

A 40 year legacy of scholarship: When parallel lines intersect

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The Morning Watch is celebrating a 40 year legacy of social policy and educational discourse in 2013. This modest contribution, to the Morning Watch scholarship, I have written will come in two parts. In the first part I will share the narrative of my personal journey as a Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) graduate and scholar. In this part I will draw on insights gained through my experience and research since 1973 to comment on the systems we serve and why we choose to live here. In some ways this reflects a mathematically impossible journey as my career parallels the legacy of the Morning Watch yet has significant intersections with the Morning Watch and its 40 year run. For the second part of this narrative, I will link two approximate endpoints (The 70s and now) therein-linking two salient social issues typical of the Morning Watch's social edge and research.

Part 1: The Morning Watch-there and then

The system in which we serve: The Morning Watch is a creation of professors from Memorial University's Faculty of Education. Our Faculty has almost 90 years in teacher education and research. Taking a guess at the cumulative expertise, if our faculty average 25 years of educational experience times the equivalent of 60 faculty members, we have over 1500 years of experience. We are, without doubt, the foremost authority on teaching and learning in this province. However, we are not just a provincial entity, we are also highly ranked nationally and internationally.

Having worked at three other universities, benefited from some empirical research, and participated in a variety of international development projects, I am able to see the strengths of our 'excellent' faculty and our high performing school systems all of which contribute to the social fabric these organizations serve. Yes, we have issues, but as Joey Smallwood once wrote "*No Apology from Me.*" The most significant finding I have, after 20 years in our school system, followed by 12 years working in both the most advanced (the Canadian system which includes Newfoundland and Labrador's) and the most dire systems, is the conviction that we are building on a strong system. Thus, our role is to improve and, borrowing a term from The Brian Peckford era Royal Commission Report, to keep "*Building on Strengths.*"

This province is a special place, Memorial, as its champion, is a special university, as is the faculty I serve and the journal the Morning Watch has become. The Morning Watch started in 1973. It is full of many powerful pieces from scholars and practitioners. The contributors from this faculty and province have published locally, nationally and internationally. Having looked at some of the treasured volumes of the past 40 years there is no other journal so deeply rooted in educational and social issues relevant to this province and indeed it also has merit for those far beyond our boundaries. I published my first piece of academic writing in the Morning Watch in 1994, a small piece on success in small schools. I contributed a second article on the emerging scholars of Canadian educational leadership in 2010. Beyond this writing, my most recent Morning Watch effort will be included in one of the 40th anniversary editions, coming out later this year, called *Indigenizing the Academy* co-edited by Dr. Maura Hanrahan and myself.

On being from here: Imagine you were able to attend a great university, do a great degree (three actually) with great faculties (two from Education and one from Science) at that university, live a great career, and then to return to where it started and actually lead one of those faculties. This is where my life has taken me. I was born in Shoal Brook, Bonne Bay (my grandmother as midwife), and completed high school in Corner Brook (Herdman Collegiate and Regina High School). I attended Memorial University (in Corner Brook and St. John's). In 1978, I completed my first degree, a BSc. In 1981, I graduated with a BEd from our Faculty of Education, and again in 1987 as I completed a Masters in Education, all at MUN. I did stray a little and completed a PhD from the University of Toronto, but MUN is my home campus, plain and simple.

I started teaching in Makkovikin 1981 (J.C. Erhardt Memorial School), then moved to Cartwright (Henry Gordon Academy), eventually to Woody Point (Bonne Bay Central High School and Bonne Bay Academy), Lark Harbour (St. James All-Grade) and finally the North Shore Bay of Islands (Templeton Collegiate). I have been a professor at the University of Saskatchewan, the University of Calgary, the University of New Brunswick, and now Memorial University of Newfoundland. I wanted to outline this as I feel this eclectic mixture of experiences, enables a unique perspective for comparison and possibly some insights as well.

On choosing to live there or here: Decades ago on a Western Newfoundland open line radio show, a somewhat hostile caller challenged guest speaker Peter Fenwick. He was running in an election as leader of the NDP. She questioned his motives, arguing that because he was not 'born here' he did not share the same commitment to the province as those that were. This is an unfair challenge facing many newcomers and long-time residents. His response was eloquent and I often think of it. He responded (to para-phrase him) "*Yes, but unlike those that were born here, I made a deliberate choice to make this my home.*" Therein lies the deepest of commitmentsto this place.

While living in Fredericton, working as an Associate Dean with the Faculty of Education, I faced a 'life happens' awakening. I enjoyed working there, they were a great faculty, and with strong leadership. However, in 2009 I attended a reunion of sorts in Halifax where the Wonderful Grand Band(WGB) was also playing a concert. This band was all the rage in my last couple of years at MUN, so hearing *WGB* produced lots of nostalgia, and I even found a few long lost friends who had also moved away. Following this experience I had to wrestle with a realization that many of us face in a way I had not done before. I had been away from Newfoundland for about eight years, but up until that point, I do not think I actually believed I had moved away. In the hours of driving back to Fredericton, I was drifting down memory lane and then back to the direction I was actually headed. At some point during the drive, it struck me that I had moved away-I was not going to live in Newfoundland anymore! This might seem odd, but many of us view moving away as temporary, and then life just kind of happens. It was not a happy feeling, somewhat fearful even. My sense of identity with Newfoundland and Labrador is strong and I was not sure what to do with how I felt. I know I did not make a deliberate choice to make New Brunswick my home, but the drive passed, the feelings subsided and life continued to happen.

Life is also strange sometimes, somewhat reconciled with my life in New Brunswick, happy in my work at UNB, in the summer of 2010 I saw an ad for "*Dean of Education*" at Memorial

University. I was not sure what to do. I had passed up one other opportunity to seek a faculty position at MUN as I did enjoy my life at UNB, but this was a unique opportunity. I knew I had built up a credible resume but one never knows about hiring processes. I did apply, was interviewed, and here I am writing this piece of reflection for the 40th anniversary of the Morning Watch as Dean for the faculty that has housed it for these 40 years and it is almost 40 years since I started as a student at MUN.

Part 2: The Morning Watch-then and now

In the second part of this 40-year reflection, I want to raise the two critically salient concepts I alluded to above: the first, our accent(s) and dialect(s) and the second our Indigeneity. The first was the subject of strong debates about 40 years ago as many rose to defend the legitimacy of our accents and dialects in the face of outright contempt. It may be time to come back to this. The second relates to the ending of the forced invisibility of Indigenous peoples within our province. This is ending and the growing awareness of our Indigenous reality seems to hold great promise in adding to the richness of our social fabric. This is something we need to build on.

What was important 40 years ago is important today-respecting our accented way: Being a distance educator based in Alberta and New Brunswick, I would note how my students would respond once they established that my accent was from Newfoundland. I have often compared this to the experience of seeing a person for the first time having no awareness that they were of a different race. We hold stereotypes based on culture, race, gender, dialect and indeed accent.

Beyond our notions of vernacular and standard English, David Corson, a former professor of mine, spoke often of the negative biases held against those from different social cultural backgrounds by the dominant hegemony and their use of dominant language conventions. He outlined this in an article *The Learning and Use of Academic English Words*. His view was that students who used text and speech that was seen to be 'richer' in Greco-Latin phrases were considered to be intellectually superior by instructors not because of the sophistication of the argumentation, ideas, or complexity but because of 'our' bias towards the word content (Corson, 1997). Has this type of social cultural language bias been at play in our Newfoundland and Labrador context? I think so. Remember, it was once believed that a truly educated scholar also spoke Latin.

Corson's work was considered ground-breaking research in the late 1990s. Yet this thinking was noted much earlier in the Morning Watch as several articles were published in the very first issues of the Morning Watch in 1970s on this subject in relation to "Newfoundland Englishes" (Singh, 1996).

The struggle with accents and dialects continues today. Over the years, at Memorial, there have been particular courses designed to remove the Newfoundland dialects and accents from its students. Is it the case, that to be seen as a truly educated Newfoundlander and Labradorian one also has to surrender one's accent and relative language usage? I actually do not think so, but it does worry me sometimes.

What was important 40 years ago is important today-respecting Indigenous ways: Forty years ago, in 1973, I graduated from a school system and society that essentially denied the existence of Aboriginal peoples in this province. The Beothuck became extinct, killed off by the Mi'kmaq who were brought in by the French to help fight the English. We loyal Britons were the result—that was the Newfoundland narrative of our history for a long time. Yet, folklore and family lore told a different tale. The Morning Watch serves a role in giving voice to the researcher who shares this rediscovery. As a boy I knew my family had Mi'kmaq and Inuit ancestry. My father and grandfathers had been to Labrador so our family knew about the Inuit and Innu as well. Therefore, this part of my life had mixed feelings. How do we 'right' the inaccurate, albeit grammatically correct, versions of our history? I guess this is also part of seeking the answer to the question: what is new in history? It is with these questions that I leave you now and invite you to watch for the *Indigenising the Academy* edition of the 40th Anniversary Morning Watch series. In this special hard copy edition of the Morning Watch, Maura Hanrahan will look at how Indigenous peoples were portrayed then and should be honoured now.

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