

# Report and Recommendations of the Task Force on First Nations Education to the 1999 Annual General Meeting

*(revised annotated version)*

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## About the Task Force on First Nations Education

The 1998 Annual General Meeting passed a motion, "That a task force be struck to investigate the effectiveness of the education system for First Nations students and that recommendations be made to the 1999 AGM for improvement."

An advertisement inviting applications to the task force was distributed to schools in April 1998 and eight BCTF members were appointed to the task force by the Executive Committee at its June 1998 meeting. Of the eight members, six are First Nations and one is Metis. Three members hold district positions in Aboriginal education, and the remaining five work in regular classrooms or in Aboriginal education programs in schools.

The members of the Task Force on First Nations Education are:

Geraldine Bob (Vancouver Elementary)	Deborah Jeffrey (Prince Rupert)
	Carol McCauley (Prince George)
Lexi Charlie (Cowichan Valley)	
Frank Conibear (Greater Victoria)	Ian Stuart (Delta)
Alice Gro (Central Okanagan)	Merle Williams (Delta)

Co-chairpersons are Frank Conibear and Deborah Jeffrey.

The Task Force first met at the end of June 1998, and again for three meetings in the fall of 1998. After its first meeting, the task force distributed widely a *Draft Framework for a Report* and invited feedback. Task force members held discussions at the First Nations PSA conference, the 4th Provincial Aboriginal Education Conference, the Advisory Committee of Local Presidents, community meetings, meetings of First Nations co-ordinators, meetings with First Nations teachers and Aboriginal support workers, as well as with other education organizations. The report and invitation for feedback was also published on the BCTF Web site in the section on First Nations and Metis Education. The meetings were primarily organized by individual task force members and

reflected very wide feedback on the initial framework of ideas and concerns developed by the task force. In addition, staff from the First Nations Education Steering Committee and from the Aboriginal Education Initiative of the Ministry of Education participated in task force meetings. Larry Kuehn, director of the Research & Technology Division, provided staff support to the task force.

After this consultation, the task force adopted, at a January 1999 meeting, its report for recommendation to the Executive Committee and the 1999 Annual General Meeting. Because of the many elements to be dealt with and the short time in which to carry out its work, the task force has recommended that its term be extended for another year. The task force would use this time to prepare recommendations for the BCTF Aboriginal Education Program to the Representative Assembly and a further report on policy and practices to the 2000 Annual General Meeting.

## **Who are the students who are the focus of the report?**

The task force sees several groups of students as the focus of its report and recommendations. Some are First Nations students, some with and some without status under the Indian Act, who live on and off reserves in rural and urban areas. There are also a number of Metis students, who are often overlooked, but who also have Aboriginal rights recognized in Canada's Constitution, and have specific educational needs.

Because the term "Aboriginal" is inclusive of all these students, that is the term used most frequently throughout the task force report. When First Nations or Metis is used, the recommendation is specific to those particular groups.

The task force sees its recommendations as also serving non-Aboriginal students as well through helping them to understand aspects of the society in which they live and contributing to positive and respectful relationships among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

## **Why are the issues being dealt with by the task force of importance to teachers?**

No one should need a stack of statistics to know that many students of First Nations and Metis background are not achieving success in the public schools. However, if any are not convinced without them, the statistics are overwhelming. The percentage who finish Grade 12 with their Grade 8 cohort is only about 31 percent. Even among those who finish, many do not receive the Dogwood Certificate needed to take advantage of post-secondary education. A much higher percentage of Aboriginal students are identified with special needs, particularly special needs that have a social basis, such as behaviour. More Aboriginal students drop out of school and at much earlier ages than other students for whom school has not been a success.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that there are successes. Some Aboriginal students do well, and some school programs seem more successful than others. More Aboriginal students are completing secondary school and more are in post-secondary programs than in previous decades. Identifying the conditions that facilitate success is an essential strategy to help make the changes in the public school system as a whole that will improve the chances for success for all students.

The reasons for lack of success must be understood as well.

Many of them are functions of the history of British Columbia and Canada and the relationship between the First Peoples and those who immigrated from other continents. The Indian Act constructed all the elements of the life of those who were covered by it. Some aspects of this history relate directly to education. Children were taken from their families and forced to attend residential schools. The purpose of these residential schools was cultural assimilation. Students were punished for using their own language. The opportunity for cultural knowledge to be passed from elders to children was eliminated, with cultural and economic disruption and devaluation as a result. We know now, as well, that sexual and physical as well as psychological abuses were commonplace. The impact of these practices continues to affect many in First Nations communities and is part of the reality that must be

understood by teachers if they are to effectively teach all the students in their classes.

Another factor influencing educational success is poverty. Some of the First Nations in what is now British Columbia were among the richest societies in the world in an earlier era. At the point of contact with Europeans, there was a fully functioning culture and economy, supported by education that taught the elements necessary for participation in the traditional culture and economy. After contact, First Nations were left with restricted access to forest and fish, and only a small land base on which to build. Today many people of Aboriginal descent live in poverty, whether on reserves or in urban communities. Research on students from all groups shows a high correlation between poverty and lack of success in school. On the other hand, higher levels of education are shown to have a high correlation with economic success. If teachers are to contribute to improving the success of Aboriginal students, they must be concerned about social equity and poverty, not just about the activities in their own classrooms.

A further factor affecting success of the public schools in educating Aboriginal students is cultural difference. The public school system and most of its teachers are rooted in cultures based in Europe. Implicit in a culture are many elements that are central to education: the nature of knowledge and the ways of knowing that are valued, the use of time, the relationship and importance of family and community, methods of passing knowledge from one generation to another. Because the Eurocentric cultural approaches are so dominant in our society, they are often invisible and seem like "common sense" to those from the majority culture. Any beliefs and behaviours that do not fit, can seem, from this perspective, to be perverse or willfully challenging. Aboriginal communities' definition of success may not fit with how success is viewed by the majority culture. Aboriginal people and communities would like to be active partners in the decision-making affecting the education of Aboriginal children. As long as the cultural basis of the school and its practices remains unexamined and unchanged, the public schools will not be able to serve the needs of many students from indigenous cultures.

The task force believes that changes can and must be made so that the public schools better serve the needs of Aboriginal students. Some of these changes require a new cross-cultural understanding and practice by teachers. Some require alterations in the institutional structures and practices of the school system. Others require new places to be opened at the tables where decisions about education are made—within the BCTF, in each school, in school districts, at the Ministry of Education. If the public schools cannot or will not serve the needs of Aboriginal students or communities, they will be forced to create alternatives that better meet those needs.

The task force believes that it is possible and necessary to create a new relationship, redefining what the future will look like. The task force recommendations are intended to contribute to making the public schools better able to meet the needs of Aboriginal students and the challenge of providing the opportunity for success.

## **Vision of the task force**

Each child has a gift. Look for that gift and how to help nurture it. Strengthen the spirit of the children and help them to find balance and ways of being that are rooted in land, community and culture. Help them to succeed in education and a career, as well as choices of lifestyle, grounded in language and culture. Provide an opportunity for them to have a choice of how and where to live and work.

## **What is success?**

The mandate of the task force is to make recommendations that will contribute to the success of Aboriginal students. "What is success?" is a question that was widely discussed in the many meetings held by task force members. Many of the ideas presented have been summarized by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in the section of its report on education:

For more than 25 years, Aboriginal people have been articulating their goals for Aboriginal

education. They want education to prepare them to participate fully in the economic life of their communities and in Canadian society. But this is only part of their vision. Presenters told us that education must develop children and youth as Aboriginal citizens, linguistically and culturally competent to assume the responsibilities of their nations. Youth that emerge from school must be grounded in a strong, positive Aboriginal identity. Consistent with Aboriginal traditions, education must develop the whole child, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically.

Current education policies fail to realize these goals. (Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, pp. 433-434)

## **Recommendations from the Task Force on First Nations Education**

### **Section 1: Recommendations specific to BCTF goals and programs**

#### **Recommendation 1.1**

That the goals of the BCTF in Aboriginal education be to improve the success of Aboriginal students in the public schools and to build a new relationship with Aboriginal students and communities, and that these be pursued through:

1. working with Aboriginal organizations and other groups in the public schools to define success and appropriate indicators of success;
2. building awareness and commitment of teachers to practices that will improve the success of Aboriginal students;
3. identifying and supporting practices that help achieve success for Aboriginal students;
4. working to make schools inclusive of and for Aboriginal students, parents, teachers and support workers;
5. building positive relationships of teachers and schools with Aboriginal communities.

#### **Supporting Statement**

The call for changes to improve education results for Aboriginal students has been articulated in many reports over the years, from the Hawthorne Report in the 1960s through the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. A summary of these is provided in an Appendix to the report. The changes, however, will come about only if the BCTF, teachers and others with responsibility carry through on a commitment to act.

#### **1999 Annual General Meeting**

The 1999 AGM adopted this.

#### **Recommendation 1.2**

That the BCTF extend the Task Force on First Nations Education to continue work through the 1999-2000 school year, with a further report to the AGM in 2000.

#### **Supporting Statement**

The task force has been able to identify many actions that may contribute to the success of Aboriginal students, as are reflected in the remainder of this report. However, there are other issues not fully examined in the limited time it has had to work, and the major challenge is how to translate the recommendations into actions.

#### **Recommendation 1.3**

That the Task Force on First Nations Education develop a four-year program for BCTF activity aimed at the goal of improved success of Aboriginal students in the public schools for recommendation to the May 1999 Representative Assembly.

That the program include an evaluation of the need for an ongoing program after the four years.

### **Supporting Statement**

Carrying out even some of the recommendations of the task force will require commitment, resources and staffing on the part of the BCTF. It is important that this work begin soon, and a BCTF program on Aboriginal education should be in place for the 1999-2000 school year.

### **Recommendation 1.4**

That the BCTF hire a person of Aboriginal ancestry to the professional staff, and that members of the BCTF of Aboriginal ancestry be included in shortlisting and recommending who should be hired.

### **Supporting Statement**

The credibility of a BCTF Aboriginal education program requires that it be staffed by a person of Aboriginal ancestry, and that Aboriginal representation be included in the selection process.

### **Recommendation 1.5**

That the Task Force on First Nations Education review existing BCTF policy for relevance and appropriateness and make recommendations for a comprehensive policy statement regarding the education of Aboriginal students.

### **Supporting Statement**

Because of the limitations of time, the task force has been unable to review all existing policy. Some policies continue to be appropriate while others need changes in language to reflect current understanding. Existing and new policies should also be integrated into one comprehensive statement.

### **Recommendation 1.6**

That the BCTF work with the First Nations Educators' Association (PSA), the First Nations Education Steering Committee and other appropriate groups to sponsor a provincial Aboriginal Education Conference during the 1999-2000 school year.

### **Supporting Statement**

Producing the changes in our schools required to make them more successful for Aboriginal students requires the understanding, commitment and involvement of large numbers from all parts of the system, not just those who have traditionally been involved in working on improving the situation for Aboriginal students. This conference should be aimed at engaging people from throughout the school system in the process of making changes outlined in the task force report.

### **Recommendation 1.7**

That the BCTF work with the First Nations Schools Association to build co-operation between First Nations-run schools and public schools.

### **Supporting Statement**

The First Nations School Association is an organization to represent First Nations-run schools and to assist them in developing programs that more effectively meet the needs of First Nations students. Often students move back and forth between the public system and these schools. Working together, the students in all the schools that serve First Nations students may be better served.

## **Section 2: Teachers**

### **Recommendation 2.1**

That the BCTF develop a program with adequate resources to build teacher awareness of the needs of Aboriginal students and to create teacher commitment to changes in the public schools and in teaching

practice to meet those needs.

### **Supporting Statement**

Teachers have a central role in the education process, along with students and families. Any strategy to produce fundamental change in the public school system to improve the success of Aboriginal students must be based on teacher awareness and commitment to the change. The BCTF does not carry alone the responsibility for teacher awareness and commitment. However, the Federation is uniquely positioned to engage teachers in dialogue about the necessity for change and to facilitate the collective action necessary to make change.

### **Recommendation 2.2**

That the BCTF carry out a discussion among its members during 1999 about:

- a. the *BCTF Aboriginal Education Teacher Awareness and Commitment Principles*.
- b. the conditions necessary to make it possible for the principles to form the basis of practice throughout the school system (e.g., workshops, resource materials, teaching materials, committee structures, links to Aboriginal communities).
- c. the impediments to implementing these practices (e.g., provincial curriculum and testing policies that contradict or negate the need for the recognition of difference, the nature of existing structures, practices in the management of schools).

### **Supporting Statement**

If the ideas in this report are to have an impact, the work must begin by reaching the many teachers whose work in the classroom is central to education. One way of doing this is to ask all locals to engage in discussion with their members. The onus for change should not, however, be entirely on teachers. Teachers need tools and resources. And some significant changes will be impossible, despite the best of intentions, if elements of the structure of the school and the demands of the Ministry of Education make it impossible to carry out the changes. Any successful strategy for change must address all of these elements, and the task force believes that BCTF locals are strategically placed to engage teachers in this discussion.

### **1999 Annual General Meeting Action**

The 1999 AGM sent these to members for discussion and recommendation to the 2000 AGM.

### **Recommendation 2.3**

That the following be adopted in principle for discussion and recommendation to the 2000 AGM as the *BCTF Aboriginal Education Teacher Awareness and Commitment Principles*:

- a. The teacher expects that Aboriginal students will succeed and seeks the strengths of each student and builds success through nurturing of those strengths.
- b. The teacher recognizes that there are many forms of success, and that these include, but are not limited to, academic success.
- c. The teacher recognizes that Aboriginal communities and families have the key role in defining what constitutes success for their children, and that success includes recognition of their identity and pride in their culture.
- d. The teacher creates a welcoming atmosphere in the classroom and school for Aboriginal parents.
- e. The teacher acknowledges and respects different world views and the implications for what is valued knowledge and what are ways of knowing.
- f. The teacher incorporates Aboriginal history and culture into the curriculum and teaching practice on an ongoing basis.
- g. The teacher is respectful of protocols about specific cultures and recognizes the situations in which it is appropriate or inappropriate for the sharing of stories, dances and other forms of cultural representation.
- h. The teacher acknowledges the importance of First Nations languages to both individual development and maintaining cultures and recognizes the expertise of First Nations language teachers.
- i. The teacher recognizes that Metis and different First Nations have many different cultures and languages and avoids presenting curriculum on a pan-Indian basis.

- j. The teacher recognizes the positive contribution that elders and role models from Aboriginal communities can make to the content of education, to creating pride among Aboriginal students and to building respect for Aboriginal culture among all students.
- k. The teacher participates, where possible, in events in Aboriginal communities to gain understanding and to show respect for Aboriginal cultures and people.
- l. The teacher contributes to a welcoming atmosphere in the school and classroom for Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal support workers.
- m. The teacher recognizes that treating all students just the same is not a form of social justice, but is a form of submerging the Aboriginal student in a culture that is based on European patterns.
- n. The teacher is aware that any single particular Aboriginal student or adult should not be expected to be expert on all Aboriginal cultures or peoples.
- o. The teacher recognizes that the development of the whole child includes physical, intellectual, social, emotional and spiritual development.
- p. The teacher recognizes that the academic language of the school may require a form of second-language learning.
- q. The teacher recognizes the negative impact that the residential school experience had on many individuals and the ongoing impact on the relationship of many First Nations people to the schools.
- r. The teacher uses culturally sensitive teaching strategies.

### **Supporting Statement**

The most important changes in the school for Aboriginal students will come about with greater understanding by teachers. Not all the elements on this list may be widely understood, or even accepted as correct by everyone. Nor does agreement with all or most of the items necessarily easily translate into obvious practices. The purpose of putting them forward is to have a beginning point for an extended dialogue that includes teachers and Aboriginal communities, and to identify the basis for research, development and communication on how to change teaching practice in ways that will assist the learning and success of Aboriginal students.

### **Recommendation 2.4**

That the Task Force on First Nations Education prepare a discussion guide for locals and that resource people be made available by the BCTF for the local discussions.

### **Supporting Statement**

Guides, information and resource people will facilitate the success of locals in carrying out the discussions proposed in Recommendation 2.2.

### **Recommendation 2.5**

That each local be requested to prepare a report by December 1999 on its discussions of the *BCTF Aboriginal Education Teacher Awareness and Commitment Principles* and the conditions necessary for them to be implemented throughout the school system.

### **Supporting Statement**

Reports to the task force on the discussions among teachers will be essential if it is to be able to use the content of the local discussions in preparing recommendations for a BCTF program and a comprehensive policy statement.

### **Executive Committee Action**

That each local be requested to prepare a report by November 30, 1999 on its discussions of issues referred by the AGM and the conditions necessary for them to be implemented throughout the school system.

### **Recommendation 2.6**

That the Task Force on First Nations Education report to the 2000 AGM on the *BCTF Aboriginal Education Teacher Awareness and Commitment Principles* and recommend a program of action to gain the conditions necessary for them to be carried out throughout the school system.

### **Supporting Statement**

Moving from discussion to action is essential if changes are to be made.

### **Executive Committee Action**

The Task Force on First Nations Education will report with recommendations to the January 2000 Executive Committee on issues referred by the AGM.

### **Recommendation 2.7**

That the BCTF recognizes the importance of teachers of Aboriginal ancestry working in the school system, both for programs that are targeted to Aboriginal students and programs that serve all students.

### **Supporting Statement**

Teachers of Aboriginal descent are very much underrepresented in the teaching force, whether compared to the percentage of the population or of students who are Aboriginal. Having Aboriginal teachers as role models throughout the school system is important, not only for Aboriginal students, but for all students.

### **Recommendation 2.8**

That the BCTF supports affirmative action programs aimed at increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers.

### **Supporting Statement**

Improvements in the representation of Aboriginal teachers will be facilitated by affirmative action policies. Some potential teachers who have already been trained through programs such as the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) at UBC have moved into other jobs because of lack of positions in teaching. However, in order for affirmative action to be successful, particularly in bringing Aboriginal teachers into secondary schools, there will have to be corresponding increases in the number of students who are recruited into teacher training programs at the universities.

### **Recommendation 2.9**

That the Bargaining Division work with the Task Force on First Nations Education in developing recommendations related to the collective agreement that would facilitate affirmative action.

### **Supporting Statement**

Some provisions of the collective agreement may form impediments to school districts being able to use affirmative action hiring policies. These should be explored with the Bargaining Division, with a report on the impact of the collective agreement and actions that may be necessary to pursue an affirmative action program.

### **Recommendation 2.10**

That the BCTF should work with appropriate education and Aboriginal organizations to create a program to encourage Aboriginal people to enter teacher training.

### **Supporting Statement**

Increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers is possible only if there are increases in the number that enter teacher training programs. Activities aimed at recruitment could include Aboriginal access programs, presentations at career fairs, and university external programs.

### **Recommendation 2.11**

That the faculties of education should develop programs that encourage Aboriginal support workers to train as teachers.

### **Supporting Statement**

Aboriginal support workers already working in the schools are a group likely to have an interest in teaching. They should be encouraged to build on their school experience and become teachers.



### **Recommendation 2.12**

That each local work with its board of school trustees and Aboriginal communities to develop a district plan for recruiting, retaining and supporting Aboriginal teachers.

### **Supporting Statement**

Programs for seeking out teachers with a particular background have been used in the past, such as for French immersion programs. A similar approach should be developed to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers hired in districts. It is not enough to just hire, and not provide further support. Some Aboriginal teachers report that the environment of the school has not always been supportive for them. Positive support strategies such as mentoring are important. A session at the beginning teachers' conference could be useful.

### **Recommendation 2.13**

That the BCTF work with the First Nations Educators' Association (PSA) to develop a program of support for Aboriginal teachers who are new to teaching.

### **Supporting Statement**

Beginning teaching can be challenging to anyone, and teachers who come from a minority cultural background may find it even more so. The First Nations PSA, in conjunction with the federation, could play a role in providing the mentoring and support that would assist first year Aboriginal teachers.

### **Recommendation 2.14**

That the BCTF encourage the faculties of education and the B.C. College of Teachers to ensure that all teachers during teacher training take at least one course on Aboriginal history, cultures and education.

### **Supporting Statement**

All teachers are expected to integrate Aboriginal content into the curriculum that they teach. Consequently all teachers should have at least an introduction to the history of Aboriginal peoples, the cultures of Aboriginal peoples and the historical experience with education. In addition, most B.C. teachers will have some Aboriginal students at some time during their teaching career, and should be better prepared to teach these students.

## **Section 3: Students and the School**

### **Recommendation 3.1**

That the BCTF supports headstart-type programs and early intervention programs controlled by Aboriginal communities to give a successful start to the school experience for Aboriginal students.

### **Supporting Statement**

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples concluded that there is an "accumulation of convincing evidence that early education is a strategic intervention point to enhance healthy development and learning." Further, it says that "since any intervention at the critical age for cultural transmission will have a profound, long-term impact on the child's life, it is imperative that early childhood strategies be fully under the control of parents, who can make strategic choices about shaping their children's future." (*RCAP, p 451*)

### **Recommendation 3.2**

That the school and community should recognize the successes of Aboriginal students.

### **Supporting Statement**

Much of the focus of this report and others like it is on improving the situation for students who are not succeeding under current conditions. That is understandable, but the fact that some students are succeeding should not be lost, and it is important that the successes be recognized.

### **Recommendation 3.3**

That each school district should develop a plan and services to support Aboriginal students, particularly at the points of transition where many students experience difficulty.

### **Supporting Statement**

A look at progress statistics of students through the system indicates that there are crisis points at each stage of transition from one part of the school system to another. Many students get lost in the move from elementary to secondary school and before the point of entering the last two years that lead to high school graduation. Similarly, many students who could benefit do not move on to post-secondary education. Districts should have plans and services in place to support students through these transitions.

### **Recommendation 3.4**

That counselling and Aboriginal support workers should be available in all schools with Aboriginal students to provide assistance to Aboriginal students experiencing difficulty.

### **Recommendation 3.5**

That each school, particularly those with more than five percent of students who are Aboriginal, should review on a regular basis its policies, practices and the school environment to assess whether it is inclusive for Aboriginal students, and take appropriate action to make it more inclusive.

### **Supporting Statement**

Seeing themselves and their culture reflected in the school in a variety of ways helps to make the school feel like a friendly and supportive environment for participation and learning. Many factors contribute to inclusiveness, and regular review of all elements of the school and its practices should help to make the school inclusive.

### **Executive Committee Action**

Referred for discussion by BCTF members during 1999.

### **Recommendation 3.6**

That a school review of inclusiveness for Aboriginal students include areas such as the following:

- a. Does the school physical environment include visible representation of Aboriginal culture and people?
- b. Are there Aboriginal people working in the school as teachers, support workers or in other positions? Do they feel comfortable in the school?
- c. Does an Aboriginal advisory committee exist and is it consulted about the policies and practices of the school?
- d. Do students feel comfortable in self-identifying as Aboriginal?
- e. Do parents feel comfortable in coming to the school?
- f. Does the school encourage and support teachers including elements of Aboriginal culture and heritage in their teaching?
- g. Do Aboriginal students participate in extra-curricular activities?
- h. Are Aboriginal students achieving academic success?
- i. Are there appropriate supports to assist students who are not succeeding academically?
- j. Are Aboriginal students overrepresented in special education?
- k. Are Aboriginal students included in gifted programs?
- l. Is targeted funding for Aboriginal students, for special needs and for ESL getting to the school in ways that help the intended students?
- m. Has the school offered cross-cultural training for teachers?
- n. Does the school invite elders into the school to participate in programs? Does it recognize their expertise and cultural knowledge with an honorarium?
- o. Are Aboriginal students graduating from secondary school with courses that allow them to go to post-secondary programs?
- p. Are language and culture programs offered in physical facilities that are central in the school or in

- rooms or portables that are on the margins of the school?
- q. If Aboriginal languages are offered, are students meeting the objectives?
  - r. After secondary school, are Aboriginal students experiencing success in post-secondary education and careers?
  - s. Are parents informed about programs that are available and about the implications of choosing particular programs?

### **Executive Committee Action**

Referred to BCTF members for discussion during 1999.

## **Section 4: Curriculum, Learning Resources and Programs**

### **Recommendation 4.1**

That curriculum and learning resources that are relevant and respectful to Aboriginal culture be available for use at all levels and that the ministry provide adequate funding for development, distribution and implementation.

### **Supporting Statement**

While some appropriate curriculum materials and learning resources are currently available, there is need for more of both. The ministry should fund the development of these materials, as well as facilitating distribution and implementation.

### **Recommendation 4.2**

That curriculum and learning resources that are relevant and respectful to Aboriginal culture and its diversity are included as integral parts of the curriculum and Integrated Resource Packages, not as add-ons marginal to the regular program.

### **Supporting Statement**

The task force recognizes the crowded curricular program and the many demands placed on teachers to cover a wide curriculum. However, it is essential if the public schools are to be inclusive for Aboriginal students that Aboriginal culture and history be a part of the school at all levels and in a range of subjects.

### **Recommendation 4.3**

That learning resources related to the culture of the First Nations in the region where the school is located be used in classrooms, and that ministry funding should be available to support the development of these learning resources where they do not already exist.

### **Supporting Statement**

It is essential that teachers recognize that British Columbia has many diverse and different First Nations cultures and languages—more so than all the rest of Canada. Learning resources should reflect these differences as well as similarities. Material should be available so that both First Nations and non-First Nations students learn about the traditions of the people who live in their region of the province. This may require the development of new resources, and this should be funded by the ministry.

### **Recommendation 4.4**

That the BCTF, with other partners, develop, maintain and make accessible to teachers a database of existing learning resources and locally developed curriculum for all grade levels to support the inclusion of Aboriginal content throughout the curriculum.

### **Supporting Statement**

Some useful locally developed curriculum and learning resources already exist, but are not easily available

to teachers to use in their classrooms. Collecting and providing the information on what is available and where would facilitate the use of these resources.

#### **Recommendation 4.5**

That Aboriginal history and culture content be increased in all subjects, with special emphasis on social studies, and that workshops for teachers be made available to support this additional content.

#### **Supporting Statement**

Many teachers feel that they do not have the background and expertise to increase the use of Aboriginal history and culture in their teaching. Workshops should be available so that they are comfortable in increasing the use of this content. Learning about the history and culture should be a part of school growth plans.

#### **Recommendation 4.6**

That the history and background to treaty processes should be incorporated into social studies at different levels, including the information from history, provisions of the Canadian Constitution relevant to Aboriginal inherent rights to self-government, the definition of Aboriginal rights through court decisions, and the B.C. Treaty Process.

#### **Supporting Statement**

It is particularly important for students to know about the history of British Columbia and the nature of Aboriginal rights protected in the Canadian Constitution if they are to understand the treaty process. The negotiation of treaties under the B.C. Treaty Process has only just begun. It will be central to the political and social climate of the province for many years to come.

#### **Recommendation 4.7**

That teacher-librarians, in consultation with First Nations educators, should increase their holdings of appropriate materials related to Aboriginal history and culture and should review collections to ensure that existing materials are appropriate.

#### **Supporting Statement**

Rich and positive resources in school libraries are important to support the inclusion of more Aboriginal content throughout the program of the school. Inappropriate materials should not just be removed from shelves, but should be used to increase understanding of the way that stereotypes are communicated.

#### **Recommendation 4.8**

That B.C. First Nations Studies 12 should be offered, in consultation with First Nations communities, in secondary schools throughout the province, and the BCTF and locals provide encouragement through the professional development and specialist association structures for this to happen.

#### **Supporting Statement**

First Nations Studies 12 is a provincially developed and authorized course for Grade 12 credit. It provides a sound basis for developing an understanding of Aboriginal history and culture and relationship to the rest of society. However, the course is available in only a limited number of schools and it should be made much more widely available.

#### **Recommendation 4.9**

That the BCTF encourage all universities and colleges to accept B.C. First Nations Studies 12 as acceptable for Grade 12 course credits for admission and advertise that recognition in their catalogues.

#### **Supporting Statement**

One of the reasons that more students do not take First Nations Studies 12 is that it is not recognized for credit as an acceptable Grade 12 course at many of the post-secondary institutions, although Simon Fraser University has recently agreed to recognize the course for admission. Requiring a provincial examination

for the course, as currently required by many institutions for recognition, would counter many of the positive elements and the flexibility of the course to deal with local First Nations cultures within the course framework.

#### **Recommendation 4.10**

That B.C. First Nations Studies 12 be accepted by the ministry as meeting the foundation social studies requirement for graduation.

#### **Supporting Statement**

This request was heard by the task force from a variety of sources. Ministry staff indicate that it is reported to them that the single course credit that is most often a block to the graduation of Aboriginal students is social studies. A ministry review of the learning outcomes of Social Studies 11 and First Nations Studies 12 indicates that 80% of the learning outcomes of Social Studies 11 are covered in the learning outcomes of B.C. First Nations Studies 12. This would allow a choice of courses to meet the graduation requirement, much like student choice of several different courses in the sciences to meet the base requirements for graduation.

#### **Recommendation 4.11**

That in-service programs on the content of the First Nations Studies 12 course be made widely available to teachers.

#### **Supporting Statement**

Few teachers have had an opportunity to learn about Aboriginal history and culture in their own school experience. The content of B.C. First Nations Studies 12 would provide valuable background for the incorporation of this content into their teaching and their background in general knowledge. The content of the course should be adapted for in-service programs and be made widely available through summer institutes and programs during the school year.

#### **Recommendation 4.12**

That in partnership with First Nations communities, programs in First Nations languages, K-12, should be supported, developed and offered, as additional language, immersion or bilingual programs.

#### **Supporting Statement**

The single most important element in the practice and transmission of a culture is language. Most of the First Nations languages in B.C. are in danger of dying with current generations of elders. Restoring and maintaining a viable base of speakers of these languages is an essential part of any program of cultural maintenance. The First Nations Education Steering Committee has produced a report identifying some strategies for the development of language programs. That group is also working with Simon Fraser University to develop a teacher training program specific to the teaching of First Nations languages. These efforts deserve the support of the BCTF and other organizations to help make them successful.

#### **Recommendation 4.13**

That the BCTF produce, in conjunction with other appropriate groups, a report, with recommendations, on a) the reasons higher percentages of Aboriginal students are identified as having special needs and are in alternative education programs, b) the cultural appropriateness of special education and alternate programs, and c) whether the programs can meet student needs.

#### **Supporting Statement**

Aboriginal students make up a much higher percentage of students with identified special needs. This identification is particularly high in the behaviour category. It is important to understand why this is happening, whether these designations are appropriate for the development of the students, and whether the special education programs for designated students are appropriate in all ways, including culturally.

#### **Recommendation 4.14**

That Aboriginal cultural awareness and enrichment programs and services supported by targeted funding be either exclusively for Aboriginal students, or open to all students, by choice of the local Aboriginal communities.

### **Supporting Statement**

Under the current regulations for targeted Aboriginal education funds, these funds can only be used for programs that are specific to the identified Aboriginal students. In some cases, this is appropriate, so that the students have an opportunity to take a program that provides them with necessary support. In other cases, however, Aboriginal communities have indicated that they would like cultural awareness programs to be offered to all students, so that they develop an understanding of the culture and history of the Aboriginal peoples in their region. The regulations should provide for either of these approaches to be acceptable, as determined by the Aboriginal communities.

## **Section 5: Racism**

### **Recommendation 5.1**

That the BCTF recognizes that racism does exist in B.C. schools and is committed to eliminating racism.

### **Supporting Statement**

Although it is sometimes denied, the evidence is overwhelming that racism is in practice in B.C., and in particular in regard to Aboriginal peoples. A necessary first step to eliminating racism is acknowledging that it does exist, and that concrete action must be taken to oppose it in schools and communities.

### **Recommendation 5.2**

That the BCTF recognizes that some racism is individual and some systemic and institutional and that some racism is conscious and intentional and some unconscious; further, that all these forms of racism must be opposed.

### **Supporting Statement**

To develop effective programs to oppose racism, it is necessary to understand the different forms it takes. Then appropriate policies, programs, training and other strategies can be used to address each manifestation of racism.

### **Recommendation 5.3**

That the BCTF believes that forcing students to assimilate to majority cultural attitudes and patterns is a form of racism.

### **Supporting Statement**

Public schools primarily transmit the culture of European-based peoples. Schools are often places of pressure to conform. Aboriginal students should not have to compromise their identity in order to succeed in school. An inability to conform is often a source of alienation of Aboriginal students from the school.

### **1999 Annual General Meeting Action**

Adopted by the 1999 AGM.

### **Recommendation 5.4**

That the BCTF develop a handbook that identifies practices that may reflect systemic and institutional racism affecting Aboriginal students and that suggests alternative policies and practices.

### **Supporting Statement**

Systemic and institutional racism is often invisible to any but those affected by it. It often reflects practices that may be appropriate and acceptable for some students, but may have a harmful effect on others. If harmful practices are to be eliminated, they must be identified, and alternative models provided.

### **Recommendation 5.5**

That unlearning racism and skills for students to respond to racist incidents be included in the personal planning and the career and personal planning programs at all levels.

### **Supporting Statement**

Anti-racism as a part of the mandated curriculum will help ensure that all students have the opportunity to develop the skills to deal with racism and help counter the claim that racism does not exist in schools.

### **Recommendation 5.6**

That the BCTF make widely available to teachers workshops on inter-cultural communication and assist them to deal with all forms of racism, including individual racist incidents in classrooms, stereotyping of Aboriginal students and peoples, and systemic and institutional racism and That these workshops be provided to all schools with the support of school districts, as with the model of harassment in-service.

### **Supporting Statement**

Racism will only be systematically reduced if there is a systematic approach to assisting teachers to deal with it. Inter-cultural communication provides some techniques to reduce the likelihood that cultural misunderstanding will become a racist incident.

## **Section 6: Governance, Funding and Accountability**

### **Recommendation 6.1**

That the BCTF recognizes that Aboriginal communities have the primary responsibility for defining what constitutes success for Aboriginal students in the public schools.

### **Supporting Statement**

Studies, reports and commissions have consistently emphasized that Aboriginal communities need to be able to participate in the decision-making process, including their definitions of what constitutes success.

### **1999 Annual General Meeting Action**

Adopted by the 1999 AGM.

### **Recommendation 6.2**

That the BCTF encourage locals to co-operate with First Nations and school districts in the negotiation and implementation of Local Education Agreements that provide funding from the federal government for the education of on-reserve First Nations students in the public schools.

### **Supporting Statement**

Local Education Agreements are an approach by the federal government to provide funding for on-reserve students in public schools in a way which allows for the First Nations to have an influence over the education of their children. Some school boards have negotiated Local Education Agreements that have provisions in conflict with those in the Collective Agreement. All the parties involved, including the BCTF locals, should attempt to make these agreements serve the needs of the students without producing conflict among the various parties.

### **Recommendation 6.3**

That an accountability system for success of Aboriginal students in the public schools should reflect a variety of ways of demonstrating success as developed with Aboriginal communities, not externally imposed systems of numbers and test scores; further, that indicators of opportunity to learn should be a part of the accountability system.

### **Supporting Statement**

Many people have made the point that the "bean counter," accounting, everything-can-be-reduced-to-numbers and results-based approach to accountability is not appropriate. Accountability for the quality of education is, however, important, and it should be provided through a system that reflects the reality of diversity of communities and the complexity of the education process. Indicators of opportunity should identify the conditions and supports to achieve success.

**Recommendation 6.4**

That the BCTF encourage school districts to develop district Aboriginal/First Nations Parent Advisory Committees.

**Supporting Statement**

Existing Parent Advisory Committees often do not reflect the views of parents of Aboriginal children and may not be a comfortable environment for these parents. District committees have been structured in several communities to help Aboriginal parents have more influence on education policies. One purpose of these committees should be to help parents understand the school so they can be participants in policy recommendations and in providing support for their children.

**Recommendation 6.5**

That the Ministry of Education should make a firm, long-term commitment to maintain targeted funding for Aboriginal students and ensure that decisions about programs and staffing funded with these funds are supported by the relevant Aboriginal communities.

**Supporting Statement**

Many of the existing school district programs to support Aboriginal students were developed only when Aboriginal education funds were targeted in 1994. The programs have existed for only a short time. The problems that led to the creation of the programs have a long and complex background, and will take some time to resolve. The ministry should make it clear that the financial support for these programs will be there for the long term.

**Recommendation 6.6**

That district funding for programs for Aboriginal students should not come exclusively from targeted funding, but also from the per capita funding that is provided for each student in the school district.

**Supporting Statement**

Each Aboriginal student brings to the school district not only the special targeted funds, but also the same per capita funding that is there for every student. Those funds are aimed at meeting the educational needs of the student, and should be available for that purpose. For example, Aboriginal books and resources can be purchased from learning resource budgets, not just from targeted funds.

**Recommendation 6.7**

That the Ministry of Education should maintain a standing advisory committee on programs and policies related to Aboriginal education, with significant representation from Aboriginal communities and organizations.

**Supporting Statement**

Dealing with the many challenges in Aboriginal education requires that the many concerned organizations, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, work together on common programs. The ministry should play a leadership role in engaging all of these groups in planning and consultation on an ongoing basis.

**Recommendation 6.8**

That the Ministry of Education should maintain an Aboriginal Education Branch with Aboriginal staff to support Aboriginal education initiatives throughout the public school system.

**Supporting Statement**



While the ministry has had Aboriginal programs for several years, the ministry has gone through continual re-organization and has had constant turnover of staff. Providing effective support for Aboriginal education requires a long-term commitment and plan, Aboriginal staff committed with experience in the schools, and stability of funding and staff. In addition, Aboriginal perspectives need to be heard throughout the ministry, with Aboriginal staff not just in the Aboriginal education section.

### **Recommendation 6.9**

That the federal government provide funding for programs to maintain First Nations languages, including the training of First Nations language teachers.

### **Supporting Statement**

Maintaining First Nations languages is essential to the cultures of the First Nations. If action is not taken very soon, many of the languages will disappear from living use. Specific funding for the complex programs required to maintain the languages is essential if this is not to be their fate. The federal government has responsibility for support of languages, as was pointed out by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

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## **Appendix**

# **Summary Report of Selected First Nations Education Documents**

**Submitted by Deborah Jeffrey to the  
BC Teachers' Federation Task Force on First Nations Education**

**January 1999**

- Introduction
- A Survey of Contemporary Indians of Canada, Volume II
- Indian Control of Indian Education, 1973
- Tradition and Education, Towards a Vision of Our Future (Volumes 1, 2, 3), 1988
- A Legacy for Learners (The Report of the Royal Commission on Education), 1988
- Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Gathering Strength, 1996
- Related First Nations Education Studies
- Ministry of Education Statistics Concerning Aboriginal Students
- Conclusion
- Bibliography

## **Introduction**

Since contact, Aboriginal education has been used as a vehicle to attempt to assimilate Aboriginal people into Canadian society, sometimes aggressively, as in the residential school experience. Aboriginal leaders of the past and present have continually sought to improve the quality of life for their people and have made repeated submissions to various levels of government institutions expressing concern and demanding change. Despite several studies and reports calling for changes to existing education institutions to improve the quality of education for Aboriginal children, very little positive change has taken place.

The political climate of British Columbia is changing as many Aboriginal peoples seek to redefine a new

relationship with British Columbia and Canada through the treaty process. Many Aboriginal peoples in B.C. engaged in the treaty process have placed a high priority on education. Aboriginal parents and communities want their children to receive a quality education that will allow them to live and work where they choose and foster a sense of pride in who they are as Aboriginal people.

This document will summarize selected reports and documents concerning Aboriginal education. I have purposefully included several quotes from each of the original documents to capture the tone and essence of the reports. The documents summarized include:

- *A Survey of Contemporary Indians of Canada, Volume II, 1967*
- *Indian Control of Indian Education, 1973*
- *Tradition and Education, Towards a Vision of Our Future (Volumes 1, 2, 3), 1988*
- *A Legacy for Learners, 1988*
- *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Gathering Strength, (Volume 3), 1996*
- *We Are All Related: Parts 1 & 2, 1998*
- *Ministry of Education Statistics Concerning Aboriginal Learners 1998*

## ***A Survey of Contemporary Indians of Canada, Volume II***

The *Survey of Contemporary Indians of Canada, Volume II*, published in 1967, is often referred to as the Hawthorn Report. H.B. Hawthorn coordinated a study to investigate the social, educational, and economic situation of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Although the document reflects some paternalistic ideas, much of the discussion in the section on education is concerned with inequity and injustice. For the most part, the conditions affecting Aboriginal learners in 1967 remain relevant in today's public school context.

It is difficult to imagine how an Indian child attending an ordinary public school could develop anything but a negative self-image. First, there is nothing from his culture represented in the school or valued by it. Second, the Indian child often gains the impression that nothing he or other Indians do is right when compared to what non-Indian children are doing. Third, in both segregated and integrated schools, one of the main aims of teachers expressed with reference to Indians is "to help them improve their standard of living, or their general lot, or themselves," which is another way of saying that what they are and have now is not good enough; they must do and be other things.  
(Hawthorn, p.142)

Hawthorn reports on the discontinuity of culture between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people made evident in the school setting. Aboriginal communities and schools differ in a number of areas including values, beliefs, experiences, expectations and attitudes. Some of the topics discussed in the study include, Aboriginal students' sense of alienation, lack of belonging, irrelevant curricula, absenteeism and language problems. The study points out the injustice of applying Western referenced norms in standardized tests to Aboriginal students. Overall, the report paints a very dismal picture of Aboriginal education in Canada.

The study reports on grade twelve completion rates and includes data for a twelve year cycle of school between 1951 to 1962. Out of a total of 8782 Aboriginal students, 8441 did not complete grade twelve, resulting in a ninety-four percent drop-out rate. Aboriginal learners were not receiving an education and Hawthorn was strongly advocating for change to take place.

The socialization of Aboriginal children in schools is quite frustrating for students, teachers, administrators, parents and community members. It was clear Aboriginal culture in the classroom conflicts with the general conformity expected in the routines and schedules of schools. From early in their schooling experience, Aboriginal children are unable to conform to the expectations of schooling, resulting in feelings of alienation and inadequacy. The identity of Aboriginal children is consistently undervalued, challenged and often negated. Parents expressed frustration and felt they were unable to change the situation.

Generally, schools have fairly stringent rules and expectations regarding conduct, timetables, curricula, teaching and administration. The ever increasing demands placed on teachers and schools allow little flexibility or room for the integration of material from other cultures. "Society and the school accept little responsibility for those

who cannot conform and the teacher is not in the position to fight an educational system and a society on behalf of a few children out of the many"(Hawthorn, p.121). Similar concerns are expressed today resulting in too few opportunities for meaningful and respectful inclusion of Aboriginal content into the classroom.

Hawthorn indicates that overall, teachers have low expectations of Aboriginal children and did not expect them to do well at any level. Many teachers felt strongly that they had to teach Aboriginal students as if they were from mainstream culture. Teachers were convinced they were 'helping the children overcome their Indianess'. Hawthorn emphasizes the importance of teacher attitude in the development of self-image of the Aboriginal student. The lack of value placed on Aboriginal culture is causing problems of identity and self-esteem for Aboriginal learners.

The schooling of Indian children today raises many questions. School for some of them is unpleasant, frightening and painful. For these and for some others it is not so much adaptive as maladaptive. They have little reason to like or to be interested in the school in any way, in or out of the classroom, and it does not provide a path to the jobs some expect from it. Preliminary studies indicate that their motivation to do well in school drops during their stay there. They fail to reach their potential as scholars. They fall behind from the beginning and come to see themselves as failures. Their schooling is not justified by results and moreover they are unhappy in it. A pattern that is followed by a few White children is followed by many, perhaps most, Indian children.  
(Hawthorn, p.6)

Absenteeism for Aboriginal students is reported to be very high. Reasons for absence fell under two categories. The first category is related to the cultural values held with responsibility to relatives. The second category of absences relates to the school experience itself. During the study, it was reported that Aboriginal students miss an average of forty days per school year. Non-Aboriginal students miss only five to ten days per year. A high rate of absenteeism for Aboriginal learners continues today.

Concern about absenteeism is based on the belief that school is the place the child should be. The question of what is happening to the child at school is relevant here. If the child is suffering in school, as some of these children are, school is not the place he should be. Children who are frightened or hungry or ridiculed are not free to learn. They are too busy attempting to defend themselves"  
(Hawthorn, p.136).

Hawthorn expresses the voice of Aboriginal students and parents in the study. Parents and students felt discriminated against and for the most part, did not have positive experiences with schooling. "Parents and youth perceive the problems of youth in school with considerable consistency.... The problem of discrimination was raised in several instances and students mentioned 'feeling stupid all the time and 'not belonging' as other major sources of discomfort" (Hawthorn, p.140). Students indicate that the school system is too rigid in its routines and expectations. The lack of success in their school experience generally lead students to believe they were unable to succeed in the non-Aboriginal world.

In sum, the atmosphere of the school, the routines, the rewards, and the expectations provide a critically different experience for the Indian child that for the non-Indian. Discontinuity of socialization, repeated failure, discrimination, and the lack of significance of the educational process in the life of the Indian child result in diminishing motivation, increasing negativism, poor self-images and low levels of aspiration.  
(Hawthorn, p.130)

A sad picture is painted regarding the education of Aboriginal students in Canada. Public schools neglect of the needs of Aboriginal students is made painfully evident in the documents. Educators who read the report will be struck by the similarities of the educational experiences of Aboriginal children in today's public schools.

### ***Indian Control of Indian Education, 1973***

The landmark National Indian Brotherhood policy paper, *Indian Control of Indian Education*, was approved by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in 1973. The enduring nature of this 1973 policy paper is testimony to the strength and conviction of the statement. Although written more than twenty-five years ago, this landmark document is still a primary consideration in First Nations education across the country and is often referred to in studies and documents. The primary goals stated by the policy paper include:

What we want for our children can be summarized very briefly:

- to reinforce their Indian identity
- to provide the training necessary for making a good living in modern society  
(National Indian Brotherhood, p.3)

The National Indian Brotherhood strongly advocates for the right to control Aboriginal education based on the two principles of "parental responsibility" and "local control" of Aboriginal education. The document calls for immediate action and reform in four areas of concern: responsibility, programs, teachers and facilities. Each of the four sections contains recommendations to facilitate positive change for Aboriginal learners.

### **Responsibility**

Responsibility for Aboriginal education calls for the immediate transfer of jurisdiction to Aboriginal people. Responsibility for Aboriginal education includes local control at the community level. The policy paper also advocates for new legislation which would provide for mandatory representation on provincial school boards.

### **Programs**

There is a need for relevant Aboriginal curricula with programs that balance Western academics and Aboriginal culture. "The Indian child who learns about his heritage will be proud of it. The lessons he learns in school, his whole school experience, should reinforce and contribute to the image he has of himself as an Indian" (National Indian Brotherhood, p.9). The document calls for an end to the use of standardized tests for Aboriginal students. A range of educational opportunities and programs should be provided to Aboriginal learners including nursery and kindergarten programs, junior and senior high schools, vocational training, adult education, post-secondary and alcohol and drug education. The policy paper strongly recommends that Aboriginal languages be taught in school.

### **Teachers**

There is an urgent need for more Aboriginal teachers and counsellors. The document recommends that Aboriginal teacher training programs be created and offered in partnership with Aboriginal communities. Non-Aboriginal teachers should take compulsory courses in Aboriginal culture and history to better prepare them to meet the needs of Aboriginal learners. Inservice training regarding curriculum, teaching strategies and the needs of Aboriginal learners should be made available to all teachers. More trained Aboriginal paraprofessionals are needed.

### **Facilities**

Improved facilities which meet the needs of the local community must be provided. Substandard unsafe or obsolete facilities must be replaced with new and modern facilities. The report recommends a staffing ratio of one Aboriginal , staff person for every twenty Aboriginal students. More research conducted and coordinated by Aboriginal people is needed to facilitate education planning and decision-making at the local level.

Respectful integration of Aboriginal students into public schools is an incredible challenge. Those involved in education have a responsibility to ensure the integration of Aboriginal students in public schools is meaningful, respectful and results in a positive learning experience. Integration in the 1970's was not integration at all.

Integration viewed as a one-way process is not integration, and will fail. In the past, it has been the Indian student who was asked to integrate: to give up his identity, to adopt new values and a new way of life... The success of integration is not the responsibility of Indians alone. Non-Indians must be ready to recognize the value of another way of life; to learn about Indian history, customs and language; and to modify, if necessary, some of their own ideas and practises.  
(National Indian Brotherhood, p.25-6).

A quality education must be provided for Aboriginal learners, but not at the expense of their self-worth and identity. Positive change in the education of Aboriginal children can only come about through full participation and partnership with Aboriginal parents and communities and educational institutions.

***Tradition and Education, Towards a Vision of Our Future (Volumes 1, 2, 3), 1988***

The Education Secretariat of the Assembly of First Nations conducted a four year community based research project commonly referred to as the National Review of First Nations Education. The National Review of First Nations Education focused on four aspects of First Nations education:

- jurisdiction over First Nations education
  - quality of First Nations education including language and culture
  - management of First Nations education
  - resourcing of First Nations education
- (Tradition and Education Vol. 1, p.2).

The National Review was based on extensive national research including a literature review, public hearings, community surveys and a case study of First Nations schools. The results would assist First Nations with development and implementation of policy initiatives and legislative proposals. The final report was published in a three volume document.

### **Jurisdiction**

The National Review consistently refers to *Indian Control of Indian Education* throughout the research and builds upon ideas presented in the earlier document.' The two guiding principles of *Indian Control of Indian Education*, "local responsibility" and "parental involvement," were extended from control to the assumption of complete jurisdiction in education of Aboriginal children.

The Review indicates that First Nations would seek a Constitutional amendment which would explicitly recognize First Nations' inherent right to self-government. In the interim, the Review advocates for new legislation to transfer the jurisdiction of education to First Nations. Both the federal and provincial governments would be removed from all decision-making for First Nations education and the federal government would act only as a funding agency.

The Review expressed concern about the lack of understanding of non-First Nations about First Nations history and culture and advocates for First Nations and the federal government to work together to provide opportunities for non-First Nations to learn about the history, culture and aspirations of First Nations people. Concern about integration of First Nations learners is raised in the report stating that it was not integration but assimilation. "First Nations maintain education programs and curriculum are largely irrelevant to the values, philosophy, and needs of their people, families, and communities" (Tradition and Education Vol. 1, p.58).

### **Quality**

The National Review indicates that "only 20% of the First Nations students complete grade twelve as opposed to a national average of 70%" (Tradition and Education, Vol. 2, p.80). Considering the Review was released twenty-one years after the Hawthorn report, there has been little improvement in the graduation rate and overall quality of education provided for First Nations learners and communities.

To create a quality First Nations education program, the philosophy and goals should be developed, implemented and evaluated at the community level. The National Review reports the two primary goals of First Nations education are:

1. education should prepare children to gain the necessary skills for successful living and to contribute to community and
  2. education should reinforce the student's cultural identity"
- (Tradition and Education, Vol. 1, p.72).

The Review outlines some of the factors which need to be addressed to improve the quality of First Nations education; Aboriginal languages; culturally relevant curriculum; learning styles; evaluation, testing and achievement levels; parental involvement; counselling; student career planning and vocational development; and accreditation. These factors should be recognized and taken into consideration when revising the current education programs for First Nations learners.

Poor student performance, poor attendance, and high dropout rates must also be addressed at various levels of education by such activities as: providing relevant curriculum; adequate numbers of culturally trained teachers; consultant specialists; special education programs; proper library facilities; student counselling and evaluation services; and culturally appropriate teaching methods.

(Tradition and Education, Vol. 2, p.88-89)

Some recommendations are directed specifically to teachers. The Review recommends that an affirmative action policy be put in place to dramatically increase the number of First Nations teachers. Regarding non-First Nations teachers, "all non-aboriginal educational staff, government administrators and policy makers who continue to be involved should be required to undertake accredited cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity training" (Tradition and Education, Vol. 1, p.101).

Other recommendations called for more counsellors and elder involvement in education as well as improved preschool programs. Broadening the educational experience to include seasonal camps, wilderness camps and survival schools would greatly increase the quality and relevance of First Nations education. The report calls for culturally appropriate testing mechanisms to be created and a review of special education practices.

In the discussion regarding a quality education, there was a great deal of emphasis placed on the need to include First Nations languages in education. The review strongly recommended that language and culture be integral to the curriculum. In addition, the document calls for legislative recognition for First Nations languages. "Aboriginal languages must be accorded official recognition within Canada. Funding is needed for development of immersion programs, curriculum materials, aboriginal language teachers, and language resource centres" (Tradition and Education, Vol. 3, p.10). First Nations languages transmit culture and they are vital to the survival of First Nations.

### **Management**

Long-range education goals that meet the needs and aspirations of the local community and the management structure to implement them have to be created at the local level. First Nations education authorities should be formed at the local level to assume jurisdiction and management of First Nations education from preschool to post-secondary, including adult education. First Nations education systems should be evaluated on a regular basis to ensure effective management long term.

The issue of labour relations in school management is complex. In some instances, principles of a union may overlap and conflict with First Nations self-government. "Unionized teachers in First Nations schools have the potential of imposing an external body of union rules and laws on the First Nations community. These rules and laws reflect the needs and values of the province rather than the local First Nation. The First Nation views the imposition of external rules as an undesirable encroachment on their jurisdiction over education" (Tradition and Education Vol. 2, p.27). These potential labour disputes can be avoided by clarification of jurisdictional powers, relevant laws, and personnel policies.

### **Resourcing**

First Nations education is an Aboriginal and treaty right and the federal government is obligated to fund it. Historically, the inadequacy of financial resources in First Nations education has contributed to the lack of quality education offered to First Nations. Funding for education must increase to meet the needs of the local First Nations community.

Two primary conclusions summarizing the National Review research include:

First, education is an inherent right which must be respected by all levels of government. In particular, First Nations governments must assure that children, teachers of their children and community members understand fully that the concepts of self-government and self-sufficiency are related.

Second, the results of the National Review indicated that the communities which are exercising a degree of jurisdiction over the education of their children tend to rate statements of self-government philosophy higher than communities not involved in these processes. Given this trend, it is imperative that provincial and territorial schools serving First Nations children include contemporary First Nations issues in the curricula.

The National Review focussed on the need for recognition of Aboriginal peoples inherent right to self-government. By exercising self-determination, Aboriginal people will be able survive as culturally and linguistically distinct people within Canada.

## ***A Legacy for Learners (The Report of the Royal Commission on Education), 1988***

*A Legacy for Learners* is often referred to as the Sullivan Report and its publication led to some changes in the public education system in B.C. The report expresses serious concern regarding the education of Aboriginal learners in the public school system. "One of the most important and long-standing issues in education in British Columbia, indeed across Canada, has been the provision of suitable schooling for Native youngsters. Using any typical evaluative criteria, it is apparent the province has not achieved its enunciated goal of "parity for Native ... children within the public schools" (Sullivan, 1988, p. 205). The Commission recognizes that "extraordinary measures" will have to be taken to address the longstanding neglected educational needs of Aboriginal students in British Columbia.

Sullivan provides a summary of some of the social and economic conditions which contribute to the lack of success for many Aboriginal learners. "Unless the health, social, and economic conditions of Native lives are generally improved, the problems of language development and lower-than-average educational attainment levels will regrettably remain a part of the Native experience at school" (Sullivan, 1988, p. 208).

Overall, the level of academic achievement is substantially lower than that of the general population with far fewer Aboriginal graduates. Of those who graduate, many were in non-academic programs and there is a significantly higher rate of absenteeism. There is a lack of readiness skills for many children entering school which hampers their progress in the formative primary years.

Fifty-two briefs were submitted by Aboriginal peoples emphasizing similar goals regarding their need "to reclaim elements of their endangered heritage, to be significantly involved in educational decision-making, and to assist their children in fulfilling their parents' dreams that they live productively and with pride and dignity" (Sullivan, 1988, p. 206). The two goals of success in mainstream society and strength in one's heritage are quite consistent with goals outlined in *Indian Control of Indian Education* and the previous *National Review of Education*.

The Sullivan Report recognizes and accepts the need for Aboriginal people to exercise self-determination, including the area of education. The Commission encourages the public school system to accept this principle and work with Aboriginal people to make it happen. "Consonant with the Commission's emphasis upon responsible local and individual initiatives in education, we believe that First Nations people should be permitted to exercise the maximum degree of self-determination concerning the provision of educational services for their children" (Sullivan, 1988, p. 208). Concern is expressed regarding the preservation and maintenance of Aboriginal languages and it is recommended that strong support be given to Aboriginal language renewal initiatives.

As a result of the public school system's inability to meet the needs of Aboriginal children, Aboriginal learners suffer from lack of belonging, low self-esteem and the inability to conform to the Western values and standards of the public school system. The findings of *A Legacy for Learners* are quite consistent with the Hawthorn report when reporting on conditions of Aboriginal learners and the mismatch of culture and expectations in the classroom:

The history of Canadian education, however, illustrates the long-standing cultural difficulties Native youngsters have faced in school. Native children, we are told, arrive at school ill-equipped (with few exceptions) to bridge the gap between their home lives and traditional classroom expectations. For the most part, the school represents a new and strange cultural atmosphere to which they cannot easily adapt. In addition, many Native youngsters face a crisis in terms of their identity and must suffer the low esteem in which they are held by the majority of their classmates. Native parents

frequently spoke of such circumstances to the Commission and claimed that their children are compelled to adapt to the culture of the school, with little evidence that the reverse occurs.  
(Sullivan, 1988, p.207)

To better meet the needs of Aboriginal learners, the Commission recommends that public schools should exemplify the following characteristics:

1. Teachers should be knowledgeable about the heritage of Aboriginal children in their classrooms.
2. Aboriginal role models should be present in schools as much as possible.
3. Curriculum units which positively portray Aboriginal people and culture should be required for all learners.
4. School policies and procedures should reflect dignity for individuals and recognize the importance of all cultures as well as eradicating racial discrimination.
5. Adequate guidance and counselling support needs to be provided to better prepare Aboriginal students for entering the workforce.

(Sullivan, 1988, p. 207).

Four recommendations are made concerning Aboriginal education. Firstly, Sullivan recommends that Aboriginal peoples have the authority and resources for self-determination or have shared responsibility for education with the real cost of education made available to Aboriginal people. Secondly, a formal process for the participation of parents and schools be established. Thirdly, a series of recommendations are made to help bridge the cultural gap:

1. improving home/school liaison, particularly throughout the early years of schooling;
2. orienting all children, through formally developed curriculum units, to the history, culture, status, and contributions of First Nations people;
3. reducing the impact of an inflexible graded school system upon Native children and allowing, in the early years of schooling, for a continuous, incremental pattern of learning;
4. initiating means of assisting Native peoples in the preservation and promotion of their heritage languages, including their incorporation into classroom experiences;
5. discouraging any evidence of racial bias on school transportation and premises;
6. deliberately appointing or enlisting the volunteer support of competent Native adults as role models for all children;
7. encouraging teachers to improve their knowledge and understanding of Native cultures, heritage, and traditions through individual initiative and organizational support; and
8. providing continuing counsel to Native students to prepare them for living and working in a multicultural society.

(Sullivan, 1988, p. 208-9).

Finally, compensatory action for Aboriginal learners should be taken to improve the preschool and language abilities of the early school years along with support to improve parenting skills and adult education opportunities.

Much of Sullivan's report and recommendations concerning the state of Aboriginal education are quite consistent with previous studies and reports. To create a public school system that meets the needs of Aboriginal learners would require recognition and respect for Aboriginal people and a great deal of commitment to make change happen. More than ten years later, little of the recommendations concerning Aboriginal learners has been realized.

## ***Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Gathering Strength, 1996***

Gathering Strength Volume 3 of the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* provides an excellent overview of issues in Aboriginal education and provides comprehensive recommendations. Ten



sections make up the chapter on education including: Background; The Framework: Lifelong, Holistic Education; The Child; Youth; Teacher Education Programs; Adult; Elders; Aboriginal Institutions; Education for Self-Government; and New Partnerships in Aboriginal Education. This chapter should be recommended reading for all educators in Canada.

The Royal Commission provides a very useful summary of recommendations from previous reports and studies:

- Aboriginal control of education.
- School courses in Aboriginal studies, including history, language and culture.
- Training and hiring of more Aboriginal teachers.
- Inclusion of Aboriginal parents, elders, and educators in the education of Aboriginal children.
- Special support programs for Aboriginal students, for example, counselling, substance abuse education, remedial education and retention programs.
- Funding of support services for students in post-secondary studies.
- Aboriginal language instruction from preschool to post-secondary education.
- The resolution of federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictional conflicts over responsibilities, or recognition by the federal government of its funding responsibility for education.
- Training Aboriginal adults for teaching, paraprofessional and administrative positions in education.
- More emphasis on preschool and kindergarten education.

(Gathering Strength, Volume 3, p. 441)

The Royal Commission heard from many individuals and organizations across the country and consistent themes in education were heard and represented in the document. The Royal Commission Report highlights four key issues in the section regarding the child in the formal education system: early childhood education, culturally based curriculum, language education, and Aboriginal control and parental involvement.

Many other themes appeared in the hearings: the lack of Aboriginal teachers and , education leaders in public school systems; inadequate funding to deal with special needs of children with disabilities in Aboriginal schools; racism in classroom interactions and in curriculum; the use of intelligence and scholastic tests that take non-Aboriginal populations as their norm; learning styles of Aboriginal children and teaching styles to accommodate them; the streaming of Aboriginal children away from rigorous programs. The list could be extended.

(Gathering Strength, Volume 3, p. 472)

The report makes several recommendations regarding teachers. More Aboriginal teacher education programs must be created and delivered directly in communities. Schools have to dramatically increase the number of Aboriginal secondary teachers. Post-secondary institutions offering teacher education programs should have at least one component on teaching Aboriginal content. "We emphasize the need to correct erroneous assumptions and to dispel stereotypes that still abound in the minds of many Canadians... Teachers cannot convey accurate information about Aboriginal people and instill respectful attitudes unless they have been prepared to do so" (Gathering Strength, Volume 3, p. 499). In addition, elders should play an active role in education as teachers and be compensated as professionals.

The report indicates Aboriginal learners continue to experience a lack of belonging in schools and consistently express feelings of low self-esteem. "Rather than nurturing the individual, the schooling experience typically erodes identity and self-worth. Those who continue in Canada's formal education systems told us of regular encounters with racism, racism expressed not only in interpersonal exchanges but also through the denial of Aboriginal values, perspectives and cultures in the curriculum and the life of the institution" (Gathering Strength, Volume 3, p. 434). Although this document was written almost thirty years after the Hawthorn Report, the learning conditions for the majority of Aboriginal learners in public schools has not changed.

Many Aboriginal youth are in a state of turmoil and are struggling to find a place for themselves where they can receive a quality education and at the same time feel comfortable and secure. "The vast majority of Aboriginal youth, however, are simply struggling to survive. They are caught between the expectations, values and demands of two worlds, unable to find a point of balance. Their despair is manifested in early school leaving, substance

abuse, suicide attempts, defiance of the law, and teen pregnancies" (Gathering Strength, Volume 3, p. 475).

Parents and communities feel strongly about the need to be involved in the development and implementation of programs for their children. "Education programs, carefully designed and implemented with parental involvement, can prepare Aboriginal children to participate in two worlds with a choice of futures" (Gathering Strength, Volume 3, p. 442). Parents want Aboriginal language programs taught as well as curriculum that reflects the culture of Aboriginal people.

One of the recommendations calls for an comprehensive Aboriginal education strategy for all schools boards with Aboriginal enrolment. This strategy has to be developed in partnership with Aboriginal parents, elders and educators. Elements of this comprehensive plan could include but not be limited to:

- a. goals and objectives to be accomplished during the International Decade of Indigenous Peoples;
- b. hiring of Aboriginal teachers at the elementary and secondary school level, with negotiated target levels, to teach in all areas of school programs, not just Aboriginal programs;
- c. hiring of Aboriginal people in administrative and leadership positions;
- d. hiring of Aboriginal support workers, such as counsellors, community liaison workers, psychologists and speech therapists;
- e. curriculum, in all subjects areas, that includes the perspectives, traditions, beliefs and world view of Aboriginal peoples;
- f. involvement of Aboriginal elders in teaching Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students;
- g. language classes in Aboriginal languages, as determined by the Aboriginal community;
- h. family and community involvement mechanism;
- i. education programs that combat stereotypes, racism, prejudice and biases;
- j. accountability indicators tied to board or district funding; and
- k. public reports of results by the end of the International Decade of Indigenous Peoples in the year 2004. (Gathering Strength, Volume 3, p. 474-5)

Despite the consistency and urgency of recommendations over the years regarding Aboriginal education, little action has taken place resulting in very little improvement. The Royal Commission Report provides an analysis as to why there is failure to improve the quality of education for Aboriginal learners:

- Federal policy has been moving in the right direction since 1972, but federal authorities have failed to take the decisive steps necessary to restore full control of education to Aboriginal people.
- Nearly 70 per cent of Aboriginal education has been in the hands of provincial or territorial authorities, with few mechanisms for effective accountability to Aboriginal people and involvement of parents.
- Aboriginal people have been restricted in their efforts to implement curricula that would transmit their linguistic and cultural heritage to the next generation.
- Financial resources to reverse the impact of past policies have been inadequate. (Gathering Strength, Volume 3, p. 441)

Through the changing political climate, Aboriginal people have a choice through treaty to address the needs of their learners. Currently, Aboriginal education can be accommodated under Aboriginal governance or through an improved public education system (Gathering Strength, Volume 3, p. 472). Now is the time for provincial education systems to assume "responsibility to take an aggressive and proactive stance against discrimination and barriers to the achievement of equitable outcomes in education for Aboriginal peoples (Gathering Strength, Volume 3, p. 473).

Public educational institutions must play a role in transforming Canadian society. "We maintain, however, that recognition of the distinct place of Aboriginal nations in the Canadian federation and accommodation of Aboriginal culture and identity should be regarded as a core responsibility of public institutions rather than as a special project to be undertaken after other obligations are met. Education institutions have a pivotal role in transforming the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Canadian society" (Gathering Strength, Volume 3, p. 515). Aboriginal education must no longer be perceived as an additional burden or add-on in classrooms.

New partnerships are required to meet the challenges of the future. Aboriginal people today, like their ancestors, continue to struggle for survival. The Royal Commission Report advocates for a renewed relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. This new relationship should be based on the four principles of Mutual Recognition; Mutual Respect; Sharing; and Mutual Responsibility. Accepting and acting upon these principles will bring about significant change and new partnerships which will contribute to a far richer Canadian society as a whole.

## ***Related First Nations Education Studies***

A recent study entitled, *We Are All Related: Parts 1 & 2* was completed in School District 52 (Prince Rupert). This study, like several previous studies, pointed out that public schools do not meet the needs of Aboriginal learners and change is overdue and necessary.

As our research progressed, it became evident that there is a great deal of discontinuity between the worldview of First Nations families and public schools. Many of these discontinuities come from culturally based assumptions about child-rearing practices, the role of community, family responsibilities, ways of teaching and learning, and methods of communication. They lead to conflicts, which can be manifest in anger and hostility or alienation and estrangement. (Wilson, Martin, Napoleon, Part 1, p. 38).

Students expressed similar views presented in earlier studies regarding their overall sense of lack of respect and belonging for who they were as Aboriginal people.

The children and young people we spoke with did not feel that they were respected members of their schools; they saw few opportunities to develop a sense of social responsibility within the school setting. For much of their school careers, they had been viewed as 'a problem'. They were faced with educational choices that tried to change them in some way to better fit into the school system and to be responsible for their actions in a situation which did not reciprocate and provide support for them. Many chose instead to leave the school system. (Wilson, Martin, Napoleon, Part 1, p. 35)

A sense of hopelessness and dejection is expressed by many Aboriginal students. Recognition must be given to the strength and courage of these students to resist conformity. As Hawthorn pointed out earlier, many of these students are too busy trying to defend themselves.

Prince Rupert School District has approximately fifty percent enrolment of Aboriginal students. During the 1996/97 school year, there were 80 Aboriginal students out of a total of 262 grade twelve students, not including those who dropped out along the way. Twenty of the eighty Aboriginal students completed graduation requirements by June 1997. Aboriginal students are over-represented in special needs and alternate programs and under-represented in extra-curricular and enrichment programs. Absenteeism for Aboriginal students on average is far higher than that of non-Aboriginal students. The results of the study indicate Aboriginal students are not achieving academically.

Public schools in partnership with Aboriginal communities can create quality education programs that provide balance for all learners. Historically, the application of Western values on Aboriginal students in public schools is not working. *We Are All Related, Parts 1 & 2* includes a quote from Cajete, a Native American from the United States, who strongly emphasizes the need for balance between modern and traditional education in schools:

Modern education and traditional education can no longer afford to remain historically and contextually separate entities. Every community must integrate the learning occurring through modern education with the cultural bases of knowledge and value orientations essential to perpetuate its way of life. A balanced integration must be created. Over time, the emphasis on Western education will erode Indigenous ways of life. Indian educators and Tribal leaders must understand that the unexamined application of Western education can condition people away from their cultural roots. Modern education provides tools essential to the survival of Indian people and communities, but this education must be within the context of a greater cultural whole. (Wilson, Martin, Napoleon, Part 1, p. 12)

The study also includes a summary of successful characteristics of Aboriginal programs from a provincial case study research project. Successful programs for Aboriginal students:

- reflect a strong understanding of the role of culture in defining meaning and building a strong sense of self;
  - recognize that conflict is often created by change and growth and that from this conflict comes a richer vision of what is important in education for First Nations students;
  - grow from ongoing, viable relationships among educators, parents, administrators, community members, and students;
  - incorporate structures and models that reflect First Nations ways of teaching and learning
  - are carefully and properly developed, and acknowledge the roles and responsibilities of many people in the education of children;
  - acknowledge the complexity of current First Nations issues and their implications in educational, financial, and policy decisions;
  - acknowledge the varying ways people define success, and make explicit some of the assumptions inherent in different views of success;
  - provide ongoing professional development opportunities and a network of support for teachers of language and culture programs;
  - focus on the First Nations of the local communities as well as First Nations in other parts of British Columbia and Canada.
- (Wilson, Martin, Napoleon, Part 2, p. 34)

Changing attitudes is incredibly complex and difficult. Teachers have an incredibly powerful and influential role to play in the process of creating positive change for First Nations learners. Caine and Caine emphasize the need for personal transformation to take place in order to bring about meaningful change:

Most of the work on school change, even when parents and other stakeholders have been included, has been directed at changing strategies, structures, and external behaviors. In a turbulent world, that approach cannot work. We are now finding out that the key is to assist systems to self organize and transform themselves. This process can be influenced, but it simply cannot be controlled from the outside... It is not simply a matter of changing strategies - it is a matter of seeing with different lenses... We ultimately concluded that the most important step that we could take would be to come to understand these perceptual differences, and that the key to successfully transforming education lies in transforming ourselves.

(Wilson, Martin, Napoleon, Part 2, p. 46)

Public education institutions must change to meet the needs of Aboriginal learners. This will not happen without a sustained commitment from a majority of teachers and other education partners. As educators, we need to personally reflect on our current policies and practises in our classrooms regarding Aboriginal learners. We must begin to take risks and incorporate new ways of reaching all our students. A great deal of support must be made available to teachers to facilitate this change process. Aboriginal students deserve an opportunity to reach their potential. As teachers, we need to see with new lenses.

## **Ministry of Education Statistics Concerning Aboriginal Students**

During the fall of the 1998, the Ministry of Education released education data concerning Aboriginal students. The Ministry released information regarding Aboriginal students as a whole provincially and subsequently released data for individual school districts. Some of the data included; Proportion of Students Who are Aboriginal; Number of Aboriginal Students; Progress Through Secondary School; Grade 8 to Grade 9 Transition; Proportion of Students at Each Age That Leave Without Graduating; Aboriginal Dogwood Completion; 1990 and 1991 Dogwood Completion Rates, for Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Students by District; Dogwood Completion by District; 1996/97 English Exam Results and Participation; 1996/97 Math Exam Results and Participation; 1996/97 Graduates' 1997/98 Transitions to BC Universities; 1996/97 Graduates Attending BC Universities by Ethnicity; and 1997/98 Students in Special Education.

The statistics collectively indicate Aboriginal students are not doing well academically in the above-mentioned areas in our public schools. The graduation rate presented is 32% overall with incredibly high over-representation in special needs, especially the severe behavior category. Far fewer Aboriginal students enroll in grade 12 academic English and Math. The progress of Aboriginal students through the secondary grades drops

markedly each year.

These statistics do not reflect the strength of Aboriginal people and their ongoing struggle to maintain their identity. The figures cannot accurately measure the knowledge, strength and ability of Aboriginal learners. Norms used to measure non-First Nations do not do justice to First Nations learners. These statistical documents can be used as discussion to open communication between education partners but they should not be the primary indicators of a quality Aboriginal education program.

## Conclusion

For countless generations, Aboriginal voices have been consistent and strong in demanding educational change for their children. Many national, provincial and local Aboriginal education studies over the years have indicated the inability of public schools to meet the needs of Aboriginal learners. Public education institutions to date have not responded to the call for change. To continue with the status quo will do a great injustice to a majority of Aboriginal children who have been historically denied an opportunity to develop to their full potential.

Throughout history, Aboriginal parents and community leaders have expressed the will and aspirations of the Aboriginal community concerning the education of their children.

They want education to prepare them to participate fully in the economic life of their communities and in Canadian society. But this is only part of their vision. Presenters told us that education must develop children and youth as Aboriginal citizens, linguistically and culturally competent to assume the responsibilities of their nations. Youth that emerge from school must be grounded in a strong, positive Aboriginal identity. Consistent with Aboriginal traditions, education must develop the whole child, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically.  
(Gathering Strength, Volume 3, p. 433-4)

There are consistent themes throughout all the documents and each report strongly advocates for change to take place. Particularly troubling in the review of the reports is the repeated reference students and parents make to racism and discrimination in schools. We must be honest about the issue of racism and work in partnership to eliminate it from individual, institutional and systemic practice.

At this point in history, the B.C. Teachers' Federation, in partnership with Aboriginal communities, is in a position to play a key role in transforming the public school system to better meet the needs of Aboriginal learners. Only through a focused and determined effort will meaningful change take place regarding the education of Aboriginal children. *The Report of the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples* recommends that change take place on the basis of a renewed relationship based on the principles of mutual recognition; mutual respect; sharing; and mutual responsibility. By adopting these principles, new solutions can be found to meet the needs of all.

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