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## Address - Weaver-Tremblay Award 2019 / Allocution - Prix Weaver-Tremblay 2019

# Illuminating Details: Reflections on a Practice of Anthropology

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**Abstract:** This revised address for the 2019 Weaver-Tremblay Award revisits some underlying questions about the practice of anthropology that have figured in my own work. First, why might one choose anthropology as a means of intellectual and practical inquiry into social and cultural phenomena? Second, what kinds of anthropological practice can be pursued? Finally, what types of knowledge can be acquired through anthropological approaches, and to what purposes might this knowledge be applied? These questions are considered within the context of two rather different fields of anthropological inquiry I have pursued: relations between Indigenous Peoples and state governments, on the one hand, and the social construction of sport, on the other. As well as sharing some unexpected analytical commonalities, these ostensibly disparate fields speak to the power that resides in illuminating details of the type that anthropologists are particularly adept in recognizing.

**Keywords:** comparison, Indigenous-state relations, knowledge, narrative, passions, sport, tutelage

**Resumé :** Ce discours mis à jour pour la remise du Prix Weaver-Tremblay 2019 revisite certaines questions sous-jacentes à la pratique de l'anthropologie que j'ai abordées dans mes propres travaux. Premièrement, pourquoi choisir l'anthropologie comme mode d'investigation intellectuelle et pratique des phénomènes sociaux et culturels? Deuxièmement, quels types de pratiques anthropologiques peut-on exercer? Enfin, quels types de savoirs peut-on acquérir par l'intermédiaire d'approches anthropologiques et à quelles fins ces savoirs peuvent-ils être appliqués? Ces questions sont examinées du point de vue de deux champs d'investigation anthropologique assez différents que j'ai moi-même explorés: les relations entre les peuples autochtones et les gouvernements étatiques, d'une part, et la construction sociale du sport, d'autre part. En plus de partager des similitudes analytiques inattendues, ces champs apparemment disparates témoignent du pouvoir qui réside dans le type de détails révélateurs que les anthropologues sont particulièrement habiles à reconnaître

**Mots clés :** comparaison, relations autochtones-états, savoir, récit passions, sport, tutelle

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## Introduction

Preparing this lecture for the Weaver-Tremblay Award nudged me to retrace my anthropological journey and tease out some of the threads running through projects and topics that have preoccupied me at different times. Alongside the many events, faces and stories summoned up by this reflective exercise, several abiding questions have stayed with me through the years. The first asks forthrightly, why anthropology? Having chosen to become an anthropologist presumes that one has at some point addressed this question. Yet for me, it is one that has never been fully and finally answered. It remains an open query that resurfaces time and again during field research and in the classroom. Second question: What kind of anthropology? I will speak to a couple of the options with which I have engaged. And third, what knowledge, and knowledge for what? Marc-Adéland Tremblay (1983) posed this essential two-part question some years ago. The issues he raised then are no less significant today.

## Why Anthropology?

Let us turn to the first of those questions, namely, why anthropology? I was not supposed to become an anthropologist. As a 20-something MA student, I was on my way to fulfilling my childhood dream of becoming a historian. My thesis topic was one that had at that point received little attention from scholars: namely, the outcomes of an agricultural development initiative mounted on First Nations reserves in western Canada from 1880 to 1885 (Dyck 1986b).<sup>1</sup> What I discovered was that the allegation that First Nations farmers had proved incapable of taking up agricultural pursuits during this period – a claim made in the 1880s by senior federal officials and thereafter accepted largely at face value – fundamentally distorted what had actually happened. In fact, during the first few years of this undertaking, reports from the West noted both the commitment of these novice farmers and the promising nature of their

achievements. Subsequently, in the wake of successive early frosts that destroyed crops, in addition to severe reductions in federal funding due to a cyclical trade depression, First Nations farmers and their families had their rations halved by administrative fiat and then halved again. Starvation resulted. As I read my way through the reports and correspondence files of the Indian Affairs Department and other federal agencies, what stood out was the self-righteous callousness with which an ambitious endeavour that had started as a joint undertaking on the part of First Nations and the federal government was reframed and transformed, especially after the North-West Rebellion of 1885. Dealings between federal officials and First Nations ceased to be those of treaty partners and assumed a rigidly coercive form. In parliamentary debates, this was rationalized and wrapped in the rhetoric of a paternalistic Christian “duty” or “burden.”

Finding my way through these documentary materials was a gripping experience for a young historian in training. I was eager to share my findings with anyone who cared to listen. One autumn afternoon, a man came looking for me. He introduced himself as John R. McLeod, a Cree member of the James Smith Band and a janitor at the university. He had also served as the chair of his band’s school committee and its delegate to the provincial association of Indian school committees. John had heard about my research from someone in another department. A lengthy conversation ensued, the first part of which was taken up with details and insights gleaned from my archival studies. John responded with a wide smile and an encouraging affirmation.

He then turned to his concerns, which centred on the federal government’s insistence on transferring its responsibilities for the schooling of First Nations children to the provinces. This was being off-loaded along with substantial federal funding to local, non-Indigenous school boards that operated under provincial supervision. The result of these transfers, John explained, was that students were being bused to off-reserve, so-called integrated schools. The trouble was that these actually remained resolutely non-Indigenous institutions within which First Nations students were being warehoused, but at the personal cost to them of lost educational opportunities and ongoing stigmatization. As I was to learn later, one of those students was John’s son, Garnie,<sup>2</sup> who, like other youths from his band community, had been rated as an unpromising student when he enrolled in a nearby town’s secondary school. After a very frustrating period for Garnie, John and his wife, Ida, formally requested that departmental officials allow their son to complete his secondary schooling in

Saskatoon. In an urban high school, Garnie’s grades improved dramatically. Following graduation, he proceeded to the University of Saskatchewan, where he earned a Bachelor of Education degree.

John’s own experiences of formal schooling, which did not extend beyond the elementary grades, were of a rather different type. He had acquired a practical education through his voluntary enlistment and deployment as a marksman in the Canadian army during the Second World War. Following the war, he qualified for assistance through the Veterans’ Land Act and set up his own farm on the James Smith Reserve. But John’s passion, which he shared with Ida, was to create educational opportunities for First Nations children and youths that would allow them to thrive. To this end, he dedicated years of voluntary service on band school committees. He read in their entirety not only the Treaties that his forefathers had negotiated with the representatives of Queen Victoria but also every piece of federal and provincial legislation that pertained to the education of First Nations children.

Our conversation that afternoon would prove fateful for the aspiring young historian. I had spent months finding my way through departmental correspondence files, handwritten copy books and many reels of microfilm. For all that, what I had been able to access clearly represented only a small part of an unequal and far from straightforward administrative relationship. The voices of First Nations people surfaced only occasionally in this political and bureaucratic correspondence and, when they did, too often tended to be discounted or dismissed out of hand by most government officials.

Conversing at length with John, who had lived within the confines of the administrative regime I had only recently begun to study, was an exhilarating experience. Thinking about the limitations of carrying on without the continuing benefit of such contacts and perspectives led me to wonder what might be involved and perhaps gained by shifting to another disciplinary approach. And, if so, why anthropology? In part, my tentative answer reflected the prominent role played by Canadian anthropologists, including Marc-Adélar Tremblay, in producing a then recently published two-volume report on the contemporary economic, political, educational needs and policies pertaining to First Nations in Canada (Hawthorn et al. 1966, 1967; Weaver, 1993).

With that, I declined an offer to complete a doctorate in history and instead set off for the north of England and the University of Manchester to study social anthropology. It was, I told myself, a matter not of giving up on the past but rather of taking on the present and the future. For the record, John McLeod did not

recommend that I become an anthropologist: that word was not uttered during our discussion. He merely spoke of his past experiences and hopes for the future and, in so doing, offered penetrating insights into a set of overlapping cultural, political and intellectual fields. Choosing anthropology would change my *métier* and intellectual interests. But what I learned from John, Ida, Garnie and other members of their family changed me as a person. Their stories, of course, remained theirs to share or to reserve as they wished. And I respect that in this presentation, as I have in my other publications. Nonetheless, we also lived through some stories together. And that was a world away from a career that might otherwise have been spent with documentary sources that, however remarkable, could never have equalled the experiences and understandings I acquired through the McLeods' gracious friendship and passionate commitment to make this a better world for First Nations and for all of us.

What kind of anthropology did I encounter in Manchester? One that paid close attention to social relationships, political processes and the types of insights attainable through careful ethnographic analysis, case studies and the comparison of ostensibly unlike practices and places. I returned to Canada the following year with a bare-bones research proposal. What I intended to examine were factors affecting the incorporation and non-incorporation of First Nations migrants within an urban community. Although a plausible and doable project, it was destined to be overtaken by other developments then taking shape in Prince Albert (PA), a mid-sized city in north central Saskatchewan that had been suggested as a potential site for field research. Among other things, PA hosted the head office of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians (FSI), the organization that represented band chiefs and councils from across the province. The FSI had risen to prominence through the controversy that erupted in 1969 with the release of a federal White Paper proposal bluntly entitled "Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy."

Briefly, what Pierre Trudeau's recently elected government sought was to end its administrative responsibilities for First Nations Peoples by terminating their special legal and constitutional status and simply declaring them to be equal to all other Canadians. The officials who drafted the White Paper spectacularly misjudged not only the sentiments of reserve residents but also the capabilities of First Nations' representatives. To the amazement of governments, the news media and the Canadian public, the FSI and other provincial associations denounced the White Paper. First Nations leaders fought to protect treaty rights and land rights, ushering in a new era of dealings with the Canadian state.

## What Kind of Anthropology?

It was an exciting time to be an ethnographer interested in First Nations issues.<sup>3</sup> My erstwhile plan to study rural-urban migration was effectively overtaken by the contacts I made with First Nations residents of PA, many of whom happened to be FSI officials or employees. For them, living in PA was part of their involvement with an organization that was leading a province-wide political movement. My familiarity with the historical operations of the Indian Affairs Department and, more importantly, my friendship with John McLeod facilitated a number of introductions, some of which resulted in requests for my assistance as an unpaid consultant in assessing reports and drafting preliminary versions of proposals concerning various matters. These involvements led to a certain amount of time spent away from PA, driving or flying with FSI personnel to meetings with federal and provincial officials in Regina and Ottawa, as well as First Nations associations in other provinces.<sup>4</sup> Road trips provided ample time for discussing policy and program initiatives, as well as all manner of other topics. Whether I was applying anthropology or being applied despite being an anthropologist was not clear. Yet, in the moment, that was beside the point. Fascinating and consequential things were happening. I was learning a great deal by virtue of being allowed to be there. That would not, I believe, have been the case except for a balancing of practical participation with intellectual curiosity.

John McLeod's appointment as co-chair of the FSI's Task Force on Indian Education immersed me in another set of issues and travel destinations. His commitment to what he and others identified as "Indian control of Indian education" placed him at the forefront of a campaign that would in later years be identified as one of the first from which elements of self-government emerged (McLeod 2005). John, however, doubted that phrases and declarations alone would ever bring this to pass. His long experience of working on these issues drew him to the potential advantages of addressing some of the qualms harboured by non-Indigenous people about the prospect of there being more rather than fewer First Nations schools. He accordingly accepted as many invitations as he could fit within his already hectic schedule to meet with local school trustees, teachers' associations and university education classes. For all this, John was often frustrated by what he often saw as his inability to get through to non-Indigenous audiences. This finally came to a head after an especially difficult session spent with a university class that turned painfully silent when John began to detail the legislative and administrative barriers that stood in the way of offering Cree language programs

in schools. Following that talk, John told his friends that he was finished speaking to groups that, as he put it, “expect me to tell them what Indians want, but don’t even know how their own government works.” Eventually, he was once again compelled by the considerations that had initially moved him to speak to non-Indigenous groups. Now, however, his presentations took a different tack, with John starting his talks with one or another story about incidents from his life (Dyck 1986a).<sup>5</sup> Here is one example:

I want to tell you about how I went to school as a boy. When I was about 13 or 14 I was at home on the reserve for the summer. When the fall came and the Indian agent and farm instructor collected the other children to go back to the residential school, I was out fighting fires in the forest reserve across the river. I was old enough to fight fires with the men from the reserve. Anyway, by the time I got back to the reserve, they seemed to have forgotten me, so I stayed at home with my father until Christmas.

After Christmas, the Indian agent came to our place and told my father that I would have to go back to school again. I didn’t want to go back, and my father said that he wouldn’t make me go. One of my sisters had died at residential school, and he was still sad about that. But the agent said that I would have to go back because my father had agreed when I first went to residential school that I would stay there until I finished.

In a couple of days, the agent came back with an RCMP officer from Melfort. I was going to try running for the bush, but it was too late. My father was sick, but he took off his moccasins and gave them to me to wear because mine were in pretty rough shape. And the RCMP took me to Melfort to wait at the RCMP barracks for the train to Prince Albert. When the train arrived, the policeman handed me over to the train conductor. When we got to Prince Albert, another policeman met the train and took me down to the police station because the train to Saskatoon didn’t leave until morning. I guess they didn’t know what else to do with me, so they told me to sleep in a cell.

The next day I travelled to Saskatoon the same way, and another policeman met me there at the train station. I stayed overnight in the jail in Saskatoon. I didn’t get much sleep that night because the guy they put in the next cell was really drunk and rough. The next day, I caught the train to Punnichy, but no one was there to meet me at the station. So I had to walk all the way out to the residential school. It was several miles, and it was really cold. No one was up

when I got there, so I went down to the kitchen to look for something to eat. I hadn’t eaten all day, but everything was locked up there.

And that’s how I went to school when I was a boy.

And another:

One time after the war when I was farming, I went to the farm instructor and asked him for a permit to sell a couple of heifers. He told me that the prices were not good, so I should wait until later. I didn’t say anything; I just walked away.

But I decided that I was going to sell those heifers anyway, so one morning, another fellow and I got up before dawn and loaded the animals into the back of my truck. We drove off the reserve with the lights off, taking it real slow and quiet. When we were off the reserve I took back roads all the way to Prince Albert. It took about two hours longer to get there that way, but we didn’t want to run into anyone we knew on the way.

When we got to Prince Albert, the sun had been up for a couple of hours. I drove over toward the stockyards but stopped the truck a couple of blocks away. I wanted to go into the stockyards first to see whether the coast was clear. And when I got up to the ring, who do you think I saw, leaning on the rail, right up at the front? It was the Indian agent. I saw him, but he didn’t see me.

So, I walked back to the truck and told the other fellow that we weren’t going to sell any heifers that day. We got into the truck and drove back to the reserve and unloaded the heifers.

These are just two of the stories I heard John share with non-Indigenous audiences in locations as diverse as the school gymnasium in a bucktoothed prairie town, a convention hall in an expensive urban hotel and around the kitchen table in his home. His use of personal narratives differed from the more aggressive political oratory favoured by some First Nations leaders in the 1970s. Instead, John made use of a traditional Cree genre, the personal narrative, albeit in English and with audiences that knew far less about First Nations people than he knew about his interlocutors.

He never said what the point of his stories was: he forced his listeners to discover it for themselves. His efforts were confined to challenging their understandings by establishing with them a new set of facts about First Nations lives that were seldom considered, if even known, by non-Indigenous Canadians. And almost invariably, he was pressed to provide further details about the power relations and inequalities that figured

in his stories. Why would a young boy be held in a jail cell? How could a man who had gone to war for his country be prevented from selling his own cattle by a government official? Only when members of his audiences had reached the point of confessing either to him or to themselves that they “didn’t know that” would John turn to the other issues, such as Indian control of Indian education, that mattered so much to him.

A willingness to talk does not, however, rule out decisive action. One evening shortly before the end of my first stint of field research, John called to ask whether I could accompany him to an emergency band council meeting to be held on a reserve some distance from PA. A few days earlier, in the middle of the school year, the band council had decided to hold back all its First Nations children from returning to primary and secondary schools in a nearby town. This action was taken in response to a smouldering two-week panic unleashed by school authorities who mistakenly decided that students from the reserve were contaminated with head lice. The climax to this sorry episode came with a publicly-enacted humiliation of First Nations students, who were made to gather up all their possessions and wait outside for buses that had been ordered to transport them back to the reserve. While they waited, non-Indigenous students chanted and hurled insults at them (Dyck 1991, 120–132).

In the aftermath, the band council decided it could not send its children back to the town schools. They contacted John to see what might be done next. What came out of that meeting was a two-part demand that called upon the federal government to terminate its tuition funding agreement with the town schools and to immediately arrange schooling for these children on the reserve. Raising the possibility of contacting the news media about this outrageous incident, John and other FSI personnel helped the band council draft its formal demands. Their letter sufficed to oblige government officials in Regina and Ottawa to approve the reopening and expansion of an on-reserve school that would be controlled by the band.

Along with the immediate sense of relief and soaring hopes it unleashed, this action counted as an essential step toward the goal of First Nations control of First Nations education. Yet an achievement of this order can run the risk of being expected to usher in a happily-ever-after conclusion. Setting up and managing a school is a demanding task at the best of times, let alone when undertaken in a matter of weeks with an uncertain budget. Difficult challenges lay ahead. Still, despite an initially bumpy ride, the adoption of a patient, step-by-step approach to enhance the school’s ability to serve its students’ needs gradually began to realize the potential

for positive change that had been envisioned from the outset. Remaining in touch with those who stayed to see this process through provided me an invaluable lesson: namely, the importance of reserving some notional space in our accounts and assessments for the yet-to-be-revealed “longer run.” What emerged over the years was a quietly remarkable set of small steps and easily overlooked contributions that were, in truth, fundamental to the continuing fulfillment of this undertaking.

### **What Knowledge, Knowledge for What?**

Some years later, I was asked by the PA Grand Council, the executive organization of First Nations in that district, to prepare an administrative history of Indian residential schooling in the city of Prince Albert. This study would, by design, not look into the experiences of individuals who had attended the various Indian residential school facilities that had operated in the city since 1867. Former students’ stories about their residential school years were to be respected and treated as their own. Instead, I was to examine the range of functions served and forms of federal support received by these institutions over the decades. As I was to discover, this assignment offered a front-row seat from which to witness yet another round in First Nations’ struggle to determine their own futures.

After 1969, most students in the remaining Indian residential schools in Canada were transferred to integrated schools, as called for in the federal government’s plan to terminate its responsibilities to First Nations. In Saskatchewan, several residential schools were maintained for short-term logistical purposes or in response to requests from First Nations that could imagine better uses for these facilities than those to which these had been put in the past. The recently refurbished student residence established on a former military base located on the west side of PA comprised a facility that could continue to serve the educational needs of children whose families spent the winter on scattered traplines in the northern part of the province. The FSI insisted that a joint supervisory committee composed of government and First Nations representatives should manage the facility. Several committee members had been students at the school, and they championed the hiring of more First Nations supervisory and childcare staff. A few of the federal appointees, however, insisted on continuing to consult with the Anglican Diocese, which had historically presided over Indian residential schooling in the city in return for federal financial support.

After more than a decade of this curious administrative arrangement, First Nations leaders lobbied to take over the operation of what had become a residential

facility that allowed First Nations students from the North to attend non-Indigenous schools in the city. Eventually they succeeded. Now retitled as the Prince Albert Indian Student Education Centre (PAISEC), it established a reputation for ensuring that local schools provided appropriate services and treatment to the First Nations students at these schools. A no less important function was that of providing a safe and healthy place for First Nations children who, for whatever reason, needed to be removed temporarily from their home communities. PAISEC's success in meeting this sensitive yet essential need was easy to demonstrate: over a ten-year period of caring for some of the most seriously at-risk children in the province, there was not a single suicide among its students. In the absence of PAISEC, children from these communities would have been assigned to provincially operated child services programs, within which they could expect to experience multiple sets of foster parents, some of whom took in foster children primarily to augment their incomes. Children who rejected fostering arrangements or repeatedly ran away were assigned to larger provincial facilities where they would be held until reaching the age of majority, when they would be released to care for themselves. What happened next to these First Nations youths was not tracked by either federal or provincial authorities. But too often they were effectively lost to their families and reserve communities.

The problem facing PAISEC had nothing to do with the calibre of care it provided First Nations children and youths. An independent professional assessment of the operations of this unique facility had fully established that matter. Instead, federal officials objected to PAISEC's involvement in activities that, they claimed, lay beyond the scope and terms of its funding agreement with Canada. They also accused PAISEC of exceeding some parts of its budget. But objections such as these were only a pretext. The real problem with PAISEC was that it was seen as standing in the way of a federal initiative to transfer administration of child and family services from provincial and territorial agencies to individual First Nations, a scheme inspired by the rapidly rising financial costs of subcontracting these services to other levels of government. Entering into long-term contracts with individual First Nations might result in substantial savings for the government. This would be especially likely if these agreements were signed before First Nations had a clear sense of the actual costs and challenges of entering into direct service provision in this field. One of the few established First Nations institutions with a well-informed understanding of the extent of these costs and challenges was PAISEC.

I was enlisted by the Grand Council to demonstrate that denominationally managed Indian residential schooling had historically been funded by the state to attend to not only the educational needs but also the health and welfare needs of First Nations children taken from their families (Dyck 1997a). The archival materials duly demonstrated that this had, indeed, been the case at the residential schools operated at different times in PA. Such arrangements were further corroborated in interviews I conducted with individuals who had held positions in the administrative entities that preceded PAISEC.

To supplement my part of this larger study, I was also permitted full access to PAISEC's administrative records. Office space was found for me in the residence's main building. Looking out onto the large adjoining dining room, I could not help but hear and see the animated arrivals, departures and conversations of scores of children at different times during the day. The upbeat atmosphere of the dining hall radiated throughout the facility. The ease of interaction between staff members and students was manifest. A staff of mature and committed First Nations employees, most of them women, clearly understood PAISEC's essential mission. Ironically, in the end, it may have been their hard-won expertise and collective knowledge that placed PAISEC in the crosshairs of federal troubleshooters.

The Grand Council's support of PAISEC had been unwavering. Nevertheless, an agreement in principle to close PAISEC was abruptly accepted one summer afternoon by representatives of the Grand Council. This occurred after the government imposed an immediate and indefinite freeze on all capital spending for First Nations educational facilities, including band schools, throughout the province. The rationale for that measure was that the projected cost of repairs said to be required by the remaining residential education centres was so large that it would preclude any further capital funding for any First Nations education requirements until the "future" of the student residences was resolved. Directors of the student residences argued that the capital requirement figures projected for their facilities were intentionally inflated and misleading. Nevertheless, the student residences were suddenly and irredeemably re-defined as being in direct competition with band schools for scarce resources.

Sometime after the imposition of this freeze, a routine meeting was held between the Grand Council and a senior federal official. Tied up with other business, the Grand Chief was unable to attend this meeting. In his absence, alternate representatives agreed to the closing of PAISEC in return for a firm commitment from federal officials to build a new school on the home reserve of

one of the band leaders at the table that afternoon. In fact, his band's request for a new school had not been listed anywhere near the top of the Council's prioritized list of required education capital projects. What ought to be emphasized in this case, however, is not so much the nature of the "quid" that was claimed in return for this "quo" but, rather, the intervening "pro": that is, the ability of state officials to arbitrarily freeze and then selectively release and redeploy federal resources to suit their purposes (Dyck 1997b).

The federal government's success in rushing First Nations into taking responsibility for child and family service programs did, indeed, serve to limit its costs, at least in the short run. But this cost saving was followed by countless wrenching tragedies for First Nations children that others have been left to cope with. The Assembly of First Nations, the National Advisory Committee on First Nations Child and Family Services Program Reform, and the Canadian Human Rights Commission, among others, have documented Canada's continuing failure to support these programs adequately (see, for instance, Assembly of First Nations n.d.). It is against this backdrop that the effective, affordable and compassionately professional approach that PAISEC created and continued to improve upon, until it was eliminated, needs to be remembered. Attempts by anthropologists to support communities in pursuing practical and worthwhile outcomes do not always bring timely victories or lasting resolutions. This can be deeply discouraging for us and for those with whom we seek to effect meaningful change. Sometime after these types of setbacks, however, it is worth revisiting what we have witnessed and learned from doing so. Retrospective accounts, whatever form these might take, can constitute intellectual contributions in their own right. Our accounts may also prove to be of interest and of use to non-academic communities, sometimes in ways we might not have predicted.

Looking back over that period, several concerns caught my attention and continue to command it. The first involves the ways in which narratives can be employed to depict lives and the complexities within which these are lived. I had been drawn to biographic approaches and episodic accounts of social situations before I began to work with John McLeod.<sup>6</sup> Yet hearing him deliver his narratives with such clarity and impact took me to another level of appreciation of the power and subtlety that can be generated by performances that truly communicate. He showed that remembering can be an act with an ethical purpose as well as a communicative function. John breathed life into the proposition that sometimes, saying can be doing.

A second issue that gradually came into focus was the analytical utility of the concept of tutelage.<sup>7</sup> The dynamics of relationships between First Nations and state officials, clerics and ordinary Euro-Canadians that I observed did not always fit comfortably within existing models and glossaries of colonialism, race relations or cultural difference. What has intrigued me about tutelage in general is the manner in which it defines and articulates social relationships and purposes in terms of a set of familiar processes: (a) instruction, teaching and education; (b) protection, care and guardianship; and (c) the condition or duration of being supervised by a tutor or guardian. On the face of it, how could one object to the proffering of tutelage that is, by definition, extended in order to instruct or protect recipients who request or appear to need such assistance? But the system of tutelage that First Nations were ensconced in was neither consensual in nature nor escapable, except under exceptional circumstances. For instance, when John McLeod served in the Canadian army, he was legally entitled to the full range of privileges enjoyed by Canadian citizens; upon his return to civilian life after the war, many of these were rescinded, and he returned to being administered as an Indian. The form of tutelage applied to First Nations provided a formidable social and political instrumentality precisely because of the government's unflagging commitment to garbing and celebrating its operations as acts of beneficence. This stance supplied a de facto justification for controlling First Nations Peoples as if they were children who somehow never quite managed to attain maturity or outgrow their need for paternalistic guidance. Of course, any given mode of tutelage should not be assumed to stand for or explain all others. Be that as it may, the variable nature and range of enterprises that can be conjured out of the basic premises of tutelage is a matter that continues to fascinate me.

Another interest that developed during that period concerns the importance and complexity of children's lives and activities. Childhood, parenting and society's stake in the "proper" development of children are matters often linked to tutelage projects, but these are not simply reducible to that framework. Residential schools were originally touted as the solution to the so-called Indian problem. Taking children from their parents and communities and placing them in the care of religious denominations was intended to transform them, in the vernacular of the day, into "brown Whitemen." The damage it did is being revealed and addressed today. But in the worst of conditions there were small acts of perseverance and resistance on the part of First Nations children who did the best they could to remain themselves. Their quietly courageous efforts as children

contributed cumulatively, though more often than not inconspicuously, to creating the basis from which restitution is being sought today. We cannot afford to overlook the agency and ingenuity of children or the burdens and hopes they may be constrained to bear.

A fourth matter, the insights made possible through comparative analysis, came alive for me during the initial phase of my anthropological studies and continues to this day. The contrasts between my own experiences of growing up on the Prairies and the lives and circumstances of First Nations members were far deeper and cruder than I had ever imagined. What transpired one Saturday afternoon when Garnie McLeod and I went into a café in a town near his home reserve brought this home dramatically. Upon our entry into an almost fully occupied main street café, the hum of conversation suddenly subsided as we sat down at one of the few unoccupied tables. A quick glance around the silent room revealed an entirely non-Indigenous staff and clientele. Smiling at me from across the table was Garn, who leaned forward to say quietly, "They know who I am. They're just trying to figure out who you are." Comparisons that reached beyond everyday interactional fields led in time to more ambitious analyses constructed with anthropological colleagues who had examined the similarities and differences between Indigenous-state relationships in Canada, Australia and Norway (Dyck 1985).

### **Unanticipated Similarities**

Completing my doctorate and taking up a university appointment ushered in a new pattern of life that combined teaching with research that continued to focus on relations between Indigenous Peoples and nation-states. The birth of two daughters, however, eventually brought me to local soccer fields, where they and their teammates played a scaled-down version of a sport I had watched in Manchester as an escape from academia. Sport had been part of my childhood, and this reintroduction to children's sports initially fit within the category of time spent with my daughters. Yet looking on from the sidelines, a different approach was taken to children's sport than had existed during my childhood, when parents seldom attended games. Now, mothers and fathers were expected to appear regularly at their children's matches or provide a plausible explanation of the circumstances that had prevented them from doing so. Keeping separate my professional and paternal obligations, I spent countless hours at youth soccer matches and track meets. In the absence of other volunteers, I even helped out as a coach in both soccer and athletics.

This congenial division of paternal and professional spheres began to unravel during a track meet on a

summer weekend. During such meets, medals or ribbons are typically awarded to first-, second- and third-place winners in each age- and gender-differentiated event. The presentation of awards occurs continuously throughout a meet, and winners tend either to stuff medals and ribbons into carrying cases or to hand them over to parents or friends for safekeeping before trundling off to their next athletic event. What caught my attention that afternoon was a man of approximately my age who, like many other parents and coaches, was dressed for the hot weather in a pair of shorts, sandals and a sports shirt. What seemed remarkable, however, was that he also wore two gold medals around his neck and an enormous smile on his face. I was struck with a powerful impression that here was the father of a successful athlete who was acting almost as though he had won the medals himself.

In the following days, I related this incident to several people, including a mother with whom I shared a waiting room while our daughters took their weekly piano lessons. Recounting the story of the man with the medals around his neck, I reached my verdict-cum-punchline: "It was almost as though he had won the medals himself!" After politely chuckling at my story, she paused for a moment, and then observed thoughtfully, "Well, in a way he had." With that comment she deftly connected an incident that had initially seemed humorous, if somewhat odd, to an ongoing discourse on parenting that I had heard in bits and pieces but had not fully grasped to that point. What I had regarded as polite small talk that made the time pass sociably was actually a discourse centrally concerned with the aspirations, sacrifices and values of a particular style of parenting. This mother's quietly stated contention jolted me into recognizing that children's games and achievements were being treated not as matters that children should be largely left to get on with as they wish but rather as the objects and products of adults' "work." With this, my carefully nurtured partition between an academic career and time spent attending and helping with community sports for children began to crumble. The possibility that parents' and coaches' priorities might in some respects resemble those of traditional Indian agents conjured up issues that could not be unthought. From that point on, my anthropological curiosity was drawn to the complicated ways in which children's sports here revolved around various modes of work engaged in by parents and coaches as well as the young people who venture onto the fields, rinks and other venues of community sports (Dyck 1995) – tutelage of a different type, for sure, but tutelage nonetheless. After a protracted period of struggling with doubts about the merits of proceeding further,



I decided to undertake formal research in this field and to transform what had been an enjoyable and taken-for-granted personal and domestic pastime into the focus of professional inquiry.

The study of children's sport brought with it a medley of attractions and challenges. On the plus side, there is no shortage of community sport in either the Metro Vancouver area or Montreal, nor of parents, sports officials, children and youths willing to speak about their participation in these. Engagement with community sport remains essentially voluntary, something that participants can usually find a way to walk away from, should they be determined to. Accordingly, interviews with participants tend to be generally positive in tone, although they are remarkably frank in calling out arrangements and experiences viewed as being unsuitable. Mapping out the organizational features and operations of community sports associations seemed a reasonably uncomplicated matter until I came to recognize the extent of involvement by municipal, provincial and national governments, as well as businesses, in kids' sports (Dyck 2012). Reading my way into the emerging field of child and youth studies afforded some provocative analytical insights into the varied considerations that might tempt states to intervene in child-rearing. Although little mention was made of children's sport in this literature, the anthropologists working within this field were open to hearing about some of the ways in which sport intersects with and partially shapes childhood in Canada.

I also turned to the writings of those few anthropologists then studying sport, almost all of whom focused on adult athletic activities. On paper, at least, we must have seemed a motley crew, taken up variously with baseball in the Dominican Republic, Cuba or Japan; football in the United Kingdom; traditional forms of wrestling in India or Turkey; football in Argentina and Scotland; women's volleyball in China; and the Olympic Games themselves – not to mention child and youth sports in Canada. When we reached out to introduce ourselves via email or at conferences, our conversations often included some comparing of notes about anthropology's sustained ambivalence toward the study of sport. As one fellow traveller put it during our initial telephone conversation, "Anthropologists are only too happy to hear about Latino drug dealers. But about Latino ballplayers? Not so much."<sup>8</sup>

Ironically, despite the then near-mandatory veneration awarded to Geertz's text on the Balinese cockfight and the use of the "Trobriand Cricket" film documentary in many an introductory anthropology course, sport tended to be residually relegated by most anthropologists to the domains of modernization and sociology. To present a paper that centred on sport without signalling

at least some mitigating linkage to childhood, religion or nationalism was to consign oneself to the outer margins of anthropological respectability. *Games, Sports and Cultures* (Dyck 2000), a volume that I edited, features a set of chapters that had been part of a proposed AAA conference panel on sport that had been rejected. But that was then. By now, anthropological studies of sport have given rise to a lively and delightfully disparate body of scholarship.<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusions: The Significance of Illuminating Details

What began for me as an out-of-the-blue ethnographic journey into community sport (Dyck 2012) has branched into other projects that have considered, for instance, the pursuit of athletic scholarships at American colleges and universities by young Canadians, not to mention their coaches and parents (Dyck 2011); the choices faced by elite amateur and professional athletes when their playing careers wind down; and the impact of professional sport and mega-sport events upon local sporting practices (Dyck with Gauvin 2012). Each of these studies has relied upon ethnographic inquiry and comparative analysis. My work represents only a small part of what has been unfolding in this sphere of inquiry. Yet, one of the side benefits of labouring within it has been the impetus it provides to stay abreast of the rapidly developing corpus of anthropological writings on sport. This impressive body of work is enabling me to address a question that has preoccupied me since I first began to study sport. Plainly put, what, if anything, might anthropology tell us about sport that is not already abundantly apparent to athletes and aficionados or readily accounted for within existing interdisciplinary sports studies analyses? If the answer to this happened to be "not much," there would be little need to proceed to the second part of Tremblay's question about anthropological knowledge. But that, I suggest, is not the case.

The longer version of my argument is awaited by long-suffering family members, friends and my publisher, all of whom are tired of hearing "sorry, but I am busy working on that book." The shorter version begins by acknowledging that although sport exists in many forms and fascinates countless people around the globe, there remain many others who would do almost anything to avoid exposure to, let alone active involvement with, any form of sport. But since that is not always easy to do, there is something to be said for gaining an understanding of what attracts others to sport. In fact, athletic activities and practices come in a far wider range of forms than is allowed for in western media coverage of a small number of sport industries, such as the National Hockey

League, the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup of Football. Among their other undertakings, these and other corporate entities strive to define and control the meaning and usage of the term *sport*. It is treated almost as a trademarked brand, even though professional and elite athletes constitute only a tiny proportion of those who actually play even these showcased sports. Yet, within this schema, the NHL is regarded as virtually “owning” hockey. This line of reasoning exiles a vast array of non-professional, recreational and traditional sporting practices to the outer periphery of the so-called sports world. A line in the sand is drawn between what are alleged to be mere fun and games as opposed to the deadly serious stuff of “real” competitive sport.

One of the downstream effects of spokespersons or scholars focusing primarily upon what is featured beneath the banner of corporate sport is that it becomes almost second nature to define the generic qualities and properties of sport writ large in terms of the particular products sold by this industry. More insidiously, the financial profitability of sport enterprises is then served up as proof positive of the so-called intrinsically human qualities to be found, perhaps uniquely, within certain hard-sold sporting events. Out of this emerges a storyline and set of transposable characters: visionary officials, owners and managers; exceptional athletes who are recruited, trained and celebrated during those seasons when a few of them may, indeed, be exceptional; fans and occasional patrons who eagerly consume staggering amounts of sporting products; and governments at different levels that see and support sport as a powerful means for accomplishing all manner of objectives.

The worrying thing about this model is just how smoothly it anticipates so much of what we have become accustomed to seeing or hearing about the relatively small selection of sports that have been successfully commodified (Dyck and Hognestad 2015). Indeed, it is precisely that capacity and those assumptions, which have so much in common with those that propped up the coercive tutelage practised by nineteenth- and twentieth-century Indian administrators, that have captured my attention. So, what to do? The productive choice is to do what anthropologists do best: turn our attention to the everyday uses made of sport by a wider range of people both within and far beyond the arenas and settings laid out by corporate sport managers and their associates. Since not all that many field sites are utterly bereft of any form of engagement with sport or sport-like activities, it may often be less a matter of searching out sport than of taking account of that which is already there. Time spent with athletes of differing ages and abilities, as well as with spectators, volunteer coaches, sensei,

organizers and even those who seek to avoid sport, can yield vivid insights into how athletic events and practices figure within their lives. To engage in these types of conversations is to elicit richly detailed stories and explanations that do not always fit comfortably with the truisms within which mainline professional sports tend to encase themselves.

An overarching concern that has gradually made its way from my own studies and several other anthropologists’ work into the project I am now focused upon centres on the differing types of passions associated with sporting activities. The locus of these passions ranges from social relationships to cultural identities to embodied experiences that can reach across fields of play to domestic and civic settings. The book examines the individual and collective actions, feelings, stories and outcomes that seem to cohere roughly within the ambit of sporting passions. The essential part of this undertaking is to show the ways in which these expressed passions for sport fit within the everyday lives of the participants, on-lookers and communities within which these unfold. My underlying interest is not to establish the transcendent meaning of sport but rather to consider how and why it figures as it does in the lives of those who engage with it.

Quotidian matters, to be sure, and not ones that will command everyone’s attention. Still, as I learned many years ago by listening to the narratives of John McLeod, stories about small matters may lead us to larger issues than we might have expected. In the end, perhaps, it comes down to how well we listen and what we are prepared to hear.

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## Notes

- 1 *First Nations* is the general term that has been adopted since the 1980s to describe Indigenous Peoples in Canada who are not Métis or Inuit. It refers to the original inhabitants of the land that is now Canada, the descendants of whom are more likely to identify themselves as members of particular nations or communities within those nations. First Nations Peoples were historically identified and continue to be legally registered as Indians under the provisions of the Indian Act. Within this statute, First Nations communities were and still are designated as bands and their lands as reserves. Notwithstanding its historical usage and continuing legal significance, the term *Indian* bears certain negative connotations. In this essay, I use the term *First Nations* except when referring to existing legal entities, documents and publications or when I am reporting the actual words used in previous years by individual First Nations persons in their public statements or conversations with me.
- 2 Garnet was, in fact, one of his middle names and the source of the shorter “Garnie” or “Garn” that members of his family used when speaking of and to him. In his professional life, he preferred to be known as Jerry, which was a shortened version of his first name, Jeremiah. Throughout our long friendship, he identified himself as Garn on telephone calls he made to me, and I always addressed him as Garn.
- 3 A searing and widely discussed denunciation of cultural anthropologists was authored by Vine Deloria, Jr. (1969, shortly before I began field research.
- 4 One of these trips brought us to the personal office of the minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, where we met with his parliamentary assistant in the minister’s absence. Another brought us together with the provincial attorney-general and the RCMP commanding officer of the Saskatchewan division to discuss potential solutions for problems plaguing reserve residents’ dealings with local RCMP detachments.
- 5 Sadly, I lacked the wit to record these stories; nor, I discovered after John’s death, had anyone else done so. I did, however, discover that my recollections of John’s stories, following, tallied reasonably well with those held by his family and friends.
- 6 I remain indebted to Basil Sansom for introducing me to the intricacies and possibilities of social situations, situational analysis, narratives and so much else. See [Sansom \(1980\)](#).
- 7 My initial introduction to the analytical possibilities presented by the concept of tutelage came from Robert Paine (1977).
- 8 My own reflections on this ironic disciplinary effacement of sport took me back to my time in PA when the creation of a First Nations regional hockey league had produced a sudden demand for referees and linesmen: the people I was working with were determined to be players, not officials. In addition to being conscripted to serve as an on-ice official, one evening I dressed as a player for the local Indian-Métis Friendship Centre team in a game held in a maximum-security penitentiary against the inmates’ Native Brotherhood team. A cut on my face, administered by an opponents’ (perhaps) errant hockey stick, left a small scar as a souvenir of this unusual but instructive match.

We lost that evening, but after the game, we were free to leave the facility.

- 9 See also Dyck and Archetti (2003) for comparisons of sport and dance as embodied practices.

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