

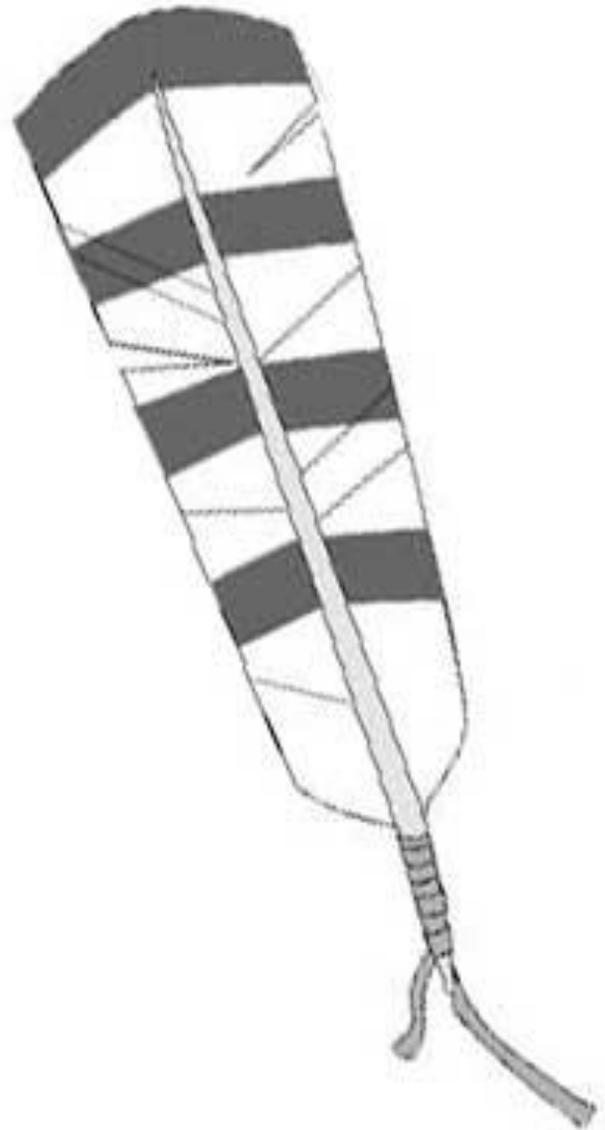
## Section 4.1: A New Curriculum

### Creating Space for Aboriginal Perspectives

There are many ways in which the lives of young people across this land would benefit from a revised and enhanced curriculum and pedagogy infused with Aboriginal histories and contemporary themes.

There are also a number of ways in which all the Peoples of Turtle Island – this nation now known as Canada – could benefit from a more comprehensive understanding of each other.

As an introduction to this exploration, we begin with a story told by a Canadian of European settler heritage in the CAAS network, who recently visited ‘Ksan Village, the Gitxkan historical museum in the north central region of British Columbia. Although generally well informed about Aboriginal cultures, something surprised this visitor during the tour of the Village.



## ‘Ksan Totem Poles:

### What I Learned on my Summer Vacation

*While in northern British Columbia among the Gitx̱kan People this past summer, I visited the small historical ‘Ksan Village. ‘Ksan is a museum that displays the Gitx̱kan culture and history. Visitors to ‘Ksan are also invited to travel to several other sites through the Gitx̱kan territory to view Totem Poles. These have been relocated into accessible groupings where the art and story of several different carvers can be compared.*

*At ‘Ksan Village, near the Skeena River and amongst the long plank houses and beautiful trees, are several Totem Poles.*

*Our guide was a young fellow who had just finished attending a local (Canadian) high school and was headed towards Vancouver in the Fall for University. Sadly, he seemed to know little of the traditional stories of his People. Our young guide tripped over many questions from our group of tourists, but was able to deliver the set presentation effectively.*

*As we approached one of the Poles, I noticed that it had several traditional figures underneath - towards the bottom of the Pole - and at the top sat a squat but rugged looking White Man - replete in suit, tie, top-hat and briefcase. I instantly acknowledged this as the “Oppressor Man”, a phrase I recalled from a Jimmy Cliff song - a 1970’s reggae song from Jamaica. I was thinking to myself: yes, this is where the White Man has always sat, right on top of the Indigenous Peoples, pushing them down. He is here because of his great weight and all the detrimental impact he has had on their People. These thoughts I had in the flash of an eye. Wafting forward from my childhood was a saying, a warning, an explanation: one must always look to see, who is at the top of the Totem Pole?*

*The young fellow took us to the base of this Pole and explained its origins. He explained that it was carved to commemorate the opening of ‘Ksan Village, and represents the fact that various Canadian governments collaborated with the Gitx̱kan People to make this historical village possible. “You will*



*notice,” said our guide, “that the figures from the ground up represent our Clans, and that at the top is the figure representing the help of the Canadians in making this historic museum village possible. We place the figures on the Pole in this order because we always put the most significant figures at the bottom – after all, they are holding everything else up. The bottom figures must bear the weight, and they support all of the others above them, who are relying on them. So the figure on the bottom is the most important.”*

*That day at Ksan Village I saw once again that I know very little about the Original Peoples, and their histories and cultures of this land that is my home. I have been learning this over and over again since the fateful day in the “Hot Summer” of 1990, when - with the Crisis at Oka blaring through the media - I decided the time had come to do some learning.*

*For more than ten years now, I have gone through a painful period of exploration requiring me to be as humble as possible and to remember that I must first be immobile and then crawl before I can toddle, and that I must walk before I can run. I understand this process as a pedagogical one - to be clear, as the process of being willing to give up my biases, ignorance, stereotypes, misinformation and Euro-cultural blinders.*

*I have to be constantly vigilant in remembering that whenever I look at anything, I am using my own European ancestral (dominant North American cultural) viewfinders. It's like having double vision – only instead of obscuring what I see it brings both perspectives into focus.*

*I expect and believe that I will and must always continue to be a humble student in the act of learning about this land, the First Peoples of this land, and my relationship to both. My life, my mind and my heart have been fulsomely enriched by this effort. Unlike the vast majority of Settler (non-Aboriginal) Peoples in Canada, I count among my friends many Native persons. My friends come from a wide variety of First Nations, urban communities, walks of life, traditions and professions. Now I know something about Turtle Island – this land I was born in and stand on – and I am at peace with being here.*



One important lesson we can draw from this “totem-pole story” is that the concept of *culture* has deep meaning. This is particularly true when *culture* is used in its traditional, anthropological sense, to describe specific historically-developed ethno-cultural communities (as compared, for example, to the ways in which it is also used to label specific aspects of a specific contemporary group practices and values – i.e. ‘popular culture’).

As this totem-pole vignette suggests, *culture* is not just a matter of quaint food, dance and other “strange” practices. Rather, *culture* is the totality of the ways of life of any group of people. It is the ways that people perceive, conceptualize and live in the world, the ways in which they understand and think about the world, the sum total of their beliefs, their values, their ideas, their spirituality, and all of the things they do - individually and collectively. While both the Canadian visitor and the Aboriginal guide *saw* the same image at the top of the totem pole, they had diametrically opposing views about what it was, what it represented, and why it was there. This is understandable considering that these two opposing perceptions were based on very different sets of values, social and political locations, cultural understandings and lived experiences.

Canadian society will be much stronger when everyone, including young people, has deepened their understanding of the culture of its founding Peoples. As a result of building this cross-cultural understanding, Canadians will be better prepared to understand the many other ethnic and racial groups or cultural communities which make up our country. In the words of a non-Aboriginal student who responded to our SAS survey,

*These teachings/stories are very significant in that it gives a person a “sense” of where Aboriginal Peoples have come from, fosters respect for their cultures, and encourages knowledge of these things for all young people today.* [Yukon college student - Canadian]

As the ‘Ksan Totem Pole story’s narrator relates, it is important to always remember the racial or ethnic positions from which we view the world, speak, and interpret things. This helps us to see things from more than one perspective, building our capacity to perceive and be informed by both our own respective ethno-racial locations and that of others. In so



doing, our collective learning, as well as the teaching in which we all engage as we learn, will be enriched, more comprehensive and especially satisfying.

Many Aboriginal people look to the day when Canada acknowledges all its founding Peoples. This must, of course, include the fifty or more different cultural and linguistic groups of Indigenous Peoples who have been on this land since “time immemorial (Dickason, 1992:64).” Further, Canadians must begin to develop an understanding of Aboriginal Peoples’ worldviews and spiritualities, and the political, social, cultural and educational issues this report begins to address.

### Whose Interest Does “Multiculturalism” Serve?

Canada as a nation can be strengthened by a polity of shared, broad understandings about the deep meanings of the concept of *culture* - including a shared understanding about the importance of the culturally different ways in which people come to perceive, learn about, know, and understand their worlds. Viewing *culture* as a perspective that all Peoples possess and live by means discarding the concept of one, subsuming “Canadian” *culture* and rejecting the bland notion of “multiculturalism.”

Repressive legislation such as *The Indian Act* is supported by individual, institutional and systemic racism. Aboriginal Peoples are socially, culturally, economically and geographically tethered into marginalized places in their own lands (at best) or made invisible (most frequently). The invisibilization and marginalization of Indigenous Peoples has been enforced by a pervasive educational pedagogy (the *pedagogy of oppression*), which is historically designed to achieve social goals of forced assimilation and cultural eradication. This harsh experience of Aboriginal Peoples’ reality bears no resemblance to the Canadian program of “multiculturalism”.

Knowledge and understanding of the historical and contemporary concerns and cultures of Aboriginal Peoples will immediately begin reversing the damage of the past several hundred years of cultural invasion, repression and other failed strategies for elimination of the so-called “Indian Problem.”<sup>1</sup> This new understanding of Aboriginal cultures and histories will



build on, and at the same time critique, the Canadian government's attempt over the past decades to promote cross-cultural understanding through a policy of "multiculturalism." It will strengthen Aboriginal and Canadian cultures, promoting healing and movement towards a consensus on a new, restructured relationship between First Peoples and Canada (RCAP, 1996:Vols.1-5).

When we think of the education of students in Canadian classrooms, it is clear why Aboriginal students would find irrelevant program initiatives purportedly designed to accommodate and integrate them into the mainstream educational system. Clearly, these students' experiences of the many ways in which they have already been socially, culturally, economically and politically marginalized would only be reinforced by framing *Canadian culture* within this "multiculturalism" paradigm (however well-intentioned).

Canada's origins lie in the First Peoples' relationship to the land, their spirituality, beliefs, values and other life systems. Canadian school curricula and teachers must offer knowledge and understanding of the traditions of the First Peoples of this land, Aboriginal Peoples, and their relationship to this land. This learning will provide a more fertile social environment for addressing the many issues between Aboriginal Peoples and the settler and newcomer ethno-racial cultural populations who have made Canada their home.

## **Developing a Society Responsive to Diversity Through an Antiracist Curriculum**

Canada as a nation can benefit in yet another way from an enhanced exploration of Aboriginal cultures in the curricula of its schools. Inclusion of this content across school curriculum will permit a pedagogical investigation of another set of important social issues that require enhancing: the awareness of all Canadians about Canada's complex *culture*. This would widen the understandings of young Canadians about the importance of viewing and treating all cultures in a sensitive and equitable manner. Across Canada, the terms "race" and "ethnicity" are found in common discourse, and used in a number of ways. Depending upon context, these are sometimes benign usages. However, for many people, these two terms also act as a code for an array of strongly held beliefs about social difference. All too



often, these terms are grossly misunderstood and misused, particularly during highly emotional discussions and debates about perceived social “problems” in our communities. Even well intentioned people find themselves caught up within these highly discriminatory and anti-social meanings because they have not had the opportunity to explore their complex meanings.

Creative opportunities can be provided, especially through discussions about specific cultural groups, so that young people come to understand the ways in which these concepts/terms can, and should, be used. This can occur without reference to the unsupportable and discriminatory meanings that have unfortunately permeated the common lexicon.

For example, in the context of encouraging cross-cultural understandings among all Canadians, school curricula should explore the ways in which the concept of “race” has often been used (and continues to be used) to attribute negative social characteristics to entire racial groups. Canadian textbooks no longer blatantly describe entire cultural groups as being “shifty” or “dark” or “secretive.” However, unfortunate and erroneous generalizations like these continue to be voiced in the common vocabulary. Look at these two comments from respondents to the CAAS’ Student Awareness Survey. The first comes from a Social Services student who identified as Canadian and said s/he had learned nothing about Aboriginal Peoples “until college”:

*Alcoholism is a problem in the aboriginals [sic]. They get addicted to it and it then destroys them. [I work with them, and to resolve it, I would] educate them more and help them understand that it is in their genes. They can't handle the alcohol without getting addicted. [Ontario college student - Canadian]*

The second comment is from a Canadian university student who is also burdened with bias,

*...[An issue for Aboriginal Peoples is] land taken away from them. [I would resolve it by] 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 university student - Canadian]*



On a wider scale, recent world events have done little to improve this situation. As we have seen, much of the response of the media and of government officials themselves – in particular, religious and racial profiling and stereotyping – serves only to maintain discriminatory values and beliefs which have been pervasive for much too long in Canadian society.

The racialization of individuals and groups, that is, the identification of individuals and groups by race and ascribing particular negative qualities to them, is part of the practice and structure of racism and colonialism - the subjugation of one cultural group by another (as illustrated in the quotes from students, above). Racism is not simply individuals' attitudes, but a structural reality. By this we mean the ways in which established structures operate to limit the participation, opportunities and possibilities of certain groups of people in our society. A social stratification system, which regulates the access some groups have to power, privileges and resources in our society works to maintain a system of inequality through which colonization, racism, classism, ethnocentrism, sexism and xenophobia operate.

An enhanced discussion of Aboriginal history and culture in schools across our nation would do much to alter negative impressions and opinions about concepts like “race” and “ethnicity.” Canada would certainly benefit by having its young people be truly knowledgeable about the deep meanings of race, ethnicity, culture and cultural groups as one non-Aboriginal college student responded perceptively to our national survey:

*I think they have contributed by surviving the assimilation attempts, genocide of culture, etc, demonstrating their innate strengths and spiritual connections regarding family, environment and growth.* [Yukon college student - Canadian]

## **Building Respect for Difference, Diversity and Common Ground**

Canada will benefit directly from enhanced understandings about concepts such as culture, race and ethnicity. From this new understanding, young people would gain an awareness of the nature and extent of diverse cultural groups across our country. Canada is a land of many groups who pride themselves on their cultures. The extent of these cultures must be



understood and respected. Most important in this new curriculum is the development of an understanding that different cultures represent important differences in worldviews, i.e. how different Peoples perceive, think, believe and understand the world around them. While there may be an argument to be made about the importance of “unity” in regards to some aspects of a nation’s existence, as anti-bias educators we definitively argue for the importance of supporting cultural *difference* or *diversity* among Peoples. As respect is manifest for a diversity of beliefs and ideas, Canada will be progressing towards our goal of a democratic, pluralistic society.

An encouraging number of the SAS respondents see the benefits of inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in Canadian curriculum as a way of providing more space for Indigenous worldview in Canadian culture. When speaking of the contributions that Aboriginal Peoples have made to Canadian culture, two students from opposite ends of Canada answered as follows:

*...[Aboriginal Peoples] provide diversity, different perspective on society.... Religious practices display love of mother nature and other human beings (should enlighten the rest of us). [Atlantic university student - Canadian]*

*European dominance has not allowed a lot of influence or contributions but hopefully in the very near future these influences will emerge to provide sustainability in future development. [British Columbia university student - Canadian]*

We have much to learn from Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island; knowledge that can teach us all about respecting our part and place within this land, shouldering our responsibilities towards others and towards the natural world, honouring and respecting our children by taking care of their world. The first step in this direction is obviously to help Canadians understand the histories, perspectives and worldviews of the Aboriginal Peoples of Turtle Island.

## **Towards the Honest Practice of a Canadian Human Rights Culture**

In summary, we return to a basic issue of importance to all Peoples across this land – the



right to respectful and equitable treatment in their homes, in their neighbourhoods, in their schools, in the media, and in every institution (public or private) which intersects with their lives. Again, one of the SAS respondents, a Canadian university student from southern British Columbia, sheds some light on how inadequately the schools have addressed these matters. The student's reflection exposes the embarrassment that coming generations of Canadian leaders feel about these complex, unresolved issues:

*Aside from reading Copper Sunrise, I don't recall much Aboriginal culture or history lessons... Most of my understanding comes from the radio and listening to peers and others...The negative way in which Canada has traditionally dealt with the Natives/Aboriginals has contributed to a fractious outlook on solving issues. I think it takes Canada down a notch or two in terms of being an internationally recognized just society. [British Columbia university student - Canadian].*

As innumerable official reports continue to note, Canada is not yet, in reality, a just society. We have still some considerable distance to travel in this journey. Clearly, this journey is crucial, not only for those who already live in Canada but also for those who hope to make our country their new home.

There are many ways in which this journey – a journey described in this report as learning about *Walking in Beauty* towards tolerance, respect and justice. This journey can, and must, be accelerated. A vital, essential step is to ensure that Canada's Original Peoples are portrayed in classrooms across Canada. This enhanced understanding of Aboriginal histories and cultures must include an understanding of the ways in which Aboriginal Peoples have been treated in the past by the dominant settler cultures, and how the Peoples continue to be negatively affected by these unequal relations. Through this pedagogy, young Canadians will come to see the importance of diverse cultures existing, side by side, in our nation. Only in this way, will Canadians of all ages come to see the importance of treating every person equitably, regardless of background and culture.

## **Acknowledging Aboriginal History**

CAAS is committed to developing new strategies for the integration of content concerning



Aboriginal Peoples into the general curriculum for all grades from kindergarten to grade twelve. Analysis of the data from the Student Awareness Study (SAS) research, presented in *The South*, demonstrates that recent Canadian high school graduates are not well informed about some of the most basic facts regarding the cultures and histories of the Aboriginal Peoples of this land. Most university students, for example, are familiar with Greek and Roman mythology as well as the epic Homeric and Norse sagas. Settler and newcomer Canadians have much to learn from Indigenous stories and knowledge across Turtle Island.

*If it is worth our while to be aware of the myths [sic]<sup>2</sup> of the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and northern Europeans, it is just as important for us to be aware of the myths [sic] of the land in which we live. It might be said that until we know the ancient collective dreams of what we like to call ‘our land’ and ‘our nation,’ we cannot know ourselves or be in any full sense a part of the land.*

(Leeming and Page, 1998:ix-x).

Over the past several years, there has been steady progress in the promotion of First Nations’ culture and history throughout the country. There has been some positive movement among provincial and territorial education authorities towards developing curricula that incorporate Aboriginal Peoples’ cultures, histories and language education.

Although these are encouraging developments, a great deal remains to be done in order to achieve a fuller integration of Indigenous content into the general curriculum for *all* students. With few exceptions, the current approach favoured by most departments of education is to present Indigenous content in separate units or in specially designed “Native Studies” programs and courses. Beyond any doubt, these are important additions to the curriculum. However, they are offered only at the secondary level and are primarily seen, by the education community, as being offered for the benefit of Aboriginal students.<sup>3</sup>

CAAS knows that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and their communities would benefit from improved general public awareness about Aboriginal histories and cultures. Aboriginal Peoples’ oral traditions provide a vast storehouse of evidence that not only includes stories and legends but also specific memories of historical events that have been



passed down from one generation to the next. In recent history, Aboriginal oral account has proven reliable and, in some cases, even more so than written accounts of events. A remarkable confirmation of this fact is found in the recent oral history of the North-West Rebellion in which the authors gathered oral evidence from the elders from many of the First Nations Peoples in that region. These collective accounts have seriously challenged the official records of the events and they have contributed to a revision of the history of the entire episode in Canadian history (Stonechild and Waiser, 1997).

Recent Canadian jurisprudence also upholds the value and validity of traditional Indigenous oral histories. In the Supreme Court of Canada’s 1997 ruling on *Delgamuukw*, regarding Aboriginal title to the Gitxkan and Wet’suwet’en territories in north-central British Columbia,

*The 1997 decision stated that traditional lands are “owned” by the entire Aboriginal community using and occupying them. The court also **reaffirmed the value of oral evidence** in determining traditional patterns of land ownership (Kevin Reed, 1999:63, emphasis added).*

Many other examples can demonstrate the documentary value of oral tradition, and as these come to light they promise to expand our understanding of many key events over the last several centuries of Canadian history. Admittedly, stories and legends are but one source of historical evidence. An increasing number of Indigenous cultural centres and museums also actively promote education and research. Some of these include the Woodland Cultural Centre (near Brantford, Ontario), Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Num (in Manitou Rapids, Ontario), Wanuskewin (north of Saskatoon), Batoche (in Rosthern, Saskatchewan - although a national historic site and not Métis-run, it appropriately presents Métis perspectives), and the ‘Ksan Historical Village and Museum (in The Hazeltons, British Columbia).<sup>4</sup>

## **Lessons on *Walking in Beauty* from Aboriginal Histories**

The infusion of Aboriginal Peoples’ histories and experiences with living on this land into “Canadian” history and other curricula offers valuable learning opportunities for all students. Canadians have much to learn from examples of how Indigenous knowledges have enabled



Original cultures to dynamically and historically adapt to environmental change. An intimate relationship with and respect for nature is an integral part of Aboriginal Peoples' spirituality and worldviews. This commitment to "right relations" has enabled First Peoples to face the many challenges posed by their environment and other circumstances of life.

Over the course of the last ten thousand years, or more, climatic changes and other environmental challenges served as catalysts for large-scale cultural and technological transformations on Turtle Island. Due to the northern conditions of climate and soil, many Indigenous cultures in Canada innovated and adapted to continue to exist. For example, Inuit cultures demonstrate the strength of Indigenous knowledge as a path for living in harmony – *walking in beauty* – with all of creation. In a natural environment that is profoundly challenging for human beings, changes in climate over the millennia had a significant impact in what is now known as the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions of Canada.

In particular regions, climatic cooling had profound effects that were sometimes personal and local in nature. Indigenous cultural groups of this region were traditionally comprised of extended family units that lived relatively isolated and independent lives for much of the year. The onset of sudden climatic cooling retarded the growth of vegetation, which meant that animals, like the muskox that lived on vegetation, declined in numbers or disappeared altogether. This, in turn, resulted in starvation and apparently threatened the survival of some cultural groups (McGhee 1996). The existence today of Inuit cultures demonstrates their ultimate success in meeting these challenges.

As some cultures struggled to adapt to a colder climate, others were forced to cope with the challenges brought on by a warmer climate. The Dorset of the eastern arctic, for example, had adapted well to the colder arctic climate; they had developed a hunting economy that made use of prolonged winter conditions and the extensive sea ice. Unlike the Inuit, they did not make use of boats and open water gear. The sudden shift towards a warmer climate several hundred years ago favoured the Inuit cultures, who – in a relatively short span of time – replaced the Dorset culture (McGhee 1996). (Interestingly, dramatic change in climate



was one factor that made it impossible for the Norse Peoples to continue in nearby settlements they had established (McGovern, 2000).)

The forces of nature have shaped, and continue to shape, all human societies. Expanding the continuum of Canadian history, by inserting a broader awareness of this aspect of human connectedness, offers us a profound opportunity to develop a humbler understanding of the impact environmental changes will have in the future. It may even help us to develop a critical analysis of these kinds of events, preparing us for current and impending environmental challenges.

Human beings currently face many challenges in addressing environmental, in particular climatic, changes that threaten the viability of all life forms on earth. Now more than ever, we need to open our thinking to include Indigenous knowledges that offer a time-honoured key to “Walking in Beauty” with all of creation. For Canadian students, a number of valuable lessons can be learned from being exposed to this more expanded vision of history, in that it will:

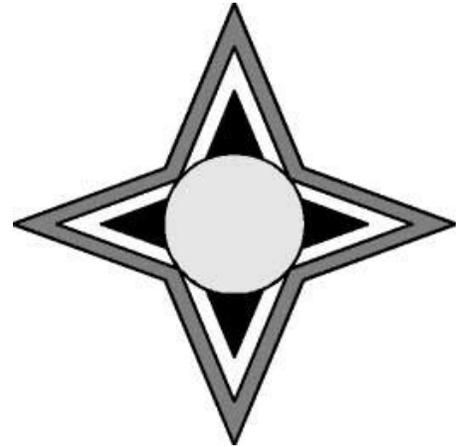
- reinforce the importance of the intimate relationship that exists between culture and the environment;
- emphasize the critical role that climate and the land have in determining cultural adaptation and technological innovation;
- above all, demonstrate how the experience of place and climate creates an inseparable bond linking Aboriginal Peoples’ cultures with *all* future generations of Canadians.

A more inclusive history of Canada will extend to all Peoples – Indigenous, established settlers, or newcomers – a sense of personal and collective connection. We have much to learn, as human beings, from All Our Relations on Turtle Island.



## Section 4.2: Building a Pedagogy of Respect and Honesty

Canada's schools should offer the best opportunity for broad public education on these matters. The classroom should also offer the opportunity for safe exploration of controversial matters. Teachers are already mandated to develop skills in cross-cultural understandings, critical analysis and problem-solving. Schools have stepped into the debates for respect and protection of the natural environment, as well as giving major support to various international human rights campaigns.



They have taken up the fights against racism and sexual abuse. They have played key roles in the campaigns against harmful lifestyle choices, such as cigarette smoking, drug use and unprotected sex. Students often work together with teachers on projects of ‘social welfare’, to help vulnerable persons in their communities or elsewhere. Arguably, some of these efforts have been more successful than others, in some locales more so than in others. However, schools *do* this kind of work.

Over the past few decades there has been a massive movement, within the halls and practice of pedagogical science, to address many social issues through public education’s curricula or messaging. We have seen the inclusion, in Canadian classrooms, of multicultural perspectives, environmental education, anti-bias learning, equity hiring programs and more. We know that this has been beneficial for students and Canadian society in general, despite the persistent concern that some of these initiatives may be fraught with contradictions. While there has been social gain from these new curricula, much of the gain arises from the profound efforts of a small group of dedicated educators. An even smaller, wonderful group



of educators have taken up the challenge to realize this kind of change regarding the presentation of Aboriginal Peoples in Canadian classrooms. But, progress is slow.

### On a Positive Note...

## Teaching and Learning About Walking in Beauty

In the Student Awareness Study Survey (SASS), a few students expressed their satisfaction with the learning they had done in school about Aboriginal Peoples' history, cultures and contemporary issues. In the responses, most commonly named positive experiences were with Aboriginal teachers, alternative programs within the education system, and other educational or recreational programs outside the regular classroom. Of particular note were: *Children of the Earth* alternative high school in Winnipeg, a live-in Long-House cultural immersion education opportunity with elders in Vancouver, and some on-Reserve First Nations teachers and schools.

Many students felt that the quality of learning opportunities was much better in university than in elementary and secondary school; a view frequently expressed by students from the University of Northern British Columbia, in particular.<sup>5</sup> Common to both Aboriginal and Canadian students is the sense that teaching of Aboriginal history and culture was most effective when provided in a cultural immersion and/or Aboriginal-led environment.

One of the most encouraging aspects of this survey was the fact that a number of students demonstrated a positive, caring approach to finding ways to resolve some of the crucial issues between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Peoples. Some could even identify really positive ways to begin to tackle current problems:

*An issue for me is that people in general view Aboriginals as “dirty”, drunk. Personally, I do not view Aboriginals in this manner because I have been brought up properly... I continue to work at this!* [Ontario/Canadian]



## WEST: Autumn – Time of Renewal and Rebuilding – Decolonization

*[A current issue is] Lack of knowledge and understanding of these people in our culture... [and one way to resolve this is by] providing information and cultural awareness as early as possible to promote understanding and acceptance. [Prairies Region/Italian-Canadian]*

*[A current issue is a] new high school for aboriginals to minimize culture shock in new society... [and a solution is] let kids adapt slowly and at a calm pace. [Ontario/Canadian]*

*I would say racism. Thunder Bay is horrible for it... People must open their eyes. [Ontario/Canadian]*

*[A current issue is] land treaties... [and it can be resolved] through educating the very young to the very old, one person/group at a time. [Quebec/Canadian]*

*Burnt Church issue... Specific classes dealing with Aboriginal traditions, lifestyles, history, etc. Even a section of history classes could cover it. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]*

*[Current issues are] 1) Prejudice 2) Suicide 3) Apathy... [and solutions are] Difficult. 1) Information to stop 2) Help programs 3) Job training. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]*

*[A current issue is] Davis Inlet in Labrador - substance abuse by youth. Many are currently being removed from the reserve for treatment... I don't know enough about this issue to even attempt to pretend I could resolve it. Many of the problems facing Aboriginal Peoples today are rooted in centuries of abuse and mistreatment by a White government that didn't understand them. [Atlantic Region/Canadian-American]*

*[A current issue is] Racism, there is a lot of it here. Not enough cultural practices. Not community services... [and the solution is to] Get our people on track. Build more opportunities for our people. [Ontario/Canadian-Aboriginal]*

*[A current issue is] Fairness in dealing with Native and non-Native fishing rights... [and the solution is] Communication, education and calmness. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]*



*[A current issue is] Educational funding, land rights, fishing rights... The aboriginals must be taken more seriously by government and in the media. The general public must get involved, not just the Aboriginals. [Atlantic Region/Canadian]*

*[A current issue is] Land Rights and Treaty issues - regaining traditional lands. Land was never given away in Treaty... [resolving this is] Difficult to do considering the years of injustice to Aboriginal People, the arrogance of White Superiority that still exists. [British Columbia & Yukon/Canadian]*

*[A current issue is] Probably the loss of their territory and their cultural practices... I don't know what kind of laws [could resolve this] but they must be free to practice their beliefs. [Quebec/Haitian-Canadian]*

*The Haida are involved in the repatriation of important sacred artifacts and ancestral remains. They recently went to Ottawa to reclaim hundreds of ancestral remains for reburial in August... I think these remains and these artifacts are rightfully the property of First Nations people. I think also that cooperation can occur, however, between anthropologists who want to study these things and the tribes they belong to as long as proper guidelines are followed where both sides are satisfied. [British Columbia & Yukon/Canadian]*

*[Current issues are] racism, restorative justice, native-run casinos... [and, for solutions] I'm not a politician. I have no effect. As a teacher I would teach tolerance and respect for all others, Aboriginal in Manitoba definitely included. [Prairies Region/Canadian]*

**(Answers to SAS Q's 19a and 19d: to identify a current issue & solution.)**

## **What are Educators Supposed to Learn from this Commentary?**

In a dialectical sense, the voices of the SASS respondents instruct us all that young adults across Canada are already beginning to learn about *Walking in Beauty*. The majority of SASS respondents express no tolerance for the *pedagogy of oppression*. Conscientious youth are generations beyond the BOC of schools, and they resourcefully seek answers to their questions elsewhere.



*If men [and women] are unable to perceive critically the themes of their time, and thus to intervene actively in reality, they are carried along in the wake of change. They see that the times are changing, but they are submerged in that change and so cannot discern its dramatic influence... This shock between a yesterday which is losing relevance but still seeking to survive, and a tomorrow which is gaining substance, characterizes the phase of transition as a time of announcement and a time of decision...*

*...While all transition involves change, not all change results in transition... The time of transition involves a rapid movement in search of new themes and new tasks. In such a phase, man [sic] needs more than ever to be integrated with his reality. If he lacks the capacity to perceive the “mystery” of the changes, he will be a mere pawn at their mercy. (Freire, 1973:9-10)*

Where does this leave the schools, and what does this mean for teachers? The education systems across Canada will have to change in order to maintain *any* credibility or relevance to “Canada’s most pressing human rights issue” (UNHRC, 1999). Canadian society and its school systems have a responsibility to deliver. On the other hand, **the type of racist commentary provided by a minority of respondents** to the SAS, such as the comments found in *The East* section (page 56 – “Oppression: Canadian Students Succumb to Racism”), **must be directly addressed.**

The BOC is the fundamental building block for all these attitudes. Yet, it is all that today's Canadian classroom educators have to hold onto when they stand in front of their students to deliver curricula related to Aboriginal Peoples – this is how teachers have themselves been educated. Change must happen immediately in faculties of education, teacher organizations, school boards and all other centres of pedagogy for educators. Change must happen, not only because these changes will create healthier and more just conditions in Canada, for First Nations and for Aboriginal Peoples and Canadians, but also because students are asking for this change.

On the question related to the purposes and impacts of residential schools, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal respondents demonstrate minimal variance in their comments. This shows



that, while it still persists in Canadian classrooms today, the powerful reign of the BOC is finished. It has failed. The *pedagogy of oppression*, the lies and obfuscation, the *mythicisim*, the many programs of *cultural invasion*, have failed. The awful truth is emerging and will no longer be suppressed.

The SASS responses show us that the “*the outrages were too many and too great* (Patterson, 1972:5)”, but that at this point they must be admitted by educators, leaders and decision-makers within Canadian government. Acknowledging the outrages of Canadian policy towards Aboriginal Peoples requires Canadians, especially those working as educators, to work at change. Indeed, an EFFORT is required - to learn, or teach, about the history, culture, perspectives and contemporary issues of Aboriginal Peoples because we have all been taught the BOC.

## Aboriginal Peoples are Still Here

Despite efforts made by colonizers over time, and which they continue to make, to obliterate the collective memories and the current presence of Aboriginal Peoples in what we now call Canada, Aboriginal Peoples are not disappearing.

The 1996 release of the final *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP) seemed to indicate, on the part of the Canadian government and people, an awareness of the presence and the concerns of Aboriginal Peoples in the country. In *The Globe and Mail's* November 23, 1996 cover story on the Minister of Indian Affairs response to the Report, the Minister says: “There has to be an understanding that they [aboriginal people] won’t disappear unless their issues are addressed.” Yet, the Minister and, by extension, the Canadian people, appear to remain caught in assimilationist ideology - either expecting Aboriginal Peoples to disappear or assuming that they already have. Although initial efforts to assimilate Aboriginal Peoples were made very much by design, more recent moves are driven as much by ignorance. Classrooms are one of the places where we can start to redress this ignorance.



What does some of this history show us? Libraries, archives and attics hold endless documentation, which clearly demonstrates the history of relations of injustice between Canada and First Nations. Increasingly, oral tradition based in Aboriginal worldview is gaining credibility. Within the Canadian justice system and elsewhere, this system of learning and teaching is beginning to be recognized as legitimate and sanctioned knowledge. Not only resisting efforts at assimilation, many Aboriginal Peoples are working proactively and relentlessly to regain their rightful place in, as well as full recognition of their continuing presence on, their traditional lands. For others to understand and consequently act justly in relation to this work, they need some familiarity with the knowledge guiding it.

Rebuilding our classrooms and the curriculum within them will allow all children to develop an awareness of colonization. With this awareness will come a fuller understanding that the European settlers and other newcomers and immigrants did not ever come to an empty land.<sup>6</sup> Canada's education systems have been unable or unwilling to give full acknowledgement to the many rightful places of Aboriginal Peoples in this country - currently and historically, indeed since time immemorial.

Decolonizing curricula in Canadian schools will change what is taught and the way it is taught. When considering the teaching of history in schools, one is faced with the question: How is it that so many are allowed **not** to know some things which seem so obvious and so central to others? Whose traditional lands are you on at this moment? How did you come to be here? What do you know of the past and present of the peoples who traditionally dwelt here? Whose interests are served when you cannot answer these questions? Here are some other voices from a Canadian university that demonstrate this permission **not** to know. These examples have arisen over the last five years, when a professor was giving some introductory lectures on Aboriginal education to students in their fifth year of a concurrent program in education which lead them to two degrees -- one in education and the other in arts, science or some other area. These students had spent at least seventeen years in Canadian educational institutions; they are some of the best-schooled young people in our county. Three non -Aboriginal students' commented:



*I have always seen myself as someone who tries to understand and learn about other cultures in order to better myself as a person living in a multicultural society. This lecture brought me down to earth in a sense that I realise that I do not know more than the bare essentials about Native culture.*



*Today was the only day in all my education classes that the topic of Native peoples was discussed. Unfortunately, it has been my experience that we have overlooked this issue and have instead focused solely on the broader issue of multiculturalism. Although multicultural issues are important topics in our schools, neglecting the issue of Native peoples or simply encompassing them into the realm of multiculturalism makes a very strong negative statement about Canada's First Nations.*



*This is the first I've ever heard about the residential schools, and as I am studying Anne Frank's diary in another course, I could not help thinking that residential schools have been as detrimental to Native people as the Holocaust was for Jews and others affected by the disaster... I will admit that because of my ignorance, my sympathy for the struggles of First Nations people was minimal. I have heard more about the Native people with alcohol related issues who receive free tuition to university than I have heard what has happened to them to make them so desperate. I have not heard as often that European settlers brought alcohol to the Native people and that tuition is not free. Schooling is financed using money that belongs to the First Nations people for centuries. This money is owed to them as one aspect of compensation for their land. (Haig-Brown, 1995)*

These young non-Aboriginal settler or newcomer students are not exceptional. They were part of a teacher education program that makes a sincere effort to address the diverse backgrounds of the students in Ontario schools and yet manages to ignore Aboriginal Peoples. And they are not the only generation of teachers to have been allowed such ignorance.

## **Admitting the Failure of Canada's Goal of Cultural Eradication**

A genuinely encouraging finding from the SAS is that most young people attending Canadian universities and colleges across the land know the truth about residential schools.



When asked to describe in their own words, “some of the impacts of the residential schools on Aboriginal people, their families and communities,” here are some representative comments from non-Aboriginal SAS respondents:

*Hurt all involved, tactics didn't work, made things worse. [Newfoundland university student]*

*There was abuse: sexual, physical, emotional, suffered by young kids; families were torn apart and people are still dealing with the effects today. [New Brunswick university student]*

*Families were destroyed, like any family would be that was torn apart. [Interior British Columbia college student #1]*

*Depriving them of their own religious beliefs. [Nova Scotia university student]*

*Suicide, depression, fear, hatred. [Northern Ontario college student]*

*Most of these Aboriginal People feel that their childhood has been stolen from them and their beliefs of their own culture. [Manitoba college student]*

*Destroyed family units, language, self-esteem and traditional customs, resulting in much alcoholism, abusers (self and of others), suicide, FAS/FAE. [Yukon college student]*

*Culturally decimated them, left very few with parenting skills, promoted abuse of children. [Interior British Columbia college student #2]*

In the face of this understanding, Canadian policy-makers and enforcers cannot revert to this kind of repressive program of cultural eradication, even when motivated by the grand and guiding principle of molding a unified Canadian state. Young Canadians - tomorrow's business, community and political leaders - understand the kind of damage wrought by these policies, and see that the end result is not only bad for Aboriginal Peoples, but also for Canadians.<sup>7</sup>



Almost from the moment the doors were opened, Indigenous Peoples, families and individuals made efforts to resist residential schools.<sup>8</sup> From refusing to send children to these schools, to attending government hearings in order to present grievances and concerns about them, the Peoples indicated that they saw education as a powerful and useful tool but that they did not see the necessity of abandoning their own ways in order to assume the power of the “white man’s” education. One might consider their attitude to be indicative of an assumption that biculturalism and multiculturalism were an advantage, not a detriment.

Serious questioning about the schools came to a head in the 1946-48 hearings in Ottawa for the purpose of revising *The Indian Act*. As discussed earlier, *The Indian Act* is a separate set of federal laws, which pertain to those defined by the government to be “Indians.” It has been referred to as Canada’s apartheid law, because of its many definitions and inequitable restrictions. The sources of conflict related to the *Act* including such provisions as old Section 12(1)b which, until 1985, determined that an Indian woman who married a white man became a non-Indian and a non-Indian woman who married an Indian man became an Indian entitled to all the rights and benefits as well as the restrictions of being an Indian in Canada. Changing that piece of legislation was the result of unceasing work on the part of Aboriginal women from across the country. As Patricia Monture-Angus writes:

*It is interesting to understand that the first formal (that is to say under the corporate laws of Canada) organizing of Aboriginal women occurred around the issue of state oppression and not around so-called women’s issues (violence against women and children, rape, custody, daycare, employment equity and so on). (1995:181).*

Among the many other issues discussed during the 1946-48 hearings, presentations were made regarding the residential schools, their shortcomings and the disappointments they had wrought. Although some also spoke favourably about them, the outcome of the discussions was the beginning of the end of the schools.

In amendments to *The Indian Act*, which resulted from these hearings and in new provincial agreements established with the federal government – but significantly without the direct



involvement of Aboriginal Peoples – it became possible for Indian children, upon the payment of a tuition fee, to attend public schools. In the context of the times, this seemed an improvement, but still Aboriginal languages of the students were not used as the languages of instruction, and in fact were not even honoured.

## **Demands Mount for Appropriate Aboriginal Education in Canadian Schools**

One might assume that once Aboriginal children gained access to the public schools, their aspirations for formal education in a respectful environment could be realized. Such was not the case.

The level of ignorance concerning the cultures and worldviews of Aboriginal Peoples, as well as their land, treaty and resource rights, offers obvious explanations for Aboriginal students' continuing lack of success. (The SAS demonstrates, as seen in the quantitative analysis in *South*, that this ignorance continues to permeate today's schools.) In 1967, in his *Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada*, Hawthorn and others documented the now infamous statistic that haunts those who work in Aboriginal education. Between kindergarten and graduation, Indian students had a 97% drop out rate from public schools.

It is noteworthy that the recommendations from the Hawthorn Report are quoted in their entirety in Verna Kirkness' 1992 report on First Nations' schools across Canada. She makes it clear that these recommendations are still applicable twenty-five years later and that very few of them have been satisfactorily addressed. During this period, educated settlers, newcomers and Aboriginal teachers continued their struggles inside schools to provide a satisfactory learning experience for Aboriginal students and a satisfactory education for all students about Aboriginal histories, Peoples and issues.

Dissatisfied with continuing marginalization, Aboriginal parents, educators, leaders and policy makers, decided it was the time to act. Partly in response to the Hawthorn report and more directly in response to the *White Paper* of the Trudeau government which sought a solution to what the bureaucrats had come to call the "Indian Problem," members of the



National Indian Brotherhood prepared a landmark document for presentations to the federal government. Written in 1972, *Indian Control of Indian Education* remains one of the clearest statements of direction for the future and dissatisfaction with the past that has been written. Calling for local control and parental responsibility, the authors of the policy pointed out that integration into the public schools was a one way street:

*...integration in the past twenty years has simply meant the closing down of Indian schools and transferring Indian students to schools away from their Reserves, often against the wishes of the Indian parents. The acceleration with which this program has developed has not taken into account the fact that neither Indian parents and children, nor the white community: parents, children and schools were prepared for integration, or able to cope with the many problems which were created....*

*In the past, it has been the Indian student who was asked to integrate: to give up his (sic) identity, to adopt new values and a new way of life. This restricted interpretation of integration must be radically altered if future education programs are to benefit Indian children (Indian Control of Education, 1972:25).*

Calling for teachers with cross cultural training and sensitivities, curriculum which reflects the reality of Aboriginal students, and schooling which honours the fundamental values and attitudes of First Nations, the document remains to this day a beacon of possibility for all children and a directive for all Canadians. It says:

*...it is essential that all Canadian children of every racial origin have the opportunity during their school days to learn about the history, customs and culture of this country's original inhabitants and first citizens. (Indian Control of Education, 1972:25)*

## **Reframing Pedagogy: Building New Relations**

In relation to the fractured circle, as depicted in the *East*, the above quote from *Indian Control of Indian Education* makes a contribution towards efforts at healing the rupture wrought by the experience of colonization. It contains strong statements on the need for education of teachers and students in order to establish good relations between Aboriginal Peoples, settlers and newcomers.



A new Circle for sharing understandings, such as the CAAS Learning Circle, will allow an honest and open examination of the legacy of colonization, a respectful consideration of the many First Nations Peoples and others who make up this country. CAAS invites all partners to participate in building a dialogue about the incorporation of aspects of Aboriginal worldview into the work of schools. In such dialogue lies the possibility of unmasking the post-contact breaks with traditional education and the Aboriginal worldview, which originally guided and can continue to guide all the inhabitants of this land. This dialogue can promote a reframing of school curriculum that addresses the losses and can rebuild what counts as serious and important knowledge.

Both *Indian Control of Indian Education* and the three volume comprehensive study of First Nations education across Canada, *Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future* (1988), developed by the Assembly of First Nations call for precisely these changes. While their focus is on schooling for First Nations students, their directives have implications for all children in classrooms across Canada. In order to engage in this work, teachers and others working with schools and children must be educated themselves both in historical facts and in ways of communicating difficult knowledge to children. It is also important that non-Aboriginal teachers accept their limitations, continue their own education, and find new ways to include Aboriginal Peoples and perspectives within their classrooms.

Things related to schools and curricula are slowly changing as a commitment to decolonizing and rebuilding gains credibility. In the fall of 2001, for example, in one community, officials of the Ministry of Education, the school district, local bands, and the tribal council signed a First Nations Partnership Agreement highlighting the following statement:

*Our school system is dedicated to creating a community of young people and adults who value First Nations language, culture, knowledge and peoples as an integral part of the education system.*

(Prince Rupert School District #52 First Nations Education Council, Oct. 29, 2001).



The statement is not meant to limit such valuing to First Nations' students. While this is only one example of a mainstream school district recognizing the need to respect Aboriginal People in their region (and the history of those People), some others are beginning to follow suit. When all schools can acknowledge the place of Aboriginal Peoples in history and in the current context of Canadian society, all Canadian children will have a better opportunity to grow into the fullness of Canadian history. While all the stories may not be nice ones, as educators, we must commit to knowing rather than hiding what has happened to form this country. As students come to understand the joy and strength, the resilience, the silencing and the pain of People/s whose cultures have been under attack for up to five centuries, they come to know themselves a little more.

Through respectful and careful efforts to tell truth in schools, healing becomes possible. Through deception, contrived half-truths and outright lies, the ruptures, which began with colonization can only continue. Patricia Monture-Angus, while cautioning that First Nations meanings are “are not the same as the ways known to the dominant society,” (31), uses respect and truth interchangeably. The Assembly of First Nations (1988), and the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996) argue for truth telling and the reparation that must accompany it.

The CAAS Learning Circle, and its accompanying learning expectations for high school graduates, shows the real possibilities that exist right now for participating in the process of decolonizing classrooms and rebuilding curriculum. This is a healing pedagogy that will be implemented as Canadian educators and social policy managers become willing to accept their responsibilities and the challenges involved in telling the truths, in good ways, about our relations to one another within this land.

Following centuries of devastation through disease, and community disruption, the population of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada is increasing both on and off reserves. A federal report from 1985 comments that “by 1991, it is estimated that one out of two new entrants to the Manitoba and Saskatchewan labour force will be of Native ancestry (Deputy Prime Minister, 1985:5).”



Increasing numbers of Aboriginal Peoples are living within cities across Canada. Urion (1992:3) reports, “half a million aboriginal people in Canada live away from reserves, 45% of them 19 years old or younger (MacDonald, 1991:3).” They are asking that the schools they attend teach about and treat Aboriginal Peoples and history with a respect that acknowledges the traditions of the lands on which the buildings stand. Reiterating the notions of local control and parental responsibility, which are central to the *Indian Control of Indian Education* document of 1972, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples reports:

*In the main, Aboriginal peoples want two things from education:*

*They want schools to help children, youth and adults learn the skills they need in order to participate fully in the economy.*

*They want schools to help children to develop as citizens of Aboriginal nations – with the knowledge of their languages and traditions as necessary for cultural continuity (RCAP, 1996:Vol 3,82).*

Achievement of these goals should be an aim for all educators in Canada. Aboriginal Peoples and their allies are leading the way in public schools and other educational institutions to address the needed changes which will acknowledge the place of Aboriginal Peoples in this country. Hiring more Aboriginal teachers and culturally-sensitive non-Aboriginal teachers, whose experiences and teacher education reflect the values outlined in the CAAS Learning Expectations (found in Appendix C, with relevant discussion in *South*), is central to the changes needed to create healthy schools.

While schools and other educational institutions with considerable Aboriginal control are being developed across the country, all schools are facing this need for change. There are lessons to be learned from cultural survival schools such as the Toronto District School Board’s First Nations School, Saskatoon’s Joe Duquette High School, and the Plains Indian Survival School in Calgary, which are addressing student needs and curricular foci not available in mainstream schools. As seen in *South*, educational programs such as these were evaluated positively by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal respondents fortunate enough to



attend them. Sol Sanderson, former president of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians, articulates the reasons that such schools have become important for First Nations students. His words hold a lesson for all schools:

*For some time we have recognized the critical importance of having our own educational institutions to counteract the influence of Canadian educational institutions on our young people, who are being alienated from their own communities and heritage. As Indian people we have been expected to change spiritually, culturally, and otherwise to conform to Canadian expectations (1984:156, emphasis added).*

We need to address the influences of Canadian educational institutions. What happens in our schools hurts young Aboriginal people, and purposely confuses them about their collective history. If we pay attention to whose land we are on, this forces us to recognize the Peoples who have been here since time immemorial. Peoples who were on this land in a time when the buffalo were plentiful, long before the horses which Hollywood stereotypes summon to mind, long before the coming of the European and other settler men and women.

The following words from Dr. Verna Kirkness provide a look at the direction in which schools and educators should be moving:

*It is the challenge to today's peoples to correct the situation created over three hundred years of attempted assimilation. To achieve this, the First Nations children of today must know their past, their true history, in order to understand the present and plan for the future. First Nations cultures must once again be respected and the traditional values must again be held in high esteem (1992:103).*

It is time that Canadian educators ensure that a *Pedagogy of Respect and Honesty* is the basis of all classroom education for all of Canada's children, current and future citizens. With educated and committed teachers, supportive communities and agreement to work together to redress the injustices of the past, the classrooms of the nation are the places where the goals become achievable.<sup>9</sup>



*In Volume 1 we turn our attention to Canadian history... We argue that consideration of this history will surely persuade the thoughtful reader that the false assumptions and abuses of power that have pervaded Canada's treatment of Aboriginal people are inconsistent with the morality of an enlightened nation (RCAP, 1996:Vol1,3).*

*First Nations education must go beyond the bounds of being only for First Nations. Our place in this land must be understood by all Canadians so that we might work together toward building a more harmonious world (Verna J. Kirkness, Cree Nation. 1992).*



*We will respect First Nations cultures and traditions, including the tradition of respecting the primacy of the culture and language of a First Nation within its traditional territory (Prince Rupert School District, 2001).*

Canadian schools suffer because educators and the general public in this country remain, for the most part, vastly ignorant of the history of relationships between Aboriginal Peoples and European settlers and other newcomers. North Americans of immigrant ancestry, whether they have come to this continent recently from points around the globe (newcomers), or are descended from foreigners who came here forty or more years ago (settlers), have been allowed to become citizens with little knowledge of an issue foundational to the new nations imposed upon the lands. Within Canada, for example, the very phrase “the founding nations” almost always bypasses First Nations to focus on England and France.

In this report/study, the CAAS demonstrates, analyzes and describes this historical lack of knowledge. We also set out proposals designed to augment the knowledge of all citizens especially educators because they have the power and skill to initiate this enormous, vital campaign of public education. This campaign has the potential to redress the narrow approaches we have used to frame an official history, within lands that are traditionally and currently occupied by Aboriginal Peoples. With this rekindled respect, it may become



possible for teachers, families, and communities to teach all our children better ways to relate to one another and from that position to create a stronger and wiser country.

An analysis of the history of education in this country will help us better understand each other, including the social and historic pedagogy that has contributed to our current relations. This overview points to the need for change in curriculum so that all educated citizens have the opportunity to develop a more complete understanding of Canada's history and current relation to lands and Aboriginal Peoples.



## Section 4.3: CAAS as a Decolonizer

CAAS is an active supporter in decolonizing curricula in Canada. Its grassroots network of Aboriginal and Canadian educators, activists, scholars, Elders and community leaders have two priorities in common:

- improving provincial curriculum to be more respectful and inclusive of Aboriginal Peoples, and;
- assisting classroom teachers, the vast majority of whom are non-Aboriginal, in their teaching about Aboriginal Peoples.



### Mandate and Activities

The mandate for these priorities comes from several sources:

- RCAP recommends a more informed relationship between Aboriginal Peoples and the people of Canada. Various sections of the RCAP report are quoted throughout this report. Its demand for action on presenting Aboriginal Peoples' histories, cultures, worldviews and issues is strong and clear.
- In 1994, with the encouragement of Rev. Dr. Stanley McKay, the All Native Circle of the United Church of Canada (UCC) motivated the UCC's General Council (its highest body) to support healing among individuals and in the wider community through advocating changes to the content of Canadian curriculum about Aboriginal

Peoples. The church's commitment to this was based on its 1986 apology to Aboriginal Peoples for its role in running Residential Schools. The decision rested on the recognition that Aboriginal curriculum in "mainstream schools in Canada is seriously lacking" and "not accurate" and that "the oppression of Aboriginal peoples since European contact must be recognized" (Comeau, 1995:Appendix 4).

- Over a five-year period, community discussions initiated by Aboriginal and antiracism educators connected with the Aboriginal Rights Coalition<sup>10</sup> (of which the United Church of Canada is a member) gradually developed into an informal national network. People and groups in this network felt the need to create an entity that could pursue this work in a more effective manner. A 1994 study conducted by Lisa Comeau for the Aboriginal Rights Coalition found that there is a need for a better educated Canadian population so that decisions regarding land, treaties and reconciliation could be negotiated in good faith, and that current Canadian curriculum was not designed to achieve this goal.
- Throughout the early and mid-1990's, a variety of related initiatives were led by the Assembly of First Nations, other Aboriginal organizations, the Canadian Teachers Federation and some of its affiliates, staff within departments and faculties of education across Canada, grassroots groupings of teachers (such as the Global Educators network), and other educators across Canada. Consensus began to develop that more Aboriginal content and better prepared teachers, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, are needed in Canadian classrooms. Consensus also developed that a primary step towards these goals must include providing opportunities for Aboriginal Peoples and Canadians, especially those involved in education, to meet and respectfully acknowledge one another.

In February 1999, CAAS was established during a two-day meeting held at Tsiniyukwaliho:tu, the Oneida Traditional Learning Centre. All the people who came together that weekend are still involved with CAAS, which now has a national network of more than 300 people who share our goals. In the fall of 1999, the founding members of CAAS began



an outreach campaign to recruit other individuals from across Canada. The goal was to include members from faculties of education, Aboriginal organizations, local communities and professional organizations to collaborate on these shared priorities. Most of the individuals who joined in this effort have been working on these issues for a decade or more. As a group, we are dedicated to building a respectful and “more humane” Canada, through the education of all children attending Canadian schools. The growth of CAAS has strengthened our commitment to a Canada where Aboriginal Peoples are treated with respect and dignity.

Our common and primary goal is to ensure that the future of Canada is built on a shared vision for this land. This requires an educated population, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Having expanded its Core Group, CAAS began a public information strategy to expand its network and share the information we had assembled. This was accomplished initially through the publishing of periodic newsletters and was followed by the creation of a website. These publications enabled CAAS to collect and share information with educators across Canada. CAAS members also began to attend and present at numerous conferences and meetings of like-minded and interested organizations. In this way, CAAS members collected and developed links and lists of classroom resources, developed a public education display with associated materials, supported the development of an online forum for respectful dialogue between Aboriginal Peoples and Newcomers (*Turning Point*), and met with various education partners and stakeholders in this field.

Our vision remains strong. More and more educators from across Canada talk and share with us their experiences and their resources. As our teacher and Elder Art Solomon wrote:

*It's been a long wait. We have waited patiently, and we still honour and respect people of all colours of skin.*

*There are many stories: there are many prophecies in the Indian Land that talk about the time when 'a people would come with hair the colour of fire' - red hair. The Norsemen came. – 'But they won't stay very long.'*



*‘And then there would be another people who come after them with white skin, and wings’ (sails)  
‘on their canoes’.*

*‘But they would come with two faces. One was the face of brotherhood. And one was the face of  
anger’.*

*We know what face they came with because we have lived with the longest holocaust of any people in  
the human family; the desecration of the earth and the people of the earth.*

*It’s been a long hard story. But we’re not complaining about the past.*

*We’re going to identify it. We’re going to take hold of the present and make the future what we want  
it to be, because we are the final teachers in this sacred land. And all we have to do is teach our  
sisters and brothers to live in harmony together as men and women...’ (Solomon, 1994: 139)*

## **Review of Provincial Curriculum**

The first question CAAS faced was: how does provincial and territorial curriculum include Aboriginal Peoples? CAAS initiated a review of these curricula over a period of one year. The focus was to determine the subjects and grades that addressed Aboriginal content and perspectives. This research was also part of the basis for the SAS, measuring understanding of Aboriginal Studies content with young Canadians who recently graduated from provincial and territorial schools. A bibliography of documents and websites reviewed is found in Appendix D. <sup>11</sup>

When the respondents to the SAS were in early elementary school (a decade or more ago), the learning expectations regarding Aboriginal Peoples were neither detailed nor specific in the mandatory curricula across Canada. This is just one of the many similarities, across the provinces and territories that became evident during our overview of Aboriginal Studies learning expectations and/or outcomes.



In the Primary grades, learning about Aboriginal Peoples is usually incorporated into, and often limited to, the study of early pioneers. This is a study of the Europeans who came and colonized the land. There is usually a brief introduction and overview, certainly no expectation concerning an in-depth study, of the “Native Peoples” who inhabited this land prior to the arrival of these settlers. The study of settlers deals primarily with the building of farms and farming communities, early travel and commerce. Aboriginal Peoples are mentioned in this curriculum in terms of those who occupied the land, but awareness of relationships between Aboriginal Peoples, between Aboriginal Peoples and their lands, and between Aboriginal Peoples and settlers, is noticeably absent.

None of the Primary mandatory curriculum deals with issues regarding the process by which Europeans acquired land from Aboriginal Peoples. In most jurisdictions, students do not ever study land ownership, treaties, re-location of Aboriginal Peoples or the acts of segregation and discrimination against the Original Peoples who owned this land. Content of this nature is certainly not a key component in any mandatory provincial curriculum at this level, when the learners are undertaking their initial exploration of the colonial period.

In the Junior Divisions, Aboriginal Peoples are included in the curriculum only in relation to the early explorers and their conquest of the land. Students learn the names, dates and significance of European explorers who came to this land to find a new route to the “Orient,” and established trading posts for beaver pelts, which was the new trade commodity. The expectations attached to this curriculum ask the students to identify these European men (hence the term used in some circles: His-story) who made inroads into this land. For example, students are expected to be able to identify the place names the explorers used to map the territory they “discovered.”

In general, the expectations specific to Aboriginal Peoples’ histories and cultures in this Division require the identification of groups of Aboriginal Peoples, including naming the land they inhabited.



Students are also asked to identify general characteristics of these Peoples, and to differentiate between the different *geographical* groups. Thus, Aboriginal Peoples are identified by their location throughout Canada: there are the “Woodland Indians,” “Plains/Prairie Indians,” “Northwest Coast Indians,” “Arctic Indians” and the “Atlantic Coast Indians.” This territorialization (or *geographicalization*) of “Indian People” leads to teachers constructing and teaching stereotypes associated with each of the original groupings of inhabitants of the land. **Aboriginal Peoples should be appropriately presented as Nations of Peoples**, each with their own rich and coherent culture, language, traditions, government and social structure. Instead, each “group” of Peoples (usually reflecting geography more than anything else) is identified by the type of home they had (e.g., tipi or igloo) and their lifestyle as a “hunter-gatherer,” a semi-agriculturalist society, or a coastal/fishing society.

The Original Stories of each Nation of Aboriginal Peoples are not included in these expectations, leading teachers to rely on the Bering Strait Theory of how Aboriginal Peoples came to live on Turtle Island.

At the Intermediate level, including grades seven, eight, nine and ten, the curriculum focus has been on Canadian History. This includes early government in Upper and Lower Canada, Confederation, Canada as a growing nation, Canada as it is involved in world events, and the repatriation of the Canadian Constitution. The curriculum focuses again on specific individuals who were involved in “historic” moments in this chronology, including dates and other details regarding their activities. It does not usually address the issues of relocations, Treaties and the subsequent breaking of those Treaties by the colonial or Canadian governments, and the policy goals and effects of *The Indian Act*.

The mandatory high school history courses address issues of the Canadian government, civics and rules of Parliament. However, laws pertaining to the Indigenous Peoples of this land -- which have been rife with government-imposed human rights violations restricting everything from spirituality to language to freedom of movement to choice of where to live to cultural identity and more -- are not generally included in this study.



“Famous” Aboriginal personalities are included as characters in the “His-story” of Canada. Canada's education system expects students to know about Tecumseh’s involvement in the War of 1812 and Louis Riel’s crucial role in the Rebellion of 1876 by the time they complete high school. In both cases, the huge, underlying issues of Aboriginal Treaty rights, negotiations, human rights abuses and land rights that motivated Tecumseh and Riel are not under scrutiny in the curriculum. 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.<sup>12</sup> A detailed discussion or expectation regarding the nature of the relationships between the Governments of Canada (at that time) and the Aboriginal Peoples is not an expectation. For the vast majority of students, this curriculum contributes to the fallacy that the “Indian Problem” disappears with the death of Louis Riel and the scattering of Big Bear and his Warriors.<sup>13</sup>

At the Senior level of high school, most jurisdictions have developed more in-depth courses on Native or Aboriginal Studies. In each jurisdiction, these courses are optional for students. While this study did not examine the extent of availability of these optional programmes, the results of the Student Awareness Survey indicate that Aboriginal Studies was not taken by the majority of Canadian students. The expectations in these courses was investigated, however, and it is determined that the optional courses at the senior level (grades 11, 12 and OAC/13 where applicable) would provide students with the opportunity for in-depth study of many vital issues. Finally, the fact that most high school students did not receive these courses indicates that their level of learning about Aboriginal Peoples has been limited.

## **Current Developments in Aboriginal Curriculum**

Over the past three years, two significant activities have been underway which may serve to increase the basic level of understanding about Aboriginal Peoples: the Mi’kmaw Studies project in the Atlantic Provinces and the Western Canada Protocol in the western provinces. These activities are to be commended, along with current references to the Canadian government's “Statement of Reconciliation (1997)” and the pardoning of Louis Riel.



However, these are minor improvements to a flawed curriculum and do not form a sufficient basis for common understanding of shared history.

In both the Atlantic Provinces (Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island) and through the Western Provinces (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and the North West Territories) ministries of education are working together to create new curriculum guidelines. Included in these curricula are expectations related to Aboriginal Peoples.

The Mi'kmaq Studies Grade 10 course in Nova Scotia (discussed in the *Teacher as Individual Learner* section in *North*) serves as a prototype for the other Atlantic Provinces. Although it is an optional course, through the dedicated effort of Mi'kmaw educators and community members as well as antiracism educators in that region (some associated with CAAS), the course continues to be offered and to attract Canadian as well as Aboriginal students.

In the western provinces, the Western Canada Protocol (WCP) is an agreement among the departments of education to collaborate in their development of new curriculum. One of the first documents produced through this protocol is an Aboriginal Languages guideline. This document serves as a guideline for teaching Aboriginal Languages across the provinces and territories, and is an indication that in the future there may be more Aboriginal content in other core subjects. However, at the recent history conference on *Giving the Future a Past*, it was reported that the implementation of Aboriginal content had not yet progressed much beyond the policy development stage.<sup>14</sup>

In Ontario, the newest curriculum does little to extend content regarding Aboriginal Peoples. At the grade six level, Aboriginal Peoples continue to be viewed as part of the exploration and colonization of Canada, not as partners, owners or Original Peoples of this land. As well, in intermediate History and Geography, the expectations do little to further student understanding of the issues regarding Aboriginal Peoples and the people of Canada.



Excellent *optional* Native Studies curriculum is available in Ontario as it is in several of the other provinces. The Ontario Ministry of Education developed this curriculum in 1998 through a community process that included some members of the CAAS network and even our Core Group.

In Ontario, this excellent new curriculum is not being implemented, certainly not in schools with small or hidden populations of Aboriginal students. For example, in the 2002-2003 course calendar for high schools in the south district of Toronto where many Aboriginal students live, only a few small alternative schools and one regular high school appeared to actually be offering the new excellent secondary level Aboriginal history and culture courses.<sup>15</sup> Aboriginal language was offered in at least one other location but that would likely be intended for, although obviously not restricted to, Aboriginal students. Once again, “mainstream” Canadian students who wish to become better informed have no *real* options in the education system.

Conversations with members of the CAAS network across the country indicate that the situation is much the same in other locales. CAAS’ lack of resources to do a full investigation of the status of new and emerging curriculum in Canadian schools has a severe impact on the degree of certainty with which we can present this conclusion.

## **Why is There Not a Greater Emphasis on Aboriginal Peoples in the Curriculum?**

What is the result of this lack of information and understanding? What is stopping provincial jurisdictions from including more of this content? Are there few or many teachers working to strengthen and increase their level of understanding and teaching about Aboriginal Peoples?

How will graduates from Canadian high schools today be able to make decisions on major issues facing Canada and Aboriginal Peoples? Treaties, Land Claims, Resource Sharing, Reconciliation and Self-Government are major concerns that affect all Canadians and their relationships to Aboriginal Peoples across Canada.



It could be argued that the Federal and Provincial governments do not want their constituents to gain this information and understanding. When we looked at the curricula, we saw that it is based on Eurocentric ideals and values, and there is very little room for alternative worldviews. The ideal of two founding nations, the French and the English, does little to acknowledge the **Fact of Aboriginal Peoples** -- that Aboriginal Peoples have always been here, that Aboriginal Peoples have Language, Culture, Spirituality and Values, different from, but not lesser than, that of any other People.

When one does not know enough about a subject or issue, the result is that one relies on stereotypes and misinformation. One cannot make informed decisions without information.

How does one name the current situation? Is it a gap? Or is it exclusive? Elitist? Supremacist? Dominant? Racist? These are harsh words, but they can be used legitimately to describe the lack of acknowledgement of Aboriginal Peoples in the curriculum. They describe the exclusion of the ideas, values, understandings and knowledge that Aboriginal Peoples contributed during the foundational era of this young nation: Canada. This is the situation, and the possibility of it changing in the future is not great.

Without awaking to the Spirit of Aboriginal Peoples, how can the Canadian population make informed decisions, direct their government, and establish new relationships with Aboriginal Peoples, the land and all the two-legged, four-legged and other creatures across Canada? How can the healing begin without accurate, culturally valid information?

Looking at “Canada,” we see a growing nation that perceives itself as “multicultural”. CAAS has earlier presented a serious deconstruction of this concept and its profound limitations regarding Aboriginal Peoples. Canadian culture and curriculum are not inclusive of Aboriginal worldviews, values and interests, nor those of the many of the newcomers who have come to Canada from the Four Directions of the earth. All of us who are not of European descent are only an incidental part of the curriculum. CAAS waits and listens to hear all these voices incorporated into Canadian curricula in a respectful manner



The CAAS Learning Circle and PLEx set out the program of study that we believe is appropriate for all students attending Canadian schools. These expectations should be delivered across the curriculum, and in all grades. These are, by and large, the expectations attached to the new optional Native Studies secondary school courses, which have been developed by several departments across the country but are not being adequately implemented. In this sense, the curriculum development work has already been done. Because this learning will be more effective if it begins in the earliest grades, some scaling and delineation of what is appropriate at which level remains to be established, but the basis is there.

Governments, as a demonstration of their willingness to develop quality programming dealing with Aboriginal Peoples, celebrate their new Native Studies curriculum documents. Yet the number of times these courses are actually being offered to non-Aboriginal students is an indication of the two-faced nature of the dominant education system. If there were a genuine interest in teaching about Aboriginal Peoples, the curriculum would be more extensive, more inclusive and more honest about the history and reality facing Aboriginal Peoples today. Are provincial jurisdictions against including more information and understanding about Aboriginal Peoples? No government would say they are against such a thing, but their actions seem to indicate otherwise.

## **Time for Action**

There are some teachers who have worked very hard to come to new understandings about Aboriginal Peoples, and to include these understandings in their teaching. As stated above, further study is required to determine the level of occurrence among all teachers, and how to initiate such changes. CAAS has looked at provincial curriculum to determine what students should have learned while in school. From CAAS' analysis of the mandatory provincial curriculum, we determined that it still does not make an adequate effort to include the realities, contributions and real issues of Aboriginal Peoples. While there have been initiatives to expand and co-operate in the development of new curriculum documents, there is still much needed improvement.



Our review of mandatory curriculum points to the fact that Aboriginal content and perspectives are not a high priority in provincial schools, and as a result graduating students will have little or no regard for the Aboriginal Peoples of this land. This lack of education is in spite of the fact that current events, improved curriculum policies and new optional curriculum materials all point towards bias in the system, which we have called a *pedagogy of oppression*. A new, improved *Pedagogy of Respect and Honesty* is required.

This deficiency means that Canadian citizenry will continue to be misinformed, or poorly informed, and unable to comprehend or make decisions regarding the issues and future relationships between Aboriginal Peoples and Canada. If the new graduates, who will be our future leaders in this country, are not well informed, how and where will they gain the information and understanding to make these tough decisions?

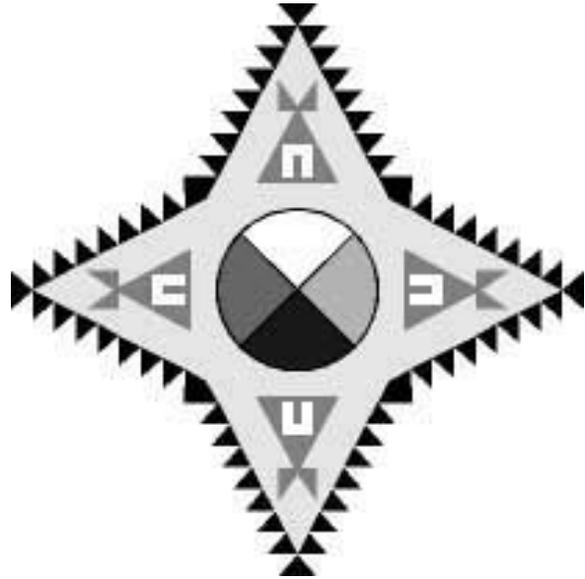
The CAAS Core Working Group decided to conduct a survey of student awareness on the content identified in our PLEx to help us understand what students are actually learning, retaining and understanding from the curriculum emanating from existing education policy, which were designed for them. The SAS was designed to reflect the learning outcomes and specific expectations that were in place at the time of their education, as well as the proposed learning expectations, which accompany the CAAS Learning Circle.

Even though many Indigenous activists and leaders say, “we have been studied to death;” these are the obvious reasons why Aboriginal and Canadian members of the CAAS decided to undertake the SAS and to “put our minds together” to write this report. We hope you find our research worthy and useful.



## Section 4.4: Future Directions and Proposals

*Our people have always understood that we must be able to continue to live our lives in accordance with our culture and spirituality. Our elders have taught us that this spirit and intent of our treaty relationship must last as long as the rivers flow and the sun shines. We must wait however long it takes for non-Aboriginal people to understand and respect our way of life. This will be the respect that the treaty relationship between us calls for. - Josephine Sandy, Ojibwa Tribal Family Services, Kenora, Ontario, 28 October 1992 (cited in RCAP, vol.2, 36)*



On the following pages, we make proposals about “Next Steps” towards helping all our Peoples to begin *Walking in Beauty*.

### **Build Working Partnerships with Government & Institutions**

Current governmental policy points towards some willingness to carefully and cautiously partner with the kinds of approaches we advocate. Here, we call for collaboration and support from the federal government, and from provincial and territorial authorities, as well as national organizations and institutions with mandates for this area of work.

To change the *pedagogy of oppression* into a *Pedagogy of Respect and Honesty*, there is an acute need for resources, and this is one meaningful way that the federal government can collaborate with the efforts itemized here.



Since “education” is not a federal responsibility under the Canadian constitutional division of powers, why is Ottawa so important? We call on the federal government to support our work because Ottawa has responsibility for “Indians and lands reserved for Indians” (arising from the *Proclamation of 1763*) under the Canadian constitution. Further, it is the federal government that is expected to live up to international human rights covenants, which are based on the international recognition of the principle of inherent Indigenous Rights. As well, Treaties, in this case between the First Nations and Canada, are governed by international law (Pohl, 2000).

While the provision of education services is clearly a provincial or territorial responsibility, policy directives and resources required to establish a *Pedagogy of Respect and Honesty* regarding Aboriginal Peoples must come from Ottawa. This reasoning connects to Osborne's comments (cited in the *East*) about the historic importance of schools and curricula as tools for creating social cohesion around public policy issues.

The new federal policy regarding relationships between Canadians and Aboriginal Peoples is characterized by the *Gathering Strength* document, Ottawa's response to the 1996 recommendations from Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP). Recommendations from the RCAP and the federal response in *Gathering Strength - Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* assert that action is needed, even if a clear commitment to action cannot yet be discerned.

*In developing its Aboriginal Action Plan, the Government of Canada sincerely hopes and believes that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can develop a common vision for the future. This vision must include the means for Aboriginal people to participate fully in the economic, political, cultural and social life of Canada in a manner which preserves and enhances the collective identities of their communities, and allows them to build for a better future. This can and will be achieved as all parties accept, in a spirit of mutual respect and mutual responsibility, the challenge of strengthening the partnership between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians (1997).*

Ottawa is called on to demonstrate, through concrete action, that federal policy will embrace the task of developing a new relationship between Canadians and First Peoples of this land – a relationship that must be honestly restructured to rest on the principles of mutual respect and reciprocity.

Φ **The federal Department of Canadian Heritage and the education and public education branches of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs are called on for support**, in particular regarding to this report's recommendations re: promotion of RCAP materials, National Aboriginal Peoples Day, and the CAAS priority initiatives in public education, networking and professional development.

Φ The federal Department of Canadian Heritage is called on to work together with the Council of Ministers of Education, the CAAS and CRRF to explore ways that **"civics" curricula across Canada can be expanded to address social and cultural issues of contemporary concern to Aboriginal Peoples.**

Both these federal departments are already engaged in projects that support Aboriginal education within Aboriginal communities. This request for support is made in the spirit of the many RCAP recommendations that address the need to change attitudes and awareness amongst non-Aboriginal settler and newcomer Canadians.

Another very important partnership must be formed with the institutions that train and govern the professional practice of classroom teachers.

Φ **Faculties of education and teachers' regulatory bodies across Canada are invited to support the move towards learning about *Walking in Beauty***, using Aboriginal pedagogical methodology including the framework developed by CAAS and presented in our Learning Circle and related learning expectations. These institutions will have the ongoing cooperation of CAAS and CRRF in working together to:



- Identify ways to **attract, support and successfully graduate many more teachers of Aboriginal heritage**.
- **Promote awareness among school boards, undergraduate students and other sectors of civil society** about the need for teachers who are committed to transformational learning through honouring the voices, the histories and the cultures of Aboriginal Peoples.
- Encourage faculties of education to **collaborate on a research study similar to the SAS among their teacher candidates**, in order to determine what is needed to improve pre-service programs.
- Encourage teacher colleges and faculties of education to **undertake research** with selected in-service educators to determine what they need in order to move forward with good pedagogy
- Grant **professional development credits** for ongoing educator training in Aboriginal Studies.

Support is emerging from a variety of locations for building a new pedagogical paradigm that promotes learning about *Walking in Beauty*. With a consolidation of effort, material and, perhaps most importantly, educator training, a groundswell of commitment may be developed that produces effective results on the integration of Aboriginal perspectives into the learning environment. As noted, the Canadian Race Relations Foundation has already taken a strong position, acknowledging the need for immediate and focused work in this direction. We are requesting that it take the lead in helping to consolidate this community-wide support:

- Φ CRRF is asked to work together with Aboriginal educators and organizations, the CAAS and other partners to **promote community consensus around the *Walking In Beauty* pedagogy**, as modeled by the CAAS Learning Circle and learning expectations. This effort would focus on developing and enhancing formal and informal networks with educational, community and political organizations (e.g. provincial and territorial teacher federations, trustees, “subject” or professional



councils, community equity-focused groups, etc.) to get them “on side” with these pedagogical changes.

The consolidation of “grassroots” support identified here is the only way to ensure that Canadian schools give full consideration to the need for Aboriginal-perspective and inclusive curriculum in all Canadian classrooms. Education policy- and decision-makers must hear these views articulated by parents, students and the community.

## **Supporting Aboriginal Educators & Scholars to Develop Resources**

The goal of the Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies is an integrated, inclusive curriculum that respectfully presents valid and honest Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge in all subject areas, in all grades, in all schools. This *Pedagogy of Respect and Honesty* must acknowledge and honour the histories, cultures, achievements and aspirations of Aboriginal Peoples, while humbly examining the relationship of Canada and Canadians to Aboriginal Peoples. To make this happen, accurate Aboriginal-perspective material must be available for and accessible to educators.

Such resources must be generated by Aboriginal Peoples, to ensure the validity of the resources in covering the range of issues with respect to the histories, cultures, perspectives, and achievements of distinct groups of First Peoples. Many excellent resources have already been developed by Aboriginal educators, often initially for use within their own communities. An impressive amount of optional “Aboriginal Studies” ministry-approved curricula can also be found across the country, much of which was developed by Aboriginal educators. All of these resources could be suitable for use in Canadian classrooms, although some may need adaptation for use at varying grade levels and with diverse school populations. Some of these curricula and resources are noted in Appendix D, and many more can be found at the CAAS website: [www.edu.yorku.ca/caas](http://www.edu.yorku.ca/caas).

Again, a crucial first step is ensuring that educators, both in the schools and in the faculties of education, have access to these materials. Equally important is the adaptation of existing



materials, which may be designed for specific grade-levels or student populations, but which contain information appropriate for various other uses.

- Φ CRRF and CAAS should develop a strategic plan to support the work of **Aboriginal Educators, Elders and traditional Teachers**, including:
- A system for **promoting and distributing existing resources** developed by Aboriginal educators;
  - A system for **promoting ease-of-access for classroom educators seeking Aboriginal resource persons** for class visits: i.e. authors, story-tellers, performance artists, Elders, traditional Teachers, etc.;
  - A clearly directed, well promoted and easily accessed **pocket of funding must be available to bring Aboriginal resource persons into the classroom**;
  - Identifying resources for development of **sample analyses of existing curricula in Civics, Social Studies, History, and English** to assist educators in finding “ways in” to integrate Aboriginal perspectives;
  - Identifying **resources for development of sample curriculum units** to share and respond to, which would encourage educators to use the excellent material available.

## **Helping Teachers Get Started with a Respectful Curriculum**

While access to information is a necessary place from which to start, it is not sufficient. Accurate and authentic curriculum materials from an Aboriginal perspective cannot be used effectively in the classroom without the development of what the CRRF refers to as “cultural competency (CRRF NGO Forum Position Paper for WCAR, 17).”

“Cultural competency” implies the development of an anti-racist perspective on the part of the teacher. This approach challenges historical and systemic assumptions about, for example, interpretations of history; judgments about culture and material values; diversity in family and social structures; the impacts of colonialism and its manifestations, the validity of “voice,” the implications of power inequity, and so on.



An anti-racist approach identifies and can challenge stereotyping and bias within conventional and current curriculum materials and resources, as well as discriminatory behaviour in the use of these materials. The classroom teacher must develop an awareness that, for most of the time, only part of the story is being told – and told from the perspective of the power elite. The teacher must have the ability to identify the spaces within “unfriendly” curriculum where Aboriginal perspectives and information can be accurately and respectfully inserted and allowed to permeate. It is essential then, that educators at all levels, including instructors in faculty of education programs for pre-service and in-service teachers, have or develop these sensibilities.

Teachers need support in developing new strategies for integrating Aboriginal content into all areas of the Canadian school curriculum. This involves changing both the content and the way we teach subjects such as Canadian history and social studies as well as natural sciences, mathematics, language arts, music, and so on.

Φ Using Aboriginal pedagogical methodologies (i.e. modeled by the CAAS Learning Circle and learning expectations), faculties of education, teacher federations and school boards can **provide essential training for both in-service and pre-service teachers**. They can:

- Facilitate development of sample **train-the-trainer workshop models** for use in Aboriginal perspective and cross-cultural awareness workshops and training programs for educators at all levels, including administrators, trustees, faculty of education instructors, teachers and parents. These would be developed and delivered by Aboriginal educators, to ensure they reflect community realities. This training component is one of the most important pieces of work to be done, and one of the most sensitive in terms of local needs.
- Facilitate development of sample **antiracism and equity training and workshop models** for use with educators, community members, students, and parents. These would reflect community realities and perhaps be more generic in format than the Aboriginal perspective training model.



To accomplish this professional development,

- Φ School Boards, Teacher Colleges and Certification Boards, and Provincial and Territorial Governments are called on to publicly indicate their **support for professional development opportunities**. As well, **faculty of education curricula must be revised** to promote movement towards an Aboriginal Studies *Pedagogy of Respect and Honesty*. This reoriented curriculum and classroom practice will be based on Aboriginal educational approaches, which would be infused into all curricula from the earliest grades to senior high school courses. New pedagogical tools, such as the CAAS Learning Circle and learning expectations, are required for this work, but the single most important element is political and practical **support from four areas of the education system: the classroom teacher, administrators, policy/decision-makers and resource allocation**. To facilitate this change of perception, attitude and sensibility, all partners in education must work together.

## Support to Exemplary Teachers

While only a minority of educators find ways to proactively improve their classroom, programs are still very much in the minority across Canada. The research CAAS has been doing on exemplary practices is encouraging for others who want to move in this direction. (For some illustrations of this effort, see Appendix F). In the *North* section, some preliminary conclusions are presented regarding research into the critical dynamics that will support teachers with these efforts, and the benefits flowing from these sorts of interventions. This work must continue.

Educators who are willing to seek out and apply new learning deserve strong support. Challenging the *status quo* (regarding existing assumptions about what is *appropriate* to teach in the classroom, or the all-too-common misrepresentation or omission of Aboriginal Peoples and histories) can be a very lonely experience for the classroom teacher. System and school administrators must publicly encourage and sustain these efforts and provide whatever system support is possible. It is not easy to find the time to locate quality resources or to attend in-service programs, especially if there is little validation of one's efforts. The



admirable antiracism and equity policies that exist throughout Canadian educational systems are ‘toothless’ without the active, public support that is needed to provide truly inclusive curriculum implementation.

Φ CRRF and CAAS may consider the establishment of **an awards program** that identifies, acknowledges and shares the accomplishments of classroom educators, especially those of Canadian settler and newcomer heritage, who have developed respectful and honest “Aboriginal Studies” pedagogical practices.

## Resources from RCAP

The SAS results demonstrate that more than five years after the publication of the RCAP final report, students do not know about it. RCAP is a priceless educational resource. The Commission determinedly and appropriately insisted on telling Aboriginal Peoples’ stories in all their complexities and within their own cultural frameworks, using their own voices.<sup>16</sup> Anyone who wants to learn almost anything about Aboriginal history can use this material, if they can get their hands on it. The entire report was posted online by the Institute of Indigenous Government at the University of British Columbia: <<http://www.indigenous.bc.ca/search.asp>>.<sup>17</sup> As well, it has spurred, and continues to provoke, a serious discussion and dialogue within Aboriginal communities and First Nations who are engaged in the work of decolonization and rebuilding. Thirdly, as Ottawa did act on some of its recommendations, and this has manifested in important support for Aboriginal language education and retention programs, the creation of National Aboriginal Peoples Day, and the Aboriginal Peoples’ Television Network (APTN). APTN daily puts Aboriginal leaders, stories, issues and concerns onto Canadian television screens.

Because of its cultural integrity and the accuracy of its content, RCAP represents one of the most important achievements to date in the campaign for recognition of Aboriginal Peoples’ human rights within Canada. CRRF, CAAS and other partners must make strategic and effective efforts to implement the recommendations made in RCAP. Teacher resources can begin a new *Pedagogy of Respect and Honesty* with information kits and proposed classroom activities that draw material from the RCAP report and its educator’s guide:



- Φ Appropriate agencies within the federal government are called on to **make the RCAP Report readily available to students and educators** for use within places of learning, as recommended by the Royal Commission. The RCAP report is the most comprehensive pedagogical resource available to teachers as well as secondary and post-secondary students engaged in research or independent study. **Print copies of the report and the CD-ROM version** (which contains a teaching guide, see below) are not available to the public. RCAP must be provided to and used effectively in schools across Canada.
- Φ In addition, the RCAP staff's excellent education and learning guide designed for secondary and post-secondary students, *For Seven Generations: An Information Legacy of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* should be made readily available. This has not been promoted or distributed. It **must be made available to all educators**, and CRRF and CAAS must take a leadership role in supporting the many Aboriginal educators who help develop and contribute to the learning guide, and to secure its release and widespread distribution.
- Φ For several years the RCAP report was available online and fully searchable at [www.indigenous.bc.ca](http://www.indigenous.bc.ca), but it has not been accessible for several months now. The Public Education Unit at INAC is called on to **take all necessary steps to ensure that RCAP goes back online immediately**.
- Φ *Gathering Strength*, and in particular its *Statement of Reconciliation* poster, **must be circulated** by the federal government to all senior elementary or middle schools, all secondary schools and all colleges and universities.

## Promoting National Aboriginal Peoples' Day

In Canadian classrooms, discussions towards understanding the “outrages” (Patterson, 1974), the awful truths, and the terrible impacts of contact between First Peoples and



newcomers, that continue to this day, can be opened up. On a more positive note, for example,

Φ National Aboriginal Peoples Day should be celebrated in every school in the country, in a manner that works for teachers and for any Aboriginal students in a given school. To raise the visibility of this learning within Canadian classrooms, CAAS and CRRF must work with partners and allies to find ways to promote National Aboriginal Peoples Day. Hopefully it can be expanded into a week and throughout the whole year. This will require working with Aboriginal groups and schools at the local level and with Aboriginal organizations, as well as federal departments such as INAC and Canadian Heritage at the national level, to **develop activities, projects, information and resources to assist in the recognition of National Aboriginal Peoples Day**. Although June 21st may not be a convenient time for a celebration in schools, acknowledgement activities could be done as a lead up to the day. In this way, the "Day" would become a longer, more appropriate period of time – e.g. perhaps in the form of an essay, art or other project that has several months lead time and results in a community display with an awards ceremony on June 21<sup>st</sup>.

## Next Steps for CAAS: Three Priorities

The SAS results show that few Canadian students feel that they have adequate knowledge about Aboriginal Peoples and related issues. They have told us that they were not taught enough, nor were they provided with appropriate, or accurate, or necessary, information. They feel deprived of information that, for the most part, they feel they need to know in order to be socially and politically aware citizens.

Students have told us, directly and indirectly, that the information that they get about contemporary Aboriginal Peoples and issues comes primarily from the media, which, unfortunately, “still perpetuates stereotypes which foster racism and discriminatory practices...” (Assembly of First Nations, cited in RCAP, 1996:Vol5,103). They know that media accounts are far from being adequate or honest, and they expect better. They want to



get this information through their public education. And students know that educators need help and training so they can better their classroom programs.

It is reasonable to conclude that few teachers would have a substantially different story to tell, through no fault of their own. The majority of educators across Canada have lived and learned in broadly homogeneous environments, particularly in terms of race and class. Most Canadian educators do not live near, socialize with, or work with Aboriginal persons, so they do not have significant personal or academic experience with them or their communities. They went through schools and universities where little or no attention was paid to Aboriginal perspectives, or even to basic information about historical and contemporary Aboriginal Peoples and their lives.

Few educators would be sufficiently well-informed to feel confident in approaching issues and information from an inclusive perspective. Many feel a degree of anxiety about the concept of “Aboriginal perspective” – they know at some level they must honour it, but don’t know what “it” is or how to find out about “it.” At this point, CAAS' priority is to promote better practices in Canadian classrooms through professional development supports, resources and programs for in-service teachers, and by improving the kind of cross-cultural and Aboriginal cultural knowledge and awareness training available to pre-service student teachers.

CAAS is already engaged in three priority areas: building public awareness about the need to change “Aboriginal Studies” curricula (of which this research and report is an important component), Sharing Circles, and the Unlearning-to-Learn anti-stereotyping exercises. These priority initiatives all relate directly to the needs of students and educators to prepare themselves to learn, teach and understand Aboriginal perspectives on history, worldview, culture and contemporary concerns.

Educators must not only be able to find the information and resources they require, but must also be supported to use appropriate materials positively, respectfully and honestly. Support to teaching staff does not simply mean making resources available to teachers.



- Φ **Tackling Stereotypes and Misinformation:** CAAS members are developing Unlearning-to-Learn participatory exercises. This is a flexible, deconstructive and decolonizing popular education module, designed to break down stereotypes and prepare educators and learners from age 10 upwards to begin a learning/teaching journey.

Teachers and decision-makers within education, who were themselves poorly educated about Aboriginal Peoples, must be supported and emboldened to embrace the new, authentic Aboriginal resource materials and turn them into living “learning moments” in Canadian classrooms. It can be done.

- Φ **Sharing Circles** is a resource and network-building concept under development by CAAS members, based on a model originally from Manitoba. These are community-based gatherings for sharing appropriate, relevant resources and building local networks for professional support. Teacher federations, ministries of education and civil society organizations can contribute by hosting volunteer-based Sharing Circles on a regular basis, and with resources to facilitate the sharing of curriculum and professional development materials.

Even prior to members of CAAS coming together as a grassroots network, some of us discussed how helpful it would be to convene a national conference of educators and related professionals. We could share teaching resources, professional development approaches, tactics for working with colleagues who have minimal interest in our pedagogical mission, and more. The Canadian Teachers’ Federation has planned a national symposium on Aboriginal education during the very week this report is being released. Other such gatherings have happened recently, and more are being planned. What CAAS envisions will complement these initiatives, because our intent is to reach out to the Canadian education community and invite you to participate in these Aboriginal-led, ongoing efforts.



Φ **A national “Educators’ Workshop Gathering”**: focussed on in-class teaching strategies, as well as on sharing of curriculum and professional development resources. At such a gathering, the analyses and data encapsulated in this report, along with other relevant material from across Canada, would be shared and celebrated among educators brought together by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF), York University, the Canadian Teachers’ Federation, other CAAS partners, Aboriginal organizations, and education stakeholders who seek to improve learning and teaching about Aboriginal Peoples in Canadian classrooms.

“Gatherings” can also take place using print, video and other media. By being made available on display tables in staff rooms and libraries, these kinds of resources are also effective forms of outreach for building public interest and awareness. They would contain information on resources, teaching strategies, announcements, photographs, and reports about exemplary practice.

Φ **A CAAS newsletter and other periodic and occasional publications** are needed, as are teacher resources in audio and video formats. These publications would encourage educators and scholars in faculties of education across Canada to undertake research and writing that addresses the particular and general issues of public education in relation to Aboriginal Peoples. Other prepared materials could include in-service teacher support materials for use within Boards of Education.

Another contemporary way for “gathering” to share resources and strategies is through the Internet. Over the two years of our existence, CAAS has developed a website that provides many resources and learning opportunities for educators. The funding to develop this website came from the Public Education Unit of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and the George Cedric Metcalf Foundation. As part of our online service to educators, we envisioned publicizing a hotline email question-and-answer service for educators to assist with queries on resources and teaching strategies. We also envisioned regularly updating the site. Achievement of these two goals has not been possible, because of lack of funding. Over the coming months, CAAS hopes that partners will emerge to support



the outreach and public education elements of CAAS' mandate. The allocation of resources and support to CAAS would enable us to:

- Φ Augment the CAAS **website and other online resources**, including maintaining a “clearing-house” of resource – a website with links to resources of many kinds and information about where and how to find them. The site might include:
  - annotated bibliographies of Aboriginal writing and biographies of writers;
  - history, social studies and civics information;
  - ways to contact Aboriginal and First Nations representatives who are willing to assist educators, or to come to schools;
  - Aboriginal and First Nations organizations across Canada that educators can approach for advice, information and assistance;
  - Guides to analyzing learning materials for bias and exclusion;
  - Articles, non-mainstream media analyses and information on contemporary issues and events respecting Aboriginal Peoples;
  - Suggestions for challenging racist behaviour and language; and
  - Information, which counteracts conclusions drawn from stereotyping.
  
- Φ Provide the proposed **online service for teachers**, where their questions about resources, contemporary issues, and teaching strategies could be answered in a timely, cost-effective and accessible manner.
  
- Φ Further develop, and maintain, a CAAS **e-list and professional online conferences** for real-time networking.

## **Building on Support from Students**

Although a minority of SAS respondents was already interested in being better informed, a considerable number of students were transformed by finding out, through the SAS process, how little they knew about Aboriginal Peoples.



Young Canadians are asking for curriculum based on a *Pedagogy of Respect and Honesty*. This shift in the “Aboriginal Studies” pedagogical paradigm requires the collaboration of pre-service teachers, classroom educators, and scholars in Canadian faculties of education, as well as Ministry, school board and teacher federation officials. All education partners must get involved because, as every educator knows, transformational learning occurs not simply through what is taught and learned, but how it is taught and learned.

The Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF) has also identified the importance of delivering transformative pedagogy to children in Canadian classrooms. In its presentation to the World Conference Against Racism's NGO Forum, CRRF observed that many children in Canada have the “misconstrued notion that Canada is a country to which First Nations peoples... have had - and still have - little to bring (CRRF NGO Forum Position Paper for the WCAR, p. 16).” Given the awareness of young people about the need for change, and the CRRF's commitment to this task,

Φ CRRF and CAAS must find creative and inspiring ways to **open a dialogue with Canada's elementary, secondary and post-secondary students**, to get their support for promoting the objectives of the CAAS in their own schools.

## **Young Canadians Will Lead Us Towards *Walking in Beauty***

CAAS members know that building a *Pedagogy of Respect and Honesty* about Aboriginal Peoples will help to restructure the flawed relationship between First Peoples and Canada, enabling us all to learn about *Walking in Beauty* together. Social change such as this requires many new and stronger partners to come on side with CAAS.

It is heartening to CAAS that the majority of young adults in Canada are giving a strong mandate to the education system, and to classroom educators in particular, to pay attention to this important and urgent task. The work ahead is clear, the task is great, and the potential rewards are enormous. CAAS invites you, the reader, to engage with us in these efforts.



**Opening the Bird Cages**

What I am doing I see as  
liberating the birds.

Opening the cage doors  
and letting them fly where they want.

To help the people to do  
what they need to do to assert themselves,  
to do the things of value to themselves.

I call it opening the bird cages.  
That's what I call it.

Once the cages are open,  
the birds can fly wherever they want.  
The sky's the absolute limit.

*Arthur Solomon, Ojibway Elder,  
from Eating Bitterness: A Vision Beyond the Prison Walls*



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Duncan Campbell Scott, a former Superintendent General for Indian Affairs in the early 1920s stated: “...Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian department, that is the whole object of this Bill.” Cited in Celia Haig-Brown, *Resistance and Renewal. Surviving the Indian Residential School* (Tillacum Library, Vancouver) 1993.

<sup>2</sup> The designation ‘[sic]’ is used here to denote CAAS’ editorial disagreement with the use of the word “myth” to describe stories of spiritual significance. In our view, this is disrespectful and chauvinistic terminology.

<sup>3</sup> All provinces now place a good deal of emphasis on developing Aboriginal and Francophone educational programs, but these programs are designed to meet the particular needs of First Nations, Métis and French speaking students; as such, they are not part of the general curriculum for all students. Saskatchewan is one of the few provinces that has confirmed, in principle, its commitment to integrate Indian and Métis content and perspectives within the K-12 curriculum. The Saskatchewan Curriculum Reform in Social Studies and History Guidelines state that “the inclusion of Indian and Métis perspectives benefits *all students* in a pluralistic society” (see: *Introduction to Saskatchewan Social Studies*, p.3, <http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/social20/intro.html#overview>). This principle of inclusion is echoed in the objectives of the common curriculum in the Western Canadian Protocol but, again, the main emphasis is on the development of distinct programs for Aboriginal and French education. Moreover, the outline for Aboriginal education adopts the traditional approach of treating Aboriginal history as entirely distinct from Canadian history (see: Item A, “*Aboriginal People in Background, a Foundation Document for the Development of the Common Curriculum*”, <http://www.albertalearning/document/index.html>).

<sup>4</sup> The reader learned about ‘Ksan at the beginning of this section.

<sup>5</sup> One would hope that education opportunities would continue to deepen and intensify in value the further one goes in one’s education. The negative side of this assumption is that not everyone stays on the education continuum to post-secondary education. The vast majority of Aboriginal students who attend Canadian classrooms have not and do not presently continue to the post-secondary level, as noted elsewhere in this report. As well, education around basic values and behaviours is the work of primary level educators, not university professors, for many valid pedagogical reasons.



<sup>6</sup> The argument an empty land could and should be claimed as a colony for European powers is known as the *Doctrine of Terra Nullius*. “*Terra Nullius*” rests on several Eurocentric assumptions, prime among them that if the two-leggeds (humans) occupying a land were deemed to be uncivilized then the land could be considered “empty”, and thus available for occupation and use by the “discoverers” sent by European Kings and Queens. The measure of civilization was the presence within the culture of King, God and Law. Perhaps the absence of buildings associated with the functions of governance, spirituality and social harmony, buildings such as castles, churches and jails, led the Europeans to believe that there this was an uncivilized land. Together with Darwin’s social theories about inferiority (discussed in *East*), *Terra Nullius* created the intellectual platform for Great Britain’s colonies and repressive policies in what is now known as the Americas.

<sup>7</sup> The SAS findings show they do not appear to have learned this in school.

<sup>8</sup> See for examples, Redford, 1979; Haig-Brown 1995:50-76.

<sup>9</sup> This section is an adaptation of an earlier publication, the introduction to *Making the Spirit Dance Within: Joe Duquette High School and an Aboriginal Community* written by Celia Haig-Brown, Kathy Hodgson-Smith, Robert Regnier and Jo-Ann Archibald, published by James Lorimer & Sons of Toronto.

<sup>10</sup> Now known as the Aboriginal Rights Committee of KAIROS.

<sup>11</sup> This overview is **not** a comprehensive comparative study. Its scope was constrained by the limited resources of CAAS, however we are confident in the validity of the thrust of the conclusions we present here. Fortunately, we were able to rely as well on related research and analysis developed by Lisa Comeau for the Aboriginal Rights Coalition in 1994. Finally, the reader should take note that the content has changed on the websites cited in Appendix D over the intervening 12 - 24 months since this research began.

<sup>12</sup> Although this is changing, since Riel has relatively recently been ‘rehabilitated’ by federal policy.

<sup>13</sup> A reference again to Duncan Campbell Scott – see footnote 1.

<sup>14</sup> Reported by a panel representing the WCP, Ontario and the Atlantic Provinces at the “Giving the Future a Past” Conference, October 2001 in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

<sup>15</sup> See MacSeáin, 2002, which presents findings of an Ontario-wide telephone survey of twenty provincial secondary schools conducted in October 2001, “Some of the sample schools in the telephone survey were selected for geographic variety, while others were chosen because they are located in, or neighbor, an area with a significant Aboriginal population. When asked in the survey whether or not Native Studies courses are



---

offered at their school, it was not uncommon for Student Services staff to reply, “No. We don’t have Native students in our school.” Here we encounter the knotty heart of the re-culturing problem. The prevalence of this sentiment – that Aboriginal Studies is still unnecessary for non-Aboriginal learners – only serves to illustrate the crucial need for education of Canadians about Aboriginal Peoples and issues in Canada. The telephone sample survey revealed that the new Ontario Curriculum Native Studies courses for Grades 9, 10 and 11 are being offered in some provincial secondary schools – and in some instances to great acclaim – but in all cases only where the school has significant Aboriginal student enrolment. Unfortunately, some schools in this sample with Aboriginal enrolment were found not to offer any Native Studies courses and no schools without Aboriginal students offered Native Studies courses.”

<sup>16</sup> It even demanded the right to pose problems for discussion and identify areas that need more consideration, rather than prescribe possibly simplistic solutions to problems that are centuries old. Of course, the volume of proposals and recommendations, their scope, and the fact that many were posed as questions rather than answers was seen as a weakness by Canadian officials and leaders – but that is another discussion.

<sup>17</sup> An inquiry has been sent to the email address for this website, and although one reply was received expressing surprise at this state of affairs, nothing more has been heard.

