

Residential Schools: The Intergenerational Impacts on Aboriginal Peoples

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Abstract

Many authors, historians and researchers concur with the idea that residential schools have impacted generation after generation of Aboriginal Peoples in this country. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the federal government wanted Aboriginal peoples to abandon their traditional beliefs and adopt western-based values and religions. The investigation of the role and impacts of residential schools on Aboriginal traditional knowledge and mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being must be studied within the context of colonization and genocide. Residential schools were funded by the federal government, but were operated by various religious institutions. The goal of residential schools was institutionalized assimilation by stripping Aboriginal peoples of their language, culture and connection with family. Although the assaults on the first peoples of this land have been devastating and intergenerational, as discussed within this article, it is with pride that we celebrate the resilience and tenacity of the holistic well-being of Aboriginal peoples. We are still here.

Introduction

What people didn't understand is that those boarding (residential) school terrorists thought that it (culture) could disappear in a generation, and they would have white thinking children. They couldn't erase it, and therein lies the hope. Right there. And when that spirit is reawakened it is more powerful than anything that I have ever met in my whole life. I am impressed with the strength of culture. Even though the missionaries tried, the boarding (residential) schools tried, all the well-intentioned little white people tried . . . But something hasn't died (Cleary & Peacock, 1998, p.102).

Boozhoo; Aanii; Sago; Wachiya; Bonjour; Greetings. Baybaamoosay-Kwe n'dishnakaz. My Anishinaabe name is Woman Who Leaves Healing Tracks. *Migiizii n'dodem.* I belong to the Eagle Clan. *Wasauksing n'donjibaa.* I am from Wasauksing First Nation. *Anishnaabe miinwaa Pottawatomi n'dow.* I am of Ojibwe and Pottawatomi descent. *N'winiishoo Midewiwin Kwe.* I am a Second-Degree Midewiwin woman. I am a daughter, sister, partner, mother, auntie, grandmother, and great-grandmother. I am the daughter of a residential school survivor. I (as well as my family), have been directly affected by the Residential School Syndrome.

Residential schools had a specific goal which was . . . institutionalized assimilation by stripping Aboriginal people of their language, culture and connection with family. the results for many, have included a lifestyle of uncertain identity and the adoption of self-abusive behaviours, often associated with alcohol and violence, reflect a pattern of coping sometimes referred to in First Nations as, "The Residential School Syndrome" (McKenzie & Morrissette, 2003, p.254).

I was robbed of my Mother tongue, "*Anishinaabamowin*," by the residential schools and all that they represented. I am a statistic of what is known as one of the intergenerational impacts of those infamous 'schools'. My father attended two residential schools in northern Ontario, far from Wasauksing First Nation. He and two of his brothers were incarcerated in Chappleau, and later at Shingwauk Residential School. One of

his brothers died while at Chapleau residential school. I cannot imagine the impact his death had on the two little boys who were left. They were hundreds of miles from home, with no one to comfort them in their loss. This is a thumb-nail sketch of my personal history, but my blood memory goes way back.

Eddie Benton-Banai, a Midewiwin Elder stated that, “We the Anishinaabe people have a history that goes back 50,000 years on this continent, which is now known as North America, but which has been always known to us as Turtle Island. And 50,000 years is a long, long time (Peacock & Wisuri, 2002, p.16).”

It is my intention to demonstrate how the Aboriginal / Indigenous learning systems operated prior to contact with the colonizers, how they operated during contact with the colonizers, how they operate at the present time and how we hope to see them operate for the next Seven Generations. It is also my intention to include my story in the research on Aboriginal / Indigenous learning systems. I have the right to locate myself ‘within’, because *I am Aboriginal*, and this is my story.

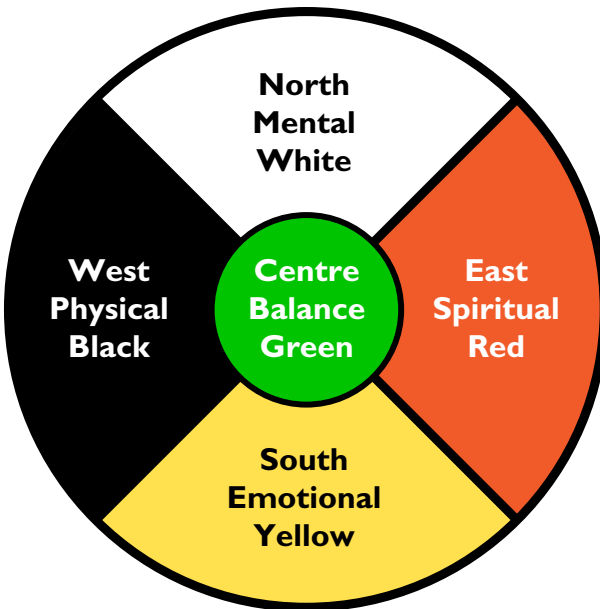
The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship of residential schools and their intergenerational impacts on Aboriginal Peoples and their mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being. This paper is organized into four sections. The Medicine Wheel paradigm will be utilized to explain each section and to place the reader into the reality of the world-view of this Anishinaabe-Kwe (Ojibwe woman) writer. (See Figure 1, pg 36)

Starting in the Eastern Doorway, from which direction is the beginning of all things, contextual information on Aboriginal learning systems prior to colonization will be briefly outlined. Aboriginal cultures have their own knowledge systems and means of knowledge transmission. There are many common characteristics of Aboriginal / Indigenous peoples worldwide regarding their means of transmitting their knowledge.

The second section will be represented by the Southern Doorway which is where relationships are formed. The colonization process took place at this time. This particular *time* period represents centuries and the

development of the colonizer – colonized *relationship*. The process of colonization will be briefly outlined and the implementation of residential schools will be discussed. Aboriginal populations were tremendously impacted by residential schools (Adams, 1999; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Toulouse, 2006). The acquisition of our traditional knowledge was effectively halted at this time.

Figure 1: Medicine Wheel



LEGEND

East – Birth, Vision, Renewal
 South – Relationships, Time
 West – Respect, Reflection
 North – Movement, Action, Caring
 Centre – Balance, Healing

(Nabigon, 1993, pp. 141-143)

The third section will be represented by the Western Doorway and will outline where Aboriginal peoples are located in relation to centuries of colonization and the generations of children who were incarcerated in residential schools. *Respect* is a fundamental aspect of this direction. Aboriginal peoples were not acknowledged or respected for their thousands of years of accumulated knowledge of their environment (Cajete, 1999; Peacock & Wisuri, 2002). The Aboriginal peoples of this land are *reflecting, remembering, revitalizing* and *reclaiming* their knowledge, their traditions, their culture and their identities during this period of decolonization (Assembly of First Nations, 1994).

The fourth section will be represented by the Northern Doorway and will demonstrate how *action, movement* and *caring* have assured the survival of Aboriginal peoples. Now that Aboriginal peoples are healing from the centuries of oppression, there is a dedication to the maintenance and transmission of traditional knowledge to the next Seven Generations of all our relations (Cajete, 1999; James, 2001; Smith, 1999).

The Eastern Doorway

All life begins in this doorway, we come into this earth-plane from this direction. Whether we begin a project, a paper or our life - this is where we start. (Nabigon, 1993; Nabigon, 2006) Figure 1 depicts the Medicine Wheel Teachings and the diagram is quite self-explanatory. I would like to expand on these teachings by adding many of the gifts which we were given by Gchi-Manido (Creator / Great Spirit). The list of these gifts is not exhaustive, but will help the reader to understand the Aboriginal world-view with a little more clarity. The Gifts of the East are: *light; beginnings; renewal; innocence; guilelessness; capacity to believe in the unseen; warmth of spirit; purity; trust; hope; uncritical acceptance of others; birth; rebirth; illumination; seeing situations in perspective; ability to see clearly through complex situations; leadership; etc.* (Bopp, Bopp, Brown, & Lane Jr., 1984, p. 72).

The circle, more than any other symbol, is most expressive of the Aboriginal world-view. It is, in essence, the first design Gchi-Manido drew on the darkness of the universe before creation began. It has, since that initiative, been the primary pattern by which all things begin, have being,

change, and grows toward fulfillment and eventually begins again. Within creation, all life maintains and operates within this circular and cyclical pattern. The circle then is primal to all of life and process and is also of primary significance in relating to and understanding life itself in all its dimensions and diversity. Human beings, amongst other related beings, are in harmony with the life flow and grow to their greatest fulfillment when they too operate in a circular fashion, thereby strengthening the circle (Dumont, 1989, p. 48). Black Elk's famous soliloquy expresses this concept in a powerful way:

Everything an Indian does is in a circle, because the power of the world always works in a circle, and everything tries to be round. The sky is round, and the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for their religion is the same as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves (Neihardt, 1988).

The circle, being primary, influences how we as Aboriginal peoples view the world. In the process of how life evolves, how the natural world grows and works together, how all things are connected, and how all things move toward their destiny. Aboriginal peoples see and respond to the world in a circular fashion and are influenced by the examples of the circles of creation in our environment (Dumont 1989, p. 48).

From time immemorial, until the invasion of the ones who are now dominant, Aboriginal peoples lived their traditional cultural way and were in balance and harmony with the natural environment (Cajete, 1994; Cajete, 1999; Dumont, 1989; James, 2001; Johnston, 1988; McKenzie & Morrissette, 2003). Huntley (1998) says that, "Aboriginal pedagogy, our own world-view and teachings, served the needs of Aboriginal peoples for thousands of years before the arrival of a new and dominant pedagogy". Our belief systems reflected our unique understanding and perception of our place in the world. From our understanding of creation, we personified the forces of nature into such beings as the Creator, Mother

Earth, Grandmother Moon and elder brother Sun. The relationship to all things in creation is understood to be one of kinship (Antone, Miller, & Myers, 1986; Deloria, 1997; Dumont, 1989). The teachings tell us that the plants and animals are our elder brothers and that we can learn much from them if we listen and observe (Cajete, 1999; Dumont, 1989; Peacock & Wisuri, 2002).

Representations and Understandings

An exploration of the ways in which our cultures symbolically or concretely represented our understanding of nature in our arts, oral traditions, ecological practices, medicine, social organizations, and philosophy will be briefly discussed.

Historical Context

In more traditional times, older family members taught the history of their families, including their origins, family formations, how they were raised and prepared for adult life, how they made a living, their celebrations, their achievements and failures, and their hopes and dreams (Deloria, 1997; Huntley, 1998; Graveline, 2002; Mussell, Nicholls & Adler, 1991).

As other Aboriginal / Indigenous peoples, we sought fundamental truths and an understanding about our place in the cosmos. The genesis of an Aboriginal world-view emerged from a close relationship with the environment.

A world-view can be defined as a set of related ideas or views to which members of a distinct culture subscribe. World-views represent religious, political, social and physical information about people and the societies they create. Once accepted, a world-view becomes a 'recognized reality' that serves to socialize its citizens and to create a political culture. A particular world-view is transferred to citizens through institutions such as the family, teachings, and religion; in that process, particular values, attitudes, beliefs, and opinions are adopted. Although specific beliefs and practices vary among different groups of Aboriginal

people, it has been demonstrated that several common traditional values exist (McKenzie & Morrisette, 2003, p. 258).

Babies spent much of the first two years of their lives in a *dikinagan* (cradleboard), where they learned the important life skills of observation and listening (Peacock & Wisuri, 2002, p. 71). They watched life flow around them and were able to absorb almost by osmosis the daily routine of the members of their dwelling. At that particular time in our history, much of the daily routine took place outdoors, especially during the summer months. Women of the community had water to haul, berries to pick, hides to tan, cooking to do, children to watch and all the while socializing. Men of the community went hunting, taught boys and youth the art of weapon-making, ensured that their community was safe and they also socialized among themselves. During the time when Mother Earth was resting under a blanket of snow, there were clothes to make and repair, snares to check, cooking to be done, and in the evenings, stories to be told.

As their parents worked, little Ojibwe children would watch the dance of life around them – the play of light and shadow, the movement of grasses, the sparkle of sun through branches, and the habits of people and animals. As young children they honed their skill of observation. This traditional attribute served the Ojibwe well as hunters and gatherers, as warriors, and as keen observers of the subtlety and nuances of both human and animal behaviour. Moreover, as the young witnessed the goings on of life from their *dikinagan*, they also learned the art of listening. All around them were the sounds of life, the chatter of squirrels, the whisper of grasses, the songs of wind through trees, and the inflection of voice in their parents, grandmothers and grandfathers, and aunties (Peacock & Wisuri, 1992, p. 71).

The skills of listening and observing are traits which are still prized by Aboriginal peoples. These inherent skills ensure the effectiveness of Aboriginal social workers. Personal Note: I am a social worker by profession and have always found that my listening skills are of the utmost importance when working with clients of any age. Listening means using every fibre of my being, not only my ears.

Cultural & Social Context

Cultural values and beliefs should transcend time and contribute to the uniqueness of a people (Antone, Miller & Myers, 1986; Dumont, 1989; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Graveline, 2002; Peacock & Wisuri, 2002). Antone et al (1986) state that, "Holistically, culture should be viewed as a living dynamic composed of all the social institutions that ensure the transference of beliefs, values, language, and traditions."

One of the traditional ways of transference was role modeling. Adults had to model their behaviour to young people, thereby passing down the traditions through the generations. When my great-grandmother used to make scone / bannock, she would always make sure I was right there beside her on a little stool. She would give me the opportunity to get my chubby little fists in there to knead the dough. When someone would ask, "Who made the scone? It's so good." I would always pipe up, "I did," and my Gchi-Nookomis (Great Grandmother) would always smile and nod in agreement. This is something that has stayed with me to this day, the pride and empowerment that were my family's gift to me when I was a very young child.

Storytelling was another important way of transmitting knowledge from one generation to the next. Cajete (1999) eloquently talks about this method in this way.

In the telling of stories, the content of myth and everyday reality are integrated within the content of the learner. Stories kept listeners aware of the interrelatedness of all things, the nature of plants and animals, the earth, history, and people's responsibilities to each other and the world around them. Storytelling, like myth, always presented a holistic perspective, for the ultimate purpose is to show the connection between things (p. 131).

Storytelling fulfilled a vital role in the continuity of not only the tribal culture, but of the mindset concerning people's relationship to the natural world. In this respect, the storyteller was the philosopher-teacher of tribal knowledge (Cajete, 1994; Cajete, 2000; Deloria, 1997; Dumont, 1989; Mussell et al, 1991; Peacock & Wisuri, 2002; Rice, 2005; Tou-

louse, 2006). Traditionally, the transmission of knowledge occurred in a holistic social context that developed the importance of each individual as a contributing member of the social group.

Storytelling was an educational process that unfolded through mutual, reciprocal relationships between one's social group and the natural world. Spirituality was intertwined and interwoven within everyday life (Toulouse, 2006). Aboriginal people were raised in an environment characterized by respect, and as such, they learned to value their lives and the lives of other creations of Gchi-Manido (Creator). Personal Note: My maternal Grandfather was a great story-teller. He could tell stories about long ago happenings and make them come alive in the present. He would describe what the participants were wearing, how they looked, how they sounded and then he would describe the surroundings in detail. He would paint a picture that you could actually see in your mind's eye, then he would explain exactly how the person wasn't watching where they were going and fell off the dock into the water! He would laugh and you would laugh because it was so funny! But there was a seriousness to the story when you thought about it – he would be telling you how to behave around the water and to always be aware of your surroundings.

Aboriginal people had a sense of connectedness with everything in their universe; other people, the plants, the animals, the rocks, the water, the stars, the moon, the sun and their accompanying spirits. Through song, dance, prayer, ceremony, and other processes of sharing, all were honoured and respected (Cajete, 1999; Cajete, 2000; Dumont, 1989; Mussell et al, 1991; Peacock & Wisuri, 2002). Cajete (1999), reiterates that the ultimate purpose of story-telling was to show the connection between things and;

Stories told about creativity – about how things came to be; they explained the what, why, and how of important phenomena; they related the myth behind the ritual; they described the way of healing, health, and wholeness; they presented practical information about how things are done and why; they illustrated and illuminated the universal truths and characteristics of human life. In all these dimensions, stories were rooted in experience and provided an intimate reflection of that experience. They were a

way of retracing important steps in life's way and of developing an affective perspective of themselves, their people, and their world (p.131).

The transmission of knowledge in pre-contact times was through storytelling, through song, through dance, through prayer and through ceremony. Ceremonies were held throughout the year and there were ceremonies for many different community events, (e.g. Births, Namings, Deaths, Healings, etc.) as well as seasonal ceremonies (e.g. Spring, Summer, Fall & Winter Ceremonies), to celebrate the changing seasons and the gifts of each season.

In many traditional Aboriginal cultures dancing was important in grand ceremonials. Dances had many different purposes; healing and curing, celebrating animal and other natural spirits, renewal and thanksgiving, birth and marriage, greeting, joy and mourning, even clowning. Dancing is also a way to get in touch with the Spirit World (Reed, 1999, p. 24).

Our Ojibwe ancestors used a form of the written language to record history and spiritual teachings on rocks, song sticks, birch bark (scrolls), wood, hides, wampum strings and belts (sometimes made of sea-shells). These were preserved and passed down through the generations (Cajete, 1999; Dumont, 1989; Peacock & Wisuri, 2002). Our ancestors knew the importance of our interrelationships as brothers and sisters to everything animate and inanimate and their accompanying spirits (Toulouse, 2006). We used to communicate with the animals through dreams and thoughts. Many times the animals gave up their lives in order to give us life. They would reveal their location so that we would find them while hunting. Thanks were given to Gchi-Manido and the spirits of the dead game, in the form of offerings and prayers for having shared themselves with us (Dumont, 1989; Peacock & Wisuri, 2002).

Our responsibilities were handed down through the generations. We know this through "concrete" ways, such as our sacred scrolls, pictographs, and other tangibles as well as through "knowing" without question, through our ancestral memories and our dreams. Dreams are reality to Aboriginal peoples. We learn much knowledge about medicines, songs and also about our history through dreams. We are taught to take

the knowledge that comes to us through dreams and use it, so it does not get lost.

Traditional stories, legends, songs, history, and all other forms of knowledge were passed on from one generation to another by constant retelling. A wide range of songs, chants, and prayers were also kept as parts of ceremonies practiced for centuries. Spiritual leaders, Elders, members of dance and Medicine societies and others kept the knowledge of these spoken forms in their memories (Reed, 1999, p. 30). This is what we know about how we lived pre-contact. Our contact with the Spirit World also tells us how things were at that time. The means of contact are through the Vision Quest, Fasting, Sweat Lodge Ceremonies and other ceremonies.

One of the teachings that were passed down from our relatives talks about our knowledge of the coming of the light-skinned race. It was prophesied by one of our old ones, whose great sanctity and oft-repeated fasts enabled him to commune with spirits and see far into the future (Dumont, 1989; Peacock & Wisuri, 2002). They came to this land and they changed the land, the water, the air, the environment and they tried to change the people.

The Southern Doorway

As we travel further around the framework of the Medicine Wheel, we arrive at the southern doorway, where contact with the invaders was made. This period of time will cover centuries of the relationship between the Aboriginal people who were occupying their own land and the non-Aboriginal people who came to their land. It will be helpful to refer back to the Medicine Wheel on page 4 to orient yourself regarding location. Again I wish to share with the reader some gifts of the South, which were given to us by Gchi-Manido. They include; *youth, generosity, sensitivity to the feelings of others, loyalty, noble passions, love, determination, passionate involvement in the world, emotional attraction to good and repulsion to bad, kindness, anger at injustice*, etc. (Bopp et al, 1985). Aboriginal / Indigenous languages contain generations of wisdom going back into time immemorial. Our languages contain a significant part of the world's knowledge and wisdom (Cajete, 1999; Cleary & Peacock, 1998;

Dumont, 1989; Huntley, 1998; Peacock & Wisuri, 2002; Smith, 1999). Language and culture are intricately intertwined, and one question which has gone around for awhile now is; if you do not know the language, can you really understand all the subtleties, nuances, and deeper meanings of culture? Further to that is, if the language dies, does the culture die too?

Historical Context

Contact with Europeans had a profound impact on Aboriginal peoples and their cultures. Diseases such as smallpox wiped out a large part of the original population. The loss in population weakened Aboriginal communities and undermined their cultures. (Reed, 1999, p. 8) The long history of contact between Europeans and Aboriginal peoples started out as mainly friendly. They were allies and trading partners. The early explorers needed the Aboriginal peoples to show them how live in the harsh environment. Aboriginal peoples helped Cartier's men survive their first winter in what is now Quebec. European powers realized the importance of the support they received from the Aboriginal peoples, especially in regard to their struggles to win political control of North America. The English for example, allied themselves with the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy against the French (Adams, 1999; Dumont, 1989; McMillan, 1995; Reed, 1999). Competition for furs due to government policies created a new element of instability in relations among Aboriginal people. While there were conflicts before the Europeans arrived, they were not generally widespread or destructive. The introduction of muskets and rifles increased the competition and the bloodiness of some conflicts. The ever increasing pressure of Canadian settlement and government policies under the Indian Act of 1876 forced some Aboriginal peoples out of their traditional territories.

“The imposition of a colonial framework on Canadian – Aboriginal relations has had powerful, negative effects on Aboriginal peoples over nearly four hundred years of contact” (McKenzie & Morrisette, 2003, p. 254). The schooling of Aboriginal children came under colonial control in 1867, with the British North America Act. In 1876, colonial control was further consolidated and centralized by the Indian Act. Over the years, one outcome of the Indian Act was the development of “Indian education policy,” which included policies of assimilation, segregation, and integra-

tion, and the adoption of a residential school model for implementation of these policies (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Brizinski, 1989; Miller, 1994; Reed, 1999; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

There were three eras during which colonizers tried different tactics to ‘educate’ Aboriginal peoples of this land. Prior to the mid-1800’s, the majority of Aboriginal children who were “schooled” attended “mission” schools located nearby their own communities.

Assimilation (1850 – 1909)

The federal government commissioned a report on the schooling of Aboriginal children. The Davin Report of 1879 recommended the adoption of the American model of residential schools with an added provision. Canadian residential schools were to be operated by various Christian denominations, since they already had missionaries who were committed to “Christianize and civilize” Aboriginal peoples. Thus the formalization of the policy of assimilation was systematically and all-encompassing and implemented between “church and state” (Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1986; Dickason, 1992). “Boarding schools and industrial schools were the preferred means of assimilation because they were more effective in separating and isolating Native children from the influence of the traditional culture” (Dawson, 1988). During this time, “Many traditional Indian dances and ceremonies – recognized as a vital element in the Native culture and spiritual identity – were outlawed as a result of amendments to the Indian Act in 1884 and 1885 (York, 1990).” These schools were generally located quite a distance from Aboriginal communities. Personal Note: A Cree friend of mine who is from a Cree Nation in Quebec was sent to residential school in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, where the majority of the inmates were Ojibwe. She was with other Aboriginal children, but they could not understand each other!

Segregation (1910 – 1950)

By the early 1900’s, it was obvious that the policy of assimilation was not working. It was discovered that Aboriginal peoples who came out of the residential schools did not fit into their own communities or into the Euro-Canadian communities. By this time there had been a severe drop in the Aboriginal population due to disease and starvation. However, there was

an increase in immigration which was able to meet Canada's labour force. This resulted in a re-evaluation of the policy of assimilation, which caused a policy shift towards isolation or segregation of Aboriginal peoples (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Miller, 1990).

The purpose of the new segregationist policy of residential schools was to prepare Aboriginal children for adult life in their original communities. During this period, basic literacy through to grade 8 was provided. The 'academic' curricula taught was severely inferior to what was taught in Euro-Canadian institutions. In 1920, an amendment to the Indian Act made school attendance compulsory for all Aboriginal children between the ages of seven and fifteen, which meant that children were forcibly removed from their homes to attend residential schools (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Barman et al., 1986; Chrisjohn, 1997; Miller, 1990). Personal Note: What is not mentioned in the books is that children as young as three and four years old were taken and placed in residential schools. My father was one.

Integration (1951 – 1972)

In the years following World War II, the government revisited its role regarding control of education policy and residential schools. In 1951, a further series of amendments to the Indian Act shifted policy from segregation to integration. Where possible, Aboriginal children were absorbed into mainstream schools; some Aboriginal communities which were isolated, children still attended residential schools. By 1954, the teachers at residential schools were employees of the federal government and academic curricula were similar to that of mainstream schools (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Barman et al., 1986; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Miller, 1990). Personal Note: There was a school on my First Nation, called Ryerson Indian Day School. My Mother was fortunate as she was able to attend this school and stay on the reserve with her family. The school was run in a similar vein as residential schools – the children were punished for speaking their language. She remembers this well, as she did not know any English when she began school. I also attended Ryerson Indian Day School.

During the early 1970's, Aboriginal peoples through the National Indian Brotherhood of Canada, were calling for the end to federal control of Aboriginal schooling.

Cultural and Social Context

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the federal government wanted Aboriginal peoples to abandon their traditional beliefs and adopt Christian and ‘democratic’ values. One example of a ceremony which was banned from being practiced was the potlatch. The potlatch was an important cultural and spiritual practice among the West Coast Aboriginal peoples. Chiefs used potlatches to name children, to announce an important marriage, to transfer titles and privileges from father to son, and to mourn the dead. The Chief and his family enhanced their honour and status at the potlatch by reciting their family history and by giving away valuable gifts. This ceremony showed their wealth, and guests who accepted the goods showed they agreed to the honours being claimed. The potlatch also served an economic function by redistributing wealth. The non-Aboriginal peoples did not see or could not see the value of the ceremony, and so the potlatch was banned in 1884 by the federal government (Reed, 1999).

The investigation of the role and impacts of residential schools on Aboriginal traditional knowledge must be studied within the wider context of colonization and genocide. One may say that by either design or default, the various mechanisms used by the invaders to try to conquer the Aboriginal peoples worked synergistically. Some of these mechanisms were pre-cursors to others, while others worked interrelatedly.

Residential Schools were one of many attempts at the genocide of the Aboriginal Peoples including the area now commonly called Canada. Initially, the goal of obliterating these peoples was connected with stealing what they owned (the land, the sky, the waters, and their lives, and all that these encompassed); and although this connection persists, present-day acts and policies of genocide are also connected with the hypocritical, legal, and self-delusional need on the part of the perpetrators to conceal what they did and what they continue to do. A variety of rationalizations (social, legal, religious, political, and economic) arose to engage (in one way or another) all segments of Euro-Canadian society in the task of genocide. For example, some were told that their actions arose out of a Missionary Imperative to bring the benefits of the One True Belief to savage pagans; others con-

sidered themselves justified in land theft by declaring that the Aboriginal Peoples were not putting the land to “proper” use; and so on. The creation of Indian Residential Schools followed a time-tested method of obliterating indigenous cultures, and the psychosocial consequences these schools would have on Aboriginal Peoples were well understood at the time of their formation (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997, pp. 3-4).

Residential schools were funded by the federal government, but were operated by the Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, and United churches. The goal of residential schools was institutionalized assimilation by stripping Aboriginal peoples of their language, culture, and connection with family (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; McKenzie & Morrisette, 2003; Reed, 1999; Toulouse, 2006). Aboriginal children were removed from their homes and lived in the residential schools, where many were abused spiritually, emotionally, physically and mentally. They were forced to pray to an entity which whom they had no connection. The goal of the missionaries who taught at the schools was to convert the children to Christianity. Children were often severely punished for practicing traditional spiritual beliefs (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Reed, 1999).

Life at the schools was often harsh and rules were strict. Much of the day was spent in Christian religious instruction, learning English or French, and doing chores. Girls looked after the laundry, kitchen work, and learned other ‘practical’ skills, such as cooking and sewing. Boys did the outside work, such as cutting wood, learning to farm, looking after the animals, and learned trade skills such as carpentry and blacksmithing. The schools typically spent less than two hours per day on academic subjects. When the students did leave the residential schools they were ill-prepared for life outside the schools (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Reed, 1999).

The residential schools were regimented and strict. Aboriginal children were rudely awakened by ringing bells, they went to breakfast, lunch and dinner when the bell rang, they went to chapel when the bell rang, the lights were turned out when the bell rang, they changed classes when the bell rang, etc. “They lived by the bell” and they lined up and marched

single file everywhere. Even when they had outings, they were very visible to the mainstream communities because they were all dressed the same, their hair was cut the same, and they marched along as if they were in the militia. When they marched through town, children and adults would point at them and laugh at them. One can't imagine what that did to their inner selves. When they were released from residential school, they had become dependant upon the regimentation and could not function on their own, they had become "institutionalized." Children lost their spontaneity, their joy for living, their independence, their self-esteem, and their problem-solving skills (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Miller, 1996; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

The residential schools with their regimentation and bells taught Aboriginal children that time is important. Their days were broken up and compartmentalized into increments of minutes and hours. They were taught that everything happens at a certain time and that failure to abide by that would result in certain punishment. Aboriginal children had lived by the natural cycles of the days, months, seasons and years and now they were told that their traditional ways were wasteful and that their families were lazy (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Miller, 1996; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

The residential schools taught English or French. Aboriginal children had to learn these foreign languages or else. They were forbidden to speak their Aboriginal languages, under threat of corporal punishment. Their self-esteem was undermined when they were told that their languages were primitive. Many children forgot their languages and adopted the language of the dominant society. With the loss of language came the loss of the ability to communicate with their parents, extended family and Elders back home (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Miller, 1996; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

The residential schools taught Christianity. Aboriginal children had to learn to pray while kneeling on the cold, hard floor of the chapel, with hands clasped and eyes closed. They had to pay homage to a god who would punish them if they were disobedient, who would send them to burn in hell and who had to be sung to on a certain day of the week. Aboriginal children were mystified by the behaviour that they had to emulate, but they

had no choice, they would be corporally punished if they did not do as they were told. Aboriginal peoples and spirituality were intricately intertwined and interconnected. One could pray to Gchi-Manito whenever and wherever one wished, we did not have to do it on a special day at a special time. To Aboriginal peoples, every single day that we walk on this earth plane is special. This connectedness and relationship with our natural environment was lost (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Miller, 1996; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

The residential schools taught Aboriginal children that their parents were dirty, savage, pagans. They were told that their parents were no good and that the sooner that they forget their old ways the better. They were systematically and consistently brainwashed to believe that everything that they were learning was right. To Aboriginal peoples, their family, extended family, community and nation had been of utmost importance, now they were ashamed of their families and themselves for being Aboriginal (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Miller, 1996; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

The residential schools taught Aboriginal children that their rituals, coming-of-age ceremonies, and seasonal ceremonies were works of the devil. They were told that if they practiced them, they would burn in hell forever. Consequently, when many Aboriginal peoples left the schools, they did not want to have anything to do with their traditions or their culture (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Miller, 1996; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

The residential schools taught Aboriginal children that the story-telling of their parents and grandparents and their Elders, were not true. The priests and nuns told the children that they were make-believe stories and they were to forget anything they were told by their relatives. Many legends and valuable histories of Aboriginal peoples were lost in this way (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Miller, 1996; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

The residential school taught Aboriginal children that they should be proud when they were hand-picked to serve as sexual playthings to their so-called protectors. Boys and girls alike, were sexually abused by their

guardians. Aboriginal children lost their childhood, their trust, and their innocence in those acts of violence against their small, unformed bodies (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Miller, 1996; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

THE WESTERN DOORWAY

Respect is the primary value which is representative of this doorway. In the words of Herbert Nabigon (1993), "Respect means to look twice at everything we do. The quality of our inner life is enhanced when we understand and implement the word respect" (pp.136-138). Aboriginal/Indigenous peoples (world-wide) have been reflecting, remembering, revitalizing and reclaiming our knowledge, traditions, culture and our identities since the late 1960's and early 1970's. The reader may refer to the Teachings of the Medicine Wheel on page 4, in order to locate and orient self to the Aboriginal world-view. As before, this writer will add a list of gifts from Gchi-Manido in relation to this westerly direction. Please note that this list is not exhaustive. The Gifts of the West are; *darkness; the unknown; going within; dreams; perseverance; consolidating of personal power; spiritual insight; meditation; fasting; reflection; silence; respect for Elders; respect for others' beliefs; humility; love for the Creator; commitment to struggle to assist the development of the people etc.*

(Bopp et al, 1984, p. 73).

Historical Context

Colonialism is predatory and parasitic in nature. It drains not only the material wealth it seeks, but sucks the life-blood from host peoples. With "progress," it extracts increasingly with less brutality, by detached technological means (Davis & Zannis, 1973, p. 58). We see evidence of the destruction of our world; polluted water, animals becoming extinct, holes in the ozone layer, seasons out-of-whack, clear-cutting, Aboriginal/Indigenous peoples who are now extinct, and the list goes on. Another prophecy which was foretold was that the light-skinned race would come to the Aboriginal / Indigenous peoples for help. (Cajete, 1994; Dumont, 1989; Neihardt, 1988; Peacock & Wisuri, 2002; Smith, 1999) They have come, but many of them only want our knowledge in order to use it for

profit. So we are holding our ‘sacred bundles’ close to our hearts for the benefit of the generations to come.

Our ancestors used oral transmission as well as a form of the written language to record history and spiritual teachings on rocks, song sticks, birch bark (scrolls), hides, wood, wampum strings and belts (sometimes made of sea-shells) (Dumont, 1989; Peacock & Wisuri, 2002). We are told by our relatives that our sacred records are hidden in a place where only a few guardians know about. These records are inspected every fifteen years and if they are becoming decayed, they are replaced. The description of the sacred scrolls being stored away until the right time to bring them forth, highlights the close relationship of the philosophy, cultural teachings, and spirituality of the Ojibway to the language in both its written and oral form (Dumont, 1989; Peacock & Wisuri, 2002).

I wholly concur with Smith (1999) when she states in her book that, “The struggles of the 1970’s seem to be clear and straightforward; the survival of peoples, cultures and languages; the struggle to become self-determining; the need to take back control of our destinies (p. 143).” We have been doing just that in our ongoing struggle to regain and reclaim some of which was lost through the auspices of the residential schools. Although the last school closed around 1984, the effects are still with us today. The aforementioned statement is reinforced by the following statement in *Breaking the Silence* (1994), “Residential school is an experience which has had the power to wound, dividing First Nation families and communities to this day” (Assembly of First Nations, 1994, p. 114). In Indian Country, there is agreement that the impacts will be felt for the foreseeable future.

Some of the intergenerational results not mentioned previously;

- ***Loss of Meaning*** – the trauma suffered by children resulted in their not knowing that they disconnected themselves from their terror and horrific experiences. One woman to whom I spoke talked about soap being forced into her mouth, allegedly so her ‘caregiver’ could wash the dirty Anishinaabe words from her. She was still angry about something that had happened to her sixty years ago.

- ***Loss of Family*** – some children never saw their families again, through death or not being able to go home during the summer. When they did go home – nothing was the same and they did not fit into community life. Personal Note: My Father tried speaking Anishinaabe but found that he had ‘lost’ the dialect and he never spoke it again. Our family (brother, sister, myself & subsequent generations) lost out on knowing our Mother Tongue due to residential school.
- ***Loss of Childhood*** – the best years of their lives (their childhood) were taken away from them when they were incarcerated in the residential schools, where they had to work in all kinds of weather without proper attire. Personal Note: This is how my Father’s brother died, he caught pneumonia when he was doing chores outside in the winter. He was the uncle my siblings and I would never know.
- ***Loss of Feeling*** – the children had no one to turn to when they needed to be comforted. They had no one to tell them that they were loved. I can not even imagine how my father and his brothers felt to be taken so far away from their home and family to be raised by so-called religious ‘care-givers’ whom they could not even understand. (Assembly of First Nations, 1994, p. 166-167)

These losses to the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being of the children who attended residential schools have impacted our communities intergenerationally right up to the present day. Personal Note: We were extremely fortunate because we were raised with love, kindness, respect and generosity by both of our parents. I believe that my Father’s strength of character and resilience were such that he was able to give his children and grandchildren all the love, kindness, respect and generosity that he missed when he was a child.

Cultural and Social Context

There are differences *between* Nations / Tribes, as well as differences *within* Nations / Tribes. The Aboriginal peoples of this land, called Turtle Island, have more similarities than differences. We have the ability to connect or bond with other Aboriginal people within a moment in time.

It is something which has transmitted itself, in spite of the residential school experiences of family members. I would like to recount a personal anecdote to illustrate this phenomenon.

I was working within a mainstream mental health agency in the Native Services Department in Sudbury. This particular mental health agency had clinics in many small communities in northern Ontario. At the time, a child psychiatrist and a non-Aboriginal social worker were traveling to one of the clinics, about a five hour drive away. They asked me if I would be willing to travel with them to the small community where one of the clients was an adolescent Aboriginal girl. They said the (non-Aboriginal) social worker in the clinic could not seem to make any progress with her, she was closed-down. I agreed to go with them to see if perhaps I could work with her. She was told that there was a new social worker for her to meet. We were all seated in the meeting room in a semi-circle; the psychiatrist, the worker from the clinic, the worker from Sudbury, and myself. The door opened and a beautiful, young lady walked in, followed by her foster mother. The instant she saw me, there was a recognition and an instantaneous bond established. The other worker from Sudbury saw the exchange and was shocked and amazed, he actually saw the instant connection almost tangibly. He told me this later. We were introduced and I began to work with her that day. The only way I can explain it is that this adolescent who had been “in care” for most of her young life, had *never had an Aboriginal social worker!*

This phenomenon or ‘recognition’ is something which happens many times in our life, we are able to connect with other Aboriginal / Indigenous peoples no matter where we are. Sometimes when we are far away, it is with happiness and joy that we meet another Aboriginal / Indigenous person and we greet each other accordingly. Personally, I believe that we are able to connect because our ancestors have had similar experiences and somehow these are communicated at a higher level of our being. It is the only explanation that comes to mind and the only one that makes sense.

Although we lost so much through the residential school system, we are in the process of healing through reflection, remembering, revital-

izing and reclaiming our knowledge (Assembly of First Nations, 1994, pp.136-137).

Reflection – this is a necessary part of healing. It forces us to see the destructive nature of our lives. This is of particular significance in this doorway, we are “looking twice” at the past and are committed to the vision of a positive Aboriginal way of life, free from the destructive forces of alcohol and drugs. This means going back to a traditional, balanced way of life in all its aspects, spiritual, emotional, physical and mental (Antone et al, 1986; Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Mussell et al, 1991; Peacock & Wisuri, 2002). Personal Note: When I became aware of the impacts that residential school had on its survivors, I was a mature individual. Many things became clear to me and I now knew why my Father used alcohol and how it had also affected the next generations. I also learned that in order to live a traditional, balanced life – one must not put any harmful substances (alcohol / drugs) into their body which might affect their mental, spiritual, emotional or physical being. Upon reflection, I chose to live a healthy, positive Anishinaabe lifestyle.

Remembering – is the second aspect of healing. It involves breaking the silence with oneself and with others. Disclosure is acknowledged as difficult and painful, but it is necessary. It opens the possibility of breaking the isolation which has become unmanageable and destructive. Sharing the experience of residential school is considered important to the adults who survived. It tells them that they are ‘not alone’ (Assembly of First Nations, 1994, p. 137). I would like to share a personal anecdote that occurred in 1992, when I was going to conduct an interview with my Father regarding his residential school experiences for an academic paper. We got off to a fine start, we were seated in the kitchen of our home at Wasauksing First Nation with our coffee on the table beside us. I had a notebook ready to take notes. I asked him the first question, “What was residential school like?” Unbidden tears came immediately to his eyes, and he said with so much emotion, “Pure hell.” That was the end of our interview. I could not go on, because my eyes were overflowing, as were his. We sat in silence with tears running down our cheeks, we hugged each other, and we never mentioned the interview again. My Father suffered a stroke a couple of years after that and it affected his speech, so there was never again an op-

portunity to broach the subject. My Father passed on to the Spirit World on May 15, 2001, with his memories intact.

Resolving -- the issues means ‘working through’ the spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental wounds of residential school. For example, dealing with the anger and the grief, with a person who might use traditional methods of healing. They could use the Sweat Lodge ceremony, a healing circle, a healing dance or other methods (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Dumont, 1989; Peacock & Wisuri, 2002). There are those Aboriginal peoples who would rather use the western methods and if this is their choice then they are accommodated. Personal Note: There was no chance for my Father to resolve the wounds he suffered at the residential schools. I feel that I am resolving the intergenerational wounds that have affected me by attending ceremonies, sweats, teachings and fasting upon the lap of Shkagamik-Kwe (Mother Earth). In other words, actively seeking and receiving healing so I can live my life in a good way. My family, including my Mother, my daughter, my grandchildren and my great-grandchild have also attended seasonal ceremonies. Attending ceremonies with the accompanying traditional teachings are very empowering for those in attendance.

Reconnecting – is the part of healing which shows individuals moving past their isolation and becoming actively involved with their families and their communities. Reconnecting with the family that has been ‘broken’ by residential school, opens the possibility of rebuilding that family and reclaiming one’s place within that family. The individual is able to regain what they had lost; their meaning, their family, their pride, and their identity (Assembly of First Nations, 1994, p. 137). Personal Note: My Father never lost his pride in “being Indian.” He used to dance, sing and drum. I was exposed to these practices at a young age and have continued these to the present day. I belong to an Aboriginal women’s hand drum group and we meet bi-weekly to sing and drum. I also wrote a proposal entitled, “Pshe Genda Gok Miiikaans” (Sacred Path) which was accepted and contributed to healing within my community for residential school survivors.

The Western Doorway is also the location where decolonization is taking place. Many Aboriginal peoples have taken back their spiritual, emotional, physical and mental beings and are living in balance with their

cosmos. It is a phenomenon which has been gaining momentum since the early 1970's. Since then, more and more First Nations have begun to operate schools. By 1996, the number of band-operated schools had risen to 429 (from 64 in 1977). Band-operated schools are incorporating Aboriginal knowledge, language, and concepts into the curriculum (Reed, 1999, p. 71). Personal Note: The school in my community does incorporate the above into the curriculum and my great-grandson is reaping the benefits. The school also has a Sweat-lodge on the property.

Aboriginal peoples have achieved some aspects of self-government, such as social services, health care, education, resource development, culture, language and justice. With more and more Aboriginal peoples becoming educated, in areas such as medicine, social work, health care professionals, law, education, and politics, there is hope for the future that we will be able to hold onto what we have regained in order to pass it on to our succeeding generations. We, as Aboriginal peoples, are regaining, remembering, and picking up our Sacred Bundles that were dropped beside the trail and stayed there for so long, waiting to be recovered.

THE NORTHERN DOORWAY

This doorway is characterized by action and movement and caring. We can extrapolate by saying that we who are now in the Western Doorway, are decolonizing ourselves so that we can hand over the reins of what has been recovered and revitalized to the next Seven Generations. We are caring for the Sacred Bundles and when it is time, they will be given to our children and our children's children and so on. Our ancestors are always nearby and they will let us know when it is time to take action.

Personal note: I have had the privilege of being guided by my ancestors at crucial times in my life. During my first Fast, my ancestors were present to tell me what to do and actually guided my actions in carrying out my duties while I was sitting upon Shkagamik-Kwe (Mother Earth). I believe that with the Spirits always present, we can never forget our ways. The Spirits of our ancestors will always be there for us, they come to us in our dreams, our vision quests and during sweat lodge ceremonies.

Conclusion

I am the daughter of a residential school survivor. My Father lost his language while he was at residential school. He was very young when he was incarcerated, and when he was released, he was thirteen years old. Being a teenager, he was eager to reconnect with his friends. They were standing down the road and he ran up to them and started talking Anishinaabe to them, they burst out laughing! They could not understand what he had said, apparently he had lost the dialect. My Father never spoke another word of Ojibwe for the rest of his life, and he was 76 years old when he passed on to the Spirit World. My brother, sister and I were raised in a home where English was spoken, even though my Mother is a fluent speaker. When she did not want us to know what she was talking about, my Mother would talk to my Father in the Anishinaabe language and he would either reply in English or he would nod his head. He understood every word of Ojibwe, but he would not speak it. Residential school affected four generations of my family, but hopefully, the fifth generation will speak fluently. We are a family of five healthy generations: Mother, myself, daughter, grand-daughter, great-grandson. I am a social worker and therefore, an optimist. I look forward to the day that I will be fluent in my language and it will take hard work and determination but I know it can be achieved. My daughter has recently expressed a real interest in learning our language and it fills me with hope and pride knowing that we are role models for our progeny.

There are great expectations for the next Seven Generations, because this generation has taken up the responsibility to ensure that the culture, traditions, ceremonies, language, values and beliefs of our peoples will be there for them. I will 'requote' part of the introduction,

What people didn't understand is that those boarding (residential) school terrorists thought that it (culture) could disappear in a generation, and they would have white thinking children. They couldn't erase it, and therein lies the **HOPE**. (emphasis added) Right there. **AND WHEN THAT SPIRIT IS REAWAKENED IT IS MORE POWERFUL THAN ANYTHING THAT I HAVE EVER MET IN MY WHOLE LIFE. I AM IMPRESSED WITH THE STRENGTH OF CULTURE.** (emphasis added) (Cleary & Peacock, 1998, p. 102)

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