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**THE POTENTIAL FOR PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT  
AROUND THE TAKINI SCHOOL  
HOWES, SOUTH DAKOTA**

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**Abstract:**

*This article examines community development issues faced in the vicinity of the Takini School, a small grant school on the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota. By exploring various suggestions regarding participatory development, I consider possibilities for Takini's future, as well as how a development agent might function in the emerging community.*

The Bureau of Indian Affairs chose a location for the Takini School on the basis of equal distance from each of the three communities the school serves. Before Takini was built, Cherry Creek, Red Scaffold, and Bridger each had their own small schools. The Federal Consolidated School Reform Act, the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) P.L. 103-382, and the Goals 2000: Educate America Act P.L. 103-227 motivated the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to combine the communities' schools. The Takini School, located in an area where according to members of the three communities, "Not even the coyotes go," opened its doors to students in 1988.

In that short period of time, the Takini School has both enjoyed a reputation as a progressive and successful example of

Indian education and has sunk to a tumultuous low during which the school almost closed two years ago. Currently, Takini struggles to recover from the disorganized and unstable atmosphere caused by controversy, high teacher turnover, and dysfunction in the three communities. Located approximately a half hour drive away from each of the communities, the Takini School originally built four houses for employees and has since periodically added to the school's staff housing with trailer houses. Most of the classified staff (teacher's aides, business, custodial, and other staff) live in the communities (or in the general area of the reservation), although several live in the school housing. Several employees drive from Faith, Sturgis or Spearfish miles away.

Takini receives its funding in two ways. The Federal government provides a certain amount of funds for each student enrolled and at school during Count Week. The Federal government also provides funds for such programs as Special Education. As a grant school, Takini must also write for grants for programs and projects. Currently, Takini depends on a grant-writing team of four employees who serve in other positions around the school.

Takini serves approximately 425 school-aged students in three communities and their vicinities. These students may choose a number of options besides attending Takini. There are many truant children; and Takini employs a truant officer to search for them--especially in the weeks before Count Week. Students may also attend Native American boarding schools like St. Joseph's in Chamberlain, or the Flandreau Indian School. The Cherry Creek Christian school, run by Mennonite missionaries, has an enrollment of approximately 25 students. Students may also choose to attend school in Dupree or Eagle Butte. During the fall of 1998, the Takini School served 247 students (kindergarten through twelfth grade).

The Takini School provides extracurricular activities for the students despite its geographic isolation. The Lakota Drum and Dance is being revitalized, although the Drum Group has been much more consistent. In the past, Takini students have performed for various audiences as part of a Drum and Dance group. Several sports teams are extremely popular, in particular, both girls' and boys' basketball teams receive community support. The school publishes an annual yearbook, and began a high school journalism class for the 1998-99 school year. School buses make additional trips to provide students transportation to and from extracurricular activities. Several clubs meet while school is in session, such as class committees.

The school board is comprised of two members from each community, often parents of Takini students. Many school employees are also parents of students who attend the school. Parents and other relatives sometimes volunteer at Takini. However, despite transportation provided to school board meetings, few parents attend. School employees often have difficulty arranging meetings with parents, and often go to the three communities for required parent signatures when parents refuse the invitation to visit the school. Although school employees appear to desire parental involvement, one also senses an attitude of resignation and uncertainty about empowering parents' roles in the education of Takini students.

In addition to the school buildings and the school housing, the Cheyenne River Housing Authority recently built thirteen new Tribal Housing units adjacent to school property, into which new residents moved in early December of 1998. All of the new residents are transferring from one of the three communities.

Several school employees and their families live in the ten trailers and the four houses, which sit only yards away from the

school. Many of the residents leave Takini on the weekends and during the summer, demonstrating little investment in the atmosphere or well-being of the area as a community. As the Tribal Housing units stood empty waiting for permanent residents, many school employees (both school housing residents and residents of the three communities) were waiting to see if problems in the three communities will be transferred to the Takini housing. No public preventive steps were being taken to avoid the possibility. Currently, there is little sense of community in the staff housing, and most residents of Cherry Creek, Red Scaffold, and Bridger do not consider the arrangement of temporary housing at Takini a "community."

I intend to explore the primary development issues at Takini, to consider possible options for the future, and to examine the potential role of a development agent/catalyst in Takini's development process. After a relatively brief ten-week visit, I have formed certain opinions about my hopes for the Takini School and the surrounding housing--and my focuses will no doubt reflect my biases, however, I seek an exploratory tone for this article. If I were to presume to recommend steps for Takini's development process, I would undermine principles of participatory development that I hope to present in this article.

### **Defining A Community for Takini**

The creation of Takini could serve as the epitome of top-down development. A bureaucratic department of the Federal government, the Office of Indian Education Programs (a department of the BIA) determined that there should be a school and that it should be located six miles off of Highway 34 at a place equidistant from the three communities served. Therefore, the school was built there, regardless of local opinion. The bureaucratic institutions of the school, and more recently the Cheyenne River Tribal Housing

offices, have created the buildings that have since been added. Little local empowerment has occurred, but then, most people with a long-term vested interest in the potential community actually live in one of the other communities. The housing that has been at Takini, the employee housing, has experienced an high turnover rate.

Unfortunately, such bureaucratically created collections of people do not necessarily evolve into communities as has possibly happened with Takini. Bureaucracy has little to do with people, and, therefore, little to do with communities of people. Guy Gran explains in *Development By People (1983)* that:

as a political entity, bureaucracy is an authoritarian, hierarchical control instrument. It replaces the needs of people with the needs of systems. It hires functionaries instead of citizens; they apply management instead of leadership. As a cultural entity, bureaucracy replaces social norms with operational codes and ethics with effectiveness. As a psychological instrument, bureaucracy creates new forms of dependency. Role and work identity replace person and personality, conditioning takes the place of socialization, and teamwork is more rewarded than skill. (p.16)

The residents at Takini are estranged from one another, and for the most part may consider their living arrangement a part of their job. They are connected to one another not by social systems, but through a common employment by a school. Most teachers from off the reservation do not visit.

A teacher at Takini who resides near Rapid City explains to her friends, who want to know about life on the reservation that, "I don't know what it's like to live on a reservation; I teach on a reservation." She expresses through this statement the estrangement of teachers' and students' lives at Takini. While most students live in one of the three communities, many of the teachers are not involved in any community related to Takini. Sometimes teachers do not desire

further involvement; others do not know how to become involved in a constructive and appropriate way.

Few members of the certified staff are Native American, although several excellent Native American teachers and administrators serve and have served at Takini since its creation. Sar A. Levitan and Barbara Hetrick examine the issue of Native American teachers in *Big Brother's Indian Programs With Reservations (1971)*:

The low proportion of Indian teachers is not due to BIA discrimination, but rather to the unavailability of teachers who qualify under the civil service regulations. Whether these qualification requirements are relevant or serve the Indian children well is a crucial question which the BIA has not attempted to discern through experimentation or alternations in required credentials. A major shortcoming of the white teachers working in BIA schools is their ignorance of Indian culture. (p.45)

Hopefully, the number of Lakota certified staff will continue to increase and teachers from off the reservation will gain increased awareness of the realities of their students' lives. Currently, many proficient Lakota aides and other classified staff work at Takini.

Those interested in community development in the area around Takini currently face the great obstacle that many people do not consider Takini or the current housing part of any community. A Lakota woman who works as an aide at the Takini School explains that, "I don't feel Takini is a 'real' community. . . Takini School has never really had community involvement. It was always discouraged. With the new housing [Cheyenne River Tribal housing], hopefully more parents will become involved." To examine Takini's status as a

community and its potential for participatory development, one must first consider various conceptions and definitions of Community.

At Takini, “the communities” commonly refers to Cherry Creek, Red Scaffold, and Bridger. In daily conversation, a clear distinction exists between the school and the communities. Regardless of whether Takini can currently be considered a community or not, one might first consider possibilities of why it is not perceived to be a community. Vivian One Feather suggests in *Indian Community Organization and Development* (1978) that for the Lakota, a community must be made up of Lakota. She explains that:

The most accurate description of a community feeling may be derived from Thomas Tyon, an Oglala, who described the essence as, THE Lakota are allied against all others of mankind though they may war among themselves. They are *oyate ikce* (native people) and are *ankantu* (superior) while all others of mankind are *oyate unma* (other people) who are *ihukuya* (considered inferior). (p. 2)

People (often whites) from off the reservation, however, have occupied the housing at Takini. Often, residents have immediate families elsewhere and do not develop close relationships while they stay at Takini. The residents are generally not permanent. Members of the communities that the school serves, who are accustomed to communities of complex relationships, extended families, and common experiences, would not consider the Takini housing a community.

Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball provide a very helpful definition for community in *Culture and Community* (1965):

As a social system the community is made up of a series of interdependent sub-systems, that is, groups of people organized to meet the needs of their members or those of the community. A system is



composed of individuals united by ordered relations, existing in time and space, each individual responding in a customary manner toward others in the system (or outsiders or events which impinge on the system). The nature of the interaction (ordered relations and customs) being an expression of the values affected by the situation or even which stimulated the response. (p. 270)

Currently, residents at Takini exist in atomized positions which concern their individual relationships to the school, rather than their relationships with one another and the community. A high school teacher who resides in a school-owned mobile home suggests that the residents near Takini need, "more 'community service' attitude, less 'I am right' attitude."

Common connections to the Takini School have brought employees and residents of the three pre-existing communities to a point where there is the potential for a community--one that can develop in a positive manner or in a dysfunctional manner. Although the school has created the situation, it cannot be the only structure of the potential community to be considered as residents look toward proactivity in development. Macgregor (1970) explains in "Changing Society: The Teton Dakotas," that one community facet alone, isolated from all other crucial parts of people's lives, cannot be used to heal dysfunction in a community (and, presumably, a community-to-be):

Most Bureau officials still see the solution to this problem as improvement in education, vocational training, more jobs, and better housing. These are undoubtedly necessities, but they have been offered to previous generations without marked success. They have not offset the increasing deterioration of reservation societies and the personal maladjustment of individuals. (p. 105).

A more holistic approach must be taken to developing a community,

and while the Takini School occupies a peculiar place in the development of the community around it, it cannot be considered the only aspect significant to social change. The school occupies an integral place in the potential community, but as One Feather notes, one should recognize that the most beneficial changes for the Indian community are those which begin at its smallest units, the *tiospaye* and the household (1978:10).

For these reasons, those considering development action at Takini might emphasize the school's role (which might be done simply because of the convenience of the building), they must also address the existence of other systems in the emerging community. The education and acculturation of children exists as one of the most important cultural and developmental considerations, but it is also only one system. Compartmentalizing education, family, employment, health, and spiritual well being hinders positive community growth. Guyette explains in *Planning for Balanced Development: A Guide for Native American and Rural Communities (1996)* that:

when a single development action positively affects more than one of those systems, it becomes more reinforced or culturally meaningful and will have a long-term and widespread impact on the community. To the extent that two or more cultural subsystems are affected positively, synergy is created, leading to momentum in development. (p. 2)

Development actions at Takini have thus far been isolated incidents concentrating on the school's needs, or, more recently, on economic decisions carried out by the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

The Family and Child Education Program might serve as the possible exception to the general lack of publicized planned community development at Takini. Employees of Takini who are parents and community parents of young children may participate in

the early childhood education program that integrates education for the parents into well-planned time with the children.

### **Takini's Choices for Development Planning**

Should current development trends continue at Takini, several hypothetical situations might occur. If employees, students, and parents do not assume agency of the school's physical appearance, the environment will continue to become dilapidated. Currently, the buildings remain in fair condition, but at the present rate of abuse, their appearance will decay quickly. Not even the maintenance department picks up the litter that decorates the patches of dirt and grass along the sidewalks. The flowerbeds beside the trailer classrooms are falling apart and sowed only with scraggly prairie grass and weeds. Several school employees have begun efforts to beautify school grounds, but this small minority needs support.

Takini has haphazardly created employee housing, adding mobile homes as needed, with no apparent regard for aesthetic value or community feeling in the physical appearance. The thirteen Tribal housing units adjacent to school property in staid uniformity on their rectangular yards, lined up in four rows along two short gravel roads. More housing might be added, and one assumes that it would be placed where convenient.

As Takini grows, more buildings will doubtless appear; it might gain a small store, a post office, or a gas station in the next ten years. Perhaps some sort of industrial opportunity might occur nearby. Unfortunately, these sorts of changes and buildings do not qualify as the only important kind of community development. In fact, if affected families do not assert their interests and help to plan for the area, no amount of economic opportunity, buildings resources, and government funding will create a healthy community at Takini. Since

every new resident in new housing will transfer from a tribally-owned house in either Cherry Creek, Bridger, or Red Scaffold, some or all of the dysfunctions from those communities might simply be transferred to a different geographic location. The teachers housed in school housing can stay equally estranged from students several hundred yards away as they can from their students who are currently thirty miles away. Without a change in perceptions, parents might not feel any more comfortable at the school than they formerly did. Simply creating new buildings and funding projects at the Takini School will not create the livable community that its residents deserve.

The Takini School and surrounding area desperately needs some form of development planning and subsequent development that originates with the people who will be living with the results. Guyette (1996) explains her conception of bottom-up development, which is:

determined from below and reflects a different interpretation of the purpose of development. Development goals are balanced with maximum use of natural, human, and institutional resources. The purpose of this type of development is satisfaction of the basic needs of community residents through small-scale, regional, resource-based, and often rural activities. (p. 132)

Residents must soon decide their basic needs as people sharing a common space. They can begin to establish expectations, relationships, and goals for their community. In addition to attending to basic needs of sustenance, Gran (1983) emphasizes that development can aid residents to succeed more. He explains that participatory development is the self-sustaining process to engage free men and women in activities that meet their basic human needs and, beyond that, realize individually defined human potential within socially defined limits (p.327).

However, the participation of the general public is inherent to this sort of empowering and healthful progress. One Feather (1978) defines desirable development as The total mobilization of physical, economic, and social resources which may assist any potential growth. The greater the number of participants in the process, the more involvement and subsequent changes will be rendered (p. 37). The particular dynamics at Takini require examination of who the participants should be; even if many residents begin to seek an active role in the development process, a huge contingent could be estranged. School employees, Takini residents, and members of the three communities that Takini serves must all claim an active role in the development process to achieve the total mobilization of which One Feather speaks.

Guyette (1996) illustrates well how various crucial systems must interact in participatory development programs; throughout *Planning for Balanced Development*, she is especially sensitive to indigenous communities. For successful sustainable development, she divides development action into six crucial and interrelated facets: kinship, economic, religious, political, ecological, and artistic (p. 3). Kinship will remain important and be very important in connecting the emerging community at Takini to the slightly older three communities. Those who come to the community through the school must respect the integral way in which family will work in development. Insensitivity to kinship and kinship relations could prove disastrous.

Takini's economic issues will continue to play an expectedly significant but peculiarly designed role. The potential community already has one of the largest and better-paying employers in the general area; however, people from outside of the communities hold most of the higher-paying positions. Perhaps Takini might seek grant-funding to initiate further education for the many capable

classified employees from the three communities, whether by awarding scholarships or by providing satellite courses on school grounds. Takini consistently sees what Guyette terms as economic leakages, which occur when dollars are spent outside of local economies due to the lack of services within a region (1996:133). As a second-year high school teacher describes the problem, it [Takini] also needs places on the reservation, closer than Eagle Butte to spend money.

Although unlike many schools Takini acknowledges the spiritual aspects of life, little religious activity occurs at Takini, and, hopefully, residents will determine how they want to integrate spirituality into their community. The Takini School and recent housing construction are both results of political institutions. Various political bodies must be addressed by residents as they consider proactive steps to take in their community; the Takini School Board, the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, and the BIA are only a few of the important entities residents should consider.

So far, little research has occurred concerning ecological issues; in fact, the new housing was built on prime buffalo grazing pasture. The area's design has not involved planning for atmosphere, much less amateur landscape architecture which could integrate local artistic talents. In particular, Takini students could gain a sense of investment in the community by contributing their artistic impulses and designs to the appearance of the area.

Takini School has not encouraged a sense of ownership of the school and investment in the emerging community in the student population. A ninth-grade female expresses a sentiment typical of many students when answering the question, "Do you feel that Takini and the surrounding housing area is an attractive place? Is that an important issue to you?" She responded, "I don't care because I

don't live up here." The drab housing surrounds a haphazardly designed campus that is littered with refuse and perhaps a pounds of aluminum cans.

In "Considering the Environment: An Approach for Rural Planning and Development" Wayne Caldwell (1994) proposes that "concepts of land stewardship... have been replaced with the industrial ethics of efficiency and productivity" (p. 324). Despite rhetoric of traditional Lakota values, at Takini the bureaucratic and economic goals of the school as an institution often replace the community's ideals for the experience and education of their children at the school. The appearance of the school is no exception, for immediate convenience has been of much greater priority than campus attractiveness.

As Meg Maguire, Ray Foote, and Frank Vespe (1997) demonstrate in "Beauty As Well As Bread" one must take seriously the linkages between physical design, everyday visual experience, and community sustainability (p. 317). I feel that students and residents might take Takini's appearance more seriously and respectfully if school administration and government bureaucracy treated the aesthetics of place with more care and seriousness. Not only would the experience of being at Takini grow more pleasant, but I also suggest that it would ultimately create a more effective, efficient, and successful school as well as a better place to live. Maguire, Foote, and Vespe (1997) explain:

First, we're coming to understand how people's attitudes and behavior toward a place arise from what they perceive as appropriate for that place. . . Second, research is beginning to reveal the fundamental physiological effects of visual quality, and their implications for the well-being of communities. For example, Roger Ulrich, a professor of environmental psychology at Texas A & M, has demonstrated that hospital patients with views of trees may fare better than those looking

out on a brick wall recovering more quickly, requiring fewer painkillers, and expressing less hostility toward hospital staff. (p. 320)

Unfortunately, much has already been done without consideration for attractiveness. However, groups of people involved through the school or through residency could choose to improve the appearance through adding and restoring plant life, proposing a planned design for how Takini will grow, attending to the upkeep of current buildings, as well as by improving the current appearance of buildings on the school's campus and in the vicinity.

Guyette (1996) provides clear and helpful advice on a wide range of aspects of the community development, and those interested in a proactive approach to change at Takini might find *Planning for Balanced Development* to be an extremely helpful resource. She cites several steps as crucial for the planning process :

Step 1: Create a Vision

Step 2: Identify Key Issues

Step 3: Define a Strategy

Step 4: Collect and Analyze Important Data

Step 5: Do a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis

Step 6: Create a Mission Statement.

(p. 9-20)

Residents may find the temptation to allow the school and the government to continue to control the area very strong, however, as inevitable participants in the beginning of a community, they have an interesting and unique opportunity to seek their own goals.

On the other hand, those concerned with Takini's future might remain wary of planning, especially if an institution volunteers to do



the planning after citizens suggest it. Gran (1983) explains how planning can actually be counterproductive:

Planning as done by aid agencies or local officials, often produces these negative results: (1) planning can be used as a substitute for action; (2) planning drains scarce human capital; (3) planners, for many reasons, seek the larger, more complex and thus more expensive possibility; (4) planners create problems to gain influence; . . . (5) planners generate false hopes which lead to disillusionment; . . . (6) planners are an interest group with their own biases. (p. 242)

As One Feather (1978) emphasizes, several plans must be examined before the most feasible one is chosen to begin the participatory development process.

### **A Development Agent**

Someone from outside a community often initiates development projects both through top-down and bottom-up approaches. The development agent (also called a development catalyst) who seeks a participatory development approach must be extremely sensitive to what that means, and therefore careful to impose as little as possible instead attempting to encourage residents to create their own development. Gran encourages development agents, especially those from outside a community to consider daily James Yen's advice from his work in the 1920s Rural Reconstruction Movement in China:

Go to the people  
Live among the people  
Learn from the people  
Plan with the people  
Work with the people  
Start with what they people know  
Build on what the people have

Teach by showing; learn by doing  
Not a showcase but a pattern  
Not odds and ends but a system  
Not piecemeal but integrated approach  
Not to conform but to transform  
Not relief but release

(Yen, 1950)

Whether or not the leadership emerges from Takini or one of its surrounding communities or from outside of the reservation, the initiation of positive development action could prove extremely helpful. Development agents must take care to avoid the familiar conventional imposition of development ideas. One Feather (1978) notes that an agent must not consider herself a leader so much as a facilitator; leadership must, therefore, be distinguished between leadership in representing Indians among White or government agencies, or the leadership representing Indians among Indians. It is the latter which has aided the survival of the Indian community (p. 43). An agent must encourage leadership in the community participants, and assume a more quiet kind of leadership. One Feather explains that a successful development agent must have technical skill, belief in mission, cultural empathy, a sense of politics, and organizational ability. Without all of these characteristics, a development agent risks greater setbacks, or perhaps imminent failure.

The most effective development agent at Takini would be someone extremely familiar with the development strengths and challenges of Bridger, Red Scaffold, and Cherry Creek. Ideally, the development catalyst would be a resident of one of those communities who is now transferring to Takini. A long-term employee of the school would have particular biases but also a valuable perspective that could either aid or hamper her possible role.

Perhaps someone completely new to the area could initiate healthy development, however, if she were to follow the advice of One Feather, Gran, and Guyette.

I hope that regardless of the presence of a development catalyst who considers herself as such, positive development leadership will soon emerge from the small population concerned with the well-being of Takini School and the potential community of Takini. The dynamics of the area are rapidly evolving, and without planning, the changes could produce new and exacerbate familiar social problems.

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