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The changing leadership culture in Northern Territory Indigenous remote community schools: Implications for Indigenous female principals and school community partnerships

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Abstract

The leadership culture in Indigenous remote community schools in the Northern Territory (NT) of Australia is gradually changing, as departmental education executives are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of bridging the cultural gap between Indigenous and contemporary western leadership forms in the administration of these schools. As a result, many NT Indigenous female school principals are now participating in leadership training programs as part of their professional development, in the hope that enhanced leadership skills will in turn lead to more effective school and community partnerships, and improve student educational outcomes. However, such leadership training programs tend to emphasise the acquisition of conventional leadership constructs that are characteristics of systemic (Eurocentric) leadership frameworks on the assumption that they have the potential to bring about effective accomplishment of educational outcomes. Hence, Indigenous school principals are encouraged to integrate such frameworks that are culturally appropriate in their schools. Yet there is no agreed understanding among departmental education executives, Indigenous school principals, and community leaders about how such integration should occur, degree of integration in specific leadership tasks, or whether such integration could be aligned with school community partnerships. This paper will explore emerging questions on educational change and transformational leadership in Indigenous community schools and, drawing on Hofstede's analysis of cultural disparity, consider implications for Indigenous female principals and school community partnerships in the evolving leadership culture in Indigenous remote community schools.

Introduction

Recent research on Indigenous education both in Australia and internationally has revealed a revolutionary era in Indigenous schools (Trujillo-Ball 2003; Pritash, 2002; Vander Jagt, Shen, & Hsieh, 2001; Fitzgerald, 2003; Dimmock, & Walker 2005). More and more Indigenous educators and professionals are participating at higher levels of educational administration (Nolen, 1998; Stewart, 1994; Haggett, 2002), and while there are a number of reasons for these changes, literature on Indigenous school leadership suggests that professional development pursuits such as leadership training (DEET 2005; DEST 2004a; Fitzgerald, 2003; Nolen, 1998) to some extent have played, and continue to play, a pivotal role in increasing Indigenous leadership in schools. In turn, there is evidence to suggest that the relationship between Indigenous schools and their communities has gradually improved, with collaborative 'partnerships that engage both parties in healthy mutual decision making regarding western formal education of their children' (Beresford, & Gray 2006, p. 267; Collins 1999; House of Representatives Standing Committee on ATSI Affairs 2000). My claim here is that professional development training in school leadership for Indigenous school principals is critical to bridging the cultural gap between contemporary western educational leadership and Indigenous leadership practices, as well as vital in accomplishing school outcomes. Currently, the literature on school leadership is replete with an inventory of frameworks on managing school effectiveness, yet I would suggest that there still exists a

dearth of material on school and system structural arrangements, and on effective ways of encouraging community participation. Consequently, questions of what constitutes effective Indigenous school leadership, and school community partnerships, still remain indefinable.

Indigenous remote communities

Indigenous Australians comprise 2.4% of the total Australian population of approximately 20 million people. In the Northern Territory, 30% of a total population of approximately 200,000 Territorians are Indigenous, and most Indigenous Territorians live in remote communities spread across 1 346 200 square kilometers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001).

Today's remote Indigenous communities in Australia's Northern Territory are places with people from many different cultures and language groups. During the early colonisation period when missions were first being established, there was minimal consultation or negotiation with Aboriginal people. Hence, government policies and police actions at that time forced people from different groups to live together, and to conform to the dominant European culture. The end result of this was a loss of culture, language and identity for many Indigenous people right across the country (Nolen, 1998).

Nationally, the use of the term remote is derived from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) under a classification defined by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care. For legislation and policy reasons, it became imperative that a standard definition be adopted nationally. Consequently, five divisions were developed in the classification, namely: major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote, and very remote. This classification takes into account geographical distances from all essential services. Most regions where Indigenous principals are located in the Northern Territory are classified as remote or very remote.

The Indigenous school communities discussed in this paper are typical examples of remote and very remote communities in the Top End, located over 150 km from the nearest regional, urban town, or city. Maningrida for example in the Top End of the Northern Territory is a large Aboriginal remote community [by NT Aboriginal community standards] that is home to approximately 1,800 people with twelve distinct language groups. Facilities equivalent to those enjoyed by mainstream communities in these environments, for example social, educational and financial institutions, housing, and employment, are often in short supply or non-existent. There is a strong non-Indigenous presence in providers of health, education, and other commercial services. Among the different Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, Nolen, (1998) claims traditional culture is still a vital part of life that includes observing rules of kinship, knowing their language, and having a great sense of belonging to country. Relationships create a strong sense of collegiality essential for wellbeing and, as such, relationships to spirituality, family, and land are essential to Indigenous wellbeing.

Although they share much in comparison to non-Indigenous Australians, each Aboriginal group has its own unique tradition with distinct differences between the different cultural practices of different regions of Australia. It is important to know that these differences are as great as between countries in Africa, Asia, or Europe. As such, they are unique contexts, and investigation into educational issues from the perspective of Indigenous people should not be generalised.

Despite a strong presence and tradition of male authority in most communities, Indigenous women have dominated the field of educational leadership in most Indigenous remote community schools (Nolen, 1998). In the context of remote community school leadership, Indigenous women far outnumber their male counterparts. Of the current six Indigenous principals in remote community schools in the NT, all are female. However, they comprise only a minute percentage of principals in all schools in remote communities. It is against this backdrop that Indigenous female principals are required to demonstrate high levels of leadership skills for transforming their schools and involving the whole community in effective leadership and management within the school.

Professional development for Indigenous leaders

In the endeavour to adequately prepare Indigenous principals to meet the demands of administering the schools in their communities, the NT Department of Employment, Education and Training (NT DEET) and the NT Catholic Education Office (NT CEO) have a major responsibility to initiate and provide professional development programs (in addition to any other formal programs the principals may be enrolled in). However, while such professional development programs do assist in building leadership capacity, departmental leadership discourses, like any other leadership program at the federal, state and territory levels have their origins in a western framework from my observation that fails to consider the values and practices of Indigenous educational leaders. Moreover, such programs train Aboriginal people 'to take over the role of non-Indigenous educators the same way as the non-Aboriginies they are replacing' (Stewart, 1994). This fails to consider the traditional values and practices of Indigenous educational leaders. As a principal –in-training in the late 1990s stated

One of the parts of the principal's job I find difficult is dealing with all the Departmental paperwork. There is so much of this, big piles of paper!! And often it is in complicated English that is hard to understand' (Ngurruwutthun & Stewart, 1997).

In the early 1990s, a draft Aboriginalisation policy aimed at devolving executive powers to Indigenous teachers and communities in remote schools was introduced in the NT. It must be noted however that 'Aboriginalisation' did not include the way that schools function and operate including curriculum matters; it was only from a staffing point of view' (Stewart, 1994, p.53). Since then, there have been some positive changes in the management of Indigenous remote schools. For example, where possible, school councils have been delegated to make major decisions at the school level on governance and management. Nevertheless, this delegation of powers from the central body to school councils was only 'administrative rather than political with decisions at the school level being made within a framework of local, state or national policies and guidelines.... the school remains accountable to a central authority for the manner in which resources are allocated' (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988 p.5). Despite these challenges, however, different ways of structuring leadership and management roles within communities have since emerged.

As part of the process of preparing Indigenous executive teachers for school leadership roles, mentoring was initiated as a possible program that would complement and dovetail into formal administrative courses at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education and other national universities. Thus, the Department of Education and Catholic Education Office in the NT organized professional development mentoring programs both on and off site in order to ensure that Indigenous school principals were provided the necessary support (Nolen, 1998).

While there have been some gains in leadership development due to such professional development training programs, there are serious concerns about not only the overall content, but also the implementation strategies of such programs. Stewart (1994) claims programs such as the mentor program grew in an ad hoc manner with no guidelines developed, no specific competencies identified, and very little understanding of skills required of a mentor other than an ability to run a school. Over the years, remote Indigenous community schools have had increasing pressures for uniformity and conformity, thereby negating differences and diversity (Fitzgerald, 2006, p.203). Professional development programs in leadership I argue, in part contributed to this. Leadership training programs are predicated on western worldviews that are yet to create space for minority voices. Hence difficulties experienced by some Indigenous leaders have included isolation on the part of principals in articulating and negotiating shifts in thinking with communities, the challenge of leading in an environment of rapid and continuous change in schools, and school and system structural arrangements that are insensitive to cultural demands. Nirrpuranydji (in Henry and McTaggart, 1991, p. 95) expresses her views; 'It is really dangerous for one Yolngu person to allow herself or himself through training to become a 'bungawa' and act like a boss in a balanda structure. In this way the trained Yolngu joins the oppressors and breaks the relationship with the Yolngu in their community'.

Educational Leadership

Leadership remains an elusive term with 35,000 definitions in academic literature (Dubrin, 2000). It seems there is no unitary explanation of what it means to exercise leadership in contemporary society. Admittedly, Bennis and Nanus' (1985) views on leadership two decades ago lead the field while the search for the 'holy grail' continues (Pye, 2005, p.32). Bennis and Nanus (1985, p.1) note that:

Leadership is a word on everyone's lips. The young attack it, and the old grow wistful for it. Parents have lost it and the police seek it. Experts claim it and artists spurn it, while scholars want it. Philosophers reconcile it (as authority) with liberty and theologians demonstrate its compatibility with conscience. If bureaucrats pretend they have it, politicians wish they did. Everybody agrees there is less of it than there used to be. It now stands that leadership hath been broken to pieces (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p.1).

The collective body of educational leadership theory and research in the last hundred years distinguishes among traits (Stogdill, 1974) behavioural, (House, 1971) situational, (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988), process (Burns, 1978) and quite recently, values (Sergiovanni, 1992a;

Starrat, 2004) with related theories of servant (Greenleaf, 1977) and authentic (Duignan, 2002) leadership.

Traditionally, the literature in educational leadership has been grounded in western thought, but recent research has indicated differences between theories of leadership and native ways of knowing (Nolen, 1998; Johnson, 1997; Trujillo-Ball, 2003). While leadership in western worldviews is usually seen as authoritarian, individualistic, (Johnson, 1997), privileged and future oriented (Trujillo-Ball, 2003), leadership in Indigenous cultures is viewed as collective, interdependent, deeply connected to present, and of deep spirituality (Bond, 2004; Nolen, 1998; Trujillo-Ball, 2003). Of course, this is an over-simplification and generalization of the differences between the two, but it is nonetheless now generally acknowledged that these sorts of differences in worldviews and corresponding values present unique challenges for minorities in leadership positions. Hence, Indigenous people in school principal positions often find themselves caught between quite antithetical values, and sometimes find themselves having to inhabit a persona that is neither wholly recognizable to westerners nor well accepted at the local community level as echoed by Ngurruwutthun;

One of the difficulties in being a Yolngu principal in a balanda education system is the different way we look at being a leader. In Yolngu society, leaders are not placed up above everyone else....it is important that I am not a 'bungawa', a boss. This is not the way leaders are in Yolngu culture. But I work in a balanda system which has a hierarchical structure. In this structure I am seen as the boss of the school. I am supposed to be able to make decisions about the school (Ngurruwutthun and Stewart, 1997, p.18).

Current research on educational leadership advocates the need for culture specific leadership that fits the history and needs of the community it serves since leadership and life are interwoven (Trujillo-Ball, 2003). Johnson (1997, p.269-270) cautions, 'reducing leadership to behaviours without understanding the cultural beliefs and values, social conditions, historic influences and contexts as well as the individual behind the behaviours, trivialises the meaning of Native leadership'. However, while leadership theories may reflect some relevant leadership styles and behaviours, in my view they are problematic in the sense that they have not widened the debate to include issues of diversity such as ethnicity, colour, race and gender and have been constructed from a western paradigm that denies the inclusion of marginalised groups. Hence, if we are to ensure a more inclusive leadership discourse, then there needs to be a shift towards a cultural diversity perspective (Banjunid, 1996; Foster & Goddard, 2003; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998; Heck, 1998; Dimmock & Walker, 2005) that will provide a genuine opportunity to include minority voices that were hardly considered in the development of leadership theories.

Western theories may offer practical benefits to western oriented organisations and therefore should not be pontificated across the board as a 'one size fits all'. Educational leadership discourses in my opinion should commence from a platform, which embraces a more negotiated forum where meaning is constructed from multifaceted paradigms, which embrace a non-dominant cultural value based organisational perspective.

Indigenous women and educational leadership

Globally, Indigenous women are relatively new to educational leadership (or at least, that is, they are new within formal western style education systems). Hence, studies involving minorities and women in positions of educational leadership are limited (Fitzgerald 2002; Parker, 2004). Research that exists on women in education according to Brunner (in Trujillo-Ball, 2003), has been largely undertaken by the women themselves. In general, these women researchers conclude that the dearth of studies on women in positions of educational leadership 'reflect attitudinal neglect, and dismissal of women as leaders and not important enough to research, and the absence of research on successful minority women in leadership roles denotes lack of respect for minority women as leaders' (p. 56). Unfortunately, the use of the term 'sisterhood' as a model for feminist intercommunity relations has often proven more of a hindrance than a help for women of colour, as westerners have often used the term to assert inclusion without having any material basis for doing so. hooks (1995 in Oyewumi, 2001) claims 'sisterhood amongst women of racially cultural groups is possible but only when the divisions of race are conquered'. Until we close the divide, the 'sister outsider' (Lorde, 1984, in Oyewumi, 2001) will be denied class privileges and a less prominent place in leadership literature.

Nonetheless, this limitation has not prevented a few studies that have been conducted nationally and internationally, echoing the voices of minority groups such as Native American (Johnson, 1997), Canadian Indian (Wicks, 1999), New Zealand Maori (Fitzgerald, 2006; Wicks, 1999), and Australian Indigenous women (Nolen, 1998, Fitzgerald, 2006; White, 2007)). This literature on minority women stands out from the small but relatively large body of literature on women's educational leadership, which has mostly been concerned with western (White, middle and upper class) women (Parker, 2004). Nonetheless, literature pertaining specifically to Australian Indigenous women leaders is extremely scarce and research on Australian Indigenous women educational leaders is only just emerging. I want now to turn to a few studies on Indigenous educational leadership that have been conducted in the Northern Territory.

Nolen (1998) has investigated emerging models of Indigenous educational leadership in five remote Indigenous community schools in the NT, and her research includes Indigenous women leaders. Nolen concludes that leadership and management could be exercised in different ways, as each community is uniquely constituted by its own particular set of socio-historical circumstances. She also suggests that more extensive studies should be undertaken in order to establish the specificity and validity of leadership and localisation issues. Another researcher, Wicks (1999), has conducted a comparative study in selected Indigenous schools and identifies the following common themes with regard to educational leadership in these communities: the placement of a high value on culture, involvement of community, the importance of relationships, and consensual decision-making. These common themes are articulated models of educational leadership in selected Indigenous schools in British Columbia, Canada, Auckland, New Zealand, and Northern Territory, Australia.

International studies of New Zealand Maori, Mexican American, Native Canadian leaders, and their counterparts in Australia, have all reported similar findings in their perspectives on leadership. Each advocates for other (non-western) ways of conceptualising leadership. This means that the performance of leaders should not necessarily be assessed using western

normative measures or western mainstream standards. For many of the world's Indigenous peoples, the inclusion of diverse voices, community involvement, empowerment and 'power with', rather than 'power over' others (Johnson, 1997) and leadership practices of a shared vision with the community as a whole (Trujillo-Ball, 2003) are integral aspects of good leadership.

The results of these national and international studies echo the challenges faced by many Indigenous educators in Australia today. With limited studies on Indigenous women as educational leaders, it is time to widen the lens, and to build on the few studies that do exist in order to generate more literature useful for professional development providers and trainers (who are, for the most part, non-Indigenous) endeavouring to build the capacity of Indigenous educational leaders. Professional development providers and other stakeholders need to be able to support Indigenous educational leaders as they endeavor to integrate knowledge across diverse paradigms, as, only offering leadership development training within a Eurocentric paradigm, with little consideration for Indigenous worldviews, amounts to nothing less than 'pedagogical imperialism' (Lau & Roffey, 2002, p.3).

The current climate in devolved (community organized and controlled) schools requires Indigenous principals and their staff to work in partnership not only with their local communities, but also with a diversity of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff embodying multiple identities and realities. Whilst there is some flexibility in establishing such partnerships within schools, Indigenous female principals are still expected to operate within departmental guidelines that are replete with inherited bureaucratic jargon including terms such as 'strategic plans', 'student outcomes', 'market managerialism, and 'casting'. All of this and more must be pursued under the umbrella of 'school improvement', with the highest premium placed on achieving 'performance targets'.

Meanwhile, it is reasonable to suggest that some contemporary Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory still hold predominantly patriarchal views. (Of course this is as true of non-Indigenous Australia). It is therefore a challenging job on the one hand, to keep to traditional values, on the other, articulate and engage in productive and sustained partnerships with communities that have emerged from complex historical, social, and political turmoil. In the voice of an Indigenous principal 'I sometimes find it hard to involve the full cooperation of the men. We women run the school and they don't see it as their business. It is like a women's business and sometimes it's hard to get their support in school programs' (Dhaykamalu, 1999, personal conversation) Demonstrating such leadership as part of a performance criterion demands different set of strategies and mind sets than the norm, and they will require a new persona in a 'crosswalk' of AT LEAST two polarized epistemological frameworks.

The group of Indigenous women leaders in NT remote community schools face the enormous task of bridging the gap between leadership values that have 'come out of the colonial experiences of institutional life on reserves' (Pearson, 1999, p30) and those aspects of Indigenous leadership that seem resistant to western leadership values. Their position as women in the forefront of school leadership requires them to communicate bureaucratic western practices in ways that empower the entire community to be involved in school management.

The place of culture in school

There is now a growing body of literature that recognises the importance of culture to society and the influence of culture on educational leadership (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2003; Foster & Goddard 2003; Gardiner, 1996; Stewart, 1994). Other research specifically emphasizes the importance of cultural diversity and the role of Indigenous women in cultural leadership (Puruntatameri, 1996; Nolen 1998; Gardiner 1996; Stewart, 1994; Kanu, 2001). Generally, culture is a term that does not lend itself to a normative universal definition - it comprises many definitions originating from many academic disciplines, and in particular anthropology and sociology. From an anthropological perspective, culture refers to a socially constructed phenomenon that 'defines clear beliefs and rules which prescribe how we relate to others (Vecchio, Hearn & Southey 1996, p. 46). Dimmock & Walker (2005) define culture as 'a whole way of life of the members of a society or group of people' (p. 7). In keeping with these views, James (1999, p. 194) proposes that:

Culture consists of a dynamic and complex set of values, beliefs, norms, patterns of thinking, styles of communication, linguistic expressions and ways of interpreting and interacting with the world that a group of people has developed to assure its survival in a particular physical and human environment (James, 1999. p. 194).

Bearé (1989, p. 173) extends his definition to include environmental materials such as buildings, and how they look, the people in them, their behaviours, what they say and do, their art, songs, language, and knowledge - all constitute their culture'. He goes on to argue that a school culture begins to show in:

...the way the school is run, its furnishings, its rewards and punishment, the way its members are organised and controlled, who has power and influence, which members are honoured, which behaviours are remarked upon and so on. All these things create the climate in which children learn, and which is powerfully pervasive in those learnings (1989, p.19).

In determining school outcomes, then, female principals in Indigenous schools have to ensure that 'both the school and the community own the educational programs' of their schools (Gardiner 1996, p. 20). This requires negotiating partnerships that need to be nurtured and respected at many levels. Without doubt, building such partnerships requires hard work and commitment on the part of school principals and other school leaders in order to bring the school, the community, and the parents together. In addition, Indigenous school principals and other staff are expected 'to draw on the community's knowledge, expertise, and cultural practices to shape the work that schools do and make them relevant to the lived experience of children from Aboriginal [communities]' (Corson 1998, p. 239). This is vital, for, as Harris (1990, p. xiii) cautions, neglecting community involvement in the development of Indigenous school children and instead allowing them to achieve 'academic success [alone] in the Western school system could seriously undermine Aboriginal identity'. Harris' reasoning here supports the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and epistemology in school programs if they are to foster a 'two-way schooling [and] education' (Willis 1996, p. 6).

Application of Hofstede's cultural analysis to leadership practice in schools.

It is widely recognized that culture also manifests itself in dimensions within the workplace. This is best understood in the landmark study conducted by Geert Hofstede from 1968 through 1972 involving 117, 000 IBM managers, employers, and supervisors across fifty countries and three multi-county regions. Hofstede's research focused mainly on work-related values, and he identified five basic cultural dimensions that illustrate differences across the fifty nations studied. These are: *Power distance*, *Uncertainty avoidance*, *Individualism – collectivism*, *Masculinity*, and *Long-term orientation* (Hofstede, 1991). Of the five dimensions identified, two are particularly relevant as conceptual tools in this paper. These are ***Power Distance***, (the extent to which members of a particular culture or society accept the unequal distribution of power), and ***Individualism and collectivism*** (the degree to which members of a community or school culture see themselves as separate),

Although Hofstede's work has been widely acclaimed as an influential piece of cross-cultural research, the empirical validity of his framework has also been severely criticised in cross-cultural scholarly circles, mostly for being too general and overly simplistic (Nicholson, 1991; Roberts & Boyacigiller, 1984). Other critics have simply cautioned that the model dimensions of Hofstede's analysis are a product of his time, and that this should be taken into account when employing them. Nevertheless, the overall framework of Hofstede's cross-cultural analysis has been used extensively and successfully in a variety of empirical and conceptual studies across numerous disciplines (Yates & Cutler, 1996), and it is generally accepted as the most valid, reliable, and stable.

Implicit in Hofstede's study is the notion that, while culture does not totally determine a person's behaviour in any given cultural situation, it serves as a powerful framework 'in which each person comes to understand themselves and the reality in which they can act' (Vecchio et al 1996, p. 688). Thus, each community school can be seen to have its peculiar culture that is critical to the success of any school community activities, partnerships and practices (Plucker, 2000). As Carroll & Carroll (2001) note, communities and their cultures serve as catalysts in negotiating and reforming school community relationships.

Hofstede (1991, p. 5) defines culture as 'the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another'. This definition has complex implications for the workplace where the dominant majority transfer cultural patterns of primary socialization with little or no accommodation of potential differences in relation to race, ethnicity, or gender. While Indigenous female principals are encouraged to exhibit leadership practices that are inclusive of their culture, constructs of leadership in professional development programs reveal 'blind spots'(Harris, 2004, p.12) to race and ethnicity in the practice of school leadership. Organisational culture in Australia is highly Eurocentric, and schools - being a part of this culture - find themselves inheritors of a Eurocentric set of 'exported and imported educational policy solutions' (Fitzgerald 2003, p. 3]. Such solutions based on Eurocentric assumptions are intended to rectify and resolve all problems in the field of education, but often fail due to a lack of understanding of the impact of cultural differences and/or specificities. In what follows, I employ two of Hofstede's conceptual tools in the hope of illuminating the multiplicity of binds in which Indigenous school principals may find themselves.

The following two tables (table 1, 2) outline the major differences at both ends of the continuum of two of Hofstede’s conceptual tools: Power distance and Individualism and Collectivism.

Table 1 Key differences between small and large power distance societies. General norm, family, school, and workplace.

Small power distance	Large power distance
Power is based on formal position, expertise ability to give rewards	Power is based on family or friends
Decentralisation is popular	Centralisation is popular
Privileges and status symbols are frowned upon	Privileges and status symbols for managers are both expected and popular
Subordinates expect to be consulted	Subordinates expect to be told what to do
The ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat or good father	The ideal boss is a resourceful democrat
Inequalities among people should be minimised	Inequalities among people are both expected and desired
Skills, wealth, power, and status need not go together	Skills, wealth, power, and status should go together

Source: Hofstede (1991, p.37)

Table 2 Key differences between collectivist and individualist societies. General norm, family, school, and workplace.

Collectivist	Individualist
People are born into extended families or other groups which continue to protect them in exchange for loyalty	Everyone grows up to look after himself/herself and his/her immediate (nuclear)family only
Identity is based in the social network to which one belongs	Identity is based in the individual
Children learn to think in terms of ‘we’	Children learn to think in terms of ‘I’
Harmony should always be maintained and direct confrontations avoided	Speaking one’s mind is a characteristic of an honest person
Relationship employer-employee is	Relationship employer-employee is a

perceived in moral terms, like a family link	contract supposed to be based on mutual advantage
Hiring and promotion decisions take employees' in-group into account	Hiring and promotion decisions to be based on skills and rules only
Management is management of groups	Management is management of individuals
Relationship prevails over task	Task prevails over relationship

Source: Hofstede (1991, p. 67)

The differences outlined by Hofstede (and reproduced in the tables above) are culturally embedded through an early mental programming, and these have implications in various settings including the workplace such as schools. As every human being is born into a culture, each person is introduced to primary socialisation right from the very beginning of life. These values inculcated into us during the primary socialization stage 'are important for determining our sense of who we are' (Duignan, 2006, p.75). Duignan (2006) further states that this task of developing the child by inculcating in them specific cultural values over time is 'influenced by family, education, peers and a whole range of experiences, both good and bad, that have helped shape us' (p. 75). As such, this socialisation process includes definite principles that must be followed and obeyed. As children begin to make the transition to school life, they encounter a further socialization process through the curriculum, and this is largely prescribed by the state. At this stage, some children from minority groups attend formal education institutions predicated on western values, in which case they may find themselves being initiated into a new culture that differs markedly from the culture of their primary socialization. Aboriginal children in Australian schools are an example of this. Although Australia as a multicultural society prides itself as embracing of diversity, this rhetoric does not easily translate into school curriculum and management practices, including Indigenous remote community schools.

If we consider for a moment Hofstede's conceptual tool of a power distance scale, then organizational culture in Australia is very much an Anglo Celtic domain that is representative of a small power distance scale. Meanwhile, some Aboriginal people (from my observation and personal discussion with Indigenous people) as well as some other ethnic groups display a majority of behaviours on a large power distance scale. Of course, these differences are generalizations (as the result of homogenizing a diversity of behaviours within a cultural group) and not absolute empirical facts. The differences also make sense only when two cultural groups are held in comparison to one another, so that the attributes in each of the categories can be seen as behaviour patterns exhibited more or less frequently by some groups in society relative to others, depending on the particular cultural values held.

However, to the extent that the differences do hold, obviously has serious implications for imparting knowledge and leadership practices in Indigenous community schools. For

example, workplace cultures in Australia as in other 'western societies tend to play down inequality as much as possible. Other societies and cultures accept and support large imbalances in power, status and wealth' (Lau & Roffey, 2002, p. 8). In comparison, some Aboriginal Australians are more likely to show greater acceptance of a large power distance, and hence demonstrating leadership practice from a small power distance is likely to present a cultural challenge in the running of day-to-day school tasks. Moreover, the wholesale export of western values into these community schools could result in cultural transformation, by fundamentally altering the mental programming of children, Indigenous staff, and therefore the wider community. Duignan (2006) claims the current educational leadership challenge within the extremely turbulent environment of the twenty-first century is the 'shifting of mindsets to a new paradigm' (p. 6) that encourages the building of closer community relationships.

Considering the Collectivist-Individualist conceptual tool from Hofstede's analysis, many if not all contemporary western societies are likely to fall on the individualist end of the scale. This is largely supported by Sommerville, (2000 p.6, in Duignan, 2006) who alerts us to the 'process addiction' of many secular western societies based on intense individualism'. Process addiction he argues is disengagement with society where as a world we are addicted to processes such as working long hours, intense competition, stressful work environments, high career-driven ambitions, and frivolous spending beyond our means (Duignan, 2006, p.7). As a result these addictive processes have left us with little time to connect to family and community that is important to our existence. What is even more disturbing is the tendency for key institutions, including schools, to promote addictive practices such as materialism, competition, and self-aggrandising habits (Duignan, 2006) across the board, without taking into account cultural differences and diversity.

The contemporary educational leadership landscape calls for collective responsibility, and embracing of community and a renewed sense of belonging. As ambassadors for the institutional body on the one hand, and cultural leaders for their communities on the other, female Indigenous principals find themselves 'walking between two worlds' (Fitzgerald 2006) that are in constant competition, in many ways polarized in terms of both their cultural mindsets and their educational practices. As echoed in the voice of an Indigenous female principal 'now I am an educational leader in my own community and it is not an easy task. I see myself torn between two cultures that are just beginning to understand each other' (Nirrpuranydji, 1998, in Nolen, 1998).

Within this context, Indigenous female principals can find negotiating partnerships at all levels an extremely complex task, even given flexible institutional guidelines and cultural expertise in possession of the necessary tools for cross-cultural practices. Ngurruwutthun (1997) expresses her predicament;

I have had to learn with Yolngu and balanda staff in different ways because of different cultural background...It is hard for me as a Yolngu woman to do this when the teacher might be a male balanda, but there are also difficulties with Yolngu staff if they are family members (p.18).

At the same time centrally developed professional development programs do little to prepare Indigenous female principals for the diversity of situations the majority may encounter. Even as they struggle to walk between two worlds themselves, Indigenous female principals are

also expected to be 'experts' in unpacking the entrenched western 'slavish commitment to individualized ways' (Duignan, 2006, p.6), and to communicate this to parents and the entire community, with very little professional training to guide them. To take off one set of cultural baggage and to pick up another obviously requires a major unlearning process. But enabling this putting on and taking off of more than one cultural way of knowing and being to become something of a habit is, as most educators rightly agree, a most difficult skill to learn.

Behaviours such as professional workplace relationships mainly exhibited at an 'intense individualised' and impersonal level 'especially in the developed world' have become so addictive that they are taken for granted as the norm despite often being in direct opposition to the moral and ethical considerations of many cultural groups, including those of Indigenous people. Meanwhile, Duignan (2006) highlights the contribution that key institutions such as schools may make in the mental programming of children. While this may seem trivial at a glance, deep-rooted cultural discrepancies between western style education systems and remote Indigenous communities can mean that female Indigenous educational leaders feel forced to compromise cultural values at every level of relationship, including internally at the school level and externally in the community. At every level of cultural practice, the collectivist analysis (see table 2) is an everyday practice of most minority cultures, and includes a deep commitment to extended family, group management, spirituality, kinship and land. In mainstream culture where identities are largely based in the individual (see table2), transporting this thinking to Indigenous environments may likely create an identity conflict.

A question that always resurfaces in work places where radical cultural differences prevail is this: How do female principals in Indigenous remote communities embark on bringing both cultures to work in harmony? There are no easy answers without revisiting prescriptive theories of best leadership practices that are unfortunately embedded in western hegemonic discourses and tend to have a 'colonising assumption that rests on the predication that leadership is exercised by an individual' (Fitzgerald, 2002, p.10). If administrative practice is culture-bound (Wicks, 1999), then western epistemologies, with a tendency toward bureaucratic forms, are indeed in sharp contrast to Indigenous cultural practices that are embedded in the importance of kin and family relationships and mutual obligations and a strong sense of spirituality. The dualities I would argue are incongruent with present leadership development structures in Indigenous remote schools.

School and community partnerships

The above analysis has many implications for school community partnerships in remote Indigenous community schools. School community partnerships have become an operational norm in many countries, and research literature abounds with the benefits of partnerships between schools, parents, and communities (Boyd, 1997; McInerney, 2002; Epstein, 2001). Research both overseas and in Australia has shown that such partnerships improve school outcomes, connect parents, increase leadership skills, and promote healthy mutuality among the entire school community (Davies & Karr-Kidwell, 2003; Foster & Goddard, 2003; Spry & Graham, 2006; Stone, 1995).

In order to contextualise the discussion it is necessary to define some key concepts such as community, school, and partnership, and to sketch out the relationship that exists between them. Spry & Graham (2006) note that 'community' is a key word invoked in educational circles, and an emphasis on building community in schools is fast becoming a cliché in educational circles. It is little wonder, then, that buzzwords such as 'community decision-making', 'community standards', 'learning communities', 'communities of practice', (Spry & Graham, 2006) and 'community partnerships' are now the standard glossary of most educational institutions. McNerney (2002) defines community as 'a social group with similar interests, social structures, values and life styles' (p.3). Boyd (1997) on the other hand describes community as a site of contested interests. In this view, a community is a social democratic setting within which people have equal right to contribute to community issues.

Three views of community promoted by sociologists are models of 'gemeinschaft' (Community), 'gesellschaft' (organisation), and personalism (combination of gemeinschaft and gesellschaft) (Spry & Graham, 2006). The personalist model of community that supports the centrality of the person, subjectivity, diversity, participation, as well as solidarity (Spry and Graham, 2006) seems to be consistent with Indigenous worldviews of interdependence and cooperation for the common good (Nolen, 1998, White, 1998; Johnson, 1997). This is important when discussing school and community partnerships since schools have a moral and ethical responsibility to prepare students for successful integration into wider society. More importantly, school communities rely on norms, purposes, shared values and beliefs (Sergiovanni, 1994), and educational leaders are, as Duignan (2006) suggests, charged with the responsibility of serving others through leadership practices that are collaborative and inclusive (p. 12). The glossy idea of building communities of practice and developing binary relationships is incomplete without seriously deliberating on the unifying force of this chemistry (between schools and communities). There is hence a need to deconstruct and define 'partnerships' in order to fully engage in such discourse. Partnership has been defined as

a sharing of power, responsibility and ownership, with each party having different roles, a degree of mutuality, that begins with the process of listening to each other and which incorporates responsive dialogue and 'give and take' on both sides. It also involves shared aims and goals based on a common understanding of the educational needs of children and a commitment to joint action in which parents, students and teachers work together.

(Australian Council of State School Organisation -Issues paper, 2004, p. 3-4).

According to current literature, in order to promote the sort of partnership outlined above, school principals need to develop and sustain a sense of trust (Foster & Goddard, 2003), where staff and community people can enter into a relationship with shared power, responsibility and ownership. Equally, principals should provide staff, parents, and the entire community with the opportunity to engage in open and full dialogue; that is, principals need to foster 'dialogic practice', since 'what gets said and what gets listened to is always understood to be marked by unequal powers' (McInerney, 2002, p.8). How well this translates within and across cultures, however, is another matter altogether. For female

Indigenous educational leaders in remote community schools it seems the challenges are (almost) insurmountable, as they seek to turn their community schools away from being institutions largely predicated on contractual individualised relationships.

Bond (2004), in a study conducted on Mornington Island, Queensland, explored the perception of Indigenous elders regarding schools, communities, and the relationships they believe should exist between them. He noted a number of studies that reported a somewhat negative perception of Aboriginal people about western schooling. Beresford & Omaji, (1998); Haslett, Harrison, Godfrey, Partington, and Richer (1999, in Bond, 2004) assert that 'most Aboriginal parents view teachers as hostile and schools as threatening environments (p. 29) and, as such, 'many Indigenous people passively resist the education system, by apparent silent tolerance of the status quo, while in fact steadfastly and impassively refusing to be a part of it' (Ingram, 1981; Trigger, 1992; Reynolds, 1999, in Bond p. 29). These researchers further contend that the 'dismissal of Indigenous knowledge and the marginalisation of the custodians of this knowledge and the practitioners of these pedagogies increase the schools' cultural gap from the community and contribute to the failure of education in remote Indigenous communities' (Bond, 2004, p. 30).

A theme that emerged from Bond's (2004) study was the role of the principal in creating space to respond to local community needs and acknowledgement of 'the refusal of elders particularly men to be subservient to the authority and dominance of the school system' (p. 225). For this group of elders 'the name '*principal*' was institutional rather than referring to individual persons and, for them the principal represented western authoritarian norms of senior government officials' (Bond 2004, p. 220).

The Australian Council of State Schools Organisation Family School Partnerships Issues paper (ACSSO) (2004) identifies the role of leadership in partnerships. In it, the authors argue that 'principals play a pivotal role in influencing all that happens in schools' (p.11) and that the principal's attitude has much to do with the type of collaboration and level of involvement of parents and community. The issues paper published as part of a project to enhance partnerships between Australian schools and their families recognises the role parents and the wider community play as first educators of their children (ACSSO, 2004; Department of Education Tasmania, 2002). As a result, all state/territory governments have developed policies that discuss the role of parents and communities. However, a key criticism that has emerged from these policies is that 'parents and families are treated as homogeneous groups of social equals, with similar beliefs, attitudes and skills' (ACSSO, Issues paper, 2004, p.1). The paper further reports that 'anecdotal evidence from the community suggest problems of implementation that are often patchy, uncoordinated, and under resourced' (p. 2) and, that official policy in the public domain is not necessarily a good indicator of quality and extent of partnerships in schools. While considerable efforts are being made through consultations, and reconceptualising structures, a central problem for remote Indigenous communities has been and still is creating cultural spaces to accommodate indigenous voices to initiate and implement lasting changes.

The current shifts in educational policies are premised on the recognition that good relationships and partnerships between schools and communities benefit school children. What is lacking presently is a consensus (even among Indigenous leaders' networks) as to

how these effective relationships should be achieved, who holds responsibility for what, and where power and control should reside in making educational decisions (Beresford & Gray, 2006).

Implications for Australian female Indigenous educational leaders

There are some significant implications stemming from these issues for female Indigenous principals in remote community schools. The educational leadership landscape of the twenty-first century in a time of rapid change is challenging. In Australia, it may well be that discourses in educational leadership remain a 'privileging construct that is played out differently across gendered lines' (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 432) irrespective of circumstances of race, ethnicity, social class, and geographical location. For female Indigenous remote community school principals, the rhetoric of leading today's schools and forging partnerships with their respective communities does not easily translate into practice. Structures that seem to encourage self-determination and self-management are technically in place, but there appears to be only a rhetorical reliance on the direction and support of school councils and elders in governance and decision-making. Having the administrative authority to dismantle chronic structures that are inimical to Indigenous values and beliefs is one thing, and operating within western ethnocentric notions of leadership that are 'transported and legitimized across homogenous educational systems' (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.431) with 'intense individualistic and addictive' practices (Duignan, 2006, p. 13) is another.

Despite these concerns individual communities have initiated structural change that still supports system agencies but that are compatible with local community life. The notion of shared leadership that is compatible with traditional community life (Nolen, 1998) seem to have some answers. At Murrupuritiyanuwu Catholic School on Bathurst Island in the NT for example where no school council was appointed, a shared leadership model has been in practice for a number of years. This shared leadership model called the Milimika (cleared ground prepared for ceremony) Circle involves the Indigenous principal and four skin group representatives in a shared leadership team. Education and organization of school is like a Milimika ground. The school is a place of ceremony. Like the Milimika ceremonial dance, the school leadership team perform different dances in the ring in pairs or as a group and the philosophy of leadership is that they work together supporting each other, and taking on different roles and responsibilities in school matters.

Other communities where school councils have been established made structural changes to accommodate needs of the school and the community. At Yirrkala, in Arnhem land for example, there is a council with membership comprising the sixteen clan groups. This body is the main policy-making body within the school. The Action Group is an off-shoot of the School council that is responsible for the day-to-day decision making within the school. This group comprises all Indigenous school staff from the principal to the janitor. They all have a role to play and each person's opinion is valued. There is also a parent group to encourage parent participation. These structures ensure control to some extent of directions for children's education. Some other communities may decide to have a both ways structure where non-Indigenous staff may be in deputy principal positions to be responsible for bureaucratic matters that sometimes distract the Indigenous principal from the real job of demonstrating educational leadership. This way both Indigenous and non-Indigenous are working together and learning from each other.

Indigenous female principals face a double bind. While they are advocates for Indigenous children, parents, and the entire community with a strong voice on Aboriginal issues, they also represent the central system as ambassadors for promoting western bureaucratic structures that are process driven and are in many ways the very antithesis of Indigenous worldviews. At the school level they work in quite diverse environments with non-Indigenous staff some of whom with all good intentions cannot avoid bringing the baggage of mental programming that is incongruent with Indigenous worldviews. The idea of communicating core values and building communities of practice is an enormous task for female Indigenous leaders. In addition, many Indigenous people still view schools as threatening environments, and passively resist the education system by apparent silent tolerance of the status quo (Bond, 2004, p.29).

Further, some communities they work in are in constant conflict and disorder underpinned by violence, drunkenness, and erosion of lawful society as part of the context. (Ah Kit, 2002) As women, there is also the gender dimension of adhering to Indigenous cultural leadership philosophies that clash with organizational cultures that are insensitive to values that determine their presence. These are very complex issues for female Indigenous principals to contend with.

Balancing professional and personal responsibilities remains another key implication. The current educational climate is complex and pregnant with rapid and often unexpected changes that demand educational leaders to work longer hours than expected. For female Indigenous leaders this kind of demand may require them to compromise their personal and cultural obligations within the community as the job of leading schools encroaches on every bit of their time. This is likely to create an internal conflict that may jeopardise both their professional leadership capabilities and their loyalty to their community. Consequently, some Indigenous principals have developed strategies where family members are invited to job interviews as a way of informing them about job requirements (Puruntatameri, 1996). It is expected that this form of communication encourages support from family members whose demands are quite often challenging.

Duignan (2006) notes that the 'real challenges' of educational leadership – the ones that keep educational leaders awake all night - are tensions between and among people especially those based on philosophies, values, interests, and preferences. Female Indigenous leaders are confronted with not only managing non-Indigenous staff but Indigenous staff who may not necessarily respect and trust the individual wearing the 'principalship' hat and where, additionally, these women have to work even harder to gain the trust of their elders. In order to resolve some of these problems the role of elders is increasingly important where elders deal directly with conflicts among Indigenous staff. Issues to do with non-Indigenous staff are sometimes referred to senior executives at the system level. These circumstances do not put them in any enviable position.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have traversed a broad spectrum in the tensions Indigenous female principals are confronted with in managing change within Indigenous remote community schools. The task of embarking on negotiating school and community partnerships with their communities is enormous especially within communities that are socially, politically and economically

dysfunctional. It is important to note that there are no quick fixes to these cultural and educational issues. The present challenges in Indigenous education, and leadership of the schools for female Indigenous leaders cannot be overemphasised. One thing that is evident, the principalship is no longer the sacred realm of non-Indigenous educators. As such, there are opportunities for Indigenous female principals to contest hegemonic practices and integrate the attributes that accompany leadership practices from an Indigenous perspective such as espoused notion of shared leadership, high level of community involvement, acknowledgement of and incorporation of cultural norms and values, and a continued dialogue and negotiation with all parties involved in the education of Indigenous children. Significantly, it is time that these cultural philosophical perspectives contribute to theory development in the field of educational leadership to include Indigenous world views.

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