

NATIVE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLING IN CANADA: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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Abstract / Résumé

The author provides an extensive review of the literature concerning Native residential schools in Canada. He argues that since its inception, the secondary literature has evolved in significant ways and given rise to many important issues. The author suggests several novel topics and approaches for further research.

L'auteur offre une étude approfondie des études touchant les écoles résidentielles des autochtones au Canada. Il soutient que depuis ses débuts, la recherche a évolué considérablement et a soulevé plusieurs questions importantes. L'auteur énumère plusieurs approches et sujets nouveaux propices à une recherche plus avancée.

Overnight, it seems, since the early part of this decade Native residential schools have occupied a position of prominence in public and media discourse. In fact, a stranger coming to this country for the first time might think that this topic was of very recent origin. This however is not the case. (While public scrutiny of the residential school system is a recent phenomenon, attempts to acculturate and "civilize" Aboriginal peoples through educational institutions, of which residential schools were a part, greatly predate their recent prominence.) European schools for educating and acculturating Natives first appeared in 17th century New France. Like their latter-day counterparts, these attempts to make Europeans of Natives proved unsuccessful, not least because of a lack of Native interest in the project. Schools began to appear in Ontario near the end of the 18th century, but more significant developments date from the 1830s. (Following the war of 1812, the utility of Native peoples as military allies dramatically declined and so a new policy—assimilation through the "Christianizing" and educating of Natives—gradually developed. This new policy was aimed at Native youth since officials quickly came to believe that such efforts would be wasted on the adults) in E.F. Wilson's telling phrase, "the old unimprovable people of the passing generation" (Nock, 1988:74). (Schools of industry which taught boys and girls many of the skills necessary to take up a place among the lower orders of White society, and which would impart to them loyalty and deference to upper class White authority, became the celebrated solution to the "Indian problem.")

In the late 1870s and early 1880s, the disappearance of the buffalo from the Canadian plains and the government's new found responsibility for over 100,000 Natives created conditions which demanded a reexamination and expansion of Indian policy. Having by this time established that schools where students stayed in residence enjoyed higher attendance (the government decided that an ambitious system of boarding and industrial schools would be the most efficient and economical mechanism for assimilating the Native as an individual into the dominant society) and thus a priority was placed on the more expensive, specialized industrial schools—(supposedly the last preparatory stage before entrance into White society.) (Over time, however, a number of factors, most notably Native resistance, the failure of the policy of assimilation and the high cost of the industrial schools combined to cast these schools in a negative light.) The result was the gradual phasing out of the industrial schools (the last closing occurred in 1923) and a focus on preparing Native people for life on their Reserves. This new policy brought in its wake a much less specialized, less academic education for Native people since only the most basic skills; the government believed, were necessary for life in a Native community. The policy held

sway until the latter 1940s, when outside factors again led to a renewed emphasis on assimilation, now framed in the less sinister language of "integration." This policy lasted until its culmination in the 1969 White Paper, after which the residential school system and government control of Native education (i.e., in provincial schools) was gradually dismantled.

• (The system of church-state run residential schools for Natives was the central element in the government's policy of forced assimilation and its legacy has shown it to be the most damaging to Native individuals, communities, and cultures.) To date, however, it remains sadly under-studied by academics and known of only in the most limited fashion by the general public. My research has uncovered some sixty-five to seventy studies of the schools. Depending on what criteria we use to distinguish primary from secondary sources, we may include works from as early as the 1920s, though certainly the bulk of this literature has appeared within the last thirty-five to forty years. Numerous theses and dissertations and several book length studies help to constitute this literature, with the majority of pieces appearing in scholarly journals or journals published by the main stream churches. Several Native writers have contributed autobiographical pieces ranging in length from brief articles to books. Geographical and topical coverage in the literature is also fairly even. Yet if there is fairly even distribution among authors, topics and types of pieces, overall, the literature we are dealing with is still very preliminary. For one, the number of pieces is misleading given the fact that a significant minority of the contributions are out-dated, of poor quality or too brief to be of very great consequence. Similarly, while the coverage of established topics is fairly even, the lamentably small number of studies in any given area barely begins to address the breadth and complexity of the topic, and recent work has only added new perspectives and subjects for study. In sum the topic of Native schooling remains a largely uncharted wilderness into which significant forays have been made but which continues to refuse us detailed knowledge, in many ways, of anything more than its periphery.

My principal aim in this piece is thus to encourage further exploration of this vast terrain. With this in mind, I offer as an introduction and stimulus to further dialogue and investigation, a discussion of many of the major pieces which constitute this literature as well as some of the significant trends, themes, and controversies which have characterized scholarship. I have chosen to structure the piece according to trends and themes, so I attempt to show how some of the selected works illustrate certain common characteristics. Additionally I discuss how some existing strengths may be built upon to further our understanding of the schools and how other avenues of inquiry might yield positive results.

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In order to make the review more manageable I limit the inquiry to pieces which deal with the *residential* schooling system in the period, 1830 to 1945. Additionally of the sixty-five plus works constituting the secondary literature on this topic, I have selected for discussion many of the pieces which I feel make a significant contribution to the literature, which as a percentage, account for roughly one-third of the works. Unfortunately, selecting a manageable number of pieces has meant ignoring a few studies which are certainly not undeserving of attention.

The Nature of and Motivations behind Government Education Policy

While it would clearly be exaggeration to say that there are any formalized debates in the literature on residential schooling, there are certainly significant contradictions, discrepancies and differences of opinion between authors and between particular works. One topic over which there seems to be some disagreement, even confusion is the exact nature of or motivations for the government's Native education policy. At the level of theory, there are two opposing perspectives, a traditional and "revisionist" view, with authors endorsing to varying degrees, either perspective or a combination of both. Since both versions make use of the same story elements the difference between the two lies mainly in the emphasis placed on, and interpretation of, certain elements. The (traditional view) that has been established in the ethnohistoric literature on Native-Euro-Canadian relations dating from the 1970s, holds that the government's policy was one (of assimilation through Christianization and education.) This view posits a (mix of cynical and humanitarian motives.) On the cynical side, we have the government's desire to rid itself of its moral, economic and legal obligation to Natives and to "free up" the large tracts of land reserved for the Natives. On the benevolent side is the wish to avoid the costly and brutal subjugation of the Natives through military means, the wish to save a supposedly dying "race" still in its "civilizational infancy" and to "raise it up" and bestow upon it the "innumerable advantages" of British civilization. Also while traditional accounts have acknowledged the self-serving aspects of government Native policy, they have tended to emphasize the altruistic (if terribly misguided) intentions of policy makers to a greater extent.

At the other end of the spectrum is the (revisionist position) a slightly modified version of the traditional. (The revisionist position questions the sincerity of the supposedly altruistic intentions behind the policy of assimilation, viewing the benevolent policy statements of Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) and government propaganda as largely (if not wholly) rhetorical

justifications for a more cynical, self-serving programme. (Revisionist accounts thus emphasize the self-interested intentions of government policy makers and view education foremost as a mechanism for the social control or "management" of the Natives.) As one might expect, the practical difference between these two versions has less to do with the actual nature of policy than with the government's less tangible intentions.

As with most disagreements the participants do not fit conveniently into two distinct and opposing camps, but rather find themselves spread out at various places across the playing field. If we begin with those on the traditional side of the field, we find J.S. Milloy's (1996) "Suffer the Little Children: A History of Native Residential Schools in Canada" farthest from those whom I am labelling "revisionists". Milloy has ironically been, at once, one of the most outspoken and eloquent critics of the government's education policy, and the author to give the government's humanitarian rhetoric the most credence. According to him, throughout the period of initial development in the 1830s, 40s and 50s and indeed beyond, policy makers' intentions were good if tragically misguided. In fact, from its uncertain beginnings, in Milloy's view, through to its most coercive manifestations in the later 19th and early 20th centuries, (the government's policy of Native "civilization" was nothing less than "a national duty" and "a sacred trust") (*Ibid.*, 1996). Moreover, according to the author, if there were to be practical benefits such as the disappearance of the economic burden of supporting the Natives and the windfall of their reserve lands, these were certainly outweighed, in the minds of policy makers by "their sincere Christian certainty" that assimilation was the only and best policy for the Natives concerned and by the knowledge that Natives would be assuming "the privileges and responsibilities of full citizenship" (*Ibid.*:30, my emphasis). In fact Milloy gives such credence to government propaganda, that he characterizes it as a "vision" and virtually ignores the more mundane, practical side of policy: the government's wish to be freed of its economic and administrative responsibility to Aboriginal people, and while that responsibility endured, to exercise the utmost "economy" in fulfilling it.

Yet to describe his work as a purely traditional account would be inaccurate, for Milloy does recognize, albeit briefly, that the schools also served as agents of social control. For instance, in explaining the 1842 Bagot Commission's choice of manual labour schools, he points out that these were "part of a wide network of institutions meant to be servants ministering to industrial society's need for order, lawfulness, law and most critically, security of property" (*Ibid.*:44). And similarly, he mentions a more surreptitious motivation "which occasionally broke through the surface... a fear of the unknown other and of its disruptive potential" (*Ibid.*:41). If Milloy

is aware of an alternate logic to the schools, however, it is nowhere as important in his account as the well-intentioned desire to assimilate and "civilize" Natives.

J.R. Miller, a major contributor to the field of Native residential schooling, has tended to support the traditional view. To be sure, in such works as "Owen Glendower, Hotspur and Canadian Indian Policy" (1992) or his precedent setting *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (1996a), Miller never devotes the attention to policy intentions that Milloy and some other commentators do. This being the case, his support for the traditional view is nevertheless quite clear. For instance, his introduction to the government's policy of "the bible and plough" in "Owen Glendowers" is a standard expression of the conventional wisdom on 19th century Indian policy. His endorsement of the traditional view is even more apparent in *Shingwauk's Vision*: As important as the push for self-support and Christianization among the Indians was in its own right, it was "also the means to another end: full citizenship and absorption into the body politic [which would include the]... peaceful elimination of Indians' sense of identity as Aboriginal people..." (*Ibid.*:184).

Another student of residential schooling to have devoted significant attention to the "nature, formation and implications of the educational system...[and] the underlying premises of that system" is Sylvia Dayton (1976). Her thesis, "Ideology of Native Education" attempts to uncover government ideology *viz. a viz.* Native education from a distillation of DIA policy. Of the three premises she argues underlay Department policy, the second quite clearly echoes the traditional view: "The 'integration' or 'assimilation' of Native peoples into mainstream Canadian society" (*Ibid.*:70).

Indeed of the many scholars who have asked the question, "what exactly motivated Ottawa to establish and run the schools?", the majority espouse some version of this traditional thesis. There are a small number of authors, however, who offer a slightly modified, nuanced version of this account. Agnes Grant is one such author. In fact it may be more accurate to say that there is some contradiction in Grant's analysis of government policy since at different places in her study she offers support for both views. For example, at one point she comments, "It was felt that the Indian race and culture were inferior and that the 'superior race,' out of a sense of *duty* and *generosity*, must first civilize... and then assimilate them... these objectives remained the same and were modified only by the emphasis placed on them by different administrations" (Grant, 1996:61, my emphasis). And at other points in the text, she casts government policy in a different light: "The goals of Aboriginal education were structured to meet the needs of

the colonizers" (*Ibid.*:89) or similarly that "... the whole move to assimilation and total equality was carefully prevented by government policies" (*Ibid.*:57). Whether this contradiction (or confusion?) is merely a mistake on Grant's part or whether it is illustrative of the ambivalent nature of government motivations themselves, is open to debate. To be sure, those in favour of a revised narrative would opt for the latter explanation.

Jacqueline Gresko, another prolific contributor to the literature on residential schools, also evinces a somewhat equivocal attitude on the subject of government intentions. Though most of her work concerns itself with local conditions and the effects of policy on the microcosmic level,¹ she seems to recognize a semi-benevolent policy of "civilization" and assimilation. Notwithstanding this general trend, in her lengthy Master's Thesis "The Qu'Appelle Industrial School: White 'rites' for the Indians of the Old Northwest" (Gresko, 1970), she argues for a more cynical view of government motivations: "Ottawa administration's main concern in Indian education was ever increasing control of the Indians, care of the buildings, cultivation of a good public image for the Department, and less and less the vocational or academic education of Indian children, concern with parental wishes, community-wide education, or continuation programs" (*Ibid.*:231). A similar message is also conveyed in this statement: "The Indian schools became increasingly in the 1900s holding institutions where Indians might be taught or frightened into obedience to governmental authority and to obeisance to "higher" racial and ethnic groups" (*Ibid.*:240). The image created in both these citations is of a government increasingly interested in controlling or "managing" Native peoples and ever less with enacting any humanitarian reforms among them. As such this is a forceful articulation of the revised conception of government policy and motivations.

The contributor with whom we may most reasonably associate the revised conception, however, is Jennifer Pettit, the author of "From Longhouse to Schoolhouse: The Mohawk Institute 1834-1970" (1993) and "To 'Christianize and Civilize': Native Industrial Schools in Canada" (1997). Pettit's first contribution to the field, "From Longhouse to Schoolhouse" in fact, is centred on the dichotomy between official representations of policy—i.e., the complete "civilization" and assimilation of Native peoples—and what policy actually entailed, in Pettit's view—"management" of the Natives. According to Pettit, "the professed goal of" assimilation differed from "the actual goal... to manage [Indians]... Effectively 'assimilation' was a prescription for Native acceptance of upper class White authority" (*Ibid.*:13). In "To 'Christianize and Civilize,'" though Pettit expands her focus to consider the system of industrial schools as a whole, she nevertheless maintains a similar stance on the issue of government motivations. Early in

the dissertation, she makes the point that industrial institutions for Natives may be accurately considered mechanisms of social control utilized by government and missionary groups. She again argues that assimilation was merely a cover for control, explaining that "Religious and civil authorities apparently sought change in the Native community only to the point where they felt Natives would willingly become managed, subservient members of society" (*Ibid.*:44).

What are we to make of this spectrum of opinion? Clearly questioning government motivations and the precise nature of policy is far from simply an academic or intellectual exercise. Given the negative and purposeful elements of the system of residential schools for Natives—the "infantilizing" paternalism of the Department, the attacks on language, beliefs, and values, the degradation of parents and Aboriginal authority figures—the issue of exactly what the government was trying to accomplish becomes a very important one. For if these depredations were carried out for the cynical and pseudo-machiavellian motives that some authors have ascribed, then the conventional image of residential schooling in the literature may have to be repainted in yet darker, more sinister hues. Clearly this is a significant topic—one deserving of further investigation and discussion.

The Evolution of Theory and Practice: Three Chronological Trends in the Literature

Though, as stated above, the literature is still very preliminary and largely of recent origin, it is nonetheless of sufficient duration to have fostered a number of chronological trends. These trends might be summarized as follows: i) new ways of approaching problems in the residential schools, a greater awareness of various sorts of problems and a far more critical attitude towards the government and the schools; ii) the growth of a similar negativism in the portrayal of the schools in the memoirs of former students; iii) the regrettable infiltration of a small number of scholarly works by moral indignation. Together these trends, especially the first two, have resulted in a significantly revised image of the residential schools in the literature. The contours and hues of this revised image reveal a deeply flawed system in which serious problems, emotional and physical suffering, and callous negligence abound.

The Evolution of Interpretation

The first trend in this three part transformation may be described as a general growth in sensitivity towards and awareness of the deleterious effects of the schools on Natives and with this a more highly critical evaluation of the schooling system and its agents. In comparison to older

literature, studies from the 1980s and 1990s demonstrate a more thorough understanding of the manifold problems of residential schooling and a greater sensitivity to the more mundane "evils" of everyday experience: the separation of brothers and sisters, the alienation experienced over the prohibition of Native languages, the loneliness and isolation of the prolonged separation of children from their parents, the frightening experience of coming to school for the first time. In keeping with this image of the schools, authors are much more critical of the government and school staff who, they argue, were often the perpetrators of abuse or were cruelly negligent in responding to problems in the schools. This chronological trend may be most effectively demonstrated through a comparison of older and newer literature.

A good place to start is Jacqueline Gresko's 1970 MA thesis, "Qu'Appelle Industrial School" which we have already had the opportunity to consider briefly above. Like some other works to originate in the 1960s and 70s, this study is at least moderately positive in overall tempo. This is reflected well in Gresko's occasional musings: "If at Qu'Appelle Roman Catholic neophytes knew the Alleluia of Easter, Ave Marie Stella and Cantique de Noel, the Regina pupils knew their temperance pledge and gave pocket money toward mission work in India, China, and the New Hebrides" (*Ibid.*:115). Like other authors, too, Gresko was evidently aware of the problems created by the per capita grant system, the high incidence of disease, poor sanitary conditions and the government's shoddy record in dealing with these problems. They are discussed at some length in her thesis, and she chastises the government fairly severely.² Yet her assessment of at least the nuns and school staff who "gave the sick the best care that" they could, is quite positive (*Ibid.*:82). Moreover, she points out that since the school principal appointed older boys and girls to serve as monitors, there were "... few discipline problems and little necessary for corporal punishment" (*Ibid.*:114). What is the most revealing of the differences between "Qu'Appelle Industrial School" and more recent studies, however, is the complete absence of any recognition of the problem of abuse. Now, that Qu'Appelle itself was free from the abuse that plagued so many other institutions has stood the test of time and further research.³ But Gresko does not mention that abuse was a problem at other schools and probably was not aware, in 1970, that it was. Further, we see nothing of the sensitivity to the mundane but nonetheless intimidating, unpleasant or regretful aspects of the system, none of the attempts to emphasize with the children, which characterize so many later pieces.

A second piece which is similarly representative of the earlier literature is John W. Chalmer's (1972) *Education Behind the Buckskin Curtain: A*

History of Native Education in Canada. This work is an especially good example of the contrast between older and new literature. Given the wide scope and intentions behind the work,⁴ one would expect to find some mention of the problems inherent in the system of residential schools: the shocking health conditions, assaults on language and culture, unusually high incidence of abuse, etc. There is mention of some of these topics, but again cognizance of the problem of abuse and of the many unpleasant and intimidating aspects of school life is conspicuously absent. For instance in a chapter devoted to Natives' experiences in the schools (*Ibid.*:177-188), Chalmer recognizes the high incidence of disease, and the apprehension children may have felt seeing the school for the first time. At the same time though, he seems wholly unaware of the emotional pain and alienation engendered by the government's attempted eradication of Native languages and cultures. Moreover, like Gresko, Chalmer was probably unaware of the surprising frequency of physical and sexual abuse, and these too, of course receive no mention.

In contrast to these works stand numerous modern studies of the schools. J.R. Miller's (1996b) "Reading Photographs, Reading Voices" is a historiographic piece which in its plea for an eclectic and unconventional historical method capable of uncovering the "hopes, hurts, successes, and sufferings of many people" epitomizes one aspect of the new trend: the importance of empathizing and "imaginatively" reconstructing Natives' experiences. According to Miller, the student of the history of residential schooling must aim "to tell their long and complex story as systematically and comprehensively as possible" (*Ibid.*:464), and this means in practice that we must uncover the often remote experiences and actions of the third partner in the residential school drama, the Natives. Unfortunately, conventional documentary sources are not sufficient to this task and therefore one must turn, in the author's view, to such unconventional sources as pictures, literature, and especially oral history. While "Reading Photographs" is highly indicative of the new sensitivity to Native experiences in the schools, other studies speak no less forcefully of the second element of this trend: the greatly expanded awareness of serious problems in the schooling system, especially in the form of abuse.

Elizabeth Furniss' (1992) *Victims of Benevolence: The Dark Legacy of the Williams Lake Residential School* is an excellent example of our expounded knowledge of the extent of abuse. The very structure of this work, indeed, speaks to the new prominence of this problem. *Victims* is a slightly expanded study of two student deaths which were most likely precipitated by excessive physical punishment and intolerable conditions at the school. Moreover, if the narrow focus of the study is not enough to

register the integral position of abuse in more recent understandings of the schooling system, then the author's claim that "These stories have... much relevance to current discussions of the impact of residential schools..." (*ibid.*:10) certainly should.

Another case study which is indicative of this new trend is Celia Haig-Brown's (1988) *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School*. Haig-Brown's much needed study attempts to reconstruct Native perspectives on residential schooling through detailed interviews with thirteen former students of Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia. Though the study is not long, the author's almost singular focus makes for a thorough exploration of Native perspectives and experiences, at least at Kamloops. This focus on Native views also incorporates a keen sensitivity to the many unpleasant, yet common aspects of everyday life. For instance, giving her informants ample space to describe their memories of their first days at school, she explores the many challenges, emotions and conflicts, which this experience engendered (*ibid.*:47-52). Her keen sensitivity to the children's induction into the school, also leads her to remark aspects of this transitional phase which have been overlooked: for one, the fact that no or few attempts were made to slowly introduce the children to Euro-Canadian practices (*ibid.*:52). A second aspect of the trend we have been considering—a more critical attitude towards the schooling system—is also well in evidence. According to the author, the children were for the staff, little more than "Objects to be processed as cheaply and efficiently as possible then passed along to the next station" (*ibid.*:56).

This trend is also apparent in historical surveys such as J.R. Miller's (1996a) *Shingwauk's Vision* and J.S. Milloy's (1996) *Suffer The Little Children*. In his comprehensive interrogation of the history of residential schooling, Miller has made extensive use of just the unconventional sources he advocates in "Reading Photographs." In Part two, he devotes individual chapters to reconstructing the experiences of students and documenting the extensive problems in the schools. What emerges is thus an account which is at once highly sensitive and sympathetic to the experiences, perspectives and roles of Natives and highly critical of the system of residential schooling and the government. Though operating on a more general level, Milloy's study is also illustrative of this trend. In fact, in his sensitivity to the *negative* elements of the residential experience and criticisms of the government, he surpasses Miller. In one representative passage, he contrasts the DIA's intentions to create a "homelike" and "caring" atmosphere in the schools, with the antithetic reality. According to the author, even "the basic premise of resocialization was violent" so that the rhetorical aim "to kill the Indian in the child"...took on a sharp and

traumatic reality in the life of each child—separated from parents and community, often at the tender age of six, and isolated in a threatening world hostile to identity, traditional ritual and language” (Milloy, 1996:64). His criticisms of the government are no less forceful. In his second and third chapters, for instance, Milloy goes to great pains to prove that extensive problems existed, and that the department was well aware of these problems but did nothing.

This trend is similarly manifest in a number of education studies which have appeared in the past decade. Rosalyn Ing's (1991) "The Effects of Residential Schools on Native Child Rearing Practices" and Linda R. Bull's (1991) "Indian Residential Schooling: The Native Perspective" are good examples of this. Both studies are based on first hand interviews with former students. Bull's findings are especially indicative of the new sensitivity of approach which has characterized much recent scholarship. She finds that among other negative experiences, children suffered from extensive "cultural discontinuities related to language, food, cultural barriers, strict adherence to rules and regulations of a regimented, militaristic approach" (Bull, 1991:58). Twenty-five to thirty years ago, there was only the most limited recognition of "cultural discontinuity" as a serious problem and wider awareness of this phenomenon has only come about in very recent years. Ing on the other hand, focuses on the adverse effects of residential schooling on traditional Native parenting skills. According to her, residential schools denied children the family and parental interaction necessary for them to learn healthy parenting skills. At the same time, the schools' all too effective attack on Native languages severed the artery of Native cultural transmission—oral communication—and thus further impeded the transference of positive child-rearing norms.

In summary, it would seem that the past two decades have witnessed a considerable growth in the sensitivity and imagination with which commentators approach even the most mundane aspects of the residential experience and at the same time, an expanded consciousness of the extent and seriousness of problems such as abuse. To be sure, works on both sides of the chronological divide share a critical attitude towards such subjects as health conditions in the schools and the per capita grant system. Yet, as we have seen newer literature is aware of many serious problems which were largely unknown or overlooked twenty or thirty years ago; and these same works are far more critical of the government and its education policy. Undoubtedly the public and personal revelations of victims of abuse have played a critical role in this transformation. It seems that the valorous first step taken by then Grand Chief Phil Fontaine in 1990, has encouraged a flood of other individuals to come forward with their own stories of abuse.

Due to the surreptitious nature of abuse, it has taken the mass testimony of victims to awaken the academic community and larger society to its wide spread existence. Still, while these disclosures have played a key role in extending our knowledge of the problems inherent in the system, the new sensitivity and eclecticism advocated in Miller's "Reading Photographs," has also played a role. For, though public disclosures have drawn our attention to the deplorable problem of abuse, only empathy, creative imagining, and a non-discriminatory historical method could have revealed the more banal "violence" of the system.⁵

Temporal Variation in Student's Memoirs

The literature on residential schooling, as I state above, also includes several memoirs contributed by former students. The generational differences among these authors furnish us with a representative sampling of various geographic locales and especially different types of schools and different time periods. For instance, James Gladstone's (1987) "Indian School Days" and Louise Moine's *My Life in a Residential School* both deal with the authors' experiences in industrial schools, while Basil Johnston's (1988) *Indian School Days* and Isabelle Knockwood's (1992) *Out of the Depths* deal with life in the boarding schools. Furthermore, such variation gives rise to at least one interesting tendency in the literature. Now given the relatively small number of studies it is difficult to identify, or speak definitively about any specific trends among these works. But if we consider them in the context of some of the other time-related trends discussed in this section, a definite theme emerges: a hardening of attitudes towards the schools over time. In contrast to the academic pieces which vary loosely according to publication date, variations in these works seem to depend upon the time period in which the author attended residential school.

Perhaps one of the most favourable portraits of the schools and the department has come from the Reverend Edward Ahenakew (1965) in his recounting of how the Little Pine Indian day school came to be reopened.⁶ In fact, the language and tone of Ahenakew's prose often bears an uncanny resemblance to that found in the DIA's yearly reports. Consider one characteristic passage: "Subsequent developments showed that these Indians had qualities, dormant until then, waiting to develop only under suitable stimulus and proper guidance" (*Ibid.*:57). Other statements in the text similarly praise the Department and its education policy. Perhaps the most contentious is this one: "The Department of Indian Affairs showed that there is nothing reasonable it will not do to help such a school" (*Ibid.*:62). The high esteem in which the author obviously held the DIA and the

residential schools may be somewhat unique, even among early students of the schools.

An even better known former student was Senator James Gladstone. He attended an on-Reserve boarding school followed by an industrial institution. He gives a fairly positive accounting of his experiences at both institutions. Much of his reminiscences consist of fondly remembered anecdotes: boyish pranks, games, "the way things were" and the like. All of Gladstone's memories are not so pleasant, however. Writing this piece nearly sixty years after the fact, his anger over how the boys were treated when one of the laundresses lost a pair of moccasins, is still quite evident. Yet, if school officials occasionally earned his ire, the former Senator is unequivocally positive in his overall evaluation of at least his schooling experience: "Over the years I have been grateful for the education I received and I have always been impressed about St. Paul's mission and Calgary industrial School..." (Gladstone, 1987:24). In fact, in a surprising twist, he holds the educational experience of those Natives who went to school prior to 1905, far above that of the "younger generations." "In those days, we had dedicated teachers..." he says, and as a result, "you can tell the Indians who went to these schools before 1905. They have been the backbone of our reserve..." (*Ibid.*:24).

The experience of Louise Moine, another industrial school student, seems to have been similarly positive. Moine also attended early in the century. Coming from a Métis family, she was not officially entitled to be educated in a federally-run school, but apparently Father Hugonnard, the principal of Qu'Appelle industrial school, quietly admitted a number of Métis out of a sense of moral duty. She relates some unpleasant memories of the school: her dissatisfaction with the food the children received in comparison to that of the staff, experiences with two cruel individuals, Father Kalmes and an unnamed nun. But there are also many warm or humorous memories of the school. For instance, she comments of the strict segregation of sexes, "I can't speak for the teenagers, but we, the younger members, were satisfied with these regulations" (Moine, 1988:9). Moreover if Father Kalmes and the unnamed nun were too quick to use the strap, the children, for their part, were not angels either. When their regular teacher was replaced by one with a more delicate nature, "they gave her a bad time and had her in tears many times" (*Ibid.*:14). Moine's evaluation of her schooling experience, perhaps best illustrates her positive attitude: "I spent six years of my life in that place and, as I look back, I believe that they were not wasted years. The education I received there gave me a good foundation which gave me strength to face life with its problems, trials and tribulations... Now only pleasant memories return of those childhood days" (*Ibid.*:28).

Authors such as Basil Johnston and Isabelle Knockwood seem to have had quite different experiences in the residential schools they attended, and their accounts are correspondingly more critical and angry. Johnston attended a Jesuit-run school in Northern Ontario called *Spanish*, during the 1940s. His contribution, *Indian School Days*, gives a thorough accounting of school life, from his first involuntary introduction to the school to his high school graduation. Johnston's memoir is similar to Moine's and Gladstone's in that it is replete with fondly remembered anecdotes and stories. Johnston departs from these authors, though, in revealing some of the unpleasant or even intolerable aspects of school life and in occasionally criticising school and staff. The evocative paragraph he devotes to describing the scarcity of food is a good example of some of the more unpleasant experiences in his narrative.

In quantity served there was just enough food to blunt the sharp edge of hunger for three or four hours, never enough to dispel hunger completely until the next meal. Every crumb was eaten, and the last morsel of bread was used to sponge up any residue of soup that might still be clinging to the sides or to the bottom of the plates... There was the same quantity for every boy regardless of size or need. Yet even the "little shots"... were never heard to extol a meal with "I'm full". "I'm full" was an expression alien in our world and to our experience (Johnston, 1988:40).

In other instances, a latent anger towards the school, past staff, or government policy manifests itself, often in the form of sarcasm. For example, describing a priest's reaction to the prospective groom's concern that he and his wife to be were from the same *totem*, Johnston writes, "Oh, that... Just part of old pagan primitive beliefs and practices. Come on, Stingy, you should know better than to believe in or worry about superstitious practices,' and with a wave of his hand the priest dismissed several thousand years of Anishinaubae history" (*Ibid.*:128). Johnston also takes issue with what he feels was maltreatment. "To grumble that the school served nothing but barley or pea broth... while it ordered staff and faculty roasts of beef and pork and poultry was actually a protest against abuse and maltreatment... the abiding condition was hunger, physical and emotional" (*Ibid.*:137). Yet while these occasional criticisms and Johnston's anger are unmistakable, they are embedded among a vastly superior number of positive experiences. If there was no love lost between the students and some of the staff, then at least Johnston's remembrances of his peers and their shared amusements are fond ones. Moreover, as a high school student, Johnston returned to Spanish of his own volition and when

it came time to say good bye, "Farewell did not come easily or freely" (*Ibid.*:243). We might speculate, then, that if Johnston's experience was not always pleasant, and could have been greatly improved by a more humane staff and certainly more food, he nevertheless appreciates the education the school gave him and the memories of his peers.

The same cannot be said of Isabelle Knockwood's experience at Shubenacadie. Knockwood's *Out of the Depths* is by far the most doleful portrayal of residential school life by a former student. She attended the school from the mid 1930s to the mid 1940s, just a half decade ahead of Johnston in Ontario. Like Johnston, Knockwood, too, evinces some anger over school policies and the callousness of many of the staff. Yet anger is only a very subtle theme in her book in comparison to the themes of ~~*loneliness, hunger, trepidation, and brutality.~~ "Day after day, week after week, month after month and year after year for seven, eight, nine or ten years, this was the atmosphere we ate our meals in—an atmosphere of fear of the unknown, the unexpected and the reality that you could be next" (Knockwood, 1992:45). If hunger and fear were constant, so too was the insensitivity even maliciousness of many of the school staff. Many of the children wet their beds, but instead of being treated with sympathy and understanding they were subjected to humiliation—parading through the dining room wearing their soiled sheets—and "horrible beatings" (*Ibid.*:30). Moreover, while Johnston obviously derived some good from his time at Spanish in the form of his education, at Shubenacadie, "Much of our learning took place despite, rather than because of the nuns' efforts" (*Ibid.*:54). Classroom work, too, was permeated with fear, both of the teacher's pointer and her incessant yelling, according to Knockwood. In fact, ~~*the teaching at the school was so poor, that the author claims to be virtually self-taught in English.~~ If we are to believe Knockwood, her ten years of schooling brought no benefits or favourable memories and amounted to nothing better than a waking nightmare.

The variations among experiences and evaluations in these memoirs may be interpreted in several ways. On the most basic level, they provide first hand evidence of the distinctness of institutions and uniqueness of ~~*students' experiences.~~ Given the increasingly critical tone of these memoirs, it might be tempting to speculate that experiences worsened over time. This, I think is incorrect. What I would suggest is not that experiences definitely worsened over time (after all the early industrial schools suffered the worst funding, health conditions and attrition in Native lives), but that ~~*interpretations changed over time,~~ largely due to environmental factors. As the place of Native people in the nation changed, Native politics came to the fore, Native cultures began to be revitalized, authors came to think

differently about their experiences, though the experiences themselves, may not have been all that dissimilar. Take the contentious issue of corporal punishment in the schools, for instance. Moine and Knockwood evince conspicuously different opinions on this issue. Moine's account of the strapping of one of her peers demonstrates her acceptance of this type of punishment when the offence was serious enough: "I think we felt very sorry but she had done a terrible thing [-in trying to burn down the school-] and she deserved to be punished" (Moine, 1988:10, my emphasis). Knockwood, in contrast, portrays any and all instances of physical punishment as sheer brutality, which, given the meekness and fearfulness of the children, was completely gratuitous.

A substantial case can be made for the influence of environmental factors by looking to the contexts of the authors and the time when they were published. Both Johnston and Knockwood are well-educated, successful writers with the ability to carefully structure their works, the presentation of their experiences. This much is undeniable given their successful publication, each, of book-length memoirs. What I would argue, however, is that in both cases, but especially in Knockwood's, a great deal of thought goes into demystifying the schools so as to increase public awareness of their darker side: excessive punishment, frequent hunger, high incidence of sexual and emotional abuse, etc. In 1992, perhaps one of the high-water marks in public attention given the schooling system, Knockwood was perfectly placed to reveal her tale of savage cruelty, government neglect, and cultural assimilation. Since the revelations begun by Fontaine in 1990, the climate has been right for such critical accounts of the schools. Johnston, writing in 1988, just preceded this mass awakening and it may not be too much to accept that his criticism of the schools was more tempered because of it. Moine, Gladstone and Ahenakew were also undoubtedly affected by the environment in which they wrote and in which they were educated: there was much less sympathy for and awareness of Native grievances in the 1970s, when Gladstone and Moine put pen to paper and little questioning of the moral justness of the policy of assimilation at the turn of the century, when both went to school. This is in no way meant to question the sincerity of any of the authors, or to downplay the neglect, insensitivity and in especially in Knockwood's case, the severe cruelty, suffered at the hands of the system. Rather it is to suggest that these works are not naive or unreflective but, like most written works, are influenced by the political atmosphere of their times.

The Rise of Moral Sentiment

If criticism of the schools has sharply mounted in Native memoirs and scholarly accounts then the third trend—the recent appearance of moral indignity in ostensibly disinterested academic studies—should come as less of a surprise. Whether morality should have a place in academic literature is a question over which there is little agreement, at least within the field of history. However when such moral indignation results in a compromise in the professionalism of the study, it is surely regrettable. The frequency with which such sentiment compromises an otherwise excellent work is not great, but is high enough to have attracted the attention of at least one other scholar (Raibmon, 1996:71-72). Such indignation often, though not always, correlates with a lack of historical research and/or understanding and thus with sweeping statements which completely ignore the complex, varied reality of the residential schools. Additionally, not surprisingly, the studies which engage in this sort of oversimplification are often the most critical of the government and most damning of the schooling system.

Ironically, Ing's "The Effects of Residential Schools on Native Child-Rearing Practices" demonstrates some of these regrettable traits. In all fairness, Ing's scientific detachment is evident throughout the lengthy paper, so moral vexation is not an issue. The study does, however, make some greatly over-simplified statements regarding the policy of the schools—statements which are amply refuted by the evidence, and in one case unintentionally by Ing herself. Consider for instance, her claim, "During this annual ten-month period they were isolated from their parents and from the rest of Canadian society" (Ing, 1991:71). Since the author uses no qualifier (i.e., "many" or "some") we must infer that she is referring to the experience of all the children who went to residential schools. This claim, however, correlates well with neither type of residential school. In the case of industrial schools, which were purposefully located a significant distance from Native communities, government policy was to severely limit visits of parents and vacations of students both because of the desire to keep parents and children separated and because of the costs of sending children home for vacation. The result of this was that many children would not have seen their parents even on a yearly basis, and in a few well known cases students did not return home for four to five years. In contrast to the industrial schools, the boarding schools were located much closer to Native communities (and were thus more popular with Natives). At these schools parent-student visits probably occurred more frequently than once every ten months. In fact, in Isabelle Knockwood's case, weekly visits from her parents gave her the will to withstand the experience. (Knockwood, 1991).

Similarly unsubstantiated is Ing's contention that "All aspects of the Native Child's life were regulated and monitored from morning to night by their caretakers..." (Ing, 1991:71). Certainly this is the sort of totalitarian atmosphere the Department would have liked to create, but as numerous authors have remarked the school's neglect of the students was a very common and pernicious problem.⁷ Indeed, Ing herself recognizes the common "practice of leaving children unattended in locked dormitories... at night" (Ing, 1991:111).

A study in which moral virtuousness seems to have unduly influenced scholarship is Agnes Grant's *No End of Grief*. Though Grant's survey of the topic may be a useful introduction for those with no background in the field, the book shows an unfortunate predilection for exaggeration, dramatization and over-simplification. It would be futile and time-consuming to itemize and refute each individual instance, so instead, I would like simply to note a few of the more conspicuous examples. To begin, Grant states early on ("With the full force of law behind them, government and especially churches held the power of life and death over Native people. These powers were delegated unconditionally to bureaucrats and missionaries") (Grant, 1996:23). Certainly the government's power over Native people extended to many aspects of Natives' lives, but I for one, am unaware of any piece of legislation which gave the DIA, the Churches or any elected government official the right to execute Natives. Indeed until the removal of the death penalty from Canada's criminal code, the right "of life and death" would have been the right of a properly appointed judge during sentencing and would have covered, in fact, all Canadians. A further example of exaggeration is the author's claim that "Psychological abuse was *every* child's *daily* experience *throughout* the years in school. Some children suffered more than others, but *all* children suffered" (*Ibid.*:234, my emphasis).

In other instances Grant makes inaccurate statements, sweeping generalizations or untenable, highly contentious assertions. Her discussion of the "gender-free worldview of Aboriginal societies," for instance, significantly misrepresents pre- and post-contact Aboriginal cultures (*Ibid.*:33).⁸ A similarly questionable statement is her assertion that "... the commitment of the Protestant churches throughout the colonial era must be acknowledged in that they allowed greater progress and showed greater acceptance of Native people than any other Canadian institution at this time" (*Ibid.*:24). Now, having made this breathtaking generalization, Grant does not take the trouble to offer any substantiating examples of references to sources of evidence. One wonders, therefore, on what evidence she bases this generalization, and further, whether it is possible to prove such a grandiose statement in a full length monograph, let alone the space she

allows. The worst gaffe by far, however, is the mock trial Grant holds for the Canadian government and society in which she finds them guilty of genocide. The author's disdain for the government's education policy is certainly understandable, but by making such an inappropriate argument she calls into question the serious, detached nature of the rest of the work. Not only is it inappropriate, however, Grant has to manipulate evidence in four of the five categories used by the UN to define genocide in order to arrive at her verdict of guilty. Lastly, and most significantly, by inferring that the Native residential experience was in the order of the Nazi Holocaust she perverts the concept of genocide and does a grave injustice to these highly distinct historical phenomena.

Thankfully, the number of instances in which moral righteousness has inappropriately influenced scholarship is quite low in the literature under consideration. Given the justness of such indignation and especially the fact that the field is daily attracting new contributors, there is always the risk that such instances will grow in number. In dealing with such a controversial topic, it is incumbent upon professionals to avoid letting their personal vexation jeopardize the richer, more thorough understanding of the history of the schools which must surely be the unitary goal of scholarly inquiry. Put simply, anger at the government and the schooling system may be justified, but it is unhelpful and may in fact work against a greater understanding of the schools.

This is especially true if righteousness leads authors to make sweeping statements. Such statements are favoured, I believe, because these lead to a simple cause-effect scenario in which it is much easier to point the finger. The complexity which usually characterizes everyday and historical situations often makes them unsusceptible to simple cause-effect analysis and thus poor tools with which to pass moral judgements. The history of residential schooling is no different than other historical problems. In fact one of the most prominent attributes of this topic may be its highly varied and individualized nature. Schools differed substantially according to such factors as time of operation, denominational affiliation, class (i.e., boarding or industrial), staff and student population. This fact is incontrovertible, and must be recognized if we are to enhance our appreciation of the history of residential schooling and not simply a moral case against it. Raibmon's study of George Raley, principal of Coqualeetza Indian Residential School, is illustrative both of the need to take diversity seriously and of the benefits of doing so. Raibmon convincingly shows how Raley introduced a number of modifications to the standard school program, which, while keeping it well within the framework of Victorian social values, made for a much healthier and happier experience for the children. As the author argues, this demon-

stration of the latitude open to Raley and the positive use he made of it suggest the need to take a closer look at individual principals and institutions in explaining issues such as conditions and the experiences of students. Similarly it suggests the inadequacy of accounts which generalize complicity to the "system" as if it were some sort of homogenous whole.

A Theoretical Conundrum: The Agency vs. Victimization Debate

A few years ago a brief exchange took place in the *CHR* which highlighted the problematic nature of the notions of agency and victimization and underlined their relevance to the topic of residential schooling. In 1994 two very brave (or foolish?) graduate students criticized four well-known historians for what they contended was misuse of the concept of agency. The two graduate students in question, both of the University of Toronto, were Mary Ellen Kelm and Robin Brownlie, while the historians whose work they found fault with, were Douglas Cole and Ira Chaiken (1990), authors of *An Iron Hand Upon the People: The Law against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast*; J.R. Miller, author of "Owen Glendower"; and Tina Loo, author of "Dan Crammer's Potlatch: Law as Coercion, Symbol, and Rhetoric in British Columbia, 1884-1951." Though welcoming the application of the concept to 19th century Native-Euro-Canadian relations, they argue that all four historians play down the government's ability to implement its more coercive policies such as the prohibition of the potlatch, the pass system and residential schooling and emphasize Native resistance in order to reach the conclusion that the pernicious effects of these policies "were mitigated, even nullified." In so doing, claim Kelm and Brownlie, these authors inadvertently turn Native agency into colonialist alibi (*Ibid.*:545). Miller and Cole's responses appeared one year later.

This brief exchange exemplifies what we might call the *agency vs. victimization* debate. Agency, ostensibly a synonym for human agency, refers to the ability of all human beings to decide upon courses of action, through what is most often rational thought, and to act to achieve the desired ends. Given this formula, all human beings including those in oppressive situations can act to ameliorate or manipulate the tools of their oppression. Similarly they are not simply the objects or victims of repression, abuse, etc. This is not as straightforward as it might at first seem, however. Technically speaking agency refers only to the human capacity for self-determination, and has no direct or causal relationship with success. Of course it goes to reason that one is more likely to achieve a desired end if one thinks and acts to achieve it. Failure, even abject failure, though, is no denial

of agency. The man who leans too far out the window and falls to his death, while trying to pick an apple is as much an agent as the woman who picks the apple successfully with the aid of a ladder. This subtle distinction between intent and achievement, as we shall see, is not often appreciated. To make this even more confusing the concept of victimization is not an exact opposite of agency. This concept unlike that of agency seems to include a notion of results achieved, or more appropriately unachieved. To stress victimization, it seems to me, is to stress the damage and hurt done to those who are subject to repression and simultaneously to refute or at least question the notion of any effective mitigation of this repression.

Having established the theoretical framework for these two concepts, we can now move to their more practical manifestations. Agency is particularly useful for scholars who study people in situations of inequality or oppression. Agency furnishes authors with the conceptual framework necessary to show that those who were subject to inequality resisted, manipulated and in some cases adapted, the tools of their oppressors, all for their own ends. This in itself is innocuous enough, but authors have seldom been satisfied with simply arguing that resistance and manipulation occurred: they frequently feel it necessary to show that these measures were at least to a limited extent successful. And this, I think, is where the debate arises. In the case of residential schooling, no scholar would deny the existence of agency in Native students and parents, for in essence that would be tantamount to denying their humanity. What is contentious is not the issue of agency itself, but the degree of success Natives enjoyed through its application or put another way, the effectiveness of Native resistance. Thus we have Brownlie and Kelm complaining that due to Miller and others' misapplication of the concept, "the negative effects of colonization were mitigated, even nullified" in their accounts (*Ibid.*:545).

Again, though, there is more here than meets the eye. Brownlie and Kelm (among other authors) take issue with certain uses of the concept, not simply because it results in a portrait of the system they disagree with, but because this portrait may have negative political implications for Aboriginal peoples still seeking redress for historical grievances. As an example of the negative political consequences historical scholarship can have, they cite the 1991 ruling against the Gitskan Wet'suwet'en land claim. The debate over the application of agency is thus centred around, not just the academic's text, but its "political ramifications" (*Ibid.*:543).

If uses of agency are contentious, then the same can be said of the notion of victimization. One objection to the over-utilization of this concept is advanced by Miller in his response to Brownlie and Kelm. Over stressing Native victimhood, argues Miller, is in itself politically risky since systematic

attempts to dissolve an Aboriginal right are the criteria, by which, under "the Sparrow test," and Aboriginal right is judged extinguished. A far more serious concern, and this takes us full circle to agency's inception, is that by stressing victimization authors may unintentionally portray the modern day descendants of oppression, as scarred, dysfunctional or maimed. Agency seems to have originally appeared in the midst of a massive backlash, (principally and unintentionally inaugurated by American historian, Stanley Elkins in his *Slavery*),¹¹ against the portrayal of Afro-Americans as seriously maimed by the institution of slavery. Elkins thesis that the fictive character "Sambo" was not so fictive but the tragic result of the brutal institution of slavery, was met with a flurry of protest from intellectuals, Black and White. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s the "victimization" thesis of Black history was thoroughly renounced and a new picture developed stressing the autonomy or agency of Blacks, despite the shackles of slavery as well as the resilience of the Black community, family and individual in the face of tyranny (Novick, 1988:481-488). It is thus with great irony that Brownlie and Kelm now accuse Miller and others of authoring a politically "incorrect" picture of Native resistance, when agency was itself initially advanced as a "corrective" to a politically "incorrect" picture of Black victimhood.

This issue—the problematic nature of the arguments for agency and victimization—is evidently quite significant in a topic such as residential schooling. Indeed, if it is premature to call the ongoing dialogue on this issue a "debate," it is certainly not exaggeration to say that there are divergent opinions and substantial contention. The field is still too small, perhaps, to have fostered clearly defined schools of thought, but close examination of opinions does reveal some significant commonalties. Those who stress agency tend to emphasize the ingenuity of Natives, manipulation of the tools of suppression, resistance, cultural and linguistic resilience and at least to a limited degree, success—defined as the maintenance of cultural patterns in spite of government efforts to eradicate them. Those who oppose this view are critical mainly of the degree to which resistance was effective. These authors, while acknowledging the existence of Native agency, question its impact, and stress the monolithic structures of department and church authority, and legislation as well as the students' lack of autonomy relative to their adult supervisors.

Jacqueline Gresko has been one of the longest standing advocates of Native agency, within the field of residential schooling and even within Native history as a whole. Her first contribution to the field, "Qu'Appelle Industrial School," was, in fact, structured along the lines of a contest between the "civilizers"—the churches and Department officials—and the

Natives. For the author, Qu'Appelle Industrial school was, in microcosm, the large scale confrontation between two opposing sets of social "rites" and social systems. The Department sought to "apprentice" the Native in Euro-Canadian civilization by having them pass through the appropriate "rites," but the Cree resisted the government's programme by emphasizing their own educative programme and "rites of parallel significance" (Gresko, 1992), namely the annual Sun Dance. Additionally, much to the Department's chagrin, the Cree used the knowledge they had gained in industrial schools like Qu'Appelle to hire lawyers, test the legality of the prohibition of the Dance, and otherwise resist the government's assimilative program.

In other articles Gresko is similarly attentive to Native agency, and further, positively evaluates the success of Native attempts to resist government authority. In a 1975 article largely based on her MA thesis—"White 'Rites' and Indian 'Rites': Indian Education and Native Responses in the West, 1870-1910"—Gresko reiterates her findings concerning Cree opposition. The author then moves to assess the outcome of this contest of socializing programmes. Her conclusions are that by attempting to forcibly assimilate Natives, the government actually encouraged them to maintain their traditional customs and rituals:

It might even be said that the efforts to transform western Indians into civilized Christians through educational programs did not halt but in fact encouraged native involvement in traditional social and religious institutions, stimulated resistance to the assimilative efforts of white government and missionaries, and encouraged the generation of modern Indian rights movements (Gresko, 1975:164).

In her comparative study of two Catholic schools in British Columbia and Saskatchewan, she extends her thesis of Native resistance to the BC school and similarly argues that Native resistance at both schools may have been augmented, rather than adversely affected, by Departmental policies (Gresko, 1986). In her emphasis on Native agency and the successes of resistance, Gresko is one of the stronger advocates of the concept.

Another commentator to stress Native resistance and its effectiveness is Celia Haig-Brown. The focus of her book is primarily residential schooling from the perspective of former students; she therefore devotes considerable energy to uncovering the ways students resisted the system. Her findings indicate the existence of numerous forms of resistance, a shared mentality on the part of the children and a high degree of sophistication and ingenuity. According to Haig-Brown a sub-culture of crime surrounded such activities as stealing food or wine or the clandestine exchanges of glances, words or notes between the sexes. Other students chose to run away from school,

and in the end some were successful and did not have to return. Some decided that they could empower themselves by cooperating with the Nuns or at least feigning cooperation. In the author's view, a theme central to all the various forms of rebelliousness was the wresting of the locus of control from the staff: students were seeking to gain a measure of control over their own day to day lives. That they succeeded, and won self-esteem for themselves, is clear, asserts Haig-Brown. "Even with the controls... well in place, the students found time and space to express themselves and to produce a separate culture of their own within the school" (Haig-Brown, 1988:88). In fact the analogy here to finding spaces within the restrictive structure, is very telling. Authors who minimize the extent and especially the effectiveness of Native recalcitrance stress the impermeability, oppressiveness of the structure of governmental authority and argue that Native resistance was only mildly effective because of the stifling weight of this structure. Haig-Brown, though, seems to suggest that the system was not so monolithic as to preclude effective resistance and moreover, that Native students carved out their own areas of authority, or niches in which they could feel they had at least limited control over their lives.

J.R. Miller, as we saw above, has also, perhaps unintentionally, become involved in this dialogue. The two pieces which represent his most forceful advocacy of the concept of agency—"The Irony of Residential Schooling" (1987) and "Owen Glendower"—address the issue only in limited fashion, so it is somewhat surprising that he should be singled out by Brownlie and Kelm for misusing the concept. Nevertheless, we may speculate that their rebuke had at least a minimal effect on Miller, for his later work is much more conservative in its application of this concept. Examining a portion of Miller's *oeuvre* should help bring this subtle change to light.

In "The Irony of Residential Schooling" Miller postulates three basic, related theses with regard to Native resistance and its effects in the schools. The first is relatively self-evident. Though the residential schools were meant to assimilate Natives by turning them into model Canadians, they instead gave birth to a number of Native leaders who made use of their education and familiarity with Canadian society to *represent* Native peoples against the government. Like the students in Haig-Brown's case study of the Kamloops school, these Natives endured great hardship but through perseverance, managed to wrest from the government the legal and political tools necessary to challenge their subjection. The second point may come as something of a surprise. Miller argues that of the three actors in the system of Native education, only the Natives emerged with their objectives partially achieved; the churches and the government both failed

to achieve their goals—the Christianization and assimilation of the Natives. According to Miller, Natives had requested education in order to learn enough of Euro-Canadian ways to effectively adapt to the new order; to carve a niche for themselves in Euro-Canadian society. The residential schools unintentionally provided Native peoples, especially their leaders with the tools to begin to make their place in Canadian society. Finally, like Gresko, he muses, “Ironically, it was the residential school, which was designed to be the benign exterminator of Indian identity, that indirectly played a role in its perpetuation and revitalization” (Miller, 1987).

“Owen Glendower” by contrast, is aimed at challenging “the conventional picture” of 19th century Native-White relations, in which, claims Miller, policy intentions are often assumed to be synonymous with results. The topic of residential schooling is thus one among three or four which the author targets for reinterpretation. Native agency in this piece is similarly one among other factors which Miller argues, ensured that elements in the coercive policy of assimilation seldom functioned as well as government officials and missionaries would have liked. As regards Native resistance, Miller focuses on the efforts of parents to manipulate and shape the education of their children, somewhat to the neglect of measures taken by the students. The means parents adopted to express dissatisfaction with their children’s education ranged greatly. In a very few instances, fathers chose violence, but in most cases more peaceful methods were adopted such as petitioning officials, frequently visiting schools, withholding children from school or enrolling them in a less offensive institution. Given the peculiar (and in hindsight disastrous) circumstances created by the per capita funding system, in which students enrolled translated into dollars funded, parents could exercise not inconsiderable influence by withholding their children or placing conditions on their attendance at school. In sum, concludes Miller, by applying these methods, parents “often shaped their children’s educational experiences so that they were tolerable to them” (Miller, 1992).

If these works are not especially controversial in their application of the concept of agency, they do represent a more liberal approach than does Miller’s later *Shingwauk’s Vision*. This comprehensive survey of Euro-Canadian education of Natives offers a more nuanced, careful and, in fact sophisticated interpretation of Native resistance and its results. In a chapter devoted to the subject, “You Ain’t My Boss’: Resistance”, Miller offers a fairly thorough exploration of the various methods adopted by parents and students to influence the administration of the schools, or express discontent. While the forms resistance could take were numerous and innovative as in the two above articles, the author views them as more circumscribed

in effect. Phrases like "limited in scope," "limited effect," "at least a narrow area in which to protest effectively" which appear repeatedly in his analysis, illustrate this new interpretation. In general, student and parent attempts to manipulate conditions at particular schools achieved minimal results only in two types of situations: first when the church officials feared losing the student(s) to a competing school especially that of another denomination or a day school; or second when the department worried that the protest might result in negative publicity and undesirable political consequences. Perhaps the best demonstration of Miller's revised stance is a passage in which he gives an overview of the issue and the ways it manifested itself:

What emerges from a survey of the interaction of both school-children and their adult communities is a picture not simply of authority and submission, but of a subtle and shifting interplay of forces. Influence and power could in some instances flow in favour of the Aboriginal constituency, in spite of the apparent dominance of government and church. Although too much should not be made of this phenomenon—it would be misleading to suggest, for example that Native groups were able to force schools to operate as they wished—it is important to understand that protest and resistance could and did have some effect (Miller, 1996a).

If Miller's stance on Native resistance has shifted towards greater conservatism, this is not to say that he had completely reversed his position. In fact, it might be more accurate to locate his recent views somewhere in between those of authors such as Haig-Brown, and Jacqueline Gresko as discussed above, and those which stress victimization and the severe constraints placed upon the exercising of personal agency. Miller takes the middle position.

In contrast to the authors thus far considered, are perhaps an equal number who question the argument of effective Native resistance. Elizabeth Furniss is one such author. In her examination of two incidents at the Williams Lake Residential School, Furniss challenges studies which emphasize effective resistance and partnership of the Natives involved. These studies, claims the author, fail to recognize the degree of coercion inherent in the residential school experience and the context in which the drama was played out: the structure of domination and dependence constituting Native-government relations. Worse, she argues (as do Brownlie and Kelm), this sort of interpretation sends the message that "the schools weren't that bad" (Furniss, 1992:32). Accordingly her investigation of two deaths at the schools, the complaints of students and the Native communities, and the government's responses, aims at demonstrating the mechanisms by which

the Department undermined, dismissed and silenced Native attempts to change conditions in the school. In each case, she maintains, the department "defined" problems at the school and the student's testimony in such a way as to find the core of the disturbance with the Natives. That the government was so successful is, moreover, a reflection of the prevailing structural inequalities in the government-church-Native relationship.

Grant's *No End of Grief* on the other hand sends a contradictory message which fluctuates between the two extremes of the agency/victimization continuum. She introduces the topic of resistance by challenging the "misconception...that Natives simply accepted the Residential School. Though resistance to it was difficult and largely futile, Indian parents did resist and they never stopped trying to change the system" (Grant, 1996:209). Below, other statements enforce her conclusion that resistance was "largely futile": "Parents were unsuccessful in preventing the disastrous effects the schools had on their children... By and large parents became irrelevant in the education of their children" (*Ibid.*:210). Yet, there are similar statements which contradict this view. Consider her assertion that "parental resistance to sending students great distances was almost impossible to overcome" (*Ibid.*:211). She appears similarly confused about the extent and effectiveness of students' resistance. She introduces the problem by saying "Students were helpless captives in the schools;" only to argue below that these same "helpless captives" were "wonderfully inventive and found ways to obtain some measure of power even though the system was designed to render them powerless" (*Ibid.*:216).

If Grant's contradictions are rather surprising in a scholarly work, they are easily enough explained. Stressing either agency or victimization, as I discussed above, has desirable and not so desirable consequences. To emphasize the agency of Native peoples and to show them imaginatively and at least with partial success, resisting, adapting or manipulating the system extends to Natives the full humanity which more traditional accounts refused them. At the same time, though, one must walk a fine line for fear of underestimating the forcefulness of government policies and their devastating effects. Stressing victimization and the futility of resistance, by contrast, has the benefit of documenting and fully appreciating policies and their effects. To overstress this side of the equation, however, is to paint Natives as historical "losers" who were powerless to help themselves, and modern Natives as dysfunctional, damaged or psychologically maimed. Ultimately, this is a question of the political ramifications of the picture we present and both types of interpretation give rise to politically undesirable messages. If Natives were successful in resisting the juggernaut of assimilation, then the system "wasn't all that bad" and wrongs on too great a scale

were not perpetrated, whatever government intentions. Contrariwise, if modern day Natives are emotionally and psychologically maimed, then how can they possibly be ready to accept responsibility for their self-governance?

Grant, I think, due to her well-meant wish to spread knowledge of the injustices suffered by Natives, tries to have her cake and eat it too: by painting a contradictory picture in which both agency and victimization are stressed, she can paint Natives as innovative, intelligent and determined in resisting the system and at the same time as victims on an horrendous scale. Emphasizing both sides of this interpretational dichotomy as we saw, however, is no solution. Given that there is no clear way out of this conundrum the best way to handle it may be to walk the middle path.

Future Directions in the Study of Native Residential Schooling

In the space remaining, I would like to make a few brief suggestions regarding some of the future avenues to be explored in our study of this topic. As I indicate above, the field, though attracting scholarly attention for thirty to forty years, has only recently begun to come of age. This overall period, and especially the past twenty to twenty-five years has seen a significant growth in both the quantity and quality of studies. We have indeed come a long way. Yet, while changes in the literature are very encouraging to date, there are still a great many areas of the topic to have received only cursory attention or no attention at all. Similarly while some of the trends which have characterized more recent scholarship are to be welcomed, there is much left to do in further extending these avenues of inquiry and in adding to the depth of understanding they have made possible. In no particular order are some of the topics I would like to see further developed: gender in a general sense in the schools, staff at the institutions, Church involvement in the project, conditions at individual schools, and finally, oral testimony.

Notwithstanding my comments above about a general learning curve among studies, the topic of gender is one of which authors seem virtually unaware. The sole exception to this rule, to my knowledge, is J.R. Miller, who devotes a chapter to exploring the different socialization experiences of boys and girls at the institutions. This chapter is an excellent first look at the differentiated experiences of the sexes, and at government and missionary designs for them, but one such exploration does not, evidently, saturate the field. Gender studies is a vast and quickly growing area of scholarly investigation, and no doubt, someone more familiar with this

subject than myself, could recommend several possible approaches to the issue of gender in the schools. For now however, especially given the preliminary nature of our understanding of the subject, two or three suggestions may serve to get us started. First, it seems to me, we have the question of government and missionary intentions (assuming these to be similar) for their male and female charges. What sort of "men" and "women" did the government expect Natives to become? Answers to this question would not only indicate officials' intentions with regards to the sexes, but might help us further understand government intentions overall. A second question would centre around the actual application of these policies. How was the socialization of children gendered in practice? What were the experiences, therefore, of boys and girls and how did they differ and intersect? Thirdly, to what degree did Native students adopt Euro-Canadian constructions of gender and in so doing, reject Native ones? Was there, as often occurred among religious "converts," a sort of duality of identities which operated at different times and places? Doubtless, further thought and research into this topic will reveal other important questions, but these should at least serve to initiate dialogue on the issue.

If our exploration of the topic of gender in the residential schools has only just begun, our knowledge of school staff is also very incomplete. A few studies have taken a closer look at principals at the schools and their role in influencing policy in the institutions. Raibmon's "A New Understanding of Things Indian," for instance, closely examines George Raley's role in reworking government Indian policy at Coqualeetza, where he was principal, and his philosophy of Native Education as it evolved over time. J. Pettit's "From Longhouse to Schoolhouse" devotes considerable attention to the management styles of Mohawk Institute principals in the 19th and 20th centuries, and how these impacted upon general conditions at the school. And Jacqueline Gresko's work on the Qu'Appelle school and its principal, Father Hugonnard, contributes substantially to our understanding of this deeply committed individual. But the average staff at the schools remain not only nameless but except for a few general inferences, largely faceless. We know for instance that many staff were incompetent, and could not find employment elsewhere in the church or in non-Native schools, that many were religiously motivated, that many were probably insensitive or at least hardened... this list could go on, but not for much longer. The closest we come to these individuals, at least in the secondary literature, may ironically be in the accounts of former students. After all it is Louis Moine's Father Kalmes, Isabelle Knockwood's dreaded "Wikew", Basil Johnson's equivocal "Father Oliver" who turn these statistical entities into living,

breathing people. This connection, in fact, points to one of the major sources of evidence on staff: oral testimony, which I discuss in detail below.

The reasons for scrutinizing school staff are relatively numerous. The most obvious, may be that they were integral to the operation of the schools, to their success or failure and to the experiences of students. If as Raibmon argues, principals enjoyed sufficient autonomy in the running of their schools to lessen or enhance the more destructive elements of the system, then staff had a similar opportunity, if on a more limited scale. Other reasons arise from the singularity of the topic and may be best indicated by looking at the important questions which arise concerning the staff. If residential schools were by and far unpleasant to work in, why were individuals motivated to work there? If conditions were so appalling in so many schools, how did staff reconcile the theoretical benefits they were bestowing upon Native people with the darker reality? Similarly, if abuse was as common as we are beginning to believe it was, why was this so? Was there simply an overrepresentation of disturbed individuals haunting residential institutions and/or was there something in the ideology of the system or the often inhospitable conditions which, at least one author has suggested (see Miller, 1996a:319, 321-322), encouraged the staff to abuse their charges? On the positive side, what was it about particular staff which led them to respect and care for students, to the point where they are remembered with admiration by their pupils? Ultimately, these numerous questions/reasons attest to the accuracy of the reason I gave for further studying school workers: their integral, and influential position within the system. If we hope to understand very much of this topic in any detail, we must have a better understanding of the people who turned policy into practice.

An area similarly in need of further exploration is the church's involvement in the residential school enterprise. Given the distinct social backgrounds, denominational philosophies and relations with the federal government and Canadian society, one would expect the motivations and intentions of the various Protestant and Catholic churches to have been at least slightly different. We get some indication that this is true from the limited number of studies which cover the churches in detail. Hope MacLean's (1995) thesis "The Hidden Agenda: Methodist Attitudes to the Ojibwa and the Development of Indian Schooling in Upper Canada," the title notwithstanding, reveals that early Methodist attitudes towards the Ojibwa were relatively enlightened. For one, the Methodists were very interested early on in higher education for the Natives, as they wished to foster an Indigenous church and Native missionaries (*Ibid.*:33-36). Eric Porter's (1982) study, "The Anglican Church and Native Education: Residential Schools and Assimilation," on the other hand, indicates that there

was little interest in an Indigenous church even among Native missionaries (*Ibid.*:19-22). Perhaps more distinct yet, are the motivations of the Roman Catholic Church, especially such bodies as the Oblates or the less numerous female orders. Evidently, as R.J. Carney (1971) and other authors illustrate,¹³ a major motivation for the Catholic orders (as with the Protestants) was the desire simply to prevent competing groups from making converts. Yet if Oblate motivations are easily enough explained, this tells us nothing of their relations with the federal government, attitudes towards instruction in English or Native languages, beliefs in Native capabilities and potential, etc.—topics which have thus far received only limited attention.

A further aspect of the churches' involvement with residential schooling which requires a great deal more attention is the "behind-the-scenes" negotiations, compromises and conflicts of intra-church politics which had a significant impact on outward policy and opinion. An excellent example of how internal squabbles could have effects all out of proportion with their moral and political weight can be found in the dispute which erupted between western and eastern bodies within the Anglican church in the 1900s. Eric Porter's excellent study of the Anglican Church and Maurice H. Lewis' (1966) "The Anglican Church and its Mission Schools Dispute" provide a thorough analysis of this disagreement, which, unfortunately, is largely beyond the scope of this paper. The quarrel which developed took place over the Church's involvement with residential schooling in the West. Feeling that the western schools were largely a failure, had become too secular in content (and lost their evangelical spirit), and citing the appalling death rates among students and graduates of the western Anglican schools, eastern churchmen attempted to force a withdrawal from the western campaign. Leading lights in the West, however, were equally committed to their undertakings there and mounted an effective campaign in favour of maintaining the *status quo*. At the same time, the government was seeking to restyle the education system, and with the Oliver-Pedley proposal of 1908, was moving in the direction of the eastern Anglicans. The upshot of this seemingly theological conflict was that the campaign in favour of continued involvement forced the adoption of a substantially diluted version of the 1908 proposal (a new agreement was ratified in 1911 by the various churches and the government). The 1911 shift in policy towards a "new, improved" schooling system was thus a much more conservative transition than might otherwise have been the case. Evidently not all internal squabbles would have had such an impact, but this example, I think, nevertheless demonstrates the importance of a more thorough investigation into the internal politics of the churches.

As I demonstrated above, the new sensitivity to and awareness of problems in the schools has significantly broadened our cognizance of day to day conditions at schools. This is really only a recent trend, demonstrated by a very small number of innovative studies. The majority of older studies are characterized by an institutional or political focus which has precluded, until recently, further interest in actual conditions at individual schools. Nor has this interest spread to all recent works. Despite its title, Jacqueline Gresko's "Everyday Life at Qu'Appelle Industrial School" says much less about the "everyday life" of the students than it does about Principal Hugonnard's attempts to foster an entente between the school and the Native communities which fed it. Again, J.R. Miller's standard setting *Shingwauk's Vision* devotes a considerable amount of space to analyzing conditions at the various residential schools across the country. Yet the strength of this work, is also its weakness: as a far reaching survey it synthesizes and analyses a vast amount of historical information but at the same time cannot afford to become bogged down in the details of individual institutions. What seems to be especially needed is more in-depth studies of conditions at individual or small groups of schools.

The issue of the sources required to successfully undertake such studies leads me to my final suggestion. As researchers in the field are aware, written documents are of only very limited usefulness for reconstructing the more immaterial aspects of the schools such as the experiences of students and staff, general conditions and expressions of resistance. Students of the topic must therefore turn to less traditional sources such as literature, artifacts, pictures and especially oral testimony. Securing this last form of evidence, may in fact be a valid goal, in and of itself. As J.S. Milloy insightfully comments, "There is... a story of these schools that can only be told by... ex-students, their families and communities whose lives have been shaped by that painful reality" (Milloy, 1996:7). What he did not add, though should have, is that there is equally a story to be told by the individuals who operated the schools on a day to day basis, the Indian Affairs officials and especially the missionary staff. What authors all too frequently forget is that the system of residential schooling was a tripartite story: it involved the churches, the government and Native peoples and could not, *and would not* have functioned as it did had any of these three not been involved. Yet our knowledge of these parties is confined principally to those in the higher echelons of all three groups, while the average individuals remain largely statistical entities. It seems to me that the only appropriate response to this situation is to turn quite determinedly to oral testimony in order to tell the stories of these three groups of largely undocumented individuals. Furthermore, if we are going to be innovative in

the sources of evidence we admit, we should also be willing to supplant conventional historical methodology which tends to appropriate voices (i.e. in quotations) and marshal them to substantiate arguments. In addition to traditional monographs, we should consider loosely edited books of oral testimony as a genre appropriate to the subject. Only then can the numerous untold stories of the residential schools begin to be told; only then can we begin to do justice to this subject, and those who lived it.

My aim in this article has been to analyze and summarize some of the more important developments in the literature over the last few decades, and at the same time to take stock of where we stand today. Many significant and promising developments have taken place during this period. The past two decades, in particular, show a substantial growth in the number of contributors and works in the field. If anything, though, the scholarly attention brought to bear on this topic has only confirmed two essential "facts:" first, that this is a timely and exceptionally important area of study; and second that further investigation, rather than producing definite answers and a finite topic area, will likely produce more questions and a broader more complex conception of the subject. In short, knowledge begets knowledge. If the second fact—the ominous reality that "the end" is nowhere in sight—is an ambivalent catalyst, the first should certainly spur us to action. In fact, given the government's recent admission of wrong doing, and decision to provide monetary compensation, the topic is more important than ever before. As academics with an abiding interest in the subject of residential schooling, we are well-placed to partake of and contribute to the debates and discussions which will no doubt continue to take place—and we are thus, to paraphrase Brownlie and Kelm, well-placed not only to study history, but to make it.

Notes

1. I have in mind such articles as Gresko 1975; 1992; and 1986.
2. Consider for instance pp. 149; 156-8; 161-5.
3. Gresko's (1992, 1986) later articles as well as Moine's (1975); and Pettit's (1997), all substantiate the positive reputation of the Qu'Appelle school.
4. The book was originally written as a survey text for a course Chalmer was teaching, since there were no other suitable texts available.
5. Thus far I have focused on how recent work paints a much darker portrait of the residential school system and how this revised portrait has resulted largely from an expanded awareness of problems in the system. To infer from this, however, that this new sensitivity has only resulted in the discovery of further evils, would be quite incorrect.

Some authors have found a good deal that was positive in the schools, in spite of all the negativity. And so it may be argued that in some studies we have a more complete picture of the system and not simply a darker one. The purpose of this discussion, however, has been only to describe the most significant changes to have occurred in the literature, not the sum total of changes. And as I have attempted to demonstrate, the most important and substantial change has been this shift towards a more iniquitous, critical portrait of the schooling system.

6. Ahenakew (1965). Though I indicated above that I would limit the focus of this study to residential schools I have made an exception in this work. I do this for two reasons: first it is indicative of the trend I am trying to bring to light; and second, in the field of Native history in general, and residential schooling in specific, Native writers are greatly outnumbered and overshadowed by non-Native academics. The limited number of pieces authored by Natives, needs, therefore, to be given that much more attention.
7. See for example Page (1996), Miller (1992), Milloy (1996) and Grant (1996).
8. For a more accurate discussion of gender roles and their evolution in post-contact time in various Aboriginal cultures, see Bonvillain (1989).
9. Their article appeared in the "Notes and Comments" section under the title "Desperately Seeking Absolution: Native Agency as Colonialist Alibi?", *Canadian Historical Review* 73(2):543-556, 1992.
10. In footnote 6, p.545, in a rather obscure passage they offer the caveat that they are only speaking to a specific class of texts, which "carry within them their own values and uses... not to particular authors..."
11. Cited in Novick (1988).
12. Gresko (1986). See especially page 102.
13. For other authors, see especially Gresko (1992), Miller (1996a; 1992), and Chalmer (1972).

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