

NATIVE LANGUAGE BROADCASTING: AN EXPERIMENT IN EMPOWERMENT¹

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ABSTRACT/RESUME

The Northern Native Broadcast Access Program (NNBAP) facilitates the production of regional radio and television shows by Native communications societies in northern areas of seven provinces and in the territories. This paper argues that the NNBAP has the empowering potential of social policies which evolve from the experience of the people affected by them. The argument is supported by examples from the history of Wawatay, an NNBAP funded radio/television network broadcasting in Cree and Oji-Cree to the people of the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation in Northwestern Ontario.

L'Emission du Programme d'Accès Autochtone du Nord (EPAAN) facilite la production des spectacles régionaux radiodiffusés et télévisés par les sociétés de communication autochtones dans les régions du nord de sept provinces et dans les territoires. Cet article constate que l'EPAAN a la possibilité de faire la politique sociale qui se développe de l'expérience des gens concernés par les spectacles. L'observation est appuyée par des exemples tirés de l'histoire de Wawatay, une EPAAN radiodiffusée et télévisée en cree et oji-cree aux gens de Nishnawbe-Aski au nord-ouest d'Ontario.

The advent of television in remote and isolated settlements across the Canadian north was sudden; satellite technologies made the medium, which had been virtually unknown in the early 1970's, commonplace in less than ten years. Although this was a welcome development for many non-Native Northerners, the Anglo-American content of programming was recognized by concerned Native groups as a threat to their traditional cultures and languages. A typical expression of such concern is found in the following quote from a Native newspaper published in Northwestern Ontario. Referring to the proliferation of receiver dishes in the area, columnist Elizabeth Thunder called the newly available American television a "culture killer" that "...will change the lives of a lot of people - and not necessarily for the better" (1982:10).

In 1983, the federal government responded to these concerns with a policy which would allow Natives to use the new technologies to broadcast culturally relevant materials in Aboriginal languages. That policy, formulated as the Northern Native Broadcast Access Program (NNBAP), funds the production of regional radio and television shows by Native communications societies in northern areas of seven provinces and throughout the territories. The program, administered through the Native Citizen's Directorate of the Department of the Secretary of State, confirmed the government's commitment to continued Native control of Native media. That principle had been established through practice with the Native Communications Program, which began providing operational funds for Native communications societies in 1974.

The present paper argues that these programs have the empowering potential which Rappaport (1981, 1984, 1985) credits to social policies which evolve from the experiences of those who are affected directly. In such circumstances, people may gain a measure of control over some specific problem; failing that, at least they will learn about the empowerment process, which will inevitably alter their social awareness. "For some people the mechanism of empowerment may lead to a *sense* of control; for others it may lead to actual control, the practical *power* to effect their own lives" (Rappaport, 1984:3). In either case, empowering policies have within them the germ of changes which may extend far beyond the situation to which they directly apply.

The usefulness of Rappaport's empowerment model in understanding Canada's Native language broadcasting policy was suggested to the authors when they were preparing an evaluation² of the Wawatay Radio Network, one of the first projects funded through the NNBAP. From its headquarters in Sioux Lookout, the network broadcasts daily *via* 28 affiliated community radio stations to the people of Ontario who live north of the 50th parallel, in the area of the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation covered by Treaty Nine (see Figure 1). This audience is unique: first, because they speak three different languages (Ojibwa, Cree and Oji-Cree); and second,

because although there are fewer than 27,000 of them, they live in an area the size of France. Before establishing media systems for themselves, these people had access only to Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) service which was fragmented and limited. Seven of the larger communities received radio broadcasts, some from Winnipeg, others through Thunder Bay, but television was not available anywhere. This situation would probably have continued if local groups had not taken the initiative to establish their own broadcasting system - first for radio and then for television - through the Wawatay communications Society.

EMPOWERMENT: A STRATEGY FOR DELIVERING HUMAN SERVICES

Communications is one area of human services where policies do allow Canadians of Native ancestry to have effective control over both content and delivery of services. In most other areas, however, governmental policies still reflect certain generic questions that limit the extent of Native control. Some of these questions are listed by Breton and Grant (1984):

Should governments design programs specifically for Native people, or should Natives have access only to programs available to other Canadians with specific needs? Should Native programs explicitly recognize the different categories of Native people, since, so far, only status Indians have had a special relationship with the federal government? Should programs be designed to accelerate the adaptation of people of Indian ancestry to mainstream institutions, or should non-Native institutions attempt to increase their understanding of Native culture and offer Native persons more opportunities to retain their own traditional ways? (xxiv)

Behind each question lies one issue: are services to be provided to all Native people as a right, or, are services to be provided only to individual Native persons when needed. As Breton and Grant point out, this matter can only be resolved through the political process; still it is apparent that policies favouring either side of the issue will leave Natives more or less dependent upon the government and will allow them little control over human service programs.

There is a basic paradox here which affects the delivery of social services to many groups in Canada: the concurrently held, but incompatible views of people as dependents who must have certain needs fulfilled (the paternalistic model) and as citizens who must be provided *any* and *all* services (the advocacy model). In either case the beneficiaries are allowed little voice in the process and, as a result, neither approach

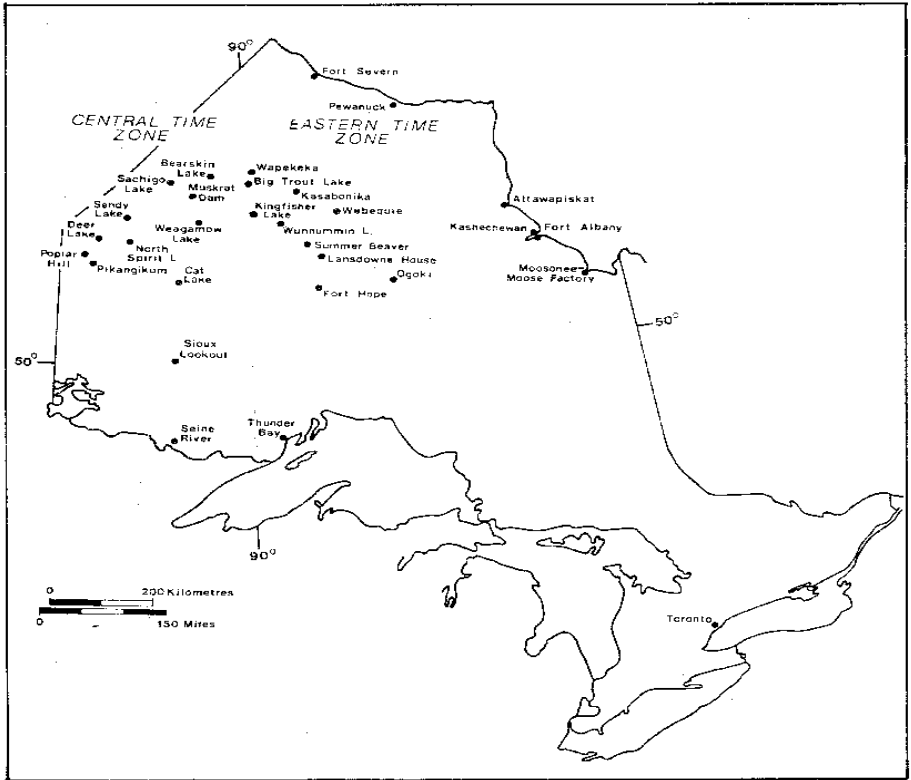


Figure1: Map Showing the Communities of the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation Served by the Wawatay Radio Network, 1987.

provides human services satisfactorily. Nonetheless, these paradigms have dominated thinking about the issue, in terms of both rationales and strategies. Community psychologist Julian Rappaport argues that there is an alternative model - empowerment - which resolves this basic paradox. It requires a policy planning process undertaken on the local level, in collaboration with the groups and individuals most directly affected by the problem, rather than one which imposes generalized "solutions" on the basis of either perceived needs or rights. In other words, the remedy is always specific to the problem.

The concept of empowerment was introduced by Rappaport in his investigations of the extent to which policies for the provision of mental health services in Illinois took into account existing community support systems (Rappaport, 1981). He concluded that certain policies helped overcome patient dependence because, inherently, they "enhance the possibilities for people to control their own lives" (Rappaport, 1981:15). They were in a word "empowering". On one hand, the presence of empowerment is more difficult to establish because it is, by definition, situationally specific. What constitutes mastery of the situation will vary from one problem to the next.

Empowerment merges the politics of social action witnessed in the 1960's with the social orientation of self-help popular in the 1970's. In a sense, then, the term as currently used in the community development literature is a new perspective rather than a new concept. Empowerment "is not in itself consistent with any particular goal or political point of view" (Rappaport, 1985:17). The ideological roots are evident, however, in the fact that empowering policies restructure relationships between the "experts" and those individuals affected by the problem. This relationship, heretofore a dependent one between "expert" and "client", becomes a collaborative one that alters everyone's social awareness. The word itself evokes both the notion of collaboration and mutual assistance. Whereas traditionally social scientists have employed medical metaphors, such as prevention or cure, in discussing social problems (implying that individuals are dependent upon professionals for solutions), the language of empowerment emphasizes the possibility that individuals can gain control over their own lives, their relationships and their communities. This does not mean that they can not seek or receive both professional and governmental assistance; but when they do it will be neither as supplicant nor as dependent.

Rappaport argues that researchers have an obligation to study situations where people feel that they are in control of what is happening to them. It is only through such studies that social policies and programs which treat "people as complete human beings" (1981:1) can be understood. The effort is justified further if, as a result, those charged with the task of developing policies in human service areas are able to resolve the needs/rights debate.

This study of Native language broadcasting is intended as a contribution to the growing literature on empowerment. In order to analyze the pertinent policy from this perspective, it is necessary to begin by reviewing the stages in its evolution. This review is presented in two sections: first, a description of the historical development of the Native language broadcasting policy and programs, and, second, a history of the Wawatay Communications Society, which is presented as an example of the way in which Natives have used local initiatives to serve and protect their own interests.

A SPECIAL AUDIENCE: THE EVOLUTION OF A BROADCASTING POLICY FOR NATIVE CANADIANS

Despite the declaration in the Broadcasting Act that, "all Canadians are entitled to broadcasting service" (Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Committee [CRTC], 1980:1), the conditional clause "as public funds become available" effectively meant that the sparse and scattered population of northern regions of the provinces and in the territories did not have access to the entertainment and information which most Canadians took for granted. To provide such services using conventional methods was considered to be too expensive because of the climate, topography and distances involved.

By the mid 1970's new technologies using videotape, microwave and eventually satellites made economical services possible, even for the most remote communities. The northern audience soon discovered, however, that changes in technologies could quickly outdistance changes in official attitudes. For example, the widespread use of community receiver dishes was an "open secret" in the north, but for several years the government held steadfastly to its position and they remained illegal.³ The pressure for increased telecommunication services in the north was, first and foremost, political (and reflected the increasing politicization of Canada's Native people in the early 1970's):

As Inuit and Indian groups organized to fight their battles in the political arena, a cultural rebirth occurred in the form of strengthened identity and cultural awareness. Native leaders became increasingly aware of the relationship between communications and cultural development and began to demand access to the new communications technologies (Stiles, 1984:10).

As a result of the growing political and cultural awareness, a number of Native communications societies were established, often by tribal councils, to act as a media link for their people. These societies set up

productions of their own (Native language newspapers in most cases), and they became local communications experts, brokers and representatives in the search for the best media mix.

The fact that appropriate technologies became available at about the same time as Native political activism took hold was significant in the formulation of Canada's Native broadcasting policy. This concurrence meant that from the outset communications programs had to take into account the changing political reality, although Native language broadcasting was not a very contentious issue (in contrast to such disputes as those over Native land claims). Indeed, the topic of telecommunications gave the federal government an opening it very much needed. By endorsing at least these Native claims the authorities could appear willing to listen to Aboriginal peoples. Moreover, acknowledging this linguistic and cultural need fit nicely into the broader commitment to multiculturalism which the government had made in the early 1970's. As well, telecommunications was one of Canada's "high-tech" specialties; it seems reasonable to suggest that, by bridging the broadcasting void in their own backyard, the industry would have a showcase for its capabilities. In sum, the social and political climate of the time ensured Native people a say in the services that they would eventually receive.

This is not to suggest, however, that the development of the pertinent policy was a simple or straight forward process. It took almost a decade, included at least one aborted attempt,⁴ and was accompanied by recurring controversies. Although Native people were consulted they were not always listened to. For example on one occasion, a representative of a northern Quebec Inuit association complained to the CRTC that a good Native language production service was needed first - not the service proposed by CBC which would use the then recently launched Anik A-1 satellite to feed television into the region. In response the CBC spokesperson pointed out that the launching of the satellite made television the corporation's priority at that time (Communications et al, 1983, DP 19). There were also disputes over how services should be funded: The consensus seems to have been, given the CBC's mandate to serve the general population, that funding for Native programming should go to organizations that could concentrate on serving Native people, rather than to the CBC (*Ibid.*: 27).

Moreover, extensive discussions and negotiations among three federal government departments (Communications, Indian and Northern Affairs, and the Secretary of State), the CRTC and the CBC were necessary because each was directly responsible for some aspect of broadcasting or the cultural needs of Native Canadians. Inevitably, this raised questions of jurisdiction which had to be resolved. Finally, the adequacy of the services offered was considered. For example, in renewing the CBC network licences in 1979, the CRTC criticized the corporation's Northern Television

Service for "not adequately serving the special needs of the northern region of the country" (Ibid.:21). It is fair to say that the Northern Broadcasting Policy finally adopted was the outcome of years of consultation, controversy, and compromise. In the interim, the federal government did establish (in 1974) a program "to enable Native people to develop and control modern communications networks" (Secretary of State, 1985a:10). The Native Communications Program, which is still in effect, is geared entirely to providing operational support for Native communications societies by funding such basic activities as technical training in equipment maintenance. To be eligible for support, the societies in question have to be registered as nonprofit organizations, be serving a specific audience, be able to demonstrate community involvement, and "be operated, managed and controlled by persons of native origin" (Ibid.:11). "Native origin" is interpreted to include Status and non-Status Indians, Métis and Inuit. In this regard, Canada's telecommunications programs apply a more inclusive definition to the word "Native" than (as Breton and Grant note above) is the case for other human services.

Another significant step toward establishing Native control of Native media was taken six years later. In July 1980, the Therrien Committee submitted its report on the extension of broadcasting services in northern and remote communities to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). The following was one of the Committee's recommendations:

Canada must fulfill its obligation to provide opportunity for its Native people to preserve the use of their language and foster maintenance and development of their particular cultures through broadcasting and other communications (CRTC, 1980:3).

The Committee conceded that this could not be achieved easily on a national scale, even though a national system could easily be established using the newly available technologies. While it was feasible to meet the telecommunications needs of the Inuit with a single network, they noted, the same was not true of the Métis or Status and non-Status Indians. The Inuit are culturally and linguistically relatively homogeneous and, as well, most live in the far north. In contrast, those of Aboriginal Indian ancestry live in isolated enclaves across the length and breadth of the country. Their tribal cultures vary widely and, what is more (perhaps most important in terms of broadcasting), their languages differ greatly; there are ten linguistic groups that subsume thirty or more distinct languages or dialects, most of which are in everyday use.

In light of the foregoing, the Therrien Committee concluded that "the approach to better service and program production will have to be addressed to communities or areas in which one language or dialect is

commonly used" (Ibid.:25). Furthermore, the Committee was of the opinion that Native communications societies could perform this role and should receive the funding necessary to do so.

Meanwhile, satellite technology was deluging the north with southern messages. By the time the government finally introduced its Northern Broadcasting Policy, there were already 18 channels from the Canadian south and 45 American channels being beamed into the north. The content of southern broadcasts might have appeal for younger viewers; at least they could grasp what was being said in most cases. But many older people could not understand the English-language programming so, naturally, it held less interest for them. Nonetheless, they were concerned that the alternative lifestyles presented *via* television would undermine their efforts to keep the "old ways" alive. They feared that children raised on a diet of southern culture would soon find the northern Native culture not to their taste; that television would create a culturally based generation gap (Communications et. al., 1983, DP:51).

In 1983, the International Year of Communications, the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, the Minister of Communications, and the Minister of the Secretary of State jointly announced a Northern Broadcasting Policy that responded "to priorities identified by the CRTC's Therrien Committee on Extension of Services to Remote and Underserved Communities" (News Release, March 10, 1983). The formulation of the new policy had involved extensive consultation with Native groups because the policy makers realized that in these particular cultures they were dealing with a uniquely Canadian heritage: "There is no other homeland for these Aboriginal cultures and languages but here in Canada where they originated and are maintained" (Secretary of State, 1985b:7). It was hoped that the languages and cultures of these people could be preserved despite the changes occurring around them. Besides the implication of equalizing service, the new policy addressed the cultural and linguistic benefits of native-language broadcasting and took into consideration such issues as Aboriginal rights and job creation (Communications et. al., 1983, DP). The end result was a set of five policy principles intended to guarantee that Native people in northern portions of the provinces and in the territories had access to culturally relevant programming.

The Northern Native Broadcast Access Program (NNBAP) was the first specific initiative taken under the Northern Broadcasting Policy. Announced as a four year program, the NNBAP committed 40.3 million dollars for the production of regional Native language radio and television programs. In 1987, at the end of the four year trial, the Secretary of State announced that the program would continue on a permanent basis (with a budget that year of 13.2 million dollars). To date 13 Native communications societies have received funding. The guidelines are similar to those established under the Native Communications Program, with the following

additions: first, broadcasts must be aimed at a regional (as opposed to a single community) audience; in addition, there must be evidence of considerable support on both a local and regional level; periodic audience surveys also must be undertaken to ensure that the broadcasters are satisfying their listeners and viewers; and finally, the communications societies must be "democratically controlled by the people in the region to be served" (Secretary of State, 1985a:16).

Each region has its own Regional Liaison Committee which monitors operations on an ongoing basis. These committees include representatives from the communications society in question, interested government departments (Secretary of State, Indian and Northern Affairs, Employment and Immigration, the CRTC), and the carrier involved (which may be either a public or a private broadcasting system). Quarterly meetings, chaired alternately by the representatives for the communications society and the Secretary of State, are held to review progress reports and financial statements, to provide feedback, solve problems, and examine new initiatives. Also, at each meeting the Regional Liaison Committee votes whether to recommend funding for the next quarter (each member, including the society representative, has a vote). By way of an appeals process, societies may ask the Minister of the Department of the Secretary of State to review decisions made by their respective liaison committees.

Implementing the National Broadcasting Policy has not been a trouble free process. One of the major problems has been the issue of fair access. Before NNBP funding can be secured, a communications society has to have a firm distribution agreement with one of the broadcasting systems already serving their region. To ensure that such agreements could be negotiated, the third principle of the Northern Broadcasting Policy stated that Native people must be given fair access to northern broadcasting distribution systems. This proved easier said than done; on one hand many private broadcasters were uncooperative, while on the other hand the CBC mandate to provide a national service conflicted with the NNBP's regional requirement. As a result, Native communications societies have had difficulty getting their programming on the air: either they are denied access entirely or else given such low priority that they have little access in prime time.

To deal with this and other problems arising out of the vague wording in which the policy principles were initially stated, in 1985 the Northern Native Broadcasting Committee of the CRTC initiated a wide ranging process of consultation with the affected Native groups. They looked, especially, for direction in establishing criteria that could be used to determine fair access and guidance on balancing the needs of the Native audience with those of non-Native northerners. Also, and particularly relevant for this paper, they asked what measures the CRTC could take to ensure Native participation in the Commissions' activities. One

recommendation, acted upon immediately, was the appointment of two Native members to serve on the CRTC's advisory committee on northern broadcasting.

WAWATAY COMMUNICATIONS SOCIETY: A STUDY IN LOCAL INITIATIVES

The Wawatay Communications Society has a history wherein one local initiative spawned another, as people learned from their experiences and took advantage of opportunities that present themselves. The chronicle began in the early 1970's with the introduction of a network of High Frequency (HF) radios. Certain Chiefs in the Treaty Nine area were convinced that these "trail" radios would overcome the already observed reluctance of some people to leave their villages to go fishing or out on the trap lines. Such traditional activities often took people away for weeks at a time, cutting them off from contact with their home base. This isolation was hard to face and, in addition, it was often dangerous. With a system of voluntarily monitored but professionally maintained HF radios people would be able to leave, but never had to be out of touch with their communities. The Chiefs pressed the government for funding, which came eventually in the form of a Department of Communications pilot project. The project set up the HF radio system, but left it to the people to operate. The Chiefs of the Treaty Nine area initially founded the Wawatay Communications Society in 1974 to take care of the new system.⁵ The original mandate was twofold: to maintain the HF radios, and to establish a monthly trilingual (Ojibwa-Cree-English) newspaper.

From the beginning, Wawatay has acted on the belief that the use of media was not limited to the mere exchange of information, but that in addition "communications systems should facilitate the social and economic development of our people" (Wawatay, 1985a, A). The role of communications in the Bands' strategies for development was quickly apparent to others as well; so much so that the Department of the Secretary of State agreed to provide funding for Wawatay as part of its mandate to foster community development. In fact, ultimately it was the success in terms of community development of groups like this one in Northwestern Ontario that convinced the Department to start specifically funding telecommunications projects.

The reader may well wonder, given the need or urge in most community groups to tap available funds, whether Wawatay was a response in the first instance to local needs or to a line item in the budget of one department or another. The answer, according to the officer⁶ in charge of distributing the Secretary of State's community development funds in the region at this time, is unequivocal. He still regards Wawatay as one of the purest examples of a community based organization. Not only were initiatives

taken on the basis of self-identified needs, but Wawatay was locally controlled and enjoyed wide support from the people of the area. Moreover, the organization worked at fostering technical and managerial skills within its own ranks. He notes, however, that they did not just blunder ahead on their own if they lacked the knowledge necessary to deal with a problem. Instead the Board of Wawatay would bring in outside experts to help. In his view, this willingness to employ and learn from specialists has been one of the organization's strengths. (The role of these consultants was always just an advisory one; they might, in his words, "influence decisions,[but]they did not dictate them.")

From the time it was incorporated, local demands encouraged Wawatay to extend its activities to help communities establish AM radio stations. In 1974 the organization worked with a local community leader, Chief Chris Cromarty, to set up the Ayamowin Communications Society in Big Trout Lake. Ayamowin operated the first community owned radio station in Ontario on this Oji-Cree speaking reserve of approximately 680 people, located 234 air miles northwest of Sioux Lookout. Radio proved so popular that people in Muskrat Dam, a neighbouring settlement of 200, approached Wawatay for help in setting up their own station. Similar requests came from other villages; so by 1977 Wawatay had developed a "package" which any community could buy, all the equipment necessary for a one-watt radio station which would have a broadcast radius of a mile or so. In most cases this was more than enough to encompass any one of the settlements.

Today 28 of the 39 reserves and Indian settlements in the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation have functioning community radio stations. Each one of these stations is owned and operated by the community it serves. They provide the building, pay for maintenance, and volunteer their time to keep the station on the air. Observations at the fairly typical station in Webequie established that dozens of volunteer disk jockeys were involved in maintaining the thirteen-hour long broadcast days (the radio was off during Band Meetings, for funerals and every Sunday during church services). Money is raised through various endeavors: song dedications, for which the person making a request is expected to pay a nominal sum (perhaps fifty cents), radio bingo games, and special events like a 1982 radio-a-thon where a local man kept his place at the console for a record 58 hours and five minutes, raising \$1,364 in cash and donated records (Dion, 1984).

Wawatay functions, in a sense, as the media resource for all of the stations. For example, the Society acts as an agent on behalf of local stations in dealing with regulatory bodies such as the CRTC and other government offices. Until recently this included holding the broadcasting licences for all of the stations; but gradually such responsibilities are being handed over to the stations themselves, an acknowledgment of the growing spirit of community independence in the region. Wawatay also provides critical services such as training station managers and sending

the Society's own technicians into the communities by air to fix equipment when it breaks down.

The idea for a network started with an experiment that the Department of Communications conducted in 1978. Local people now refer to this as the "ironstar" radio⁷ because it used the Hermes Communications Satellite to connect four communities (Big Trout Lake, Sandy Lake, Fort Hope and Sioux Lookout) to form the world's first interactive radio network. For three months that summer these communities were able to share and exchange news with one another; this was an enormously popular experience. Following the experiment's end, in response to widespread community demand, the Wawatay Communications Society undertook to establish a network which would function on a continuing basis. It took them five years to accomplish the task, however, because of the technical difficulties and costs entailed. (In the interim, Wawatay persisted in its efforts to provide the communities with region-wide news and information, by dropping [literally] prerecorded cassettes into the communities from a plane.)

The technical problems of broadcasting to the region were resolved in 1982 when TV Ontario agreed with Wawatay that it was technically feasible for their audio signal to be a subcarrier on the TV Ontario Anik C transponder. This meant that the Wawatay radio signal would uplink to the satellite from a broadcast centre at Sioux Lookout for transmission to TV Ontario's production centre in Toronto. There the signal could be mixed with the TV Ontario signal and hence relayed by means of the satellite into those northern communities that receive TV Ontario. Then the Wawatay signal could be broadcast over the community radio transmitter.

The Wawatay Radio Network (WRN) went on the air September 6, 1984. For the first year they maintained a 10 hour-a-week schedule, which was later expanded in stages to the present twenty-one-and-a-half hours.⁸ All of the region's community radio stations are part of the network. Although they remain independent, the stations affiliated with the network include WRN transmissions in their regular schedule of locally produced programs. Each network show follows a similar format; a mix of news, sports, and community bulletins, together with interviews and music. Most of the first hour in Cree originates from the Cree Production Centre in Moose Factory, which can be patched *via* telephone line into the console at the broadcasting centre in Sioux Lookout for transmission. The second hour of each show, all in Oji-Cree,⁹ is broadcast directly from Sioux Lookout. In addition an hour-and-a half long light humour show, "Good Spirits", is broadcast in Oji-Cree on Thursday nights.

Wawatay's services were expanded in January 1987 with a half hour weekly television show in Oji-Cree. These shows are a blend of news, comment and entertainment from the region called, appropriately, *Keenawid*, meaning "ourselves". The shows are packaged at Wawatay's state of the art production centre in Sioux Lookout, then sent *via* courier to

TV Ontario in Toronto for broadcast on the following Sunday.

As with network radio, TV Ontario has been instrumental in establishing a system for delivery. TV Ontario not only operates English and French language services, but also hold the licence for the Ontario Legislative Assembly (OLA) Service. On Sunday afternoons, in recognition of the bilingual character of parts of the province, the English service broadcasts exclusively in French, while the French service is all in English. Northwestern Ontario receives the English service, which of course means that French speaking residents enjoy valued programming on Sunday. It is recognized, however, that these programs are not of much interest to the people of the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation, few of whom speak or understand French. This fact, combined with the fact that the Legislature does not sit on weekends, suggested both a good time and a way to broadcast Wawatay's TV show.

TV Ontario uses the Ontario Legislative Assembly transponder, otherwise unused on Sunday, to broadcast Wawatay's TV show at 4:00 pm Central (5:00 p.m. Eastern) time. TV Ontario technicians use remote control to switch the northern Indian communities from their regular service to the OLA service, allowing them to watch *Keenawid*. To accomplish this technical wizardry, new satellite receivers for the OLA service were installed in each community (in addition to the ones which permit reception of TV Ontario's English service, and consequently WRN's audio signal).

The costs of providing Wawatay's services have been shared by both the federal and provincial governments. Since 1984, the installation of equipment necessary for TV Ontario reception in northern and remote communities has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Northern Affairs (now Northern Development and Mines). Operating grants have been provided through the NNBP, under the auspices of the Department of the Secretary of State. Likewise the capital costs for the additional receivers, which make the television reception possible, were funded from this source. Maintenance costs for TV Ontario equipment, essential for the Native language network function, are picked up by the Ontario Ministry of Culture and Communications.

WAWATAY RADIO AND TELEVISION: MEDIA AS A MEDIUM OF EMPOWERMENT

Rappaport's point that empowerment is easy to define when it is absent seems especially relevant to the present analysis. The symptoms of powerlessness which he notes - learned helplessness, alienation, a sense of having no control - describe the experience of Native people throughout Canada's history so accurately that he might just as well have been writing with them in mind. As a consequence, evidence of empowerment among Native people (as identified in the development of these communication programs), is all that much more important.

Although the authors argue that Native communications policy has been empowering, we are not implying that the introduction of media services in themselves can result in control that extends beyond certain, very real limits. As Valaskakis has noted in her analysis of Inuit communications, "technology obviously does not erase the marginality of communities or give them the power to regulate the changes affecting them"(1983:122). Through the NNBP, Native people were given *actual* control of only a few weapons with which to fight the erosion of their languages and culture; nonetheless any *sense* of control which develops as a result is also potentially empowering.

Rather than defining empowerment as a concept in so many words, the community development literature treats empowerment as a perspective characterized by the following key themes: (1) empowerment originates from the experiences of those involved in a situation; (2) empowerment is unique in each situation; (3) empowerment gives people either actual control or a feeling of being in control; and, (4) empowerment restructures the expert/client relationship. In sum, empowerment fosters local initiatives, thereby teaching people how to take control of their own lives. Native language broadcasting, in principle and practice, is considered here in terms of each of these themes, as evidenced in the evolution of both the national policy and the Wawatay radio and television network.

First, to be empowering, actions must be rooted in local experiences; examples are found throughout Wawatay's history. Before the advent of satellite technology, HF radio receivers were the mainstay of telecommunications in the north. Entertainment and outside news were far less important than a system which allowed point-to-point communications over vast distances. When people were lonely or lost out on the trap line, they needed to be able to reach their home bases. The Chiefs of the Treaty Nine area realized this, just as they realized that there was not a lot of government interest in installing or maintaining an interactive telecommunications system for their "big triangle". Affordable HF radios became available locally only after the Chiefs demanded that the government fulfill its obligation to provide communication services. The fact that, once in place, the operation of the HF system was left up to the Bands, however, empowered them to create their own communications society.

Wawatay Communications Society became, in turn, a stimulus to further telecommunications developments in the area. The AM radio station in Big Trout Lake is an example. At the time the local chief argued that there had to be a way for Indian people to keep up with the changes in the outside world that were already affecting their way of life. He proposed setting up a radio station, which the people of Big Trout Lake managed to do with Wawatay's assistance and funding from the provincial and federal governments. Community radio stations quickly became an essential part of life in the settlements of the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation. The experience in

the Ojibway settlement of Webequie was typical. Welcomed as a diversion one winter, radio had become a necessary utility by the following spring. Beyond providing entertainment, Dion (1984) found that radio was immediately adapted as a political forum, emergency hot line and general community bulletin board.

The "ironstar" radio experiment was one time in which people were able to take advantage of an opportunity simply because the organizational structure was in place: Wawatay itself and four functioning community radio stations. The Department of Communications wanted to test the Canadian Technology Satellite in a northern context; the Wawatay setup was ideal for these purposes. Even this experiment, although it originated outside of the area, was empowering on the local level. The realization that intra-regional communication was possible, and well worth having, spurred the Band members, through their local representatives on the Wawatay Board, to demand a regional network.

In part people wanted the network because it would allow them to keep in touch with neighbouring communities; family and friendship networks are widely spread in the area and, naturally, they have a mutual interest in things happening in one another's villages. What is more, the people were aware of the cultural threat from outside. Nothing could make this point more clearly than quoting a few comments about the role of Wawatay radio that people made during a survey the authors did in the spring of 1985. "Young people [should] be encouraged by the elders and helped to prolong the survival of the Indian tradition," one person said. Another wondered, "why young people today can't speak nor understand their Native language." A third pleaded that she could not "get my offspring to speak [the] Native language. Please help. More Indian, Indian..." (Minore, 1985:26).

The desire to preserve the languages and culture of the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation threads through the Wawatay story, in a sense binding it together. It was this desire, among others, that led the Chiefs to create the Communications society in the first place. Ever since it has continued to define Wawatay's activities; almost everything they do is considered, at some point, in terms of these goals.

Empowerment analysis emphasizes that no matter how universal a problem is, in some ways it is always particular to a given situation. This is evident in the case at hand. Although the erosion of language and culture has been a shared experience for most Canadians of Indian ancestry, every tribe has experienced it differently. For those in Northwestern Ontario, the unique character of the phenomena partly results from an instant and massive penetration of outside influences. Erosion of their languages and culture is the cumulative result of just one decade's worth of actions: by the government (in building permanent airstrips); private enterprise (extending Bell Telephone service); and the people themselves

(by setting up television receiving dishes).¹⁰ The people of the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation, however, are believed to have retained their mothers' tongues to a greater extent than most other Native groups, so the damage done may still be undone. It is clear, nonetheless, that a remedy must take into account the specific local situation, or, in sum, the problem as it is experienced.

The NNBAP is geared to local specification. Distribution agreements, for example, must be negotiated separately with broadcasters who already serve an area. Wawatay was more fortunate than other communications societies, because TV Ontario was willing to carry the service and the Ontario Ministry of Northern Affairs (now Northern Development and Mines) funded installation of receivers for the TV Ontario signal in those settlements which were not receiving it as of 1984. Essentially, the Northern Broadcasting Policy recognizes the fact that Native language broadcasting in Canada can be accomplished on a regional basis only. Its implementation, as a consequence, has been situationally specific and hence, empowering.

Further evidence of empowerment is found in the locus of control. Both the Native Communications Program, and the Northern Native Broadcast Access Program have been structured to ensure that Natives, themselves, have final say over funded projects. To qualify for funding under either program the Native communications societies have to be managed and controlled by people of Native Ancestry. Further they have to be serving a designated Native audience and be able to show broadly based popular support for their efforts. The NNBAP, by making democratic control a prerequisite for funding, tied Native communication societies even more closely to their audience.

The latter program also requires that funded societies commission independent audience surveys every other year to determine the level of audience satisfaction. This aspect of Native communications policy is also empowering; it provides a mechanism to ensure that Native audiences are given an opportunity to voice their opinions about the broadcasting services being provided to them. The communications societies, in turn, can respond as they see fit. They will be answerable for the actions they take, however, to both the regulatory commission and their audience.

The evaluative survey done for the Wawatay Radio Network during its first year on the air demonstrated clearly that WRN's audience had formed firm opinions on the content that was being offered and the things that they would like to have changed. While there was a very high level of satisfaction, there were also some criticisms of the content. One of the commonest complaints, for example, was a lack of specific information about certain communities, especially the most distant settlements along the James Bay coast. By the time a second survey was done (two years later) the network had taken a number of steps to rectify this problem. In

order to extend community coverage WRN now has regular staff members working as northern producers in five of the outlying communities. Also, they have attempted to include live coverage of important events. As well, to meet the special needs of the Cree communities along the James Bay coast, four Cree speaking staff have been relocated to a "Cree Centre" in Moosonee where they are in a better position to report on developments in the coastal communities.

In identifying empowering social policies, a critical element is the nature of the relationships involved: are these collaborative or mere service rendering? In the case at hand, the usually dependent relationship between Canada's government and Native citizens has been restructured to the Native's advantage. It is clear that it is collaboration between the two parties which keeps Native languages on-air.

The lack of dependence is also apparent in the actual mechanics of delivering radio and television services. While expertise is obviously necessary when dealing with relatively sophisticated technologies, the aim has always been to train people in the north so that they "can fix it themselves." Rather than relying upon outside experts, the communications societies worked hard to become the people's source of expertise. In the case of Wawatay, this means not only undertaking the day-to-day tasks of keeping radio on the air, but also acting in matters relating to communications as custodians and spokesmen.

SUMMARY

The symbolism in the word "Wawatay", Oji-Cree for "northern light" is self evident. Since its inception in 1974, the Wawatay Communications Society has shed some light *for*, and to an extent *on* the people who live "north of 50" in Ontario. Set up by the Chiefs of the Treaty Nine area (now known as the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation) to maintain a system of HF trail radios, it rapidly became the source of media expertise for the people there. In short order Wawatay was helping to establish AM radio stations in communities around the region. This led eventually to linking these community stations *via* satellite into their own radio network. Most recently, Wawatay has undertaken to establish a Cree/Oji-Cree television network as well.

While all of this activity has been the result of local endeavors, it has been facilitated to a great extent by a unique Canadian approach to broadcasting that blends technology with tradition. Since the mid 1970's Native people have effectively controlled the nation's Native language media, and have thus been able to use modern systems of telecommunications to preserve their languages and cultures. Exercising such control over the delivery of a human service to their own people is, nonetheless, still exceptional. It came about as the result of the concurrence of several developments. The relative isolation of many

northern settlements had, for decades, ruled out economical broadcasting services, a problem which was overcome by the development of satellite technologies during the early 1970's. At about the same time, Native Canadians were becoming politicized, and coming to realize not only the importance of their languages and cultures, but also the threat to both from the newly available, southern controlled media. They demanded, and eventually got, programs that would give Native people a local alternative, broadcasts about themselves in the languages of their ancestors.

Unlike most Native policies and programs, which have created and maintained a state of dependency, the Northern Native Broadcasting Access Program has been able to respond to local initiatives; ensure that the services are tailored to fit situationally specific needs; make collaborative rather than "expert/client" relationships the norm; and, hence, has let people know the feeling of being in control. The results are remarkable and, in Rappaport's terminology, empowering.

NOTES

1. Revised version of a paper presented at the 1986 meeting of The Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association in Winnipeg. The authors wish to acknowledge the helpful comments made on that occasion by the discussant, Prof. J. Rick Ponting, and those of an anonymous referee for *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*. As well they want to thank their colleague Prof. Gerd Schroeter for the editorial improvements that he made to their text.
2. The Department of the Secretary of State, in conjunction with the Wawatay Radio Network, commissioned an interim evaluation of the network by the Centre for Regional Development at Lakehead University (Minore,1985). See also a second survey by the same author, Minore,1987. (M.E.Hill was the research assistant for both projects).
3. The "unauthorized reception" controversy rested on a number of legal, social and political concerns; although the overspill of U.S. satellite signals was unavoidable, when Canadian communities set up receiver dishes and local delivery systems for U.S. programs they violated certain proprietary, distribution and exhibition rights; further, the practice called into question Canadian compliance with various international treaties and bilateral agreements with the U.S. There was also concern on the part of the government about issues of broadcasting sovereignty, the lack of regulatory control over the reception of the signals, and the absence of Canadian content in the programs (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunication Committee,1980).
4. In 1976 a Northern Broadcasting Plan was submitted for Cabinet approval. Under this proposal, regional radio and television programming would have been developed and CBC services expanded to meet the needs of small communities. The plan did not receive approval however; the Cabinet requested instead that there be a comprehensive study done on the cost of providing services not only in the north, but to all isolated and underserved areas (Communications et al, 1983 DP:18).
5. Although founded by the Band Chiefs, the Wawatay Communications Society was organizationally separate from the Grand Council Treaty Nine. NNBP only funds communications societies that are independent of political organizations. The society is a registered charitable group, run by a board consisting of 15 representatives from the communities served, plus several Elders.

6. Mr. Brian Wolf, (at the time of writing) District Manager for the Department of the Secretary of State in Southwestern Ontario. The authors would like to acknowledge and thank Mr. Wolf for commenting on the early stages of Wawatay's development.
7. The Oji-Cree term for satellite, *pi-wapic wanagoosh*, translates literally as "ironstar".
8. The communities served by Wawatay are in two time zones: Eastern and Central. The first WRN show is heard at 11:00 a.m. Central time (or 12:00 noon for residents of the region who are in the Eastern time zone) and lasts two hours. The second show starts at 4:00 p.m. Central time (5:00 p.m. Eastern) and, similarly, is on for two hours. The Thursday night show starts at 9:00 p.m. and is on for an hour-and-a-half in the Central time zone (but only on for an hour in the Eastern time zone).
9. Ojibway, the language spoken in southern parts of the region served by the network, is considered to be so similar to Oji-Cree that Ojibway speaking listeners will have no problem following when Oji-Cree is used on the radio.
10. The lure of All-Star Wrestling from Atlanta and 24 hours-a-day movie channels caused the practice of pirating television signals to spread rapidly. At the end of 1981 there was only one "Johnny's Hat" or receiver dish in the area. One year later such dishes could be found in at least six other communities.

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