

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples  
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“A Vision on the Future of Aboriginal Peoples”

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Commissioners, Guests, Fellow Educators,

Thank you for inviting me to share some of my thoughts with you today. It is obvious that the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples has the monumental challenge of setting the educational agenda straight and on a course of action. I was asked to provide a Vision on the Future of Aboriginal Education. I had difficulty projecting ahead – even ten years of more. The future, to me, was back in 1972; so, let me begin.

Thirty years ago we called for “radical change” in Indian Education. In I.C.I.E, we stated very clearly that “our aim was to make education relevant to the philosophy and needs of the Indian people,” that education was to give our children a strong sense of identity, with confidence in their personal worth and ability. We said we believed in education:

- As a preparation for total living
- As a means of a free choice of where to live and work
- As a means of enabling us to participate fully in our own social, economic, political and education advancement

In 1972, we presented a vision of what we perceived as wholeness in education for our people. I suggest that twenty years later that vision has not changed nor have we made significant advances toward those ideals. What we have managed to do in the last twenty years is document our situation. In fact, we have studied ourselves – our education so thoroughly and so often that I’m convinced that we know everything we need to know to realize our vision.

In 1972, we called attention to four areas:

1. Responsibility - jurisdiction, control, representation
2. Programs – relevance, language, culture
3. Teachers – our teachers (TEP)
4. Facilities

We soon realized that the area of responsibility was the major roadblock. We came close in 1972 to addressing the problem through a revision of the education section in the Indian Act. We looked closely at the problem in 1982 when David Crombie was Indian Affairs Minister.

In 1988, Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of our Future was released, but for various reasons we were unable to see it through. It made recommendations in four areas:

1. Jurisdiction – responsibility and control
2. Quality - relevance
3. Management
4. Resourcing - \$

In 1991, MacPherson did a study of the study – he provided reform options related to jurisdiction. I believe we've "missed the boat" on one option – the Constitutional Amendment. So we are back to pursuing federal legislation, as the judicial option would be long and costly. It seems from all of this, we can draw at least one conclusion.

To realize our vision, it is necessary for us to have a legal basis to do so. So let's not say we need legislations – let's draft it. We, as Aboriginal people, have the legal and education expertise to do so. After that we can establish policies, goals and objectives, programs. What the Royal Commission has to do is establish a "do it" timeline with a "fast-track" procedure that agrees to a course of action to overcome impediments.

We have prepared and presented at least two comprehensive policy statements:

1. I.C.I.E – tradition and change
2. Aboriginal Language Policy (1989) – which included a proposal for an Aboriginal Languages Foundation

We are familiar with the struggles of I.C.I.E. We have not seen evidence of government recognition or acceptance of the Language Policy. I don't believe a private members bill for an Aboriginal Languages Foundation is a sufficient approach to such an important proposal. Meanwhile our languages continue to be eroded and our cultures with it – "as language is the means of transmitting uniqueness of a culture."

I can only assume, along with many of you here, that the lack of federal legislation which explicitly recognizes the inherent right of our people to exercise jurisdiction over our education is a major block to the recognition of our policies. So it appears that a "do it" agenda with a "fast-track" timetable is needed. That's my first point.

The Commission is looking for direction with institutions from Pre-K to Post-Secondary for both Aboriginal and mainstream systems. It is important that there be a clear acknowledgement of all forms of institutions attended by Aboriginal people – and how our

people relate to each in terms of jurisdiction – an outline of the relationship based on the principles of “parental responsibility and local control.”

To do this, we need to devise (construct) a framework from which to examine the characteristics of each type of institution and to determine the particular needs of each. A colleague of mine used the following to look at institutional forms of Indigenous Higher Education:

1. Independent Institutions – Tribal Colleges
  - a. B.C – NVIT & Enowkin
  - b. Arctic/Yukon)
2. Affiliated (Initiatives)
  - a. SIFC – shared auspices administered by F.S.I.N.I accredited by U of R
  - b. Gabriel Dumont Institute affiliated with U of R and U of Sask.
3. Integrated (structures) – programs contained wholly within and administered by a given institution.
  - a. T.E.P
  - b. F.N.H.L – UBC
  - c. Athabasca

I would like to add a fourth type and that is:

4. Assimilated – this may not be ‘good’ but true – the point is not to judge these, but to ensure our voice within them.

It is possible to use this kind of framework to consider Pre-K to Adult Education attended by Aboriginal people; for example, band schools would be considered independent (contradiction). Under affiliated, we might put Provincial Band Schools, Nisga School District, Cree School Board, Children of the Earth; under integrated, public schools; under assimilated, public schools.

We would consider in particular:

1. How the parents (the Aboriginal group) exercise authority in each type
2. How they are/should be funded
3. Accreditation \*would include non-status, Metis, urban, etc

To points not addressed as frequently:

1. Pre-K – a model I have been promoting is the Te Kohanga Reo – a Maori model of early childhood language immersion. TKR means “language nests” for 0-5 year olds based on Whanau (family) learning. Teachers are grandparents who have fluency in the language and must have been a parent.
2. Accreditation – we must establish our own accreditation board (problem – Band Schools/Tribal Colleges – Mokakit could be approached, for example).

To conclude, I would like to share one more thought with you. I have suggested:

- That we do have a vision of what we want Aboriginal Education to be
- That what we need is Action (“do it” – “fast-track”) – Let’s put millions into *doing* Aboriginal Education – Let’s do language
- That we know virtually everything we need to know to realize our vision

I must add a “but”, but I believe that we have not done sufficient work in either the study of or the practice of Aboriginal pedagogy or creating our own theories of Education; for example, the Battiste theory of Micmac Education. One of our Ph.D. students just completed a dissertation on “Yupiaq Ways of Knowing: Implications for Science Education.” Another student is working on Orality vs. Literacy. Each one had to work extensively with elders to obtain data. Dr. Eber Hampton (1988) in his dissertation outlined twelve standards that need to be considered in order to construct an “Indian Theory of Education,” some of these are Spirituality, Culture, Tradition, Diversity, Transformation.

I got very excited when I saw reference on a May 20 draft (it was not on draft 12) for the Roundtable on Education when it began with Medicine Wheel Teachings. I believe we must use our own pedagogy/ies to guide us, to help us understand relationships in learning, with institutions. The story of the Sacred Tree is another model/pedagogy we can study.

I would go so far as to say that in all of our endeavours – we have not approached our vision from an Aboriginal/Indigenous pedagogy. We acknowledge the wisdom of the elders but we are not taking full advantage of their teachings. We tried that in C.J.N.E (1992), “Giving Voice to Our Ancestors,” I believe that it proves we must pursue that direction. The elders use powerful metaphors in their teachings. From them we learn the importance of balance – we learn protocols associated with various acts/functions. We are told that to find the core of

knowledge, we must go in deep thought. One elder stated that “we must close our eyes so we can see further.” What our challenge really is to find that all important center/core. It might surprise us how the rest would fall into place. It is a search for deeper knowledge. The answers are within us – our people, our communities. Let this be the last outside study we do – so it has to be good. Let’s use our (time?) resources (doing?) from inside.

Thank you for your time.