



Organizational responses to institutional complexity stemming from emerging logics

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Organizational responses to institutional complexity stemming from emerging logics: The role of individuals

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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.navDOI: [10.1177/1476127016641726](https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127016641726)soj.sagepub.com**Stephanie Bertels**

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Abstract

In this article, we address two important gaps in the study of organizational responses to institutional complexity. First, we examine how organizations respond to institutional complexity associated with newly emerging logics that lack well-defined sets of practices; although previous research has examined logics new to a field, those logics have tended to be well-established in other domains. Based on the responses of 10 Canadian public schools to the emerging logic of Aboriginal distinctiveness, we identify four organizational responses (reinterpretation, advocacy, isolation, and integration) that we argue are distinctive of emerging logics. Second, we explore how individuals in organizations shape organizational responses to institutional complexity. We show how individuals' sensemaking and institutional biographies combine to affect the kinds of action in which organizations engage (discursive or practical) and the scope of that action (expansive across the organization or confined to a subset of actors).

Keywords

institutional change, institutional theory, organizational change, qualitative methods, research methods, strategy as practice, topics and perspectives

An important and enduring issue for institutional scholars is the heterogeneity of organizational responses to institutional complexity. The concept of institutional complexity describes the situation in which organizations “confront incompatible prescriptions from multiple institutional logics” that “provide guidelines on how to interpret and function in social situations” (Greenwood

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et al., 2011: 317). Research on organizational responses to institutional complexity builds on early studies of institutional pressures. Many of these studies drew on Oliver's (1991) typology of strategies that included acquiescence, compromise, avoidance, defiance, and manipulation and examined the factors affecting organizations' adoption of these strategies in a variety of contexts (Clemens and Douglas, 2005; Goodstein, 1994; Greening and Gray, 1994; Ingram and Simons, 1995). Over time, however, there has been an important shift toward an image of fields as fragmented and contested, hosting multiple logics that simultaneously influence organizational actors (Lounsbury, 2007) and thus complicate the sets of pressures that organizations face—situations that Oliver's (1991) typology was not developed to explain. Thus, a puzzle emerges as organizations face conflicting guidelines rooted in competing institutional logics: the complexity of these situations opens up the possibility of more diverse sets of responses from organizations that are unlikely to be explained by the traditional factors identified in previous research on institutional pressures.

To address this issue, we examine organizational responses to institutional complexity in the context of Aboriginal¹ education in Canada, a domain in which multiple competing logics exist, all of which are explicitly about the constitution of society and the relationships among its parts. Beginning in the early 17th century with the colonization of North America, and through most of the 20th century, public education for Aboriginal children in Canada was dominated by a “residential schools” program, which involved removing Aboriginal children from their homes to be educated in boarding schools charged with a mandate of assimilation. Canadian policy makers and educators now acknowledge the devastating impact of this program on Aboriginal individuals, families, communities, cultures, and languages (Grant, 1996; Milloy, 1999), including the significant and continued disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educational outcomes (Cowley and Easton, 2006). Over the last few decades, two logics have most prominently informed the evolution of Aboriginal education in Canada—a logic of multiculturalism and a still emerging logic of Aboriginal distinctiveness. Over the last decade, the rights of Indigenous peoples have gained increasing prominence in political and popular discourse globally, signaled most prominently by the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007. In Canada, Aboriginal leaders have increasingly asserted the rights of Aboriginal parents to determine what kind of education is best suited to their children. As a result, Canadian public schools have faced increasing pressures to respond in new ways to the distinctive needs, backgrounds, and histories of Aboriginal students (Castellano et al., 2001; Widdowson and Howard, 2013).

Within this broader context, we examine the responses of 10 Canadian public schools in one urban school district to institutional pressures for action with respect to the emerging logic of Aboriginal distinctiveness and its implications for the delivery of Aboriginal education. The school district in question was in the midst of negotiating their first “Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement”, (AEA), and the schools in this study were all invited by the district to participate in an “Aboriginal Learning Inquiry,” a 2-year process intended to “empower Aboriginal students about the possibilities of school and to create environments where Aboriginal students are engaged in learning in their classrooms.”² The Inquiry acted as a stimulus with respect to the discourse and activity around Aboriginal education in the schools, making the debates and practices more accessible and transparent to our study. Our aims were to understand the differences among the schools in how they dealt with the institutional complexity around Aboriginal education, as well as how those differences emerged.

Our study is primarily situated in the literature on institutional logics and institutional complexity (Greenwood et al., 2011; Thornton et al., 2012), which emphasize organizations as embedded in institutional systems, within which sets of logics, networks of actors, and flows of resources

shape organizational structure, action, and beliefs. We build on this literature in two main ways. First, unlike most research on competing institutional logics, we examine a situation in which a well-established logic is challenged by one that is newly emerging, and at the time of the study, significantly underdeveloped with respect to prescribing specific sets of practices. This contrasts with existing studies which tend to focus on logics that may be new to a particular domain or field but are well established in other contexts, such as the logics of the market (Thornton, 2002) or the professions (Reay and Hinings, 2009). Focusing on a newly emerging logic allows us to identify a novel typology of organizational responses to complexity. The second way in which we build on the institutional complexity literature is by exploring the impact of individuals on the variation in organizational responses. Although scholars have begun to move “inside” organizations in their investigations of institutional logics and complexity, existing research has largely conceptualized individuals in terms of their occupations or organizational roles (McPherson and Sauder, 2013; Pache and Santos, 2013), overlooking the influence of individual motivations and abilities anchored outside of those categories, as highlighted by writing on institutions as inhabited (Hallett, 2010; Hallett and Ventresca, 2006).

We present our article in six sections. We first review existing research to develop the research questions that guide our analysis. Second, we provide a brief history of Aboriginal education in Canada, highlighting the two institutional logics that underpin contemporary debates. Third, we describe our research methods. In the fourth section, we present the organizational responses to institutional complexity stemming from a newly emerging logic. Fifth, we explore why and how those responses emerged, with a particular focus on the role of individuals. Finally, we discuss the article’s contributions to the existing literature, its limitations, and its implications for further research.

Research on organizational responses to institutional complexity

In this section, we begin by reviewing what is known about the variation in organizational responses to institutional complexity. We first focus on research that addresses how differences between logics affect the variation in organizational responses to institutional complexity. We then shift our focus to examine what existing research tells us about how such variation might be rooted in differences among organizations and their members, rather than the logics they confront. It is by drawing across these approaches that we develop the research questions that guide our analysis.

Institutional logics and responses to institutional complexity

Organizations face institutional complexity when multiple institutional logics provide competing prescriptions with respect to interpreting and responding to a situation (Greenwood et al., 2011). Thornton et al. (2012) define institutional logics as “socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices ... by which individuals and organizations provide meaning to their daily activity” (p. 2). Complexity arises because actors often encounter multiple logics as they negotiate social situations, and in organizational life, some of those encounters become themselves institutionalized such that the simultaneous existence of multiple logics becomes an ordinary part of organizational life (Kraatz and Block, 2008; McPherson and Sauder, 2013). Descriptions of organizational responses to institutional complexity often suggest a struggle, as actors wrestle with pluralistic and potentially conflicting institutional demands (Denis et al., 2001; Greenwood et al., 2011; Pache and Santos, 2010). Alternatively, institutional complexity can become a basis for improvisation and innovation, as actors treat the sets of alternative values, ideas, beliefs, and practices as resources for the creative assembly of new social combinations (McPherson and Sauder, 2013; Smets et al., 2015).

These dynamics, both struggle and exploitation, are animated by two main mechanisms. The first involves the question of legitimacy. Competing institutional logics often present organizations with conflicting prescriptions with respect to what will be considered legitimate organizational aims, actions, and outcomes, as in the case of social enterprises that often struggle with the legitimacy pressures associated with commercial and social logics and the sets of actors for whom each is primary (Dacin et al., 2011; Goldstein et al., 2010). Competing constructions of legitimacy have the potential to constrain actors as they try to resolve or mitigate those tensions and enable them as they strategically appeal to different bases of legitimacy in different situations. The second mechanism involves the ways in which institutional logics shape the availability, value, and use of resources that organizations may employ in practices central to their effectiveness and competitiveness (Denis et al., 2001). This dynamic is evident in American research universities, which operate at the intersection of multiple institutional logics rooted in distinctly different societal institutions, including academics, athletics, and pastoral care (Kraatz and Block, 2008). Thus, institutional logics shape organizational action through their roles in conferring legitimacy and controlling critical resources.

The variation in organizational responses to institutional complexity that we seek to explore may be significantly tied to differences in the kinds of logics they face and the relationships among logics in pluralistic environments (Kraatz and Block, 2008). The most frequently studied situation with respect to competing logics involves the emergence of a new logic that challenges and often displaces existing logics (Thornton, 2002). An important facet of these situations has been that although the logics studied are new to the field under examination, they tend to be rooted in long-standing institutional logics of a more general nature. So, in Thornton's (2002) study of higher education publishing, the "new" logic that emerged in the field was that of the market—a logic already well established in other contexts. Similar dynamics have been documented in domains such as healthcare (Scott et al., 2000), universities (Townley, 1997), museums (Oakes et al., 1998), and housing (Binder, 2007). Largely neglected in these studies, however, are the dynamics associated with the emergence of new logics that do not neatly represent local instantiations of broader societal logics, such that clear prescriptions and proscriptions are not yet available and the legitimacy of practices and organizational structures remains untested. This represents an important gap in our understanding of institutional complexity: existing images of institutional complexity emphasize the uncertainty associated with choosing between or working to synthesize sets of practices and structures that are relatively well defined and legitimate within one or another logic. In contrast, facing institutional logics that are emerging, rather than being translated into a new field, presents organizational actors with significant ambiguity because those logics may be associated with sets of values and beliefs, but lack any well-defined practices and structures through which those values might be enacted.

The role of organizations and members in responses to institutional complexity

An emerging development in the study of institutional complexity has been the examination of how the world inside organizations shapes how they recognize and respond to competing institutional logics. Pache and Santos (2010: 457) argue that an important limitation of Oliver's (1991) original typology of organizational responses is its treatment of organizations "as unitary actors developing strategic responses to outside pressures," which overlooks the ways in which institutional complexity can generate internal conflicts that shape organizational responses. Recent work has extended this direction, showing how the ongoing co-existence of multiple logics can be achieved through the actions of "micro-level actors" who develop "localized structures and systems that enabled day-to-day work" in the face of competing logics (Reay and Hinings, 2009).

An important finding in Reay and Hinings' (2009) study is that the structures and systems employed by micro-level actors allowed multiple logics to separately guide the behaviors and strengthen the identities of different actors. Where actors inside organizations accept and manage the existence of multiple logics, by creatively employing logics at odds with what might be expected of their professional groups (McPherson and Sauder, 2013) or by "embracing, rather than resolving, institutional complexity" in ways that provide "broader practice repertoires, access to additional resource pools, and enhanced innovation" (Smets et al., 2015).

Discussions of organizational hybrids have explicitly considered the nested and intertwined sets of influences on institutional complexity and organizational responses to it at the field, organization, and individual levels (Besharov and Smith, 2014). Moving beyond traditional notions of conflicting or competing logics, this work has delineated a more complex set of relationships occurring among institutional logics within organizations, in which competing logics are viewed by internal actors as contested, estranged, aligned, or one logic is viewed as dominant, depending on the degree to which logics are compatible and central (Besharov and Smith, 2014). An important finding in the research on hybrids has been the potential for organizations to combine elements from different logics, gaining legitimacy among the stakeholders associated with the logics from which those elements emanate (Pache and Santos, 2013). The durability of such arrangements depends on internal organizational politics that avoid the formation of subgroup identities attached to individual logics, which can "exacerbate tensions between logics, thereby making their combination untenable" (Battilana and Dorado, 2010: 1420).

This movement to look inside organizations could benefit from a more explicit recognition of organizations as inhabited by individuals with complex, heterogeneous relationships to institutional logics that go beyond their organizational roles. This gap is highlighted by recent writing on institutions and identity (Glynn, 2008) and on institutions as inhabited (Hallett, 2010; Hallett and Ventresca, 2006). Research connecting identity and institutions has demonstrated the powerful influence that individuals' identities have on their relationship to institutions and to their efforts in responding to institutional pressures (Creed et al., 2010; Leung et al., 2014). The inhabited institutions approach emphasizes that while "institutions provide the raw materials and guidelines for social interactions, ... the meanings of institutions are constructed and propelled forward by social interactions" (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006: 213). A focus on institutions as inhabited moves people, and especially social interactions, to the center of institutional analysis, such that understanding how organizations respond to institutions, including the competing institutional logics associated with institutional complexity, depends on an understanding of the people in organizations whose thoughts, feelings, and actions will animate those responses. In Hallett and Ventresca's (2006) terms, organizational responses to institutional complexity will depend on how "social interactions suffuse institutions with local force and significance" (p. 213). Thus, a key issue for our study is the role of individuals, their identities, and their social interactions in affecting the variation in how organizations respond to institutional complexity.

Research questions

Looking across the research on institutional logics and institutional complexity, our study is primarily motivated by two issues that we see as critically important but under-examined. The first concerns organizational responses to institutional complexity that involve at least one newly emerging institutional logic—where an institutional logic is emerging that is associated with sets of values and beliefs, but lacks clearly defined practices and routines that represent legitimate instantiations of those values and beliefs. This issue is important because it introduces institutional ambiguity to the study of institutional complexity, whereas previous studies have primarily focused

on situations of uncertainty. The second issue is the role of individual organizational members in shaping variation in organizational responses to institutional complexity. This may be especially important in the context of newly emerging logics, where the translation of values and beliefs into organizational practices and structures depends on the will and skill of organizational members to construct new routines and organizational structures.

Thus, the research questions that guide our study are as follows:

1. What are the variations in organizational responses to institutional complexity stemming from newly emerging institutional logics?
2. How do individuals in organizations affect the variation in organizational responses to institutional complexity stemming from newly emerging institutional logics?

The logics of Aboriginal education

The research questions posed above demand a comparative study in which variation in organizational responses to a consistent institutional environment could be readily observed: we examined the responses of 10 Canadian public schools, within the same urban school district, to institutional complexity arising from competing institutional logics that were having a significant impact on the issue of Aboriginal education. Two institutional logics are at the core of this complexity: multiculturalism and the emerging logic of Aboriginal distinctiveness. Before describing these institutional logics, however, we provide a background to Aboriginal education in Canada, including the previously dominant logic of assimilation. This history serves as an important backdrop to schools' responses to multiculturalism and Aboriginal distinctiveness as competing institutional logics.

Aboriginal education in Canada

For much of the 20th century, Canadian legislation and policy sought to assimilate Aboriginal people into colonial life and values through the eradication of Aboriginal cultural (White and Peters, 2009; Widdowson and Howard, 2013). Aboriginal people were understood as savage and primitive, and thus, unable to survive in a colonial society without the oversight of the Canadian government: "Our Indian legislation generally rests on the principle, that the Aborigines are to be kept in a condition of tutelage and treated as wards or children of the State" (Department of the Interior, 1876: xiv). This logic of deficit also shaped the approach to Aboriginal education in Canada. As laid out in the Indian Act of 1876, Aboriginal children were removed from their homes, to be educated in government and religious "residential schools" where they were stripped of their languages and cultures and trained, for the most part, to be manual laborers. While residential schools began to be phased out in the 1960s, the last of the schools did not close until the mid-1990s. It is now generally accepted that the forced removal of children from their families was devastating for Aboriginal individuals, families, communities, and cultures (Milloy, 1999).

Beginning in the late 1960s, the Canadian approach to Aboriginal people began to shift, and two new logics began to surface. In 1969, after years of failed efforts to assimilate Aboriginal peoples in Canada, then Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau tried to put to rest "the Indian Problem" by proposing to repeal the *Indian Act* and terminate all legal and fiduciary relationships between the government of Canada and First Nations people. In part, in response to the Indian Problem (Chazan et al., 2011) and, in part, to facilitate a bilingual agenda and simultaneously appease growing immigrant dissatisfaction (Wood and Gilbert, 2005), Trudeau promoted the development of a new Canadian identity centered around multiculturalism. Multiculturalism, introduced as a Canadian government policy in the 1970s, was celebrated as a new vision for Canada that would foster an acceptance and

understanding of all ethnic communities. For the next half century and beyond, Canada has promoted itself as a nation of social harmony with high respect for diversity all under the banner of multiculturalism (MacDonald, 2014). A new focus on Human Rights stemming from the multiculturalism agenda even prompted the development of a Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Meanwhile, discussions about repealing the *Indian Act* also prompted a new era of Aboriginal political organizing focused on self-determination and self-sufficiency (Paine, 1999) that aligned with a more global movement focused on the rights of Indigenous Peoples to determine and control their own future (Cole, 2006). Aboriginal leaders advocated for their distinctiveness with respect to rights, educational needs and epistemology, culture, and social needs stemming from the effects of colonization. Based on this lobbying, the Canadian government enshrined Aboriginal rights in Section 35 of the new Canadian Constitution and in Section 25 of the Charter of Rights in Freedoms in 1982.

However, the Canadian Constitution does not specifically define these rights; instead, the government signaled that they were to be defined on a case-by-case basis. The result has been a slow and ongoing process of trying to establish these rights through the court system. In 1990, continued political activism by Aboriginal leaders reopened the Treaty Process in the Province in which our study takes place and a joint Federal, Provincial, and Aboriginal task force was established to find ways to fairly resolve Aboriginal land claims. In 2007, the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. While not legally binding, it sets out a global standard for the treatment of Indigenous Peoples. Canada was one of only four nations to vote *against* its ratification. Yet, reflective of changing sentiment among everyday citizens, on 11 June 2008, then Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized to Aboriginal people on behalf of the Government of Canada for past policies of assimilation. Throughout this period, Canada continued to promote itself as a nation accepting of diverse cultures, with a commitment to multiculturalism that encourages racial and ethnic harmony and cross-cultural understanding. Multiculturalism was well entrenched in the Canadian psyche.

In contrast, at the time of our study, Aboriginal distinctiveness was still an emerging logic, gathering in strength both internationally and nationally and fueled by revelations of the extent of suffering inflicted upon Aboriginal people revealed in testimonies to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Thus, at the time of our study, two institutional logics intersected to shape the delivery of education for Aboriginal students in this school district: the logic of multiculturalism and the logic Aboriginal distinctiveness. There was also considerable pressure to improve Aboriginal education to address the significant disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educational outcomes: nearly twice as many Aboriginal Canadians lack a high school education as non-Aboriginal Canadians, and there is a considerable performance gap in all subjects between Aboriginal students and their non-Aboriginal peers (Cowley and Easton, 2006). We discuss the principles underlying these two logics as they relate to Aboriginal education below and contrast their key characteristics in Table 1.

The influence of the logic of multiculturalism in the school system

Within the public education system in Canada, the ideals and images of meritocracy and the common school in which children from all walks of life operate, learn about, and respect one another, have deep roots. While the limitations that prevent the school system to live up to this ideal for many students—especially Aboriginal students—has been well documented, it remains an enduring ideal. (Laramee, 2008: 65)

As Canadian society began to see itself as more culturally diverse, schools were pressured to participate in the transformation by adapting curriculum to reflect this pluralism and

Table I. Comparison of the multiculturalism and Aboriginal distinctiveness logics as they apply to schools.

	Multiculturalism logic	Aboriginal distinctiveness logic
Sources of legitimacy	Canadian society	Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous Elders
Authority	School districts/the province Parents (in their role as voters)	First Nations (elders and parents) Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements negotiated with the province and school districts
Perspective on Aboriginality	Aboriginality is a cultural concept (The goal is to raise awareness and acceptance of a set of cultural traditions)	Aboriginality is a political concept (The goal is the pursuit of Indigenous self-determination)
Perspective on citizenship	Equality/nationalism: all citizens are equal.	Group-differentiated rights: Aboriginal peoples have the right to self-determination and self-government.
Goals—seeking to prepare students for ...	The aim is to develop open, tolerant, egalitarian global citizens.	The aim is to enable learning that recognizes the role of indigenous ways of knowing rooted in a relationship with the land and all life forms and a respect for the teaching of elders.
The role of Aboriginal culture in schools	The focus is on all cultures. Students should learn to understand and respect all cultures. Indigenous cultures are one of many cultures.	The focus is on Indigenous cultures, creating room for Aboriginal students to experience learning in the context of their own cultures.
Aboriginal content in the curriculum in schools	Aboriginal content is a “topic” to be integrated as stand alone “units.” (There is a social studies unit in the core curriculum in Grade 4 about Aboriginal history, culture, and traditional lands. There is a Grade 12 optional course on the traditions, history, present realities, and future challenges and opportunities of Aboriginal people.)	Aboriginal students will see themselves reflected across the curriculum in all subject areas.

establishing school as a place in which everyone should experience a sense of belonging in an equitable and inclusive learning environment (McLeod and Krugly-Smolska, 1997). In line with the Federal multiculturalism agenda, schools began to focus on promoting equivalency in achievement, developing an understanding and appreciation of the cultural heritage of others and developing pride in heritage. Yet, critics lamented that schools tended to focus on cultural celebrations, foods, art, and dance, treating multiculturalism as an add-on to the regular curriculum without questioning or disrupting the underlying Eurocentric structures of the school system (Kirova, 2008).

The influence of the logic of Aboriginal distinctiveness in the school system

Beginning in the 1960s, recognizing its failure to achieve assimilation and seeking to lower the costs of providing education to Aboriginal students, the government decided to phase out the residential schools program and began focusing on reserve schools and on incorporating Aboriginal

students into public schools in urban environments. But many Aboriginal students struggled to adjust to Eurocentric public schools, facing considerable discrimination by their non-Aboriginal peers. Initially, Aboriginal students were served largely through segregated programs. In the 1980s and 1990s, with increasing numbers of Aboriginal populations moving into cities and clustering in certain urban neighborhoods, urban schools moved toward a model of integrating Aboriginal students in regular classrooms with resource support through Aboriginal support workers.

The logic of Aboriginal distinctiveness brings forth a different perspective on the educational needs of Aboriginal children. In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood published “On the Indian Control of Indian Education”—a high-profile proposal that called for control of education by First Nations people on reserve lands and First Nations representation on school boards serving First Nations students (Fallon and Paquette, 2012). From the 1970s through the 1990s, shocking revelations about the mistreatment of Aboriginal students in residential schools and high dropout rates motivated a significant social movement demanding greater support for First Nations students in Canadian schools (Castellano et al., 2001; Friesen and Friesen, 2002). While some Aboriginal leaders continued to push for a separate First Nations controlled system of education (Fallon and Paquette, 2012), they also pursued educational enhancement agreements to improve the outcomes of Aboriginal students within the existing public education system.

In 1999, a memorandum of understanding was signed between Aboriginal leaders, federal and provincial governments, and the teachers’ union in support of the creation of AEAs requiring districts to develop relationships and commitments to improve the educational success of Aboriginal students. Aboriginal leaders have questioned the suitability of the content and structure of public schools to the success of Aboriginal students. Pointing to differences in epistemology, they caution that adhering to Western standards highly focused on literacy and an understanding of science and mathematics limits the growth of Aboriginal students and undervalues Indigenous knowledge. They assert that the logic of mass public education creates an expectation that success for Aboriginal students is defined in terms of their ability to perform against Western standards. Finally, the Aboriginal distinctiveness logic carries with it a recognition that there is a need for greater education support for Aboriginal children rooted in social disadvantage suffered as a result of colonialization and long-standing policies of assimilation, not as some innate characteristic of Aboriginal peoples.

The tensions between multiculturalism and Aboriginal distinctiveness

Multiculturalism as a global agenda has increasingly been the subject of critique because “it has effectively buttressed the dominant, mostly white, cultural group as the ‘central’ ethnicity of the multicultural mix, the norm against which other ethnicities are judged” (Ashcroft et al., 2013: 164). Aboriginal leaders have from the start pushed back against multiculturalism because it failed to address their unique rights as first inhabitants distinct from those of colonizer and immigrant cultures (Paine, 1999). Aboriginal critics of multiculturalism have argued that “[b]y inciting multiculturalism, public schools effectively limit meaningful incorporation of Aboriginal content and perspectives into public schools” (St. Denis, 2011: 307) and may perpetuate intolerance, racism, and social and political inequity toward Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Compounding the lack of knowledge regarding Aboriginal people among the general population, most teachers and school staff have had little or no training in Aboriginal education (Laramee, 2008). The logic of multiculturalism applied to education has also interacted with parent choice in negative ways for Aboriginal students, as it has been the parents with means who are often best able to mobilize and influence their districts (Mitchell, 2001).

Methods

Our study is exploratory, intended to generate insights into the variation in organizational responses when organizations face similar institutional complexity stemming from conflicts between existing and emerging logics and, in particular, to understand the role of individuals in driving this variation. We adopted an inductive qualitative methodology, employing a real-time, multiple case design (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003). Our research was carried out in 2006 and 2007 in a large, urban Metropolitan School District in Canada that provides education to over 50,000 students, including approximately 2000 Aboriginal students. The vast majority of these 2000 Aboriginal students attend fewer than 20 of the approximately 100 schools in the district, and they are concentrated in two distinct areas: the economically struggling inner-city and a more affluent area that borders on an urban First Nations reserve.

During the period of our study, school districts in the province were in the process of negotiating their first AEAs: 5-year agreements between Aboriginal communities and school districts that were to include shared decision-making and goal-setting to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal students. The focal school district was in the process of negotiating its own AEA with local Aboriginal communities, and there was uncertainty with regard to what form these agreements might take and what effect these agreements might have.

To support the development of their AEA, the district sponsored an “Aboriginal Learning Inquiry” (hereafter referred to as “the Inquiry”) as a means of surfacing potential approaches that could inform the goals and strategies of their agreement. The Inquiry included 18 months of gathering stories about positive Aboriginal learning experiences from Aboriginal students and their families, Aboriginal support workers, teachers, and administrators, followed by a 2-day summit to develop a collective vision and plans for the future. A total of 11 schools were selected by the district to participate in the Inquiry on the basis of having the highest Aboriginal student populations in the district—ranging from 3% to 50% of their student populations. From a methodological perspective, we conceptualized the Inquiry as a stimulus to the system that generated both discourse and actions around the concept of Aboriginal education, making it a more transparent and accessible research context (Eisenhardt, 1989). Our aim in examining these schools was to understand the differences among them in how and why they were responding to the increasing institutional complexity surrounding Aboriginal education.

Data collection

We chose to study all 11 schools participating in the Inquiry in order to gather a rich cross-sectional data set allowing us to ask questions about variation in organizational responses (Eisenhardt, 1989). One school declined to participate in our study and we retained the other 10 schools throughout the study period. Data were collected in these 10 schools over a 2-year period, with a first wave of data collection occurring just prior to the Inquiry summit in 2006, and the second and third waves approximately 6 months and 1 year after the summit. The data collected for each school are summarized in Table 2. Our primary data collection strategy was semi-structured interviews with internal and external stakeholders. In each round, our interviews at each school included at least one, sometimes two school administrators, at least one (often two or more) teachers, Aboriginal/First Nations support workers, resource teachers, and Aboriginal students and their parents or foster parents. For the most part, we retained the same participants in all three rounds. Round 1 had on average 10 interviews per school, and rounds 2 and 3 had, on average, 9 interviews per school (there were 282 interviews in total).

A team of researchers, trained and briefed by one of the authors, conducted the interviews. In almost all cases, one researcher conducted all the interviews at a given school site. Interviews

Table 2. Data collection.

School	Category of respondent	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Total number of interviews*
Rainbow Elementary Key school contact: resource teacher I	School administrators	2	2	2	43
	Classroom teachers	3	2	2	
	Resource teachers/community support workers	5	5	5	
	First Nations support staff	1	1	1	
	Parents	1	1	1	
	Students	1	1		
Kaleidoscope Elementary Key school contact: Principal	School administrators	1	1	1	24
	Classroom teachers	2	2	2	
	Resource teachers/community support workers	1	1	1	
	First Nations support staff	1	1	1	
	Students	2	1	1	
Voyageur Elementary Key school contact: resource teacher	School administrators	1	1	1	29
	Classroom teachers	3	2	2	
	Resource teachers/community support workers	2	2	2	
	First Nations support staff	1	1	1	
	Parents	1			
	Students	2			
Visions Elementary Key school contact: project teacher	School administrators	1	1	1	27
	Classroom teachers	2	1	2	
	Resource teachers/community support workers	2	2	2	
	First Nations support staff	1	1	1	
	Parents	1			
	Students	2	1		
Junction Elementary Key school contact: Principal	School administrators	1	1	1	18
	Classroom teachers	3	3	2	
	Resource teachers/community support workers	1	1	1	
Prism Secondary Key school contact: resource teacher	School administrators	2	2	2	26
	Classroom teachers	1	2	1	
	Resource teachers/community support workers	2	2	2	
	First Nations support staff	1	1	1	
	Students	1			
Pathways Secondary Key school contact: Principal	School administrators	2	2	2	16
	Classroom teachers	1	1	1	
	First Nations support staff	1	1	1	
Raven Elementary Key school contact: resource teacher	School administrators	1	1	1	29
	Classroom teachers	2	2	2	
	Resource teachers/community support workers	4	4	4	
	First Nations support staff	1	1	2	
	Students	1			

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued)

School	Category of respondent	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Total number of interviews*
Orca Elementary	School administrators	1	1	1	39
Key school contact:	Classroom teachers	3	3	3	
Principal	Resource teachers/community support workers		1	1	
	First Nations support staff	2	2	2	
	Parents	1	1	1	
	Students	3	3	3	
Eagle Secondary	School administrators	1	1	1	31
Key School contact:	Classroom teachers	3	1	2	
Principal	Resource teachers/community support workers	4	3	3	
	First Nations support staff	1	1	1	
	Students	2			
					282

*Key school contacts were interviewed multiple times during each period.

lasted approximately 1 hour and with participants' permission were recorded and transcribed. Our research team also toured the schools making note of artifacts and observations, sometimes attending school meetings where discussions about the Inquiry, or Aboriginal education more broadly, took place. The research team also attended portions of the Inquiry events.

Our semi-structured interview protocol consisted of asking participants to share a recent story (within the last 6 months) that they felt was typical of their experience with Aboriginal education at their school. We then asked: in what ways is the school having a positive impact on Aboriginal education; what kinds of conflicts arise with respect to Aboriginal education; what could I see, hear, or experience that would help me understand Aboriginal education at this school, and, in rounds 2 and 3, what has changed with respect to Aboriginal education since the Inquiry and what has been the impact of those changes? Throughout the study period, we conducted regular check-ins with the Inquiry coordinator at each site to solicit updates on the project status. Secondary sources included documents relating to specific schools, such as school growth plans, or to the Inquiry, including minutes from meetings at the school and district level and interim and final reports from the district. Our data capture a slice in time during a particularly contested period in the evolution of the practices in the schools in this district during the period in which the district's first AEA was being negotiated.

Data analysis

We engaged in a rigorous coding process and an iterative process of constant comparison between data and prior theory (Eisenhardt, 1989; Holton, 2007); our aim was to develop theory explaining the variation in organizational responses to institutional complexity. When we set out, we were interested in what the schools were doing, who was involved, what they, as individuals, were saying about the issue of Aboriginal education and what logics they appeared to be invoking. As is typical for a qualitative, inductive analysis, we proceeded through several stages

as we worked back and forth between our data and emerging theoretical insights (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978; Locke, 2011).

Preliminary coding. In our first stage of analysis, we began by reading all the transcripts for two of the school sites (Raven Elementary and Prism Secondary). We then each conducted preliminary coding to identify relevant codes, categories, and preliminary themes. We compared our codes and discussed similarities and differences. At this stage, our focus was drawn to the following questions: What are schools doing with regard to Aboriginal education? Who is involved? How are they talking about the issue (what meanings are associated with Aboriginal education and Aboriginal students and what logics are they invoking)? What can we learn about them as individuals?

Coding for practices. Given our interest in the variation in responses, we were first drawn to the practices undertaken at the schools. Given the large amount of data in our study, one author undertook the coarse coding for practices for all the transcripts. Working off these coarse codes, each author then conducted more detailed coding for practices. We again compared our codes and discussed the emerging codes. Then one author used this coding to generate detailed data tables using tactics such as those outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994) and retaining extensive representative quotes. By grouping and comparing the coded material, we identified four key categories of practices, grouping them according to organizational responses that involved predominantly “discursive action” versus those that involved significantly more “practical action.” We found that *Professional and Organizational Development* was a discursive practice including practices aimed at increasing the level of understanding among staff regarding Aboriginal culture and education. The remaining three practices we grouped as Practical Activities. *Academic Accommodation* covered a set of activities aimed at increasing the academic success of Aboriginal students using traditional (vs. distinctively Aboriginal) academic means, such as intensive or separate classes, different class structures, flexible measurements and timetables, and providing additional incentives for attendance and accomplishment. *Incorporating Aboriginal Culture into School Practices* describes a set of activities such as inviting elders to speak at school events, using healing circles to deal with conflict, adorning the school with Aboriginal artwork or artifacts, and opening school events with Aboriginal welcomes or acknowledgements of Aboriginal territoriality. In contrast, *Integrating Aboriginal Culture into Curriculum* includes activities that focus on using Aboriginal material or ideas in classroom teaching activities.

Next, as suggested by Eisenhardt (1989), we systematically compared the results across all the schools to dimensionalize the range of each of these categories of practice. Then, by examining both the frequency and intensity of the data supporting the various categories, we identified those dimensions that were best supported by the data. Comparing across the schools, we were able to cluster them identifying four distinct configurations of practice: reinterpretation, advocacy, isolation, and integration. Table 3 presents these practices for each school, providing sample illustrative quotes or observations and illustrates our clustering of these categories of practice.

Coding for explanatory factors. For each of the schools, we developed in-depth narratives. Based on the clustering of the schools with regard to their configurations of practice, we looked across the narratives, arranging our coded data longitudinally, and by school, so we could clearly interrogate the different trajectories that emerged (Eisenhardt, 1989). Through this process, we identified two

Table 3. Comparison of Practices Across the Schools.

School	Form of Action (Discursive or Practical)	Scope of Action (Expansive or Confined)			
Discursive Actions	Practical Actions				
Reinterpretation Rainbow Elementary	Professional and Organizational Development LOW: No mention of efforts to encourage discussions about Aboriginal Education in professional development sessions or staff meetings.	Academic Accommodation No Academic Accommodation: "I think the [academic] experience for Aboriginal students is no different than any other student at our school." (Rainbow, Teacher)	Incorporating Aboriginal Culture into School Practices Limited incorporation of Aboriginal culture: "We have an assembly once a year for First Nations day with drummers and a First Nations craft station ...and that's about it." (Rainbow, Teacher)	Integrating Aboriginal Culture into Curriculum Low incorporation beyond what's in the curriculum: "Teachers want to teach the curriculum, and they don't want to spend too much time focusing on other things." (Rainbow, Teacher)	CONFINED: Efforts concentrated on helping First Nations parents to feel more comfortable in the school environment through potluck dinners, extending personal invitations to school events and efforts by First Nations support staff to get to know each Aboriginal family.
Kaleidoscope Elementary	LOW: No mention of efforts to encourage discussions about Aboriginal Education in professional development sessions or staff meetings. "Again, I go back to the notion that Aboriginal education is – from my perspective – best delivered in an integrated set of experiences within a school, and within a community." (Kaleidoscope, Principal)	No Academic Accommodation: "We don't try to do things differently, and I think that's important because sometimes some of them might feel uncomfortable to be singled out." (Kaleidoscope, Teacher)	Limited incorporation of Aboriginal culture: "There's one picture in the office about First Nations" (Kaleidoscope, Student) "We had spoken of increasing awareness through a [territorial acknowledgement] ...that hasn't happened." (Kaleidoscope, Teacher)	Low incorporation beyond what's in the curriculum: "We celebrate their culture just like we celebrate Diwali and we celebrate Christmas and we celebrate all the holidays we can." (Kaleidoscope, Teacher)	CONFINED: Predominantly working only with the First Nations children as a pull-out. "I'm doing 20 minutes of culture, and 20 minutes of academics with the students. But it's not working out that way, it's mostly academics. And that worries me, ...some time they need to learn more about their culture because it builds their self-esteem." (Kaleidoscope, FN Support Worker)
Voyageur Elementary	HIGH: Pro-D days and staff meetings regularly used to promote discussion. "We've had several Pro-D days with a focus on Aboriginal Learning, we've had a number of staff attend district-wide events and we've done some work as a staff around the stories that the children and parents told us." (Voyageur, Principal)	No Academic Accommodation: "As teachers, we don't have enough of a population to think that there might have to be separate approaches for Aboriginals." (Voyageur, teacher)	Limited incorporation of Aboriginal culture: "We have a First Nations collection in the library." (Voyageur, Teacher)	LOW: General teaching population is starting to show interest in having the resource teacher and the FNSW come in to do cultural content.	EXPANSIVE: "our main thing was getting the whole school involved, so getting the whole staff involved – not just our group." (Voyageur, teacher) "We are participating in the District pilot of the [Connectedness] assessment tool for our First Nations students" (Voyageur, school growth plan)
Advocacy					(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued)

School	Form of Action (Discursive or Practical)	Scope of Action (Expansive or Confined)	
	Discursive Actions	Practical Actions	
Visions Elementary	HIGH: Pro-D days and staff meetings regularly used to promote discussion. "...because I've had a significant amount of experience with First Nations students ... that helps me to sensitize a meeting on a discussion. So I try to facilitate the healthiest, most productive dialogue that will eventually best meet the needs of these kids." (Visions, Principal)	LOW: "A lot of these activities entail pull-outs and teachers aren't in full agreement with that." (Visions, FN Support Worker)	LOW: "Well we have now implemented an Aboriginal acknowledgment at the beginning of every assembly. [...] there was no unanimous 'yea' or 'nay' [...] The principal was in strong agreement. The first assembly we had, a staff member walked out during that portion. Then there was a conversation between the administrator and that individual." (Visions, Teacher)
Isolation	Junction Elementary	LOW: No mention of efforts to encourage discussions about Aboriginal Education.	MED: "We've come to the realization ... that their learning can be demonstrated in more ways than the traditional pencil paper." (Junction, principal) "My First Nations kids are not coping with the curriculum ... so I brought in some resources that I think I'll be able to adapt for those kids." (Junction, teacher)

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued)

School	Form of Action (Discursive or Practical)			Scope of Action (Expansive or Confined)	
	Discursive Actions	Practical Actions	Academic Accommodation	Incorporating Aboriginal Culture into School Practices	Integrating Aboriginal Culture into Curriculum
Prism Secondary	MED: "We will definitely have one Pro-D day wrapped around First Nations learners and I will ensure that we have some dialogue wrapped around [Aboriginal] learners and what we're doing to ensure that we have First Nations learners at the forefront of our thoughts." (Vice-Principal, Prism Secondary)	HIGH: There is a First Nations department head (the only one in the district) and a separate academic stream for First Nations learners that includes a First Nations Phys ed class. MED: Territorial acknowledgment at the beginning of school events and an FN greeting once a week on the PA system. "...the idea of restoring the totem pole at the front of the school. [...] the First Nations student council's also looking at ...creating a mural (Prism, Teacher)	MED: Development of specialized curriculum and pedagogy for "at risk" Aboriginal students with a focus on delivering concrete skills suitable for employment upon graduation. "So we've set up a homework club ... because often they don't get that support at home." (Pathways, Teacher)	LOW: No efforts cited to integrate more Aboriginal content into the mainstream curriculum.	CONFINED: Aboriginal education efforts are targeted almost exclusively at Aboriginal students. We have a program set up ...it's for First Nations kids only and they do a lot of outdoor activities, field trips, and [...] First Nations history. [...] A lot of the parents [...] view it as segregation. (Vice-Principal, Prism)
Pathways Secondary	LOW: No indications of efforts to increase discussion about Aboriginal Education and how best to serve Aboriginal learners.	MED: Totem poles; introduced signage in the local First Nations language; mural	MED: Elders luncheon; Aboriginal Day celebration; Potlatch; talking sticks, talking circles and healing circles. Grouped the school into four spirit houses based on four Aboriginal symbols to build community across the grade levels.	LOW: No efforts cited to integrate more Aboriginal content into the mainstream curriculum.	CONFINED: Aboriginal education efforts are targeted almost exclusively at Aboriginal students. The district has a program for students deemed unlikely to graduate. They complete a modified curriculum to graduate with a leaving certificate and concrete work experience. At Pathways, Aboriginal students have been the only students in the program for years.
Raven Elementary	LOW: "We've talked a little bit about Aboriginal resources at a staff meeting [...] there's been no real formal discussion." (Raven, resource teacher)	HIGH: Elders luncheon; Aboriginal Day celebration; Potlatch; talking sticks, talking circles and healing circles. Grouped the school into four spirit houses based on four Aboriginal symbols to build community across the grade levels.	MED-HIGH: "because they don't want to be pulled out of class [...] we've found it's easier just to go in and teach the whole class, so everybody gets the same lesson and everybody learns the same information." (Elem A, FNRT)	EXPANSIVE: Several teachers are integrating Aboriginal cultural content. "So any way that I can find to get First Nations things into the curriculum, or things we do, I always go for it." (Raven, Teacher 2)	Aboriginal education was addressed through a school-wide focus on community building, by informal mentoring/check-in programs between teachers and Aboriginal students, and through the creation of Spirit houses.
Integration					(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued)

School	Form of Action (Discursive or Practical)		Scope of Action (Expansive or Confined)
	Discursive Actions	Practical Actions	
Orca Elementary	Professional and Organizational Development	Academic Accommodation Incorporating Aboriginal Culture into School Practices	<p>HIGH: "We have totem poles in the school [...] and the Aboriginal mural. For the [re-] opening of the school [...] we invited the elder from [a local First Nation] and he gave the blessing and [performed] a singing. [...] it's just natural to us to have things happening here that are Aboriginal things." (Orca, Administrator)</p> <p>MED: "there is a new program for math that's been brought in particularly around First Nations learners." (Orca, Administrator)</p> <p>"We have a lot of ability grouping" (Orca Elementary, teacher)</p> <p>HIGH: "We have totem poles in the school [...] and the Aboriginal mural. For the [re-] opening of the school [...] we invited the elder from [a local First Nation] and he gave the blessing and [performed] a singing. [...] we would have done crafts in classrooms, but [there] wouldn't have an objective to it or an assessment. It would just be 'wasn't that fun?' So, that's the important shift." (Orca, Principal)</p>
Eagle Secondary		<p>MED: "We're looking at structure. Does the timelier work for Aboriginal kids?" (Principal, Eagle Secondary)</p> <p>"Our math teacher has a module specifically for First Nations kids [...] with a math professor or she made up this textbook, which we'll probably see province-wide. So this school's cutting some fresh ground. (Eagle, FNRT)</p>	<p>MED-HIGH: "There's been an effort to make First Nations art visible so that when they walk in they know 'this place is welcoming me.' (Eagle Secondary, counselor)</p> <p>"A local elder welcomes every new Grade 8 student using local First Nations traditions. There's a traditional dance group that does a welcoming song. [...] every student – no matter what background" (Eagle, FNRT)</p> <p>MED: "In our Grade 10 Social Studies we incorporated Aboriginal and Treaty Rights." (Eagle Sec., teacher)</p> <p>"I'm working on a module for science and I'm bringing in elders to talk about resource uses – from cedar bark to deer hide, and the science behind that." (Eagle FNRT)</p>

FN: First Nations; FNSW: First Nations support worker; FNRT: First Nations resource teacher. Bold signals commonality among the schools with regards to practices.

dimensions along which the four configurations of responses varied: the form of action and the scope of action. Comparing the schools on these two dimensions, we identified a set of potential explanatory factors. With regard to differences in the form of action, we identified differences in how individuals constructed the issue of Aboriginal education and the logic of Aboriginal distinctiveness as well as differences in the exposure of these schools to gaps in the performance of Aboriginal students. Comparing the schools with regard to scope of action, we identified differences with regard to individuals' engagement in political actions (influence, authority, and coalition building) and their own exposure to Aboriginal issues in the past.

Next, we returned to our full set of transcripts with one author undertaking rigorous coding related to these evolving constructs in all of the transcripts and the second author reviewing and challenging this coding and categorization (Eisenhardt, 1989). We engaged in detailed coding for the following factors: construction of the logic of Aboriginal distinctiveness; exposure to gaps in performance; institutional biographies and political actions. Throughout this process, we engaged in data-theory iteration (Eisenhardt, 1989; Glaser, 1978; Smets et al., 2015) to draw out the factors that appeared to help explain the different approaches in the four clusters of schools. As a result, we engaged in further coding related to threats to professional identity and identification with the emerging logic of Aboriginal distinctiveness. By examining what influenced the practices adopted by the schools, we were able to theorize more generally about why organizations might respond differently and what role individuals played in influencing their responses. We outline our findings below.

Organizational responses to the institutional complexity of Aboriginal education

Our first research question asks what variation exists among organizational responses to institutional complexity stemming from newly emerging institutional logics. To answer this question, we first identified practices that schools undertook to respond to the newly emerging logics of Aboriginal distinctiveness and then grouped those practices into four categories: professional and organizational development, academic accommodation, incorporating Aboriginal culture into school practices, and integrating Aboriginal culture into curriculum. Depicted in Table 3, we found distinct patterns that differentiated schools in terms of how extensively they employed these categories of practices, allowing us to cluster the schools into four distinct configurations of practice: reinterpretation, advocacy, isolation, and integration.

Reinterpretation

The *reinterpretation* configuration was identified at two schools—Rainbow Elementary and Kaleidoscope Elementary. The distinctive characteristic of this configuration was the relatively modest efforts specifically directed toward Aboriginal students or Aboriginal education. In these schools, there was little or no professional and organizational development focused on Aboriginal education, no significant level of academic accommodation toward Aboriginal students, and relatively little incorporation of Aboriginal culture into school practices or curriculum. We describe this configuration as reinterpretation because we observed a pattern of reinterpreting the challenges of Aboriginal students as more general issues of belonging, being “at risk,” or being one of many cultures in need of more opportunities to express elements of their culture.

At Kaleidoscope Elementary, for example, teachers and administrators frequently stressed that addressing the needs of Aboriginal students was no different than how they worked with students from other cultures. As one teacher expressed it, “really, they’re just kids and our job is just to educate them all.” While participating in the Inquiry, the teachers and administrators at

Kaleidoscope were focused on finding practices that could benefit all students. In their discussions and practices, they frequently reinterpreted or reframed the issue of Aboriginality as an issue of “belonging.” As one teacher explains, “the talk is not necessarily directed at Aboriginal education. It’s directed at all education, meeting the needs of all children. I think that that’s the whole idea of desegregation, including everybody in the group, not just the Aboriginal kids.” As described by another teacher, “We had many discussions with the group about Aboriginal learning, and how we can improve it in our school. I think what a lot of people realize is that we don’t celebrate a lot of cultures in our school.”

In these schools, the predominant pattern of action regarding Aboriginal education involved including Aboriginal students in practices focused on the academic and non-academic needs of all students, such as efforts to create a sense of belonging by celebrating a range of cultural holidays and traditions, getting involved with the school, and supporting all students equally, irrespective of their cultural background. The only significant exception to this pattern was some academic help for First Nations students from First Nations support staff.

Advocacy

The *advocacy* configuration was observed at two schools (Voyageur Elementary and Visions Elementary). These schools engaged in relatively modest efforts with regard to Aboriginal education, with no significant level of academic accommodation toward Aboriginal students and relatively little integration of Aboriginal culture into school practices or curriculum. What differentiated these schools from the reinterpretation schools was the presence of professional development activities promoting a broader understanding of the issues around Aboriginal education and efforts on the part of administrators or others to promote experimentation with new practices.

Visions Elementary is an example of an advocacy school: like the reinterpretation schools, teachers, parents, and administrators described the school as “highly multicultural” and very “student-centered” and described Aboriginal students as being “no different from other students.” Aboriginal parents, however, were often viewed by these teachers as being less involved and, in several cases, less capable than other parents. One teacher suggested that “we probably have less [Aboriginal] parent involvement than a lot of the other cultures … the parent is probably suffering [from] lack of education … and because of that it’s almost like they’re still a child, trying to raise a child.”

The principal at Visions described how he “worked to frame this all within the Aboriginal enhancement agreement [process]” by providing “updates and information around what was going on at the larger district level and then contextualizing these strategies.” Vision’s Principal described his role as shaping a professional learning community:

that means people are thinking—reflecting on their practice [...] I think it’s my role to try to bring some of those questions into play to facilitate that kind of reflection and inquiry [...] and I guess part of that is because I’ve had a significant amount of experience with First Nations students and know some things about their culture.

The Principal used professional development days to raise awareness about issues surrounding Aboriginal education and made considerable investments to help the staff better understand how they could support Aboriginal learners. Similarly, the school’s Inquiry team (the principal, the school’s First Nations support worker, and the project teacher) created one-on-one mentoring programs for all Aboriginal students and developed opportunities for cultural learning for teachers, students, and parents. The team also implemented a tool developed at another school that helped

track the academic and emotional status of Aboriginal students. Despite these efforts, however, there remained a perception among the school's teachers that Aboriginal students would be best served by an expanded multicultural focus:

So now the conversation is "maybe all the kids in the school could make drums. They don't have to be Aboriginal drums *per se* because every culture has drums. ... Or maybe we could have—oh, masks. Not just Aboriginals wear masks; every culture has masks for something." It's almost moving Aboriginal, First Nations culture into that multicultural thing ... We're still looking to see, let's see if we can infuse it so that we don't actually have to segregate Aboriginal education as a separate thing. (Teacher, Visions)

And so, the path forward for Aboriginal education in the advocacy schools was understood primarily in terms of the need to help the core teaching staff gain better awareness of the unique needs of Aboriginal students.

Isolation

The *isolation* configuration involved a more extensive set of practices focused on Aboriginal education than were associated with the reinterpretation and advocacy configurations. The isolation schools (Junction Elementary, Prism Secondary, and Pathways Secondary) all engaged in moderate to high academic accommodation and undertook moderate efforts to incorporate Aboriginal culture into school practices, though relatively little in the way of integrating Aboriginal content into curriculum. More notable than the number of practices in which they engaged was their approach: isolation-oriented schools consistently focused on developing separate educational programs and administrative structures for Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal students.

Pathways secondary, for example, is located in a relatively wealthy area that borders a First Nations reserve. Most secondary students from the reserve attend Pathways, but Aboriginal students only make up about 4% of the student population. Aboriginal students at Pathways have low graduation rates, which is in stark contrast to the high academic performance of the bulk of the student body. While the administrators and staff at Pathways were quick to point out that there have been one or two First Nations students who have attended the school's gifted program, for many years, Pathways has maintained a separate program attended by most First Nations learners, the primary goal of which has been to keep First Nations students in school. As described by the administrator,

for the kids in the [First Nations] program hopefully, at the end of the five years, they will have at least a Grade 10, instead of just a School Leaving Certificate. And we also want to have the kids have maybe First Aid and Food Safe when they leave. Things that they can put on their resume.

Integration

The *integration* configuration involved efforts to integrate Aboriginal culture and/or Aboriginal students into the school's core education processes. Looking at the practices associated with this configuration, two elements are particularly distinctive. First, this group was the most active with respect to integrating Aboriginal culture into school practices. At these schools (Raven Elementary, Orca Elementary, and Eagle Secondary), there were significant efforts to make Aboriginal culture integral to the school's identity by prominently displaying cultural artifacts including art on the walls, totem poles, and button blankets and involving Aboriginal elders in school events. At Raven Elementary and Orca Elementary, staff had developed lesson plans that incorporated Aboriginal

themes such as the medicine wheel. Integration schools incorporated Aboriginal practices: all three schools had an Aboriginal territorial acknowledgement or blessing at school events; Raven Elementary made use of a “talking stick” at assemblies; Raven and Eagle were experimenting with healing circles; and the Grade 8 students at Eagle Secondary were welcomed to their new school by a local First Nations elder.

The second main feature of the integration configuration was moderate levels of academic accommodation. At Orca and Eagle, changes specifically targeting Aboriginal students were made to the math curriculum. At Orca, there were also study groups and a homework club for Aboriginal students. At Eagle, the Principal, several math and science teachers, the First Nations resource teacher, and the First Nations support worker were actively engaged in designing new ways of delivering the curriculum that accommodated the learning needs of Aboriginal students.

At Orca Elementary, for example, the connection to Aboriginal culture was apparent the moment one walked in the door. As the Orca Principal noted, “we’re a First Nations school so everything we do I see as involving and including First Nations. ... It’s in our letterhead. It’s on our pictures. It’s on our paintings. It’s in our artwork.” A teacher noted, “every day in meetings we talk about how best to help the First Nations children.” This included supporting First Nations families by holding regular campaigns to ask parents at other more wealthy schools to donate much needed food and used clothing. Prior to the Inquiry, the school had restructured its teaching around ability groups to help Aboriginal students build foundational skills and introduced a new system for teaching math because they found it produced better results for Aboriginal students. Community elders were involved in school activities and the school actively reached out to Aboriginal parents to help them feel welcome and be involved in their children education. Aboriginal practices were also incorporated into formal activities, including Aboriginal territorial acknowledgements at school events.

Differentiating between the organizational responses

As an intermediate step in explaining the roots of the different responses to the emerging logic of Aboriginal distinctiveness, we identified two dimensions along which the four configurations of responses varied (depicted in Figure 1). The first dimension is the “form of action” that dominates that response: we differentiate between organizational responses that involved predominantly “discursive action” from those that involved significantly more “practical action.” The second dimension describes the “scope of action” and distinguishes between “confined” and “expansive” responses.

Differences in forms of action. In distinguishing between discursive and practical actions, we recognize that discursive action could also be described as “practical” in the sense of involving the shared routines or practices of a community (Schatzki et al., 2001; Whittington, 2006). We differentiate these forms of action, however, to highlight the differences we identified in the schools. Whereas all schools responded to some degree to the pressures to act on the issue of Aboriginal education through the generation of talk and text “about” Aboriginal education, only a subset of schools responded with an additional level of effort by making changes to day-to-day educational and administrative practices. In the reinterpretation and advocacy schools, the actions were predominantly discursive in nature. To the extent that the issue of Aboriginal education was addressed in these schools, it was done mostly through talk: Visions and Voyageur elementary schools held professional development days dedicated to discussing issues in Aboriginal Education, and Rainbow Elementary held a summit to solicit student opinions. In contrast, in the isolation and

		Form of Action	
		Discursive	Practical
Scope of Action	Confined	Reinterpretation <i>Practices:</i> Few efforts to incorporate Aboriginal culture or students into the education process beyond what is done for other cultures and students. Pressures are reinterpreted in terms of being one of many cultures Rainbow Elem Kaleidoscope Elem	Isolation <i>Practices:</i> Developing or maintaining separate educational programs and administrative structures for Aboriginal students Junction Elem Prism Secondary Pathways Secondary
	Expansive	Advocacy <i>Practices:</i> Champions attempt to increase awareness of Aboriginal culture/practices among staff and students Visions Elem Voyageur Elem	Integration <i>Practices:</i> Considerable effort to integrate either Aboriginal culture or Aboriginal students into the education process Raven Elem Orca Elem Eagle Secondary

Figure 1. The schools' responses to institutional complexity.

integration schools, the work undertaken included more effortful and practical action, involving explicit, often formal, changes to educational and administrative practices: Orca Elementary, for example, changed how they taught math across the school specifically to improve outcomes for Aboriginal students and Prism Secondary introduced a First Nations department head.

Differences in scope of action. The second dimension we identified that differentiated the schools' responses involved the scope of the actions in which they engaged. In the reinterpretation and isolation schools, their actions seemed to restrict the impact of the emerging issue on other issues or practices. We refer to the scope of such actions as confined. For instance, isolation-oriented schools created separate educational programs and administrative structures for Aboriginal students, which seemed to isolate Aboriginal culture and students from other elements of the schools. In the reinterpretation schools, the few actions undertaken in these schools minimized the issue entirely. In contrast, in the advocacy and integration schools, the actions seemed to increase the connections between Aboriginal education and other issues and practices, and so we refer to the scope of such actions as expansive. In the advocacy-oriented schools, the focus was on affecting school-wide discourse with respect to Aboriginal students and culture; integration-oriented schools created programs and activities that integrated Aboriginal education into school-wide practices.

Explaining organizational responses to the institutional complexity of Aboriginal education

We now turn to our second research question—how individuals in organizations affect the variation in organizational responses to institutional complexity stemming from newly emerging institutional logics. In exploring the two dimensions proposed above—the form of action and scope of action—we found that individuals in the schools played important roles in shaping both. We describe these findings in detail below. But, in brief, we found that higher levels of external surveillance surfaced performance gaps that triggered sensemaking that were more likely to incorporate the emerging logic engendering more practical forms of action in contrast with schools that experienced less surveillance where sensemaking was rooted in the dominant logic and restricted to more discursive forms of action. We further found that individuals with prior exposure and connection to the emerging logic identified with it in ways that led them to engage in political actions such as influencing, exerting authority, and coalition building that expanded the scope of the organizational response to the emerging logic. Together, these findings suggest an image of organizational responses to institutional complexity as an internally complex process in which individuals make sense of and give life to institutional logics inside organizations.

Understanding differences in the form of action

Our explanation of the role of individuals in the differences across the schools in the form of action—whether the practices were primarily discursive or practical—begins with differences in the context in which organizational members operated. An important difference between the schools that took practical action rather than discursive action was the visibility of the performance gaps associated with the academic performance of Aboriginal students. As illustrated by the data in Table 4, all the schools in our study were subject to routine formal surveillance tracking the performance and progression of all students, which provided some visibility to the academic problems of Aboriginal students. Those problems were, however, made more explicit and public in the isolation and integration schools, all of which were either secondary schools or elementary schools with large Aboriginal student populations. The performance gaps were most visible in secondary schools where mandatory provincial examinations in Grades 10, 11, and 12; the ability to legally “drop-out” at age 16 years; and high school graduation all make visible the performance gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. As the Principal of Eagle Secondary explained, the transition to secondary school comes with a significant increase in accountability with respect to academic performance:

Grade 10 provincial exams are a barrier for our First Nations kids. No doubt about it. In the past, with all due respect, I’m sure there has been a great deal of social promotion. But with the Grade 10 exams, it’s more difficult.

Among the elementary schools, the visibility of Aboriginal student performance problems varied significantly, with much more intensive surveillance and greater visibility for elementary schools with large Aboriginal populations. As the Principal at Kaleidoscope explained,

When your scores [on the Grade 4 and Grade 7 skills assessments] are reported out, they are masked if you have less than five [Aboriginal] children per grade, because it’s too easy to identify those students if they’re not doing well.

As a consequence, there was significantly less visibility of Aboriginal student academic performance in those schools with Aboriginal student populations less than approximately 15%.

Table 4. Understanding differences in form of action.

	Form of action	School	Visibility of performance gaps	Emphasis on dominant or emerging logic
Reinterpretation	Discursive	Rainbow Elementary 6% Aboriginal	Limited: So I think for many classroom teachers, in particular, they're going "Aboriginal education? Right. That's that one boy in my class." (Rainbow Elementary, teacher)	Dominant logic: I think the experience for Aboriginal students is no different than any other student at our school ... To understand them, then you would understand all of the kids in the school because there's no difference. (Rainbow Elementary, teacher)
		Kaleidoscope Elementary 13% Aboriginal	Limited: Because First Nations makes up a small percentage of our school ... Some of them even look Caucasian, so you don't even notice. (Kaleidoscope, teacher)	Dominant logic: You don't look at a child as "oh, he's come from a different culture, or he's First Nations." (Kaleidoscope Elementary, teacher)
Advocacy	Discursive	Voyageur Elementary 3% Aboriginal	Limited: The struggling ones are always there and you're going to need to give them that extra boost—whether they're Aboriginal or not, I think. (Voyageur Elementary, teacher)	The initiatives have been perhaps not labelled as First Nations, they've just been labelled as good teaching practice. (Kaleidoscope, Principal)
		Visions Elementary 12% Aboriginal	Limited: "We're a very multicultural school, very high ESL population, that's our struggle." (Visions, Administrator)	Dominant logic: They're just all kids, right. They see themselves as that too. (Visions Elementary, teacher)
Isolation	Practical	Junction Elementary 25% Aboriginal	Exposed: The success rate of my [Aboriginal] students as they go on into high school is very minimal. (Junction Elementary, teacher)	Dominant logic: I think they're awesome students, the same as our Croatian or Sri Lankan—they're awesome people in general. I hope to be able to make that difference to move us along so that First Nations, Sri Lankan, Vietnamese, or Cambodian—it does not matter—they will be successful as learners. (Visions Elementary, Principal)
		Prism Secondary 8% Aboriginal	Exposed: mandatory provincial examinations in Grades 10, 11, and 12. I think there's a sense of frustration that we lose a significant number of [Aboriginal] kids by the end of Grade 10 ... We might start with 140 in Grade 8 and we might graduate 20. (Prism Secondary, Principal)	Emerging logic: First Nations children are at a deficit already in their experiences, and in the language spoken, and the ability to express themselves. They come with a lack of those things. (Junction Elementary, teacher)
				Emerging logic: I think it's like—what can we do. We're doing everything we can. So, you've told us it's relationships. OK, we'll try to build them, but they're never in the building. How can we build relationships if they're not in the building?" (Prism Secondary, Vice Principal)

Table 4. (Continued)

Form of action	School	Visibility of performance gaps	Emphasis on dominant or emerging logic
Pathways Secondary 4% Aboriginal	Pathways Secondary 4% Aboriginal	Exposed: mandatory provincial examinations in Grades 10, 11, and 12. “I really think it’s underestimated how debilitating it can feel for [teachers] ... when the students do not have success. It’s just a huge issue.” (Administrator, Pathways)	Emerging logic: Considering many of our kids’ grandparents—if not their parents—but certainly their grandparents went to residential schools, the educational experience for the most part, has probably not been a positive one.” (Pathways Secondary, Principal)
Integration	Practical	Exposed: The pressure’s on to follow through I guess ... we need to go to the board and have to say “this is what we’ve been doing at our school.” (Raven Elementary, teacher)	Emerging logic: A lot of our First Nations students have moved several schools so their early schooling has been interrupted. They don’t have the same skill set that maybe kids would in a strong family. (Raven Elementary, teacher) It’s because the parents are in crisis. They’re smoking and drinking at home. (Raven Elementary, First Nations resource teacher)
Orca Elementary 49% Aboriginal	Raven Elementary 50% Aboriginal	Exposed: We have successes along the way, but the odds are stacked so deeply against some of our kids and some of their families we’ve really got to be realistic about being able to make a difference. (Orca Elementary, Administrator)	Emerging logic: We have desperate housing situations, desperate living conditions, desperate food and nutritional issues, health issues. Our struggle is to get them here well dressed, well fed, well slept ... We feel if we could make a difference in that, then that’s where our battle really is. (Orca Elementary, Principal)
Eagle Secondary 21% Aboriginal	Eagle Secondary 21% Aboriginal	Exposed: mandatory provincial examinations in Grades 10, 11, and 12. “To date we have not had one Aboriginal student pass Math 11 or 12. Out of 12 Grade 12 kids, we will have four of them graduate. (Eagle Secondary, Principal)	Emerging logic: Sadly our neighborhood is impoverished, and with poverty comes tons of problems. (Eagle Secondary, teacher) In a lot of these Native houses - it’s a two bedroom but there’s two complete families in there. There’s no place to do homework. (Eagle Secondary, FN resource teacher)

FN: First Nations; ESL: Students for whom English is a Second Language.

In contrast, for those elementary schools with a higher percentage of First Nations students, raising their overall school performance on the skills assessment was contingent on raising the performance of Aboriginal students. As explained by an Orca Elementary teacher, where half of the students were Aboriginal, the changes they made to how they approached teaching reading to accommodate Aboriginal learners “has helped these children learn how to read and that’s good. I mean we got to go to [the] big “whoop de do” downtown because we had improvement in our [exam] scores.”

We argue that the impact of this surveillance and the visibility of performance gaps on the forms of action undertaken in the schools were through the sensemaking of teachers, staff, and administrators who drew upon very different understandings of Aboriginal students and the roots of their performance problems. As illustrated through sample quotations in Table 4, we observed that in the schools where discursive actions dominated (the reinterpretation and advocacy schools), organizational members relied on the multiculturalism logic and constructed Aboriginal distinctiveness primarily as a cultural difference. They understood Aboriginal distinctiveness in the same way as they described differences associated with any other culture. To the degree that Aboriginal students were understood as distinct, it was as one culture among many and as an interesting and important culture in Canadian history. The problems that some Aboriginal students had in terms of academic performance were understood as separate from and not usefully related to their Aboriginality.

In contrast, in schools that engaged in more practical forms of action, teachers, staff, and administrators drew much more heavily on the emerging logic of Aboriginal distinctiveness to frame their sensemaking around Aboriginal students’ academic problems, constructing those students in concrete terms, as a social class with unique educational challenges borne out of a distinctive history and political and economic circumstances. In these schools (associated with the isolation and integration configurations), Aboriginal students were described as coming from challenging home lives, living in unsafe conditions, often unhealthy and poorly fed, and either being involved in or being around significant substance abuse. These characteristics were seen as bound up in, not separate from, their Aboriginality.

In summary, as depicted in Figure 2, we found that visible performance gaps created by external surveillance triggered sensemaking on the part of organizational members. In the schools confronted with more visible gaps in Aboriginal student performance, we observed that as actors make sense of these gaps, they used the emerging logic as their key frame and began to construct the issue of Aboriginal education as an immediate social problem requiring practical action. In interviews, teachers and principals made reference to these gaps, to their frustrations in trying to remedy the gaps, and to the practical action they were taking to address them. In contrast, in schools that experienced less scrutiny (elementary schools with low Aboriginal student populations), internal actors used the dominant logic to construct accounts of Aboriginality as a cultural and historical concept that they translated into a broader issue of multiculturalism, which consequently required no immediate corrective action.

Understanding differences in the scope of action

We turn now to the question of how and why organizations varied in the scope of their responses. The reinterpretation and isolation schools engaged in a constrained set of actions, directing their responses exclusively through separate programs or practices aimed only at Aboriginal students or, in some schools, their parents. In contrast, the integration and advocacy schools engaged in more expansive actions, with their responses largely targeted across the whole school. As with our explanation of the form of action, we begin close to the phenomenon with the observation that more expansive action seemed connected to three forms of political actions on the part of individuals:

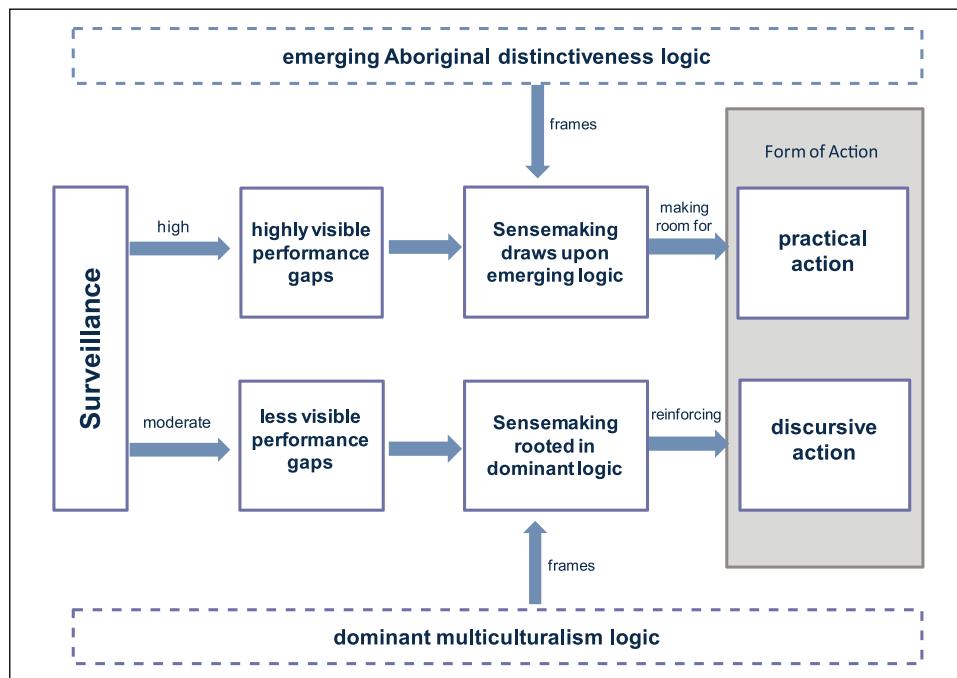


Figure 2. The role of surveillance in shaping the form of action.

influence, authority, and coalition building. We provide illustrative data for each of the schools describing individuals' political actions in Table 5 and discuss specific examples below.

Influence was employed by respected, liked, and/or relatable staff and teachers who were able to leverage their social capital to expand the scope of organizational responses to Aboriginal education. At Raven, for example, one teacher noted,

Having different staff involved and taking the leadership role is good, because now you have a classroom teacher that's taking that role rather than somebody who's not a classroom teacher. Because that kind of helps the other teachers see what's going on—other enrolling teachers ... And [she]'s well respected and she's well liked by the staff, so that helps out a lot.

An example of such an influencer was a well-liked teacher at Visions Elementary whose spouse was Aboriginal and was a teacher at another school: he noted that

generally speaking the curriculum is just not really reflective of Aboriginal people and I think it's sort of, it's an area that we are trying to address with more materials and professional development for teachers but it is an area that's lacking. So, many teachers are not Aboriginal and yet they have to come in and they have to work with a lot of Aboriginal students yet they don't have a lot of experience, history or knowledge of Aboriginal culture at all.

The Principal at Visions described how, this teacher

has been here quite a long time [he] is also our union rep. So he's a definitely an informal leader in the school. ... He's also a very nurturing, empathetic kind of person. So does a lot of modeling [with our staff].

Table 5. Understanding differences in scope of action.

	Scope of action	School	Institutional biography	Identification with the emerging logic	Political actions influence, authority, and coalition building
Reinterpretation	Confined	Rainbow Elementary	None identified—FN support staff changes frequently	No evidence of identification.	Low: "We have such a small number of First Nations students in this school that overall who I'm dealing with on daily basis, or interacting with teachers on, is not the First Nations students." (Rainbow, Principal) Low: "My [role] is like a coordinator, I guess, to promote the belief that every child can learn and will learn, and is a positive entity and will contribute to society in a healthy manner." (Principal, Kaleidoscope)
	Kaleidoscope Elementary	Minimal: one teacher has signed up for a course in Aboriginal education in her masters Present:	"I was principal at an inner-city school with a huge First Nations population and high poverty—that's where I first ran into these issues and I see them here." (Principal, Voyageur)	No evidence of identification.	Moderate political action. Coalition building: "The vice-principal and there's another resource teacher and the First Nations support worker—I think were the three people who coordinated that [initiative]." (Voyageur, Elementary, teacher) Authority: High involvement from the Principal and Vice-Principal "[The Vice-Principal] s been really instrumental in going and getting grants." (Voyageur, First Nations support worker)
Advocacy	Expansive	Voyageur Elementary	First Nations Support Worker and a resource teacher are Aboriginal. The Principal came from a school with a high Aboriginal population.	"I'm not Aboriginal myself but I married a First Nations woman. My wife experienced racism in the school system." (Visions, teacher)	High political action: Authority: Principal is a strong advocate.
	Visions Elementary	Present: Principal has led several innovative initiatives around Aboriginal Education across the Province over several decades. Well-respected teacher has an Aboriginal spouse.	"[their culture] is not brought to school. So I think that makes it more difficult for this school to connect the two worlds, because it's kept separate." (teacher, Junction)	No evidence of identification. "The First Nations Department Head and the First Nations Support Worker are both Aboriginal."	Coalition building: coalition of the Principal, a project teacher, a teacher and the FNSW "we do have four of us that do not hold the same attitudes and values as maybe some of the other staff. So we're creating a little tornado, where it's starting to spin on the bottom. And people can either get involved with it, or get [whooshing noise] thrown right out." (Visions, project teacher) Influence: broader amplification by a well-liked teacher with personal connections to the Aboriginal community. Low: Teachers are frustrated, afraid to offend, limited efforts. Limited efforts on the part of the Principal and mostly based on pressure from the district.
Isolation	Confined	Junction	None identified FN Support Worker changes frequently and the last few have not been Aboriginal	No evidence of identification. "The First Nations Department Head and the First Nations Support Worker are both Aboriginal."	Moderate: Authority: Principal created an Aboriginal department head. "One of the people driving it is our First Nations department head. She constantly has the drive of looking after her area, just like a Math teacher would look after their Math area. For her it's the drive of our 140 First Nations kids." (Prism Secondary, Principal) Influence (low): Department head has created lesson plans in her spare time but can't find teachers that want to use them, runs the separate FN alternative program and the FN student council.
Pathways	Secondary	Prism Secondary	Minimal: FNSW is Aboriginal.	Minimal: General teaching population has very little interest.	Low: Authority: Principal and VP are involved, but only to the extent that they must participate in the negotiation of the Enhancement Agreement.

Table 5. (Continued)

Scope of action	School	Institutional biography	Identification with the emerging logic	Political actions influence, authority, and coalition building
Integration Expansive	Raven Elementary	Present FNSW, FNRT, inner-city project teacher and another teacher are all Aboriginal. Previous Principal was Aboriginal (current newly arrived Principal is not and senses pressure about that).	Well on the positive side I think there's a real core of people who are committed to this (Raven Elementary, teacher)	High: Coalition building: Big committee including teachers, resource teachers, FNSW, FNRT, inner-city project teacher and the Principal Influence: If [our committee chair] comes up with things they want to do, it'll fly. [Our committee chair] is very well liked and has history here. She gets along with everyone. She has the respect of the staff already. (Raven Elementary, teacher) Authority: Principal supports the committee, but is not driving the agenda (still gaining confidence in interacting with the Aboriginal staff and parents), Medium:
Orca Elementary	Present	Principal has ongoing engagement with the Aboriginal Learning committee from the Board FNRT and the FNSW are Aboriginal have been with the school for a long time	I think I have learned a lot about First Nations people, which has been an eye opener. I went to school with First Nations children, but there weren't many of them and they weren't my friends. So coming here and teaching First Nations children and having [our elder], who is just a marvellous person, I've learned so much from her. It's really gotten me interested in the First Nations culture. (Teacher, Orca). My children's generation were the first without residential school and all the shackles on them but they still had a difficult time because of the racism. (FN resource teacher, Orca)	Influence: We're trying to highlight [our First Nations Support Teacher] and trying to get her voice heard, empowering her to take the lead— that's a good thing that's happened so far. (Orca Elementary, Principal) Authority: Active engagement by administration "Biggest factor ... well, leadership guess. Leadership by our principal" (Orca Elementary, teacher) I think our leader is definitely following up— [the Principal] is really bringing it to the staff. ... He's working with [our First Nations support worker], having lots of meetings but also [asking] what are we going to do, how are we going to support these children. (Orca Elementary, teacher)
Eagle Secondary	Present	Four staff members are Aboriginal. FNRT is the ALI team coordinator for the school district	Who's doing it? Well, I'm assuming that we're all doing it. (Elem C, teacher)	High: The Native support people who were involved in that summit—their professionalism, the view of them as professionals has gone up. Their status has gone up I'd say. They're seen as more valued educators, more with it, more leaders. ... They're identified as leaders in the school. (Eagle Secondary, community support worker)

FN: First Nations; FNSW: First Nations social worker; FNRT: First Nations resource teacher; VP: Vice President; ALI: Aboriginal Learning Inquiry.

Like this teacher, the most influential staff members acted as advocates for Aboriginal education, gently but persistently suggesting ways that classroom teachers could be better supported to engage Aboriginal learners or integrate ideas about Aboriginal education into their lesson plans.

A second form of political action was the use of authority. We found that administrators in the schools with expansive responses exercised their formal authority in service of expanding the discourse and/or practices related to Aboriginal education by placing the topic on the agenda of professional development sessions or by allocating resources to the pursuit of new initiatives. These administrators used their authority to affect organizational goals, structures, staffing and to encourage and resource the development of curriculum to support Aboriginal education.

The third form of political action was coalition building. Previous research has noted the importance of coalitions in shaping organizational responses to institutional complexity and the role of sub-groups and role identities in effecting coalitions (Besharov and Smith, 2014; Pache and Santos, 2013). In the schools that undertook more expansive action, we tended to find broad, heterogeneous coalitions of Aboriginal support/teaching staff and high status actors such as senior administrators (Orca, Vision, and Voyageur Elementary and Eagle Secondary) or highly influential rank-and-file teachers (Raven Elementary). For instance, at Visions, there was a core group that included the principal, the inner-city project teacher, the school's First Nations support worker, and a project teacher who were actively working to create better outcomes for Aboriginal students. In contrast, in the schools where the action was more confined, action was limited to smaller, more homogeneous groups composed of individuals with only moderate levels of influence.

The second step in our explanation of the scope of the schools' responses focuses on why some individuals, but not others, engaged in political actions to support more expansive approaches to Aboriginal education. As outlined in Table 5, we found evidence that the institutional biographies of the people in the schools—the connections that people had to institutions and logics and the “events, relationships, and circumstances that shaped their connection to those institutions” (Lawrence et al., 2011: 55)—seemed to underpin their willingness to engage in political actions. These biographies, we argue, were shaped by both the dominant and emerging institutional logics to different degrees. The participants in our study were all working in the public school system and were nearly all educated in Canadian public universities, both of which have long-term commitments to mass education and multiculturalism embedded in their systems, structures, and cultures (Mitchell, 2001). We found, however, that some people in our study had personal experience, family connections, and professional backgrounds that connected them to the logic of Aboriginal distinctiveness, which significantly shaped their institutional biographies, and in turn, their identification with the emerging logic of Aboriginal distinctiveness (Ashforth et al., 2008).

Some individuals were themselves Aboriginal, some had spouses who were Aboriginal, some had taught or participated in Aboriginal teacher training programs at the two local universities, and some were involved with the district's AEA process. All these connections were described by participants as critical lenses through which they viewed the issue of Aboriginal education, influencing their personal approaches and strategies to the dynamics of the issue. In the case of administrators who exerted their authority, we found that teachers connected these administrator's backgrounds and experience to a willingness to “make room for” or “back” Aboriginal education. A teacher at Eagle Secondary shared that when her principal “was a VP ... she was excellent with the First Nations kids ... saying ‘OK, how can we make this successful for you?’ ... Now that she's a principal it's still a big value for her.” When we examined the membership of the strong coalitions, we also found evidence of identification. For instance, Visions had several staff who, though not Aboriginal themselves, had considerable experience with Aboriginal education. The Principal was on faculty in the Aboriginal teacher training program for 3 years at a local university. The inner-city project teacher had worked with Aboriginal teacher training programs at both local universities; he

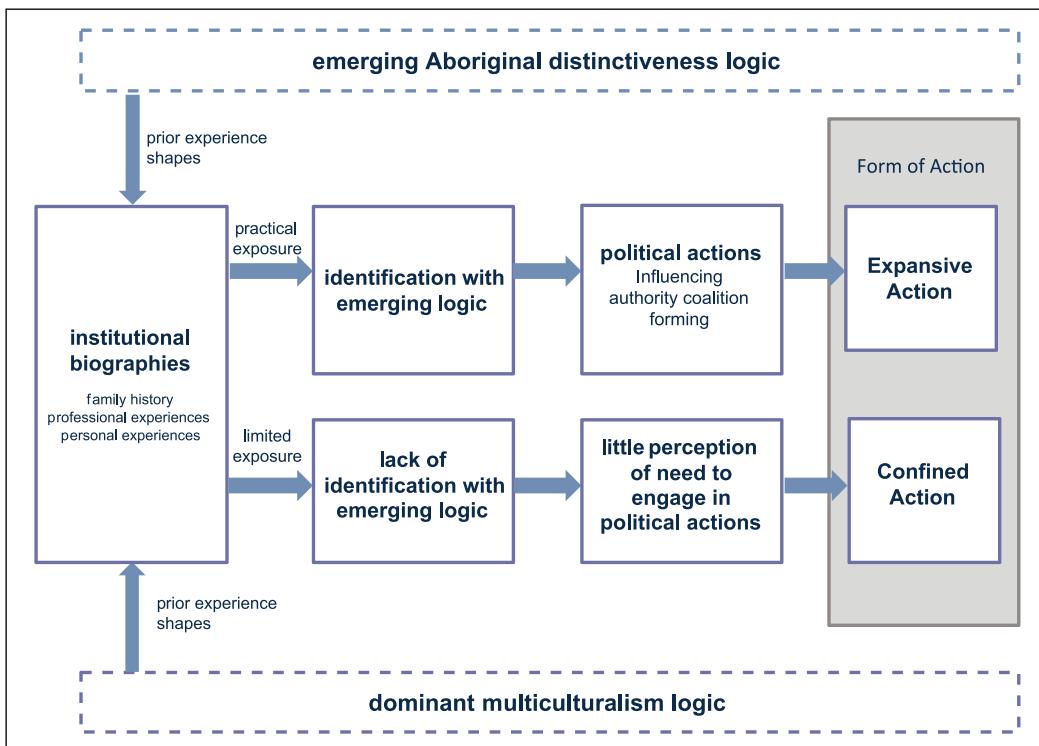


Figure 3. The role of institutional biographies in shaping the scope of action.

was also involved with a professional development group for inner-city schools and had been championing an effort to “look at First Nations students and how we can better support them [right through] to graduation.” The principal and the First Nations support worker were both involved with crafting the district’s AEA. These connections seemed to shape their institutional biographies in ways that led them to identify with the emerging logic of Aboriginal distinctiveness and motivate political action to encourage school-wide discussions about Aboriginal education or implement new practices on a school-wide basis.

In summary, and as depicted in Figure 3, we argue that people’s institutional biographies contribute to their identification with the emerging logic, fueling their willingness to engage in political action that affects the scope of schools’ responses to the issue of Aboriginal education by shaping the flow of resources, including “hard” resources such as time, space, and money and “softer” resources such as attention, visibility, and legitimacy.

Discussion

This article has explored the variation in how organizations respond to institutional complexity that stems from emerging institutional logics and the role that individuals play in shaping that variation. By examining a context in which a well-established logic is challenged by one that is newly emerging, we identify a novel typology of organizational responses to a different kind of institutional complexity—when instead of facing a choice between two well-formed sets of organizational practices, the organization must choose (or not) to develop new practices to accommodate the

emerging logic. Another important way we contribute to the study of institutional complexity is by exploring the impact of individuals on the variation in organizational responses. We show how differences in surveillance provokes sensemaking that draws differentially on dominant and emerging logics shaping the form of action in which organizations engage and how individuals' institutional biographies shape the scope of action. In this section, we discuss our findings in relation to the existing literature and explore their implications for future research.

Four responses to emerging institutional logics

Our identification of four organizational responses to the institutional complexity that accompanies emerging institutional logics—advocacy, reinterpretation, integration, isolation—both confirm and extend previous writing on organizational responses to complex institutional demands. One important way our study contrasts with previous research is that we did not observe any of the strategies outlined by Oliver (1991) and further discussed by Pache and Santos (2010). None of the schools in our study acquiesced: they did not voluntarily comply to a set of prescriptions coming from external actors such as the district or Aboriginal communities because in this context, there did not exist a set of prescriptions for action to which these schools could acquiesce. The schools also did not engage in active avoidance strategies: they did not attempt to conceal their non-conformity or buffer themselves by decoupling formal structures or trying to exit the domain. They did not engage in defiance by challenging or explicitly rejecting the institutional logic of Aboriginal distinctiveness or by dismissing or challenging institutional demands to improve the performance of Aboriginal students. They also did not engage in manipulation: the schools did not attempt to influence the promoters of Aboriginal distinctiveness by co-opting or attempting to control them. We address Oliver's (1991) final strategy, compromise, below when we discuss the integration configuration.

Furthermore, each of the strategies we identified makes a distinctive contribution to the literature. The reinterpretation strategy that we identified differs from previously articulated strategies in that the organizations employing this approach buffer themselves from the need for further action by reframing the emerging logic in terms that are compatible with existing practices. The isolation strategy points to a mode of selective adoption that differs from prior discussions of avoidance through decoupling (Oliver, 1991) or what Pache and Santos (2013) describe as selective coupling, which involves selectively adopting a subset of practices. In contrast, the isolation strategy restricts the need for changes in practices by applying them only to a subset of the most affected actors. The advocacy strategy also appears to be distinctive from those responses identified in Oliver's (1991) strategic responses which focused on responding to pressures to conform and Besharov and Smith's (2014) typology based on internal conflict: extant frameworks remain silent on the idea of internal advocates working to make room for an emerging institutional logic. Finally, our integration strategy extends current writing on organizational responses to competing logics (Besharov and Smith, 2014) by advancing the possibility that organizational actors can creatively develop new practices that increase alignment by actively improving the compatibility of prescriptions for action associated with different logics. Thus, the integration strategy points to the importance of attending to positive, creative responses to institutional complexity, as a complement to the defensive or coping responses that have dominated the literature.

Individuals and institutional complexity

The second focus of our study was on the role of individuals in shaping organizational responses to the institutional complexity associated with newly emerging logics. Building on

previous work that has begun to look inside organizations to see how institutional complexity is animated and enacted by organizational members (McPherson and Sauder, 2013; Pache and Santos, 2013), we viewed the organizations we studied as inhabited by people with complex relationships to well-established and emerging institutional logics. Our approach echoes Lok (2010), who argues that the relationship between identity- and practice-work at the societal and micro levels is “complex and contingent” even when “the practices associated with a new institutional logic appear to be very broadly diffused” (pp. 1330–31). We extend Lok’s work by exploring how identity affects individuals’ responses to an emerging logic that lacks established, broadly diffused practices. Our findings have significant implications for how we understand the role of individuals in organizational responses to institutional complexity.

The first implication concerns how individuals construct the meaning of those logics in ways that reflect and facilitate the aims and resources of individuals and their organizations. Our findings suggest that performance gaps prompt both sensemaking and sensegiving (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007). We observed that organizational members constructed the emerging logic of Aboriginal distinctiveness in different ways depending on the visibility of the performance gaps around Aboriginal education in their school, either in cultural terms that allowed primarily discursive responses or in social terms that facilitated and even necessitated practical action. This variation highlights not only the variation in how individuals respond to institutional pressures but also the potential for institutional logics to be constructed and enacted in divergent ways that can become embedded in organizational routines and practices. Whereas studies of institutional complexity have tended to highlight tensions between competing logics such that organizational responses are shaped by the extent to which they incorporate the meanings and practices from one or another logic, our findings suggest that emerging institutional logics are themselves indeterminate in the routines and practices they will support, and that their meanings will be the object of local negotiations.

The second implication concerns our basic conceptualization of the relationship between individuals and institutional logics. In their discussion of the microfoundations of institutional logics, Thornton et al. (2012) describe individuals as social actors who are “situated, embedded, and boundedly intentional” (p. 102). From this perspective, individuals are “embedded in social, cultural, and political structures and ... guided by cognitively bounded identities and goals” and animated by specific social situations that “shape which of multiple social identities and goals get triggered” (Thornton et al., 2012: 80). Our study builds on these ideas, suggesting that the concept of an institutional biography (Lawrence et al., 2011) may provide a more concrete and cohesive conceptualization of the relationship between individuals and institutional logics. The notion of an institutional biography is consistent with a situated, embedded, and boundedly rational actor, but brings those characteristics together with an understanding of identity as constructed through narrative and other symbolic means in ways that allow individuals to actively manage the degree to which institutional logics are accessible and active. Our arguments regarding the role of institutional biographies build on Lok’s (2010) suggestion that “one of the most important ways to influence behavior is to influence their identification with a particular logic and its associated practices” (p. 1307). We found that emerging institutional logics were important to people in organizations to the extent that they had already been incorporated into their institutional biographies. So, rather than just sensing institutional pressures or using logics strategically as part of a toolkit, the people in our study were motivated to diffuse the emerging logics of Aboriginal distinctiveness in their schools to the extent that they identified with the logic and it had somehow become a part of their own personal narrative.

As people go through their lives, they are constantly working with, for and against sets of institutional logics that shape their social and cultural contexts. As those individuals experience personal wins and losses, they do so in relation to goals and rules shaped significantly by those logics and thus incorporate both their own triumphs and defeats and efforts and retreats, partly in terms of those logics. Thus, when they encounter new situations that they may wish to influence, they carry with them personal narratives of their relationships to relevant institutional logics—their institutional biographies. Those biographies shape both their understandings of the situation and their willingness and ability to form coalitions and to engage in influencing and authorizing more expansive action. The concept of institutional biography is consequently a political one: “[n]either change agents nor their identity targets can operate outside the power relations through which their identities exist and are acquired, claimed, and allocated” (Lok, 2010: 1307). Thus, institutional biographies play an important affective role in motivating and sustaining the political action necessary to effect organizational responses to institutional complexity.

Limitations and conclusion

The study on which we base our findings and model has important limitations and boundary conditions that need to be recognized. Our study relies primarily on interviews for its data, through which we may have been unable to access some of the more subtle, and perhaps negatively charged, aspects of Aboriginal education in the schools. Furthermore, we examined only the organizational responses of the schools in our study, with no analysis of the consequences of their choice of actions. We cannot, therefore, draw conclusions regarding the differential effectiveness of these responses for Aboriginal students or anyone else. Despite these limitations, we believe our study of organizational responses to the institutional complexity that arises from emerging institutional logics makes a significant contribution to the study of institutional complexity and logics more broadly.

This study builds on growing interest in understanding organizational responses to institutional complexity and on understanding the role of individuals in the processes of institutionalization. Through a comparative study of organizational responses to institutional complexity that stems from the encroachment of an emerging logic, we are able to expand both our understanding of the range of organizational responses to institutional complexity and the role of individuals in shaping the meanings and practices that will help define those responses.

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Notes

1. A note on terminology: The term “Aboriginal” describes descendants of the indigenous people of the region that is now described as Canada, including First Nations, status and non-status Métis and Inuit persons as recognized by the Canadian Constitution. There are over 630 recognized First Nations across Canada. The term “Indigenous” describes first people more generally, including the Maori in New Zealand and Aborigines in Australia, as used in the United Nations’ Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
2. Initial site orientation materials, 22 November 2006.

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