

Reflecting on Colonial Education Experiences: Sharing My Story

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Welcome to my sacred space! I am honoured that you have entered my lodge to hear my story. But before I share my story, I will cleanse my mind, body, and spirit. I will burn sweetgrass and guide the sacred smoke to my head, eyes, ears, mouth, heart, hands, and feet. I will guide the sacred smoke to my head so that my mind will have positive, respectful thoughts. I will guide the sacred smoke to my eyes so that I will always appreciate the beauty of creation. I will guide the sacred smoke to my ears so that I will hear the wonderful sounds of creation. I will guide the sacred smoke to my mouth so that the words I use will not hurt anyone and always speak the truth. I will guide the sacred smoke to my heart so that I will be caring, compassionate, and understanding to others. I will guide the sacred smoke to my hands so that they will not be used to physically hurt anyone. I will guide the sacred smoke to my feet so that I will always walk in beauty and respect our Mother Earth. I will guide the sacred smoke to the front of me in honour of all those who came before me, our Wolastoqi ancestors. I will guide the sacred smoke behind me in honour of all those who will come after me, our future generations. I will now share my story.

Introduction

When I first reflected on my experiences at the Tobique Indian Day School and later in the provincial schools located in Perth and Andover, I thought that this would be an easy task. However, I found the drafting of these experiences to be a challenging endeavour. All my emotions re-surfaced when I began writing about my experiences. The first part of the reflection was enjoyable because I remembered the social and cultural life of the community fondly. However, I felt a sense of loss because I miss those times when Tobique was a more united, cohesive and community-minded society.

When I wrote about my formal educational experiences, I became angry as I reflected on the treatment of Tobique students at the Indian day school. The anger, resentment, and bitterness re-surfaced, and the first draft reflected those feelings. Although I have always despised colonial education, racism, oppression, subordination, and exploitation of colonized people, I thought I was past the stage of bitterness. I had to re-draft the paper numerous times to ensure the negative feelings were at a minimum. This was important because my earlier drafts attacked the colonizers and in particular the nuns and teachers who abused children in the Indian Day schools as well as public schools. I identify with the Tunisian writer Albert Memmi, author of *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, who stated that “this book has caused as much anguish and anger as it has enthusiasm” (1957, pg. xvi). I had to cleanse myself with a ‘smudge’ (cleansing of the mind, body, and spirit with smoke from burning sacred herbs, as described above) before each writing session to remove the negative feelings that I was carrying unconsciously. The combination of “smudging” and re-writing of subsequent drafts eventually helped me to release these negative feelings.

Colonial Education:

The term “colonial education” is derived from the literature on classical colonialism (Balandier, 1951; Blauner, 1969) and internal colonialism (Hechter, 1975; Havens and Flinn, 1970). Classical colonialism is defined as the domination of one nation over another while internal colonialism is defined as “populations dominated by foreign nations existing within the same national boundaries” (Altbach and Kelly 1978, page 1). Historically, Wolastoqey and Mi’kmaq nations were colonized and subsequently dominated by France and England (classical colonialism). Following the founding of Canada, Wolastoqey and Mi’kmaq nations continue to be dominated by the Canadian state (internal colonialism).

Altbach and Kelly (1978), in particular, examined the literature about education under classical and internal-colonial situations. This conceptual framework (internal colonialism) has been applied to the education of Aborigines in Australia (Welch, 1988), Native Americans in the United States (Iverson, 1978) and First Nation students in the Canadian context (Perley, 1993). In all of these cases, colonial education was imposed on the colonized and the goal of this type of education was to serve the needs of the colonizers, not the colonized. Educational decisions for the colonized were made by the colonizers and control was placed in the hands of the new settler societies established in Aborigine, Native American and First Nation countries. The colonized were excluded from the decision-making process related to the education of the colonized.

The literature on classical colonialism, internal-colonialism and colonial education adopts the terms colonizer and colonized. The colonizers are defined as 'white European powers' such as England, Spain, and France who invaded the countries of Africa, Asia, Latin

America as well as the countries of the 'New World.' On the other hand, the colonized are the original inhabitants of the countries colonized by "white European powers. In addition to the original inhabitants of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the colonized include the Maoris, Aborigines, Aztecs, Navajos, Cree, Wolastoqiyik, Mi'kmaq and others. Their traditional territories (countries) were colonized by 'white European powers.' In the context of what is now 'Atlantic Canada.' the English and French colonized Wolastoqey and Mi'kmaq countries.

Altbach and Kelly (1978), Welch (1988), Iverson (1978) and Perley (1993) argue that the primary thrust of "colonial education" was and is assimilation of colonized students into European societies that have established themselves within the countries of the colonized. Such an education suppresses, transforms and devalues the languages, worldviews, values, beliefs, traditional knowledge systems and ancestral teachings of colonized societies. In fact, numerous languages of colonized societies have become extinct because of the destructive nature of this type of education. Colonial education attacks the core of one's identity (including language, spirituality, worldviews and traditions); therefore, such an education causes emotional pain, misery and agony for students who are exposed to an assimilation philosophy and process.

Altbach and Kelly's (1978) analysis of colonial education also revealed that racism justified the suppression of languages, worldviews, values, and traditional knowledge systems because it views colonized people as inferior and backward. Colonizers consider the mental capacities of colonized people to be inferior and, therefore, incapable of defining their own needs. Memmi (1965) maintains that this colonial attitude also applies to the governing capacities of colonized people when he hears colonizers

make the statement “They are not capable of governing themselves” (p. 95). This colonial attitude explains why colonized people were not consulted in the development and implementation of educational policies, programs, and initiatives. Until recently, colonized people performed no role in determining curriculum content which explained why content and pedagogy relating to the cultures of the colonized was excluded from the official curriculum of the colonizers.

Additional features of colonial education reported by Altbach and Kelly included an emphasis on agriculture and manual trades for students from colonized societies. The belief held by the colonizers was that the colonized were not capable of meeting academic requirements for higher education. In addition, religious education was a focus of colonial education. The emphasis on religious conversion is consistent with the belief held by the colonizers that Christianizing the 'pagan' colonized people would lead ultimately to their assimilation into the colonizer's society. They believed that “civilizing” the colonized people required their conversion into Christianity, or Christianization. This was an essential component of the assimilation process which added a sense of moral rightness to the colonizer's mission.

Colonial Education in Atlantic Canada (Pre- Confederation):

In Atlantic Canada, the French colonial authorities were the first to impose colonial education on Wolastoqi and Mi'kmaq people. Jaenen (1986) examined “education for francization” initiative adopted by French colonial authorities during the 1600s and reported that it was designed to assimilate Wolastoqiyik and Mi'kmaq into the French colonial society of New France. The primary societal goal of francization was “to make French; to affect

with French characteristics, as in manners, tastes, and expression” (Jaenen, pg 45). Father Hennepin, a Recollet missionary, stated in 1697:

But chiefly it should be endeavor'd to fix the Barbarians to a certain dwelling Place, and introduce our Customs and Laws amongst them, further'd by the Assistance of zealous People in Europe, Colleges might be founded to breed up young savages in the Christian Faith, which might in turn contribute very much to the Conversion of their Countrymen. (page 47)

Father Hennepin captures the fervour of the colonial mission that penetrated the education initiatives, as well. The focus of the colleges was the conversion of Wolastoqiyik and Mi'kmaq children into Christianity.

Following the French-English conflict over Wolastoqey and Mi'kmaq territories, the English colonial authorities assumed control of education and subsequently imposed an English version of colonial education upon Wolastoqi and Mi'kmaq people. Fingard (1972) analyzed the efforts of New England Company to assimilate Wolastoqi and Mi'kmaq children into English society for the period 1786 - 1826. The New England Company consisted of a board of commissioners who were Anglican clergymen and authorities of English colonial society. The primary objective of the Company was to “civilize Indians: to educate them in the English language, train them in a practical vocation, and Christianize them in the Protestant faith” (pg. 32).

Fingard reported that the Company adopted the approach of isolating the children from their parents, Elders and other

community members. The Company argued that it was important to isolate the children from their primary cultural influences if they were to be successful in 'civilizing' the children. John Coffin, who was a commissioner of the board, defended the infant isolation approach and maintained that if the Company was successful in 'civilizing' the children then they would return to their communities as 'civilized Indians' and eventually become role models for the 'nomadic Indians' and therefore assist in the assimilation efforts of the Company. Based on Coffin's recommendations, the New England Company established schools at Meductic, Maugerville, and Sussex Vale whereby both Wolastoqi and Mi'kmaq children were sent to one of these schools.

Colonial Education in Canada (Post-Confederation)

Kaegi (1972) and MacLeod (1966) reported in their analysis of 'Indian education' in Canada that the Confederation of 1867 transferred control of education to the federal government and, in particular, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Control was placed in the hands of the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs through sections 114-122 of the Indian Act. This Act was passed by the House of Commons in 1876, and First Nation citizens consider the Indian Act as a legal instrument designed to impose colonial education upon First Nation people across the country. For example, section 115(c) states "The Minister may enter into agreements with religious organizations for the support and maintenance of children who are being educated in schools operated by those organizations." Colonial education initiatives resulting from section 115(c) include boarding schools, residential schools, and "Indian Day" schools.

This colonial pattern of education is also evident in the imposition of provincial education upon the colonized people of, what is now, Canada. In the early 1950s, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development unilaterally decided to impose provincial education upon First Nation children across the country. First Nation parents and leaders were not consulted on the matter, and the department simply proceeded with this particular initiative. Master tuition agreements were negotiated and eventually signed by the Department of Indian Affairs and provincial education jurisdictions across the country. Colonized First Nation people were not signatories to these agreements. Parents and leaders were excluded from the negotiation process, and they were informed subsequently that their children were required to attend public schools.

In New Brunswick, the master tuition agreement allowed Wolastoqey and Mi'kmaq children to attend provincial schools. The agreement also required the Department of Indian Affairs to pay tuition on behalf of Wolastoqi and Mi'kmaq students attending public schools. This federal/provincial initiative was introduced as 'integration' of Wolastoqey and Mi'kmaq students into the public school system of New Brunswick. However, it was "integration" in name only because former Wolastoqi and Mi'kmaq students share the view that provincial education was and continues to be a tool for assimilation as explained earlier by Altbach and Kelly (1978), Welch (1988), Iverson (1978) and Perley (1993). The personal experiences of Wolastoqi and Mi'kmaq students in these schools confirm that provincial education is another example of colonial education.

Provincial education is consistent with a colonial pattern of education described earlier in this paper. Wolastoqey and Mi'kmaq

languages, cultures, histories, worldviews, knowledge systems, and traditions are devalued and, therefore, excluded from the curriculum of the public school system. Wolastoqi and Mi'kmaq parents and leaders were not consulted, and they were not allowed to participate in the negotiations leading to the signing of the Master Tuition Agreement in New Brunswick. The following reflections of my experiences at the Indian day school in Tobique as well as the public schools in Perth and Andover demonstrate the effects of colonial education on Wolastoqi and Mi'kmaq students.

Tobique First Nation: Memories of Community Life

Tobique First Nation is located approximately 9 kilometres from the village of Perth-Andover where it sits on the banks of the Tobique and St. John rivers. The Tobique River flows into the St. John River (formerly identified as Wolastoq by my ancestors). The 'Tobique reserve' was established in 1801 and the total registered population of the community is 2,039 (as of November 2011). Of this number approximately 600 live outside the community. They reside mostly in urban centers throughout Atlantic Canada and the United States because they decided to migrate into urban centers to find employment or attend post-secondary institutions.

As I reflect on my formative years at Tobique during the 1950s and 1960s, I recall a cohesive, tight-knit community. Tobique people were community-minded and, if required, they would volunteer to organize community events and various activities for children. I also remember community members helping one another during times of hardship. Without hesitation, community members shared their resources (e.g. food, traditional medicines, clothing, wood supplies) with those experiencing difficulties in meeting their basic needs. Our willingness to volunteer and to share our resources

demonstrated a community of caring and compassionate members who emphasized collective well-being rather than individual interests.

I also remember all children being taught to respect our Elders. We were instructed to hold them in high esteem and to assist them whenever they needed a community service such as snow shovelling during the winter months or lawn maintenance during the summer months. Sometimes our Elders required splitting and piling wood in preparation for the winter season or needed assistance in harvesting and preparing medicines. It was instilled within us that Elders were not to be abandoned or neglected. They had wisdom, knowledge, teachings and stories to share with us. We were encouraged to tap into their gifts, and we were always reminded to assist when it was required.

With pride, I recall that everyone engaged in backbreaking seasonal work. Each season opened opportunities for work and this allowed families to meet their basic needs. These seasonal activities included planting potatoes in the spring, raking blueberries in the summer, basket-making in the summer and winter, picking potatoes in the fall, and logging throughout the year. Furthermore, these activities were family oriented since all members of the family were expected to contribute towards the family income. As mentioned previously, a few community members migrated into urban centers in the United States to seek employment. Some were fortunate enough to find full-time employment while others found only short-term employment and eventually returned to Tobique.

I also remember a time when our ancestral language was strong within the community. In the 1950s and 60s, everyone within the community spoke our Wolastoqey language fluently. You would

hear our language throughout the community except for the local church and the Indian day school. Our ancestral language was not allowed to be spoken in these two places. However, the use of the Wolastoqey language was highly encouraged within the community and was the language of all community members. Our Elders of the day reminded us how important our language was to our identity. They emphasized that language was what made us 'Wolastoqew.' They, therefore, resisted the numerous attempts by the Indian agent, nuns, and priest to discourage the use of our ancestral language.

I fondly remember our family and community gatherings. These gatherings strengthened relationships within the family and the community as we shared food, laughed, told stories, and played games. I looked forward to these gatherings because they provided a strong sense of belonging. They made me feel connected to the family and to the community. Every Sunday and on special occasions such as birthdays and holidays, we would have our family gatherings and enjoy the feast prepared by my mother. In addition, community events were organized and attended by the majority during the year. These gatherings established and nurtured strong social bonds among family and community members. They also created a network of relationships within the community and the connections that emerged from a supportive, caring network contributed to the development of a healthy self-concept and a sense of worth.

Another aspect of community life that I thoroughly enjoyed was listening to our Elders tell stories. Each night, we were entertained by a highly skilled storyteller. My friends and I heard stories of *kiwolatomuhsisok* (the little people), *motewulinok* (shaman), *Koluskap* and other stories passed down from generation to

generation. During the winter months, we sat close to the wood stove in the living room and listen attentively to our ancestral stories. Elders also entertained us with their intriguing stories during the summer months as we sat in a circle around a campfire in someone's back yard.

Elder stories conveyed traditional teachings, values and morals. For example, stories of *kiwolatomuhsisok* conveyed teachings of truth and honesty. Another story about a *Wolastoqi* hunter and partridge reminded us about the importance of living in harmony with the 'winged people.' In this story shared by Elder Raymond Nicholas, the partridge asked the hunter not to shoot him because he also had a family to feed. They eventually agreed to help one another to find food for their families. The partridge knew where there was a fallen deer to feed the human family and, in return, the hunter knew where to find crab apples to feed the partridge family. This story also reminds us to hunt only for necessity and not for sport.

This community context established within me pride in my language and culture. I had immense pride in my ancestral background. I loved my language, my culture, and the teachings of our Elders. I was immersed in the cultural foundation of my community. The relationships that evolved within the community reinforced my identity. They placed me in a safe, respectful and nourishing environment. The community provided a source of strength for all community members. Consequently, I developed a positive self-esteem and I felt secure in my *Wolastoqey* identity.

All this changed when I attended the Indian day school at Tobique. The school was located within the community, but the "education" provided attacked all aspects of our culture and identity. It attacked our *Wolastoqey* language, community values, and the teachings of

our Elders. It certainly was not a community school reflecting community values; it was a colonial school established by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development imposing a foreign language, values, beliefs, and worldviews resulting in the separation of children from the values and belief system held by our family, Elders and community members.

The Pain Begins: “Indian Day” School:

This is my story of my struggle with colonial education in New Brunswick. This story is filled with pain, anger, and resentment but, at the same time, with survival, persistence, and determination. My story begins in 1955 when I attended the “Indian Day” school at Tobique First Nation, which was my introduction to “colonial education” within the New Brunswick context. My colonial education experiences continued into the provincial education system as well as my post-secondary experiences at St. Thomas University and the University of New Brunswick in the 1970s.

The Department of Indian Affairs established 'Indian Day' schools within Wolastoqey and Mi'kmaq communities in the 1870s. In 1869, William Sprague, the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs and his superior, Hon. Hector Langevin proposed that a system of 'day schools' be established in Atlantic Canada. Supposedly, these schools would enable Wolastoqi and Mi'kmaq children “hereafter to share in the blessings of civilization” (Hamilton, p. 11). In 1870, the local priest at Tobique First Nation, Rev. John J. O’Leary, submitted a request for funds to educate the children of the community. Shortly thereafter, Tobique First Nation constructed a school, and the Department of Indian Affairs approved funds for a teacher's salary. This was the first Indian day school in Atlantic Canada.

The Tobique Indian day school operated for only two years due to major conflicts between Rev. John O'Leary and a non-Native teacher recruited by Rev. O'Leary. In those days, the priest was a powerful figure within the community, and the Indian agent tended to take direction from the priest. The first teacher was eventually removed from his position in 1871 and due to recruiting and funding problems the school remained closed until 1881. From 1881 to 1924, the Tobique 'Indian Day' school was staffed by non-Native teachers and supervised by missionary priests assigned to Tobique. Members of the Franciscan Missionaries of Baie St. Paul, Quebec, were recruited to run the school in 1924 and were subsequently replaced by the Sisters of Charity in 1928. Thus, the Sisters of Charity were Tobique's primary teachers for grades one to six from 1924 to 1972. Most community members referred to them as 'nuns.'

I recall my first day at the Indian Day school in Tobique, and I remember being anxious and excited about the fact that I was entering a new stage of my life. I also remember how these feelings of excitement quickly turned to fear after the first day of school. The nuns made it clear to all Tobique students that speaking our mother tongue would not be allowed in the school. We were also warned that students caught speaking the Wolastoqey language would be punished with a strap. English was the only language allowed in the school, and this policy was strictly enforced. This oppressive language policy was enforced not only in the classroom but also on the school grounds during recess.

Since the majority of Tobique students spoke only our Wolastoqey language, I witnessed a number of my classmates being punished for speaking the only language they knew. This was our first exposure

to an English only language environment and we, therefore, experienced significant difficulties in adhering to the school's language policy. We came from homes where our ancestral language was the dominant language, and in our first day of school, we were expected to speak a foreign language. Not surprisingly, most students were unable to adhere to the language policy and suffered the consequence of the dreaded strap. I managed to escape punishment the first day, but it was not long before I felt the pain of the strap.

I remember being in constant fear during the seven years I attended the Indian Day school; I failed a grade and this prolonged my agonizing experiences at the day school for another year. I was in constant fear because of the threatening environment created by the nuns who were strict disciplinarians. Students were punished on a regular basis not only for language violations but also for mispronouncing English words or not comprehending instructions in the English language. Punishments came in the form of the strap or 'pointer,' ear pulling, hair pulling, slapping, pinching, vigorous shaking, ridicule, or after school detention. Due to these daily punishments, most students became fearful and developed strong feelings of resentment, anger, and bitterness towards the nuns and toward schooling.

Not surprisingly, the Sisters of Charity placed heavy emphasis on praying and attending daily masses and catechism classes. Each day began and ended with a prayer. In addition, they kept a record of those who attended morning masses during the weekdays and especially during Lent. Of course, our first class was catechism, and the local priest visited the class on numerous occasions. By grade five I realized that a student could get on the right side of the nuns by attending masses. They had their favourites, and they were

usually students who attended mass with their parents or grandparents, regularly. Those favoured ones volunteered to clean the church or become altar boys for each mass. The favourites were seldom punished in school. Needless to say, I became an altar boy and volunteered to clean the church on a number of occasions.

During the early years of my colonial education experiences at Tobique Indian day school, I began to adopt negative feelings towards my own identity as an 'Indian.' In school, I learned that 'Indians' were despised and to be an 'Indian' was considered by mainstream society as uncivilized, savage, ignorant, stupid, slow (mentally deficient), and backward. We were made to believe that everything about being 'Indian' was negative and we were therefore forced to reject our identity as Indians and adopt the ways of the non-Natives. The racist attitudes exhibited by the nuns had a devastating impact on my self-esteem. By the end of grade six, I was so ashamed of being 'Indian' that it placed me on a personal path of rejection and denial.

My feelings of rejection were intense when I was in the classroom, but these eased when I was interacting with family and community members. I felt like I was dealing with two opposing forces; one force was destructive, attacking the very core of my identity; the other was like a safety blanket comforting me and reassuring me that I was worthy and a valued community member. The community was my safe haven and provided the strength that I needed to deal with the destructive forces emanating from the Indian day school.

I did not hear our ancestral stories at the Tobique Indian day school. I did not hear my language in school, and I was not exposed to my ancestral teachings within this abusive and alienating environment. I do not recall our Elders being invited into the

classrooms to share their knowledge and wisdom. The textbooks either ignored First Nation people or if 'Indians' were mentioned they were described as 'uncivilized, savage, primitive people.' The images portrayed in the textbooks were negative, degrading and dehumanizing. We were subjected to these negative images throughout the school year which reinforced the primary message from the nuns that we were inferior to 'non-Natives.'

When I completed grade six at the Indian day school, I remember feeling relieved knowing that I would no longer have to deal with the nuns and their harsh classroom practices. For seven years, I was in constant fear because I witnessed some of my friends and relatives being severely punished for speaking our ancestral language or engaging in 'inappropriate behaviour' as defined by the nuns. I was also a recipient of physical punishment a few times during the seven years I attended the school. All the punishments I experienced as well as witnessed made me ask the question "why do they (nuns) hate us?" Their comments about 'Indians' reinforced my belief that they truly hated us simply because we were 'Indians.' Consequently, I was relieved that I was finally leaving the Indian day school and entering grade seven at Perth Regional High School in 1962.

The Pain Continues: The Public School System:

Perth Regional High School is located in a non-Native community of Perth-Andover which is approximately 7 kilometres from Tobique First Nation. The school taught grades seven to twelve and Tobique students were bused to the high school. I learned later during my first day of school that the bus from Tobique was identified as the "Indian bus" by the principal, teachers and non-Native students. I remember sitting in the bus on my first day of school anxiously waiting to arrive at the high school. When we

finally arrived at the school, I remember the numerous faces looking out the windows of the school because the non-Native students wanted to see the 'Indians' coming out of the 'Indian bus.'

I always wondered why they would be so fascinated with our arrival at the school. Were they waiting for 'Hollywood' Indians with war paint, war clubs, tomahawks and war bonnets? Were they expecting us to do the 'war dance' after we stepped off the bus? I believe their fascination was influenced by the stereotypes they held of 'Indians.' Images of 'savage, barbaric Indians' were prevalent throughout the school. These stereotypes were introduced by the Hollywood movies and reinforced within the classrooms. I recall teachers reading passages from classroom materials describing 'Indians' as savage, barbaric people. Unfortunately, most non-Native students considered these images to be accurate.

As we stepped off the bus and continued walking into the school, I could see and hear some of the non-Native students mimicking the 'Indian war cry' of the 'Hollywood Indians.' Shortly after our arrival, the principal announced on the school's public announcement system that all 'Indian' students were to report to the gymnasium. We gathered in the gymnasium, and the principal informed us that the Maliseet language would not be allowed in the school, especially within the classrooms. We were also informed that misbehaviour from 'Indian students' would not be tolerated. Finally, we were issued a meal ticket for our lunches, and we were assigned a specific location within the cafeteria. Welcome to Perth Regional High School!

After only a short period at the high school, my feelings of fear, apprehension and anger quickly re-surfaced. The principal's message to the 'Indian' students and the authoritative manner he

presented the message reminded me of the nuns and their negative attitudes toward 'Indians.' I also witnessed similar behaviours and attitudes among the majority of non-Native students and teachers. However, I also found some teachers and non-Native students to be accepting, understanding and respectful. In general, the teachers and student population exhibited a range of behaviours and attitudes in their interactions with the students from Tobique. Some attitudes were positive while others were negative due to the stereotypes and misconceptions held by non-Native students, teachers and administrators.

On numerous occasions, I would hear someone shout 'Injun' or 'savage' or 'wagon-burner' aimed at the Tobique students. We would be walking down the hallway during lunch break or going from one class to another, and once in a while, we would hear those derogatory terms. Of course, this caused angry exchanges between Tobique students and our non-Native counterparts. Fights would break out, and the participants would be sent to the principal's office. In the majority of cases, Tobique students would be suspended or expelled from the high school while the non-Native students were reprimanded but not suspended. Even at that age, I thought that we were treated unfairly by the non-Native teachers and the principal. In fact, most Tobique students expected to be punished while the non-Native students would receive only a warning from the principal.

The negative images of 'Indians' who were portrayed in the textbooks perpetuated racism. It seemed that the teachers enjoyed stressing readings that portrayed 'Indians' as savage, barbarous, primitive, uncivilized and pagan. I remember being uncomfortable when a teacher asked a non-Native student to read a passage that described my ancestors as savage people. I noticed that the

'spotlight' was on the Tobique students when these descriptions were being read in the classroom. In a class of 30, only 3 or 4 students were from Tobique, and the remaining students were from Perth or the surrounding areas. Thus, the 'spotlight' was huge and certainly uncomfortable.

These experiences further eroded my self-concept, which was already damaged by my Indian day school experiences. I had a low self-esteem because of the negative messages I received from the nuns and the textbooks they used in the classroom. The primary message was that 'Indians' were ignorant, stupid, uncivilized, and savage. This message was reinforced at Perth high school, and I was also introduced to additional negative images such as 'Indians' as drunks, lazy welfare bums, and parasites draining public funds. Thus, my self-esteem reached its lowest level when I attended Perth high school. This, in turn, affected my attendance at the school because I wanted to avoid the negative, highly charged emotional environment established by certain teachers.

In 1965, the Perth ratepayers passed a motion that was described by the local media as blatantly racist. The motion stated that students from Tobique were no longer welcome at Perth high school. The Chief was informed of the motion, and this naturally sparked an angry reaction not only from the Chief but also from the parents. The Chief asked the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to intervene, but their attempts to convince the school board to rescind the motion were unsuccessful. The ratepayers remained firm in their decision to ban Tobique students from Perth high school. I personally did not object to the motion since I did not want to attend a school that I perceived as racist. The majority of Tobique students shared this perception.

To apply pressure on the school board to rescind the motion, Tobique parents decided to boycott the stores in Perth. In the 1960s, most community members travelled to Perth to shop for groceries, clothing, furniture, and other items sold in the village stores. They, therefore, had a significant impact on the local village economy. There was consensus among community members that they would take their business to Andover, a small village across the river from Perth. A few also agreed to travel to Grand Falls or Fort Fairfield, Maine, to purchase their food and clothing supplies. Grand Falls is approximately 30 kilometres from Tobique First Nation while the trip to Fort Fairfield, Maine, is approximately 20 kilometres. After a month-long boycott, the merchants approached our community members and pleaded with them to return and shop at the Perth stores. The merchants promised that they would make every effort to convince the ratepayers to rescind their motion.

While the boycott was in effect, a national newspaper was made aware of the ratepayer's decision to ban "Indian" students from Perth high school. The *Toronto Star* investigated the story, and the local media followed with their own investigations. When interviewed by the press, Chief Raymond Tremblay stated that he was informed by a few residents of Perth that the ratepayers "were opposed to the white girls of Perth going out with boys from the Indian reserve." This racist sentiment was confirmed by T.W. Tomilson, secretary of the Southern Victoria Regional School District, who reported that the vote was taken by the ratepayers to ease their fears that "their daughters might go out with an Indian boy" (*Daily Gleaner*, 1965).

The media coverage and successful boycott carried out by our community members finally forced the ratepayers to rescind the racist motion and reluctantly accept Tobique students at Perth high

school. We were once again allowed to enroll at the high school, but by then the damage caused by the motion was irreversible. The message conveyed by the motion was clear; we were not wanted! Consequently, most Tobique students did not want to return to a toxic racist environment. We were afraid of the principal and teachers. We were afraid for our safety; however, the majority of Tobique students were willing to take on the anticipated challenge of defending themselves, if required to do so.

Perhaps a few Perth residents opposed the motion, but they remained silent on the matter for fear of being verbally attacked by the outspoken, narrow-minded residents. Most Perth residents were reluctant to discuss the situation publicly. The exception was the public statements made by two prominent merchants who supposedly opposed the ban. Similarly, Tobique community members were disappointed that the teachers and administrators of the high school did not come to our defence and publicly denounce the motion to ban Tobique students from the high school. Their silence was interpreted by Tobique First Nation as support for the action taken by the ratepayers.

We were, therefore, forced to return to an unwelcome environment. For the majority of Tobique students, there were no options. We had to return to the school and deal with the negative attitudes exhibited by administrators, certain teachers and a few non-Native students. A small number of Tobique students did not return to the high school because they were fortunate to have relatives living in the United States and they moved to those locations. Their parents did not want their children to be exposed to the negative education environment created by various stakeholders (ratepayers, administrators, certain teachers, and a few non-Native students). However, the majority of Tobique parents

simply did not have the option to send their children to an alternate school in the area.

When we returned to the school in the fall of '65, most Tobique students anticipated harsh treatment from the principal, teachers and non-Native students. Prior to the ban, we were convinced that the principal and certain teachers despised 'Indians.' We were also convinced that most non-Native students held similar feelings toward Tobique students. The motion to ban Tobique students confirmed what we believed, and we expected the negative attitudes to escalate following the ratepayer's attempt to ban us from the high school. Consequently, we arrived at the school fearful of the anticipated treatment. We experienced a high level of anxiety, apprehension and uneasiness. We did not feel safe at the high school, and we expected major conflicts with certain teachers and some non-Native students.

Our expectations relating to the interactions with the principal, teachers and students following the attempted ban by the ratepayers soon became a reality. I witnessed more of our Tobique students being suspended or expelled. I witnessed more of our Tobique students dropping out due to the perception held by the students that the environment at the school was too negative. I recall students failing their grades. I recall the majority of Tobique students placed in vocational rather than academic tracts. I recall the complaints of our students that they were unfairly treated by the principal as well as the teachers. I recall students' complaints about racist, derogatory terms shouted in the hallways. I recall students' complaints about non-caring teachers at the high school. I recall numerous fights between Tobique and non-Native students.

In 1967, Tobique students were required to attend high school at Southern Victoria Regional High School located in Andover, a small village across the river from Perth. The transfer occurred due to the consolidation of the schools in Perth and Andover. Southern Victoria enrolled high school students while Perth enrolled middle-level students. When the announcement was made that we would be attending Southern Victoria in the fall of 1967, most Tobique students welcomed the decision because the change meant that we did not have to go back to the Perth school. Following the attempted ban by the ratepayers, the situation at Perth high school became unbearable for most Tobique students. Our response to the news of the transfer was, therefore, positive and we were indeed looking forward to starting the new school year at Southern Victoria with the anticipation that we would be treated more humanely at the new school.

The enthusiasm and excitement of attending a new school dissipated within a few months. From our point of view, everything went back to 'normal' in the sense that the social and educational experiences at Southern Victoria eventually mirrored our experiences at Perth high school. After the first semester at Southern Victoria, we perceived unfair treatment from the administration and teachers. Teachers lacked understanding of Maliseet history, culture, traditions, and worldviews. The number of suspensions, expulsions and dropouts were high. The textbooks maintained and reinforced the stereotypes and negative images of "Indian" people. A vast majority of Tobique students were once again placed in vocational rather than academic tracts. Name calling became a daily occurrence at the school.

I eventually dropped out in grade eleven and left Tobique First Nation to live with my brother at Worcester, Massachusetts. At the

time, I had three brothers living in Worcester, and they were all making a living in the housing construction business. My intent was to work with my brothers and learn the trade, but my oldest brother absolutely refused to teach me the trade and instructed me to finish my high school education. He made it clear that I did not have any options and his word was final. He saw the value of education in the urban environment, and he wanted me to expand my opportunities by completing my high school education so that I could continue to the post-secondary level. I therefore enrolled at North High School in Worcester and graduated in 1969.

My school experiences at North High School were a pleasant change to the experiences at Perth High and Southern Victoria. The high school enrolled African Americans, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans and mainstream students. This was my first exposure to an educational environment based on the principles of diversity. In the year and a half I was at North High School, I did not hear any derogatory terms relating to 'Indians.' In fact, my classmates would share with me that "it must be neat to be an Indian" when they learned I was a Native American. For the first time in many years, I felt proud of my heritage. I was no longer ashamed to be a Maliseet. My experiences at Tobique Indian Day School, Perth High School and Southern Victoria shattered my self-esteem, but my sense of pride was re-ignited while I was at North High school.

At North High School, I found my teachers to be supportive, encouraging, and respectful. Most of the teachers at North High School were members of various ethnic/minority groups residing in the city of Worcester. This surprised me because the teachers at Perth and Andover were mostly Anglophone or Francophone. I was conditioned to believe that only Anglophones and Francophones could be teachers and administrators in the public

school system. Furthermore, I was conditioned to believe that Native people were destined for trades and manual labour while non-Natives were destined for professional occupations.

I came to realize that I could pursue a teaching career similar to the teachers from different ethnic/minority groups at North High School or other professional careers. This chain of thinking began with the notion that ethnic/majority members could be professionals as long as they apply themselves. This new mentality motivated me and eventually gave me confidence in my ability to meet the academic requirements of the high school program and to consider a university/college education. The school's guidance counsellor provided valuable advice as I mapped out a personal educational path by completing high school and submitting applications for enrolment in the surrounding colleges and universities.

Concluding Remarks:

Colonial education is devastating for the colonized people such as the Maoris in New Zealand, Aborigines in Australia, Mayans in Mexico, Native Americans in the United States, and First Nation people in Canada. Colonial education forces assimilation upon the colonized people because the colonizers (e.g. English, French, Spanish, and Dutch) of the 'New World' believed that the colonized people were primitive, savage, and uncivilized (Altbach & Kelly, 1978; Fingard, 1972; Iverson, 1978; Jaenen, 1989). This attitude was eventually adopted by federal and provincial authorities in Canada. Thus, the Department of Indian Affairs developed and implemented a policy of assimilation and forced it upon the First Nation people.

A review of the literature (Altbach & Kelly, 1978; Fisher, 1981; Hurtsfield, 1975; Perley, 1993; Welch, 1988) reveals that colonial education attacks the languages, cultures, worldviews, traditions, ceremonies, and institutions of the colonized societies. Colonial education chips away at the cultural foundation of colonized people by attacking the core elements of their identities. It targets the children because the authorities are fully aware that culture is transmitted to the children by parents, grandparents, and Elders of various colonized communities. The cultural link among generations is broken when children become assimilated into the colonizer's society. Fortunately for colonized societies, resistance to assimilation has endured since the early stages of implementation by colonial authorities and later by Canadian authorities. A few individuals have assimilated willingly, but the majority of colonized First Nation people have refused to adopt a foreign language and culture.

The outcomes of colonial education have also been well documented (Iverson, 1978; Devrome, 1991; Welch, 1988). Colonial education produces high dropout rates, low academic performance, language loss, low self-esteem among colonized First Nation students and loss of a strong cultural foundation that ultimately leads to rejection of their ancestral roots. Colonial education produces children who are angry, bitter, and resentful because they were (and are) treated unfairly and inhumanely within colonial education schools. They were punished for speaking their ancestral language; they were victims of racist attitudes held by teachers, administrators, and non-Native students; they were constantly reminded that they did not have the capabilities to handle an academic program; and the curriculum portrayed "Indians" as primitive, savage, and uncivilized people.

Within the Canadian context, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs established the residential schools as well as the Indian Day Schools across the country. Testimonials (Knockwood, 2001; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996a) by former students of residential schools confirm the harsh treatment they received in those schools. Former students recall sexual, physical, and emotional abuse that they experienced or witnessed while they were forced to attend the schools. Their stories inform us that physical punishment was a daily occurrence in the residential schools and they lived in constant fear in these abusive schools. Their fears produced anger, bitterness and resentment towards all non-Native authorities. They also recall when they returned to their communities, they felt out of place because they could not speak their language and they no longer practiced their traditions.

In New Brunswick, I experienced the pain of colonial education. Before my attendance at Tobique Indian Day School, I was proud of my ancestral background. I had a strong cultural foundation but the colonial schools I was forced to attend chipped away at my foundation. By the time I reached high school, I had an extremely low self-esteem, and I was ashamed of my 'Indian' identity. My spirit was broken. I was conditioned to believe that we were inferior to the non-Natives. I was punished for speaking my language, and I was a target of racist, derogatory terms at Perth High and Southern Victoria. The textbooks used in the classrooms portrayed negative images of First Nation people, and it seemed that a few teachers enjoyed reading passages that described "Indians" as savage, primitive and uncivilized people. The spotlight was extremely uncomfortable when these stereotypes and misconceptions surfaced in the classrooms.

Due to the destructive effects of colonial education and the pain it causes for colonized First Nation students in general and Wolastoqi and Mi'kmaq students in particular, parents and grandparents are requesting changes to the provincial education system in New Brunswick. In essence, they are making a case for the "de-colonization" of the public school system. The path to "de-colonization" will lead to the creation of an education system that is open, flexible and sensitive to the needs of Wolastoqi and Mi'kmaq students. A de-colonized education is based on the principles of respect, recognition, appreciation, and understanding and will create space for Wolastoqey and Mi'kmaq languages, cultures, traditions, and worldviews.

I am convinced that successful decolonization of the New Brunswick public school system will create public schools that are welcoming, respectful, and responsive for all students and will give official recognition to the Anglophones, Francophones, Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqeyiyik. Official recognition will be reflected in the provincial curriculum, teacher training, pedagogical practices, in-service requirements for teachers and administrators, assessment and evaluation tools, and recruitment of Wolastoqi and Mi'kmaq teachers into the public school system. Recognition will also ensure that a Wolastoqey/Mi'kmaq Education Branch will be established within the overall structure of the Department of Education and Early Childhood. De-colonization of the curriculum and learning environments will improve the public school system of New Brunswick.

Psiw Ntolnapehmok
All My Relations

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