“Reparations: Theory, Practice and Education”
12 - 14 June 2003

Day Two Roundtable: Reparations in Practice

A paper presented by Georges Erasmus,
President, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation
“It was never the policy, nor the end and aim of the endeavour [of residential schools] to transform an Indian into a white man. Speaking in the widest terms, the provision of education for the Indian is the attempt to develop the great natural intelligence of the race and to fit the Indian for civilized life in his own environment. It includes not only a scholastic education, but instruction in the means of gaining a livelihood from the soil or as a member of an industrial or mercantile community, and the substitution of Christian ideals of conduct and morals for aboriginal concepts of both.”

-Frank Pedley, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 1910.

“Residential schooling, in short, typified the totalitarian and assimilative spirit of Canada’s Indian policy in the later Victorian era and the first half of the twentieth century. It amounted, as a candid missionary put it, to an effort to ‘educate & colonize a people against their will.’”

- J.R. Miller, “Owen Glendower, Hotspur, and Canadian Indian Policy.”

“We held 178 days of public hearings, visited 96 communities, consulted dozens of experts, commissioned scores of research studies, reviewed numerous past inquiries and reports. 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.*”

- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.
Origins: An Overview of the Indian Residential School System

In the three centuries following initial contact, Europeans and Aboriginal peoples regarded one another as distinct and equal nations – a view reflected in agreements such as the Kahswenta (Two Row Wampum). In war they formed alliances, and in trade each enjoyed the economic benefits of co-operation. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the alliances of the early colonial era gave way, during this period of settlement expansion and nation-building, to direct competition for land and resources. Dominion officials began to speak of “the Indian problem.”

Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932, summed up the Government’s thinking when he said, in 1920, “I want to get rid of the Indian problem. [...] Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian Question and no Indian Department.”

Long before this, in 1842, the Bagot Commission produced one of the earliest official documents to recommend education as a means of solving the “Indian problem.” This document was followed by others of similar substance: the Gradual Civilization Act (1857), an Act for the Gradual Enfranchisement of the Indian (1869), and the Nicholas Flood Davin Report of 1879, which noted that “the industrial school is the principal feature of the policy known as that of ‘aggressive civilization.’” This policy dictated that:

- the Indians should, as far as practicable, be consolidated on few reservations, and provided with “permanent individual homes”; that the tribal relation should be abolished; that lands should be allotted in severalty and not in common; that the Indian should speedily become a citizen […] enjoy the protection of the law, and be made amenable thereto; that, finally, it was the duty of the Government to afford the Indians all reasonable aid in their preparation for citizenship by educating them in the industry and in the arts of civilization.

Davin drew from the assumption of his era that Aboriginal people belonged to the past, not the future. The Government’s aim would therefore be to civilize and assimilate the Indian. In 1879 he returned from the United States with a recommendation to the Minister of the Interior – John A. Macdonald – of industrial boarding schools.

From the beginning, the schools exhibited systemic problems. Occurrences of disease, hunger, and overcrowding were noted by Government officials as early as 1897. In 1907, Indian Affairs’ chief medical officer, P.H. Bryce, reported a death rate among the schools’ children ranging from 15-24% – and rising to 42% in Aboriginal homes, where sick children were sometimes sent to die. In some individual institutions, for example Old Sun’s school on the Blackfoot reserve, Bryce found death rates which were even higher.

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F.H. Paget, an Indian Affairs accountant, reported that the school buildings themselves were often in disrepair, having been constructed and maintained (as Davin himself had recommended) in the cheapest fashion possible. Duncan Campbell Scott told Arthur Meighen in 1918 that the buildings were “undoubtedly chargeable with a very high death rate among the pupils.” But nothing was done, for reasons Scott himself had made clear eight years earlier, in a letter to bc Indian Agent General-Major D. MacKay:

> It is readily acknowledged that Indian children lose their natural resistance to illness by habituating so closely in the residential schools, and that they die at a much higher rate than in their villages. But this alone does not justify a change in the policy of this Department, which is geared towards a •nal solution of our Indian Problem.

As a consequence of under-resourcing, residential schools were typically places of physical, emotional and intellectual deprivations. The quality of education was quite low, when compared to non-Aboriginal schools. In 1930, for instance, only 3 of 100 Aboriginal students managed to advance past grade 6, and few found themselves prepared for life after school – either on the reservation or off. The effect of the schools for many students was to prevent the transmission of Aboriginal skills and cultures without putting in their place, as educators had proposed to do, a socially useful, Canadian alternative.

No matter how one regarded it – as a place for child-rearing or as an educational institution – the Indian residential school system fell well short even of contemporary standards, a fact recorded by successive inspectors. A letter to the Medical Director of Indian Affairs noted in 1953 that "children ... are not being fed properly to the extent that they are garbageing around in the barns for food that should only be fed to the Barn occupants." S.H. Blake, qc, argued in 1907 that the Department’s neglect of the schools’ problems brought it "within unpleasant nearness to the charge of manslaughter." P.H. Bryce, whose efforts earned him the enmity of the Department (and an eventual dismissal), was so appalled – not only by the abuses themselves but by subsequent Government indifference as well – that he published his 1907 •ndings in a 1922 pamphlet entitled "A National Crime." In the pamphlet, Bryce noted that:

> Recommendations made in this report followed the examinations of hundreds of children; but owing to the active opposition of Mr. D.C. Scott, and his advice to the then Deputy Minister, no action was taken by the Department to give effect to the recommendations made.

Bryce’s 1907 report received the attention of The Montreal Star and Saturday Night Magazine, the latter of which characterized residential schools “a situation disgraceful to the country.” These publications, and others like them, make it clear that the conditions of the schools were generally knowable and known, by of•cials of the church and government, and by the public-at-large.
Conditions among these institutions varied. Former students today recall diverse memories of both good and bad experiences. There were doubtless many decent, dedicated people employed by the schools. Nonetheless, the widespread occurrence of certain residential school features suggests that structural elements were in effect. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples concluded in 1996 that the schools themselves were, for readily identifiable and known reasons, "opportunistic sites of abuse":

Isolated in distant establishments, divorced from opportunities for social intercourse, and placed in closed communities of co-workers with the potential for strained interpersonal relations heightened by inadequate privacy, the staff not only taught but supervised the children’s work, play and personal care. Their hours were long, the remuneration below that of other educational institutions, and the working conditions irksome. 

In short, the schools constituted a closed institutional culture that made scrutiny difficult, if not impossible. For staff the result was, in the words of rcap, a "struggle against children and their culture [...] conducted in an atmosphere of considerable stress, fatigue and anxiety." In such conditions, abuses were not unlikely – a fact to which the experts of the day attested.

Then there are the testimonies of hundreds of former students, whose list of abuses suffered includes kidnapping, sexual abuse, beatings, needles pushed through tongues as punishment for speaking Aboriginal languages, forced wearing of soiled underwear on the head or wet bed sheets on the body, faces rubbed in human excrement, forced eating of rotten and/or maggot infested food, being stripped naked and ridiculed in front of other students, forced to stand upright for several hours – on two feet and sometimes one – until collapsing, immersion in ice water, hair ripped from heads, use of students in eugenics and medical experiments, bondage and confinement in closets without food or water, application of electric shocks, forced to sleep outside – or to walk barefoot – in winter, forced labour, and on and on. Former students concluded in a 1965 Government consultation that the experiences of the residential school were "really detrimental to the development of the human being.

This system of forced assimilation has had consequences which are with Aboriginal people today. Many of those who went through the schools were denied an opportunity to develop parenting skills. They struggled with the destruction of their identities as Aboriginal people, and with the destruction of their cultures and languages. Generations of Aboriginal people today recall memories of trauma, neglect, shame, and poverty. Thousands of former students have come forward to reveal that physical, emotional and sexual abuse were rampant in the system and that little was done to stop it, to punish the abusers, or to improve conditions. The residential school system is not alone responsible for the current conditions of Aboriginal lives, but it did play a role. Following the demise of the Indian residential school, the systemic policy known as “aggressive civilization” has continued in other forms.

Legacy: The Aboriginal Healing Movement
The policies of forced assimilation, which includes but is not limited to residential schooling, have left a legacy of destruction, pain, and despair. Some of the issues faced by Aboriginal peoples as a result of the assaults on their cultures are:

- addictions
- lateral abuse, self-abuse, & violence
- suicide
- crime
- lack of parenting skills
- poverty
- trauma
- inability to form healthy relationships

Aboriginal people began to address the conditions of their communities even before the closing of the last Government-run Indian residential school. The healing movement corresponded with a focus on addictions and a renewed commitment to traditional Aboriginal teachings, in particular to a holistic view of individual and community wellness.

At the Four Worlds Elders Conference, in 1982, Aboriginal leaders discussed ways to free their communities from substance abuse—primarily alcohol addiction. The Canadian Government participated in these efforts by establishing, in this same year, the National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (nnadap). A core group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and a number of organisations such as the Nechi Training Centre and the National Association of Native Treatment Directors, established themselves at this time as leaders in the work of healing.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of community healing is Alkali Lake (Esketemc First Nation), in British Columbia. The revival of this community, beginning with one remaining sober adult in a society of near-universal addiction, became the subject of a video, *The Honour of All: The Story of Alkali Lake*. The case of Alkali Lake, which achieved a 95% rate of sobriety, demonstrates hope and potential when even one dedicated person is committed to the goal of community wellness.

Other models of healing, such as the Round Lake Treatment Centre, in Vernon, BC, and the Hollow Water Community Holistic Treatment Healing Circle, in Hollow Water, Manitoba, derive their successes from the participation of community members in holistic, long-term healing strategies that target balance and wellness throughout the community’s web of relationships.16

The healing movement began with primary attention to addictions, but it soon became apparent that there were deep wounds that required further action. In 1992, amc Grand Chief Phil Fontaine spoke publicly of the abuse he suffered while a student at the Sagkeen
Indian Residential school, operated by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. At this time, the residential school system’s legacy of physical and sexual abuse began to enter the discussions of Aboriginal people.

Contexts: The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

In November 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (rcap) released a 3,200-page Final Report. Organised to study in detail the historical relationship between Aboriginal Peoples and the rest of the country, rcap’s Commissioners heard many testimonies from survivors of residential school abuses. Chapter 10 of the Final Report, dedicated to residential schools, is a summation of their findings. In the matters of reconciliation and healing, rcap recommended apologies by those responsible, compensation of communities (to assist them in designing and administering programs that promote healing and the rebuilding of communities), and funding for treatment of affected individuals and their families. These recommendations were among many others addressing all facets of Aboriginal life.

On January 7, 1998, the federal government responded to rcap by issuing a “Statement of Reconciliation” and a strategy to begin the process of reconciliation, entitled Gathering Strength—Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan. Gathering Strength featured as its “cornerstone” the announcement of a $350-million healing fund to address the legacy of residential school abuse.

On March 31, 1998, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation was incorporated under Part II of the Canada Corporations Act to manage the fund. The ahf – a Board-managed, Aboriginal-run, not-for-profit corporation – was given one year to organise, five years to spend or commit the $350-million fund (plus interest generated) and five years to monitor projects and write a final report: a mandate of 11 years, ending March 31, 2009.

Public reaction to the Statement of Reconciliation varied. Some considered it proof of the government’s commitment to a new relationship with Aboriginal Peoples in Canada; others saw in the Statement language deployed with caution to prevent lawsuits, or at the least to minimise potential court damages. The government’s gesture was interpreted by the latter as stopping short of a full admission of responsibility. Despite differing opinions, however, the Statement of Reconciliation was widely reported and widely interpreted as an apology.

It is worth noting here that rcap had earlier recommended a separate inquiry with the exclusive purpose to hear and document residential school testimonies. Some felt that a respectful and open hearing of Survivors’ stories, as called for by many Aboriginal people, would have presented an opportunity for healing – and would perhaps have offered an alternative forum to the courts. In any case, the recommendation has not yet been adopted.

Reparations: The Aboriginal Healing Foundation
With no infrastructure or employees yet in place, and faced with the high expectations of Aboriginal communities, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation within days of its creation faced an influx of applications for funding. As of April 24, 2003, over $1.2 billion of healing program support has been requested.

To understand the unique work of the Foundation, as well as its relationship to the topic of reparations, it is useful to consider the following mission and vision statements:

Our mission is to encourage and support Aboriginal people in building and reinforcing sustainable healing processes that address the Legacy of Physical and Sexual Abuse in the Residential School System, including Intergenerational Impacts.

Our vision is one where those affected by the legacy of Physical Abuse and Sexual Abuse experienced in Residential School have addressed the effects of unresolved trauma in meaningful terms, have broken the cycle of abuse, and have enhanced their capacity as individuals, families, communities and nations to sustain their well being and that of future generations.

The Funding Agreement between the ahf and the Government of Canada outlines what the Foundation can and cannot do. Funding is strictly directed to activities within Canada which address the legacy of physical and sexual abuse arising from the residential school system, and the intergenerational legacy of this abuse. Thus, we are unable to provide funding for:

- capital infrastructure (buildings)
- advocacy on behalf of survivors
- litigation-related activities
- compensation
- language and culture programs

These limitations have created some challenges. Survivors have looked to the Foundation to be a voice which explains the impact of residential schools to the non-Aboriginal public. We must perform this role without becoming an “advocate.” Some have seen, and still see, the Foundation as a source of compensation or litigation support. They have been frustrated by our inability to give them what they seek.

Most difficult of all are the matters of language and culture – losses considered by many survivors to be an instance of cultural genocide. The effects of assimilationist policies upon Aboriginal languages and cultures are widely considered to be the greatest impact of the residential school legacy, and therefore the Foundation plays a role in addressing these effects by directing to alternative funding sources projects which are, as a result of their larger community aspirations, supportive of language and cultural renewal.
The Aboriginal Healing Foundation has committed just over $270 million in project funding since it began giving out funds in May of 1999. Over 1,000 funding grants have so far been approved.19

Examples of the types of projects funded are:

- **Healing Activities** (e.g. healing circles, day treatment services, sex offender programs, wilderness retreats, on the land programs, Elder Support Networks – 55% of our funding is invested here).
- **Prevention and Awareness** (e.g. education and training materials, sexual abuse awareness – for a further 17% of the healing fund).
- **Training Activities** (7%)
- **Honouring History** (e.g. Memorials, commemorations, and documentation 7%)
- **Building Knowledge** (Resources for increasing knowledge about the legacy of residential school abuse 10%)
- **Assessing Needs** (4%)
- **Project Design & Set-up** (2%)
- **Conferences** (1%)

A qualitative summary of the Foundation’s impact to date, contained in our Interim Evaluation of Foundation Activity, shows the following:20

- Individual healing services (therapeutic contexts where the focus is on personal progress) have been provided to an estimated 90,053 participants;

- Group healing (which has the whole community as a target) has been attended by 73,336 participants;

- Healing projects identified roughly 15,153 individuals with special needs (e.g. suffered severe trauma, inability to engage in a group, history of suicide attempts or life-threatening addiction);

- Approximately 20,339 participants received training;

- 3,117 paid employees hired (1,832 full-time, with about 2,743 of them Aboriginal and about 1,558 of them Survivors);

- In a typical month, over 21,148 volunteer hours are contributed to AHF projects. If we conservatively assign a value of $10/hour to volunteer service, then $211,482 per month, or $2,537,790 per year, is provided by volunteers;
· An approximate $9,480,874 has been contributed in co-funding to AHF projects. It is estimated that $7,628,773 may have been secured in ongoing funding and that the estimated value of donated goods or services to date would be $14,731,197;

· It has been estimated that an additional 106,036 individuals could have been served if funded projects had adequate time and resources. When surveyed project needs are combined, an estimated $147,743,745 would be required.  

At this point, a few observations may help better to contextualize the Foundation’s work within our present concern.

It is generally accepted that reparation includes at least the following:  

- Acknowledgement of and apology for actions causing harm
- Reconciliation, through actions which demonstrate a sustained commitment to right relations
- Provision of support for healing
- Restitution/compensation, including but not restricted to monetary exchanges

In the context of reparations, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation fulfils primarily the third requirement, support for healing. We should also bear in mind, however, that the Foundation was announced within the context of an official government Statement of Reconciliation (or apology), and that the healing of Aboriginal people as envisioned by the ahf involves reconciliation between Aboriginal people and Canadians. In practice it is difficult to separate completely the components of reparation.

Our current view is that a healing environment must be incorporated into any compensation process, whether it is litigation, alternative dispute resolution, or an accelerated resolution framework such as the one recently proposed by the Government’s Office of Indian Residential Schools Resolution. Healing is a long-term goal that will be central to Aboriginal people’s ability to address other social issues. Furthermore, the healing has just begun and there remains much work to do.

We have been able to identify principles which have informed & facilitated our work in addressing survivor needs. These include:

1) An independent, Aboriginal governance and operating structure. The Foundation has a Board and a staff composed mostly of Aboriginal people. Although this has created high expectations for survivors, there is a resulting trust among Aboriginal communities that the Foundation is addressing their concerns.

2) Mandatory and meaningful participation of survivors in all aspects of healing projects. All projects are required to have the support of survivors in the community. Projects must have
survivors as part of the management of the project, and projects must be accountable to the community.

3) **Community control over who receives support and how healing is defined.** The recipient of Foundation funding defines the healing needs of the community and determines who should receive services. The needs of the community are not prescribed by the Foundation.

4) **Funding decisions based on the ability of applicants to manage project funds** and to deliver service to survivors.

5) **A focus on residential school and the intergenerational legacy of the school system.** The need for funding in Aboriginal communities is acute for all kinds of social services, from housing to addictions treatment to recreation. As an independent Foundation, we can focus funding on healing the Legacy of residential schools.

6) **Accountability both to government funders and Aboriginal people.** The Foundation Board seeks opportunities to make public presentations and to consult with Aboriginal people on the organisation and delivery of funding and other services.

Furthermore, we have identified the following best practices of our funded projects:

- Survivor-driven, community-based projects
- Front-end, long-term planning
- Thoughtful staff selection and support
- Small-scale projects addressing concrete community needs, rather than all-encompassing mega-projects
- Community-oriented goals focused on people and participation

These principles have guided, and will continue to guide, our work. They may be further generalised into the following guideline: *that the principles and substance of the healing and reconciliation processes must be guided by Aboriginal people.* You will recall at the beginning there was a reference to the Two Row Wampum. This continues to provide a good model for the arrangement of restitutions – not only healing, but other forms of addressing the legacy of past actions and policies.
Endnotes

1. This section has been adapted and modified from *The Healing Has Begun: An Operational Update from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, May 2002.* (Ottawa, Ontario: The Aboriginal Healing Foundation) pages 3-7.

2. The Two Row Wampum Treaty established the principles of co-existence between Aboriginal Peoples and Europeans. First concluded with the Dutch in 1645, and extended to the British following English conquest of the Dutch in 1664, it became known also as the Silver Covenant Chain:

“It is two rows of purple wampum, this wampum being quahog (clam) shell – this is the purple part of the shell. This is on a field of white. The purple lines represent the Haudenosaunee travelling in their canoe. Parallel to them, but not touching, is the path of the boat of the Europeans that came here.

In our canoe is our way of life, our language, our law and our customs and traditions. And in the boat, likewise are the European language, customs, traditions and law. We have said, please don’t get out of your boat and try to steer our canoe. And we won’t get out of our canoe and try to steer your boat. We’re going to accept each other as sovereign – we’re going to travel down this road of life together side by side.”

- G. Peter Jemison, Faithkeeper, Cattaraugus Reservation, Seneca Nation.


13. Personal testimonies quoted from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Final Report, Volume 1, Part Two, Chapter 10, section 3 “Discipline and Abuse” and from Breaking the Silence: An Interpretive Study of Residential School Impact and Healing, as Illustrated by the Stories of First Nation Individuals (Ottawa: Assembly of First Nations, 1994), passim.


17. For more information, see: http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/gs/index_e.html
18. This section has been adapted and expanded from a presentation made by the AHF at the *Moving Forward: Reparations for the Stolen Generations Conference* (University of New South Wales, Sydney), in August 2001. For more information, see: http://www.hreoc.gov.au/movingforward/

19. Regular funded project updates are available from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation office. See also http://www.ahf.ca

20. These figures are estimates extrapolated from the results of the process evaluation survey of February 2001, representing 274 organisations. A fuller explanation of the data is contained in the *AHF Evaluation Update*, October 18, 2002, available from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

21. These figures are estimates of the needs of the 274 funded organisations surveyed in February, 2001 only. This is not intended as an estimate of the needs of all Aboriginal communities, or even of all AHF-funded projects.

22. This has been adapted from part 4 of *Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1997):

   **Components of reparation**

   Recommendation 3: That, for the purposes of responding to the effects of forcible removals, ‘compensation’ be widely defined to mean ‘reparation’; that reparation be made in recognition of the history of gross violations of human rights; and that the van Boven principles guide the reparation measures. Reparation should consist of,

   1. acknowledgment and apology,
   2. guarantees against repetition,
   3. measures of restitution,
   4. measures of rehabilitation, and
   5. monetary compensation.


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