

Who Should Be Teaching Who?

" . . . Indian values evolve not out of what people said but out of their language and out of their myths. And for Indians how they make meaning is as important as what meaning they make.

"Take a number of values: simple things, like the power of nature, justice, spiritual power, peace, humanitarianism, physical death, cooperation, equality, mentally adept, happiness, beauty. These are listed in order of importance, as the Indian describes them. But the Indian divides values into groups. One he attributes to nature, one he attributes to the group and one he attributes to himself.

" . . . It doesn't, for example, make sense to say of the Indian that he doesn't have a very good sense of justice. For he does not expect to have that. That doesn't lie within the individual. That lies within the group. The white group, however, finds only two separations — himself and it. What was important to the white group is that which he controlled. What is important to the Indian group is to adapt to that which is out there and imposed upon him.

"If we look at it this way, we can make sense out of a great number of things. Is the welfare system, is it so much different from nature? The Indian adapted to nature, he adapted to a way of life that included nature. Along comes the new system. What is it likely he will do? Fight or adapt? I think it is likely he will adapt. He will become part of it. And I think if you want to put another way of life upon him, he will adapt to that too. I think the Indian culture does this. It says to live with that which is. To look at things not as causative, but to look at things as they are.

"If you set out intentionally to change values, you can in fact do that, but God help you, you'd best know what you're doing. Think. Think of a thousand years. Would the value changes you make be appropriate then? Will the systems you have taught these people have meaning then? Look at the relationship that you are going to attempt to put upon these people from a culture that is barely three thousand years old, that has hardly reached the crawling stage.

"You're going to use your concepts to change people with a culture that has existed for maybe twenty-five to fifty thousand years. You're going to build for them a way of life from a culture that has not even gained stability. You're going to use that as a model for a culture that has been stable for over ten thousand years. I wonder who should be teaching who?"

— The above is a reprint of a portion of a speech given by Art Blue, of the University of Saskatchewan, at the seminar on Film, Video-Tape and Social Change, March 13 - 14, 1972.

