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# Introduction

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# Foreword

Jerry White, Julie Peters, Peter Dinsdale, and Dan Beavon

## Introduction

The third triennial Aboriginal Policy Research Conference (APRC) was held from March 9–12, 2009, at the Westin Hotel in Ottawa, Ontario. This APRC, like those before it, brought researchers, policy-makers, and the Aboriginal community together to make connections, hear about leading research, and learn together. While focused on Canada, it also included indigenous peoples from around the world with more than 20 countries represented. Ultimately this conference hopes to facilitate better outcomes for Aboriginal people across the country and internationally. This conference is the largest of its kind in the world.

The conference goals were to promote interaction between the various actors in the Aboriginal policy field. Government representatives, researchers, academic institutions, Aboriginal organizations, and Aboriginal peoples all came together to present research, hear from others, and debate ideas. The APRC is structured to facilitate better policy development and the expansion of knowledge. The 2009 APRC accomplished all of this while providing an immediate forum and establishing foundations for ongoing deliberations to occur.

The Aboriginal Policy Research Conferences held in 2002 and 2006 planted the seeds for the success of the 2009 conference. In 2002, the Strategic Research Analysis Directorate of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and the University of Western Ontario (UWO) held the initial APRC. The first conference established clearly that there was both a great demand and a need for a conference of this nature. Over 700 delegates attended, and the response of those participating was overwhelmingly positive. In 2006 the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) joined INAC and UWO as a co-chair to host the second APRC. While emulating many of the successful features of the 2002 conference, this conference expanded to include a greater emphasis on graduate students and more in-depth collaboration with the Aboriginal community. The revamped APRC was a tremendous success with over 1,300 participants attending. The 2006 conference also introduced international content with delegates from many countries attending. The United Nations used the conference to host one of its world consultations on indigenous well-being indicators.

Each of these conferences provided for greater numbers of partners to participate and collaborative opportunities to take place. We, the conference organizers, have learned from our mistakes and our successes to make important advances with each event. Our aim for the APRC has been to evolve without losing our initial focus and mandate.

As we moved into planning the 2009 APRC, we had hoped to build upon previous successes. The timing of the conference turned out not to be ideal. In late 2008, Canada was clearly entering a recessionary period of unknown duration and intensity. There was great concern about the direction of the economy during the late planning stages of our conference and during the key registration period. This clearly had an impact on the conference. There were those in the government and elsewhere that cautioned us and encouraged drastic cutbacks and even cancellation. We took the prudent path, rejecting calls for cancellation, and in the end decided to proceed with a leaner conference, placing the focus on research and dialogue while maintaining our commitment to infusing culture into the process. In the end, the APRC did not suffer from these actions and feedback has been very positive.

## **Foundations for the 2009 Aboriginal Policy Research Conference**

As with previous conferences, the 2009 APRC was developed to address the need to have an Aboriginal policy-specific process that provided opportunity for dialogue on a wide range of public policy issues. As in past years, a great emphasis was placed on partnering with the Aboriginal community in a new way. The three co-chairs sought to find as many ways as possible to ensure that the broader Aboriginal community was truly involved and cooperated in the delivery of the conference. Three specific actions were taken. Firstly, Aboriginal researchers were invited through a call for proposals process to present their research. This action opened up the APRC to a whole range of public policy actors who did not previously have a natural way to fully participate in the conference. Secondly, the co-chairs invited national Aboriginal organizations to be members of the planning committee and to present their best research at the conference. This helped to ensure that the research priorities of the APRC were reflective of the research priorities of the Aboriginal community at large. Finally, the 2009 APRC ensured that Aboriginal people helped to organize, facilitate, and present all aspects of the conference. This extended from the co-chair position to using Aboriginal businesses and suppliers where they were available. In total, the 2009 APRC represented a best practice for interacting with the Aboriginal community in a truly cooperative and respectful manner.

In addition, this APRC also sought to ensure that a strong focus on the public policy process and its drivers was reflected in the conference. The 2009 APRC provided a forum to hear about leading research on the public challenges of the day. All of our partners—Aboriginal and government—were able to present their research, policy, and programming responses to these challenges. Each of the actors had an opportunity to engage with each other and build bridges to new understanding. APRC 2009 was no different than past APR conferences, as many workshops on clean water, residential schools, and urbanization of Aboriginal

people reflected the headlines of the day and ensured the conference was timely and relevant.

The conference demonstrated yet again that the original cross-cutting design remains relevant today. Stakeholders from across Canada and the world came together to interact. The structured dialogue that the APRC provides allowed for all public policy actors to work through some of the most challenging issues. The 2009 APRC provided an opportunity to learn lessons from past conferences and apply them. There were clearly some challenges to growing the conference in a difficult economic environment and remaining committed to its original vision and mandate. We believe that the 2009 APRC succeeded.

## **Aboriginal Policy Research Conference 2009**

The goals for the 2009 Aboriginal Policy Research Conference were as follows:

- to expand our knowledge of Aboriginal issues
- to provide a important and neutral forum where these ideas and beliefs can be openly discussed and debated
- to integrate research from diverse themes
- to highlight research on Aboriginal gender issues
- to highlight research on urban Aboriginal issues
- to allow outstanding policy needs to shape the future research agenda

In pursuing these goals we sought to make some improvements upon past conferences. Three innovations took place at the 2009 conference. As previously mentioned, this APRC sought greater collaboration with national Aboriginal organizations. After the 2006 APRC, some organizations felt the conference could be strengthened with greater, more in-depth collaboration—and they were right. Organizations were brought on as partners and involved in planning and preparations for the conference. In addition, these organizations were provided with opportunities to present their research.

In addition, a greater international focus was present at the 2009 APRC. Many countries around the world are dealing with the same issues we face in Canada. A larger number of international delegates came to participate in the 2009 conference. Representatives from the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues also participated in our sessions.

Finally, we sought to deepen our commitment to and support of Aboriginal students at this year's conference. A new scholarship for Aboriginal graduate students, that will be delivered through the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, has been developed. The scholarship is named after Gail Valaskakis, a tremendous Aboriginal policy advocate who touched all who knew her. The Gail Valaskakis Memorial Aboriginal Policy Research Conference Bursary will provide \$7,500 over three years to Aboriginal graduate students. It is a fitting tribute to a remarkable woman who was our friend and conference partner.

In addition, the NAFC reached out to the private sector to find resources to bring Aboriginal students from across Canada to attend the conference. After a call was sent out, over fifty youths were brought to Ottawa. Graduate students were also provided with the opportunity to participate this year; a specific call for papers was made to graduate students to present their research at the 2009 APRC. All ten graduate students that were selected in the cross-Canada competition won a scholarship from the conference!

The 2009 APRC also saw the first ever Cinema N' Chat series during which Aboriginal films and films about Aboriginal issues were shown with some commentary from the filmmakers or special guests. The films ran concurrent to the conference and allowed APRC attendees to explore this medium and learn from the films and their makers. This is one example of the variety of activities that take place during the conference to help facilitate dialogue; among the other activities were dozens of dance, music, singing, and art performances presented around the clock. We had visiting artists from several other countries performing at plenary sessions, evening socials, and in the hallways.

These new innovations were not the only improvements made at the 2009 conference. As in past years, two calls for papers were sent out for interested parties to present at the conference. A call for papers for the academic community was overseen by UWO. In addition, the NAFC conducted a second call for papers by Aboriginal communities wishing to present research at the conference. In the end 60 academic and 30 Aboriginal community researchers were selected, and their work complemented our partner's papers.

The 2009 APRC also saw expanded partnerships. As previously discussed, a new category of Aboriginal organizations was brought on board as planning partners. In addition, we reached out to government organizations to become financial and planning sponsors. As a result 20 government partners and 20 Aboriginal partners helped to make the conference a success. It should be noted that the 2009 APRC saw Ontario come on board as a funding and planning partner, the first province to do so. It is the co-chairs' hope that this type of partnership will be expanded at future conferences.

So how did we do? Despite some of the challenges we faced, the 2009 APRC was our most successful yet. Over 1,300 delegates attended the conference. Over 150 workshops and 459 research presentations were provided. Plenary sessions and pre-conference workshops added to the wide range of discussions that took place. Numbers are only part of the story—feedback from participants was enthusiastic concerning relevance, quality, and opportunity to make connections with others concerned with like issues.

Ultimately it is the new knowledge and learning that come out of these discussions which will speak to the success of the 2009 APRC. We believe that it is the very structure of the APRC that will help to ensure its success. The workshops are developed in such a way as to encourage broad reflection on a host of areas and how they impact each other. Justice, social, economic development, health,

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governance, infrastructure, demographic, and urban issues, among others, are all part of the same story. We are chasing the answers to important questions, and as the conference unfolded we could see progress being made.

### ***Building a Collaborative Environment***

As in past years, at the 2009 APRC we sought to ensure the conference environment helped to support our goals. Elders opened each session. Drummers helped to set the overall tone and mood of the conference. Fiddlers, throat singers, and dancers demonstrated the vibrant First Nation, Métis, and Inuit cultures that thrive in Canada. These were not side events or additions to the conference, but critical pieces that helped to ground conversations and support our collective efforts.

Ultimately, all of these efforts are made to help ensure that we create a better policy and research environment. Policy-makers require solid, evidence-based research to make decisions. Policy-makers also need to ensure that decisions are being made in a collaborative way that addresses the articulated needs of communities. The 2009 APRC provided the policy/research nexus, in a supportive environment, for this collaboration to take place.

The next conference will be in 2012; we hope you will be involved.

### ***Proceedings***

The co-chairs have decided that we will continue our tradition of publishing the best papers from the conference in our book series, Aboriginal Policy Research. Volumes 6 through 10 of the series do not represent all of the work discussed at the conference, but a cross-section. The following section describes what is included in this volume of the series. Consider these proceedings our invitation to you to join in the next journey.

# Introduction to Aboriginal Policy Research: Learning, Technology, and Traditions

Jerry White and Julie Peters

This is the first of five volumes that present a small number of the high quality papers that were presented at the Aboriginal Policy Research Conference 2009. Our purpose was to group the research into sets of complementary ideas. In this volume, we have divided the papers into three sections: In Part One: Education Issues, we look at some of the general and community research related to educational processes and improving attainment; in Part Two: Technology and Community Well-Being, we look at how technology is influencing new learning strategies, particularly in remote areas, and how technology can impact other endeavors as well; and in Part Three: Revitalizing Spiritual Traditions and Languages, we present a small number of articles on spirituality and language.

Part One covers a range of interesting issues related to learning and education. **Chapter 1** reports a study that used data to monitor early literacy development. Elizabeth Sloat and Joan Beswick describe an early literacy monitoring system that was pilot-tested in collaboration with 26 schools, including six First Nations schools and two public schools with high concentrations of First Nations children.

The project aimed to discover how to reduce reading problems for children, with a focus on students in kindergarten to grade two. This is the time, the authors maintain, during which children are at risk of experiencing early reading difficulty. Working with children during this developmental period has a great impact on enabling students to transition successfully from primary to elementary school. The authors take us through the evidence that indicates the importance of learning to read early, and they point out the relationship between early reading acquisition and later academic success. They describe a cross-section of monitoring systems currently available to guide literacy program planning and policy, highlighting the problems with these systems. Sloat and Beswick's collaboratively developed monitoring system and its positive aspects are then presented. They conclude their study by outlining a number of policy implications. Their key finding is that children often arrive at school without some or all of the basic foundational skills (like reading), which means they are doomed to experience failure in school from an early stage. The key, they argue, is to diagnose these problems accurately and early, which allows for specialized attention be given to the children who are in need. The system they use for determining the academic deficiencies, they argue, is effective.

**Chapter 2** is about literacy and numeracy support for First Nations students in an elementary school. Authors Jody Alexander, Judy Hewitt, and Thérèse

Narbonne look specifically at the role of the Aboriginal resource teacher in improving classroom results. Their study is based on the assessment of a project undertaken by the Renfrew County District School Board in partnership with the Algonquins for Pikwàkanagàn Community, the Renfrew Catholic District School Board, and the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS). Through this project, Native student resource teachers were placed in two schools. The role of these teachers was to provide support to First Nations students, helping them demonstrate their capacities and narrow the achievement gap. They also intended to promote Aboriginal students' pride in their culture, help them integrate at the school, and build bridges between home and school and school and the First Nations community.

This is a fascinating study that sets the context of the school and community to help us understand the impact of resource teachers and the issues involved in their placement. The findings are quite interesting—the data indicates that there was quite an improvement in the Aboriginal children's tested capacity. Indeed we see that the cohort of students who began the program when they were in grade one had success rates superior to non-Aboriginal students by year two. The authors conclude that the work of the Native student resource teacher was pivotal to the successes achieved by the First Nations and Métis students.

**Chapter 3**, by Evelyne Bougie and Sacha Sénécal, looks at the intergenerational effect of residential schooling for off-reserve children, with a focus on 6- to 14-year-olds. Their approach—utilizing the 2006 Aboriginal Peoples Survey to investigate the factors associated with school success as perceived by parents—is interesting. The factors that negatively influenced school success were: gender (being a boy), living in larger households, experiencing periods of food insecurity, and having parents who attended residential school. Children in higher income families with better-maintained houses were more successful at school, as were children in families where an Aboriginal language is spoken at home.

This is an important study, as the authors looked at how each of these factors interacts with the others. The families in which parents were former residential school attendees were more likely to live in larger households, have lower incomes, and to report experiencing periods of food insecurity. In Canada, we are still trying to understand the process and scope of the impact of the residential school policy on Aboriginal peoples. This study is an important piece of the evidence we need to be able to more completely develop this understanding.

In **Chapter 4**, Randolph Wimmer, Louise Legare, Yvette Arcand, and Michael Cottrell bring us a qualitative study that reports the impressions, ideas, and understandings of teachers who have recently graduated from an Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP). They draw from these reflections to outline proposals for policy and research. What will strike the reader in this chapter is the emphasis on methods of research. This paper not only contributes substantially with regards to the issues related to teacher training, but also on the “how to do respectful and ethical research” front. The authors address issues as diverse as cohort effects



and field placements, and make some interesting revelations, including the fact that even though the Aboriginal graduates of the training program were familiar with issues in First Nations communities, they did not feel prepared enough to deal with these issues as teachers. The researchers recommend that Aboriginal teacher education programs include “life skills” training, which they characterize as promoting the Aboriginal teaching of holistic learning.

In **Chapter 5**, Susan Phillips presents a summary of six community-school case studies she conducted in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The chapter also draws some conclusions and develops recommendations from that research. Phillips was particularly interested in how programs evolved to meet community needs; the governance structures and adaptations required to function in an integrated services environment; what partnerships were needed between agencies and schools; the indicators used for measuring success; and any promising practices that could be identified in these schools.

Part Two of this volume is related to technology and communications. Some of the articles in this section focus on education, while others examine general e-strategies for First Nations. In the first of our articles, Judy Whiteduck looks at the strategy for building a First Nations e-community (**Chapter 6**). She situates the development of an adequate First Nations broadband network as part of a comprehensive and integrated plan for economic, social, and cultural change. Whiteduck brings her vast experience to bear on this need to make a strategic shift toward an approach for economic growth based on knowledge and information. The backbone for the strategy is a national First Nations broadband network that reaches all 630 communities across the country. As she points out, there are many contributors with expertise and infrastructure already in place; any strategy demands mobilizing these stakeholders and building on their work. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is an organization working on this strategy, and Whiteduck discusses the history, strategy, policy, operational, and infrastructure requirements being explored by the AFN, including community-level work to increase the efficiency of the delivery of programs and services.

This chapter addresses some fundamental issues, as it explains the context and history that have led to today’s situation. These include governance capacity and coordination; First Nation connectivity; information and communication technology (ICT) human resources development; First Nation information management; and service delivery and partnering.

**Chapter 7** by Tim Whiteduck looks at Indian and Northern Affairs Canada’s First Nations SchoolNet and investigates broadband and community-based ICT applications in remote and rural First Nations in Canada. He makes some important observations, such as how the First Nations SchoolNet program has been successful in connecting very difficult-to-serve regions of Canada, and notes that its successes are recognized internationally. He outlines why the program is successful by looking at many important First Nations–led initiatives, such as regional management organizations. He outlines the kind of partnerships and

levels of cooperation that have been necessary to the growth and development of this program. As Whiteduck explains, these are developments that have wide application possibilities in other fields, such as health.

**Chapter 8** presents research from the Keewaytinook Okimakanak Research Institute, focusing on the Kuhkenah Network (K-Net). K-Net is a regional First Nations network that partners telecommunications providers, governments, and First Nations to develop and provide broadband connectivity applications to remote and rural First Nations communities in Ontario. The chapter opens with a piece by Penny Carpenter in which she introduces the K-Net project, highlighting its historical development, the partnership process, and the ways in which K-Net impacts the socio-economic well-being of First Nations communities in remote and rural locations. Developing the infrastructure to support ICTs has been one of the primary challenges for these communities. Carpenter shows how K-Net has also taken on a lobbying role on behalf of communities, and has helped to shape federal policy that establishes requirements for basic service levels to be made available to all communities. As new ICTs make their way into remote and rural First Nations communities, it will be important to find ways to harness the technology so that everyone can benefit. As Carpenter notes, K-Net is only a tool; it is up to communities, organizations, and individuals to find positive uses for the technology. In the remainder of Chapter 8, four case studies are presented that demonstrate the diverse ways in which communities are doing just this.

In the first case study, Susan O'Donnell, Brian Walmark, and Brecken Rose Hancock examine the use of videoconferencing in remote and rural First Nations communities. They are particularly interested in non-institutional uses of videoconferencing; they believe that by making videoconferencing a part of everyday life, its use in institutional settings, such as education and health care, will also be improved.

In the second case study (presented in two parts), Brian Walmark and Darrin Potter each address the use of broadband applications for educational purposes through an examination of Keewaytinook Internet High School (KiHS). The school was set up as a five-year demonstration project from 2003 to 2008. Walmark provides an introduction to KiHS, describing the educational landscape in northern Ontario, outlining the development of the school, and examining the challenges that the school had to overcome. Potter presents results from the KiHS review, which was carried out at the completion of the initial five-year project. The findings show that KiHS has had considerable success in granting high school credits to a student population that faces considerable barriers to educational achievement. One of the key benefits of the KiHS is that it allows students to complete secondary school credits without having to leave their home communities. Based on the review's findings, Potter provides a number of recommendations for improving the educational experience offered by KiHS. These recommendations would also be useful for regions that have already implemented an online high school program (or are considering doing so) in their communities.

The third case study looks at an innovative approach to the community delivery of water treatment services that depends on broadband technology. In this case study, Barry Strachan outlines a new initiative that involves using videoconferencing to provide continuing education and mentorship for water and waste water plant operators. The initiative is working towards ultimately providing remote monitoring and electronic servicing for water and waste water plants.

The final case study, by Donna Williams, looks at how K-Net can be used to provide health and wellness services. Access to comprehensive health services is one of the primary challenges for remote and rural First Nations today. Williams shows how information and communication technologies are being used in innovative ways to address the health priorities of these communities. She examines in detail a telehealth and telemedicine project in Sioux Lookout and highlights the need for comprehensive policy and partnerships to ensure the continuation and expansion of the program. In all, these case studies demonstrate the myriad of positive ways in which First Nations communities are making use of existing broadband technologies, and they provide policy directions for improving and expanding ICTs for First Nations communities across Canada.

Part Three of this book concerns traditions in the broadest sense of the word. This section contains three chapters, which were all presented at a conference session on religion and spirituality. In **Chapter 9**, Earle Waugh uses real experiences he or his contacts, friends, or interviewees have had to create archetypal case studies from which he draws lessons. Waugh challenges us to see that there are more complex—and frankly more interesting—relationships in this world than the Christian/traditional Aboriginal religious dichotomy. He believes that realizing and embracing this will lead to a new relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and societies in Canada.

Waugh first looks at how dominant Canadian culture and religion has tried to destroy its indigenous counterparts. Secondly, he delves into feminism and examines the role of women in the sun dance and, by extension, the role of women in Aboriginal culture and spirituality. Thirdly, he looks at “a religious world within Aboriginal culture itself that is more pluralistic than an Aboriginal/Christian dichotomy would suggest,” and explores what is traditional and what is new. In this case, he confronts both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, urging us to think about what transitions and changes are taking place in spirituality and culture given that we know practices never stay exactly the same, but evolve over history as they interact with the world around them.

**Chapter 10**, by Mark Ruml, could be described as a look at Dakota life and well-being, but that really does not capture the complexity of Ruml’s work. He looks at life through a sensitive “anthropological lens,” and discusses kinship and family relations, economic and political relations, and what he understands to be fundamental religious principles. Ruml explores cultural-spiritual practices while attempting to draw readers into a deeper understanding of the meaning and place of these practices in the essence of indigenous societies.

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Marc Fonda, managing editor of the *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, is the author of **Chapter 11**, “The Policy Implications of Revitalizing Traditional Aboriginal Religions.” He develops his discussion based on an argument by analogy regarding the impacts of revitalizing traditional Aboriginal languages. He acknowledges that language is an incomplete proxy for religion, but relies on the accepted understanding that language is a foundational part of culture and, therefore, has a relationship to religion. Language, culture, and religion are inextricably intertwined, argues Fonda, and he notes that one can argue that involvement in traditional ceremonies is antecedent to learning one’s traditional language.

He concludes that knowing one’s language and religion “offers a sense of belonging, a vision of being part of a history and part of establishing a future ... not only are religion and language interrelated but both can help improve the well-being of the communities that practice them.” The path to this conclusion takes him through the current understanding of how many people practice particular religions; Fonda attempts to sort out how many Aboriginal peoples self-report traditional religious involvements. By looking at the work of other scholars and policy analysts, he captures how we might understand the situation given the weak data that exists on the subject. Fonda goes on to examine some of the policy implications of accepting the need to preserve or revitalize language.