**Let's Talk:
A Conversation about
Canada and Quebec**

Queen's UNIVERSITY

Two sides to the Canada-Quebec "Way of Being Canadian"

Michael Doxtater

Queen's National Scholar,
Queen's University

In this discussion of *Quebecers our way of being Canadian*, let me first say what I'm not talking about. I am not ignoring political economy and power elites in the C. Wright Mills sense of social stratification in Canada. Nor am I valorizing the social economy of what I could call an Indigenous Social Gospel. Philosophizing about Socrates's dog is also absent—semantics over treaty versus treatise; democracy as consensus versus majority rule; indigenous as adverbial or pronominal; being and becoming Canadian. However, I focus on two aspects of the policy on the affirmation of the Quebec nation:

1. *Neocolonialism* to diffuse an innovation that only implies Indigenous Peoples and,

2. *Neopragmatism* to challenge this innovation.

One tradition is exclusive and continues an impasse. One is inclusive and could break the impasse.

1. The Neocolonialist Impasse

C. Everett Rogers wrote the manual for colonization, titled *Diffusion of Innovations*. Everett's manual describes how external change agents recruit local change agents to diffuse an "innovation." The innovation does not originate with the local community but is created at an external site—in Ottawa, for example. In the case of Indigenous Peoples, the innovations began as a means for trading (a pile of hides for a rifle), but later became regulations and laws to govern Indians' affairs. Local change agents over the past 100 years have names like "elected band councils" (since 1924) and "special champions" (in the Buffalo Jump era since the 1980s). Nearly 30 years ago, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) began talking about devolution as the final stage of Indian self-government. Examples of innovations include the following:

Year	Policy
1763	Royal Proclamation
1857	Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribes (Indian Advancement Act)
1867	British North America Act
1876	First Indian Act - Indians were the exclusive responsibility of the federal government
1880	Partial federal enfranchisement
1884	Indian Advancement Act
1889-1911	Termination of lands and rights to lands
1900-1925	Overthrow of chiefs and land allotment carried out simultaneously (outlaw of the Potlatch, Sundance, Great Law of Peace)

1925-1951	Interwar period - The Indian Act was no longer enabling legislation for the Crown to honour its treaty obligations, but was an Innovation diffused to control resources, children and identity, residential schools, foster care, selling of wood on own land, liquor, etc. - Indian Agent had power of peace officer (police) - The goal of on-reserve education was to make Indian children obedient to authority - Indians (as well as lunatics, alcoholics, and criminals) couldn't vote.
1951	Complete overhaul of Indian Act - Establishment of Indian Registry with more clearly defined membership and policies defining Indian identity.
1970s	Beginning of discussions for self-government/self terminate strategies, e.g., James Bay Northern Quebec; Nishga; Nunavut
1985	Era of Bill C-31 - Devolution of responsibility for Indigenous Peoples from federal Crown to provinces
1992	Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
1980s and 1990s	Indian Taxation Advisory Board, First Nations Lands Management Act
Early 2000s	Rejection of First Nations Governance Act; initiation of tripartite discussions amending devolution.
2008	Canada's Apology June 11, 2008 to "aboriginals"; termination of use of the word "Indian".

The innovations seek assimilation-based development that includes the overthrow of treaty signatories, extinguishment of land title, and ultimately Indian termination, a policy designed by Canada and the US in 1912 to "kill the Indian in the child" (Canada) and "kill the Indian in the man" (US). The resistance to subjugation (as seen in myriad social movements among Indigenous People continent-wide over the past 30 years) sustains an impasse that has existed for nearly 100 years.

An educated cohort of Indigenous People noticed that "devolution" did not mean devolution from the Crown to the treaty-signatory Indigenous People, but from the federal Crown to the provinces. The idea of devolution is being amended through tripartite discussions between Canada, provinces, and First

Nations in areas like education and health care. And that is the "blind spot" in the Affirmation Policy. The Affirmation pays modest heed to Indigenous Peoples living outside of the 200-mile geopolitical and geocultural Laurentian territory of Quebec. The Quebec Affirmation describes a policy on provincial and federal relations that evokes the older devolution discourse. With most of the Quebec geography encumbered by treaties and the James Bay agreement, it seems likely there will be objections from Indigenous Peoples.

The Neopragmatist Construct

I teach conflict resolution and managing organizational change. My practice comes from grassroots organizing in the Indigenous community, and mediation at Oka, Red Hill Valley, and Caledonia. But it also incorporates work in large organizations in Canada and the US. I tell Canadian students, "I can teach you how to block a road or downsize your organization," which gets a chuckle. Then I tell them what I'm really teaching —"something radical called democracy." I use these pragmatic principles to teach:

1. consensus-building based on equal access to information, voice, removing coercion, being a stakeholder, and mutual respect;

2. leadership based on convening, facilitating, and mediating human interactions to solve locally identified problems;

3. governance based on positing the locus of control in the local community to find local solutions to local problems using local knowledge and local wisdom.

Curiously, these foundational principles originated in the Americas—in the free world that Settlers enjoyed once they were emancipated from their homeland aristocracies and theocracies. Perhaps the Indigenous thesis and the Settler antithesis could create a higher synthesis for inventing a future for our Children—another dialectical invention originating in the Americas.

The Indigenous-Settler syzygy has two divergent interests. Firstly, underlying title to land has been affirmed by Crown courts as an Indigenous preemptive right protected by the "inherence" clause in the Charter. Secondly, there are 30 million citizens who have achieved the Nation-State in Canada, and are not going anywhere. My motive here is not to stupidify the syzygy, but to simplify the syzygy for purposes of offering a simple idea to enact stable social change, as I realize we have two spheres of interests operating on the same interdependent orbit. Power balancing seeks to address and harmonize:

1. Neocolonialism that continues to privilege cultural presuppositions by power elite's assumed authority to invent Indigenous Peoples' future, if not all people's future.

2. Neopragmatism by leaders who value social, philosophical, political, and economic differences and believe in democracy as the best way of reconciling these differences.

If Quebec decides to implement the policy, there are many stakeholders that need to be considered. The policy statement "Our Way of Being Canadian" says that the Quebec Secretariat for Canadian Relations (QSCR) "will implement a new structure for strategic monitoring, reflection and action, and will seek new input from all government departments." Operationalizing Quebec's vision requires consensus building between the federal Crown, the provincial Crown, and Indigenous Peoples. The project could provide a model for enacting change among diverse interests in a multicultural setting.

In *Political Liberalism,* Rawls identifies overlapping consensus as central to a political construction. Outside the overlapping consensus rests the asymmetry of separate entities. In this construction, similar to Indigenous People's conception of a lodge-longhouse braced by foundational principles, diverse liberal and illiberal interests engage in a deliberative discourse to find pragmatic solutions to conflicts, disputes, or issues requiring resolution. Based on justice as fairness and moral obligation, principled collaboration and cogenerated knowledge builds consensus. Critically, reflection encourages creativity, innovation, and imagination for finding solutions to problems like pollution, drugs, violence, racism, and wellbeing. The Affirmation policy opens a potential dialogue on serious issues that humanity faces about life on earth.

I see the Quebec Affirmation as the possibility for the Indigenous-Settler relationship to re-invent itself. One method used by Organizational Learning specialists is to facilitate this critically reflective transformation in what action researchers (AR) call open systems thinking and diversity management. Organizational Learning practitioners maintain that viable, healthy learning organizations or systems must be open and proactively adaptive to existing and foreseeable environmental factors. By scanning and addressing those social, philosophical, political, and economic factors interfacing a system, Organizational Learning facilitates in-depth analysis of a given system's past, present, and future plans.

Organizational Learning involves professional facilitators, managers, and stakeholders from the various communities of practice. Collectively, they identify issues; learn social research methods together; set the research agenda; execute the research collaboratively; and, over time, strategically implement the results as a team. The aim is to generate collective knowledge that supports the values, ideals, and realities of the total organization. Participatory action research (PAR) values "local knowledge" that is as vital as "expert knowledge" in the design of democratic social change. The skilled facilitator seeks to mobilize that knowledge, help local people articulate what they think so that they can be understood, and incorporate their knowing into the evaluation and planning of new efforts. Stakeholders learn to control their power to own the situation, which is critical if the outcomes are to be used and the content of social change is to be stabilized.

That seems like a pragmatic premise in and of itself.