

ABSTRACT

North American Micmac Indians in the classroom and in the community organize themselves into work groups for mutual benefit via cooperative sharing. Motivation is not through individual competition but rather by way of working together. Micmac leaders and teachers know so. They prompt students in the classroom and people in the community, as at Burnt Church, New Brunswick, Canada, to organize into groups around work projects. By doing so, the Micmac group ethic is invoked. The group ethic is traditional, and it continues today as this article demonstrates.

KEY WORDS: Micmac Indian leadership, classroom motivation, group values and ethic

This paper draws upon my ethnographic field work among Micmac Indians in eastern Canada. It highlights one community's leadership dynamics showing creativity that benefited the community, if only temporarily, in a cross-cultural situation (Van Horn 1977).

The Micmac Indians basically stayed where they were aboriginally. European explorers and settlers advanced around them (Upton 1980). Micmacs are speakers of Micmac, an eastern Algonkian language, and are bilingual in English (Van Horn 1975). They reside primarily in Canada – in Quebec (Bock 1962; 1966), New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia (Wallis and Wallis 1955; Nietfeld 1981) and in the United States primarily in Maine and Massachusetts (Guillemin 1975; Prins 1996). Traditionally, the Micmacs hunted, gathered, fished and gardened (Wallis 1961; Wallis and Wallis 1955). For gardening, they augmented their subsistence pattern with the limited horticulture characteristic of a northern climate with a short growing season. Micmacs have the

dubious distinction of being among the first North American Indians to have been contacted by Europeans — with the discovery of Cape Breton (Nova Scotia) by the French Bretons in 1504 (Hoffman 1955:7).

For New Brunswick Micmacs, European contact is traced to 1534 and Jacques Cartier's North Atlantic expedition from France. His party chanced upon Miramichi Bay and the Bay of Chaleur. Trading with Micmacs took place from ships and later on shore (Guillemin 1975:25-27).

In modern times, Micmacs of Canada and the United States spend extended periods of time working in such cities as Boston and Worcester, Massachusetts, and in such entities as shoe factories. They serve as seasonal harvesters in the potato fields of Maine and the blueberry

patches of Nova Scotia. Monies are often sent back to family members in the Canadian or United States home villages (Guillemin 1975:83).

I emphasize the fact that the Micmacs were not pushed westward like many North American indigenous peoples due to European exploration and settlement. Even if vastly reduced with designated reserves in Canada, Micmacs live in historic communities of their own (Patterson 1972:4). The counterpart in the United States would be designated Indian reservations. None seems to exist for Maine Micmacs, but the United States Government officially recognizes the Aroostock Band of Micmac Indians without a formal land base (Bureau of Indian Affairs 1997:21).

THE BURNT CHURCH SETTING

This article's setting is the Micmac community of Burnt Church, New Brunswick, Canada. The name stems from the Seven Years' War of 1756 to 1763, known as the French and Indian War in the United States (Anderson 2000). At the time, the Micmacs sided with the French against the British, who were struggling for control of North America. Micmacs hid Acadians, who were French settlers, and saved some from the expulsion out of Nova Scotia by the British that began in 1755. Acadia included what is now western Nova Scotia and eastern New Brunswick. New Brunswick was heavily settled by Loyalists to Great Britain after the American Revolution and became a separate British colony in 1784. It was a founding province within the Dominion of Canada under the British North America Act of 1867. The Indian Act became law that same year. It established the initial Micmac reserves in the Maritime Provinces, including the one at Burnt Church (Ganong 1904 and 1908; MacBeath and Chamberlin 1965; MacNutt 1967; Department of Indian Affairs 1970).

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Having been shipped to France from Nova Scotia circa 1755, many Acadians starting in 1765 then settled in Louisiana, continued to speak a distinctive dialect of French, and became known as Cajuns. They maintain this ethnicity today.

The naming of Burnt Church derived from Acadian fugitives eventually building a church there along the Miramichi River as it opens into Miramichi Bay, to give thanks for their safety and to honor their Micmac benefactors. It was for mutual Micmac and French worship because by the mid-eighteenth century through missionaries, many Micmacs had become Catholics, at least nominally as they are today. On September 17, 1758, a British patrol from a man-of-war skirting Miramichi Bay set fire to the church (Ganong 1914:304). The name Burnt Church therefore came into being.

This Micmac community is situated on the north shore of Miramichi Bay near the primarily English-speaking community of New Jersey, New Brunswick, to the southwest and equally near to the primarily French-speaking community of Neguac to the northeast. People who live in New Jersey are monolingual in English. Those who live in Neguac are bilingual in French and English and are of Acadian heritage. The Micmacs of Burnt Church are bilingual in Micmac and English, as noted previously (Van Horn 1975).

Residents of Burnt Church, like those of other Indian communities relatively close to the U.S. – Canadian border, enjoy the practice and freedom of crossing the international border at will to work for extended periods or to visit. This privilege derives from the Jay Treaty of 1794 between the United States and the United Kingdom. This border divided the Micmacs' aboriginal territory, and "border tribes were free to travel back and forth ... for hunting, fishing, and trading purposes" (Prins 1996:48).

With bilateral descent, Micmacs have traditionally regarded the patrilocal extended family as an important entity for different types of political, economic, and social cooperation. One's relatives are determined equally through both one's mother and father. With patrilocal residence at marriage, different patrilocal extended families cluster in different sections of their own on a Micmac reserve. Several families constituted a band with one band per village. Band leadership resided in a headman holding the office in part via inheritance from his father and partly by way of consensus of the family heads of his fitness to lead. The Micmac headman today is a Micmac chief who is elected every two years along with members of the community's band council – the Burnt Church Micmac Indian Band Council.

Traditionally, village heads would meet annually to reallocate hunting and fishing territories among patrilocal extended families (Speck 1915; 1922). Variables included

rough population estimates of the fluctuations in the species preyed upon and changes in Micmac family size. Such estimates were used to adjust boundaries of each family's subsistence territories. Traditionally, the emphasis was regional; today it is larger as one Micmac people united into the Micmac nation (Prins 1996:65).

With no plow agriculture and no animal husbandry, income at Burnt Church derives from a small commercial cooperative that involves fishing and harvesting evergreens for pulp wood and "Christmas trees." It is a men's group. Another cooperative is of women who make and sell handicrafts including beadwork operating out of a building known as the handicraft center. There are some salaried jobs. The elementary school employs six teachers, including a teaching principal, plus a janitor who cleans the community hall and medical clinic. There is a community nurse and a welfare officer for social assistance. A Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) constable, a Micmac Indian, is stationed here. One family runs a small grocery store at Burnt Church. Potential exists for more small businesses, but Burnt Church is not as developed as the much larger Micmac reserve of Eskasoni in Nova Scotia (Strouthes 1998). The modern church at Burnt Church operates as a mission out of Chatham, New Brunswick, on the south shore of the Miramichi opposite Newcastle on the north shore. A priest comes on Sundays to conduct a worship service and visits individuals, as needed, at other times.

CREATIVITY AND ITS CONSTRAINTS

The creativity alluded to in the title of this paper refers to an idea of some years ago that the Micmac band chief at Burnt Church had to increase funds for major home repairs and improvements (Van Horn 2008). Federal funds could be gotten to construct new houses. But no category existed to fund such improvements as rewiring an older frame house when needed or for up-grading the electrical system when new appliances including electric stoves were introduced. (The protagonist is hereafter referred to as the chief.) He saw a need, temporarily realized it, and saved the government money in the process. The chief demonstrated that a major-repairs program was less expensive than building new homes from scratch. The agency in question was the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs (CDIA) of the federal Ministry of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

The chief's idea was to seek CDIA funds for rent for individual families to occupy their own houses. The deed of home ownership would be turned over to the band's tribal government – the Band Council of the Burnt Church Band of Micmac Indians – which approved the plan by passing the legislative equivalent of a municipal ordinance.



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The plan worked well. Funds were sought and received to install new electrical wiring, new siding plus constructing new rooms as add-ons and replacing weathered roofs. Implementation was gradual. The chief had the different family heads deed over the titles to their homes to the band council. The welfare officer, the Burnt Church Micmac in that office, in turn initiated the rent requests to her counterparts in the CDIA regional office involving a welfare-officer hierarchy resulting in routine approval.

The rent-request process worked so well that the chief told other New Brunswick Micmac chiefs about his plan. He even alluded to it in front of visiting CDIA officials. That was the plan's downfall. After some investigation, the chief was abruptly hit with a stop-order. The CDIA ordered him to cease what he had been doing because regulations had no provision for this practice and type of funding.

Thus, according to the CDIA, no precedent existed for the chief's innovative plan. There was no proper budgeting category for legal federal funding to pay rent. Even though the CDIA officials involved had signed off on the monthly home rental payments under the plan's deed transfers, they felt deceit had been at play. The chief felt he had deceived no one. Had he not discovered a legitimate bureaucratic way to meet a community need? Had he not shared his solution openly with all concerned? But the paperwork had to be undone and the plan was abandoned.

THE GROUP ETHIC

My understanding is that the chief acted out of what is known as the group ethic among Micmac Indians (Van Horn 1983; 2002). Micmacs working together in groups for specific, particular purposes is an important cultural value that is congruent with Micmac egalitarianism. Situations include classroom and business settings as well as incidents of behavior in the wider community. Data for analytically suggesting the Micmac group ethic come from my direct observation via field work plus the life histories of the many Burnt Church community members I interviewed as part of ethnographic field work (Van Horn 1977).

For sharing money and for performing household and other work tasks the patrilocal extended family is a basic economic unit and a traditional political unit. Jeanne Guillemin refers to a Micmac reserve as a conglomerate of extended families with "the extended family ... [including] three or four different generations" (1975:83). Ideally within the patrilocal extended family, cooperation is the norm. Culturally, Micmacs value people over things and freely share their knowledge, material possessions, and other resources with fellow Micmacs.

The Micmac emphasis on sharing freely within a reference group can be seen in the elementary school at Burnt Church. This sharing happens even during tests, much to the

chagrin of the mostly European Canadian (hereafter, Euro-Canadian) teachers and teaching principal. During field work, I spent some time in the classroom. I frequently observed by sitting in the third grade class of the only Micmac teacher on the staff at the time. She is a college graduate and holds a teaching certificate. Her classes when I observed them were generally noisier than the other elementary school classes. Her students tended to talk more freely while in her class.

True to Micmac culture, learning was achieved through group activities. Subgroups would be formed for the different subjects in the third grade, and the students worked together expressively to solve subject-matter problems and to review previous lessons. I was greatly impressed with one little girl in the class next to whom I sat during an arithmetic lesson. This student was delightfully alert, and immediately showed me what her teacher and her classmates were doing, what types of problems they were solving, and what numerical concepts they were employing to do so. She did this on her own with no prompting from the teacher. She repeated to me what the teacher was doing. She had included me, to my honor, in the work group of which she was a part. Her enthusiasm was apparent. She demonstrated pride, too, in showing me and sharing with me the work of her group.

As part of my field work, the privilege was granted to me to teach the sixth grade from time to time as a substitute teacher at Burnt Church. I saw how Micmac students readily share their knowledge. Having presented a lesson on one occasion on famous North American Indian leaders in history, I gave a quiz to see what the class had learned. The students began to talk among themselves. My prior European American (hereafter, Euro-American) experience dictated that I tell the students to be quiet and do their own work individually.

But realization came quickly. I was being ethnocentric. Why not permit talking during the test? I was delighted to learn afterwards that everyone in the class got an "A." Not only did my students listen to and evaluate explanations from each other as answers to questions. They also voluntarily took information home and elsewhere in the community. As soon as the next day, I was hearing factual details from a history lesson from people I would casually come across. Many adults, including parents of the students, shared with me information that I was teaching in the sixth grade classroom. The father of one boy I taught reiterated highlights to me in the small local grocery store. Such information as I conveyed in the classroom was seemingly much appreciated. Presumably, it was learned well, judging by the number of times it was accurately told and re-told.

From such observations and interactions with both the students and teachers, I believe that this group method of



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teaching, versus an emphasis on individual performance and competition, maintains a level of interest and participation characteristic of a Micmac class that might otherwise be lost by the methods of the Euro-Canadian teachers. My own life experience with Euro-American teachers from elementary school through high school, college, and graduate school confirms this belief.

Euro-Canadian and Euro-American teachers tend to motivate students through individual competition by encouraging competitive performances between and among individuals. My experience shows that this approach is not effective among Micmacs. Certainly, it is not as effective as the group approach that draws upon the Micmac group ethic. My sixth grade teaching at Burnt Church was a discovery process for me and revealed the meaningful result of the Micmac group ethic in action in the class and in the community.

The principal at Burnt Church confirmed my findings. The most effective teaching device that this principal/teacher had found in working with Micmac children is the group project. He came to use this method for virtually every subject covered in the sixth grade. He would direct his six graders to work together in small groups to gather a body of data and to analyze it by applying it to stated problems. Each project consisted of a series of questions that would be answered in a joint report written together by all of the members of a group.

CONCLUSION

As a cultural value, pride in group achievement takes precedence over individual accomplishments among the Micmacs. The way to motivate Micmacs is to recognize each one's role in a group. Then appeal for the best performance of each individual as a group member in the name of the group. Micmac persons tend to find personal satisfaction and social identity as a member of a group. Men's work groups at Burnt Church include construction workers, skilled carpenters, fishermen, and wood-cutters. Women comprise the work group of handicraft manufactures. There are three ongoing committees of men and women: The Church Committee, the Health Committee, and the School Committee. Members in each case are appointed by the chief. Each committee reports to the band council, of which the chief is the presiding officer. Individual committee and council members work toward the success of the group of which they are a member and the ultimate collective success of the band as a whole. The overall situation of different roles for different groups is consistent with Micmac egalitarian values.

Daniel Strouthes (1998) establishes the relationship between Micmac sharing, leadership, and motivation as follows, confirming Micmac egalitarian values and the Micmac group ethic:

[Micmac] people strive to share with others at least partly to increase personal prestige.... Those who work hard and productively and who share the fruits of their labor enjoy prestige and, if their other qualities warrant, positions of leadership (Stouthes 1998:44).

The way to motivate Micmac students in the classroom and people in the community, as the chief well knew at Burnt Church, is to organize individuals into groups around work projects and to invoke the Micmac group ethic. Group activities lead to cooperation and consensus to work together. If competition is called for, it occurs on behalf of a group with its members striving together and not in competition with each other. Survival for Micmacs as a culture and a people has depended on their group ethic in the past; it does so today. The chief was right. He was able to promote group cooperation among his people but unable to sustain it with the CDIA.

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