Why Aren’t We Doing Better?
The History of Aboriginal Education in Ontario

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November 2012
Introduction

The reality of the current education situation in Ontario is that Aboriginal students are consistently achieving and succeeding less in all subject areas than non-Aboriginal students. The reasons for this are vast and complex but much has to do with the troubled past of Aboriginal people since the advent of Europeans in North America. The European education extended unto Aboriginal communities was designed to lift Aboriginal peoples from their ‘savage’ state so that they could, as ‘civilized’ people, benefit from and contribute to modern European society. The most comprehensive vehicle of Eurocentric education with the goal of Aboriginal assimilation were residential schools, whose horrific legacy still haunts Aboriginal peoples across Canada today. Since the era of residential schools great strides have been taken in reconciliation and achievements made towards the goal of greater Aboriginal self-governance and control over their own education. Yet, Aboriginal communities are still faced by many deep and troubling challenges and many improvements in regards to Aboriginal communities and education remain to be made. This essay will examine how the history of Aboriginal people in Ontario has impacted the experience of Aboriginal children and youth in schools today.

To begin to understand the state of Aboriginal education today, it is important to look back at how it got to where it is. Traditional Aboriginal education was something much different than the educational system we have today in North America. It is important to know what Aboriginal education was like before colonisers came to what is now the country of Canada. Aboriginal education was not held in today’s European style classrooms. The “classroom” was the world surrounding the community. The “subjects” taught began with oral traditions and practical experiences of real life. Aboriginal people learned about their culture and traditions from their elders through the teachings of storytelling. Family and group socialization was also a large part of their education, where “children learned traditional values such as humility, honesty, courage, kindness and respect.” (Reforming First Nations Education).
Traditional Aboriginal style of education was practical and useful to their way of life. It can be said that Aboriginal people were very much alike because “whatever their ecological base and specific lifestyle, Canada’s aboriginal peoples shared certain cultural attributes.” (Barman 3) However, things changed when European settlers came to Canada. Not only was their world flipped upside down, but with it their traditional way of education.

Implications of the Treaties in Canada on Aboriginal Peoples

When the settlers first arrived to North America, the relationship between the Aboriginal people and the settlers was amicable. There was an understanding that the Aboriginal people would help the settlers learn to live off the land. This relationship changed when the settlers introduced signed treaties with Aboriginal groups. The treaties were put in place to exchange land for protection of the Aboriginal people. The “treaties, which were white paper described as containing limited and minimal promises failed to protect the economic, educational, health and welfare needs of the First Nations population” (Godlewaska 421) and thus held very little real meaning when they were signed. When the Aboriginal groups signed treaties with the settlers, little did they know that they were signing away their sovereignty, autonomy and freedom to practice their customs like they had for centuries.

Treaties were established with the Aboriginal people to create an understanding between the settlers and the Aboriginal people of how the land would be divided between them. The treaties began in 1701 with the British Crown who entered into treaties to keep relations between the two groups peaceful (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada). In signing treaties with settlers who had come to North America, Aboriginal people did not know what signing them would mean for their people. The reason for signing them was to maintain their amicable relationship. This was the case for most Treaties signed by one Aboriginal group or another with the settlers.

With regards to Aboriginal education in Canada, in the Pre-Confederate Treaties, education was not specifically addressed. Christian missionaries were a significant part of Aboriginal
schooling once the Europeans came to North America; they were an integral part of the dominance of the Europeans (Barman 3). Using Western education models, the Christian missionaries and other settlers attempt the assimilation of Aboriginal people. This was done with little to no consideration of what was best for the Aboriginal communities; the European settlers and missionaries believed that their way of life was superior and they openly sought to assimilate them into Western culture.

The significance of the treaties is that they in fact were the reason why Aboriginal education disappeared and reappeared in a different form. The traditional education that Aboriginal people lived by was in some ways gone. “The newcomers’ ethnocentricity predetermined an attitude of superiority, reflected in such assumptions as the Micmacs being incapable of writing and aboriginal children benefitting from European-style schooling.” (Barman 3) This example of the attitude of superiority displayed by the “newcomers” to North America that Barman et al. refer to led to the destruction of the Aboriginal people’s traditional ways of education. Yet, this attitude did not stop with the Micmacs. All Aboriginal groups were affected by this attitude and this was what led the Aboriginal people to stop the widespread practice of their traditional approach to education.

There are many treaties that were created and signed with different Aboriginal groups both before and after Confederation. In regards to the treaties signed before Confederation, none of them explicitly cover the topic of Aboriginal education. The education factor was dealt with more in post-Confederate treaties. Pre-Confederate treaties include the Niagara Treaty of 1764, the Fort Stanwix Treaty of 1768, the Treaty of Paris of 1783 and the Upper Canada Treaties of 1764-1836. Being bound in these treaties, Aboriginal people’s autonomy disappeared in many ways without them knowing. The Aboriginal people could not have known that in signing the treaties, they would slowly be giving themselves away over the next few hundred years. At the time when they were signing these treaties, the Aboriginals believed that the land would be divided as the treaties claimed and that they would then in turn get protection from the Europeans. What happened thereafter is that the Europeans would
assimilate the Aboriginal people to be more like them. This is what caused them to lose their autonomy and sovereignty over North America. They could not have known that they would be forced to assimilate.

The Treaty of Paris in the year 1783 is when Aboriginal people truly lost a place in the treaties of their future. This treaty ignored promises made to the Aboriginal people by the British. The Aboriginal people were never invited to take part in the signing of this treaty, despite the fact that many Mohawks fought on the side of the British during the American Revolution. Mohawk people had decided that the British were less likely to interfere with their land and way of life than the Americans. The British government in London, however, had little interest in the their right to be a part of these negotiations, as the government was pursuing its own imperial goals in the remaining North American colony that it controled. News of this betrayal shocked Loyalists in the Iroquois Confederacy. To appease this group, Québec governor Fredrick Haldimand decided to offer two parcels of land near Lake Ontario in 1784 to the Iroquois who were still loyal to the Crown. An agreement was reached with the Mississauga Indians who owned this land, which would ultimately lead to the creation of the Six Nations Reserve near current-day Brantford, Ontario (Early Canadiana Online).

**Treaties in Ontario and How They Impacted Aboriginal Education**

It is difficult to find how treaties specifically influenced Ontario. The society of the Six Nations living in the fertile area around Lake Ontario and along the St. Lawrence River was characterized by agriculture, permanent villages, a well-established system of laws and individual legal rights, formal
religion, and rich traditions expressed in music, dance and festivals. Three levels of government existed: the village, the nation and the League of Six Nations Confederacy, consisting of fifty chiefs proportionately representing each nation and meeting several times a year in a council. (Barman 2)

We can see from this excerpt from Indian Education that Ontario’s Aboriginal people had their own way of life that was working well for them. However, after treaties were signed, Aboriginal people were to stand by and watch their lives slowly disintegrated before their eyes. Just like everywhere else in Canada, the Aboriginal people in Ontario were forced to assimilate. Barman reassures this by stating that “government treatment of Indians living in Ontario was characterized by imposition, treaty negotiations rapidly forcing the surrender of Indian lands for future White settlement.” (5)

Post-Confederation Treaties and Their Impact on Education Today

It is known that some Aboriginal leaders did request that their people were educated in the way of the Europeans. They had an interest in understanding the ways of the Europeans and wanted to integrate certain aspects of European life that they found useful into the Aboriginal way of life. (Legacy of Hope) However, mostly it was the Europeans who asserted the importance of their education and imposed it on Aboriginal communities. This is evident in the Sessional Papers, the Report on the Fort Qu'Appelle Indian Industrial School, where Reverend Hugonnard is quoted saying:

"I feel certain that this school will be a great success, and that it will be a chief means of civilized the Indian; but to obtain this result, accommodation must be made to take in more pupils, as now we can only take in but one out of each reserve. A school for Indian girls would be of great importance, and I may say, would be absolutely necessary to effect the civilization of the next generation of Indians, if the women were educated it would almost be a guarantee that their children would be educated also and brought up Christians, with no danger of their
following the awful existence that many of them ignorantly live now. It will be nearly futile to educate the boys and leave the girls uneducated". (Legacy of Hope)

Many of the treaties created after Confederation, between the years 1871-1921, did include sections pertaining to Aboriginal education. In these treaties, the Crown made many promises to the Aboriginal people. For instance, the Crown made the promise of “maintaining schools on reserves or providing teachers or educational help to the First Nation named in the treaties” (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada). This promise was fulfilled; however, it was not effectively fulfilled, nor was it implemented in a way that was productive and useful to Aboriginal people. The Indian Act of 1876 has three pages regarding education out of one hundred and fifty pages. This is an important document which, although written long ago, impinged on the way that Aboriginal children are educated even today. Soon after treaties were signed, Aboriginal children were forced into residential schools. In Ontario, the Acts of 1868 and 1869 that were passed by the Canadian federal government commissioned residential schools to assimilate Aboriginal children into Eurocentric values and norms (Haig-Brown 168). Aboriginal children were taken away from their parents to become more European and less Aboriginal. By doing this, Aboriginal children were losing the practical life skills education that their elders had been providing to them through their traditions for centuries.

**The Impact of Residential Schools on Aboriginal Students’ Academic Development**

The harsh conditions, abuse and neglect that generations of Canadian Aboriginal children experienced in residential schools has devastated communities and continues to influence Aboriginal children and youth in schools today.

**Social, Political and Economic Context of Residential Schools in Canada**
Education takes form in varied ways depending on the context of a society. In Aboriginal tradition, the education of youth is ensured through experiential and societal practices that are passed down through generations. This system was a highly developed form of education, and language was at the heart of this system, since language held the key to the continuity of Aboriginal culture. However, the effects of colonization and imperialistic policies towards such education resulted in the erosion of all things Aboriginal. Eurocentrism was the founding belief that proved to be pervasive within Canada after its introduction during the colonial era. Through the authority of the Indian Act, the federal government breached its obligations to Aboriginal peoples when it sought not to educate, but to assimilate them under a seemingly “superior knowledge” (Battiste 19). Eurocentrism universalizes thought and claims to be the only truth, legitimizing the superiority of “civilized” Europeans over the inferior “savage” Aboriginal peoples. In order to be successful in assimilating the “Other”- in this case Aboriginal peoples- into a Eurocentric system, one would be susceptible to a varied educational system that requires the isolation of the “Other” at a young and impressionable age. The separation of home and school life that occurred in “residential schools,” normally boarding schools, did just this and therefore led to a dislocation of Aboriginal children from their Aboriginal culture.

From 1860 to 1960, non-Aboriginal educators and authorities controlled the education of Aboriginal children, all of which was funded and operated by protestant Catholic Missionaries (Neegan 6) and in most cases, the government of Canada. The residential school system that was formed by an amalgamation in 1923 was the product of a steady evolution at the command of numerous forces, including the Catholic Church and the Government of Canada (Battiste 19). Aboriginal children were exposed to forces of violence, powerlessness, exploitation and cultural imperialism in conditions of poverty and filth in a system considered genocide of Aboriginal culture. This was attempted by “killing the Indian in the child”. One cannot understand the severity of the trauma experience by children in residential schools without first considering a traditional Aboriginal approach to education. Whereas
Eurocentric thought asserts that it is only Europeans who can progress socially, culturally, and economically, and believes that Aboriginal peoples are “frozen in time” and can contribute nothing to the progression of humanity or the world (Battiste 4), it was quite the opposite. Aboriginal peoples are incredibly concerned with the future; they have strictly practiced sustainable use of the Earth’s bounty by living for Mother Nature, as opposed to Mother Nature living for them. Most significant to this, was linking such education to economic condition. For traditional Aboriginal communities, learning was for living and survival. Robert Leavitt states in his research of *Language and cultural context in Native education* that by the age of five, Aboriginal children were habituated to respect the environment through observation and practiced in the techniques of hunting, trapping, and fishing (Leavitt 106). Aboriginal education was not one of literature or data taught in a formal context, but one of spiritual context, through actual participation, storytelling, art and other related activities (Lafrance 68) (see Figure 2).

These experiential but “unconventional” strategies were viewed as recessive and erroneous, and therefore were subject to neglect and rejection by the European majority. The dominant Catholics and Europeans dismissed the Indigenous customs as they were considered incapable of meeting the productivity needs of the modern world (Battiste 5). Residential schools were the solution to avoid any further intergenerational spread of Aboriginal traditions.

Figure 2: Storytelling by firelight. (Miller, 1996)
The Federal Government surrendered complete control of Aboriginal education to the Catholic Church. The Church believed that Aboriginal culture was barbaric and savage, and therefore the education of children needed to be assumed by ‘civilized’ people (Douglas 298). Residential schools had two main purposes: (1) the parting of children from his or her family and (2) to extinct the Aboriginal culture since it was unworthy of preservation (Neegan 6). It was commonly agreed among missionary authorities that the earlier Aboriginal children could be extracted from their families and tribes, the sooner the children could be prepared to live a civilized life (Miller 207). Essentially, the residential school system was one geared towards displacement and elimination of Aboriginal peoples. This mission was executed through the implementation of mandatory Bible school in the summer season, which separated kids from an Aboriginal traditional caribou hunt (a profound and sentimental bonding process within Aboriginal communities that traditionally commenced during the summer as the caribou were in season at this time). Not only was this an opportunity to reinforce Catholic education, but also a method of weakening Aboriginal influence by omitting the caribou hunt. This was one of many methods of assimilation, and consistently resulted in confusion for the child. Testimonial statements of residential school survivors today recall questioning their parents, “What did I do wrong?” and “Why are you sending me away” (Regnier 54). Few Aboriginal children realized that their parents were left with no choice but to submit to the Canadian Government’s demand in transferring Aboriginal children to the Residential School system. This was due to a clear imbalance of power; an overwhelming blanket of powerlessness was laid over the Aboriginal culture. Removing Aboriginal child from their families was most advantageous in eliminating any chance of parental obstruction.

Aboriginal languages are sacred to Aboriginal people as they are central in passing down “instructions of development and survival” and other human lessons (Battiste 17). Recognizing this, the residential schools absolutely forbade any use of Aboriginal languages on school premises; the only languages that were to be spoken were either English or French. If a child was caught speaking their
native language, the punishments were severe, most commonly taking form in the piercing of their tongues with sewing needles (Lafrance 114). The eventual outcome of such a restrictive language policies ultimately led to the demise of individual Aboriginal languages and therefore greatly assisting the assimilation of Aboriginal youth into the dominant white culture (Neegan 7). Languages provide a direct and powerful means of understanding Aboriginal legacy. By sharing a language, Aboriginal peoples were able to convey their spirituality and customs of living by the land. The sharing of these ideals creates a “collective cognitive experience” that is understood as “tribal epistemology.” This is best explained in the following excerpt:

“Our Native language embodies a value system about how we ought to live and relate to each other... Now, if you destroy our languages, you not only break down these relationships, but you also destroy other aspects of our Indian way of life and culture, especially those that describe man’s connection with nature. Without our languages, we will cease to exist as separate people.” (AFN 14).

This statement conveys the loss of language suffered by Aboriginal people as a result of the residential school system which evidently had unprecedented adverse effects that would terminally cripple the existence of Aboriginal languages, and cultures as a whole. Today, over fifty Aboriginal languages are in danger of extinction, with thirteen being spoken by fewer than one hundred people (Neegan 7).

The outlawing of Aboriginal languages is considered to be one of the most powerful forces in the obliteration of the Aboriginal culture. However, it was not the only instrument of assimilation used against the Aboriginal people living in present-day Canada. At the same time as breaking-down the potential for effective communication between Aboriginal children and their families, changes in the curriculum were implemented to further daunt the Aboriginal culture. The Government was urged to use missionaries to amplify assimilation through a policy known as “aggressive civilization” which took
away traditional Aboriginal mythology from Aboriginal children immediate upon arrival at residential schools.

“If anything is to be done with the Indian we must catch him very young” (Douglas 303). The attack on the Aboriginal culture included registering the children in English sports, teaching them the classroom subjects considered to be necessary universal staples in education, including geometry, British history and geography, and lessons on the Bible (Neegan 7) (see Figure 3).

The residential school system was run in an almost militaristic way, from the children being numbered, “I was number 473” one survivor recounted (Haig-Brown 156), to the strict uniform regulations of the dress code. Any long hair or traditional Aboriginal braids were cut-off and traditional clothing was burned. The

Figure 3: Nun teaching a lesson from the Bible to Aboriginal children (Miller, 1996)

Figure 4: The powerful and famous before and after shot of Thomas Moore; although Moore did not attend a residential school located in Ontario, it is still a powerful indication of assimilation intentions of the residential schools all over Canada.
nuns at the school provided the children with new non-Aboriginal clothing, often used later as proof of in completing the cultural assimilation process. (Neegan 8) (Figure 4)

Any and every opportunity to demoralize Aboriginal culture was viewed by the authority as a chance to capitalize on rigidly enforcing European superiority. A survivor recounts her experiences, as it being “corrosive and nearly destructive of her person.” (Haig-Brown 156) Miller published in his 1996 examination of residential schools, Shingwauk’s Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools, a detailed description of one proposed program of assimilation through education and evangelization, clearly illustrating the future policy in the excerpt from Miller’s book below:

> The most effectual means of ameliorating the condition of the Indians, of promoting their religious improvement and education, and of eventually relieving His Majesty’s Government from the expense of the Indian department, are, – 1st. To collect the Indians in considerable numbers, and to settle them in villages, with due portion of land for their cultivation and support.
> 2d. To make such provision for their religious improvement, education and instruction in husbandry, as circumstances may from time to time require.
> 3d. To afford them such assistance in building their houses, rations, and in procuring such seed and agricultural implements as may be necessary, commuting where practicable, a portion of their presents for the latter.30

The policy behind this aggressive and intrusive program was that assimilation was the only conceivable “Euthanasia of savage communities” (Miller 74).

Gradually, the conditions were being exposed as unacceptable and the residential schools began either closing or transferred to the rule of Aboriginal authorities. However, the solution to fixing the damage done was not as simple as physically closing the residential school buildings, for the colonial education system of the past continues to function even in today’s schools. This is confirmed by Neegan in the following: “The alienation of Aboriginal students and the exclusion of Aboriginal education are symptomatic of the unequal power relations between non-Aboriginals and Aboriginals that continue to exist today” (8).
Ontario Residential Schools

There were sixteen Aboriginal residential schools located in Ontario. Fourteen of these schools were located in Northern Ontario with six operated by the Roman Catholic Church, four by the Anglican Church, one by the Presbyterian Church and three run by the Mennonites. Two schools were located in Southern Ontario, Mount Elgin Indian Residential School operated by the United Church and the Mohawk Institute run by the Anglican Church. The average number of students in these schools ranged from 84-292 students who were usually between the ages of 6 and 18. (Residential School Research 26)

Up until 1950, most of these schools had very few qualified teachers who were only hired based on their religious affiliation. It was difficult to find qualified teachers because these schools were often located in isolated and remote places and did not pay as much as regular schools in Ontario’s urban centers (Residential School Research 47). Most of the residential schools were also poorly constructed, and were in a constant state of repair (Residential School Research 26). The Aboriginal children attending these schools suffered immensely because many of their daily needs were not met. Medical Officers who visited the schools on a regular basis reported that there were countless sanitary problems in the schools, and as a result made suggestions on how they could make improvements. Most of the time, however, these suggestions were ignored and the unsafe and problematic situations continued (Residential School Research 27).

From 1883 to 1923, the Canadian Government distinguished two types of residential schools, industrial schools and boarding schools (Milloy 8). For the most part, industrial schools were larger, better financed, further away from Aboriginal Communities, and had more variety in the academic instruction and occupational training. These schools operated on the half-day system which meant that students would be in the class for half of the day, and would work on the farm or in trades during the other half of the day (Miller 363). Boarding schools, on the other hand, were smaller, closer to
Aboriginal Communities, and poorly supported by government grants. Many Government officials believed that if the school was situated near the Aboriginal Community, parents would visit too often, and as a result, would disrupt the students’ learning (Milloy 30).

The half-day system was seen as beneficial to the government because it supported the school financially, as it gave an opportunity to benefit from the students’ free labour (Milloy 157). At Spanish Residential School, there was little done in the institution that was not performed by the students (Johnston 26). The boys at the school ploughed, seeded and harvested crops, milled wheat and corn, baked bread, fed and tended cows, horses, sheep and swine, repaired the building, made shoes and tailored clothes (Johnston 25). At many of these industrial schools, during such times as the harvest for example, the entire student body would be pulled out of class to help with the harvesting chores. It was evident that the staff was willing or mandated to pull students out of class instruction in order to support the school at the lowest possible cost, with disregard to the students’ academic instruction (Miller 370).

The goal was to locate industrial schools close to towns and cities so that students could continuously see an example of Western civilization. After students graduated from their school, they would be placed in the nearby cities with employment in the trades so that they did not return to their communities. The cultural backsliding, “retrogression”, of graduates was a constant worry to the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Affairs (DIA) and of the churches. They believed that if the graduates went back to their communities that they would re-establish their connection with their parents, community and traditions (Milloy 40).

Rules and regulations relating to student behavior were established by the Department of Indian Affairs. Many schools also had their own types of punishment, which included coercion and humiliation. Physical punishment was also very common and was delivered by anything that was close at hand, such as a ruler, rod, bell, pointer or an open hand or closed fist (Johnston 138). At Spanish Residential School
in Spanish Ontario, students were usually sent to Father Hawkins for punishment. Students viewed him as an executioner who waited for boys needing punishment (Johnston 138). At another Ontario School, Cecilia Jeffery, a female student was beaten by a principle so severely that she became ill and died shortly after the beating (Residential School Research 37).

In 1896, the DIA published a curriculum, “Programme of Studies for Indian Schools” in its Annual Report for that year. This original curriculum consisted of geography, reading, history, calisthenics and religion. Students moved through six standards in each subject, advancing only once they understood all concepts (Milloy 34). This curriculum was used in the residential schools until the 1930s when they were then expected to follow the provincial curriculum (Milloy 34).

**Impacts of Residential Schools**

Residential schools created a large group of Aboriginal men and women who had neither the education, skills, nor experience to survive in their traditional Aboriginal lifestyle, or in mainstream non-Aboriginal society. Since Aboriginal children were taken from their homes and placed in residential schools, they did not get the opportunity to learn their traditional Aboriginal way of life. Anything they had previously known about their culture was erased during the assimilation that took place in the residential schools. In these schools, children were neglected in receiving enough education to find a job in the mainstream society. The young Aboriginal people, therefore, became trapped between two cultures, and had a difficult time functioning in either one.

The use of Eurocentrism in residential schools played a vital role in manufacturing the physical and cultural inferiority of Aboriginal peoples, and has in most cases led to the loss of cultural identity, with an internalized hate for Aboriginal people living among a dominant white society today (Neegan 9). The dominant colonial rule, control and subordination, continue to influence education systems today. The detriment suffered in the 19th and 20th centuries terminally echoes in the lives of survivors and their
families. The residential schools disrupted Aboriginal families and individual identity: “It had severed the ties that bound Native children to their families and communities, leaving semi-assimilated young people and shattered communities; in far too many cases it had driven its young products into destructive byways from which far too many never emerged alive” (Miller 10). Thus, many Aboriginal peoples lost their pride and identity, and were ashamed of who they had become. To cope with this tough situation, many Aboriginal individuals resorted to alcohol and drugs as a means of coping with their past experiences, and their present situation. The result of this marginalization has made many generations of Aboriginal communities trapped in a cycle of poverty, neglect, abuse, loss of pride and identity, and shame (Residential School Research 10). The impact of residential schools remains quite evident today since Aboriginal children and youth are significantly less successful in schools than non-Aboriginal children and youth. The effect of the residential schools upon Aboriginal people has left society to deal with many disturbing and demoralizing issues.

Case Study: The Mohawk Institute

The Mohawk Institute was located in Brantford Ontario and was established near the Six Nations Indian Reserve (Residential School Research 48). It was affiliated and operated by the Anglican Church and was opened in 1834 (Miller 60). J. R. Miller explains that in the more than three decades that the school was in operation, it clearly illustrated, “what was becoming a depressingly clear moral in the residential schooling story: neither missionaries, nor the government learned from earlier mistakes” (Miller 360).

The new Mohawk Institute was constructed in 1903 after the original was burned down in a series of fires (Residential School Research 47). The new building was a solid red brick structure which housed up to 150 students between the ages of 6 and 16 (Residential School Research 47). The Mohawk Institute was the first Residential School in Upper Canada and it became a model in terms of programs
and physical layout, which is why the Mohawk Institute is a beneficial school to study in detail (Carney 24). The central portion of the school contained the principal and teachers’ quarters and administration offices. One wing consisted of the boys’ dormitories, and the other was the girls’ dormitories. The layout of the school, which completely separated the staff from students, distinguished the native people from the non-native people. In 1922, a new wing was also added with a dining room, kitchen and laundry room, and in 1930 a chapel was constructed (Residential School Research 48).

There were a total of six principals during the long operation of the Mohawk Institute (Residential School Research 53). The staff in 1930 consisted of the principal and his wife, with three female teachers and three male teachers. Of these six teachers, only two were qualified (Residential School Research 49). There was also a nurse, sewing teaching, two dieticians, laundress, housekeeper, matron, a boy’s matron, mechanic, farmer and gardener in the school as well (Residential School Research 49).

The Mohawk Institute was labeled an industrial school and ran on a half-day system (Milloy 35). In this way, students would receive the skills that would allow them to cope with, and participate in the new economy and society (Milloy 152). Ontario at this time was quickly being settled and modernized.
If the Aboriginal children were not forced to change, many believed they would die off because they would never be able to naturally fit into society (Milloy 27). The Canadian Government believed that, “The Indian problem exists owing to the fact that the Indian is untrained to take his place in the world” (Milloy 35). Therefore, the Department of Indian Affairs believed that these industrial schools would be the solution to this problem since the students would receive practical training that would help them attain a career. The Mohawk Institution was a working farm with a variety of livestock, large gardens, barns, stables, and chicken and pig pens (Residential School Research 50). Boys worked a variety of activities on the farm grounds and as they got older, they worked in various trades. The Canadian Government liked agricultural instruction because it was cheap to provide and contributed to the overall operation of the school. The girls worked inside the school doing various domestic tasks, sometimes labeled, “domestic household science courses”. These tasks included washing, ironing, sewing, mending and knitting (Residential School Research 47). This division of labour, instilled gender roles into the students, as it was clear that males worked outside, and females worked indoors (Milloy 222).

All instruction and communication in the Mohawk institution was in English (Carney 24). Language and communication was seen as one of the most important ways of transmitting cultural values from one generation to the next. Therefore, requiring the students to speak only English was a way to break them away from their Aboriginal culture. This English-only policy was considered so
successful at the Mohawk Institute, that other residential schools adapted this model as well (Carney 24).

The Mohawk Institute, like many other residential school, had many safety hazards and unsanitary living conditions. It was reported to be infested with rats and cockroaches. Food, such as milk, was not stored properly, and dishes were cleaned and dried with dirty water and dishtowels. In addition, it had an unsafe electrical system with poor lighting in classrooms, inadequate fire alarms and hazardous electrical outlets and wiring (Residential School Research 52). It was also overcrowded with students, which led to many other serious problems, including the spread of illness and diseases. Whooping cough, colds, influenza, grippe and infections in the upper respiratory tract were all common (Residential School Research 51).

The Mohawk Institute was the site of some spectacular instances of Aboriginal resistance to the oppression of the schools (Miller 360). Many students attempted to run away, but most were found, returned to the school and punished. In 1922, when Nelles Ashton was principal of the school, he punished the girls who ran away by cutting off their hair and placing them in a “dark room” with only bread and water (Residential School Research 51). Another astounding form of resistance occurred in 1903 when a group of boys set fire to the school, burning it down (Residential School Research 51).

Eight boys were punished and arrested for this crime (Milloy 369).

Many parents in Aboriginal communities resisted and tried to change the structures in the Residential Schools. Most parental complains were ineffective and evoked little change. However, one case
around the time of World War One proved to be effective when a father of two girls in the Mohawk Institute, with the approval of the Council of the Six Nations, took the administrator of the school to court seeking damages for the physical mistreatment of his daughters. After the hearing, the court agreed with the plaintiff, and awarded him compensation for his daughters’ suffering (Miller 379).

The Mohawk Institution was closed down in 1969 after being in operation for 139 years. It was closed down, like many other schools, during this time because the Canadian Government began phasing out residential schools. It was the longest running residential school in Canadian history (Miller 360). It enrolled between 150-190 students every year that it was in operation, and therefore shaped the lives of many Aboriginal people in Ontario. For years they lived away from their parents and community, and grew up in a highly regulated structure filled with abuse and neglect. The legacy of residential Schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today.

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In totally there were sixteen residential schools in operation in Ontario established in order to assimilate the Aboriginal population in Canada. The first one, The Mohawk Institution, opened in 1850 and Sirland Lake was the last one to close in 1990. Most of these schools were categorized as Industrial Schools that ran on the half-day system. In these schools generations of Aboriginal children and youth experienced harsh conditions since the schools were not well constructed or well kept. Many schools were overcrowded, unsafe places where students’ daily physical, intellectual and spiritual needs were ignored. The children subjected to these schools became a marginalized group who were lost between their traditional aboriginal culture and the mainstream society. The end result was that they did not fit into either one of the societies. The abuse and neglect suffered by these children through much of their childhood and youth certainly scarred their adult lives, and further scarred the lives of their descendants. As a result, the damaging effects of the residential school experience continues to impact
upon Aboriginal communities today. The evidence of this is that Aboriginal students in schools today continue to achieve far less, and become less successful in their endeavors as their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Thus, it is clear that Aboriginal people have suffered consequences. Furthermore, the Eurocentric notion of inferiority has facilitated the creation of discriminatory stereotypes that are very much alive today; the impact of these stereotypes is evident, because although the Aboriginal youth today may not be in the harsh conditions of residential schooling, they are still at a disadvantage as such stereotypes and exclusions are by-products of a still white-dominant society in Ontario and Canada.

Change in Aboriginal Education: the 1960s to 1990s

The 1960s and 1970s were characterized by political activism and change internationally and domestically (Abele 5). Significant events in Canada included Canada's centennial in 1967, the adoption of a policy of multiculturalism in 1971, the enactment of the Canadian Bill of Rights in 1960, as well as the establishment of a number of human rights commissions at both the provincial and federal levels. (Abele 4) It was also during this period that Aboriginal issues gained prominence across the globe and significant gains would be made for Aboriginal civil rights (Abele 5). For the first time, Canadians were talking about Aboriginal peoples’ rights, including rights specific to them. Much of this was set in motion by the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights which forced the Canadian government to examine its treatment of Aboriginal peoples. The 1960s also saw extended voting rights for Aboriginal people, a protest in Ottawa in 1964 involving 400 Aboriginal participants from six different reserves, and the erection of a pavilion at the 1967 International and Universal Exposition in Montreal which loudly proclaimed to the public the stark reality of the treatment of Aboriginal people in Canada.

In 1966, the Hawthorn Report, commissioned by the federal government to investigate the social, educational and economic conditions of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, was published. The Report,
although still supporting the Indian Act, suggested that Aboriginal peoples should not be forced to acquire the values of the majority of society and should have more say in their own governance. (Dickason) As can be seen, following centuries of domination and the attempted imposition of alien values and lifestyles, Aboriginal people in Canada started taking control of their own destiny by reaffirming the validity of their culture and redefining their political, economic, and social priorities. Central to this process was their regaining of control over their education. (Barman 1)

The thrust towards Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education should be seen as part of the larger revitalization of Aboriginal societies occurring in Canada and throughout the world in the last decades of the 20th century with the particular focus of self-governance (Barman 2). The failure of the formal European education system imposed upon Aboriginal people with the intention of their assimilation led to a fundamental redefinition of the purpose of Aboriginal education; just as education was used against Aboriginal people with the purpose of their assimilation, it was implicit in Aboriginal people’s endeavor to reclaim control over their own education that it would be used as a mechanism of cultural revitalization. (Barman 4) As stated in “The Challenge of Indian Education: An Overview”, “it was only with the growth of organized aboriginal self-determination, both in Canada and more generally across the world, that assimilation through education ceased to be an official government policy” (Barman 1).

In 1969, the Canadian government issued the Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy paper known as the White Paper which proposed to end the special status of Aboriginal peoples as individuals and their communities as distinct political entities. The policy paper caused a reawakening of political consciousness and the emergence of provincial and territorial Aboriginal political organizations with the purpose of protecting the rights of Aboriginal peoples. (Longboat 24) Through the policy it became clear that the federal government was intending to transfer jurisdiction over Aboriginal education to provincial governments (Abele 5). As a response, the National Indian Brotherhood,
presently known as the Assembly of First Nations, produced the landmark policy statement, *Indian Control of Indian Education* (Longboat 24). The document, in principle accepted by the federal government and the Department of Indian Affairs, was the first expression of the themes of Aboriginal parental responsibility and Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education that would continue to dominate discussion on Aboriginal education for the next decades (Barman 2).

Since the issuing of *Indian Control of Indian Education*, many things took place in regards to Aboriginal education. For the first time, bands started taking over the operation of schools on reserves, Aboriginal cultural survival schools were established in several provinces, and curriculum products were developed in many localities. These changes reflected the increased political activity of Aboriginal peoples, their leaders and their supporters. (Barman 2) Although gains were made in term of Aboriginal control of their own education after the acceptance of the Brotherhood policy paper, the transition and implementation process was not easy and was characterized by misunderstandings and frustrations. This largely had to do with the fact that the DIA had a different perception of what Aboriginal peoples meant by Aboriginal control (Barman 6); the DIA defined “control” to meaning “a degree of participation” (Longboat 24) while Aboriginal documents define it as the total or partial transfer of jurisdiction over education to the local community level (Abele 9). Provincial documents of the period defined control in a similar manor: The *Summary Report of the Task Force on the Educational Needs of the Native Peoples of Ontario* of 1976 defines “control” as “input” (Abele 9).

Furthermore, although the goals of the policy proposals in the *Indian Control of Indian Education* were in theory accepted by the DIA, no legal bases existed in the Indian Act for the transfer of control of educational programs to Aboriginal communities. As a result, in 1976 the Brotherhood proposed revisions to the education section of the Indian Act (Barman 6); they believed that if sections 114 and 115 of the Act were amended it could enable band councils to take control of education (Longboat 24). To the frustration of the Brotherhood, the DIA’s response was to retain ultimate control of education
but enter into agreements with bands who they defined as ‘capable of control’. Aboriginal leaders rejected this approach as they claimed that it was evidence that the DIA was not serious about giving Aboriginal communities meaningful control of education. (Barman 6) Despite the DIA’s response, a joint committee composed of members of the federal cabinet and senior officials of the National Indian Brotherhood was formed in order to consider legislative reform of the Indian Act. Lack of significant progress after two years of meetings, however, led the Brotherhood from ending their participating in the committee. (Longboat 24)

Although it was the suggestion of the Indian Control of Indian Education document to keep the provincial governments out of aboriginal education, the provincial governments were not absent from the policy discourse during this period. Somewhat ironically, the provincial documents from this time are the only ones that show some signs of struggling with the question of commonality versus diversity in Aboriginal education. (Abele 6) For example, the Summary Report of the Task Force on the Educational Needs of the Native Peoples of Ontario reports extraordinary efforts to have Aboriginal interests represented at all stages of the consultation process and ensure that the voices of Aboriginal peoples are heard. Ontario was also one of two provinces that made efforts to establish a formal structure for gathering information and discussing the issue of Aboriginal education. (Abele 8)

In the 1980s, the process for discussions and interaction became more regularized and structured, with official institutions established to deal with issues of Aboriginal education. The period was also characterized by the emergence of provincial and territorial governments as prominent participants in the discourse on Aboriginal education, many making efforts to incorporate the views of Aboriginal peoples. (Abele 14) In 1982, the federal government introduced the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This was significant for Aboriginal peoples as Section 35 of the Constitutional Act recognized and reaffirmed their existing aboriginal and treaty rights. (Abele 10) Between 1984 and 1987, thirteen significant reports on Aboriginal education were published; although the provincial and
territorial governments dominated the discourse, aboriginal organizations participated in the
development of many of these documents. (Abele 11)

The publication of Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of the Future by the Assembly of
First Nations in 1988, was the culmination of a four-year study and is one of the most comprehensive
report on Aboriginal education. The document advances the ideas in the Indians for Indian Education
document but also reflects a clear shift from thinking about control in terms of authority and devolution
to thinking about education in terms of self-government. (Abele 15) The Assembly of First Nations
voiced their opinion in the document that the best way of recognizing Aboriginal peoples’ inherent right
of self-government and achieve Aboriginal control over education was through constitutional
amendments  (Abele 16). In 1991, the MacPherson Report on Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision
of Our Future by James MacPherson, as commissioned by the DIA, was published in response to the
Assembly’s document. MacPherson’s report mostly disagreed with the Assembly and was a source of
disappointment and frustration on the part of Aboriginal people. (Abele 16) As can be noted, the last
decades of the 20th century saw profound change in Canada’s approach to the education of Aboriginal
people. The decades were characterized by great achievements and accomplishments as well as
significant disappointments and misunderstandings. Although there is still far to come, the 21st century
holds hope of a more complete restoration of Aboriginal peoples’ rights, especially in regards to their
self-government and education.

**Aboriginal Approach to Education**

The lack of Aboriginal content, cultural knowledge in school curriculum as well as disconnects in
the relationship of Aboriginal students and non- Aboriginal teachers causes a greater gap in
achievement and failure among Aboriginal students. (Kanu 5) The way in which Aboriginal people have
traditionally educated themselves is different from the contemporary Ontario Ministry of Education approach to education. Although Aboriginal people in Canada encompass hundreds of communities with greatly diverse cultures, languages and nation-based governance and treaty-related rights, they share a common approach to learning (CCL 07). Aboriginal learning is holistic; it engages and develops all aspects of the individual—emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual, as well as the community (CCL 09). Individual development and personal responsibility are viewed within the larger context of contributing to the collective well-being of the community. Aboriginal people do not classify knowledge into hierarchical competencies or disciplinary specializations; all knowledge, whether the knowledge of language, culture, traditions, and existence, are interconnected through their shared origins from the Creator. (CCL 07)

Aboriginal knowledge and learning is also lifelong; it begins before birth and continues through to old age. The aboriginal perspective on learning reflects an enduring philosophy and lifestyle that integrates all knowledge and experience throughout each stage of an individual’s life. Learning is a communal process in which parents, family, elders and the broader community all have a role and responsibility. (CCL 09) Knowledge is handed down from generation to generation and elders play a key role as facilitators of lifelong learning, transmitting the community’s culture through parables, allegories, lessons and poetry; all adults in Aboriginal communities are responsible for ensuring that the children learn the specific skills, attitudes and knowledge needed to function in everyday life. The traditional Aboriginal classroom not only consists of the community, but also the natural environment in which individuals learn through doing. (CCL 07) Their learning is very much connected to lived experience and reinforced by traditional ceremonies, meditation, storytelling, observation and imitation (CCL 09).

Aboriginal learning is also rooted in Aboriginal languages and cultures. It is very much bound to language, which conveys a community’s unique values and worldview. (CCL 09) As Aboriginal languages
encode unique ways of interpreting the world, they are seen as inseparable from the maintenance of Aboriginal knowledge systems (CCL 07). Like Aboriginal culture and lifestyle, traditional Aboriginal education is also spiritually oriented (CCL 09). In order to understand the reality of physical existence it is believed that one must turn inward to connect with the energy that is in all created things. Thus, the seeking of knowledge is a spiritual quest often tied closely with ceremonies, vision quests and dreams.

(CCL 07) The aboriginal approach to education is an adaptive process that draws from the best of traditional and contemporary knowledge, integrating both Aboriginal and Western knowledge (CCL 09). Learning that integrates both Aboriginal and Western knowledge has been proven to counteract the effects of cultural mismatch that have contributed to low participation of Aboriginal people in post-secondary programs (CCL 07).

The Legacy of Residential Schools Today

In previous sections, the actions taken towards Aboriginal people who were forced into residential school has been widely discussed. It is important to understand that the residual impact of residential schools deeply affects aboriginal people across Canada today. (Legacy of Hope) This fact is true in the sense that the effect of the residential school has transcended generations and perpetuates current Aboriginal societies. Aboriginal communities across Canada are feeling the effects of the education system forced upon them by the Canadian government and are engaging in the long and difficult uphill battle of rebuilding nations of disjointed people, families and communities. (Finkel 405) These implications on Aboriginal people directly impacts the success of education in terms of student overall achievement as well as Aboriginal authority over education policies, frameworks and curriculum.

The impact of residential schools in Canada has taken its toll on Aboriginal peoples, emotionally, physically and culturally. Residential schools in Canada were open for 150 years; as a result
there are 80,000 survivors living in Canada today. (Legacy of Hope) The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and various other reports have documented the emotional, physical and sexual abuse that many children faced in these government-funded schools. (Hutchinson 148) The Commission states: “Our central conclusion can be summarized simply: The main policy direction, pursued for more than 150 years, first by colonial then by Canadian governments, has been wrong.” (Highlights from the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples 3) The ramifications of residential schools consist of many factors that hinder progress and provide difficulty in achieving success in education. Such results include multifaceted issues on reserves and in native communities including but not limited to family disjointedness, isolation, poverty, depression, loss of identity and culture, alcoholism, diabetes, obesity and high suicide rates.

The issue of loss of identity and culture is directly related to loss of language because of residential schools. In a lecture by Bonnie Jane Maracle, a faculty member at The Queens Faculty of Education who specializes in Aboriginal Education and Native languages, she stated that language is “connected to identity and culture” (Maracle). With residential schools there was an “annihilation” in language and culture which plays into a feeling of lack of identity, place and acceptance in native communities. (Maracle) However, with the development of policies of First Nations, Inuit and Metis beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the residual effects of residential schools has begun to change. As described above, policy papers were produced such as Indian Control of Indian Education which stressed the importance of reintegrating Aboriginal culture into curriculum and increasing parent involvement and teacher education. (Indian Control of Indian Education 7) Awareness of the loss of aboriginal language and culture is permeating Aboriginal society as well as the greater Canadian society through partnerships with the Ontario Ministry of Education and Aboriginal organizations who are developing programs where a regrowth of language and culture, partnership and awareness is of concern.
Another impact on the success of education in aboriginal communities is the lack of parental support and family connections in communities due to a history of residential schooling. (Legacy of Hope) The Legacy of Hope Foundation is a foundation that aims to rebuild Aboriginal communities through social work and building awareness of the legacy of residential schools. It was created in 1998 by the Canadian Government as a healing fund as part of the Gathering Strength: Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan. The Foundation explains: “survivors were often away from their parents for long periods of time and this prevented the discovering and learning of valuable parenting skills.” (Legacy of Hope) This issue directly correlates to issues surrounding disjointed families, broken relationships and lack of community on many Canadian Aboriginal reserves.

Part of what the Legacy of Hope Foundations is aiming at accomplishing is the fostering of conversations and dialogue among non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal citizens. In an interactive website with virtual exhibitions, the Legacy project outlines the history and implications of residential schools. In addition, filmed interviews provide audiences with first-hand accounts from survivors of their personal experiences in residential schools and how they are coping today. In a 2009 interview Ingrid Arnault describes her experience while she attended the MacKay Indian Residential School from 1959-1967,
grades 2 to 9. She states with anger: “they [Canadian Government] took us without asking...they did things to us. How could they do that to a whole nation of people?” She describes her experience of being forced to eat “white” food and how she had to lie and steal food just to have a full belly. She says: “we didn’t know how to steal before but the government taught us how to steal...to steal to be full...they taught us how to be bad people.” (Legacy of Hope)

Arnault continues by expressing her anguish of her experience and how she deals with many current challenges because of it. One problem she faces is the lack of feeling of acceptance within her community. She explains: “I couldn’t come home for four and three years after being away for seven years...now I am asking myself- Where do I belong? What do I do with my life...where do I fit in? Where do I belong?” She explains that she came home to her original community to look after her dying mother. Arnault explains this experience: “It was hard for me to come home. I can’t take a job with this community because I feel like they don’t like me, that is how I feel. I am labeled by this band [community]- so I feel like I don’t have a home, I feel like I don’t belong here...I don’t know if I’ll ever be accepted by my people. But I am here and I am struggling.”(Legacy of Hope) This part of her interview depicts the difficulty that many Aboriginal peoples are facing with regards to a loss of identity, a loss of sense of place and wellbeing. This is a multi-generational issue that impacts the educational system and bears the mentality of the African proverb: “it takes a village to raise a child.”

Another issue that Arnault faces as a result of residential schools is her lack of parenting skills. She speaks in tears about this issue: “I didn’t have a family for eight or nine years, so when I started having my daughters, I flinched when they hugged me and my daughters said: ‘wholly, mom I can’t even hug you?!’ and it broke her heart. I was so distant from my children- I didn’t know how to hear them, how to see them and that comes from not knowing how to be in a family...My second husband had to raise my two grandchildren because I was totally unaware of native medicine, totally unaware of culture, tradition and totally unaware of how to interact.” This issue with the lack of parenting skills is a
fact of life in Aboriginal communities that greatly affects the success of education as parental support is seen as of great importance in various Aboriginal education policies including the *Indian Control of Indian Education* policy paper (1972).

Issues that Arnault expresses are caused by the residential school system and have a direct correlation to Aboriginal education for children and youth today. Loss of identity, culture, language, community, generational parenting issues and disconnections within families make it increasingly difficult for education on reserves to grow and succeed. (Legacy of Hope) Furthermore, family disjointedness has increasingly become of issue for youth who leave their northern reserves to attend high school in more southern areas of Ontario.

Such an instance is taking place in Thunder Bay, Ontario where aboriginal students attend a mainstream public high school in order to achieve their high school diploma. Lack of course offerings in higher grades often lead many Aboriginal youth with no choice but to leave their rural northern communities to be billeted by a family in a city such as Thunder Bay. The system seems to be pragmatic in the sense that it provides youth an opportunity they might not have received otherwise, although there are many negative social implications involved that make this experience very challenging for Aboriginal youth and attests to their low graduation rates. (Fifth Estate- CBC) In a Fifth Estate documentary by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), the circumstances surrounding seven suicides of aboriginal youth attending Dennis Franklin Cromarty School in the last seven years are examined and brought to the attention of the public. Although the school is striving to provide adequate support for these youth, many are dealing with social issues including family separation, substance abuse, depression, anxiety, and a sense of isolation away from their own community and family. (CBC)

These factors encompass the greater social context in the education of Aboriginal students attending mainstream schools in urban areas or at schools on reserves. (Kanu 5) The principle of Dennis
Franklin Cromarty School describes in an interview the typical challenges facing the students attending the school: “high trauma to their wellbeing through tragic events in their life- we have a high suicide rate in our region and a lot of our kids have lost loved ones to suicide and tragic deaths and a lot of our kids don’t have the coping skills that will help them to adjust and that’s why they go to alcohol.” (CBC) The multifaceted challenges that Aboriginal students face are directly related to their social environment and life outside of the school; which in the overarching context of aboriginal history can be traced directly to residential schools and the loss of native autonomy.

The Residual Effects of the Residential School System on Ontario Aboriginal Education

Aboriginal education in present day Canadian society and more specifically Ontario has many layers, policies, frameworks and goals that come together to create positive action as well as many challenges. In 2007 there were an estimated 50,312 Aboriginal students who attended provincially funded elementary and secondary schools in Ontario (5,212 of those students were living in Aboriginal communities but served under tuition agreement by the provincial government). (Aboriginal Education Office 5) In a 2005 Ontario Government document entitled Ontario’s New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs it was announced that the demographic of Aboriginal youth is the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population. In Ontario, fifty percent of the Aboriginal population-on and off reserves- is under the age of twenty seven. (ONAAA) The document further explains: “It is widely acknowledged
among Aboriginal communities and educators that many Aboriginal students are achieving at a much lower rate than other students in the province.” (ONAAA) The document outlines its goal as the following: “Achieving a better future for ourselves and our young people is a goal shared by all residents of Ontario. At the heart of this government’s new approach is the recognition that together we must create a better future for Aboriginal children and youth. We are committed to working with Aboriginal leaders and communities on health and education initiatives that will help Aboriginal children and youth stay healthier, do better at school and enjoy improved opportunities throughout life.” (ONNA) By outlining the increasingly growing population of Aboriginal children, the government acknowledges that a partnership between Aboriginal leaders and the Ontario Ministry of Education is important in finding solidarity and unification to achieving a common goal. Whether or not that partnership and plan of action has actually been successful is another issue in itself. Due to the current social context of Aboriginal communities, positive change in education is a slow and tedious process that is still young in the context of Canadian history as a whole.

Aboriginal educators continue to encourage the increase of Aboriginal content in the education of Native, Metis and Inuit children and youth that incorporates the fundamental learning qualities intrinsic to native education. As mentioned in previous sections, the Indian Control of Indian Education document written in 1972 by the National Indian Brotherhood was instrumental in creating a framework and direction in which Aboriginal education could take. Aboriginal content in curriculum in mainstream southern communities as well as curriculum in northern reserves is steadily increasing as awareness of issues grow as native leaders and communities find a voice in Canadian society as a whole. (Kanu 4) In a 2007 document, Ontario First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Education policy Framework, the goals set in the previously mentioned document from 2005 are clearly placed into an action plan and framework with a sense of direction. The document outlines several issues involved in the education of Aboriginal children and youth: “lack of awareness among teachers of the learning styles of Aboriginal students and
a lack of understanding within school boards of First Nation, Metis, Inuit cultures, histories, and perspectives...a lack of coordination between First Nations governments, Aboriginal organizations, and the provincial and federal governments.” (Ontario Ministry of Education)

Since the publication of the *Ontario First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* in 2007 by the Ontario Ministry of Education, there have been several programs implemented. In 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education released a follow up report to the 2007 document entitled: *Sound Foundations for the Road Ahead, Fall 2009 Progress Report on Implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework*. This document describes new implementations, successes and areas for further growth. The Ministry noted that The Minister’s First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Advisory Council was launched in 2009 to provide a forum for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit representatives from across Ontario to meet with the Minister of Education and senior ministry representatives to advance the K–12 education agenda for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students. (OME) With this positive step in partnership the document states that “First Nation, Métis, and Inuit curriculum content is being integrated into the revised curriculum, as part of the ministry’s curriculum review process, in consultation with Aboriginal organizations.”(OME) The integration of Aboriginal content in all curriculum subjects is an important step for Aboriginal Education as a whole but benefits non-Aboriginal students as well in the sense that it fosters a greater inter-cultural understanding among all students and an overall enhanced social with active and mindful educated citizens. (Kanu 9)

After the 2007 document, the Ontario Ministry of Education reviewed its Native Language and Native Studies courses and in 2009 they began a two year process of consultation, review and revision in
conjunction with organizations such as the Anishnaabek, Mushkegowuk, Onkwehon:we Language Commission, as well as an extensive network of educators, faculties of education, and education sector organizations. (OME) The increase in Aboriginal language is an important step for many Aboriginal peoples as it represents a rebuilding of culture lost during the residential school era. This process is slow and multi-generational but there is evidence of steps being taken by both the Ontario Ministry of Education and native communities.

Another tool that was implemented in 2009 was the *Aboriginal Perspectives: The Teacher’s Toolkit*. This is a resource that has been developed to help teachers integrate First Nation, Métis, and Inuit perspectives into classroom instruction by providing teaching strategies that can be incorporated into mainstream curriculum on and off reserve. The Ontario Ministry of Educating developed two new native studies textbooks: *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada* (Grade 10) and *Aboriginal Beliefs, Values, and Aspirations in Contemporary Society* which take a more mindful, unbiased and inclusive approach to teaching Aboriginal Issues. An increase in resources for teachers and new curriculum guidelines has increased the number of boards offering these course options which has allowed for an increase in student enrolment in the subject areas of native languages and native studies. (OME)

There is evidence to suggest that the Ontario Ministry of Education in partnership with Aboriginal Education agencies have created frameworks that have increased the success of Aboriginal students in the public school system on and off reserves. However, the changes are slow to be implemented, especially in Northern reserve communities where management and communication between organizations can be difficult and support can be “watered down” and ill managed. In a personal interview with teacher Geni Robertson, she describes these management issues as well as issues that her community and students face are a result of residential schools. Robertson’s personal experience dealing with these issues took place on an Aboriginal reserve in Northern Ontario.
Robertson, a non-Aboriginal from London, Ontario, taught grade three for one year (2010) in Kashechewan, Ontario at St. Andrews Elementary School.

Robertson describes her first time in the classroom as nothing short of “challenging.” As a first year teacher, Robertson faced one of the biggest challenges of her life, she explains, “not only was I teaching for the first time but I was trying to find my own resources and figure things out on my own all while teaching in a community that I knew very little about.” When asked whether she was provided with proper tools and resources to teach in an Aboriginal community she replied with a quick “No.” “Teachers at the school were provided with a Professional Development day on Aboriginal culture at a nearby community centre in May, which was the second last month of the school year. It would have been more useful to have had that workshop at the beginning of the school year.” In the 2007 *Ontario First Nation, Metis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* it states that “school boards will strive to offer training for teachers about First Nation, Metis and Inuit histories, cultures, and perspectives and increase knowledge of cultures among all school staff…acquire and provide access to a variety of accurate and reliable Aboriginal resources such as periodicals, books, software and resources in other media, including materials in the main Aboriginal languages.” Although Robertson is only one voice, she
provides good insight into whether or not these goals have reached the Northern Ontario reserve in which she was teaching. She explains that money is “thrown” there and the teachers are encouraged to pick resources and tools that the government would supply. She explains that the big problem was that teachers did not even know where to start with resources or they lacked the skills and training to use resources that the government sent them. She explains: “the government would throw money at the problems the school faced but there would be no one to manage the money properly...or if a teacher were to get something started they would be gone the next year because of the high turnover rate in teachers- projects wouldn’t get carried on...it was like the school would start new every year with new management and teachers- there is no consistency and a serious lack of management in Kash.” When asked whether or not she incorporated Aboriginal methodologies to her teaching, she responded by explaining that the only resources and knowledge about that topic was what she had researched herself but that there was no support for it in the school community. “The kids weren’t interested in their culture...they were more interested in technology and youtube and music from the south...the parents weren’t teaching it so how would they know...I didn’t feel qualified to teach them about their own culture.” Further items of the discussion included the fostering of Aboriginal culture within the community. Robertson explains that families are “disjointed” because of the residential schools and there is evidence of a loss of knowledge of aboriginal culture within the community. Students would partake in an “Aboriginal culture day” once a year where they would learn from elders on how to skin a beaver or clean a fish. This rebuilding of knowledge of their culture and traditions is important to the development of a sense...
of respect and connection to their Aboriginal heritage. Feeling a sense of identity is important to the rehabilitation process in regards to residential school trauma as well as building strong communities which correlates directly to the education in that community. The 1972 document *Indian Control of Indian Education* states:

“Unless a child learns about the forces which shape him: the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never really know himself or his potential as a human being. Indian culture and values have a unique place in the history of mankind. The Indian child who learns about his heritage will be proud of it...The lessons he learns in school, his whole school experience, should reinforce and contribute to the School curricula in federal and provincial/territorial schools should recognize Indian culture, values, customs, languages and the Indian contribution to Canadian development. Courses in Indian history and culture should promote pride in the Indian child, and respect in the non-Indian student.”

The 2007 Ontario Ministry of Education *Ontario First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* document states that their goal is to have “integration of educational opportunities to significantly improve the knowledge of all students and educators in Ontario about the rich cultures and histories of First Nation, Metis, and Inuit peoples.” This important step in raising awareness of Aboriginal cultures was seen briefly during the year according to Robertson however, there is still progress to be made in regards to cultural awareness in education both on and off reserve schools.
Robertson explained that with the introduction of the ‘Northern Store’, members of the community no longer needed to rely on hunting as a main source of food. She describes this as being part of a “vicious cycle” as people were purchasing what was the cheapest at the store, but not usually the healthiest; for instance, Robertson often heard the students saying they were off to the store to get “chip, pop, bar”, a commonly used phrase indicating how normal the consumption of these types of food had become. The lack of fresh food in conjunction with high food costs in Kashechewan has resulted in high levels of obesity and diabetes. Furthermore, because of the ‘Northern Store’ people in the community no longer need to rely on hunting for their food source and therefore knowledge of Aboriginal hunting traditions within the community is disappearing. Robertson further explains that alongside poor health issues there was a severe lack of support at home, substance abuse, unemployment/reliance on welfare (98% unemployed) and a lack of sense of community. Robertson felt that she was constantly in an “uphill battle” with one “quick fix” after another occurring to get by.

Contrary to the experience of Robertson, the Ontario Ministry of Education acknowledges “tremendous progress in the past three years” as they have formed stronger relationships between school boards and Aboriginal organizations in “all regions of the province.” The Ministry concludes by stating:

“Overall, there is growing awareness of the framework and dedicated support for its implementation. There is also greater recognition of the need for and value of engaging First Nation, Métis, and Inuit families and communities in supporting First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student achievement. The work that has been done since the release of the framework in 2007 has built a sound foundation for the road ahead. We look forward to continuing, in collaboration with all of our partners, to support improved student achievement for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students in provincially funded schools in Ontario, and, equally, to ensure that all students in Ontario have knowledge and
appreciation of contemporary and traditional First Nation, Métis, and Inuit traditions, cultures, and perspectives.”

It is clear that there is progress being made towards a brighter future in the education of Aboriginal people, however the compounding results of the residential school system and the loss over many years of Aboriginal culture and language continues to be a factor in this progress. Government apologies, including the most current 2008 apology of the federal government, healing programs and education-based programs have all been implemented, some more positively than others. Although financial support has been provided to Aboriginal communities and steps have been taken towards a brighter future where positive change is possible and evident, there are still many issues that Canadian, and more specifically Ontario, Aboriginal communities face today which hinders the progress of their education, as well as their development and healing. The effects of residential schools will have a lasting impression on Aboriginal peoples. There is hope, however, that through further public education and stronger partnerships between Aboriginal, Provincial, and Federal governments, there will be a greater awareness of the issues that currently face Aboriginal communities in Ontario. Despite all of the painful experiences within the history of Aboriginal education in Ontario, the 21st century marks a new beginning.

Figure 14: Chief Phil Fontaine addressed Parliament at the official federal government’s 2008 public apology to the century of abuse and culture loss involving residential schools. (CBC, 2008)
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Discussion of Sources

Primary Sources:


Discussion of Sources

Primary Sources:


Johnston’s autobiography of his experiences as a Canadian Ojibwa taken from his family at age ten and placed in a Residential School called Spanish near Sudbury was an excellent resource. The book highlighted the everyday struggles and personal experiences that the children faced in the Residential School. Throughout the story the reader learns about the daily routines and the overall operation of the school.

Geni Robertson, Interview.

A personal interview of a non-aboriginal teacher’s experience working in a Northern Aboriginal Reserve. She openly and candidly explains the issues she experienced surrounding Aboriginal education and how the issue is multifaceted encompassing multigenerational and social issues.

Secondary Sources:

Marie Battiste, “Enabling the autumn seed: framing a decolonized curricular approach toward Aboriginal knowledge and education” paper presented at the CSAA Learned Society Conference, St. John’s, Newfoundland, June 8-11, 1997).

Battiste’s work was an extremely valuable resource, that resembled strong content, unique perspectives and passionate debate in conveying the colonial dominance of Aboriginal cultures and reclaiming the Indigenous voice and vision of Canada. The information Battiste presents was critical to writing our essay, as it clearly illustrates the magnitude of the problems experienced by Aboriginal peoples in presenting research, case, studies, interpretations and analyses.


This book is the first book in two volumes of its kind about Indian Education from the time the settlers arrived in North America all the way to the present day. It gives a more detailed account of what happened over the course of 300 hundred years in Canada. Unfortunately, there was not a lot of specific information about Ontario. However, it was helpful to reaffirm knowledge previously known about what took place when the settlers first arrived and also new information about how the Six Nations worked together before the settlers arrived.


Carney’s article examines the early years of Residential schools and how and why they came to be. It provided lots of information on the Mohawk Institute, which was used for the case study, because it was
the first Residential School in Upper Canada and became a model for others. This article also provided an excellent comparison between boarding schools and industrial schools in Ontario.


Early Canadiana Online. Canada in the Making. 2005. http://www.canadiana.ca/citm/themes/aboriginals/aboriginals4_e.html. This website was instrumental in the formulation of understanding how treaties affected Aboriginal people. This site gave great context and insight to what was documented in the treaties. It was also in a chronological order, so it is possible to see how treaty after treaty affected the Aboriginal people of Canada.


Haig-Brown, C. Resistance and renewal: Surviving the Indian residential school. Vancouver: Tillacum Library, 2008. This book by Celia Haig-Brown is research book done by the author for people who were in Residential Schools. She researched for over a year through conducting interviews with real students and getting an insight to what it was like in the schools.

This article is mainly about Aboriginal education today and how it got to be the way it is. What can be seen in this article is a bit of history of how the treaties led Aboriginals to the educational system they are in now.


Lafrance describes the divergence that occurs around the concept of “education” and how society has continually failed to recognize that schooling involves cultural negotiation. Lafrance was an invaluable source in terms of content to describe not only the Aboriginal traditional education but how it changed with time due to the Western dominant attitude.


Leavitt’s research flawlessly describes the Aboriginal customs in education the youth through experiential techniques such as hunting, trapping, fishing etc., and effectively articulates how Aboriginal education was not one of literature taught in a formal context, but one of a spiritual context. Thus, his information allowed us to achieve a solid foundation on which to build our argument.

Legacy of Hope. Where are the Children? June 26, 2009. http://www.wherearethechildren.ca/en/exhibit/assimilation.html. This website was helpful in understanding a little more on Aboriginal education. It is mainly a website for a Museum Exhibit but gives background information on residential schools and groups of Aboriginal
people. What was the key importance from this website was that it gave another side of the story of Aboriginal education, that in some cases Aboriginal leaders were curious about the lives of Europeans.


Miller’s book conveys the voices of the minority Aboriginal peoples as survivors of the compulsory Residential Schools. Miller formulates ideas within his content by revealing the perspective in viewing Residential Schools systems as “Cultural Genocide” and explores this theory. This text shows an excellent comparison between the government and missionaries, and the students.


Miller’s article covered a range of topics such as the half-day system, abuse in Residential Schools, resistance and detailed information on certain schools such as the Mohawk Institution, Pelican Lake, and Shingwauk. This specific information was helpful for our case study section.


This book was an excellent overall resource as it provided a great information, images and statistics on Residential Schools in Canada. It focused on the Canadian Governments goals with the creation of Residential Schools, the daily experiences of the students at these schools, and the negative effects these schools left on Aboriginal communities. It also had interesting sections on gender and Aboriginal resistance.


This online source was produced by the Residential School Research, archive and Visitor Centre and The Shingwauk Project which is a cross-cultural research and educational development project of Algoma University College. This source was instrumental in providing excellent information on the establishment and operation of Residential Schools, student life at the schools and a case study on the Mohawk Institute. The information was presented clearly with lots of detail and images.


Neegan’s article proved to be the most significant instrument in examining an overview of residential schools and their impact nationally in Canada. Neegan’s article showed an excellent chronicle analysis of residential schools in Canada as well as providing background information establishing a solid foundation to prove her argument. The works cited by Neegan also proved to be invaluable sources of effective information pertaining to our question.


Regnier describes a school in Saskatoon using the Sacred Circle as a spiritual foundation for the social and cultural dimensions of healing education in upgrading and academic programs for Aboriginal youth. He examines the transition for Aboriginal youth to achieving balance. His text allows us an
understanding of where Aboriginal youth stand today after the intergenerational impact of residential schools in Canada.

This article is about the educational gap that Aboriginals face today. It covers the curriculum and historical aspects of where education is now for the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

This is the official Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada website regarding the treaties with the Aboriginal People of Canada. It describes many of the treaties and gives a vague description of what was in them. What cannot be found is much about education of the Aboriginal people. This has led us to believe that education wasn’t something promised to the Aboriginals. The only thing about education mentioned is post-Confederacy.

Images and Media:
Images 1-4 are all derived from J.R. Miller’s Shingwauk’s Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools.
Each image is critical in conveying the extremes in which the Residential School System. The images accompany significant information that illustrates visually the information being presented, and therefore are extremely effective in enriching our essay.
Images 4-6 are all derived from the online source, Mohawk (Institute): Indian Residential School Brantford Ontario Six Nations of the Grand River. The images display the Mohawk Institution, some of the students who attended the school, and the types of activities that were performed by the students.


Indian Brotherhood. *Indian Control of Education.* 1972.

Kanu,Yatta. *Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives Into the School Curriculum.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.


