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Aboriginal Education in Canada: A Retrospective and a Prospective

Verna J. Kirkness

The year 2000 is a good time to reflect on where we have been and where we want to go in Aboriginal[1] education. During the course of my career in education, which spans over forty years, I have had the opportunity to work at many levels of education. Similar issues and challenges have existed and continue to exist in post-secondary and in-school education offered to Aboriginal students, both young and old. Though there has been progress in improving access and quality of education for our people, it is clear that much remains to be done. In 1992, 1 was the principal author of a study commissioned by the Canadian Education Association to determine the state of Aboriginal education in federal, provincial (public & separate), and Band schools in Canada. The study, entitled "First Nations and Schools: Triumphs and Struggles," indicated that positive changes began to occur after the policy of Indian Control of Indian Education was introduced in 1973.

Over the years, I have given many talks on Aboriginal education and written a number of papers on the history of Aboriginal education in Canada which include directions for the future. When asked to submit a paper as a retrospective and prospective of Aboriginal education in Canada for this journal, I went to my file and decided to include two of my papers, one written in 1985 entitled "Indian Education: Past, Present and Future" and the other, written in 1998, "Our Peoples' Education: Cut the Shackles, Cut the Crap and Cut the Mustard."

A review of these two papers takes us from our earliest experience in education both informal and formal, albeit briefly, to where we are today. It leaves us to speculate whether we are, in fact, making progress, or are we destined to repeat history even at our own hands.

INDIAN EDUCATION: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE (1985)

The Past: Pre-Contact - Traditional Indian Education

[1] Aboriginal is the latest generic term used to refer to Canada's original people. Throughout this article, Aboriginal, Indian, and First Nations are used interchangably depending on the period the term was in use.

Long before Europeans arrived in North America, Indians had evolved their own form of education. It was an education in which the community was the classroom, its members were the teachers, and each adult was responsible to ensure that each child learned how to live a good life (National Indian Brotherhood, 1973). Central to the teaching was the belief in the Great Spirit. In the Gospel of the Redman, it states that "The Redman has the most spiritual civilization the world has ever known.... His measure of success is 'How much service have I rendered to my people?' . . . His mode of life, his thought, his every act are given spiritual significance (Seton & Seton, 1977)". This was expressed in their daily living, in relationship of one to another, in humility, in sharing, in cooperating, in relationship to nature --- the land, the animals, in recognition of the Great Spirit, in the way our people thought, felt and perceived their world. Traditionally, our people's teachings addressed the total being, the whole community, in the context of a viable living culture.

Then came the change. . .

Our Second Past: Contact -Colonial Domination

In the early 17' Century, European missionaries came to establish schools for Indians. It was believed that this would be the best method of civilizing the "natives." Day or Mission schools were the first to be established. The day school concept was largely abandoned in favour of residential (boarding) schools in the 1800s. The highest recorded number of residential schools, which were located all across Canada, was 80 in 1933. The enrollments ranged anywhere

from fifty to over four hundred students of all ages. Most of the residential schools were phased out in the 1960s.

Residential Schools were devised as a means of isolating the Indian child from his parents and the influences of the reserve. As one government inspector stated in the mid 1800s:

> Little can be done with him (the Indian child). He can be taught to do a little farming, and at stock raising, and to dress in a more civilized manner, but that is all. The child who goes to a day school learns little while his tastes are fashioned at home, and his inherited aversion to toil is in no way combatted. (Indian Affairs Branch, 1879-1880)

The residential schools were oppressive. Separated from their parents for long periods of time, the students, who ranged in age from three to eighteen, were subjected to a severe regimen. The boys were expected to clean the stables, attend to the livestock, mend broken machinery, and work in the fields. The girls had to attend to the upkeep of the school, washing and mending clothes, doing kitchen chores, scrubbing floors and doing other domestic duties. While former students of these schools do not take particular issue with such work, for many years it meant that the students only spent a half day in the classroom. What was provided was a very basic education designed to prepare the children for a domestic, Christian life.

The residential school was notable for its high mortality rate among the students. At the turn of the century, an estimated 50% of the children who attended these schools did not benefit from the education they received. They died while at the boarding school of diseases such as smallpox and tuberculosis. It is believed that many died of loneliness. Only recently, has the general public

become aware of the true devastation suffered by many former residential school students as they reveal the physical, mental and sexual abuse encountered under this colonial regime.

Having generations of Indian children removed from their parents, denying them a normal childhood and the teachings of their people, resulted in the loss of their cultural traditions including their native languages. It is a dark period in the history of Indian education, the repercussions of which, continue to be felt today. The weakening of Indian society as a whole can be attributed to boarding schools. Cultural conflict, alienation, poor self-concept, lack of preparation for jobs and for life in general derive from this deplorable experience. It is evident that not only are those who actually attended these schools affected but so are their children and their communities.

The government decides on another approach. . .

Federal Indian Day Schools - Integration

"To civilize and Christianize" gave way in the 50s to a rise in the number of federally run Indian Day Schools on reserves to accommodate the closure of residential schools. At the same time a policy of integration was put into effect. Integration, as it occurred, can be described simply as the process of having Indian students attend public schools. In some cases, residential schools were transformed into student residences and the students attended the nearest public school. In other cases, children were transported from their homes on reserves to adjacent public schools. By the 1970s, the government of Canada had

succeeded in making provisions for approximately 60% of Indian students in public schools.

The integration concept was a continuation of government control over the lives of Indian people. It was introduced with little or no consultation with Indian parents, Indian Bands or Indian Organizations. No particular preparation of teachers or of curriculum was made to accommodate the children of another culture.

Chief Dan George in his soliloquy, "A Talk to Teachers," made this comment on integration:

> You talk big words of integration in the schools. Does it really exist? Can we talk of integration until there is social integration. . . . unless there is integration of hearts and minds you have only a physical presence. . . . and the walls are as high as the mountain range. (George, circa 1972)

Integration has been, in most schools," only a physical presence." This approach to education has not been one of true integration where the Indian cultures are respected and recognized. Rather, it has been a process of assimilation where Indians are being absorbed into the non-Indian society.

There has been no notable improvement in the overall achievement of Indian children in integrated schools. Studies on the effects of integration have shown that Indian children reveal patterns that can be identified as alienation and identity conflict. The Indian child is caught between two cultures and is therefore, literally outside of, and between both. The panacea of integration failed to provide the answer to education for Indian students.

It is safe to conclude that federal day schools on reserve had, to this point, provided the scenario most conducive to the Indian child. While schools did little to address the cultural challenges in the curriculum, children were at least able to participate in the life of the community and remain with parents and siblings.

Finally, a monumental breakthrough. . .

The Present: Late 1960s to 1985 - Indian Control of Indian Education

In the 1960s, Indian leaders began to react to the deplorable conditions of their people. In response to the educational concerns being raised by Indian people, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indian Affairs prepared a report on Indian education. This report, presented to Parliament on June 22, 1971, unfolded before the Canadian public the educational problems facing Indian people. Some of the findings were:

- A drop-out rate four times the national average (96% of Indian children never finished high school)
- A related unemployment rate averaging 50% for adult males, going as high as 90% in some communities
- "Inaccuracies and omissions" relating to the Indian contribution to Canadian history in textbooks used in federal and provincial schools
- An age-grade retardation rooted in language conflict and early disadvantage, which accelerated as the child progressed through the primary and elementary grades
- Less than 15% of the teachers had specialized training in cross-cultural education and less than 10% had any knowledge of an Indian language

- The majority of Indian parents were uninformed about the implication of decisions made to transfer children from reserve schools to provincial schools.

From this report, it was obvious that the missionaries and governments had failed in three hundred years to administer an effective educational program for Indians. The failure has been attributed to several factors, namely: the absence of a clear philosophy of education with goals and objectives, failure to provide a meaningful program based on Indian reality, a lack of qualified teaching staff and inadequate facilities, and, most important, the absence of parental involvement in the education of their children (Indian Tribes of Manitoba, 1971).

In 1969 the Government of Canada issued a white paper on Indian policy, based on the elimination of the special status of Indians. The embittered provincial/territorial Indian organizations responded by issuing their respective positions papers related to their ongoing relationships with the federal government which included treaties and Aboriginal rights as well as strongly stating their positions in education, housing, health, and in social and economic development.

In the wake of a 1971 school strike in North-east Alberta protesting school facilities on reserves and the release of the Standing Committee Report, education was thrust to the forefront. The National Indian Brotherhood (now known as the Assembly of First Nations) established a working committee to prepare a national position in education. Basing its findings on the various position papers of the provincial/territorial Indian Organizations, the policy of

Indian Control of Indian Education was tabled with the government on December 21, 1972. In February, 1973, the Minister of Indian Affairs, the Honourable Jean Chretien, gave official departmental recognition to the policy stating "I *have given the National Indian Brotherhood my assurance that I and my Department are fully committed to realizing the educational goals for the Indian people set forth in the Brotherhood's proposal" (Cardinal, 1977).*

Indian Control of Indian Education is based on two education principles recognized in Canadian society: parental responsibility and local control. It recognizes that Indian parents must enjoy the same fundamental decision making rights about their children's education as other parents across Canada. It promotes the fundamental concept of local control which distinguishes the free political system of democratic governments from those of a totalitarian nature. The policy recognizes the need to improve educational opportunities for Indians. It states:

> Our aim is to make education relevant to the philosophy and needs of Indian people. We want education to give our children a strong sense of identity with confidence in their personal worth and ability.
> We believe in education...
> ... as a preparation for total living.
> ... as a means of free choice of where to live and work.
> ... as a means of enabling us to participate fully in our own social, economic, political, and educational advancement. (National Indian Brotherhood, 1973)

Indian philosophy of education is in many ways more valid and universal than the one which prevails in educational circles today. Instead of a one-sided view of history, we want our children to learn a Canadian history which attaches

honor to the customs, values, accomplishments and contributions of this country's original inhabitants and first citizens, the Indians of Canada.

We want our children to learn science and technology so that they can promote the harmony of man with nature ... not destroy it. We want our children to learn about their fellow men in literature and social studies and, in the process, learn to respect the values and cultures of others.

An Indian philosophy of education looks at learning and teaching as an integral part of living both for the teacher and the child. It is not a five hour, five-day-a-week exercise for a dozen years or so. It is a life-long commitment (Manuel, circa 1976).

Indian Control of Indian Education is a four point policy dealing with parental responsibility, school programs, teachers and school facilities:

- RESPONSIBILITY. Under the terms of the eleven major treaties between the Indians and the federal government and the Indian Act, the federal government is obligated to provide funds for the education of Indians. This is an incontestable fact. In no way does the principle of *Indian Control of Indian Education* contradict or nullify this fundamental federal obligation. The government's financial responsibility does not justify its dominance over the lives of Indian people. This policy statement demands that Indian parents participate as partners with the government in the education of their children.
- PROGRAMS. The curriculum must be structured to use the child's awareness of his own cultural environment as a springboard for learning about the outside world. The community must participate in program change.

No innovations in curriculum, teaching methods, or pupil-teacher relationships can take root unless parents are convinced of their value.

- TEACHERS AND COUNSELORS. The federal government must help train Indian teachers and counselors. Experimentation and flexible structures will allow Indians with talent and ambition to take advantage of training programs. Non-Indian teachers and counselors should receive additional training to prepare them for cross-cultural situations and teach them how to make curriculum for Indian children more meaningful.
- FACILITIES. Educational facilities must meet the needs of the local population. Substandard buildings and equipment must be replaced.

Today, over a decade later, we find ourselves confronted with serious problems with the implementation of the policy. In May, 1981, a resolution was passed by the Assembly of First Nations indicating national concern regarding the implementation of *Indian Control of Indian Education.* The resolution reads:

> WHEREAS *Indian Control of Indian Education* has been endorsed and accepted by both the Indian people and the Department of Indian Affairs; and
>
> WHEREAS the Department of Indian Affairs has promised to actively support the full implementation of *Indian Control of Indian Education* policy paper of 1973; and
>
> WHEREAS the Department of Indian Affairs has failed to actively support the full implementation of *Indian Control of Indian Education* as seen by recent moves to cut back on several programs in education; and ...

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT this Assembly of Chiefs reaffirm the policy and directions as stated in the 1973 *Indian Control of Indian Education* paper; and ...

FURTHER THAT WE DEMAND THAT the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development reinstate, maintain and expand the programs which are required to fulfill Band Educational Training and support need; and ...

WE FURTHER DEMAND THAT the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development make available appropriate financial resources to ensure the highest quality of *Indian Control of Indian Education (policy).*

A review of the implementation of the policy suggests three specific problem areas, namely, dual administration, funding and legislation. Dual administration refers to the fact that Indian Bands have ended up operating education programs under the strict guidelines of the Department of Indian Affairs. The intent of the policy was that Indian responsibility for education would mean replacing the complex existing bureaucracy not merely becoming an extension of that bureaucracy.

In terms of funding the policy states that "The Federal Government must take the required steps to transfer to local Bands the authority and the funds that are allotted for Indian education" (National Indian Brotherhood, 1973). The Department provides funding to Bands under strict guidelines on an annual basis. This precludes the possibility of priority setting or innovative planning by local Indian Bands.

A further restraining factor is that Indian controlled schools require an administration that is local. The Department of Indian Affairs, on the other hand, operates within a centralized administration. The cost factor is different. Under the present scheme, this poses additional problems for Bands. Not only is funding restricted to given guidelines, it is also inadequate. Treasury Board regulations state that the transfer to local control and administration of education programs by Bands should not entail any additional costs.

The most serious problem arises from the lack of legislation (Cardinal, 1977). The Indian Act provides no legal basis for the transfer of education from the control of the Minister of Indian Affairs to Indian Bands. It authorizes the Minister to enter into agreements with public or separate school boards, provincial/territorial governments, religious or charitable organizations, but not with Indian Bands. The present authority allowing Indian Bands to administer education funds derives from various Treasury Board authorities, covering a range of educational and student support services, which extend from kindergarten to postsecondary school programs.

These problems are all directly related. If we examine the authority used to accommodate the policy of *Indian Control of Indian Education,* it reveals that the lack of legislation enabling the Minister to transfer control of education to Indian Bands, prevents the implementation to occur as it should. This fact relates directly to funding as well as the problem of dual administration. It explains why the concept of Indian *Controlled* Schools by the Indian people became known to the Department of Indian Affairs as Band *Operated* schools. Controlling and

operating are two entirely different concepts. To control is to have power over, to exercise directing influence, whereas to operate means to manage or to keep in operation. It is predictable that the difference in perception would lead to misunderstanding and impede the direction of the policy.

However, despite the many problems experienced, progress is noted through various reports and evaluations conducted within the last few years. The involvement of Indian people in the education of their children, has resulted in:

- greater retention of students
- improved attendance
- inclusion of relevant curriculum
- better graduation rates
- development of early childhood programs
- introduction of adult education programs
- teaching of native languages (Kirkness, Bowman, 1992)

The Future: 1985 and Beyond - The Answers are Within Us

Indian people stand at the crossroads in *1985.* Our sovereign rights are being contested on the streets and in the courts. The question of our future is a serious one. We are probably facing the greatest challenge of our time. As we consider our options at this time, we must do so with pride, confidence and commitment in our ability to move forward. As we reflect upon our survival against all odds under colonization, we must remind ourselves of the tremendous strength our people have exhibited in the past and be prepared to carry on with the same determination.

Despite repeated efforts on the part of churches, successive governments, institutions, various interest groups and individuals, we have not allowed ourselves to become completely assimilated. Through education, we must continue toward the realization of our place in this country. We have shown that despite all odds, we have maintained our identity as Indian people. However, to ensure the future of our people as a unique people, we are going to have to become much more radical in our approach to education. We must put into practice our goals and objectives based on our philosophy of education. To meet this challenge, it will be necessary, in fact, critical for our people to disestablish many of the current educational practices related to foreign ethos and institutions which have failed to meet our needs.

Our efforts especially over the last decade indicate that this will be a major undertaking. Centuries of outside influences are not easily displaced. The recent initiatives of Aboriginal people have resulted in conservative change because we have continued to rely on theories and practices of the dominant society.

We must heed the counsel of Paulo Freire, the radical Brazilian educator, and mobilize our people through knowledge. Freire states that the act of knowing is in part a political issue because it leads to action (Freire, *1978).* If we were to follow Paulo Freire's approach, we would engage in a massive campaign to raise the social-political consciousness of every Indian man, woman and child in Canada to understand his/her oppression and domination. In education, we would raise the awareness of every Indian man, woman and child about the issues and challenges that impact our education and that only if we act

collectively on these issues can we transform the situation. From this reflection would emerge a new knowledge which will help us shape the future as a people united in a common cause.

Our children are our future. We have a tremendous responsibility to ensure that future. The need for radical change, a complete overhaul of the education system for our people is the basis of the required change. To do this, we must look within ourselves, our communities, our nations for "the answers are within us"

As I reflect on this paper, written 15 years ago, I can see our continuing struggle to identify a meaningful education for Our People based on the policy of Indian Control of Indian Education. While the Department of Indian Affairs has removed some of the stringent guidelines, the damage has been done and our Bands have become conditioned to follow the path designed for assimilation. One major difference is that we can now articulate what we believe to be Aboriginal education. The major draw back currently facing us is that we have reversed our traditional holistic psychology to one wherein we are going from the parts to the whole. In other words, the most common approach under Indian Control of Indian Education today is to interject parts of our culture into the curriculum rather than having culture as the basis of our curriculum. The following paper may serve to clarify this dilemma

OUR PEOPLES' EDUCATION: CUT THE SHACKLES; CUT THE CRAP; CUT THE MUSTARD (1998)

From the scant knowledge that survived the many years of colonialism, we do know that our ancestors had evolved their own form of education. It was an

education in which the community and the natural environment were the classroom, and the land was regarded as the mother of the people. Members of the community were the teachers, and each adult was responsible for ensuring that each child learned how to live a good life. Central to the teaching was the belief in the sacred, the Great Spirit.

The development of the whole person was emphasized through teachings often shared in storytelling. Legendary heroes such as the Raven, Wesakachak, Nanabush and others were used to transmit learning. They were regarded as transformers or "tricksters of learning" through which children learned traditional values such as humility, honesty, courage, kindness and respect.

Traditional education was strongly linked to the survival of the family and the community. Learning was geared to knowledge necessary for daily living. Boys and girls were taught at an early age to observe and utilize, to cope with and respect their environment. Independence and self-reliance were valued concepts handed down to the young. Through observation and practice, children learned the art of hunting, trapping, fishing, farming, food gathering, child-rearing, building shelters. They learned whatever their particular environment offered through experiential learning.

The rites of passage from childhood to adulthood were practiced. In most cultures, puberty rites were recognized through formal and often complex ceremonies. This was a critical time for girls and boys who were making the transition to the responsibilities of being an adult.

Traditional education was largely an informal process that provided the young people with specific skills, attitudes and knowledge they needed to function in everyday life within the context of a spiritual world view. Our ancestors mode of life, thought and every act was given spiritual significance (Seton, 1966). Teaching and learning were a "natural process occurring during everyday activities ... ensuring cultural continuity" and a sense of wellbeing (Armstrong, 1987).

Formal education imposed on Our People by the colonizers drastically changed all that! We are all aware of the consequences that continue to plague us today. While the education of Our People has not been entirely one of gloom and doom, at least over the last 25 years, we are still faced with the monumental challenge of creating a meaningful education that will not only give hope, but a promise of better life for our future generations. I believe that this means that we must "cut the shackles, cut the crap and cut the mustard."

Cut the Shackles

In schools and other educational institutions under our authority, we have the right and the opportunity to put in place what we believe to be quality education for Our People. We are in charge. We owe it to Our People, after decades of oppressive church and government control, to release them from this bondage, by creating the kind of education that will truly liberate us so we can have the independence once enjoyed by our ancestors. Our new "independence" education must begin with us, Our People, our communities. It must celebrate

our cultures, our history, the true account of the way it was and the way it is. From there, we can build on how it should be and how it will be.

We must seize the opportunity to frame our education within our context. If we fail to do this, we run the risk of doing the greatest disservice to Our People by simply mirroring the kind of education provided to us by federal and public schools, a kind of education that has had dismal results for us over many years. We must take a strong stance in shaping our education. To do this, what we need is radical change.

We must begin by disestablishing many of our existing practices based on theories of the society that has dominated us for so many years. Then we must look within ourselves, within our communities and our nations to determine which values are important to us, the content of what should be learned and how it should be learned. This new direction must relate to theories firmly based on the traditions of Our People.

This means that we must "cut the shackles" and make a new start. It is time for us to forget band-aiding; it is time for us to forget adapting; it is time for us to forget supplementing; it is time for us to forget the so-called standards, all of which have restricted our creativity in determining our own master plan. The authorities would have us believe that we are doing a great injustice to Our People by abandoning these practices even though they have been nothing more than compromising approaches that have not worked for us. We must no longer listen to these senseless arguments.

Back in 1972, we believed that we could do a better job of educating Our People. Through our policy statement "Indian Control of Indian Education" we outlined a national position on education that stated clearly our principles and our goals in education. The two main principles of the policy were "parental responsibility and local control". After years of the church and government making decisions for Our People, it was a time for us to reclaim our right to speak for our children, to actively participate in determining what they should learn, how they should learn, and who should teach them.

Sadly, the policy of Indian Control of Indian Education has not unfolded as was expected. Two factors have been at play which have negatively affected the process. One was the manipulation of Indian Affairs to have us simply administer the schools as they had in the past. The second was our own peoples' insecurity in taking control and failing to design an education that would be based on our culture, our way of life and most important our world view. For many of our communities that have taken over their own schools and other educational institutions, much time has been lost either emulating the federal or public school systems or merely band-aiding, adapting, supplementing when they should have been creating a unique and meaningful education. At the base of this attitude is the difficulty to overcome colonial domination.

The greatest challenge is to be radical, to ask the right questions within the community, to ask the families what they want for their children. Only then will we be practicing what we set out to do in 1972, which was to have the parents set the agenda for education in our communities and then getting on with the

plan. We cannot afford to lose any more time because we have let the opportunity for radical and effective change elude us for far too long. Cut the shackles! Freedom is our only recourse.

Cut the Crap

To move on, we must cut the crap and stop fooling ourselves. From the beginning of our experience with formal education, we have had it drummed into us that education was about mastering the 3 Rs. We are told that if we cannot read, 'rite or do 'rithmetic, we are doomed to failure. We do not argue with this posture but we do take exception to the use of their prescribed methods and their usual authorized textbooks. How, then, should we teach the 3 Rs to our children?

The Children of the Earth School in Winnipeg has the right idea. They have changed the 3 Rs to *rediscovering* (research), *respect* and *recovering* the culture and traditions of Our People. We must follow this lead and research our Aboriginal/tribal pedagogy so that the curriculum will accurately reflect our traditions and cultures into what and how we teach. In other words, we must overhaul the existing system and seek more appropriate materials and strategies for teaching.

Our progress has also been hampered by the interpretation of Indian Control of Indian Education. For people in some of our communities who are making changes in the curriculum, they have taken "local control" literally to mean doing everything themselves for their respective schools. They develop programs, methods and materials but do not willingly share these with other

schools, nor are they prepared to use materials designed by other First Nations schools. This results in duplication and the value of sharing is lost.

I believe this is a mistake. In fact, a mechanism must be made available that will facilitate the sharing of information related to education. For those who are computer literate, this may already be a possibility through the Internet. Almost ten years ago, I suggested that a "moccasin disk-line" be created for the sharing of educational materials. This would facilitate communication and enable schools/communities to maintain ownership of their materials, yet share them through sale or barter.

Though it is over twenty-five years since the policy of Indian Control of Indian Education was adopted, there is little evidence of real curriculum change. We must use all our resources to realize quality education, not only for the children, but for all Our People regardless of their level of study. "Education into culture, not culture into education" must be our practice and we must believe that "the answers are within us".

This leads me to why I say we must "cut the crap". To illustrate a point, I would like to suggest that we consider a 4th R, namely, rhetoric. It is common to hear our political leaders and educators speak very eloquently about the importance of education and what we must do to improve it, not only for today, but for future generations. We know all the right words; we sound like experts, but we fall short when it comes to putting our rhetoric into action.

We have heard, read, and even said many times over the last twenty-five years that quality education for Our people must be based on our culture and on

our history, yet we continue to base education on white, urban culture and history.

We say that culture is language and language is culture and that to be Micmac, Ojibwe, Sto:lo, Cree, Haida, we must speak our respective languages, yet we continue to teach our languages for only a few minutes a day in our schools knowing that this approach is ineffective.

We say that our education must respect our values and customs, yet we encourage competition rather than cooperation, the individual over the group, saving instead of sharing. We are uncomfortable when too much time is spent outdoors learning from the land because we have been conditioned to believe that education occurs in the classroom. We continue to adhere to the established school year, even when it doesn't suit the life of the community.

The rhetoric goes on and on. We expound on the importance of our Elders. We say they are our teachers, our libraries, our archives, yet we rarely include them in a meaningful way. We rarely ask them anything. We are great at having our Elders come to say a prayer or tell a story but surely this is not what we mean when we say we must learn from the Elders. Elders possess the wisdom and knowledge which must be the focus of all our learning. It is through them that we can understand our unique relationship to the Creator, our connection with nature, the order of things, and the values that enhance the identity of Our People.

Not properly acknowledging the Elders is probably the most serious mistake we make as we attempt to create a quality education for Our People.

Let's face it; we can't do it without them. How can we learn about our traditions on which to base our education if we don't ask the Elders? There is little written by our people that we can turn to for this information.

If we sincerely believe that our traditions are important to us, we have no other recourse but to go to the Elders. I firmly believe that we must know the past in order to understand the present so that we can plan, wisely, for the future. It is up to this generation of educational leaders to tap that valuable resource, because each day, fewer and fewer Elders whose knowledge goes back at least two generations are left to teach us what we need to know. When they are gone, their valuable knowledge goes with them. It's like losing a whole library and its archives.

There is more rhetoric. We say that parents must play a major role in the education of their children, yet in many communities parents have no idea what is going on in the school. They are rarely invited to meetings to decide on directions to be taken. They are rarely asked for their original thoughts on how or what should be done in certain situations. School Board meetings are often closed meetings. Of course, they are expected to attend on Report Card Day and, if they don't, they are often simply ignored.

"Parental responsibility," as stated in Indian Control of Indian Education, recognizes that parents must enjoy the same fundamental decision-making rights about their children's education as other parents across Canada. Today, Band Councils and their designated authorities run our schools. While membership on the Band Councils and school authorities undoubtedly include parents, the

intention of the policy was to include the parents of all school children in the shaping and running of the schools.

We talk also about the need for balance in our learning. We say that we must not only address the mind, but we must also address spiritual, emotional and physical growth as well. Is there evidence of this balance in your school? Are children still deprived of recess or physical education classes as a punishment for a misdemeanor? How is spiritual and emotional growth addressed?

Finally, let's remind ourselves of our ancestors' relationship to the land. The land is our mother, Mother Earth. Are we teaching our children to respect the earth, to be environmentally aware? Are we, in our communities practicing the kind of behavior that is appropriate of a child toward a mother?

There is no doubt that we have mastered the art of expressing what education for Our People should be. The rhetoric is there but where is the substance? I believe that what we are saying is inarguable. The problem comes with turning that rhetoric into action and doing those things we say are conducive to learning for our children rather than continuing to do the same old thing in the same old way. That is why I am advocating that we must first "cut the shackles", free ourselves from mirroring a system that has not worked, then we must "cut the crap", by less talk and more action and finally we must "cut the mustard" which is to "practice what we preach".

Cut the Mustard

How do we cut the mustard? How do we get the job done? We must take a good, hard look at the education we are providing in our communities. I don't

mean that we should have a formal evaluation with some high-powered, high-priced consultants who know nothing about our communities come in and do the job. Many communities have experienced this pitfall and found that what was recommended did not resemble anything that was said by them in the data collection. It was evident that the evaluators had a blueprint solution for Aboriginal education which was not necessarily valid for all communities.

What has to happen is that people of the community must come together, (mothers, fathers, grandparents, high school and post-secondary students, members of Band Councils/school boards, etc.) to address five simple questions about the education in their community. These questions framed several years ago by my colleague, Clive Linklater, have been effective for those who have used them to evaluate and to design an innovative education plan for their school/community.

The first two questions are "Where are we now? How did we get to where we are?" By addressing these questions you will have done your own evaluation. You will have considered the history of education in your community. This might include having no formal school, having children taught informally through traditional teachings, having your children leave the family and community for a number of years, having your children attend public schools in a nearby town or city. Why were these good or bad? If you have always had a school in your community, under which jurisdiction has education been most effective? Why?

Questions three, four and five deal with the formulation of your own model of education. "Where do we want to go? How will we get to where we want to go?

How will we know when we are there?" Deciding on the kind of education you want for your children does not preclude the inclusion of certain programs and courses currently offered to them. It means that the focus of teaching and learning is based on your community's philosophy, goals and objectives which become central to everything that follows. Therefore, what you initiate and what you want to keep must correspond to that framework.

Considering the kind of education required provides the members of your community with an opportunity to share ideas on what would constitute an ideal education for your people as we approach the 21st Century. It would typically include traditional values, a holistic approach and technological and scientific advances of the modem age. How do we get to where you want to go? This question refers to implementing your concept of an ideal education. It will be necessary to discuss the factors that will assist in the process and which factors might hinder the process. In the case of the latter, thought will have to be given to how these obstacles can be addressed.

Finally, how will you know when you are there? You will know you have achieved your goal of quality education when your children are enjoying the challenge of school/learning, when their self-esteem and self-confidence is evident, when your children are proud of who they are, when their links with the older generations are made. You will know you have achieved your goal when the majority of children who enter your system graduate and go on to further education or get a job, when they are living happy and fulfilled lives of their own making. This list could go on and on. What is clear is that it could take several

years before you see the results of today's efforts, much as it has taken many years to realize the devastation caused by residential schools and other forms of colonial schooling.

There is, therefore, an urgency to cut the shackles, cut the crap and to cut the mustard. Our "independence" education will be based on a marriage of the past and the present. It will honor our cultures which include our values, our languages and Our Peoples' contributions to the development and progress of this vast country. Most importantly, in your quest for a meaningful education for your school/community, you will have found that the answers you have been seeking can be found within yourselves/within your own communities.

As a retrospective, Aboriginal education in Canada, can be described as historically ineffective. While formal education has been available in some form or another for over 300 years, only recently have Aboriginal people themselves been involved in its design and delivery. Since the policy of Indian Control of Indian Education was introduced 2 7 years ago, there have been definite signs of improvement. However, while these modest changes have resulted in many more students graduating from university, we still have a very serious attrition rate at every level of education.

The two papers have tended to relate to the in-school program but a wider application can be made, as the challenges facing young people in school are the same challenges faced in post secondary and adult education. I discuss this in a previous article in this journal, entitled, First Nations and Higher Education: The Four R's-Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility (American Indian Education, Vol. 30, No. 3)

The prospective of Aboriginal education in Canada, as I see it, begins with process rather than content. We must engage not only parents, which is paramount, but we must engage the whole community to take ownership of what is to be in Aboriginal education in the 21st century. Together with teachers, the school authority, they must decide what they want for their children both now and in the future. They must adhere to the philosophy and principles they set in place. Only then can we/they realize the significance of the rhetoric cited in the last paper and begin to see Aboriginal education as a holistic and cultural phenomenon.

Verna J. Kirkness, Associate Professor Emerita of the University of British Columbia, has worked in the field of Aboriginal education for over four decades. She has received numerous awards for her work which include being named Canadian *Educator of the Year in 1990,* the *National Aboriginal Achievement Award* in 1994 and the Order of Canada in 1999. Her publications include five books and numerous articles. Born on the Fisher River Reserve in Manitoba, she is of Cree heritage.

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