

Indian Control of Indian Education: Over a Decade Later

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In February, 1973, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development gave official recognition to the policy statement of the National Indian Brotherhood entitled "Indian Control of Indian Education". He approved its proposals and committed his Department to implementing them.

This national policy is based on statements of provincial/territorial Indian organizations encompassing all areas of concern in Indian education. It had its origin in the concern of parents for the academic failure experienced by their children in federal and provincial schools over the past many years.

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

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\* National Indian Brotherhood is now more commonly known as the Assembly of First Nations. It represents the status Indians of Canada.

The policy was prompted by the need to improve the quality of Indian education. The need for an education relevant to the philosophy of Indian people was recognized as being essential. "We want education to give our children a strong sense of identity, with confidence in their personal worth and ability" (ICIE p. 3)

The purpose of this paper is to review and to analyze the issues and concerns which continue to surround the policy of "Indian Control of Indian Education". Action necessary for the full realization of the policy within the next decade will be suggested.

Certain reports suggest that significant progress has been made toward the implementation of the policy. The Indian Education Policy Review Phase I prepared by the Department of Indian Affairs cites the following as indicators of progress (p. 10). As of 1980:

- three Indian or Inuit school boards have been created under provincial law: the Nisghas' of B.C., and the Cree and Kativik School Boards of Northern Quebec;
- 450 of the 573 bands are administering all or parts of their program;
- there are 137 band-operated on-reserve schools.

The Canadian Education Association Report on "Recent Developments in Native Education" (1984) cites the following positive responses related to Band operated Schools. These include:

- "Band schools produce a pride in Native heritage" (p. 81)
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- "Children are free to speak their Native language and are learning that to be a Micmac is something to be proud of." (Mi'Kna'wey School, p. 81)
- "Over 40 grade 12 graduates are projected in 1985-86 compared to two in 1977." (Peguis School, p. 81)
- "Attendance in the school is steadily climbing from 82% to 91% since the band took control of the school." (Bai-Bom-Beh School, p. 82)

This CEA Report also cites problems associated with Indian Control of Indian Education. These include:

- "The lack of a systematic framework for transferring control to Indian Bands has been the major obstacle to the success of band schools." (p. 77)
- "DIAND's refusal to construct on-reserve school facilities in those places where Joint School Agreements exist." (p. 78)
- "One of the problems with local control has been the high degree of politicization found in band education councils." (p. 79-80)
- "Challenges faced were low funding, poor facilities, not enough Native teachers, no direction from federal government." (The Southeast Tribal Division for School Inc., p. 8)

In May 1981, a resolution was passed by the Assembly of Chiefs (First Nations) indicating National concern regarding the implementation of Indian Control of Indian Education. The resolution reads:

WHEREAS Indian Control of Indian Education has been endorsed and accepted by both the Indian people and the Department of Indian Affairs; and

WHEREAS the Department of Indian Affairs has promised to actively support the full implementation of Indian Control of Indian Education policy paper of 1973; and

WHEREAS the Department of Indian Affairs has failed to actively support the full implementation of Indian Control of Indian Education as seen by recent moves to cut back on several programs in education; and,

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

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

WE FURTHER DEMAND THAT the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development actively engage in the implementation of the 1973 Indian Control of Indian Education policy; and,

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

Two major problem areas can be identified. One, the definition of control and secondly, the absence of a clear implementation plan. The contrast in perception of control and implementation by the Indian people and by the Department of Indian Affairs has impeded the progress of the policy.

To the Indian people, the concept of control is clearly articulated in the policy. It recognizes that the Federal government has the legal responsibility for Indian education as defined by the treaties and the Indian Act (ICIE p. 5). It further maintains that the Federal Government has the financial responsibility to provide education of all types and at all levels to status Indian people whether living on or off reserves (ICIE p. 3). It affirms that control/jurisdiction for Indian education can only derive from the Federal Government to Indian Bands (ICIE p. 5). In every case wherein directions/decisions are to be made which affect the education of Indian people, the policy states that parental responsibility must be respected and local Indian Bands must maintain the right to review and approve the conditions of any agreements (ICIE p. 6).

Control means that the Federal government must transfer to local Bands the authority for the funds which are allotted for Indian education (ICIE p. 6) Band Councils; in turn, designate Education Authorities with set terms of reference to implement local control of education.

Control means that Indian people either directly or through their respective Bands and organizations will participate fully in the design and implementation of the education of their members.

This concept of control is a drastic departure from tradition for the Federal Government who over the years through designated departments (now Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development) responsible for administration of Indian Affairs, have maintained a paternalistic attitude toward the Indians of Canada.

From the early 17th Century, Indian people of Canada were exposed to education designed and directed by missionaries and federal and provincial civil servants. The missionary approach was to "civilize and Christianize". This gave way in later years to the governments' approach of assimilation under the aegis of integration. These hundreds of years have been a dismal failure in terms of educating the masses of Indian people.

In the 1960's, Indian leaders strongly articulated their concerns for the deplorable conditions of their people. In response to the educational concerns being raised by Indian people, the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs within the government prepared a report on Indian education. This report, presented in the House of Commons on June 22, 1971, unfolded before the Canadian public the educational problems facing Indian people.

Some of the findings were:

- "- A drop-out rate four times the national average (96% of Indian children never finished high school);
  - A related unemployment rate averaging 50% for adult males, going as high as 90% in some communities;
  - "Inaccuracies and omissions" relating to the Indian contribution to Canadian history in texts used in federal and provincial schools;
  - An age-grade retardation rooted in language conflict and early disadvantage, which accelerated as the child progressed through the primary and elementary grades;
  - Less than 15% of the teachers had specialized training in cross-cultural education and less than 10% had any knowledge of Indian language;
  - The majority of Indian parents were uninformed about the implication of decisions made to transfer children from reserve schools to provincial schools."
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From this report, it was obvious that the missionaries and federal and provincial civil servants had failed to administer an effective educational program for Indians. This failure has been attributed to several factors; namely, the absence of a clear philosophy of education with goals and objectives, failure to provide a meaningful program based on Indian reality, a lack of qualified teaching staff and inadequate facilities, and most important, the absence of parental involvement in the education of their children.

The policy of Indian Control of Indian Education was designed to redress this whole issue. It was obvious that survival as nations of Indian people was dependent on taking control of the institutions which impact on Indian lives. Education was a priority.

Control within the policy included Indian authority for establishing priorities, preparing budgets, hiring staff, and developing curriculum. The difference in perception of control by D.I.A. was evident soon after the policy was established. The Indian Education Service of the National Indian Brotherhood in its effort to assist in the implementation of the policy documented specific problems associated with control.

It can best be summed up by the fact that Indian people were/are permitted involvement but not control; Indian people were required to prove to D.I.A. their ability to administer education and were encouraged to begin by taking over specific program areas such as maintenance and transportation. This process of direct transfer of specific areas brought with it specific policies, procedures and budgets. The result

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of this process is that Indians are now operating Department of Indian Affairs programs. This was not the intent of the policy. This approach does not respond to the need for parents to be involved in goal setting.

What Indian people referred to as Indian Controlled Schools soon became known by the Department of Indian Affairs as Band-operated schools. This is significant in that controlling and operating are two entirely different concepts. To control is to have power over, to exercise directing influence, whereas to operate means to manage, to or keep in operation. It is predictable that the difference in perception would lead to misunderstanding and impede the direction of the Indian Control of Indian Education policy. It is difficult to determine whether the Department's direction stems from a colonial mentality, from practical problems associated with the transfer of jurisdiction to Indian Bands or both.

A review of the implementation of the policy suggests three specific problem areas; namely, dual administration, funding and legislation.

Dual administration refers to the fact that Indian Bands find themselves operating certain programs under supervision of the Department of Indian Affairs. The earlier discussion of control versus operating offers an explanation for this. It should be made clear, however, that the intent of the policy was not that Indian responsibility for education would mean becoming yet another extension to the bureaucracy.

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The intent was not that there would be dual administration by Indians and the Department of Indian Affairs. Rather, through direct control it was to replace the complex bureaucracy already existing to administer Indian education.

In terms of funding, the policy states that "The Federal Government must take the required steps to transfer to local Bands the authority and the funds which are allotted for Indian education" (ICIE p. 6). The Department provides funding through Contributions to Bands. Funds for all programs must be within the limits of departmental budgets which means that funding is allocated specifically for certain areas i.e. administration, school programs, with each category even further specified. This limits the possibility of priority setting or innovative planning by local Indian Bands.

A further restraint is that Indian controlled schools require an administration which is local. The Department of Indian Affairs has centralized administrations. The cost factor is different. Under the present scheme, this poses additional problems for Bands. Not only is funding restricted to certain activities, it is also inadequate. Treasury Board expects that the transfer to local control and administration of education programs by Bands should not entail any additional costs.

The most serious problem, however, arises out of the lack of legislation. The Indian Act provides no direct legal basis for the

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transfer of education from the control of the Minister to Indian Bands. It authorizes the Minister to enter into agreements with provincial/territorial governments, public or separate school boards, religious or charitable organizations but not to Indian Bands. The present authority allowing Indian Bands to administer education funds derives from various Treasury Boards' authorities, covering a range of educational and student support services which extend from pre-kindergarten to post-school programs.

A review of these problems indicates that they are all directly related. If we examine the authority used to accommodate the policy of Indian Control of Indian Education, it reveals that certain restrictions; namely, the lack of enabling legislation authorizing the Minister to transfer control of education to Indian Bands, prevent the implementation to occur as it should. It relates directly to the problem of funding as well as the problem of dual administration. In fact, it explains the difference in perception of, or accommodation to, the concept of control.

Clearly, the basic fundamental impediment to Indian Control of Indian Education is the lack of enabling legislation. Without it, we can expect only minor adjustments to the existing situation. With it, an Indian Band(s), Organization(s) would be able to write its own Education Act, determine its own administrative unit, policies, aims and objectives.

Since the inception of the policy of Indian Control of Indian Education, efforts have been made by individuals, Bands, Tribal Councils,

Indian organizations, D.I.A., to monitor developments related to the policy and to identify implementation mechanisms which would facilitate the development of quality education. These are documented in a number of studies, several of which are:

- Education Funding - Education Quality  
by Sagkeeng Education Authority, February, 1984
- Indian Education Policy Review - Phase I  
D.I.A. - December, 1981
- Our Tomorrows - Today: Different Paths to Quality  
Indian Education in Manitoba  
by Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 1984
- Okanagan/Nicola Indian Quality of Education Study  
by A.J. More, May, 1984
- National Indian Brotherhood Reports  
1974 - 1976

The Assembly of First Nations (N.I.B.) continues to recognize the need for a comprehensive review of all aspects of Indian education, the need for implementation policies and enabling legislation. To this end, the Assembly of First Nations has negotiated an agreement with the Department of Indian Affairs which will enable the A.F.N. to address the problems associated with the policy of Indian Control of Indian Education. The National Indian Education Review is expected to be completed prior to the 1987 First Ministers/First Nations Constitutional Meeting. This direction is important. We must first document the existing state of Indian education; we must identify policies required to accommodate the policy and we must identify legislation which will enable the shift of control to occur.

A national effort must be launched if we are to realize fully the policy of "Indian Control of Indian Education" within the next decade. It is imperative that appropriate legislation be passed by the Government. With the legislation issue at rest, great strides can be made toward quality education by Indian people.

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