Structural Oppressions Facing Indigenous Students in Canadian Education

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Indigenous students in Canada do not graduate from secondary school at the same rate as their non-Indigenous peers. We argue in this article that the lower graduation rate is due to the many structural oppressions that Indigenous people experience. The authors concentrate on four large-scale oppressions that commonly face Indigenous students: poverty, suppression of their identities, racism and gender violence.

Indigenous worldviews, perspectives and realities are at variance with the country's dominant educational, economic and political institutions and negatively impact the self-esteem of Indigenous students. As well, their sociocultural identities are distinct, and undermined by the stereotypes and specific attributes designated to them. In order to counter these negative conditions and cultivate minopimaatisiiwin which is the Anishinaawpe concept of "living well" and "well-being", we recognize a self-determination framework as essential to Indigenous education. A self-determination framework serves to strengthen Indigenous students' identities to protect against dominant oppressions, foster resilience, and motivate younger generations towards improved educational outcomes.

The Canadian educational system is Eurocentric in origin and has been blatantly aimed at crushing Indigenous peoples and their cultural identities, including their languages (Neeganagwedgin, 2013). This education system needs a drastic overhaul for Indigenous cultural sustainability and for survival of the future generations of Indigenous people in the way of minopimaatisiiwin, which means "good life" in the Anishinaape language. We begin this article by examining the value that Indigenous nations have historically placed on education, and the traditional focus on minopimaatisiiwin. Minopimaatisiiwin results from the wholistic development of the entire human person in the areas spiritual, physical, mental/intellectual and emotional growth. These teachings instill development so that individual and collective self-determination is fostered through fulfilling responsibilities and positive relationships with oneself, family, and all Creation.

In pre- and early-contact times, the Indigenous peoples were self-determining, which included being self-sufficient and self-governing (Ballard and Thompson, 2013). Increasingly, Indigenous populations seek a revival of ways that give back to Creation to ensure sustainability, rather than adhering to practices that constantly desecrate the environment and resources (McGregor, 2016). Indigenous self-determination embodies the right of Indigenous peoples to determine their own economic, social and cultural development (García-Alix, 2003). The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) affirms self-determination within existing states and protection of cultures, institutions of governance, special relationships to the land and traditional economic activities, and representation on all decision-making bodies on issues that concern them (Musafiri, 2012). The right to self-determination of Indigenous peoples is also embodied in the UN's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Coulter, 2010). Self-determination focuses on the right of Indigenous

peoples to define for themselves their Indigenous knowledge systems and to manage and use the lands and resources in their traditional territories to realize what the Anishinaape call minopimaatisiiwin.

Self-determination in contemporary times, because of powerful and continuing impacts of colonialism, has very different manifestations than it did historically. In Western history, U.S. President Wilson introduced the concept of self-determination in post-World War I peace settlements as the war had left deeply divided borders and scattered peoples across Europe. In the sense that Wilson used it, self-determination is rooted in nationalism and the sense of uprooted populations making decisions for themselves, without the input of outsiders (Lynch, 2002). For example, a contemporary state will initiate a narrow definition of self-determination "by focusing on state political/legal recognition of Indigenous peoples as self-governing entities while diverting energies away from more substantive discussions regarding the reclamation of Indigenous territories, livelihoods, natural resources, and the regeneration of community languages and culturally based practices" (Corntassel, 2008, p. 107). As authors, we use the Indigenous concepts of self-determination.

Many Indigenous peoples are now envisioning and crafting educational systems that further the goals of self-determination in spite of outside school systems being specifically constructed by the state to ingrain Indigenous subjugation within dominant societies (Rozon, 2001). A fundamental ingredient of self-determination is education (Lee, 2015; Nakata, 2013) and as such, Indigenous educators, both formal and informal, teach the understanding of their oppressions within contemporary society. This type of education dispels passivity and Western-types of social control; instead, it leads to decolonization, self-sustenance instead

of state dependence, and cultural resilience. Alfred (2009) states that it is from political and social activities in defending the land "that many colonized Indigenous people regain knowledge of their history and culture, and the confidence to demand and affect change in their lives and in the larger society" (p. 57).

Through the founding of countries including Canada, Australia, the United States, New Zealand, and others, Indigenous peoples globally have been subjected to colossal losses of their populations, cultures, identities and ways-of-being (Alfred, 2009; Anaya, 2004). They continue to endure and survive the processes of colonization, a commonality that links them in struggles to define and restore their individual and collective identities. In daily lives and realities, Indigenous peoples seek a return, a revival of æons-old traditions that had always fostered minopimaatisiiwin and self-determination (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014).

Educational Attainment of Indigenous People in Canada and Manitoba

The educational attainment of Indigenous people in Canada trails far behind those of non-Indigenous people (Gordon & White, 2014; Richards, 2014) and, in Manitoba, government efforts to address this chasm are largely ineffective. Referring to adults in the 20 to 24 year age-group, Anderson and Richards (2016, p. 3) state that, "… 9 of 10 non-Aboriginals have at least high-school, as do 8 of 10 Métis and 7 of 10 First Nation living off-reserve. In stark contrast, only 4 in 10 First Nation young adults living on-reserve graduated from high school." In 2016, the Auditor General of the Province of Manitoba, Norm Ricard, stated that, "it is particularly concerning that the government's most recent data … shows that, despite the governments' efforts to date, only 55% of Indigenous students are graduating from high school, compared to 96%

of non-Indigenous students; a gap that has widened since 2010" (Office of the Auditor General, Manitoba, p. 1).

Recent census data shows that educational disparity continues and even with greater numbers of younger Indigenous people pursuing post-secondary education than those from previous generations, the pace compared to mainstream Canadians is low (Richards, 2014; Statistics Canada, 2011). Because of low secondary school graduation rates, Indigenous peoples' post-secondary education rates are also well below those of the overall Canadian population. For example, in 2001, only 23% of status First Nations people attained a post-secondary certificate, diploma or degree compared to 40% of mainstream Canada (Frideres & Gadacz, 2011).

Although a formal education is increasingly important for employment and improved standards-of-living (Champagne, 2015; Sharpe, Arsenault, Lepointe & Cowan, 2009; Wakefield, Sage, Coy & Palmer, 2004), many Indigenous students do not graduate for various reasons (Aman, 2009; Robertson, 2003; Spence & White, 2009). Several of these are because of an historic void in Indigenous representation within schools and the overall colonial nature of existing Canadian curriculum (Wilson, 2008; Dickason & Calder, 2006). According to Stonechild (2006), Canada's educational system is assimilative in nature and corrals Indigenous students into an unskilled, seasonal work force that supports the Canadian élite.

Evident in the Canadian educational system, systemic oppression is a dominant group exercising oppression over marginalized populations, such as Indigenous peoples, and exploiting real or imagined differences among them (Alfred, 2005; Dhamoon, 2015; Jimmy, Allen & Anderson, 2015). Oppression is embedded within a society at multiple levels, simultaneously: personal, cultural and structural (Dhamoon, 2015; Freire, 1990, 1994). Structural oppression is institutionalized and sanctioned through social structures, such as religion, government, education, law, media and health care; these institutions formulate policies, regulations, rules, social processes and practices that are consciously normalized. As well, established economic and political networks largely favour a dominant group at the expense of those who are excluded—such as the Indigenous peoples (Freire, 1990, 1994). Most power in Canadian society rests at the structural level, but because individuals are impacted at a personal level, education systems have the capacity to change the lives and outcomes of individual students (Alfred, 2005; Jimmy, Allen & Anderson, 2015). Understanding the players, dynamics and the extent of systemic oppression is necessary for reconciliation, and for emancipation that genuinely facilitates socio-structural change for Indigenous self-determination (Alfred, 2005).

To change this disheartening picture and overcome structural oppression, many Indigenous people are viewing self-determination as a framework to facilitate improved educational offerings within their communities and, overall, to address ethnocentric Indigenous disadvantage (Brayboy & Castagano, 2009; Fallon & Paquette, 2012; Israel Weinstein, 2014; National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2009). They seek a "politics of hope" (Wilkinson, 2005) and educator and activist Paulo Freire speaks of "the need for a kind of education in hope" (1994, p. 87).

In this article, we use the word Indigenous, rather than Aboriginal, even though both these words are used to describe the original inhabitants of what is now known as "North America". Indigenous has become more commonly used in Canada, and one of the federal government's most well-known departments is Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada

(INAC). Many prefer Indigenous over Aboriginal because they see it as representative of the original peoples in a global sense rather than regionally or nationally. However, some writers use the terms interchangeably.

There are three Aboriginal peoples that are recognized in the Constitution Act, 1982: Indians, Inuit and Métis. Section 35(a) of this Act states, "The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed." Most do not use the term "Indians" in self-reference as First Nation people, although others do. A "status Indian" has a specific legal identity. According to the Government of Canada (INAC, 2013, n.p.) Non-status Indians are First Nations people who have been ineligible for registration under the Indian Act. A non-status Indian may be no less Indigenous than a status Indian, and may identify culturally just as strongly as (or more than) a status Indian. However, because of gender discrimination and the convoluted and ambiguous criteria within the Indian Act (S. 6) as to who is and who is not an Indian, non-status Indians usually have no legal ties to their home reserves and are often excluded from land claims, treaties, and other similar agreements.

Some Indigenous people are adamant that their name is only according to their own language (e.g., in the Mohawk language, all are Onkwehonwe – and not First Nations, or Indigenous, or Aboriginal). In the Anishinaawpe language, most refer to themselves as Anishinaawpe, which means "human being"; the Anishinawpe are called Ojibway in English. The Inuit are home to the Arctic parts of the country. Generally, the Métis are the descendants of people born of relations or intermarriage between Indigenous women and European, mainly French, men; they are of mixed ancestry and have their own history, culture and language, Michif. Not all persons of Indigenous and European origin, however,

are identified as, nor identify with, the Métis. Finally, not all Indigenous people in Canada self-identify as Canadians. They understand the concepts of colonialism and interpret its manifestations as exclusionary of themselves and their accomplishments and do not feel affinity or association with this country.

"First Nation" can also mean the reserve, or the person(s) from that reserve – it never refers to the Inuit or Métis. Reserves are creations of the federal government through the Indian Act, and have no "nation-to-nation" intent as do the treaties that were signed by the various Indigenous groups, mainly in the latter half of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). A reserve is a "tract of land, the legal title to which is vested in Her Majesty, that has been set apart by Her Majesty for the use and benefit of a band." Reserves are under federal jurisdiction and historically devised to separate status Indian people into "waste lands", away from an upcoming respectable society of settlers whose power bases were located in cities and profitable lands, such as the prairies for agriculture (Harris, 2002; Stanger-Ross, 2008). The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is a national advocacy organization on behalf of the First Nations in Canada; it is headed by a National Chief who is elected by its membership chiefs. Not all 634 reserves belong to the AFN, however, but most do.

The article's next section concentrates on specific oppressions that Indigenous students face although there are many more which we do not specifically address in this writing. These tyrannies are overriding themes in literature regarding barriers to self-determination.

Structural Oppressions That Indigenous Students Face

The four structural or systemic oppressions are poverty, the suppression of Indigenous

identities, racism and gender violence; these are salient to practically all Indigenous students. These oppressions are systemic and pose as barriers to Indigenous students' success. For most who face these on a daily basis, these obstacles result in poor educational outcomes. In turn, the consequences of these oppressions further entrench poverty, weaken cultural identities that lead to high suicide rates which, among Indigenous youth, is almost six times greater than that of their non-Indigenous peers (Walls, Hautala & Hurley, 2014). This, as well, exemplifies the failure of education to address deep-seated feelings of inferiority and magnifies a low social status that is already pared down. These obstacles must be adequately understood before they can be addressed; only then can statistics on academic achievement among Indigenous populations start to improve and education can actualize well-being and improve the socio-economic standing and opportunities among Indigenous populations.

Indigenous people in Canada suffer from multiple interlocking oppressions (UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2010). Structural oppression results from various deliberate processes that normalize and legitimize institutional, political, cultural, historical and interpersonal dynamics for the purpose of establishing and stabilizing advantage to a dominant group (Taylor, 2013). It produces and reproduces detrimental outcomes to people outside the dominant group. Because Indigenous students do not, and cannot, belong to entitled groups, they are subject to a hierarchical system of inequity, without the privilege and preferential treatment that is reserved for other Canadians (Baskin, 2007).

Poverty

According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the outcomes of colonialism leaves Indigenous peoples "disproportion-

ately ranked among the poorest of Canadians" (Wilson & MacDonald, 2010, p. 3). What remains of traditional livelihoods among Indigenous populations is still being eroded by government-sanctioned industrial activity and resource usurpation in their traditional territories. Therefore, Indigenous students as a serial collective are unquestionably with low socio-economic capital and few cohesive supportive networks (Anaya, 2004; Lahn, 2012). Many Indigenous students are chronically disadvantaged students; they need at least the first step in helping them succeed of ensuring that their basic needs are met (Bray, 2005). Malnutrition is a reality: inadequate resources can mean poor access to high-quality foods and this directly affects how minds and bodies function (Fieldhouse and Thompson, 2012; Thompson, Wiebe, Gulrukh & Ashram, 2012; United Nations, Food and Agriculture Organization, 2014).

All youth of low-income Indigenous families are at increased risk of academic failure because their homes and reserve communities most often lack the resources to prepare them academically (Cottrell, Preston & Pearce, 2012; Brown & Fraehlich, 2012). Health conditions are appalling, too: a CBC report on Neskantaga First Nation stated, "like dozens of other First Nations in northern Ontario, [Neskantaga] does not have safe tap water, houses are crumbling and over-crowded, and there is no high school, so children as young as 13 must leave home for an education" (Porter, 2016). A high birth rate among Indigenous people (O'Gorman & Pandy, 2015; Romaniuk, 2008; Walker, 2003; Wuttanee & Wien, 2009) combined with acutely inadequate housing means that school-age children and youth most often do not have ideal conditions in which to study and do homework. Families living below the poverty level are also more likely to have children with learning disabilities and develop-

mental delays than those with more disposable income (Cappiello & Gahagan, 2009). The relationship between physical environment and learning is known on a general level in that physical safety and well-being are conducive for ease of learning and for supporting optimum student morale (Gaurdino & Fullerton, 2010; Rahman, 2013; Wiltse, 2014).

Many students who leave home reserves to study find themselves suffering because of inadequate food, shelter and clothing. For example, insufficient housing allowances often mean low-rent accommodation in neighbourhoods that are high-risk for gang recruitment and violence. However, difficult and unfamiliar situations can readily arise and students, being away from home in a strange city, are without the means and skills to cope effectively (Fulford and Thompson, 2013). As well as adjusting to culture shock, they are often without a safe, protective environment that includes a loving family ambiance (CBC, 2016). Mackay and Myles, (1995, p. 170) state that, "the greatest factor affecting student boarders who drop out is simple homesickness. Not only do they pine for family and friends, they also long for their accustomed food and lifestyle".

Indigenous students experience high levels of emotional distress, and in attempts to cope, some engage in negative life-threatening activities. These include alcohol and drug experimentation, which exacerbates suicide ideation and death by suicide and other self-destructive behaviours. In Thunder Bay, Ontario, seven students who left their remote reserve homes to attend secondary school, died over a 10-year-period – their deaths unexplained in the largest inquest in the province's history (White, 2015). These deaths demonstrate the extreme circumstances that Indigenous students encounter when they pursue educational opportunities outside their home communities.

Even within reserve schools, students face difficulties that other Canadian children do not. The quality of on-reserve education is often considered inferior because underfunding results in a shortage of material and equipment, and inadequate curriculum (Anderson & Richards, 2016; Macdonald & Wilson, 2013). Bains (2014, p. 4) states that "unlike in provincial education systems, there are no minimum legislated education standards for on-reserve First Nations students". Particularly in the north, schools on reserves are profoundly underfunded and are so impoverished that, like the entire community, often do not have safe drinking water.

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) states that, "First Nations schools are funded under an outdated Band Operated Funding Formula (BOFF) created in 1987. BOFF does not include essential education components such as technology, First Nations language immersion, sports and recreation, student data management systems or libraries" (2012, p. 2). In 2012, the federal government provided nearly double the funding for a First Nation student "attending provincial or private schools than to those attending First Nations schools" (p. 1)[1]. Regarding the Aboriginal and Northern Development Canada's (AANDC)[2] 2012 Summative Evaluation of the Elementary/Secondary Education Program on Reserve, Drummond and Rosenbluth stated that, "British Columbia provides $2,029 and Quebec provides $5,953 more funding for their students than the federal government provides for First Nation students for instructional services" (2013, p. 10). Further, a 2005 joint study by the AFN and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

1. This funding goes to the institution that the students attend, not to the individual student.
2. This federal department is is now called Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

(INAC)[3] examined the instructional services category of educational funding and found a hefty shortfall to First Nations' reserve schools that was growing over time (AFN, 2012). For both elementary and secondary schooling, the cumulative funding shortfall to FN education was over $3 billion up to 1996, with a shortfall of $620 million in the year 2009-2010 alone (AFN, 2012).

Suppression of Indigenous Identities

Historically, colonial-inspired education was blatantly aimed at molding all Indigenous students into European-acceptable subjects (Deyhle & McCarty, 2007). This has resulted in acute cultural loss and generations of Indigenous people with significantly weakened identities. Contemporary education must now cultivate Indigenous pride and strength in identity because it is essential for student success (Burk, 2007; Lee, 2009) and dramatically increases one's sense of belonging (St. Denis, 2007). Without the security of "belongingness", students are susceptible to social isolation, anomie and loneliness—all of which distract from optimal learning (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). A strong identity facilitates minopimaatisiiwin and the wholistic development of Indigenous youth, particularly because they are situated on the outskirts of prevailing Canadian society and at higher risk of multiple oppressions.

Enhancing collective cultural identity also enhances the likelihood of recognizing opportunities for self-determination and initiates introspection about state dependency (Tauli-Corpuz, 2008). Strong cultural identity is so important that Indigenous cultural practices "became one of the central ways in which courts recognize and protect Indigenous rights under the Constitution" (Eisenberg, 2013, p. 91). Although state-protected cultural rights may be dichotomous to the goals of Indigenous self-determination, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people must both effectively respond and work towards improved coexistence. Developing equity while self-determination is being achieved among the Indigenous peoples can be expedited through appropriate education. Anaya (2004) placed emphasis on the freedom and equality aspects of self-determination; these are translated into freedom from dominant society's racism towards Indigenous people, and freedom from violence through a revision of gender relations.

For true knowledge production and reconciliation, school curricula must include an acknowledgment not only of colonial history and its intent, but also its present-day impacts on Indigenous identity and show the strengths of Indigenous peoples. Curriculum planners can counter the intergenerational processes that have divested the Indigenous peoples of the ways they passed on culture and language by constructing counter-hegemonic, fluid and transformative activities that empower and recognize Indigenous epistemologies. Some of these ways are by language reclamation, Indigenous heritage self-representation, utilizing various media to capture traditional oral storytelling, promoting healing in health-related topics and integrating spirituality into contemporary contexts (Demmert, Soleste Hilberg, Rawlins, Kamanä, French & Johnson, 2014; McCarty & Lee, 2015). Freire (1990, p. 175) stated that, "What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves". Indigenous people have always wanted their children educated and well-prepared economically for the present and the future (Royal Commission on Aborigi-

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3. The previous name for AANDC was Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

nal Peoples, 1996; Saunders & Hill, 2007).

An example of the need for strong identity is from Nunavut where rapid changes have been devastating to all Inuit, especially since the mid- to late-1940s when the Cold War era began. During this period, American military presence and political influence combined with Canadian exploitation of natural resources in the Arctic and, to the detriment of the Inuit, led to their forced relocation into permanent settlements (Diubaldo, 1992). To this day, there are uniquely debilitating effects on boys and men that relate to identity and gender roles from their older so- cieties, for while many Inuit women's and girls' roles have transferred comparatively readily into the newer Western ways, those of men have not. Many Inuit men continue to suffer from subsequent identity dislocation in the contem- porary economic world, and the new images of men from a Western perspective have little to do with life in the far North as they experience it (Stairs, 1992). This means that reinforce- ment of self-confidence and self-worth in Inuit males' identity is difficult, both individually and collectively. There is difficulty in being neither modern nor traditional (Légaré, 2002); transi- tional images often emerge blurred and ambigu- ous (Dorais, 1997; Patrick, 2008).

Looking at outsider views of First Nations, Inuit or Métis is often not helpful, either (Ball & Simpkins, 2004; Seale & Slapin, 2005). This outside perspective tends to be critical and expressed without the understanding of Indig- enous cultural values and does not reflect the role that the foundation of colonialism is play- ing in the lives of these populations (Francis, 1992; Lischke & McNab, 2005). Such ethno- centric portrayals alienate youthful populations from society – whether it is Western or Indig- enous society. Alienation perpetuates struggles for a clear self-identity and eats away at an individual's sense of well-being within every- day social, familial and educational contexts and relationships.

Finding the right place for self-development among Indigenous youth within educational systems that is congruous to their sense of self may be extremely difficult, especially without guidance from Elders, or strong role model- ing. Students need strong social relationships to help build an unshakable cultural identity – this enhances their well-being and sense of individual self-determination (Kulchyski, Ang- marlik, McCaskill & Newhouse, 1999). Self- acceptance and self-awareness in the context of strong cultural identity should be a part of course offerings (Demerath & Mattheis, 2012; Harthun, Dustman, Jumper Reeves, Hecht & Marsiglia, 2008). As well, programs are needed for students to enhance their historical grounding, traditional practices and tangible concepts of their economic futures, and should include the participation of trusted Elders, leaders and mentors.

As part of their education, Indigenous students must teach themselves (and, where possible, each other) how to negotiate success within two epistemologies: their own, and that of the dominant society (Kerwin, 2011). For example, Professor Stonebanks (2008, p. 14) observed:

> *My students, Cree students who are registered in McGill's teacher training program, who when asked the question, "Who discovered North America?" answered "Christopher Columbus". When pressed with the same question again, they repeated Columbus, and then changed their answer to Cartier, trying to give it a more Canadian feeling. Finally, one student said, "Oh, you want the real answer." It was a strong indication of how they felt that their "real answers" were not acceptable in the school setting, even in higher learning.*

This passage indicates that Indigenous students know what is academically correct and factual according to colonial-inspired education (Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004). This clash in knowledge reveals the difference from what they know as truth (Pløger, 2001; Torres, 2010) – that no one "discovered North America" since they themselves had always lived here – and the right answer in state education. Indigenous students also live with the pressure of having to prove they at least empathize with the serial collective called "Canadians" when their life experiences have shown that Canada does not value them and their histories as the First Peoples (Castleden, Daley, Sloan Morgan & Sylvestre, 2013).

Indigenous students are not given formal instruction on how to deal with the long-term suppression of their histories and identities with its corresponding dichotomies and ambiguities in mainstream educational curriculum (Aikenhead, 2001; Harrison, 2007). They are left to cope on their own. Indeed, the EuroCanadian method of addressing Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies has been to relegate them as primitive curiosities and irrelevant in a "modern world" (British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 2002; Howe & Lisi, 2013). This approach is condescending and ill-conceived, but convenient for educators. By virtue of only their identity and as casualties of colonialism, Indigenous students can become unwittingly enmeshed in mental and intellectual contortions because they have learned to be dismissed, not only at a singular, but also as at group levels (Aboriginal Education Research Committee, 2010).

Whole generations of Indigenous people have been discounted. An outcome of this type of empirical knowledge, both formal and informal, creates linkages within the entire People to turbulence from the oppressions into which they were born. Their realities are often overwhelming grief and loss for a heritage and traditions of another distant life that had always provided refuge, structure, knowledge and cultural and spiritual reality (Thompson, Ballard & Martin, 2014). They can now only view that legacy which they would have inherited, had it not been for the onslaught of colonialism, through a dark glass, and never come to live it out.

An essential as spirituality is to minopimaatisiiwin and wholistic development in Indigenous philosophy (Wotherspoon, 2015), it is not given credence in the classroom (Manitoba Education & Youth, 2003; Stonechild, 2016). Most courses, though, can be taught in the context of a rich sense of spiritual place since kinship relationships with the earth and land are fundamental to the students' lives. As such, common Indigenous spiritual worldviews should be reflected in the classroom, on both physical and spiritual levels (Bala & Joseph, 2007; Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2006). Acknowledging the cosmology of the First Peoples demonstrates respect for the belief in the anti-anthropocentric place of humans within Creation and the teachings on rights and responsibilities towards and from Creation (Grieves, 2009; Ritskes, 2011). Indeed, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) Calls to Action Report (2015) states that, "respecting Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination in spiritual matters, including the right to practice, develop, and teach their own spiritual and religious traditions, customs, and ceremonies" (p. 5), and "the need to respect Indigenous spirituality in its own right" (p. 7).

Racism

In Canada, racism towards Indigenous peoples is increasingly documented. Manitoba, in particular, has been identified as being discriminatory against Indigenous peoples with Maclean's designating Winnipeg as "Canada's most racist city" (Macdonald, 2015). By rac-

ism, we adhere to Memmi's explanation:

> *Generalizing definition and valuation of differences, whether real or imaginary to the advantage of the one defining or deploying them and to the detriment of the one subjugated to the act of definition whose purpose is to justify hostility and assault (2000, p. 100)*

As Macdonald (2015) indicates, Indigenous parents' and relatives' anxieties about their children going missing or being murdered is rooted in the violence of racism—particularly because those rates are much higher than for non-Indigenous children. The TRC's Calls to Action Report (2015) identified racism as a key issue and called for anti-racism strategies; key to those in education are on Aboriginal history, the history of colonization, the treaties and Indian residential schools as well as overall inclusive Aboriginal-focused curriculum (TRC, 2015). These educational revisions are necessary to counter the racist discourses and negative stereotypes perpetuated against Indigenous peoples by colonial powers through the media and other means (Rovito & Giles, 2016) because they are damaging to Indigenous students' identities. Certainly, mass media plays a formative role in constructing and reproducing Canadians' perceptions and understandings of the social realities (Knopf, 2010) that significantly contribute to poor self-worth among Indigenous students. These elements are a large and visible part of the structural and institutional racisms that make up the lived realities of Indigenous peoples.

In Canada, the federal Indian Act (1876) legalized racism against what it labelled "status Indians". This Act also established the reserve system, which physically enforced isolation of the First Nations from the rest of the emerging EuroCanadian society, and set

the example for the apartheid regime in South Africa (Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo, 2003; Sayers, MacDonald, Fiske, Newell, George & Cornet, 2001). Long-standing state-approved racializing practices and policies resulted and have situated Indigenous people who make up about 4.3% of the population (Statistics Canada, 2015) as "other" relative to dominant Canadian society (Rhee & Subreenduth, 2006; Schick & St. Denis, 2005).

Racism has become institutionalized in education, evident in the chronically-under-funded education offered in reserve schools (Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013) – sites in which contemporary Indigenous generations have inherited a colonial legacy of active racism (Mills & Clarke, 2009). As well, research is clear that the lack of education and employment opportunities accessible to Indigenous people plays a significant role in relegating Indigenous identities into further racial inferiority (Bernhardt, 2015; Galabuzi, 2008; Lock Kunz, Milan & Schetagne, 2000). In the context of Brade, Duncan and Sokal's statement, "… education is the most frequent vehicle to societal advantages such as wealth and power" (2003, p. 236), Indigenous students are surely at the forefront of racialized educational structures that work at excluding them from the prospect of sharing the advantages offered by the Canadian state (Amadahy & Lawrence, 2009).

While many school districts and public schools recognize the failure of the education system regarding Indigenous academic achievement (Mendelson, 2006), little overall has been established to improve these outcomes, many of which result from racism (B.C. Teachers' Federation Aboriginal Education, 2002; Wane, 2009). Silver and Mallett (2002) report that, "The incidence of overt forms of racism—name-calling and stereotyping, for example—is high. Institutional

forms of racism are common" (p. 3). Elevated high-school drop-out rates are only one of the outcomes of racism against Indigenous people (Gibson, 2015; Huff, 2000). Deyhle (1998) observes that racism impedes Indigenous students' educational and economic opportunities and that "racism is a reality they live with daily, to ignore this is to place responsibility on the individual for identity problems of low self□worth, alienation, and helplessness" (p. 4).

Gender Violence

The rates of gender violence against Indigenous women and girls in Canada is very high. According to Statistics Canada's 2004 General Social Survey (GSS), Indigenous women over 15 years of age are 3.5 times more likely to experience violence than non-Indigenous women. Indigenous women are very susceptible to all forms of gender violence as well as intimate partner violence (IPV): sexual assault, rape, sex trade work, sexual harassment and sex trafficking. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) state (2015, p. 3), "Police-recorded incidents of Aboriginal female homicides and unresolved missing Aboriginal females in this review total 1,181 - 164 missing and 1,017 homicide victims." Also, 24% of Indigenous women reported having been assaulted by a current or former spouse while the corresponding number for non-Indigenous women is 7% (Scrim, 2013). The long-term ill-health outcomes for IPV victims, including children who are the beginning of succeeding generations, are numerous: mental disorders, PTSD (including hypervigilance, heightened anxiety, sleep disturbances, eating disorders), chronic headaches, low self-esteem and poor self-confidence, and addictions (Dutton, 2009; Riel, Languedoc, Brown & Gerrits, 2016; Stampfel, Chapman & Alvarez, 2010).

Gender violence is patriarchal; it enforces control and maintains structural inequalities mostly between partners, through violent behaviours. A frequent type of gender violence is IPV by a man against his female partner (Simister, 2012), but it is also a woman against her male partner. In light of the extremely high incidence of IPV in Indigenous communities (Johnson, 2012; Pedersen, Malcoe & Pulkingham, 2013; Pope, 2004), educating for self-determination in the context of freedom from personal violence is very important.

Violence has always cemented alliances and complicities (Kebede, 2001; Robertson Cremer, 2008). In this case, colonialism initialized a conjoined oppression against women, particularly on reserve lands in relation to the disempowerment of gendered traditions, and the onslaught of misogyny. Turpel (1993) observes that the private and public divisions of gender and power are deeply intertwined with the history of imperialism and colonization, and that violence against women within the home ensures their long-term oppression. For these reasons, Western-based gender roles and understanding the journey of their intrusions into Indigenous cultural territory is important for youth to learn (Emberley, 1996). Youth must be taught that IPV is not traditional to Indigenous cultures and that its roots are in colonialism which found a site for dominance by disrupting the existing structures of Aboriginal populations, such as traditional gender roles (Olsen Harper, 2011). Indeed, the diminished status placement of Indigenous female bodies, are "an important site for achieving colonial rule and male relations of governance" (Emberley, 2001, p. 71). Gender history can help Indigenous youth recognize and unlearn harmful gender stereotypes and help reverse the production of gender that makes male privilege and power appear natural, rather than it being deliberately socially structured, produced and reproduced.

Anderson and Umberson (2001) observe that the accomplishment of gender is perpetuated by "cultural beliefs about underlying and essential differences between women and men, and social structures that constitute and are constituted by these beliefs" (p. 359). Stein (1999) emphasized the importance of teaching about gender violence in schools: "My research over the past two decades on peer-to-peer sexual harassment has confirmed that schools may well be the training grounds for domestic violence through the practice of and permission for sexual harassment" (p. 112). While such insights may be too intense for young children, they can still be involved in identifying gender prescriptions in media with which they are already familiar.

Foundational curricula can be established in earlier schooling so children can sequentially develop and link to deeper gender awareness and understanding for later ages and grades (Grant & Sleeter, 2009). As well, the exploration of various specific Western-based expressions that ground the inferiority and subjugation of women into cultural norms can be informally queried at any time among students (Genz, 2012). The values, ideals and suggestive prods that emerge from popular gendered portrayals meant for children and youth should be seriously examined and questioned. Skilled instructors can help students recognize the existing gender arrangements that enable bullying and violence, particularly in this age of social media which technologically facilitates gendered violence against mostly women and girls and is increasingly accessed by the very young (Henry & Powell, 2015). Maracle (2003) envisions the creation of "safe spaces for both genders to develop" (p. 77) and encourages educators to form environments that foster open and respectful communication between males and females, places that are conducive for further understanding of traditional gender and gender roles.

The legal categorizations of an "Indian" as defined in the Indian Act can become a study in gender discrimination against females that is relevant to all Indigenous communities. Creative teachers can help youth locate themselves within federal legislation, and develop curriculum that is interesting and personally involves students through a study of their placement in the Indian registry. From a broader perspective, such discussions can help students realize the violence of the Indian Act and also the resilience of the First Nations in withstanding the extermination efforts embedded therein. The journey from state-imposed identities to sustaining an internally-derived collective sense of identity must be known by all youth. This is an important part of an educational framework based on self-determination.

A Self-Determination Framework for Education

Educating the mind and life-style towards minopimaatisiiwin is a part of self-determination (Smylie, Olding & Ziegler, 2014); it is land-based and encompasses a people's epistemology, ontology and axiology (Brant Castellano, 2000). Papillon (2008), in his writings about the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee and the Inuit of Nunavik, emphasizes that "quality of life involves more than income and standard of living. For example, a healthy body and environment, as well as a supportive community, are increasingly considered integral to a good life" (p. 5). The concepts of health and well-being among the Whapmagoostui, a Cree First Nation in Quebec, are related directly to the land – specifically, it is the actual living off the land as a daily practice for meeting livelihood needs. Other aspects of well-being are strong social relationships and an unshakable cultural identity. Their own word for "well-being" directly translates as "being alive well" (Adelson,

2000, pp. 14-15). Native historian and philosopher Donald Fixico (2003) discusses the central place that the concept of balance plays in the interpretations of this word:

> Balance is between two things or more and it is the purpose in life for American Indians whose philosophy is inclusive of all things in the universe. At least five kinds of balance exist: (1) balance within one's self, (2) balance within the family, (3) balance within the community or tribe, (4) balance with external communities, including other tribes and the spiritual world, and (5) balance with the environment and the universe. (p. 49)

Education has always been the means through which cultural understandings transfer from generation to generation (Terán Maigua & Gutierrez-Gomez, 2016); among Indigenous peoples, it can help reverse colonial processes and move towards minopimaatisiiwin – what activist and educator LaDuke calls "continuous rebirth" (1999, p. 51). Brady (1997) discusses several activities that are germane to educational systems that lead to Indigenous self-determination: she identifies the overarching principle of controlling or governing an education system as the most salient of these. From historic times when the First Peoples were autonomous and self-determining, Indigenous people had been skeptical of European-based educational systems because of their own views about the purpose of education. For example, in 1744, the chief of the Iroquois Confederacy, Red Jacket (Seneca), was offered the gift of having six of his sons educated at Williamsburg, Virginia, a highly-prestigious educational facility in the EuroAmerican society. His response, from Carroll (Ed., 1997) was:

> We are convinc'd, therefore, that you mean to do us Good by your Proposal; and we thank you heartily But you, who are wise, must know that different Nations have different Conceptions of things; and you will not therefore take it amiss if our Ideas of this kind of Education happened not to be the same as yours. We have had some Experience of it Several of our Young People were formerly brought up at the Colleges of the Northern Provinces; they were instructed in all your Sciences; but, when they came back to us, they were bad Runners, ignorant of every means of living in the Woods, unable to bear either Cold or Hunger, knew neither how to build a Cabin, take a Deer, nor kill an Enemy, spoke our Language imperfectly, were therefore neither fit for Hunters, Warriors nor Counsellors, they were totally good for nothing. We are, however, not the less oblig'd by your kind Offer, who' we decline accepting it; and, to show our grateful Sense of it, if the Gentlemen of Virginia will send us a Dozen of their Sons, we will take care of their Education; instruct them in all we know, and make Men of them. (p. 240)

This passage shows the Chief's belief that a mainstay of education was to provide youth with the capacity to meet their socio-economic needs in their own homelands. The graduates of the Williamsburg college, however, were not taught the skills to meet their basic livelihood needs from the land as their forefathers always had. Specifically in reference to graduates of the new system who could not build a cabin, kill a deer for food or defend themselves and their families—their outside education failed them and their entire People. Their cultural knowledge was also lacking since they, "spoke our Language imperfectly", and language is

imperative in the formation of self-identity (Corbiére, 2000; Norris, 2011). Education, from an historic Indigenous perspective, was meant to equip individuals with the strategies to live well within one's cultural heritage, and to show respect to those with different conceptions of life (Ma Rhea, 2015; Regan, 2011; Stairs, 1992).

Self-determination includes the implementation of multiple traditional cultural practices into education and community efforts (Ladner, 2009) and considers cultural and linguistic priorities (Audlin & Abbott, 2004: Ballard, 2012; Ballard, Klatt & Thompson, 2012; Kulchyski, McCaskill & Newhouse, 1999; Wall & Arden, 2006). Because self-determination is intertwined with respectful processes for Indigenous knowledge and knowing, it is imperative for sustaining socio-economic development, building capacity and fostering resilience. Indigenous governance has been defined as "the way in which a people lives best together" or "the way a people has structured their society in relationship to the natural world . . . seeing themselves as a part of the circle of life, not as superior beings who claim dominance over other species and other humans" (Ladner, 2003, p. 70).

Conclusion

Considering the impact of all decisions on the next seven generations is a tenet of the Great Law of the Haudenosaunee, and a governing ethic of many First Peoples in Canada. Pertaining to education, Indigenous teaching and learning must be re-conceptualized and re-imagined in such a way that the next seven generations will reap well-being and, according to the Anishinaawpe people, minopimaatisiiwin. Clearly, addressing the multiple oppressions which impose barriers for Indigenous students in post-secondary and all education will result in higher educational achievement

and vastly improve minopimaatisiiwin among Indigenous individuals and communities. On a national level, all Canadians must be conscious of changing the dynamics that perpetuate the conditions that lead to the dire socio-economic status existing in most Indigenous communities today. Support, advocacy and changed environments are needed by Indigenous youth as they set out to make their way in the world, for they are part of the cycle of perpetuating the seven generations. Indigenous youth epitomize the will and resilience of all Indigenous peoples to survive the measures of colonialism, and to thrive into the future.

Strengthening personal cultural identity is vital to minopimaatisiiwin, which is cultivated by wholistic learning, and this is recognized by many youth living on reserves. In an interview conducted by the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), for example, INAC Minister Bennett stated, regarding her visit to Attawapiskat, a First Nation that suffers chronically from numerous social problems, including high suicide rates:

> *What was so clear was that youth wanted to focus on identity, their opening remarks were about their identity, about secure personal cultural identity, how they wanted to be back in touch with their culture, they wanted to be out on the land, they wanted to get the feel of fishing, and hunting and being able to live on the land . . . bringing back hope and bringing a way forward." (April 20, 2016)*

Education must actively involve the land-based, culturally-compatible practices that have always been the foundation of self-determination among the First Peoples. These ways-of-doing, beliefs and principles are an antidote that, over time, will address the oppressions that prevent Indigenous students' strong

educational achievement. Only by restoration of ancient traditions in a current context can Indigenous people renew their relationships with the land – a life-enhancing outcome that strengthens communities, and veers away from the ills of the grossly inadequate education that is offered to today's Indigenous people.

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