

Historical Studies in Education / Revue d'histoire de l'éducation
SPECIAL ISSUE / NUMÉRO SPÉCIAL
Revisiting the Histories of Indigenous Schooling and Literacies /
Un regard renouvelé sur l'histoire de l'éducation des Autochtones

Introduction

Jean Barman

Professor Emeritus, University of British Columbia

What a pleasure it has been to read these five fine pieces of writing! To say I waited three decades to do so is not an overstatement.

It was in the mid-1980s that I met Don McCaskill, then on leave from Trent University, by chance over a photocopier at UBC. We started talking, only to discover we had each recently had submissions rejected by academic journals on the grounds that “nobody wants to read about Indians.” Not only that, he said, but so had Yvonne Hébert, a post-doctoral student at UBC in a different discipline than either Don’s or mine. The only option, we concluded, was to publish the three pieces ourselves. And so we did, thanks to UBC Press.

Persuading UBC Press to take a chance and scouting everyone we knew or knew of—Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike—for submissions, the result was our jointly-edited *Indian Education in Canada*, published in 1986–1987 in two volumes. This book was followed in 1995 by *First Nations Education in Canada*, which I co-edited with Marie Battiste, who had had essays in each of its predecessors.¹ All three books continue to sell these many years later, in part because scholars and others are only now beginning to grapple seriously with the full force of Indigenous education—and not just residential schooling. Beginning with Jim Miller’s fine history and continuing through the exemplary work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, residential schools have been a primary focus of both scholarly and popular writing, justifiably so, given their human consequences. As a result, however, writers have paid less attention to other aspects of colonial schooling’s more complicated story in what is today known as Canada.²

No more.

Alison Norman and Tom Peace have assembled five well-researched and persuasive articles comprising this special issue of *Historical Studies in Education*; they are innovative, both individually and as a group. The notion that formal schooling was imposed on Indigenous children is challenged time and again in respect to the strategies Indigenous parents and others employed in their self-interest as they perceived it.

That the five authors are emerging scholars contributes to the originality and authenticity of what they write. In the order in which their articles appear: Thomas Peace is an assistant professor at Huron University College in London, Ontario; Alison Norman is with the Ontario Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation in Toronto and is a research associate in the Frost Centre for Canadian Studies & Indigenous Studies at Trent University; Sean Carleton is an assistant professor at Mount Royal University in Calgary; Emma Battell Lowman is a lecturer at the University of Hertfordshire in England; and Braden Te Hiwi is an assistant professor at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay. They each approach the very complex topic of Indigenous schooling in a new and imaginative way.

Indigenous schooling has had a fractured history, just as have Indigenous peoples generally. Thomas Peace describes how in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, long before Canada became an entity by that name, Abenaki, Wendat, and others living in today's Quebec took advantage of alphabetic literacy and schooling. Those so taught in New England or France returned home to pass on their knowledge and understandings to the next generations, in some cases to girls as well as boys. The sequences of events were not a matter of compulsion, but, at least in part, of choice.

Two of the strengths of Peace's essay are his cross-border approach, reminding us that today's boundaries did not yet exist in the period he studies, and his careful delineation of his sources and the integration of his findings with those of other writers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, now making some of the same points as he does. Peace's concluding point in respect to the late eighteenth century that "the emergence of alphabetic literacy and schools in these communities was one of the few options these people had to confront the rapid changes taking place upon their Land" is worth pondering. Setting the scene for the next four essays, Peace calls for renewed attention to multiple historiographical and geographical contexts and to the diverse ways in which Indigenous peoples have engaged with schooling.

Moving ahead a century in time, Alison Norman turns to Indigenous women as teachers in day schools in their southern Ontario home communities. Drawing on four carefully crafted case studies, she argues persuasively for their intelligence and capacity. Despite obstacles, some of them also faced by white women of the day, Indigenous women entered classrooms where knowledge of their home languages complemented their enterprise. More generally, Norman persuades us that community leaders and others "valued western education" in those changing times.

Sean Carleton takes us west to British Columbia, where only in the mid-nineteenth century did Indigenous peoples experience large numbers of white newcomers in their midst. Indigenous peoples' resistance to the occupation of their lands precipitated newcomer alliances between state and church aimed at pacification through the provision of missionary schooling. Just as occurred across much of Canada, the government used missionaries for its own purposes, much as missionaries used the government to further their own religious self-interests. Pacification, conversion, and schooling went hand in hand.

The complexities of missionary relations with British Columbia's Indigenous peoples are taken up by Emma Battell Lowman in respect to Indigenous languages,

which became an educational vehicle much as Alison Norman describes in relation to Ontario. Battell Lowman turns our attention to Chinook Jargon. Combining English, French, and Indigenous words into a small vocabulary, the jargon was a practical means of spoken communication among Indigenous speakers having many different languages of their own across the province and up and down the west coast (so many so that Oregon's large Grande Ronde Reservation has adapted the Chinook Jargon into its official language—Chinuk Wawa).

Having introduced the Chinook Jargon's history, Battell Lowman details the development, under Oblate oversight, of writing Chinook in shorthand, an initiative that expanded into a newspaper attracting both Indigenous and non-Indigenous subscribers. *Kamloops Wawa* combined local news and religious instruction with lessons, permitting some 120 Indigenous subscribers as of 1894, and many more Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers, to write as well as to talk to each other and to read the printed issues. They became literate in a distinctive fashion, which would fall into decline, although it did not wholly disappear, in the face of residential schools with their instruction solely in English.

Braden Te Hiwi follows on from Battell Lowman by also referencing residential schools in a distinctive fashion. Drawing on the case of the Pelican Lake Residential School in northwestern Ontario, he probes an aspect of such institutions rarely considered in the scholarship, physical education. Residential schools were intended, Te Hiwi reminds us, "to impart a diverse, but coherent set of desired traits... deemed inherent to the logic of civilization." In line with these goals, joined with assumptions about gender roles, rigorous physical fitness was recommended for boys, with gentler activities for girls that encouraged passivity and even fragility. The reality was, as Te Hiwi describes, that at many schools, including Pelican Lake, "the idealized vision for physical education that was being promoted through official policy remained disconnected from the realities of everyday school life." As in so much else they did, residential schools faltered.

Each of these five articles provides a powerful reminder that the history of Indigenous schooling has been far more wide-ranging and eventful than was the residential school evoked as a blanket descriptor. The question worth pondering is why we have paid so little attention to Indigenous schooling from the inside out instead of the top down. Thomas Peace postulates several reasons, including reliance on sources originating with missionaries writing in their own self-interest, the imposition of present-day political boundaries on a more fluid past, the equation of schools with institutions rather than individuals, and the focus on boys at the expense of girls.

Not only that, but as Alison Norman reminds us, "while the historiography of Indigenous schooling has much to say about residential schools in Canada, we know comparatively little about the day schools" that complemented them, and, she adds, "even less about the Indigenous teachers who worked in the day schools." Helen Raptis's recent book about Tsimshian day schools, *What We Learned*, authored with members of the Tsimshian Nation, takes us a step along the way to doing so.³

Alison Norman's parallel point, that "too often in Indigenous history, individuals are left out of the story in favour of generalizations about the community," is also

beginning to be rectified. Again in respect to British Columbia, Shirley Sterling's seminal book, *My Name Is Seepetza*, written a quarter of a century ago from the perspective of a residential school student, which she was, and intended for young people, long stood on its own as a marker of what was possible.⁴ Bev Sellar's autobiographical book, *They Called Me Number One*, about her residential school experiences is a recent complement, as is Elsie Paul's story of her journey from residential school survivor to Elder.⁵ Similar studies have begun to appear across Canada.

Awareness of this point crystalized for me while researching and, in September 2016, publishing a contextualized biography of a Quebec Abenaki man who, by virtue of almost graduating from Dartmouth College but leaving before his final year to fight as an officer on the British side in the War of 1812, was one of the most highly educated Indigenous persons of his generation across North America. From a white perspective, however, this mattered for naught, except in wartime.⁶ Unable to find acceptance as a teacher on the pattern of his father or otherwise, Noel Annance returned home in mid-life to use his skill at wordsmithing and argumentation to seek out and to cajole officials in the future Canada's Department of Indian Affairs to act other than they did. The good news is that they read his letters; the bad news that they disagreed with virtually everything he wrote. Noel Annance, for his part, never gave up. Putting his words into print has reminded me, as do these five authors, how important it is for those of us who rely on the written word to ply our craft well and wisely.

That we have variously begun along the path of rethinking and reinterpreting the history of schooling for and by Indigenous people does not mean we can sit back and congratulate ourselves for doing so. Just as it was three decades ago, and as these five authors attest, much remains to be done.

Notes

- 1 Jean Barman, Yvonne Hébert, and Don McCaskill, eds., *Indian Education in Canada*. Vol. 1, *The Legacy*, and Vol. 2, *The Challenge* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986 and 1987); and Jean Barman and Marie Battiste, eds., *First Nations Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995).
- 2 J. R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), and Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Canada's Residential Schools*, 7 vols. *Part 1: Origins to 1939; Part 2: 1939 to 2000* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016); also see *Knock on the Door: The Essential History of Residential Schools from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2016).
- 3 Helen Raptis, with members of the Tsimshian Nation, *What We Learned: Two Generations Reflect on Tsimshian Education and the Day Schools* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016).
- 4 Shirley Sterling, *My Name Is Seepetza* (Toronto: Groundwood, 1992).
- 5 Bev Sellar, *They Called Me Number One* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2013); and Elsie Paul, in collaboration with Paige Raibmon and Harmony Johnson, *Written as I Remember It: Teachings from the life of a Sliammon Elder* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014).

- 6 Jean Barman, *Abenaki Daring: The Life and Writings of Noel Annance, 1792–1869*, McGill-Queen's Native and Northern Series, no. 88 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016).