

Section 2.1: Naming Oppression

The Words We Use “Frame” Our Relationships

For many non-Aboriginal people, education about Aboriginal issues starts with terminology related to Aboriginal Peoples. Therefore, we begin here.

In rapidly changing political times, labels take on marked significance, their changes reflecting some of the concerns with which people are wrestling. (For a further guide to terminology, please see the Glossary in Appendix H.) One often sees the words Aboriginal, First Nations, Native, and Indian used in different places and by different people to refer to themselves or others as the descendants of the original inhabitants of these lands.



Φ Aboriginal is a term which simply means from the original people. It is also a legal term that is used in the Constitution of Canada, which recognizes “Indians, Inuit and the Métis”.

Φ First Nations is a politically charged term encompassing a trilogy:

1. primacy of place,
2. reference to a political entity with structures of governance and,
3. through its plural form, a multiplicity of peoples and cultures forming these political entities.



- Φ Native, which indicates that people are born in that place, is seen as somewhat ambiguous because of the claims of many people of immigrant ancestry who have been born in North America to be native. The capitalization of the word is usually what distinguishes its application to Aboriginal Peoples from the more general usage.
- Φ Finally, Indian refers to people who are defined and governed by a set of federal laws called *The Indian Act*.¹ The definition has been the site of considerable controversy over the years. It excludes many people of Aboriginal ancestry, among them the Métis and the Inuit, although the Inuit do receive certain transfers and services accorded to Status Indians. The term Indian, legally under *The Indian Act*, also excludes those people whose ancestors were at one time part of the group termed Indians, but who have become “non-Status Indians” because of historic and current discriminatory provisions of that *Act*, or other British Crown or Canadian government policies. Thus underlying its usage is a whole set of legal and political meanings not apparent to the vast majority of Canadians. For reasons elaborated in this report, few of us realize that the intent and ongoing purpose of *The Indian Act* is to affect the assimilation into Canadian society of all Aboriginal Peoples -- a process also described as cultural genocide. At the same time, while the term Indian is based on a lost European’s misnomer, it has great social and historical significance, and is a part of the common vocabulary of many people of Aboriginal ancestry and most Canadians of other heritages.

Within this terminology stew, it must be recognized that increasingly First Nations and Aboriginal Peoples are choosing to return to their traditional ways and to identify themselves as members of their particular Nation or band. Patricia Monture-Angus writes:

I am a member of the Ho-Dee-No-Sau-Nee Confederacy...For many years, our nations were known as the Iroquois. But, this is not how we call ourselves. There are six nations which make up the Ho-Dee-No-Sau-Nee Confederacy. We are the Seneca, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Mohawk, and Tuscarora. I do not like to say that I am a Mohawk woman. A friend recently told me that she had been taught that Mohawk means “maneater” in one of the European languages...That is not what



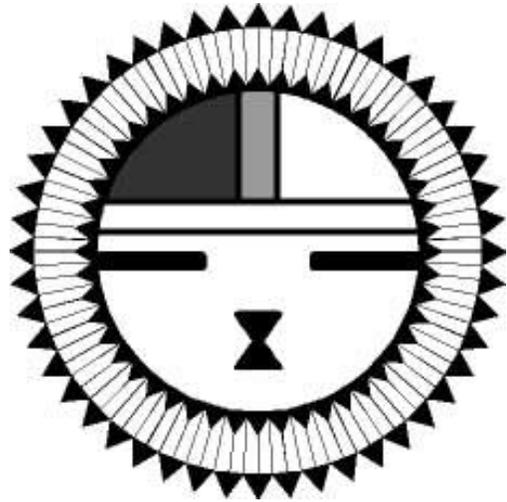
being “Indian” means to me. I am a proud member of my nation and that is a good way to be
(Monture-Angus, 1995, 30).

Aboriginal Peoples often state in English translation of their languages that they have been in these territories *since time immemorial*. As Kwagwalth leader Gloria Cranmer-Webster puts it succinctly, “We have always lived here” (National Film Board, 1993). For those people who ascribe to a European interest in attempting precision, and to a post-contact worldview where only hard science can address reality, there are many carbon-dated examples of the existence of the ancestors of Aboriginal Peoples here in North America since times before any written records.



Section 2.2: Locating Oppression in Education Policies

Into the established traditional Indigenous cultures and systems of education, came the European colonizers making demands for change. With residential schools established as the most effective means for accomplishing the changes colonization demanded, the traditional forms of education persisted only for the children who were lucky enough to avoid the schools or to spend at least some of their time with their families and communities. Residential schools are



conceptualized as a rupture with the traditions Aboriginal Peoples defined: it is the thunder bolt from outside that fractures the circle as Aboriginal Peoples and the European colonizers clash over values and life styles.

As the generations attending the schools continued through to the 1960s and 70s, it became increasingly difficult for community members to be educated into the traditions of their Peoples. Despite this aggressive undermining of community approaches to education, the traditions have persisted in dynamic forms through the tenacity of those who refused to yield fully to the ways of the colonizers.²

One of the reasons that European “explorers” ventured out into the world in various directions was an interest in finding what they considered to be the roots of their self-evaluated superior society. A frequently quoted letter from the late 1700s demonstrates this attitude in its inclusion of



...observations about the various kinds of apes and men in accordance with the eighteenth century postulate of a great chain of being stretching from the simplest forms of life to the most developed (the white European being a little lower than the angels) (Banton, 1987, 50).

In 1859, Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species* in which he theorized evolution with its notions of the struggle for existence and natural selection of the species most suited to particular environments. People interested in human organizations and their developments used Darwin's theory in ways that he never intended. Social Darwinists believed that the theory could be

...carried into sociology by substituting social groups for organisms....Society was for them a rather vague universe of social groups in conflict...Gumpłowicz and Ratzénhofer identified them with racial groups (Timasheff, 1964, 70).

Herbert Spencer is often cited as the person providing the impetus for Social Darwinism which assumed that Europeans' complex societies were at a pinnacle of the "civilized races." In this conceptualization, the "other" races of the world were deemed to represent the less developed primitive precursors of this "superior" race of men.³

... by the late nineteenth century white-skinned Canadians were very much inclined to look down on people of different hues for several reasons. New strains of scientific racism such as Social Darwinism, [and] the influence of British imperialist attitudes...combined to influence Euro-Canadian society strongly in a racist manner (Miller, 1996, 185).

Using the Circle to (Re)think a Pedagogy of Contemporary Aboriginal Education

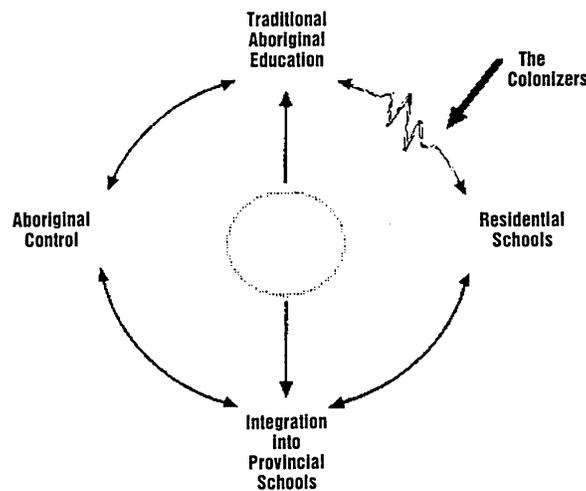
The Circle is a vitally important concept for thinking about Aboriginal education in Canada. It is a traditional paradigm that serves as a pedagogical tool for presenting and understanding Aboriginal Peoples' perspectives and worldviews. The Circle is fundamentally significant to Indigenous cultures based in this part of Turtle Island⁴, and has been since time immemorial.



By drawing on traditional teachings of the Medicine Wheel, a different Circle model (A Fractured Circle) is used here, which focuses on four points that closely correspond to the CAAS Learning Circle: traditional education (Aboriginal worldview); federally supported residential schools (The Experience of European Colonization); integration into provincially funded public schools (Many Nations. Many Stories); and Aboriginal control (Decolonization and Rebuilding).⁵ The four points were configured in a Circle to allow their interconnections to remain evident. The graphic, *A Fractured Circle*, seeks to depict relationships between some salient aspects of Aboriginal education in traditional ways and in Canada. It also shows the disruption when worldviews collide. Cultures move on from there, inextricably interlinked, inescapably affected by one another. Even though assaulted, Aboriginal cultures are strong, and although the Circle was damaged, it was never broken.

Originally considered distinct stages of Aboriginal education, the four points on the Circle are interrelated.

A FRACTURED CIRCLE



For example, if one is to consider traditional education, it is not separate from the other phases, but rather it is an understanding that continues to inform Aboriginal education in its various iterations. Some people currently focus on traditions and have little to do with the institutional education; some work in and around public schools or in Band controlled



situations and look to tradition for contributions to a curriculum development respectful of Aboriginal cultures and their histories.⁶

Settler Schools: Designed to Fracture the Circle

An examination of current school and university curricula in much of Canada demonstrates that assumptions of European superiority continue to be an organizing force for the selection of the content to which we expose the children and adult learners. When members of a society with these beliefs meet with the original peoples of the Americas, there can only be disruption. Most Aboriginal societies are based on a respect for difference and as well as a recognition that the people outside their respective Nations can never become like them. As the chiefs of Fort Rupert said to anthropologist Franz Boas in a speech published in 1896,

We want to know whether you have come to stop our dances and feasts as other missionaries and agents who live among our neighbours tried to do. We do not want anybody here who will interfere with our customs. Is this the white man's land? We are told that it is the Queen's land but, no, it is ours. Where was the Queen when our god gave the land to my grandfather and told him, This will be yours? Do we ask the white man, Do as the Indian does? No, we do not. Why then do you ask us, Do as the white man does? Let the white man observe his law; we shall observe ours. Now if you are come to forbid us to dance, leave us; if not, you will be welcome (National Film Board, 1993).

The efforts to train Aboriginal Peoples to become like Europeans were never based in the kind of respect for difference, which the passage above demonstrates. Starting in a limited way in 1620 in New France (Miller 1996:39) and reaching what Aboriginal people might refer to as the Dark Ages during the late 1800s and well into the second half of the twentieth century, these schools wrecked havoc on traditions of Aboriginal cultures in almost every way imaginable. The schools were designed on a model developed in the United States which was part of President Grant's principle of "aggressive civilization" (cited in Haig-Brown, 26). The residential schools gained favour when it became clear that federal day schools were not having the desired effect.



Settler Policies: Designed to Fracture the Circle

The newly arrived Canadians supported the policies and programs of both Christian churches and the federal government. Canadians insisted that Aboriginal Peoples should abandon their ways i.e. languages, spirituality, economic systems, seasonal movement to hunting and gathering places and, most importantly, their lands – and take up a new lifestyle defined by the colonizers.

In a series of shady real estate deals, treaty negotiations across the country and outright land grabs, most evident in British Columbia, Aboriginal Peoples were divested of much of their traditional lands and relegated to shrinking reserves or territories. Relevant federal legislation was eventually consolidated into *The Indian Act*, as mentioned above. This move signaled an attempt to smooth the transition into what was assumed to be full assimilation, i.e. disappearance of the Aboriginal population into a still being-defined mainstream Euro-Canadian society. This was to be accomplished, in part, through varied policies, many considered today to be human rights violations, which encouraged migration off Reserves into Canadian communities.

Across the country, children were taken away from their parents, sometimes for months and even years at a stretch, as the newly arrived colonizers attempted to impose what they saw as their superior ways onto the children. The methods employed in efforts to civilize and Christianize Aboriginal Peoples, and especially their children in the residential schools, were generally repressive and dehumanizing. Children were punished for speaking their languages and forbidden to practice their cultural ways. Shirley Bear, who attended a school in Prince Albert just north of Saskatoon said, “...[some] of the staff were pretty mean too and did things that were not right – such as pulling ears, slapping heads and hitting knuckles (Cited in Miller, 324).”

In and outside the schools, Aboriginal spirituality was deemed to be the Devil’s work. As one residential school survivor states:

He [the priest] would just get so carried away; he was punching away at that old altar rail ... to hammer it into our heads that we were not to think or act or speak like an Indian. And that we



would go to hell and burn for eternity if we did not listen to their way of teaching. (Sophie, cited in Haig-Brown, 1988, 54).

From 1884 to 1951 (Tennant, 1990, 52, 122), the potlatch, an economic system which included dances and feasting, was outlawed -- a legal control later extended to any gathering of “Indians” (Aboriginal Peoples). This prohibition seriously affected the People’s ability to address land claims, treaty issues and their increasing concerns about what schools were doing to, and not doing for, their children.

For the most part the students attending the schools were being asked to become like white people in ways that would allow them to perform menial, gender specific jobs or lead a life of dependency. Edward Ahenakew, a member of the Cree Nation, a residential school graduate, and an ordained minister, uses a fictional elder’s account of the schools to give his critique of them. Decrying the lives claimed through diseases spread at the schools, he says:

As for those who do live, who survive and who graduate from the school at the age of eighteen, during every day of their training they have acted under orders. Nothing they did was without supervision. They did not sweep a floor, wash dishes, clean stables, without first being told to do so, and always there would be a member of the staff to show them each step. They never needed to use their own minds and wills. They came to think it would be wrong if they went their own way. Now discipline and expediency in life are good, but will and initiative are better (1973:133).

The details of residential schools are well documented elsewhere.⁷ For now, for the purposes of this discussion, suffice it to say that their legacy prevails.

Closed for the most part by the late 1970s, there are many ongoing ramifications arising from these institutions. Recent media publicity surrounding charges of physical and sexual abuse and government and church apologies have brought the schools to the attention of many members of the Canadian public. As for the people who were taught for years that their ways of life were abominable in the eyes of God, the impact on their minds, bodies and hearts may be less easily identified, but it cuts as deeply. Aboriginal Peoples have felt this



impact. Even those members of today's Aboriginal communities who did not attend the schools most often have relatives or friends who did -- the trauma of this experience extends through virtually all families, communities and Nations.



Section 2.3: An Analysis of the Pedagogy of Oppression

The school promoters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were quite clear that schools were needed for political as much as educational reasons. The curriculum had to be designed, textbooks written, teachers trained and inspected and of course children compelled to attend schools, in order to share and protect a particular social order. (Osborne, 1991, 20)⁸



Osborne's quote emphasizes the historic importance of schools and curricula as tools for creating social cohesion around public policy issues. Earlier in this report we saw that still today Aboriginal Peoples' histories, cultures, perspectives and realities are not portrayed accurately in social studies, history and other curricula taught in Canadian classrooms.

School curriculum has been a primary vehicle for social control, delivering a *pedagogy of oppression*⁹ to both Canadians and Aboriginal Peoples. This selective and politically motivated messaging about Aboriginal Peoples has been introduced almost anywhere that Aboriginal Peoples' histories, cultures and concerns surface in Canadian society, particularly in the Canadian classroom.¹⁰

This pedagogy was designed by the European settler populations in Canada, specifically the Anglo-European dominant class, to strengthen the control of the Canadian state over Aboriginal land and resources. This approach has always been damaging for Aboriginal students, families, communities and Peoples, as it was designed to be. The CAAS Student Awareness Survey findings demonstrate that this pedagogy is also harmful for Canada and



Canadians. Further discussion of the design, methodology and quantitative findings from this survey is presented in *The South – Many Stories*, but here we look at some of the commentary from young adults in Canadian post-secondary institutions who were surveyed as part of this national research project. A majority of Canadian students are now demanding that this *pedagogy of oppression* be converted into a *Pedagogy of Honesty and Respect*.

The Pedagogy of Oppression

Up to the present time, the Aboriginal Studies curriculum taught in most Canadian schools derives from a social order based on the principles of the mediaeval European *Doctrine of Terra Nullius* (see Glossary). Although dressed up in broader concepts relating to the habitation of land and Euro-Christian concepts of “civilization,” *Terra Nullius* is simply an elaboration of the principle that “might” gives one the “right” to do as one wishes. This social orientation led, in Canada specifically, to the historic policies of forced assimilation and cultural eradication of Aboriginal Peoples.

To achieve the social goals of those who constructed it, Canadian school curricula have historically denied the complexities, accomplishments, dynamism, and even the mere existence, of Aboriginal Peoples' many diverse cultures. The curriculum has promoted theories of settlement (such as Columbus' “discovery” and the Bering Strait migration) that strengthen the validity of colonialism. Accurate portrayal, from Aboriginal perspectives, of this history would undermine the supremacy of European culture on this land.

In recent years, pedagogical approaches presenting this sort of racial or cultural superiority have been profoundly challenged. The voices of the pedagogues who historically promoted this kind of flawed, stereotypical, and often racist curricula -- which is termed here the “BOC” -- have been considerably dampened, although not silenced. The long-standing call by Aboriginal leaders and educators for a new *Pedagogy of Honesty and Respect* is still unheard in the centres of Canadian education. Little or no valid information about Indigenous cultures, worldviews and contemporary issues is presented in mandated curricula except perhaps, that, as a society, we are confused about the relationship between Aboriginal Peoples and Canada.



As the SAS research demonstrates (discussed further in *The South*), students graduate with little understanding of Aboriginal Peoples. What is taught still looks frighteningly like what has always been taught: the Bad Old Curriculum (BOC). It is just wearing new clothes -- the word Indian is now changed to Aboriginal, and so on. Within this “real” world of education, classroom teachers strive to incorporate Aboriginal content without adequate training and resources, based on their own childhood learning of this curriculum.

The first challenge faced by newcomer and settler Canadians is to find positive and effective ways to disown this legacy. The second task is to introduce into Canadian culture, especially into Canadian classrooms, understandings and pedagogical approaches that honour and respect Aboriginal Peoples as the First Peoples and the caretakers of this land since time immemorial.

We can begin by acknowledging that Osborne has correctly summed up the role of school curricula in social conditioning, and by acknowledging that what we teach about Aboriginal Peoples is a *pedagogy of oppression*. This analytical framework draws directly from the work of Paulo Freire, in specific his 1971 seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Freire's work was initially directed towards liberatory education for illiterate peasants in Brazil. Over the last three decades, his pedagogical framework, which springs from his hope to aid in “the creation of a world in which it is easier to love (1971, 19)”, has inspired new approaches to education around the world. CAAS here uses his work from the opposite perspective: to examine how the education system plays a huge part in keeping Aboriginal Peoples oppressed. Using Freire's analysis, we will examine how the BOC has continued to support the oppression of the Indigenous Peoples of this land, up to the year 2002.

To be successful, according to Freire (1971, Ch.4), a *pedagogy of oppression* requires that both the young of the dominant social class and the young of the marginalized class must be indoctrinated with the same overall message. Using the politically charged Aboriginal Studies curriculum, policy-makers have striven to ensure that each class (dominant = Canadian settlers; marginalized = Aboriginal Peoples) is prepared, shaped, molded, for its role in the



overall social structure.¹¹ One social group in Canada must be taught superiority and the other inferiority, but both are taught from the same book.¹²

Aboriginal Critiques of Canadian Pedagogy

The Aboriginal authors of our Introduction describe *why* the curriculum must change. In *The South* and *The West*, Aboriginal colleagues within CAAS critique the marginalized (at best) or "invisibilized" presence of Aboriginal Peoples in mandated Canadian curricula. To facilitate the discussion presented in this section, a brief summary of that critique is presented here.

In Canadian curricula, First Peoples are described as “those who occupied the land” before the settlers arrived. For example, students are frequently asked to identify the geographical location of various groups of Indigenous Peoples with a few general, culturally invalid characteristics. This “geographicalization” of the “Woodland Indians”, “Plains/Prairie Indians”, “Northwest Coast Indians”, “Arctic Indians” and the “Atlantic Coast Indians” has only the most simplistic, and consequently distorted, correspondence to how Aboriginal Peoples view themselves. As well, Indigenous leaders are included as “characters” in Canadian history, “These, and other, heroes of Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit nations are not identified as powerful leaders from their communities. Tecumseh is killed in Moraviantown, where his People seem to disappear. Louis Riel was executed as a traitor to Canada.”¹³

CAAS colleagues have also identified key omissions from the curricula. From a pedagogical perspective, these support stereotyping. For example, it is observed that “a traditional story that tells about creation or offers a moral about respect or responsibility would be taught without explaining how and why this story is significant.” This kind of “invisibilizing” precludes the possibility of critical analysis of contemporary issues in Aboriginal - Canadian relationships. Not included in the curricula are: land ownership issues, treaties, relocation of Aboriginal Peoples, and the colonial and neo-colonial acts of segregation and discrimination against the Original Peoples.

In *The South*, we also present one alternative, valid paradigm: the CAAS’ Learning Circle and our proposed Learning Expectations (which are to be achieved by the time students graduate



from Canadian high schools). These Aboriginal pedagogical tools are based on the traditional Circle or Medicine Wheel. Its beauty as a teaching tool is that it has no beginning and no end, so the Circle constantly “teaches” relationship building.

For Aboriginal students, whose ancestors have always been on this land, the *pedagogy of oppression* is insidious. They both see and feel that this portrayal of their cultures accomplishes the goal of cultural eradication by denying the validity, dynamism, value, integrity and accomplishments of the many Aboriginal cultures that have flourished and survived against all odds on this land. *The North* section speaks of the importance of improving curriculum, because it has been and continues to be damaging for young people.

In all this analysis, CAAS is charged with the responsibility to continue to recognize that what is still being taught is the BOC. With the SAS, found in Appendix E, CAAS primarily sought to learn what settler and newcomer Canadian students had learned about Aboriginal Peoples. We also deliberately sought some Aboriginal participation, to achieve a balance in voice, in some senses as a “control group.”¹⁴ We wanted to hear Aboriginal student voices because, as established in the Introduction, the majority of children of Aboriginal heritage attend Canadian provincial and territorial schools. Generally speaking, even those Aboriginal children educated on Reserve usually receive the government-mandated curricula. CAAS wanted to learn how the messaging of the BOC might still be continuing to affect students in the classroom today.

Due to our limited Aboriginal-identified sample, it is useful to reflect on both the Aboriginal youth's comments from the SASS, and a few of the Aboriginal voices found in RCAP.¹⁵ Listen to the students and the RCAP deputants speak about how they experienced education in Canadian classrooms:

I attended most of my elementary school shifting around Thunder Bay because my parents were attending “Post-Secondary”. Each year, I started off at another school and was taught French language and History (not that I had any choice). At that time, I don’t recall any native studies being offered around that area but recently I notice that it’s being (starting) to be taught in schools.

[SASS respondent, Ontario/Aboriginal]



The harshly assimilative policies of the past have been abandoned, but school curricula, to which virtually all Aboriginal young people are exposed, have only begun to reflect facets of Aboriginal life (RCAP, vol. 3, 585-6).

For most Canadians, understanding the practice of traditional Aboriginal cultures in cities is particularly difficult because we have been taught to ‘understand’ narrow and inaccurate stereotypes of Aboriginal culture. The images of Aboriginal culture for many people are totem poles, stone carving, pow-wow dancing, canoes, moccasins and feather head-dresses. These are among the images of Aboriginal people that are presented in schools and in popular culture. Viewed this way, culture is no more than a collection of objects and rituals, observed in isolation from their vitality and meaning within a particular cultural context. This view also emphasizes the past and leaves the impression that Aboriginal cultures are static rather than dynamic and contemporary. But the artistic and material aspects of Aboriginal culture, though important, are only a small part of its reality and need to be understood within the large context of Aboriginal peoples’ world views, beliefs and changing ways of life (RCAP, vol4, 523).

We grew up thinking that we should try to be Qallunaat [non-Aboriginal]... It is even difficult to change that mentality, even to change to a point where you think “I am an Inuk, I am a good enough person as I am (Rhoda Katsuk cited in RCAP, vol.4, 410).

Learned very little. [SASS respondent, Prairies Region/First Nations]

It was mostly games for Aboriginal Studies unit [in Grade 7]... I didn’t learn that much because sometimes a non-Native person would teach it. [SASS respondent, Ontario/Canadian-Aboriginal]

Up to the present day, Canada’s education system has been very effective at achieving the goals appropriate to a *pedagogy of oppression*. Its historic success is measured by the continuing social, cultural and economic marginalization of Aboriginal Peoples. The *pedagogy of oppression’s* effectiveness is evident in virtually every Canadian institution, in every town and city, in every region of this land.



The Bad Old Curriculum: A Pedagogy of Oppression for All Students

The desired outcome from the prescriptive BOC is to achieve a state of un-knowing (Freire, 1971:Chapter 4). The historians and policy-makers who constructed it sought to create a condition of improbability – improbability that anyone educated in *this* way could ever develop the potential to honestly and critically analyze the relationship between Aboriginal Peoples and Canadians, i.e. the “real” world around herself or himself. This condition of improbability is designed to prevent even the conceptualization of social change. It is meant to prevent any movement away from existing oppressive relationships and to unquestioningly sustain the current socio-political system of Euro-dominance.

Examined dynamically, this oppressive pedagogy does not really *stop* change: it stops the population from being able to critically analyze the world around them, and therefore from being able to *imagine* or *participate in* change. This contradiction between what seems to be or what is felt, on the one hand – and what is known (or taught) on the other hand – creates inner turmoil. The young adult Canadian or Aboriginal person feels powerless, alienated, apathetic. Through learning in a new way, it is possible to overcome this paralysis,

Freire's dialectical thinking, all dialectical thinking for that matter, treats history as process. This is a key pre-condition that enabled Freire to convey a radical theory of what it means to be a human being (a radical ontology) and a radical theory of knowledge (a radical epistemology). Whether they recognize it or not, most people have ontological and epistemological theories or at least assumptions. Freire's ontological theory is radical because it critiques what it has meant thus far to be a human being and also offers the philosophy of what we could become...

...Deeper understanding of one's own knowledge and its origins as well as new knowledge, are, perhaps, [...] the most immediate and visible consequences of the Freirian approach.

It is important that one does not remain at the same level of knowledge... one's knowledge can signify collusion in oppression (Allman, P. et al, 1998:11).



Mythicisism: Stereotypes, Lies, a Hollow Curriculum: Some Students “Learn” Prejudice and Discrimination

In Chapter 4 of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Friere identifies the tools for understanding how to avoid this “collusion in oppression.” The *pedagogy of oppression* rests on *mythicisism*, alienation, manipulation, cultural invasion, repression, and direct violent oppression (1971). The most pervasive of these six strategies is *mythicisism*: e.g. stereotyping and made-up “facts” that support neo-colonialist policies. *Mythicisism* continues to exist, largely undisputed, in the school curricula. Comparatively speaking, it seems to be the mildest – although it might be more accurate to regard it as the subtlest – of the tools in the *pedagogy of oppression* toolbox.

Why is *mythicisism* the “tool” of choice when some of the other approaches, e.g. direct violent oppression, might be much more effective? The policy- and decision-makers who design and implement this pedagogy would not want to use harsh tools on their own children. It is important to remember that the objects of this *pedagogy of oppression* (within the Canadian school system) are the young of both the marginalized and the dominant classes. In particular, the young of the dominant class must be conditioned to believe the Master-Narrative regarding Euro-Canadian cultural superiority and Indigenous cultural inferiority. This is “tough work” for the power elite, because of the contradiction between this hegemonic pedagogical goal and the fact that Canada is a social democracy that simultaneously advocates protection and recognition of human rights and freedom of opinion. Canadian youth are constantly exposed to cross-cultural leakages of information, illuminating the fallacy of this superiority-inferiority construct.

While *mythicisism* is the primary tool in the school-based *pedagogy of oppression*, other strategies for implementing and maintaining the supremacy-inferiority construct do emerge within the Canadian education system and other Canadian social institutions. Again, these strategies are designed to simultaneously mold and reinforce a “superior” Canadian identity among the young of the dominant class and an “inferior” Aboriginal identity¹⁶ among the marginalized class of Indigenous youth.



All the tools for oppression identified by Freire are employed, in one location or another, among Canadian social institutions. The media, government departments and agencies, and the “justice” system collaborate to fill the social control gaps left uncovered by the education system. While the focus of this analysis is Canadian schools, the data presented in *The South* suggests that many students use the media as a major source of information. The media, as integral components of the dominant culture and therefore infused with the superiority-inferiority construct that has been taught to all Canadians, is a dubious source of valid information. The role of media in the *pedagogy of oppression* must be considered at the relevant points of convergence.

The first of the tools for oppression – *mythicisim* – is a prevalent feature in the BOC. It has been the norm in Canadian classrooms since the advent of public education. *Mythicisim* could be as simple as the spreading of lies, but is usually accomplished either by omitting important information or through negative images that become “common knowledge” or stereotypes. Stereotyping of Aboriginal Peoples, as an example of *mythicisim*, prevents cross-cultural understanding between Aboriginal Peoples and settler/newcomer Canadians.

In its limited presentation of Indigenous cultures and histories, the BOC (backed up by the Canadian mass media), often freezes Aboriginal Peoples in the era of “long ago” or paints them with stereotyping images that include:

- historic portrayal of Aboriginal persons as savage, primitive nomads with loose morals who scalped and warred on one another;
- the timeless, sad-but-romantic, “Noble, Silent, Wise and Stoic Indian”, sitting atop his horse in the Prairie sunset;
- the poor helpless victim who may be incarcerated, drunk on the street, sniffing gas in some isolated and dilapidated recreation centre, suffering from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, or otherwise reeling from the abuses s/he or his/her People have endured;



- as militant, renegade law-breakers (e.g. land rights protestors with the media slant towards “armed stand-offs,” tobacco smugglers, greedy fishermen or hunters, urban gangs of angry youth, etc.), who are recklessly trying to destroy everything that has been built on this land since European civilization arrived.

Students repeated many of these mythical stereotypes in the commentary they provided while responding to the open-ended questions on the SAS:

Took “native studies” class - learned the cooking, loomwork, snowshoes, etc. [Prairies Region/
Canadian]

They have introduced many methods of travel (canoe, kayak, sled) which are seen as traditionally Canadian. A lot of place names are aboriginal names, as well as the names of certain animals, objects. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]

Tokens - like the artwork on the quarters. It is there but not understood. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]

We have good artwork/ totem poles/ cultural studies that we can show in museums and to other countries to make it look like we have culture. Otherwise, we probably haven’t had enough Aboriginal influence. [British Columbia & Yukon/Canadian]

They are old and therefore historically important. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]

It’s hard not to be judgmental when they get special treatment for everything. [British Columbia & Yukon/Canadian]

[Contributed to Canadian culture] With wars. [Ontario/Francophone Canadian]

Pocobontas > The movie talks a lot about respect of nature. Grey Owl > Ojibway person [sic].
[Québec/Métis]



They bring diversity. I am afraid, however, that they have not succeeded in “shaping” their images in our minds when we think of Canada. We sometimes see them simply as minorities. It’s so unfortunate. [Atlantic Region/Acadienne]

The stories describe the Aboriginal Peoples as being mean. [Ontario/Francophone Canadian]

They want more money [and the solution is] Just like weaning a baby, slowly take it away from them. [Ontario/Canadian]

They helped the Europeans to get used to the New World and to get themselves established. [Atlantic Region/Canadian-Francophone]

They have helped to culturally enrich Canada although this has been a long time coming. [Atlantic Region/Canadian-American]

If it wasn’t for the Europeans, the country would be rich with resources and by now a Much more aggressive group would have seized it. [Prairies Region/ Canadian]

We have Dream-Catchers. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]

Mythicising can also be a community project, as demonstrated by many public displays of Native history in museums and at historical sites across Canada. More frequently than not, Aboriginal Peoples are portrayed in these displays as *quaint*, a phenomenon touched on in *The West*. As presented, Aboriginal Peoples seem to have a mildly intriguing, long-ago culture that it is “good” for us to acknowledge as a “multicultural” society.

In Winnipeg, for example, at the historic “Forks” waterfront cultural and commercial tourist area, one finds a series of plaques that depict some aspects of Aboriginal culture and history from this region that go back thousands of years. At the end of these plaques, there is no indication of where these Peoples are today. Just blocks away, in reality, one finds a vibrant, and culturally dynamic Aboriginal society comprised of tens of thousands of men, women and children. They are nowhere to be seen at The Forks. Should some individuals from this



community wander through, they would be conspicuous by skin colour. Their presence would likely be regarded by the tourists and shoppers at The Forks as exotic or quaint (if in traditional costume), threatening (if young), or distressing (if poor).

Central to the *mythicising* process has been suppression of the facts arising from the more than 500 years of cultural genocide experienced by the Original Peoples of Turtle Island¹⁷. To put information about the repression and oppression that spawned this genocide into museums, or on plaques in public places, would annihilate centuries of great effort by colonizing governments, spent mythicizing – falsifying history and keeping the truth hidden.

Mythicism Can Destroy the “Teaching” Moment: Being Ignorant Becomes Comfortable

“Quaint”-ifying removes Aboriginal Peoples from Canadian lives by at least one full step. This somehow terms them into the “Other,” and reduces “Their” issues to a status of irrelevancy vis-a-vis everyday Canadian lives. This “reduction” makes it easier for Canadians to ignore the harsh realities and concerns of many Aboriginal Peoples. The SAS sample shows that some of the students responding to the survey have no serious problem with the “*quaintifying*” of Aboriginal Peoples

In one of the open-ended questions of the SAS, (Q46 - “How have Aboriginal cultures, histories and perspectives contributed to shaping and defining Canada?”), it was positioned as the *last* query to the respondents (on page 12 of the SAS). So many respondents used it as a place to make a summary statement. The vast majority of the comments in response to this question read like this sampling:

I don't think they contributed at first but with the introduction of the multicultural act in the 1980's I think they are contributing more. In what ways I don't know. Would need more info.

[Atlantic Region/Canadian]

[Contributed to Canada's] Multiculturalism. [Prairies Region/Canadian]

I have a bad memory. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]



I wasn't interested. [British Columbia & Yukon/Canadian]

[Contributed to Canada in] Many ways. [Prairies Region/Canadian]

They have added culture to Canada. It leaves [sic] open to new views. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]

Once again it gives us a sense of identity and an idea as to where some of us came from. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]

Helping to define it [Canada] as a unique and diverse society. [Ontario/Canadian]

Made it [Canada] an even more multicultural (sic). [Ontario/Canadian]

Definitely they're [sic] a part of us. [Ontario/Canadian]

Aboriginals gave us our resources (natural). [Ontario/Canadian]

I learned I just don't remember. [Prairies Region/Canadian]

The Aboriginal People were a great help in aiding the Europeans to adjust to these harsh winters - they certainly wouldn't have survived - I am sure they have a great deal to contribute to our society as all different cultures have been, to make this the great country it is. [Québec/Canadian]

They have added another culture to Canada as well as being one of the first. The only true Canadians are the aboriginals. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]

"Canada" is an Aboriginal word. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]

Canada has many cultures and languages, many of which are aboriginal. [British Columbia & Yukon/Canadian]

(Responses to Question 46 on SAS)



It is disheartening to consider these comments in light of the analysis of Canada’s “multiculturalism” discussed further in *The West*.

Obscuring Cultural Knowledge: A Shortcut from Mythicism to Cultural Invasion

Another vital part of the *mythicising* process is distorting perspective – in other words, lying here and there, keeping the true story hidden, changing the “rules” about how things are discussed or understood. This sets the stage for more comprehensive strategies. *Cultural invasion* creates distortions of perspective, so that the cultural or personal truth can not even be found, let alone recognized. One of the most successful ways of obscuring Indigenous knowledge, used universally in the oppressive curricula of residential schools, is to eradicate the First languages of Aboriginal Peoples. This effort is effective because the languages carry and communicate the understandings and worldviews so vital to the Peoples’ cultures.

Among Indigenous cultures from this part of Turtle Island, a young person’s ‘civics’ education has traditionally been communicated from generation to generation through oral or experiential means, as discussed in *The North*. In English, we call many of these cultural events “story-telling” and “ceremonies.”¹⁸ Like all other profound aspects of the cultures, ceremonies rely on concepts, understandings, relationships and worldviews that can only be expressed fully and accurately in the language of that culture. One need not be an expert in socio-linguistics to appreciate that any given culture will have words particular to that culture and language, which address the realities and issues of the People.¹⁹

In most Indigenous languages, there is no English translation for some concepts. This is also true for names of Indigenous Peoples. By using another, “outside” language to describe something intrinsic to a culture that has its own language, its meaning will almost certainly be profoundly affected.

Q5 from SAS:

What is the main source of your knowledge about Aboriginal people?



Native language (speaking to my mother). (Answer from SAS Aboriginal respondent)

We have defined culture as the whole way of life of a people... Language is the principal instrument by which culture is transmitted from one generation to another, by which members of a culture communicate meaning and make sense of their shared experience. Because language defines the world and experience in cultural terms, it literally shapes our way of perceiving – our world view...

For Aboriginal people, the threat that their languages could disappear is a threat that their distinctive world view, the wisdom of their ancestors and their ways of being human could be lost as well. And, as they point out, if the languages of this continent are lost, there is nowhere else they can be heard again...

Many forces are contributing to a decline in the use of minority languages around the world. With Aboriginal languages, however, an underlying reason for the decline is the rupture in language transmission from older to younger generations and the low regard many Aboriginal people have had for traditional language proficiency as a result of policies devised by government and enforced by churches and the education system. As documented in our chapter on residential schools, the use of Aboriginal languages was prohibited in those institutions expressly to dislodge from the children's minds the worldview embodied in the languages. The policies were also meant to alienate the children from their families (and hence their cultures), which were regarded as impediments to civilization... As the Mi'kmaq poet Rita Joe described it, the communication of many Aboriginal children became a "scrambled ballad" as a result. (RCAP, vol. 3, 603).

Cultural Invasion and Repression

Cultural invasion and repression are the most powerful tools used by the dominant culture to achieve their desired effects – in this case the forced assimilation of Indigenous persons into the Canadian dominant culture. While some of these tactics are at long last a thing of the past, many are still used today:



- Residential schools (over the past fifty years, replaced by day school education that usually still does not respect or address the cultural, social, political and economic realities of Aboriginal students).
- Laws against spiritual practices and cultural traditions such as the Potlatch, the Sundance and Pow Wow dancing (now repealed).
- Laws that forced “western-style democratic” governments on First Peoples, which also forced them to give up the governance systems they had used for thousands of years.
- Missionary evangelizing to eradicate traditional spirituality and worldview and replace it with practices and institutions based on the European worldview.
- Jails.
- Adoption.
- Police brutality and state violence against Aboriginal persons and populations, particularly those who actively advocate for their rights as members of a group of Indigenous Peoples.

Only the first of these – the Residential Schools program – relates directly to the Canadian education system, and it is finally a discredited and defeated tactic for implementing the extant *pedagogy of oppression*. However, the damage arising from the Residential Schools policies, and many of the other discarded tactics, continues today. As we found through the SASS, students are impressively well-informed about residential schools. However, CAAS research indicates that it is unlikely they learned this information in elementary or secondary school. It is a matter of great concern to the CAAS that the curriculum does not uncover these terrible truths. Hidden from view are the attempts of European and Canadian

institutions and governments to eradicate Aboriginal Peoples cultures - in some cases the Peoples themselves - through their various programs for cultural invasion and repression.

In 1972, the interesting Canadian historian E. Palmer Patterson II identified the invalidity of the colonial *pedagogy of oppression*:

*Most of the histories of the nations, which include a greater or smaller aboriginal population have been written by the descendants of the conquerors. Their emphasis has been on the white majority (or the white population, even where it is the minority)... the harshness and repression by which it [the conquest] was accomplished have been lost from the popular accounts. **The outrages were too many and too great to be admitted.** (Patterson, 1972: 5; emphasis added)*

Patterson's message was revolutionary in that era and entirely timely today. It thoroughly challenges Canadian educators, politicians, other leaders and policy-makers to find a new path, to define a new set of relationships. Until Canadians can acknowledge these 'outrages', the healing and the building of a just federation of all Peoples across Canada cannot begin. Damian MacSeáin, a CAAS Core Working Group member and a settler Canadian educator who taught high school in a northern community for several years, agrees as follows:

This realization and admission is not a hindrance to the idea or the achievement of cooperative partnership, in fact, acknowledging this truth, and learning about it, is the necessary genesis for an unprecedented partnership between Canada's aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples (MacSeáin, 2001).

Alienation and Manipulation: People Are Damaged By This Pedagogy

Cultural alienation, non-existent self-esteem, and functional assimilation are the "learning outcomes" from the *pedagogy of oppression*. The Freireian-identified strategies of *alienation* and *manipulation* are designed to condition Aboriginal Peoples to accept the reality of the dominant Anglo-Canadian class. The *pedagogy of oppression* seeks to teach them not to trust themselves or their cultures, to no longer believe in their own ways or leaders, to no longer follow their traditional methods or systems for maintaining health, social order, governance,



education of the young, care for the vulnerable, etc. Testimony of this conditioning abounds in RCAP. We also hear voices like this in the SAS:

Alcoholism and drug abuse is a big problem in my home community and there seem to be attempts at providing community services that might help address some of the underlying issues of the problem. This is a VERY complicated issue stemming from generations of lowered self worth and not quite fitting into a culture that the native community was thrown into and perhaps the native community shouldn't measure themselves by the "white-Euro-centred belief system" to re-examine where they want to fit in life and that their choices and feelings are valid too. [British Columbia & Yukon/Canadian-Cree, response to SAS Q19]

Why there is no aboriginal leader that has power of the criminal justice law... [respondent indicated he had "lived" this problem and posed the solution as] Finding the source of the problem instead of just finding a punishment. [Prairies Region/First Nations response to SAS Q19]

We face racism in the schools. Our children don't feel good about themselves when they come home and that is all held in here. By the time they are teenagers, they are lashing out at their own people (Vicki Wilson, cited in RCAP, vol. 4, 89).

I remember my first day of school... My mother said, "Here comes the bus. You will be all right, Sherry Lynn. And remember - try to act like them." That's what she told me (Sherry Lawson, cited in RCAP, vol. 4, 164)

Elements of racism are intertwined in history, in the history books, in the library books. It is found in school curriculum (William Tooshkenig, cited in RCAP, vol. 4, 527).

As we see, many members of the marginalized or oppressed class of people are eventually indoctrinated with the views of the oppressor class or dominant culture. Perhaps they are personally ambitious or they simply want to improve their living conditions. Maybe they want to help their family or community. The dominant class's most usual method of *manipulation* (i.e. ensuring the internalization of the *pedagogy of oppression*) is through bribery

with money, goods and social position. However, flattery – recognition within the dominant culture’s elite – sometimes works just as well.

The successful programs of *alienation* and *manipulation* may result in outright agreements to change sides and join the dominant culture. Often the program is much subtler, and implemented through a series of negotiated leadership training and employment opportunities, using the education system or other routes. These “opportunities” to “get ahead” carve a deep chasm between the one who has been manipulated by the dominant culture and the People from whom she or he has come.

At this point in the relationship between Aboriginal Peoples and Canadians, the processes of manipulation and alienation are fairly open and evident. Almost all parties have developed the critical analysis skills to understand what is being traded and what material gains might accrue from the trade. While one Aboriginal person may “play along” and accept the material advantages, another will refuse to engage in these “opportunities,” in order not to be swallowed by the dominant culture. This dynamic analysis is an important factor in the high rate of Aboriginal student drop-outs, at both the high school and the post-secondary levels. If getting a “higher education” means becoming Canadian, some decide to leave the Canadian education system.

Members of CAAS who teach in Aboriginal teacher training programs know that this is one of the major challenges facing faculties of education. If faculties are to get serious about attracting and retaining Aboriginal teacher candidates, they must face the reality that most Aboriginal students are unwilling to make the trade. Few education students of Indigenous heritage will give up their own knowledges, worldviews and cultural understandings to fit the dominant culture’s education paradigm, no matter how great the rewards.

All over Turtle Island, centres of Indigenous knowledge are emerging. These programs and spaces for learning and teaching present Indigenous paradigms and ways of knowing. The educators, Teachers and Elders who guide this learning choose these venues so they do not have to compromise with the dominant culture's pedagogy. Students emerge from these



programs, such as the Joe Duquette high school in Saskatoon and Tsi-niyukwaliho:tu (the Oneida traditional learning centre), with their identities intact, feeling strong and in touch with their cultures.

Oppression: Canadian Students Succumb to Racism

Over the past centuries, Canada has put enormous resources into trying to successfully condition Aboriginal persons within Canada to accept a life of cultural, social, economic and/or political marginalization. Techniques identified above – *mythicisism*, *alienation*, *manipulation*, *cultural invasion*, and *repression* – have been, and continue to be, used to this day.

In the case of the typical Canadian student in Canada’s classrooms, s/he also had to be prepared to accept his or her appropriate position relative to “Canada’s most pressing human rights issue” (UNHRC, Concluding Observations; 1999). What the United Nations Human Rights Committee is speaking of is the broad economic, social, cultural and political marginalization of the Indigenous populations within Canada.

Some students do not realize that they do not know anything. Worse, a few think they “know” and what they think they know is blatantly racist.

Whatever. Why don't they just stop fighting and get a job and fit in, that's what they want so stop trying to stick out. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]

I learned about them when I worked at the Fortress of Louisbourg, they had a display of tools from the 1700's. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]

There are more important things to worry about like health care and the economy. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]

Not really relevant to my post-secondary education. [Ontario/Canadian]

Did Aboriginals get adequate opportunity to learn of my Irish culture in school either? [British Columbia & Yukon/Canadian]



Innu youth sniffing gas... [can be solved] In the same manner that it is resolved for non-Aboriginal peoples. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]

Everything has been settled... put their picture in the paper. [Prairies Region/Canadian]

A class on Native issues existed at my high school but I didn't take it. [Atlantic Region/Canadian-American]

Don't care about it... Take the land with no remorse - survival of the fittest. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]

Probably nice people, but I'm just not interested. I really wouldn't want to learn any more of this stuff in school than we already do. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]

A lot of stories told of their culture and heritage. No offence but a lot of them were drunk that I've had contact with. [Ontario/Canadian]

They haven't and never will [contribute to Canadian society] because they have never been important. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]

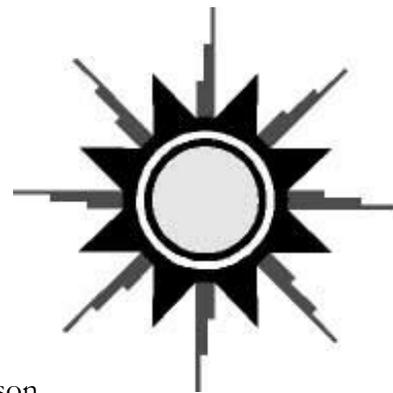
(Comments taken from responses to various questions on SAS survey.)

For now, the *pedagogy of oppression* continues to be viably propped up by the BOC. The consciousness of some respondents has been thoroughly invaded, and they seem to be unaware that they have somehow been shortchanged in the educative transfer of knowledge and awareness. Stereotypes and racist attitudes and perceptions, as well as the sense of cultural inferiority, do not just persist -- they thrive in this pedagogical environment.



Section 2.4: Contemporary Federal Aboriginal Policies

In 1951, significant revisions were made to *The Indian Act*. In that year, some of the most reprehensible human rights violations were repealed. The current era of rethinking and reformulating “Indian Policy” began during this period. Olive Dickason concludes that the further 1985 changes to *The Indian Act*, which removed or softened some of the remaining discriminatory provisions, “sounded the death knell of the official policy of assimilation.” (Dickason, 1992: 331) Most Aboriginal scholars, leaders and activists view this statement as over-optimistic but recent federal policy initiatives has at least signaled an admission of the failure of the policy of cultural eradication, and the need to rethink strategies. In some ways, the Government of Canada seems to be entering a brave new era of policy regarding Aboriginal Peoples.



This ‘rethinking’ has happened because Aboriginal Peoples have continued to demand their human rights to be who they are and to live where they have always lived, following their own ways and values and traditions. In the face of all the efforts to quash, eliminate, annihilate them and their cultures, Aboriginal Peoples continue to survive and demand respect for who they are.

The Report on the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples

RCAP documents the long struggle of Aboriginal Peoples to maintain their identities, cultures, histories and world views.

Public education is essential in confronting the problems posed by ignorance and misconceptions regarding our place in Canadian history and the nature of our rights. All Canadians should have



the knowledge required to understand our situation, as well as the knowledge that what we have sought all along is mutual respect and coexistence (Robert Debassige, Tribal Chairman and E.D., United Chiefs and Councils of Manitoulin, cited in RCAP, vol. 5, 91).

RCAP did not happen in a vacuum. It was created after a huge meltdown in Aboriginal-Canadian relationships in 1990. This "crisis" occurred in the Québec town of Oka, also known by the Mohawks who have always lived in the area as Kanehsatake.²⁰ For three months, troublesome news images bombarded Canadians and the world. An Aboriginal community was willing to use guns in self-defense because the local Québec population were planning to build nine more holes of a golf course on top of an old Mohawk cemetery in an area forested with old-growth pines. With dignity, strength and demonstrable public support, the Mohawks faced-down the Québec provincial police, the Canadian army, and, ultimately, the Canadian legal system.

Canadian officials realized that a new moment had arrived in the Aboriginal-Canadian relationship. Canadians saw themselves on international television as violators of human rights rather than as respecters of human rights – provoking a national identity crisis that evolved into a process of social analysis. In the midst of this turmoil, the RCAP was struck. Seemingly, it arose from a genuine searching for answers to questions such as: How did we get to this point in our relationships? What do we do now? The government of the day, under Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, gave the Royal Commission a broad mandate:

The Commission of Inquiry should investigate the evolution of the relationship among aboriginal peoples (Indian, Inuit and Métis), the Canadian government and Canadian society as a whole. It should propose specific solutions, rooted in domestic and international experience, to the problems which have plagued those relationships and which confront aboriginal peoples today. The Commission should examine all issues which it deems to be relevant to any or all of the aboriginal peoples of Canada... (RCAP, vol. 1, 2)

What became evident during the “Oka Crisis”, and was clarified during the five-year RCAP process, was that a new relationship has to emerge. This new relationship must be based, as



RCAP says repeatedly, on the principles of mutual respect and reciprocity. To facilitate that restructuring of the relationship between our Peoples, the old *pedagogy of oppression* must be dismantled. Aboriginal Peoples are not going to swallow it anymore. But the warnings and advice have not been heeded. So, since “Oka”, there have been repeats of, and variations on, this scenario in many parts of Canada.

Gathering Strength

For their part, in response to the RCAP report, in 1997 the federal government released *Gathering Strength*, and its accompanying *Statement of Reconciliation*. These policy documents provide some evidence of the Canadian government's current position:

As Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians seek to move forward together in a process of renewal, it is essential that we deal with the legacies of the past affecting the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, including the First Nations, Inuit and Métis. Our purpose is not to rewrite history but, rather, to learn from our past and to find ways to deal with the negative impacts that certain historical decisions continue to have in our society today...

Sadly, our history with respect to the treatment of Aboriginal people is not something in which we can take pride. Attitudes of racial and cultural superiority led to a suppression of Aboriginal culture and values... We must recognize the impact of these actions on the once self-sustaining nations...

... The Government of Canada today formally expresses to all Aboriginal people in Canada our profound regret for past actions of the federal government which have contributed to these difficult pages in the history of our relationship together...

Reconciliation is an ongoing process. In renewing our partnership, we must ensure that the mistakes which marked our past relationship are not repeated. The Government of Canada recognizes that policies that sought to assimilate Aboriginal people, women and men, were not the way to build a strong country. We must instead continue to find ways in which Aboriginal people can participate fully in the economic, political, cultural and social life of Canada in a manner which preserves and enhances the collective identities of Aboriginal communities, and allows them to evolve and flourish



in the future. Working together to achieve our shared goals will benefit all Canadians, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike.” (extracted from "Statement of Reconciliation", Gathering Strength, 1997)

In the full text of this statement, Ottawa also acknowledges the strengths and contributions of the many diverse Indigenous cultures in this region and specifically apologizes for the execution of Louis Riel and the Residential Schools policy.

The policy orientation of *Gathering Strength* arises from the government’s recognition that they must acknowledge the legitimacy of Aboriginal grievances, despite the official lack of enthusiasm for the comprehensive restructuring approach presented in the 1996 report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Ottawa's public relations messaging tried to convince both Aboriginal Peoples and the international human rights community that it does support RCAP's thrust, but *Gathering Strength* does not address RCAP's primary foci: self-determination, treaties, lands, sovereignty and resources.²¹ While containing many positive elements, the *Gathering Strength* policy initiatives are restricted primarily to programs that will reform or ease current problems, and cannot be seen as a fundamental move towards restructuring the relationship.

Canada's “Most Pressing Human Rights Issue”

Ottawa has been criticized extensively in international circles for its limited response to RCAP. Over the six years since RCAP delivered its final report, three major United Nations human rights bodies have considered Canada's submission re: progress on the RCAP report and found federal initiatives to be severely lacking (Pohl, 2001). The United Nations Human Rights Committee has said that the situation of Aboriginal Peoples is “Canada's most pressing human rights issue (UNHRC, April 1999).”

The gap in understanding and goals between First Nations and Canada appears to have intensified since the release of RCAP, in part due to disappointment on the part of Aboriginal Peoples about the federal handling of the Royal Commission's report. At the end of August, 2002, the United Nations' third World Conference Against Racism (WCAR)



opened in Durban, South Africa. At the WCAR, Assembly of First Nations National Chief Matthew Coon Come commented,

We also recognized the racist and colonial syndrome of dispossession and discrimination that was taking place in South Africa from our own experience. As indigenous peoples in North America, this is our story too... we have been deprived our means of subsistence and our lands, and are being denied our right to benefit fully and equitably from our natural wealth and resources.

Right across Canada, we have been assigned to tiny, marginal areas of land called “Indian reserves”, less than a few per cent of our traditional lands. The Canadian state has retained for itself the resource rights, even under our feet. Our communities are overcrowded. They often lack adequate sanitation and clean drinking water. Many of our people are homeless. Our dwellings are often substandard and dangerously overcrowded. We suffer very high rates of tuberculosis, HIV and other infectious diseases. In some Canadian provinces, although our people are 10% or less of the overall population, we make up the great majority of the prison population.

These conditions, coupled with our mass poverty and unemployment, often lead to hopelessness and despair among our peoples. Sadly, many of our youth are choosing death over life, and we are experiencing epidemic rates of suicide. In some cases we have the highest suicide rates anywhere in the world.

Often, when we protest and assert our rights against our marginalization, landlessness and dispossession, the Canadian state has used force against us -- even lethal force. In the 1990's and early 2000's, this pattern of state and police violence against indigenous peoples in Canada seemed to worsen...

I realize this may be surprising news for some of you. Canadians, and the government of Canada, present themselves around the world as upholders and protectors of human rights. In many ways, this reputation is well-deserved...

However, at home in Canada, the oppression, marginalization and dispossession of indigenous peoples continue.

In 1991 the Canadian federal government appointed a Royal Commission of Inquiry on Aboriginal Peoples to investigate our situation. It included a judge of the Supreme Court of Canada. In 1996 this federal Royal Commission of Inquiry... [sent] an important warning to the government of Canada [quoted from RCAP]:

“Currently on the margins of Canadian society, aboriginal peoples will be pushed to the edge of economic, cultural and political extinction.”

... Canada is one of the most developed and largest countries in the world, with one of the highest standards of living in the world. The situation facing Aboriginal peoples in Canada, however, has correctly been referred to as “Canada’s hidden shame”...

Every year, the Canadian government’s own federal Human Rights Commission draws attention to this discriminatory situation, one that stunts and takes the lives of thousands and thousands of our people. Yet little progress is made in addressing the fundamental, underlying cause of our poverty, hopelessness and despair.

This root cause is... landlessness, dispossession, and the social marginalization and exclusion of our peoples. (www.afn.ca – archived speeches; downloaded October 17, 2002)

According to an article published by The (Toronto-based) Star on September 1, 2002, Minister Nault responded to the National Chief’s analysis of Canadian Aboriginal policies, as follows:

With this kind of language and talk, I believe Matthew Coon Come is going to set the agenda back for many years... He’s going to find it very difficult for people to do business with him if he’s going to make those kinds of serious accusations, which we all take very seriously. People like myself... are not just annoyed, we’re just beside ourselves...

'Quite frankly, I think Matthew Coon Come owes us an apology,' he said.

(www.bluecorncomics/stype191.htm, downloaded October 17, 2002)

CAAS believes that one important way to begin to address the issues identified in RCAP, by the AFN National Chief, by Aboriginal educators, and through our Student Awareness survey, is to change what is taught in Canadian schools about the First Peoples of this land.

The Minister's National Working Group on Education

In a hopeful vein, in June 2002, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs (INAC) Robert Nault established a **National Working Group on Education**. This Working Group is comprised of 13 Aboriginal members, who were selected on the basis of their expertise as community members, educators and scholars, and who represent a diversity of First Nations cultures, although they are not spokespersons for any political bodies or institutions.

On striking this working group, Minister Nault commented that “improving First Nation education today means a better future for all Canadians tomorrow (INAC communiqué, June 17, 2002).” INAC materials note that the Aboriginal population is the youngest, fastest growing population in Canada and First Nation students suffer gaps in academic achievement, as well as organizational and support structures (INAC Backgrounder, June 2002). CAAS would add that Aboriginal students also suffer from social and cultural marginalization, which is manifest in the curricula.

The RCAP report describes how culturally-valid schooling can help Aboriginal children develop as citizens of First Nations and Aboriginal communities. To this end, the Working Group is researching and making many recommendations regarding many aspects of education, including several areas of specific relevance to CAAS' focus on provincial and territorial schools, such as:

- Aboriginal content in curriculum (culture and language) and pedagogy;
- national educational instruments;



- curriculum development;
- teacher training, professional development, and teacher recruitment and retention;
- community, parental and youth involvement;
- racism and antiracism education; and,
- Indigenous knowledges.

The Working Group will look at education offered directly by Band Councils as well as that provided for First Nations students by contracting for services with provincial ministries of education, and it will examine successes both within First Nations and other school systems. It is expected to present its summary findings to the Minister by the end of December 2002.

Although this committee was not initially mandated to address Canadian education issues, many of the well-respected Aboriginal educators participating on this committee have a broader view of the task that must be addressed and believe they have the ear of the Minister. The striking of this working group is an encouraging step forward.

CAAS seeks to contribute to building the social and political will to implement a new *Pedagogy of Respect and Honesty* for all students, whether they are attending Canadian schools on contract from a First Nation, or as “non-Status,” Métis or Inuit students, or as children in newcomer or long-established settler Canadian families. Certainly First Nations and other Aboriginal students have special needs for inclusive, intensive and even immersion education programs, but all students must learn about Aboriginal histories, cultures, worldview and contemporary concerns.

The relationship between all Peoples of this land will change when all schoolchildren learn, from the earliest grades, about the impact of colonization, the historic injustices, the many efforts being made by Aboriginal Peoples and Canadians to address those injustices, and the challenges that lie ahead. We will be moving away from the *pedagogy of oppression*, which has held these unjust conditions in place for so long.





Endnotes

¹ *The Indian Act* of 1876 is federal legislation pertaining to those defined by the government to be “Indians.” It governs who is a “Status” Indian and who is not (i.e. has no “status”), and what Status Indians may and may not do both individually and collectively in all areas of their lives. From its passage into law to today, “the Act’s fundamental purpose - to assimilate Amerindians - has remained a constant (Dickason, Olive Patricia. 1994:284).”

² This is why, as elaborated in *The South*, on the CAAS Learning Circle one finds “Aboriginal Worldview” and “Many Nations, Many Stories” placed between the “Time of Renewal and Rebuilding (Decolonization)” at the western door, and the “Long Era of Survival and Resistance (Colonization)” found at the eastern door.

³ The theories of Darwinism arose from the same biases that spawned the concept of *Terra Nullius*, another European philosophical doctrine of devastating consequence for Aboriginal Peoples discussed in endnote 2.

⁴ Turtle Island is the land we stand on. For more discussion, see our glossary in Appendix H.

⁵ The author of this section now feels that, like all models, the Fractured Circle constrains thinking as it informs; its usefulness pales even as it coheres.

⁶ A Band controlled school is one located most often on a reserve, i.e. a small piece of the traditional land of a people or an unrelated piece allotted by the federal government to a particular group of Indians as defined by *The Indian Act*. Representatives of the Band have varying degrees of control over the personnel and the curriculum of the school. The main student body comprises children of Band members. One of the oldest Band controlled schools in Canada is located at Peguis Reserve in Manitoba which has been under Band direction since 1977 (Archibald et al, 1994:11).

⁷ See for example Johnston 1988; Haig-Brown 1988; Knockwood 1992; Miller 1996

⁸ For those familiar with Residential Schools policies, Osborne is addressing *all* public Canadian education policy *not* the Residential Schools policy however uncannily similar the resemblance in tone and purpose may sound.

⁹ A term derived from the work of Paulo Freire, as discussed a few paragraphs further along in the text.

¹⁰ There are some exceptions which prove this rule: for quite a number of years, teachers and learners examining the arts, e.g. “Canadian” literature, dance, drama or visual art, may have had the opportunity to



explore valid, accurate portrayals of Aboriginal Peoples' perspectives, issues and world views. Anecdotally among members of the CAAS network, this area of education seems to have been the pioneer in escaping the confining dictates of the dominant narrative infused in the more politically oriented social studies and social sciences curricula.

¹¹ In this dichotomous situation, I have consciously simplified the discussion by excluding a separate analysis of settlers and other immigrants from non-European countries of origin. Due to racism, these ethno-cultural groups are not a major part of the power-powerless paradigm that is addressed here, although they could and do sometimes ally with either class and provide assistance to that class. More discussion of the intersection between Aboriginal Studies curriculum, race and cross-cultural understanding in Canada can be found in *The West*. Also, the reader might find Fyre Jean Gravelines's work of interest, in particular the chapter on Trickster in *Circle Works* (see Bibliography).

¹² Not surprisingly, recent immigrants to Canada, i.e. "new" newcomers, are left in "no man's land" on this continuum, as they are themselves socially and culturally marginalized but are usually perceived to pose no threat to the dominant class.

¹³ As noted elsewhere in this report, Riel's image in classrooms ranges from Father of Confederation to treasonous murderer.

¹⁴ This is one of the reasons we excluded students in Native or Aboriginal Studies, as one of the criteria for our survey sample. The sampling we ended up with is a reasonable guesstimate of Aboriginal heritage within the Canadian population, but much higher than is usually found with the post-secondary education community

¹⁵ e.g. although 'identifying' as Aboriginal, several refer to Aboriginal Peoples in the 3rd person, i.e. as "them".

¹⁶ "Aboriginal identity" is just one more example of this pedagogy of oppression. In the quote from Monture-Angus provided at the beginning of this direction (*The East*), we see that Indigenous persons do not see themselves as having Aboriginal, or for that matter, Indigenous identity. They are Mohawk, Dene, Hotinonshón:ni, Anishnawbe, Mi'kmaq, etc. This very construct is part of the BOC approach.

¹⁷ "Turtle Island" is the English translation of the land now known as "Canada".

¹⁸ "Story-telling" and "ceremonies" hold and teach vital information, which the dominant Canadian culture might classify as history, spirituality, social expectations, values and other cultural knowledge.



¹⁹ European languages contrast sharply with Aboriginal North American languages. Sylvia Morris points out that while an English or French speaker conceives of a shape for describing the human face (round, chubby) separately from the face/object itself, the Maliseet speaker perceives shape as a property of the object in question, expressing it as part of the noun or verb denoting or referring to the object. The single Maliseet word: etutapskonuwat (“s/he has very chubby cheeks”) is a verb which describes someone’s face by synthesizing the abstract concepts of “degree,” “shape,” “body part,” and “state of being.” In contrast, the English equivalent analyzes the face, expressing each idea— person, possession, degree, shape, body-part— in a separate word. (Morris, S., K. McLeod and M. Danesi. 1993; pg 72).

²⁰ For more information on Oka: Olive Dickason’s *Canada’s First Nations*, Alanis Obomsawin’s video documentary *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* or *Rocks at Whiskey Trench, People of the Pines*, the RCAP report, or Ronald Wright’s *Stolen Continents: The New World Through Indian Eyes Since 1492*.

²¹ More recently, the federal government has introduced some other very controversial initiatives that loosely connect to matters raised in RCAP, such as the First Nations Governance Initiative. In this example, as with others, the issues addressed are similar to problems identified in the RCAP, but the solutions proposed by the government do not synchronize with the new directions advocated by the RCAP.

