to dialogue with her interviewees about contradictions, "limit-situations" and themes. As an ethnographer (and an outsider), Haig-Brown is surrounded by the climate of contradiction, but cannot undertake "the action and reflection of men [sic] upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire 1970:66). Praxis is denied the NEC, too, by its program attachment to institutionalized provincial and federal Indian education and development programs. (The Navaho Rough Rock Demonstration School experienced program problems in many ways similar to the NEC's.)

Begun in 1968, in one room and with 12 students, the NEC now has 361 students, 50 staff members and its own building. Its student-completion rate is astonishingly high. Though this success was inspired and directed by a leader who was himself inspired by *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freirean liberation was neither sought nor achieved. It is ironic (a contradiction) that, despite this dramatic success, the NEC is denied both praxis and liberation.

This same irony is found in the NEC's two most important and successful programs: the Native Adult Basic Education Program and the Native Family Violence and Community Service Program. The former strives to get its participants to reach grade 12 equivalency, while fostering First Nations identity and respect. The latter teaches about cultural oppression and self-hatred as elements in community and family violence. Yet the NEC teachers are not able to develop the contradictions, limit-situations and themes expressed in fostering identity and respect in the face of self-hatred and oppression. The problem-posing investigation proposed by Freire (ibid.:101), based on the "men"/world relationship, is not what is being practised. Indeed, the only transformation of a contradiction that Haig-Brown mentions is not an academic one, but is rather the personal recognition of a contradiction by a First Nations instructor.

*Taking Control* is not so much about the issue of Indians taking control of their education as it is about the role that that idea has played in the achievement of the NEC's success. Individual successes by staff and students are constrained and entangled by bureaucratic funding contradictions. These limit-situations cannot be confronted in a Freirean way, because to do so would be to risk the individual successes. As Freire suggested, the theme of our epoch is domination, and, within this thematic universe, the successes of NEC and the critical ethnography can be applauded, especially considering the climate of contradiction in which we all work.