

the Department, to its goal of assimilation, than the residential school system. In the vision of education developed by both church and state in the final decades of the nineteenth century, it was the residential school experience that would lead children most effectively out of their "savage" communities into "higher civilization" and "full citizenship."

The Founding Vision of Residential School Education, 1879 to 1920

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In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as the government moved to implement Nicholas Flood Davin's recommendations, the officials of the Department of Indian Affairs and their church partners did not stray from the fundamentals of the civilizing logic of their Imperial Indian policy heritage. They did, however, build upon it, developing a full rationale for, and a vision of, education in the service of assimilation. This vision comprised a detailed strategy for re-socializing Aboriginal children within residential schools.

The vision was anchored to the fundamental belief that to educate Aboriginal children effectively they had to be separated from their families – that the parenting process in Aboriginal communities had to be disrupted. This certainty arose in turn from two further considerations: the Department's and churches' conclusion that their initial educational initiative, that is, day schools, had failed; and, most important, the European representation of the character and circumstances of the Indian "race."

This latter formative representation can be reconstructed from the correspondence among church leaders, politicians and senior Indian Affairs officials in the period after the *Davin Report* of 1879 until about 1920 when philosophic discussions about the residential school concept became rare. Of considerable use in this are the annual reports of the Department. While these were produced consciously by Department officials to be their best face turned to Parliament, the reports were also constructed subtly by the discourse about Aboriginal culture that encompassed not only the Departmental "authors" and the Parliamentary "audience" but, indeed, all Canadians.

Of course, these two considerations did not exist separate, one from the other. The failure of the day schools was, and indeed could only have been, understood by the Department within the context of that pervasive "racial" discourse.

It certainly was the opinion of the Department that, in general, day schools could not educate Aboriginal children. Officials believed that such schools could be utilized in only a limited number of situations – in parts of southern Ontario and Quebec, for example, where the bands had been for some time associated with settler communities and had, consequently, reached what was termed a more advanced level. In the main, however, for a litany of practical reasons, they were of limited value. In some areas it was impossible to employ them at all. In many communities, the population was so sparse "that the number of children, of an age to attend school on each Reserve, would not justify the expense necessary to establish a school."

Even in areas where demographics permitted a school, however, there were, as Vankoughnet pointed out to Macdonald in his 1887 memo, additional difficulties that arose "from several causes." As a rule, Aboriginal children were "extremely irregular in their attendance." Spread out on the reserve or involved with their families in traditional activities, they were simply too far from school to attend on a daily basis. Many children, he claimed, had "such a want of sufficient clothing" that especially during the "inclement seasons of the year" they could not attend. And then there was the problem of "the children being fed while attending school." Imagine, he continued,

a child residing a considerable distance – say 3 or 4 miles – from the school, leaves its home, say, at 8 a.m. to attend school, and, with the well known improvidence of Indians, no luncheon or dinner has been prepared by its parents for the child to take with it. As a consequence the child remains fasting, if it stays the day through, and after repeating this process a few times it becomes discouraged and ceases to attend.

He thought the schools could offer a hot lunch and proposed, perhaps optimistically, that a menu consisting of a "plate of oatmeal porridge with syrup and a couple of biscuits" would be "economical, nourishing" and an inducement to attendance.¹

In addition to these difficulties, there was for Vankoughnet and others an even more profound impediment in the day-school equation, for which there could be no easy remedy – the Indian "race" itself. Davin had already noted that the "influence of the wigwam was stronger than the influence of the school."² The Department believed that it had abundant evidence

from local agents, teachers, and missionaries to support that contention. The annual round of traditional activities was most disruptive:

As soon as the Spring opens – the Children are engaged in assisting to make sugar – then planting succeeds. After that gathering berries ie strawberries, Raspberries, plums and Cranberries – then comes husking and curing of Corn – so that the greater part of the year is occupied someway or other. And . . . it is very difficult to keep the Indian Children in subordination. They are so much accustomed to move about and sail and have things their own way at home, that after all it is really wonderful that any of them know anything at all.³

Moreover, it was believed, as Vankoughnet expressed it, that it was the indifference "of the parents in the matter of the education of their children and the absence of the exercise by the parents of proper authority over them to compel attendance"⁴ that caused irregular school attendance.

To understand fully such comments and how the attitudes they indicated led resolutely to the conclusion that residential schooling was the only way "of advancing the Indians in civilization,"⁵ they must be framed in a wider context. Officials and missionaries, even if they operated in remote corners of the land, did not stand outside Canadian society. They shared with other Canadians a discourse about Aboriginal people that informed their activities and, in this case, their educational plans. The basic construct of that discourse, with due regard to the poetic and philosophic utility of "the noble savage," continued to be that of the uncomplimentary comparison between the "savage" and the "civilized."

Aboriginal people were, in Departmental and church texts, "sunk" in "ignorance and superstitious blindness," a well of darkness from which they were in need of "emancipation."⁶ "Enlightened" Canadians would have "to elevate the Indian from his condition of savagery"⁷ from their "present state of ignorance, superstition and helplessness." They would then reach the state of civilized Canadians: one in which their "practical knowledge"⁸ and labour would make them "useful members of society," "intelligent, self-supporting"¹⁰ citizens.

Not all Indians, however, could be liberated from their culture; not all could undergo "the transformation from the natural condition to that of civilization."¹¹ Adult Indians were, J.A. Macrae, the Department's Inspector of Schools for the North West, explained, in his report of 1886, "physically, mentally and morally . . . unfitted to bear such a complete metamorphosis."¹² They might make some progress; they might, Davin suggested, "be taught to do a little at farming and at stock raising and to dress in a more

civilized fashion, but that is all."¹³ They had, he continued, "the helplessness of mind of the child . . . there is, too, the child's want of perspective; but there is little of the child's receptivity."¹⁴ According to the Reverend E.F. Wilson, the founder of Shingwauk Residential School, adults were "the old unimprovable people."¹⁵

Unfortunately, Indian adults were not just irredeemable; they were also a hindrance to the civilizing process. Though they could learn but little, they did teach. Their children, in the natural order of things, learned from them and from other adults in their communities. Through them to the children, and on through the generations, ran, as Davin had pointed out, the "influence of the wigwam, . . . superstition, [and] helplessness"; thus the child who attended day school also "learned little and what little he learned soon forgot while his tastes [were] formed at home, and his inherent aversion to toil [was] in no way combatted."¹⁶ Children, Vankoughnet explained, unswervingly "followed the terrible example set them by their parents" and thus became "as depraved as themselves notwithstanding all the instructions given them at a day school."¹⁷ Unlike the upbringing that children received in Canadian homes, Aboriginal education taught "little that is beneficial" or useful in a modern world:

The white child may be educated in the affairs of life and life's duties to a great extent without ever entering the doors of a school. The examples and precepts of its elders, the contact of its fellows, all the circumstances of its existence are educational agencies, indeed, it is from these far more than from instruction in schools that it learns its duties to God, to the State and to itself. All such circumstances of life equally educate the Indian child at home but its parents, fellows and existence being Indian, it is trained in Indian life not in the life of the white man upon a knowledge of which its future existence depends.¹⁸

Communities in areas of non-Aboriginal settlements posed additional difficulties. Many of them were favourable to schooling but had an educational agenda that, if allowed to predominate, would frustrate the intended assimilative function of schools. As with communities in pre-Confederation Upper Canada, bands attempted to use education as a tool of cultural revitalization as a method of mediating between themselves and the White communities growing up around them. The Department was aware of this and did not, of course, approve. Only "up to a certain point," the Department reported in 1899, "in order to derive benefit for themselves from such contact as they must necessarily have with whitemen, and to save

themselves from being overreached" did communities "show an increasing appreciation of the value of education."¹⁹

Such appreciation was limited, however; it was "regulated by the amount of practical assistance rendered thereby in dealings with the dominant race." Children needed to attend schools then only to the extent that they could acquire skills that would aid the community in its struggle to continue to support itself. Beyond that point, few parents had "any ambition" for education "on behalf of their offspring."²⁰ They certainly could not be portrayed by the Department as being in any way interested in a curriculum designed to assimilate their children.

These difficulties of Aboriginal character and circumstances faced by the Department and Canadian churchmen and -women were shared by social reformers throughout the Empire. Moreover, in each colonial setting, as an indelible element of contact between the "superior" European culture and "primitive" indigenous cultures, there was thought to be a severe and pressing crisis. Macrae sketched its manifestation in the western Canadian context:

The circumstances of Indian existence prevents him following that course of evolution which has produced from the barbarian of the past the civilized man of today. It is not possible for him to be allowed slowly to pass through successive stages, from pastoral to an agricultural life and from an agricultural one, to one of manufacturing, commerce or trade as we have done. He has been called upon suddenly and without warning to enter upon a new existence. Without the assistance of the Government, he must have failed and perished miserably and he would have died hard entailing expense and disgrace upon the Country.

Officials believed that the rapid incursion of settlement and resource development left no time for a natural evolutionary course to be run. The Aboriginal population was destined, therefore, to die off unless "special measures," were adopted "to force a change in his [the Indian's] condition."²¹ The need for such concerted intervention was obvious and compelling to Victorian Canadians. The point at which to strike so as to "kill the Indian in him and save the man"²² was equally obvious: "it is to the young that we must look for the complete change of condition."²³

The churches' agreement gave a strong moral backing to this resolute position. The Catholic Archbishop of St. Boniface and four other bishops petitioned the government to take children from their families as young as six, for it was important that they be "caught young to be saved from what is on the whole the degenerating influence of their home environment."²⁴

And the Methodists followed suit, in tones like Macrae's: "The Indian is the weak child in the family of our nation and for this reason presents the most earnest appeal for Christian sympathy and co-operation; . . . we are convinced that the only hope of successfully discharging this obligation to our Indian brethren is through the medium of the children, therefore educational work must be given the foremost place."²⁵

The Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Frank Oliver, was the only one to strike an ironically theological dissenting note in this chorus of agreement, and he did so in 1908, well after the philosophic foundation of the system had been laid: "I hope you will excuse me for so speaking but one of the most important commandments laid upon the human by the divine is love and respect by children for parents. It seems strange that in the name of religion a system of education should have been instituted, the foundation principle of which not only ignored but contradicted this command."²⁶

There were two models at hand for this educational work: "planting out," and residential schools. "Planting out" had been undertaken most notably in Pennsylvania. As Macrae described in his report, it involved placing children "at the age character is formed" with "respectable white people," thus relieving them from "the influences of Indianism" and bringing them "under those of civilization."²⁷ This form of fostering, often called "outing" or "farming out," was employed by the Department in a limited fashion only and always in conjunction with the second more popular option – the residential school.

Almost no one involved in Indian Affairs, with perhaps the exception of Oliver, seemed to have any doubt that separation was justified and necessary or that residential schools were the most efficacious educational instrument. Such schools would produce the desired result; assimilation would be most "speedily and thoroughly accomplished by means of boarding and industrial schools."²⁸

Perhaps the best illustration of this confident conviction is another Departmental photograph of that time – Quewich and his children at the Qu'Appelle Industrial School. The "weak child," the "influences of Indianism," the father, stooped and wrinkled, already a figure of the past, having reached the limit of evolution, appears to be decaying right in front of the camera, dying off, as was his culture. In sharp contrast, his children, neatly attired in European clothing, the boy's cadet cap a symbol of citizenship, are, like Thomas Moore after tuition, examples of the future, of the great transformation to be wrought by separation and education in the residential school.



Quewich and his children (National Archives of Canada, neg. no. C37113)

To achieve this transformation, the Department considered it necessary not only to remove children from parents and community and place them in the guardianship of the Department and the churches, but also to maintain that separation for as long as possible. Effective socialization depended upon, in the words of the Anglican Bishop of Rupert's Land, "continual residence."²⁹ Hayter Reed, a senior Department official, thought that the nature of the physical separation, aimed at the total isolation of the child, was important. "The more remote from the Institution and distant from each other are the points from which the pupils are collected, the better for their success."³⁰

Where the school was in the vicinity of the community, as was the case with boarding schools, and parental visits too frequent and thus disruptive, the Department was prepared to take stern measures. In 1891, for example, E. Dewdney, the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, threatened "to authorize the employment of the Police to keep the visitors off the precincts" of the Qu'Appelle Residential School if the principal could not himself handle the problem.³¹

The importance of separation was such that the question of vacations became an issue early in the history of the school system. In general, senior officials of both the Department and the churches leaned to disallowing them completely or restricting them as much as possible. Dewdney stated: "Our policy is to keep pupils in these institutions until trained to make their way in the world. [Therefore], taking children in for short terms and letting them go again is regarded perhaps as worse than useless," as the "effect of allowing children to visit their Reserves is bad."³² Father Lacombe opposed both holidays and visits from parents "because their intercourse and influence demoralize the pupils very much."³³

Missionaries, local agents, and school staff involved in the day-to-day operation of the residential school system often took a different position. For them, holidays were a necessary evil in the recruitment of students. The principal of Thomas Moore's school, pushing for a minimum three-week summer vacation, explained: "In trying to secure recruits we are met with the objection that if parents send their children to School, the children are not allowed to leave the School for a visit to their old home for many, many years and that their children might as well be dead for all they see of them."³⁴

Hardliners like Reed argued in return that holidays simply re-opened the whole difficulty "originally made by the parents with regard to parting with their children" and "render[ed] it difficult if not impossible to get them back again." He lobbied the Department to hold firm. Unless parents

could "be brought to recognize that the benefits are worth such sacrifice there would be no guarantee that they may not insist from some caprice or selfish motive, in removing their children at anytime."³⁵

In the face of these diverse opinions, the Department found itself caught. Sustained separation was a developmental requirement, but adequate recruitment was a necessity as well. It was not until the Department felt that it had sufficient control over parents to ensure that children would be returned to the school that it approved, in 1920, a standard two-month summer vacation.³⁶

All these difficulties over vacations could, of course, be obviated by recruiting children who, by European definition, were orphans. It is not surprising, then, to find a marked preference for such children. E. Dewdney, writing in 1883 to the Reverend Thomas Clarke, the Principal of the Battleford School, ordered that "orphans and children without any persons to look after them should first be selected."³⁷ This preference remained throughout the history of the residential school system.

It is important not to leave the impression that the rationale for residential schools was wholly selfless. While children were to be taken into the bosom of the Canadian nation to dwell in equality with the other subjects of Her Majesty, it was as much for the benefit of the state as it was for the nourishment of the child. Below the rhetoric of duty and civilization ran another motivation that occasionally broke through the surface of church and Departmental texts. It bespoke not a feeling of self-assured superiority in the face of Aboriginal culture but a fear of the unknown Other and of its disruptive potential.

At one level, this concern related simply to the short-term challenge of transcontinental nation building faced by Canadian leaders during the first three decades after Confederation. On more than one occasion, the turmoil in the American West, the scene of an almost-continuous battle between plains tribes and the American army after the mid-1860s, spilled over into Canadian territory. At the same time, conditions among Canada's western Aboriginal communities were increasingly worrisome because of the beginning of settlement, the diminution of the great buffalo herds, the return of epidemic smallpox, and the Riel "rebellion" in 1869-70.

The *Davin Report* was the first to make a link between anticipated disorder and the utility of a residential school system. During his stay in Winnipeg, Davin was briefed on the situation among the western Indian First Nations and Métis. He reported: "[The Métis are] thoughtful if not anxious regarding the Government's intentions regarding them, [and] among the Indians there is some discontent." He continued: "No race of men

[could] be suddenly turned from one set of pursuits to another set of a wholly different nature without great attendant distress." And danger, he could have added. The whole situation, Davin warned in conclusion, required the "serious consideration of the Department."

Davin's advice was that the problems posed by western Aboriginal people could be solved "only by educating Indians and mixed-bloods in self-reliance and industry." With a fair degree of foresight, given that the next western "rebellion" was just seven years away, he cautioned Macdonald: "There is now barely time to inaugurate a system of education. [Such a] large statesmanlike policy . . . bearing on immediate and remote issues cannot be entered on too earnestly or too soon." Through schools, the danger posed by Aboriginal distress would be neutralized, as the tribes would be "prepared to meet the necessities of the not too distant future; to welcome and facilitate . . . the settlement of the country; and to render its government easy and not expensive."³⁸

In the crisis in 1885, the "second Riel rebellion," the subtlety of Davin's position fell away. The Presbyterian church, lobbying the government in December of that year for what became Thomas Moore's residential school north of Regina, included on the list of anticipated benefits that, as Dewdney reported it, "the Indians would regard them [their children] as hostages given to the whites and would hesitate to commit any hostile acts that might endanger their children's well-being."³⁹ Such a belief, though seemingly outlandish, was not rare. In the following year, for example, the Department received the same opinion from J.A. Macrae: "It is unlikely that any Tribe or tribes would give trouble of a serious nature to the Government whose members had children completely under Government control."⁴⁰

This "realpolitik" rationale for education was not limited to this western crisis. Davin's suggestion that education was pacification, an indispensable element in the creation of conditions for the peaceful occupation of the west, re-occurred and was applied to the long-term development of the nation in general. Residential schooling was a valuable tool of social control. In 1900, Macrae made such an argument and claimed that its supporters were many:

All people in the north with whom the matter of Indian education has been discussed agreed as to its importance not only as an economical measure to be demanded for the welfare of the country and the Indians, themselves, but in order that crime may not spring up and peaceful conditions be disturbed, as that element which is the forerunner and

companion of civilization penetrates the country and comes into close contact with the natives.⁴¹

A sign of how serious the Department took such a function for the schools was given when Duncan Campbell Scott subscribed to such sentiments. In 1910, when he was Superintendent of Indian Education, he said that "without education and with neglect the Indians would produce an undesirable and often dangerous element in society."⁴²

As Scott's comment implies, residential schools were part of a network of institutions meant to be servants ministering to industrial society's need for lawfulness, labour, and security of property. Education in general, of course, had such a mandate.⁴³ And, therefore, it is not surprising that residential schools had their parallel in the industrial and correctional schools of the same era for incorrigible white children. E.B. Titley, an historian of education and a biographer of Scott, drew out this connection in reference to the non-Aboriginal Victoria Industrial School founded in 1887. Victoria, and other schools like it, were predicated, he explained, upon the middle class's judgement that the "lower class family was failing in its perceived responsibility, and it was imperative to intervene in order to break the cycle of crime, poverty, depravity and disorder." For the safety of society, the white savage child had to escape the influences of the slum wigwam. It was, as Titley put it, the "superior order of the industrial school [that] would save the children from their parents' folly."⁴⁴

The vision of Aboriginal education developed by leaders in the churches and the Department was erected on the pillars of selfless duty and the self-interested needs of the state. As different as these motives may be, they both underpinned, in their own way, the single conclusion that children had to be removed from their families, "from evil surroundings,"⁴⁵ and, as Davin recommended, "kept constantly within the circle of civilized conditions"—residential schools.⁴⁶ This image of the school as the circle of civilization permeates the vision of the schools themselves and how it was assumed that they would function.

The school was a circle — an all-encompassing environment of re-socialization. The curriculum was not simply an academic schedule or practical trades training but comprised the whole life of the child in the school. One culture was to be replaced by another through the work of the surrogate parent, the teacher. The Indian child, in the words of Reverend Wilson of Shingwauk,

must be taught many things which come to the white child without the schoolmaster's aid. From the days of its birth, the child of civilized parents

is constantly in contact with the modes of civilized life, of action, thought, speech and dress; and is surrounded by a thousand beneficent influences. . . . He [the Indian child] must be led out from the conditions of . . . birth, in his early years, into the environment of civilized domestic life; and he must be thus led by his teacher.⁴⁷

The teacher's concentration on "action, thought, speech and dress," the encoded mores of civilized society, would be the catalyst of the great transformation. Teachers of quality, being both "competent and desirable persons,"⁴⁸ would, Reed thought, "devote themselves . . . in and out of school to the improvement of the minds, morals, personal deportment and habits of their pupils."⁴⁹

The efforts of teachers would be guided, in the first instance, by a standard curriculum. In the beginning it was supplied by the Department and was based largely on an Ontario model. Later, however, principals were directed to follow the relevant provincial curriculum. In 1896, the Department published in the *Annual Report* the Programme of Studies for Indian Schools. Students applied themselves to geography, reading, recitation, history, vocal music, calisthenics, and religious instruction. They were to move through six standards in each subject and, the Programme dictated, "everything must be thoroughly understood before a pupil is advanced to other studies."⁵⁰ Tabular statements contained in the annual reports indicated that students were also to learn spelling, writing, grammar, diction, history, drawing, and arithmetic.⁵¹

The second major part of the curriculum was practical training. The Department was convinced: "No system of Indian training is right that does not endeavour to develop all the abilities, remove prejudice against labour and give courage to compete with the rest of the world. The Indian problem exists owing to the fact that the Indian is untrained to take his place in the world. Once teach him to do this, and the solution is had."⁵² The Department envisioned that there would be a daily regime of instruction in practical subjects in every residential school across the country. This was to be the case even in the modest boarding schools where it would include, at a minimum, gardening or agriculture, domestic skills, and rudimentary carpentry. In the ambitious industrial schools, there was to be a wide array of trades training. In 1891, the Department listed at its industrial schools activity for boys in the following "industries": carpentering, blacksmithing, agriculture, shoemaking or bootmaking, and printing. Female students received instruction in sewing, shirt-making, knitting, cooking,

baking and kitchen work, laundering, dairy work, ironing, gardening, and general household duties.

Academic learning and practical training were balanced in the schedule by the half-day system. Students would spend one half of their day in the classroom and the other half involved in practical activities. These latter could be in the form of structured instruction in an industrial shop room or in learn-by-doing chores. Instructive chores not only served as education but also had an economic value in the operation of the school. The domestic science taught to girls, for example, amounted to the cooking, baking, dairying, cleaning, laundering, and tailoring labour required to operate the school. The same held true for the boys' labour so that "the efforts of those receiving instruction are, as far as practicable, made available . . . for the benefit of the institution and of the Indian reserves and agencies nearest."⁵³

While the academic and practical training of the school would clothe the pupil in the skills required to survive in a modernizing economy, the Department and churches realized that the child needed to undergo more profound change. Skills would be useless unless accompanied by the values of the civilized society in which the child was destined to live. Thus, learning and life in the circle of civilization were suffused with those values. Students, the Anglican activist S.H. Blake advised the superintendent general of Indian Affairs, needed to be taught "honesty, truth, the beauty of a good, pure life."⁵⁴

Of course, the curriculum itself carried the seeds of European civilization. In "Recitation" and "Vocal Music" in the 1896 Programme of Studies, the "Simple Songs" proscribed were to be "bright and cheerful" as well as "patriotic." The verses and prose to be memorized and recited by the children were to contain "the highest moral and patriotic maxims."

Most of the teaching was to be rather more direct. The programme provided a six-standards course in "ethics." In the first year, Standard I, pupils were to be taught "the practice of cleanliness, obedience, respect, order, neatness." In Standard II, they were to learn "Right and Wrong. Truth" and a "Continuance of proper appearance and behaviour." In Standard III, they would "Develop the reasons for proper appearance and behaviour" in addition to "Independence and Self-respect." Standard IV was "Industry, Honesty, Thrift," while Standard V introduced "Patriotism . . . Self-maintenance. Charity. Pauperism."

The final standard was the most sophisticated and aggressive. Pupils were to be brought to confront the differences in "Indian and white life, . . . [the] evils of Indian isolation, . . . labour, the law of life, . . . relations of the sexes

as to labour, . . . [and] home and public duties."⁵⁵ Many of these values, including neatness, industry, thrift, and self-maintenance, for example, would also be a part of the substance of practical training. They were among the qualities necessary for the integration of a modern Aboriginal workman and workwoman into the productive life of Canadian society.

Within a school that was to function as a home, it was life itself, however, that was to be the great teacher. Children on coming to the school would enter the White world in an act of transformation symbolized by the shearing of Aboriginal locks and the donning of European clothes and boots. Thereafter, they would live the life of White children within a round of days, weeks, months, and years punctuated by the rituals of European culture. The week began with the Sabbath, and the passage of the seasons was marked by the festivals of church and state: Christmas, Easter, the innumerable saints' days, Victoria Day, Dominion Day, Hallowe'en, and so forth. These rhythms would be imprinted on the child through appropriate celebration: presents, concerts, music with bright tunes and improving sentiments.

Resetting the child's cultural clock from the "savage" seasonal round of hunting and gathering to the hourly and daily precision required by an industrial order was seen by the Department as an issue of primary consideration: "Innate in him, [the Aboriginal child] has inherited from his parents . . . an utter disregard of time and an ignorance of its value."⁵⁶ Pupils had to be taught that "there should be an object for the employment of every moment." In the school a well-structured daily routine of work, learning, prayer, and recreation was of the greatest "importance in training and education, with a view to [the] future usefulness of children who would, as a rule, never have received the benefit of the same at their homes."⁵⁷

The temporal orchestration of life heard in the sounds of water breaking through spring ice and leaves rustling in freshening fall breezes was to be replaced by ticking clocks and ringing bells – the influence of the wigwam replaced by that of the factory.

Equally essential was the influence of the Christian faith. All the early senior Departmental officials – Vankoughnet, Dewdney, and Macrae – and the *Davin Report*, itself, agreed that the role of religion in this process of cultural replacement was key. The *Memorandum* of the Convention of Catholic Principals held at Lebrét in 1924 spoke for all of them:

All true civilization must be based on moral law, which christian religion alone can give. Pagan superstition could not . . . suffice to make the Indians practise the virtues of our civilization and avoid its attendant vices.

Several people have desired us to countenance the dances of the Indians and to observe their festivals; but their habits, being the result of free and easy mode of life, cannot conform to the intense struggle for life which our social conditions require.⁵⁸

The Presbyterians echoed these sentiments almost exactly. "We aim at building and developing character on the foundation of Christian morality, making Christian faith and love the spring and motive of conduct."⁵⁹ It was not possible, Dewdney concluded, to erase an Aboriginal "mythology without providing a better one" in which there "exists no question . . . as to its perfect correctness." To do so would "rather tend to lower the Indian's mind than to elevate it consequently he must receive but one spiritual training unhampered by any other influence."⁶⁰ The school system, therefore, could not be secular; the process of civilization must be a partnership between church and state.

In school, in chapel, at work, and even at play, the children were to learn the "Canadian" way. Recreation was not leisure but re-creation. The games and activities would not be the "boisterous and unorganized games" of "savage" youth. Rather, the children would have glee clubs, brass bands, boys' cadet corps, calisthenics, football, cricket, softball and hardball, basketball, and above all hockey, with the "well-regulated and . . . strict rules that govern our modern games" that produce "prompt obedience to discipline"⁶¹ and thus move the child further toward the goal line of civilization.

None of the foregoing could be accomplished, however, unless the children could be released from the shackles of "savage" culture that they carried with them into the school. The civilizers in the church and the Department realized that that task was not to be accomplished simply by separation from the parents, the change into European attire, and the influence of priests, teachers or games masters. Rather, the profound prerequisite for re-socialization was a concerted attack on the ontology of the children.

A child's ontology, "the symbolic ordering of the world" through which "actions and objects take on meaning,"⁶² is "inherited from [its] parents" and community from the moment of birth.⁶³ Thus, for example, the child, parent, and community exist in a landscape – a culture's translation of environment into a "meaning"-filled place. Parts of the programme of studies would disorient children and then attempt to re-orient them in a place filled with European "meaning." The ethics course was an obvious attempt to have the child assimilate European values. The geography course, mathematics, and even theology, however, were insidiously disorienting. Children

were to be taught the "science" and scientific methodology of the European world to understand the world as a European place within which only European values had meaning.

For residential school children who had undergone a thorough re-education, the wisdom of their elders would no longer be knowledge but the superstitions of the "savage." Such children would be separated forever, for even if they went home they would, in the words of G. Manuel, a residential school graduate who became a national Aboriginal leader, bring "the generation gap with them."⁶⁴ Socialized as non-Aboriginal people, knowing only the mores of that culture and thus behaving according to those norms, despite the fact that they "looked Aboriginal," they could be seen, from the community's cultural standpoint, as the "crazy people."⁶⁵ Only in such a profound fashion could the separation from savagery and the re-orientation as civilized be assured.

That the Department and churches understood consciously that culture or, more particularly, that the task of overturning one ontology in favour of another was the challenge they faced is seen in their identification of language as the critical issue in the circle. It was through language that the child gained its ontological inheritance from its parents and community. The word bore the burden of the culture from one generation to the next. It was the vital connection. The civilizers knew it must be cut if any progress were to be made. Reverend Wilson, in the *Fourth Annual Report of the Shingwauk School*, informed the Department: "We make a great point on insisting on the boys talking English, as, for their advancement in civilization, this is, of all things, the most necessary."⁶⁶

Wilson was, of course, preaching to the converted. The Programme of Studies of 1896 stated: "Every effort must be made to induce pupils to speak English and to teach them to understand it; unless they do, the whole work of the teacher is likely to be wasted."⁶⁷ Without English, the Department announced in its *Annual Report* of 1895, the Aboriginal person is "permanently disabled," the process of assimilation frustrated. "So long as he keeps his native tongue, so long will he remain a community apart."⁶⁸

For the Department and the churches, the road to acculturation within the school and the assimilation of the graduate thereafter was through the English or French language. Those languages carried the culture of civilization. They alone, as the Deputy Superintendent General, James Smart, explained in 1900, can "impart ideas which, being entirely outside the experience and environment of the pupils and their parents, have no equivalent expression in their native tongue."⁶⁹ Those ideas were the core concepts of European culture – its ontology, theology, and values.

The only effective road to English or French, however, and thus the necessary pre-condition that would facilitate the operation of the multifaceted strategy of re-socialization, was to stamp out Aboriginal languages within the schools and in the children. Senior staff in the Department had no doubt that it would "be found best to rigorously exclude the use of Indian dialects."⁷⁰ Departmental policy seemed straightforward: "The use of English in preference to the Indian dialect must be insisted upon."⁷¹

Principals shouldered the task not only of language training but also of developing a pedagogy of prevention, rewards or punishments to make English or French "in and about all schools as far as possible the only allowed means of communication."⁷² The range of ideas showed imagination. The principal of Qu'Appelle School in Saskatchewan in 1884 considered the idea of admitting a "few English boys" to be divided among the Indian children at recreation periods to encourage the use of English. They would "also be a great means for helping Indian boys lose their Indian habits."⁷³

Reverend Wilson at Shingwauk considered the same technique but also developed a reward system. At the beginning of the week, each student was given a number of buttons. Every time a child was caught speaking the native language, he or she surrendered one button. At the end of the week, the student with the most buttons received a prize – a bag of nuts.⁷⁴

Almost universally, school staff in addition to their other responsibilities were assigned the duty of preventing pupils from "using their own language."⁷⁵ When children did, school authorities resorted to what was the most common corrective technique – punishment. Wilson admitted that he chastised "heavily any old pupil who presumes to break a rule"⁷⁶ governing the use of Indian languages. Over the life of the school system, many principals, had they chosen to, could have made the same admission.

The Department assumed that the ontological revolution, the fruit of its language policy, in association with the other elements of education, academic and practical training and the inculcation of western values, comprised a powerful strategy for re-socialization. At the same time, however, it understood that, if it were to ensure the assimilation of students, its efforts could not end with their graduation. Therefore, the Department's residential school vision extended past the confines of the circle of civilization. The children's education, the *Annual Report* of 1887 noted, "must not cease with their school course, on the contrary that should be only the commencement; for as a matter of fact it is after its completion that the greatest care for those who have had the benefit of training at these schools, needs to be exercised, in order to prevent retrogression."⁷⁷

"Retgression," that is, cultural backsliding by graduates of the residential schools, was a considerable worry to Department and church educators. And, thus, they held that the connection between parent, community, and child once broken should never be re-established. Graduates should not fall prey to Indian "prejudices and traditions."⁷⁸ Therefore the wisest course was "to prevent those whose education at an industrial school . . . has been completed from returning to the reserves." The Department and churches thought that the children should be placed in the non-Aboriginal world and secured there with employment in the trades that they had learned "so as to cause them to reside in towns, or in the case of farmers, in settlements of white people, and thus become amalgamated with the general community."⁷⁹ Indeed, the industrial schools were to be situated close to towns so that students could have the example of civilization always before them and so that they could be "apprenticed to local tradesmen" who would be, supposedly, "always glad to secure their services."⁸⁰ Finally, graduates could avail themselves of the enfranchisement provisions of the Indian Act.

The overall strategy of life and learning within the schools had been devoted to this goal of "amalgamation," but there were, as well, particular elements of that strategy that were pointedly mindful of the threat of "retgression." There was general agreement that, to make the children's socialization indelible, they had, for example, to be taken from their parents at the earliest possible age and kept until "their characters [had] been sufficiently formed as to ensure as much as possible against their returning to the uncivilized mode of life."⁸¹ There was some debate as to what that meant. Thomas Moore's principal wanted no age limits at all. Boys, he argued, should be kept at school until they were prepared to be responsible in the application of their training while the girls should be "under the guardianship of the school until they [were] married."⁸² The Department calculated the necessary term as a span of ten years from age six to sixteen.

A second defense against retgression lay in women, mothers, and matrimony. Senior officials held that the education of girls was as necessary as that of boys. It was their goal after all to produce not only civilized young men integrated into the non-Aboriginal labour force, but civilized families. In the Victorian view, women were the centre of that most important institution, and motherhood was the most formative socializing element. The education of girls therefore, Vankoughnet informed Macdonald, was key, as "children are generally influenced to an important degree by the precept of the mother and the example set them by her at home."

Female pupils, educated to be civilizing mothers, needed also to be civilizing wives. Unless male graduates "obtain[ed] as wives women as intelligent and as advanced in civilization as themselves, they [would] of necessity have to select uneducated Indian women as partners and if they [did] not themselves relapse into savagery as a consequence the progeny from these marriages following the example and teaching of the mother [would] not improbably adopt the life and habits of the pure Indian."⁸³

Women graduates in turn needed similar protection. If they returned to the reserve and married "among the semi-civilized men of their tribe, [then] the all but universal law by which the woman assumes the status of her husband will surely take its course."⁸⁴

According to the Department's calculation, continued post-graduate separation by integration in towns and farming communities and intermarriage among the graduates would ensure that the work of the schools would not be frustrated. Further suggestions were made to support that assumption. Vankoughnet thought, in 1884, that a system of rewards could be instituted to entice graduates to integrate. They might be offered with their diploma a certificate entitling them to enfranchisement and "other privileges from the Government."⁸⁵ Reed's advice, given five years later, was somewhat more aggressive. The Department should consider preventing the graduates returning to the reserves lest they "rapidly retrograde."⁸⁶ He envisioned communities of graduates set up adjacent to the schools "to admit of continued supervision" on eighty-acre farms, operated by married graduates who had been automatically enfranchised.⁸⁷

The residential school vision developed at the end of the nineteenth century combining in-school and after-graduation strategies forecast a shining future for young men and women. They would be self-sustaining members of non-Aboriginal communities or members of wholly modernized Aboriginal settlements. There was, however, one characteristic of that vision that was profoundly troubling, one, indeed, that frustrated much of the Department's efforts and led directly to today's tragic heritage. At the vision's core, there was a dark contradiction. Right from the outset, as the persistent punishment of children for speaking their language signals and as a review, in later chapters, of the treatment of the children discloses graphically, the "circle of civilized conditions" did not live up to its name. It did not because it could not. Government and church correspondence and reports reveal that there was, as an inherent element of the vision, a "savagery" in the mechanics of civilizing the children.

The Department, of course, intended that the schools should be homes, sanctuaries where the children would receive, in Davin's description, "the

care of a mother."⁸⁸ The principal of the Regina school even warned against institutionalization, stressing the desirability of a "homelike" atmosphere in the school.⁸⁹

Such sentiments were formalized in Departmental regulations. In 1889, Vankoughnet forwarded to the Catholic Bishop of Westminster the Rules and Regulations for the Kootenay Industrial School. Most of them were devoted to parenting concerns. On entering the school, new pupils were to have their "heads and bodies" examined, and, "if the presence of vermin is discovered, effectual means should at once be taken to destroy them." All children were to be properly attired and not "allowed to wear clothes that are not in every respect in a good state of repair and clean." Clothes were to be inspected at least once a week and repairs "promptly made." Their underclothing and bed linen were to be changed weekly. They were to wash three times a day and be "washed all over at least once a week." The school building, the dormitories and classrooms, were to be clean and well-ventilated and water closets kept "scrupulously clean, . . . and disinfectants . . . should be used very liberally." Children who fell ill were to be cared for in a sick room — "an apartment light and airy, and as far removed from the other rooms as possible." All children were to receive training in what to do in case of a fire. Finally, they were to be well fed, in line with what the Department referred to as a "dietary," with "plain and well cooked" meals. In short, "the Principal and those under him should endeavour to make all the pupils as happy and the school as home-like as possible."⁹⁰

Despite such regulations, the image of the school as home and the Department's caring parental intentions would be undercut by another set of realities, principally by a funding system that reduced the quality of care, promoted overcrowding and the growth of schools to alienating sizes. But, even without those realities, the vision itself and the language in which it was couched, revealed what would have to be the essentially violent nature of the residential school system in its onslaught on child and culture.

Schools could not be "home-like"; the basic premise of re-socialization was violent. "To kill the Indian" in the child, the Department and churches aimed at severing the artery of culture that ran between Aboriginal generations. In the end, "all the Indian there is in the race should be dead."⁹¹ This was more than a rhetorical flourish or figurative act. It took on a sharp and traumatic reality in the life of each child who was separated from parents and community and isolated in a threatening world hostile to identity, traditional ritual, and language.

The system of transformation was suffused with a similar latent savagery. Hayter Reed, in a perfectly "home-like" tone, counselled that teachers,

"while exercising firmness, [should] endeavour to influence them [the pupils] by appealing to their reasons and affections, rather than to their fears." Yet, he described the purpose of the schools, the goal of those teachers, in very different terms: "Every effort should be directed against anything calculated to keep fresh in the memories of children habits and associations which it is one of the main objects of industrial institutions to obliterate."⁹²

"Firmness," as Reed called it, was, for the sake of cultural obliteration, both a pedagogical technique and a civilizing influence. Others, like Macrae, substituted the word *discipline* and stressed its utility as opposed to the gentler appeal to reason and sentiment. Referring to the challenge of teaching English, he asserted: "Perhaps discipline will lead to its acquirement more quickly than direct teaching. Better still let discipline produce circumstances to supplement and aid direct teaching."⁹³ Discipline and learning could, indeed, be subtly folded into each other. Reverend Wilson's description of how English was taught at Shingwauk stands as a fine example of that. "The more advanced boys sit with their slates and write out definitions of English words; the rest of the boys . . . are taught *vive voce*, besides being put through manual exercises such as shutting the door, putting a slate on the bench, pulling down the blind etc.; the object being to teach them to understand, and obey promptly, directions given in English."⁹⁴

Prompt and persistent obedience to authority, order, and discipline were virtues of civilization, and in a civilized society one of their servants was punishment. Again embedded in church and Department texts was that dichotomy between the "civilized" and the "savage" — between, in this case, "the restraints of civilization"⁹⁵ as Davin characterized order and discipline and the wild, unrestrained behaviour of savagery. The children were taken from a "permissive" culture, from parents and relatives "who had never struck a child in their lives."⁹⁶ Indeed, the failure to discipline-punish children was, as Vankoughnet had pointed out, one of the debilitating attributes of "savage" Indian parenting. Debilitating, of course, because, in his view, the day-school initiative had been impaired by the inability of parents to "exercise . . . proper authority . . . to compel attendance."⁹⁷

G. Manuel, contrasting the treatment of children at home and in the schools, illustrated this cultural difference and the supposed pedagogical value of punishment. "The priests taught us to respect them by whipping us, [while] our mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles and grandparents, failed to represent themselves as a threat, when that was the only thing we had been taught to understand."⁹⁸ A child was to be brought to civilization through discipline and, if necessary, by punishment and would become,

therefore, a civilized parent, able naturally to "exercise proper authority" over the next generation of civilized children.

In the vision of residential school education, discipline was curriculum and punishment was pedagogy. Both were agents of civilization; they were indispensable to the "circle of civilized conditions" where the struggle to move children across the cultural divide would play itself out in each school situation, child by child, teacher by teacher. If this was not known by the civilizers at the level of theory when planning the schools, it was soon only too obvious. Powerful evidence of that fact came from an compelling witness, Father Lacombe. Not only can he be counted as one of the founders of the industrial school system, having advised Davin, but he was also, subsequently, the principal of High River in the Northwest Territories, one of the government's first industrial school ventures. He was a most influential proponent of the need for, as he called it, "coercion."

Lacombe's experience in his first year of running the school at High River was a warning for other would-be civilizers. Re-socialization was a difficult struggle. High River was opened in October 1884. By the spring, it had lost almost all its twenty-five pupils. With the coming of the good weather, the children "began to get more uneasy and uncontrollable and finally left the institution, some by their own will, others taken and forced away by their parents or guardians."

Lacombe and his staff did their "best to prevent these departures," but to no avail. The constant "excuse to go," rooted in the pain of separation, "was and is always the same - We are lonesome." Nothing would make them stay. Lacombe even reported: "I bought with my own money more than \$100 worth of candies and toys etc. to make them pleased and fond of the place." They would not be placated.

Those "departures" were not the only problem High River encountered. There had also been trouble throughout the fall and winter when the children had remained in the school - trouble, which according to Lacombe was rooted in the fact that the students were too "proud and set in their Indian ways." He signalled defeat in his admission: "We have not succeeded yet to cut their hair." Treats, toys, comfortable surroundings, good food and clothes, what in essence amounted to a policy of sweet bribes, were mistakes, he concluded, and so, too, was it "a great mistake to have no kind of punishment in the Institution. . . . It is absurd to imagine that such an institution in any country could work properly without some form of coercion to enforce order and obedience."⁹⁹

Lacombe's successor, E. Claude, followed in that opinion. He listed a range of punishments that he employed, including confinement during

recreation and deprivation of food, when "the student [would be made to] stand in the center of the refectory." He tried to avoid "using too vigorous means with regard to the most rebellious tempers such as blows etc."¹⁰⁰

The Department agreed with both Lacombe and Claude. Punishment, even to the extent of "blows," though corporal punishment was to have its limits, was to have an important official role in the circle. Vankoughnet's rules and regulations of 1889 stipulated that "obedience to rules and good behaviour should be enforced, but corporal punishment should only be resorted to in extreme cases. In ordinary cases the penalty might be solitary confinement for such time as the offence may warrant, or deprivation of certain articles of food allowed to other pupils."¹⁰¹

Six years later, the deputy superintendent general was somewhat more specific on the nature of permissible corporal punishment:

Instructions should be given, if not already sent to the Principals of the various schools, that children are not to be whipped by anyone save the Principal, and even when such a course is necessary, great discretion should be used and they should not be struck on the head, or punished so severely that bodily harm might ensue. The practice of corporal punishment is considered unnecessary as a general measure of discipline and should only be resorted to for very grave offenses and as a deterrent example.¹⁰²

This policy obviously violated Aboriginal norms, but it was silent on the question of the violation of non-Aboriginal norms, on the adoption by schools "of methods of discipline to which fair exception might be taken by either the Government or the Indians."¹⁰³ There was no stipulation as to what would happen if there was not "great discretion," if a child was "struck on the head" or beaten "so severely" that "bodily harm" ensued. What action would the Department take if corporal punishment, slapping, hair pulling, strapping, rather than being the exception, became "the general measure of discipline?" Such a situation was not unimaginable; the likelihood of both a pedagogy of punishment within the schools and of incidents of excessive punishment was not remote. Not every principal, teacher, or employee would be of the desirable moral calibre. Furthermore, the schools were, normally, outside the gaze of public scrutiny, isolated from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. The circle was closed to all but the official outsider, and, even then, visits and inspections were normally by appointment.

Within the schools, conditions like those that had been experienced by Lacombe and Claude would not be unusual. School authorities would

always claim that it was “very difficult to keep the Indian Children in subordination”¹⁰⁴ and thus an atmosphere would always exist that justified the use of force against children. Indeed, the atmosphere of the schools may well have been one of the most critical factors in the issues of discipline and abuse. Even in the course of the ordinary operation of these institutions, “where the work of the school is faithfully carried on[,] the strain upon the teachers and the scholars is very considerable.”¹⁰⁵

Who was there, then, to defend the child if within “the circle of civilized conditions” from such “strain upon the teachers” and other staff there emerged a culture of violence? There was, obviously, no one prepared to protect the Indian in the child. But was there not someone who would protect the child as a human creature, who would ensure that the Rules and Regulations were faithfully implemented – that children would be properly clothed and nourished, safely housed and educated; that they would not be abused. In ordinary circumstances, be it in Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal society, this was the duty of the parents. As such, protection became the duty of the Department and the churches when they presumed to parent Aboriginal children in homes they called residential schools.

In theory, at least, the answer was clear. Children like Thomas Moore were to be taken into care, cherished, nurtured, and educated. Upon graduation they would be prepared to take their place in Canada. That was, after all, the vision of the residential school system. And, in the years after Confederation, the federal government, guided by its Imperial heritage and with the power over communities placed in its hands by Section 91:24 of the British North America Act, equipped the Department to make that vision a reality. By the authority given the Department in the Indian acts and the wide latitude it had to create regulations that for Aboriginal people had the force of law, it had a strategy and the technology for cultural transformation.

The Department had, it seemed, as well as the means, the will. Pulsing through Departmental correspondence and its annual reports was the rhetoric, at least, of a resolute determination. “I want to get rid of the Indian problem,” Duncan Campbell Scott declared before a Parliamentary committee in 1920. “Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department.”¹⁰⁶

Unfortunately, the vision of residential school education, of “the circle of civilized conditions,” pushed forward by the Department’s assimilative determination, when made real in the process of building and managing the school system, fell far short of its goals. Right from the beginning, as

the *Davin Report* was implemented in the early 1880s, the Department and its church partners created a persistently dark and shameful reality to which were consigned thousands of Aboriginal children.