First Nations Education Policy

Jan Hare reports "shifts in Aboriginal educational policy in Canada, which have been marked by the state's focus on themes of civilization, assimilation, integration, and, finally, local control," focusing "on the need to expand discussions of local control to take into account mechanisms that will provide for the development of the relevant knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to assume ownership of our own education."[1] She reminds us that the "state's underlying assumption, at least until the current concern with local control, has been that Aboriginal people lack the capacity to participate in the schooling of their own children."[2] In fact, "until the 1960s, Aboriginal education policy was directed by non-Aboriginal people with outsider agendas in mind, part of a larger colonial enterprise intended to dispossess Aboriginal people of their lands, resources, and identities to accommodate the exploitation and expansion of Canada by newcomers."[3] While the "British North America Act (1867) gave the government exclusive jurisdiction over Indians and land reserved for Indians … subsequent legislation such as the Act for the Gradual Enfranchisement of Indians (1869) imposed a Canadian political ideal of elected local government on Indian bands to lead Aboriginal people away from what was thought of as an inferior political system."[4] It was not until Indian Act (1876) that "full political domination of Aboriginal people was achieved," which still "today controls every aspect of Indian people's lives, including education."[5]

Because "education was one of the principal vehicles for the domination and assimilation of Aboriginal people in Canada, ensuring that the process of schooling would lead to the demise of First Nations' cultures and languages,"[6] the First Nations have focused – "since the 1960s" – on achieving local control, resulting in improvements in Aboriginal education in Canada."[7] Hare points out that "recommendations for greater Aboriginal control over education have been concerned with issues of jurisdiction, infrastructure, and finance."[8] A "question [that] has been subsumed in reports and policy documents concerned with local control of Aboriginal education" and one that "needs to be brought to the forefront in the development of educational policies and recommendations" is: "how might local control best be achieved so that Aboriginal families, organizations, and communities are equipped with the means to overcome the challenges of implementing their own vision of education?"[9] For Hare, the answer concerns "capacity building."[10] In fact, for Hare "capacity building for self-governance in areas such as education is the most pressing issue in Aboriginal communities today."[11] For Hare, "capacity building is the vehicle for achieving effective and sustainable social, economic, cultural, and educational self-determination," and she is sure that "it will move Aboriginal parents and communities from the periphery to the very heart of educational processes and decision-making."[12]

In the next section, Hare reviews "shifts in Aboriginal education policy," from "assimilation," to "integration," finally "toward Indian control of Indian education."[13] She suggests that these shifts "have, to a great extent, been determined by the nature of the relationship between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people."[14] The first shift in "relationship" seems to follow the realization of "government officials that the missionary influence on Aboriginal children was limited" – as the Hare-Barman book details[15] – and so "plans for civilizing were intensified,"[16] shifting salvation from the spiritual sphere to the economic: "In the view of politicians and civil servants in Ottawa whose gaze was fixed upon the horizon of national development, Aboriginal knowledge and skills were neither necessary nor desirable in a land that was to be dominated by European industry and, therefore, by Europeans and their culture."[17] The "official goal" of "government" became the "assimilation of Aboriginal people,"[18] a goal she documents by quoting John A. Macdonald's endorsement of the effort "to do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the inhabitants of the Dominion, as speedily as they are fit to change."[19] It was determined that "assimilation could best be achieved if children were removed from the influences of their family and community, so day schools and boarding schools were collapsed into a larger category known as residential schools," what Hare terms – after Goffman[20] – "totalizing institutions, in which attendance was required by law**,** proved to be the most destructive force on Aboriginal cultures, traditions, and languages."[21]

Hare reports that "policies and practices at the schools were systematically aimed at eradicating Aboriginal culture and language," both of which – "if not banned outright" – "were so disparaged in school that they were among its casualties."[22] She points out that Aboriginal "children were socialized in environments devoid of the nurturing that our families and communities provided," in effect "wards of the government" and so "parental rights were extinguished," leaving parents "not consulted in any decisions regarding the lives of their children."[23] She quotes Basil Johnston, Anishinaabe writer and former residential school student, [who] recalls in his book *Indian School Days*: "the mothers and grandmothers cried and wept, as mine did, in helplessness and heartache. There was nothing, absolutely nothing, that they could do, as women and as Indians, to reverse the decision of 'the Department.'"[24] Hares notes that "residential schools predominated in the lives of Aboriginal children and families until the 1950s."[25]

"Educational policy for Aboriginal peoples shifted from assimilation toward integration in response to pressure from Aboriginal parents,"[26] Hare reports. "In hearings on the Indian Act by the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons between 1946 and 1948, Aboriginal communities and organizations submitted that federally sponsored vocational education did not prepare Indians for pursuing higher levels of education, preventing them from achieving economic parity with their non-Aboriginal counterparts."[27] To do so, it was recommended was integration, i.e. "the education of Indian children with non-Indian children."[28] So,

starting "in the early 1950s, residential schools were slowly phased out, and Aboriginal children began to attend schools within the provincial system alongside their non-Aboriginal counterparts or schools on reserves where provincial school curriculum was the norm."[29] However, this "policy of integration did not prove to be educationally advantageous for many Aboriginal children," as schools were unprepared "to create intellectual space for Aboriginal knowledge, culture, and languages, resulting in lags in age-grade placement, streaming for special education, high dropout rates, and the consequent lack of economic opportunities."[30] Moreover, "Aboriginal communities and families had little opportunity to participate in the education of their children," as "they were underrepresented in the schools and on the school boards that administered education to their children, and were not consulted in the terms of joint agreements between federal and provincial bodies."[31]

In the next section – titled Toward Indian Control of Indian Education – Hare turns the Hawthorn Report (1967) which acknowledged the "challenges posed by integration policy, but recommended its continuation and, further, provided the federal government with a new agenda for dealing with Aboriginal peoples: total assimilation by removing any distinctions between Indian and non-Indian people in Canada."[32] Moreover, the "Indian Act was to be abolished and control of all matters pertaining to Indian people relegated to the provinces."[33] The policy statement – the White Paper - outlining this "total assimilation did not sit well with Aboriginal communities and organizations," and so the policy - *Indian Control of Indian Education* (ICIE) – "was adopted in principle by the federal government in 1972," policy that "advocated local control and parental involvement in Aboriginal education."[34] Hare tells is that "in this way, Aboriginal identity could be reinforced, even as Aboriginal children would be prepared for making a living in modern society,"[35] what appears to be a contradiction in terms. "While emphasizing jurisdictional control of education," Hare comments, "Indian Control of Indian Education highlighted the need for relevant programs, teacher training, and improved educational facilities and services."[36]

"Aboriginal response to educational policy development continued with *Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future*," authored by the Assembly of First Nations in 1988, a "three-volume report [that] spanned four years of consultation and review of First Nations education in Canada on issues of jurisdiction, quality, management, and resourcing of First Nations education."[37] She reports that the 1996 *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP) "represents a significant turning point in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations," as it "made possible important contributions to advancing First Nations education."[38] The Commission mandate, she continues, "was to investigate the evolution of the relationship between Aboriginal peoples, the federal government, and Canadian society, examining all issues relevant to Aboriginal people." [39] The RCAP report makes "nearly 150 recommendations aimed at restructuring the relationship of Aboriginal people and Canada," focusing on "two sets of relationships," the first focused on "the connection

between learning and the life cycle, reviewing education from early childhood through adult education."[40] The second set of relationships linked "learning to spiritual, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. This conceptualization reflects the values of First Nations education, where learning is a lifelong process aimed at nurturing the whole individual,"[41] life-long learning long a slogan of non-Indigenous policy-makers focused on national and international economies.[42] Recall that Hare is writing almost twenty years ago when she reports the "most recent stand on Aboriginal education has come from the Minister's National Working Group on Education … commissioned by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to provide strategies and measures to foster excellence in First Nations elementary and secondary education and to reduce the gap in academic achievement between First Nations students and other Canadians."[43] The working group called for "three immediate actions: transferring the jurisdiction for education to First Nations, creating a First Nations education infrastructure with supporting mechanisms, and revising educational budgets to reflect the reality of First Nations educational renewal and reform."[44]

In the next section - From Policy to Capacity – Hare deems that "changes to Indian education policy have brought about some positive results in the last decade," the first of which is that the "number of community-controlled schools is growing," and the "proportion of children attending First Nations community-controlled schools increased from 44 percent in 1990-91 to 61 percent in 2000-01, with the number of children enrolling in provincial/private and federal schools declining."[45] Moreover, "exciting curriculum initiatives and relevant programming are finding their way into schools attended by Aboriginal children," although "we still have significant gains to make," as "Aboriginal youth are significantly more likely to drop out of school and less likely to complete high school than their non-Aboriginal counterparts."[46] Hare blames past policies, specifically those "aimed at civilization, assimilation, and integration [which] undermined the responsibility Aboriginal families and communities once assumed in their children's education."[47] It is the "capacity that has been lost over the generations needs to be restored, so Aboriginal families and communities can reassert their rightful place in educating their children and in Canadian society,"[48] capacity itself a concept associated with what Foucault termed biopolitics.[49] Hare concludes that "current educational trends that have input from Aboriginal peoples offer encouraging solutions for transformation."[50]

"Government attempts to transfer control have been superficial at best," Hare explains, "as the federal government remains in the position of ultimate authority, and Aboriginal, provincial, and federal groups differ in their approaches to the development and implementation of educational policy."[51] She charges that "provincial and federal governments … say they have transferred control through band-operated (tribal) schooling, or make claims of space for Aboriginal participation and representation on school boards and parent advisory committees, and then quickly blame Aboriginal

groups for failing to achieve a vision of education consistent with their aspirations or needs."[52] The issue of "capacity" returns when Hare reports that the "quick transfer of control that followed ICIE [*Indian Control of Indian Education*] also left Aboriginal communities to develop expertise in managing finances on a large scale," resulting in "mismanagement of funds, which in turn has led to cutbacks in educational programming for some communities, with implications for the quality of education for Aboriginal children," mismanagement for which Aboriginal communities were blamed, "although the government [had] transferred control to communities with no opportunities for specific training in management skills for financial or educational responsibility."[53]

"The key to the successful transfer of control, or First Nations ownership in education," Hare suggests, "is building leadership and organizational capacity within Aboriginal communities and organizations," something Aboriginal groups have expressed, capacity decoded as "the development of infrastructure, training of Aboriginal teachers, inclusion of parents and community members in education, or design of innovative curriculum."[54] She calls for "policy guidelines" that "support and develop initiatives that make explicit how recommendations in Aboriginal education policy can be achieved," specifying "opportunities for the development of capacity to attain such goals, whether through mentorship prospects, specific training programs and workshops, visits to exemplary programs, or the development of resources and strategic Aboriginal-directed collaborations." [55] In fact, the "development and reclaiming of this capacity needs to be seen not as a precondition to the transfer of power and control, as in the past when Aboriginal people had to demonstrate a capacity for managing the transfer of power before it could take place," but instead "as a critical component in the exercise of power, with the direction and responsibility for it falling to Aboriginal communities and organizations."[56]

A significant site for capacity building in Aboriginal education has been postsecondary institutions," Hare continues, noting that "across Canada, several Native Indian teacher education programs have taken the lead in bringing First Nations teachers to Aboriginal classrooms."[57] She identifies "social work and law" as "other areas of study in which Aboriginal people have made great strides in attaining training that will enhance the quality of life for First Nations people, and new opportunities in academia are emerging for Aboriginal students."[58] Recall that "education was one of the principal vehicles for the domination and assimilation of Aboriginal people in Canada" – quoted above – and now it appears to be a principal vehicle for ending "domination" and "assimilation." Can capacity building be construed as another form of such "education"?

Including "capacity building as a component of policies aimed at power transfer … can take many forms, of course, with two common elements: the allocation of resources, and the identification of specific strategies and processes to foster skills and knowledge among the Aboriginal population that would enable the development of

self-determination in educational programming, the creation of culturally sensitive curricula, and the exercise of leadership in implementing these changes, as well as in evaluating them."[59] Such "self-determination" includes "opportunities" for "our young people … to participate in formal and informal educational initiatives, both within and outside their communities, that are aimed at giving them the experience needed to take a greater leadership role, with an eye to being responsive, accountable, and confident in serving the larger educational cause of self-determination in the governance of education and the structure of the curriculum."[60] Hare concludes that the "restoration of self-governance among Aboriginal people is being fostered by developing capacities for leadership, initiative, and responsibility," capacities that have "always been implicit in education," now "beginning to be acknowledged as part of the development of educational policy that needs to be carried into every educational meeting and planning session to provide focus and strength in undertaking the work that will see us into *our* future." [61] Does not capacity-building risk some degree of "assimilation" into "civilization," what Hare depicted in her overview – the first quoted passage in this brief – as in the past?

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ENDNOTES

[1] 2007, 52.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] 2007, 53.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

[13] 2007, 54.
[14] Ibid.
[15] See Hare and Barman 2006.
[16] 2007, 55.
[17] Quoted in 2007, 55.
[18] 2007, 55.
[19] Quoted in 2007, 55.
[20] https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803105035774#:~:text=A%20term%20introduced%20by%20Erving%20Goffman%20in%20Asylums,play%20within%20the%20confines%20of%20the%20same%20institution.
[21] 2007, 55.
[22] 2007, 56.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Quoted in 2007, 56.
[25] 2007, 56.
[26] 2007, 57.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] 2007, 58.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] 2007, 59.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] For example, see: https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/seven-essential-elements-of-a-lifelong-learning-mind-set
[43] 2007, 60.
[44] Ibid.
[45] 2007, 61.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Concerning "capacity," see https://mcsprogram.org/our-work/health-systems-strengthening-equity/human-capacity-development/ Also: https://www.vut-research.ac.za/what-is-human-capacity-development-and-why-is-it-important/ Concerning biopolitics, see: Burns 2024, ff. Also:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biopolitics and https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/foucault/

[50] 2007, 61.
[51] 2007, 62.
[52] Ibid.
[53] 2007, 62-63.
[54] 2007, 63.
[55] 2007, 64.
[56] Ibid.
[57] 2007, 65.
[58] Ibid.
[59] 2007, 66.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.