# In the Interest of Reconciliation in Education:

# Inclusive Indigenous Content and Modifications

# to the Ontario Social Studies and History Curriculum from 1998 to 2023

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Masters Thesis

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**“If you believe in Reconciliation, what are you doing about it?… There cannot be Reconciliation in the absence of justice.” ~ Romeo Saganash** (OpenParliament, 2019)

**“Education got us into this mess and education will get us out of it.”**

**~ The Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair**

(National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education, 2021)

**“The oppressor can never be trusted as historian. Our task is preservation. Collective memory is a liberation practice. Remember and tell it.”**
**~ Cole Arthur Riley** (Riley, 2022)

**“The conqueror writes history, they came, they conquered and they wrote.”**
**~ Miriam Makeba** (Makeba, 1969)

Dedicated with deep respect to:

**Aurel Joseph Pinsonneault Chauvin**
(June 2, 1935 - May 30, 2024)
&
**Donna Jean Morrison Garant**
(February 12, 1940 - November 26, 2020)

*Your knowledge and stories will live on through us all as a foundation for our future.*

*We are your breathing legacies.*

**The Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair (Mazina Giizhik)** 
January 24, 1951 - November 4, 2024

*Chi-miigwech*

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**Abstract**

The Ontario Social Studies and History curriculum aids students in developing skills, knowledge, understanding, and attitudes that will benefit them in the classroom, their communities, and beyond. Nonetheless, there are disparities in what should be emphasized or included and which historical perspectives matter. Teachers have to deliver Indigenous content to students respectfully and thoroughly yet are provided with few tools and opportunities to do so. While the Ontario Social Studies and History curriculum includes Indigenous histories, its content is limited, and its use in the classroom solely depends on how knowledgeable and comfortable teachers are with the topic. Educators have expressed concern about teaching Indigenous topics while unprepared, under-resourced, and lacking sufficient time and support to convey the material to students effectively. While the Ontario Ministry of Education states it is doing all it can to create an inclusive curriculum covering Indigenous history, the depth of its Indigenous content has yet to be thoroughly examined. Using curriculum design theory and a two-eyed seeing approach, this research examines all elementary Social Studies and History curriculum documents from 1998 to 2023 and analyzes how the Ministry presents Indigenous content to teachers for use in the classroom. My findings show that while Indigenous content in the Social Studies curriculum has improved significantly between 1998 and 2023, gaps remain in key ideas and comprehensive content that would aid in student retention and understanding of Canadian and Indigenous history, as well as Indigenous experiences, perspectives, and subject matter. The curriculum does not adequately cover the impacts of residential schools, forced assimilation, segregation, and other atrocities against Indigenous and other minorities. Canadian history and Indigenous relationships are whitewashed, encouraging misrepresentation, omission, and marginalization while perpetuating biases and stereotypes, minimizing Indigenous voices and creating disparities in the knowledge of Indigenous history.

List of Abbreviations

OME…..... Ontario Ministry of Education
TRC…..... Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNDRIP…..... United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Keywords:

agnotology
Calls To Action
Canada
cultural humility
curriculum
education,
educational pedagogy
history
historical thinking
Ministry Of Education
Ontario
social practice of remembrance
Truth And Reconciliation Commission
Two-Eyed Seeing
UNDRIP
United Nations

**Please Note**:

*I have deliberately chosen to capitalize Indigenous-related words and, where permissible or applicable, write colonial ones in lowercase throughout my thesis.*

Decolonize
eurocentric
european
Indigeneity
Indigenous
Reconciliation
settler

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# Chapter One

## Introduction: Reconciliation in Education

My research interests explore the representation of Indigenous frameworks, knowledge, histories, and presence in the educational system and Social Studies and History curricula. Additionally, I examine how colonialism and governmental policies fuel internal prejudices, biases, and ignorance of Indigenous lived history and how the current curriculum minimizes Indigenous impacts on Canadian history.

This study focuses on the evolution of the Ontario Social Studies and History curriculum from 1999 to 2023 and the provincial government's approach to Indigenous education and content. I also explore the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action*, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*, and the provincial government's steps toward addressing Reconciliation in their curriculum and policy designs. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has challenged all areas of government related to education to implement the *Calls to Action* in a way that is relevant to teaching and learning, and meaningful to all students going through the education system.

My interest in this topic is personal. I am a daughter, sister, granddaughter, auntie, lifelong student, and an educator. I was born and raised in Waawiiye'adinong-ziibing (the place where the river bends), the traditional territories of the Three Fires Confederacy (Ojibwe, Potawatomi, Odawa) and the Wendat in Deerbrook, Ontario, in the middle of a bird conservation area, on Lake St Clair.

My family's known history on Turtle Island[1] begins in 1665 when the first man on my mother's side, François Pinsonneau, arrived in Contrecoeur, Nouveau France, and married a Fille du Roi, Anne LePère. From this point on, my grandparents have stated that the men in my family

[1] Turtle Island is a name for the continent of North America. It appears in many Indigenous creation stories, where the turtle upholds the world, symbolizing life, Indigenous identity, culture, independence, and deep respect for the environment (Robinson, 2018).

married Indigenous women and owned farms, making their way down to Rochester Township, settling in the towns of Pointe-Aux-Roches (Stoney-Point) and Deerbrook, Ontario, where we continue to reside to this day.

On my father's side, my great-grandfather Alphonse Caza and his family were said to be Haudenosaunee. My grandmother's ancestor, Michel Boudrot, arrived in Canada in 1642, where they moved from La Rochelle, France, to Port Royale, Acadia. Though family ancestry documents list that both sides of my grandmother's ancestors married Indigenous women, who they are, their communities, and their stories have been lost with time.

My great-grandfather, Phillipe Chauvin, believed the day you stopped learning was the day you died. He also believed in the importance of language preservation. He instilled these beliefs in his children, and they in their descendants. My parents insisted on raising us to speak French and English, and emphasized the importance of getting an education, stating that even though we are poor, even if we could not afford to pay for an education, nothing could take away the lessons and knowledge we learn.

Being raised with a hushed history of my Indigenous ancestors, with little beyond that they existed, much of my Indigenous knowledge came from choosing to educate myself through talking to family and pouring over ancestry documents, history books, encyclopaedias, and eventually, in high school, the internet. My mother's father told me about children running into the forests or hiding in drainage ditches to hide from Indian agents but rarely said more beyond being raised by his grandmother, an Indigenous woman named Maria Sylvestre. Whenever I asked my father's mother about her Indigenous side, she would immediately silence me and tell me it was unsafe to discuss. Often, she said to tell everyone that we were French. Upon her death, I inherited her bow and arrow, rattle and a single quill earring (like a secret nesting doll,

they had been hidden in a cloth bag, then in two other bags, and placed in the deepest corner of her closet).

Growing up, I attended three different Catholic elementary schools. Teachers in these schools often skipped past anything about pre-contact history, preferring to focus on post-colonial events in Canada. As a child, I was often silenced in class when calling out pan-Indigeneity or misrepresented history. I distinctly remember raising my hand and asking the teacher why she did not teach about the history before colonization. Her reply was, "the land had no history before we arrived." I was twelve. Given the limited content in the 1990s curriculum, I do not blame her for her statements, knowing the lack of Indigenous content and knowledge that she herself would have learned going through school. Educators in my formative years pressed on in lessons featuring european explorers and what was seen as the positive attributes of colonization. More than once, I was removed from history class for speaking against what the teacher told us.

I attended elementary school between 1991 and 2001 and high school from 2001 to 2006, prior to the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action* report and subsequent education curricular changes. My second university, Lakehead, was the only institution I ever attended that recognized the traditional land on which it operates. Even with its extensive historical Indigenous environment, the university where I received my B.A. in English Literature and Creative Writing between 2009 to 2014 did not openly recognize or honour Indigenous communities. To my knowledge, it still does not.

I began my teaching career as an English Language Learning (ELL) student-teacher in 2011. Since then, I have taught ages three through eighty-three in a variety of curriculums and subject areas, in Windsor, Seoul, Calgary, Pikangikum, Fort Frances, and Thunder Bay. Although

many of my lessons came from textbooks and lesson plans provided, I ensured that I inserted Indigenous content in many areas that would otherwise be omitted or ignored. In a history lesson about World War II, I made certain that my students knew that over three thousand Indigenous soldiers volunteered in the conflict. During science lessons about inventions with my high school students in South Korea, I discussed inventions by Indigenous people that are still used in some way today. Many of these lessons produced lengthy discussions with students who asked why this information was left out in prior grades. In some cases, students admitted that they assumed only white people had done or invented the specific thing discussed in the lesson. This experience led to my conviction that educators must ensure students' awareness of the contributions made by Indigenous people, people of colour, minorities, and others to avoid the continued erasure of their historical and ongoing contributions.

In my experience as both teacher and student-teacher, I observed that Indigenous history and education were no different than a "theme" lesson, easily put on the back burner for more eurocentric lessons like post-contact settler history, English, or other subjects. I recognized that the onus was on the teachers rather than the curriculum designers to make Indigenous history and education core subjects. This is an issue about which I have fought school administrators head-on on more than one occasion.

Through my own experiences both personal and professional in the Ontario school system, I believe that all students should be taught and exposed to the lived Indigenous history of the land known as Canada. The education system should develop an understanding of an alternative narrative to the one typically presented in the curriculum, thereby challenging the dominant ways of knowing through the reclamation and restoration of Indigenous knowledge embedded within the curricula.

I am very passionate about education rights and the inclusion of Indigenous education as a core subject. Having personally experienced the challenges of pan-Indigeneity and the colonial erasure of Indigenous history, I strive to foster open classrooms that engage with historical events that continue to affect Indigenous people. My goal is to reinforce the necessity for all Canadians to adopt a Decolonizing stance on education at a systemic level, particularly by advocating for governmental changes in Parliament.

In examining this complex issue, my research will define Reconciliation through a combination of personal experiences, scholarly perspectives, and researchers within the context of education and the Indigenization of educational spaces. A personal experience that aided my abilities to engage with the complexities of Reconciliation took place on October 18, 2022, during a quill and birch bark medallion workshop at the University of Lakehead Thunder Bay's *Gakina Ndinawemaaganag Lounge*. What began as a simple creative gathering turned into an insightful discussion on the meaning of Reconciliation in the context of our educational system.

During this event, I shared with a classmate from my *Foundations of Indigenous Education* course that my thesis would focus on the question, "How possible is Reconciliation with our current education curriculum and system?". This sparked a thought-provoking conversation among the group of women present, during which many voiced their personal views on Reconciliation. One emphasized that, "Reconciliation assumes there was a basis of peace in the beginning," while another argued that the concept of Reconciliation is flawed because it assumes mutual fault, even though Indigenous people were simply living their lives when settlers began colonizing Turtle Island. Others then asked, "how does one Reconcile with those who oppressed and abused them through genocide?" and, "how can there be Reconciliation when the land was built on the blood and bodies of children through residential schools?"

This conversation reinforced the need to critically examine the term “Reconciliation” in relation to education and colonial histories, especially within educational systems that continue to perpetuate colonial ideologies. It also highlighted the urgency of Reconciliation being more than just symbolic gestures or token efforts. Rather, it must be understood as part of a broader effort to dismantle the structures that have long silenced Indigenous knowledge systems. The very nature of these discussions brings me back to a key question of my research: Can true Reconciliation be achieved within a system built on colonialism, or must we imagine a new concept altogether?

This thesis will examine truth in the context of Indigenous content and education, with attention to how they are framed through the Ontario Ministry of Education’s (OME) Social Studies and History curriculum. By examining existing research, identifying gaps in knowledge and understanding, and charting a path forward, I aim to contribute to a more inclusive, honest, and Decolonized educational environment. My goal is to create an open educational environment where all students can grow with complete knowledge and understanding of Canada’s history, including the lived experiences of Indigenous people and communities.

This thesis will explore Indigenous history and perspectives in the educational context using a critical Indigenous lens and a two-eyed seeing approach based on curriculum design theory. Incorporating Decolonization methods that emphasize Indigenous rights to reclaim dignity, power, language, customs, and ways of knowing that are fundamental to their otherness, a critical Indigenous lens enables the stories of the oppressed that have been suppressed, glazed over, or silenced to come to the forefront (Smith, 2012; Snow et al., 2016). The two-eyed seeing approach involves a collaborative use of Indigenous and western knowledge for the benefit of all (Bartlett et al.., 2012). The research will investigate how provincial education systems present,

discuss, and teach Indigenous content to students by examining primary and secondary documents and how the education system shapes students' base knowledge, biases, and belief systems about Indigenous people, knowledge, and history. This approach will help to clarify the interplay between Indigenous and western perspectives in curriculum design, paving the way for more meaningful educational reform.

Since many of the education issues covered in this research are systemic, I propose that it is the responsibility of the provincial governments to mandate accurate, equitable, and honest academic curricula that effectively teach comprehensive, locally created content with accurate, honest, and transparent Indigenous perspectives accessible through mandatory, not optional, textbooks and courses. Analyzing the context and discussion around Indigenous frameworks, pedagogy, and knowledge in the Ontario Social Studies and History curriculum allows me to engage with the educational and governmental history in a way that allows deeper contexts to emerge, such as how Indigenous content in education affects the public perception, potential, and value of Indigenous communities and people.

## Context and Rationale

Marie Battiste states that colonial ignorance persists due to its societal institutionalization, enabled through all systemic levels of politics, law, and education, allowing the epistemically privileged to deny Indigenous involvement in its creation, maintenance, or evolution (Battiste, 2013). Canada's origin story, meticulously framed within the colonial-settler narrative, shifts Indigenous lived experiences into a palatable, friendly relationship with religious overtones, that praises eurocentric knowledge (Moreton-Robinson, 2015). Academically, this narrative paints a pleasant picture that allows for patriotism and pride in the Canadian

population's mindset. However, since the release of the October 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Dussault and Erasmus, 1996), the discussion surrounding Indigenous history and Canada's part in "cultural genocide" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015A, p.3) has shifted.

Reconciliation gained ground in the debate over Canada's past and present treatment of Indigenous people and communities with the discovery of unmarked graves in June 2021, a discovery unsurprising to Indigenous communities but previously not acknowledged by the Canadian government (Taylor, 2021). As the topic of Indigenous history gains traction in everyday conversation, much focus surrounds the educational approaches and the lack of information in Ontario schools and curricula (Shmon, 2021; Brown, 2023). By connecting with Indigenous groups in workshops, building understanding and connections between education, Indigenous educators, and Indigenous perspectives, these "personal connections provided the important opportunity [for educators] to broaden knowledge, to dispel persistent stereotypes and misconceptions, and to build meaningful connections with [Indigenous] peers and communities" (Dion et al., 2010, 47).

The exclusion of Indigenous history, conceptual frameworks, and knowledge from euro-western curricula and discussions across all educational levels is one topic of concern in education development, as is the lack of available resources for educators interested in teaching Indigenous content accurately (Schaefli et al., 2018; Dion et al., 2010; Milne, 2017). The lived experiences of Indigenous students compared to their settler counterparts should be considered when analyzing the widening achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, frequently attributed to a lack of educational competence through racist and prejudicial

beliefs (Dion et al., 2010). History, culture, and power constantly interact to shape cultural identities and worldviews (St. Denis, 2007).

Indigenous worldviews at present are shaped by the legacy of racism and colonialism. Within educational institutions, one of the most significant barriers to the integration of traditional Indigenous cultures, is the racism of educators, in that "teachers have lower academic and behavioral expectations for Students of Color than for White students, provide more negative feedback, and employ more punitive disciplinary actions" (Pagán, 2022, p1). Indigenous people currently experience incredibly high levels of incarceration, drug addiction, and academic failure as a consequence of colonial educational practices and forced assimilation into western society (Kirmayer et al., 2000). Due to the sterilization of colonial history in school textbooks and the cursory treatment of Indigenous history and culture, many Canadians are unaware of the magnitude of the historical attempts of assimilation and colonialism's effects (Hatcher & Bartlett, 2010).

A push for systemic change began with the 2007 *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), a "universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous [P]eoples of the world and it elaborates on existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms as they apply to the specific situation of Indigenous [P]eoples" (United Nations, 2007, p.28). This unprecedented document details a need for the human rights of Indigenous peoples to be respected and recognized by the government systems and those in power. One hundred and forty-four countries voted in support of UNDRIP, with the exception of Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. These countries rejected the Declaration because they believed that the degree of autonomy acknowledged for Indigenous peoples in UNDRIP would undermine the sovereignty of their

states, particularly with regard to land disputes and resource extraction affecting Indigenous territories (United Nations, 2007). The Canadian Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development for the Conservative government, at the time, Chuck Strahl, argued that "By signing on, you default to this document by saying that the only rights in play here are the rights of First Nations. And, of course, in Canada, that's inconsistent with our Constitution" (Edwards, 2007). Since UNDRIP's inception in the 1980s, Canadian Indigenous representatives have taken active roles in its development, with British Columbia as the first province to adopt UNDRIP into law in November 2019. The bill to establish UNDRIP as law across Canada was passed in Parliament and received Royal Assent on June 21, 2021 (Government of Canada, 2023A).

Stemming from this was the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and their eventual *Calls to Action*. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission *Calls to Action* 62 and 63 focus on education rights, recommending that all students be educated about Treaties, Indigenous rights, cultures, and perspectives. Today, only seven provinces and territories include one of the four elements from the *Calls to Action* report in their curricular outcomes, with British Columbia and Saskatchewan implementing more than one (People for Education, 2023B). These seven provinces implementing at least one of the recommended topics mandate learning only in a select few grades, limiting the development of students' more comprehensive knowledge concerning understanding and respecting Indigenous history, knowledge, and cultures (People for Education, 2023B). In contrast, Ontario and Quebec do not adequately cover any of the four elements within their curriculum (People for Education, 2023B). The proportion of elementary and secondary schools offering Indigenous education opportunities shows higher implementation rates in high schools than in elementary schools (People for Education, 2023B).

In 2016, the Liberal Ontario government pledged to work with Indigenous partners and residential school survivors to revise the elementary and secondary-level curriculum. The first phase of revisions focused on Grade 4-6 social studies, Grade 7-8 and Grade 10 history (Maharaj, 2018). The second phase would include more Indigenous content in Grades 1-3 Social Studies, Grade 9 geography and additional content in high school subjects (Maharaj, 2018). However, these revisions, meant to begin in 2018, stalled in 2016. After a 2018 change putting the Progressive Conservatives in power, the new government abandoned the Liberals' commitment to collaborate to integrate required Indigenous content into the elementary and secondary school curricula (Maharaj, 2018). Then in October 2022, the OME announced that they planned for curriculum rewrites to conclude by September 2023 (OME, 2022B), despite removing Indigenous land connection frameworks from the Science curriculum in 2022, as further explained in Chapter 5.

The Ontario government continues to claim publicly its commitment to strengthening connection between Indigenous lived experiences, perspectives, knowledge, and ways of knowing and educational curricula despite canceling the revision sessions (Government of Ontario, 2021B). The continuous back and forth in implementing Indigenous content into the curriculum shows a damaging trend reducing the importance of Indigenous communities, histories, pedagogy, and knowledge within the educational and governmental systems. Reconciliation and Indigenous perspectives are beneficial to all Canadians to ensure an accurate and thorough education that confronts the legacy of residential schools, bridges the gaps in Indigenous content, eliminates instructional barriers, supports Indigenous cultures, and heals Indigenous-settler relationships.

Based on my own educational journey as a student and teacher, I investigated what additional work was required to meet the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action* and *the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*' objectives for Ontario (and Canada) to achieve Reconciliation. Using a critical Indigenous lens and two-eyed seeing approach in conjunction with the western curriculum design theory, I compared Indigenous content and representation within Ontario's Social Studies and History curriculum documents from 1998 to the present day, focusing on their representation of Indigenous knowledge and Canadian history.

My research explored the past and present euro-western Indigenous portrayals and their relevance to Indigenous knowledge and frameworks as a means to find a more balanced perspective where colonial knowledge and Indigenous knowledge might harmonize to create an accurate history of Canada through the concept of two-eyed seeing. With this study, I hoped to provide insight into Indigenous knowledge and lived history absent in colonial narratives, and to provide a rationale for Reconciliation in education while promoting a curriculum that is inclusive, diverse, and holistic in its approach to a contemporary, socially just education system.

**Research Questions**

My research sought to add another voice to the topic of Indigenous education content while exploring how Indigenous portrayal in formative years affected the perception of Indigenous people and the government's steps toward Reconciliation. Specifically, this research asked broadly:

1. How possible is Reconciliation in the Ontario education system and with the Social Studies and History curriculum as it has developed until now?

2. How close have Ontario's Social Studies and History curricula come to meeting the TRC's *Calls to Action*, and UNDRIP's recommendation, since 2000, and to achieving Reconciliation as they define it?

3. What changes to the Ontario Social Studies and History curriculum might be most effective to achieve the goals of Reconciliation and to start to repair the complicated relationship between Indigenous people and Canada's colonial past?

The underlying goal of my thesis was to explore the positionality of the Ontario education system concerning Reconciliation and the history of what is now Canada.

Guiding me through these questions was an aim to explore Canadian understanding of Indigenous history and where it was lacking, and to aid in redesigning and reconstructing a new Social Studies and History curriculum that encompassed lived experiences and the true history of Indigenous people and communities. Through this redrawing of Canadian history, I hoped that educators might find my research valuable in the implementation of Indigenous Social Studies and History topics in the classroom. I hoped to ensure that teachers had supports in place that might enable them to implement these needed curricular changes through a conversation about the curriculum, how it shaped societal perception, and how to better approach complex topics relating to the formation of Canada as a colonial country.

# Chapter Two

## Methodologies

This research seeks to examine the Ontario government's commitment to Reconciliation by exploring its approaches to education and curriculum development with regard to effectively meeting the TRC's *Calls to Action* and UNDRIP's recommendations. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada defined Reconciliation as "establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples" across Turtle Island with an "awareness of the past, an acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015C, p.6-7).

The broad focus of my research aims to answer the question, "How possible is Reconciliation with the current Ontario education system and History and Social Studies curriculum?" In this thesis, I will investigate how the curriculum affects Indigenous positionality in Ontario's publicly funded school system and how it impacts Indigenous perception across Canada. I will also explore how the curriculum presents Canadian history in contrast to its reality; and the systemic biases and barriers that are buried within and still affect all Canadians today. Using a critical Indigenous lens applied to curriculum design theory with a two-eyed seeing approach, this thesis allows me to explore Indigenous history and perspectives within the educational context. The Two-Eyed Seeing approach "refers to learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together for the benefit of all" (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 335).

Joseph (2011) states that considering curriculum as culture provides for a more holistic

understanding of education, not only as planned curricular material but as individuals' lived experiences and their related importance. This enables educators to challenge the assumption of curriculum as a single reality, allowing them to comprehend curriculum as profoundly shaped by culture; hence, doing curricular inquiry means being aware of ideologies that define what is considered normal, alternative, or inconceivable.

Curriculum design theory centers around the creation of an overall course blueprint, mapping content to the proposed learning objectives, including how to develop a course outline and determining the foundations required to build the course. At the center of this is a psychological model for how individuals learn, and an objective portrayal of how knowledge and skills transfer from theory into practice (Luke et al., 2013). Curriculum theory is essentially how an institution decides what is worth learning and teaching and how this learning will be measured. While pedagogy and curriculum theory are closely related, curriculum explains how people choose what to teach and learn, whereas pedagogy focuses on how people teach and learn. In short, curriculum design is education's what, who, and why, whereas pedagogy is how the information is explored and presented.

Shizha (2014) describes the education system as deeply dependent on a colonial and eurocentric structure which presents Indigenous history through a political sieve that promotes the marginalization of epistemological diversity. Curricular knowledge is contextual, depending on geographical and historical places and events, and supports various educational goals (Joseph, 2011). Shizha’s answer to this curricular problem is curriculum in action, "one of the most powerful concepts in curriculum theory" (Shizha, 2014, p. 114). Curriculum in action focuses on all elements of school life, teaching knowledge based on student experiences and questioning curricular prescriptivism (Shizha, 2014). To successfully Indigenize the curriculum, it must be

adapted to reflect Indigenous cultural and linguistic traditions as defined by Indigenous peoples, as well as Indigenous epistemologies, axiologies, and ontologies (Joseph, 2011; Kanu, 2011; Shizha, 2014). If the Indigenous culture curriculum knowledge and practices result in quantifiable improved academic engagement, assessment, and student achievement, then the curricular culture is more likely to stay in the school (Joseph, 2011). Indigenizing the curriculum requires educators' approaches and instructional techniques to be as significant as student academic successes. This is accomplished through instructional layers that include Indigenous knowledge as a habit, not an afterthought (Kanu, 2011). It must become part of the educator's instructional habits regarding lesson preparation, resource collection, development, and implementation.

In terms of Indigenous content, the Ontario curriculum examines which colonial notions influence how history is taught, remembered, and presented. Education is political, the curriculum content dictates a culture's concept of truth and what knowledge is passed down through the generations (Shizha, 2014). "Curriculum theory and research provide ample theoretical tools for debating and contesting 'whose knowledge should count': whose versions of human wisdom and knowledge should and can be made to count in teaching and learning" (Luke et al., 2013, p.2). Using the curriculum design theory approach enables a critical analysis of educational history through the development and presentation of historical and current curricula regarding Indigenous content. Through the use of, and engagement with, primary and secondary documents, I am able to explore and dissect how the provincial education systems present, discuss, and teach Indigenous content to students, in turn shaping the students' base knowledge, biases, and belief systems regarding Indigenous people, knowledge, and history.

My research will use the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action,* specifically those concerning education, as lenses through which to view public school curricula. Both of these documents create an essential pathway towards achieving and supporting Reconciliation. The United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) provides a global framework that outlines the collective and individual rights of Indigenous peoples' survival, dignity, and well-being (United Nations, 2007). It also enhances existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms to suit specific circumstances. In 2007, with four countries voting against (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States of America) and 11 abstaining, 144 members of the General Assembly of Nations adopted The United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) to address historical injustices and protect and promote Indigenous rights, cultures, languages, lands, and resources (United Nations, 2007). It highlights self-determination, cultural preservation, and meaningful participation in decisions affecting Indigenous communities. By 2016, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States of America reversed their positions and expressed support for UNDRIP (United Nations, 2021). In 2021, UNDRIP received Royal Assent and the Canadian Government and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis collaborated to implement the UN Declaration based on Reconciliation, healing, and cooperative relations (Government of Canada, 2023B).

UNDRIP aims to ensure Indigenous peoples enjoy and benefit from the same human rights as non-Indigenous peoples, addressing the historical denial of self-determination and related rights. Its purpose is not to privilege Indigenous peoples with unique rights or give rights not already enjoyed by non-Indigenous people but to overcome systemic disadvantages and

achieve equality. This framework is the basis for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action* report.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to preserve the history of the residential school system, educate Canadians about the injustices that transpired, and develop the Calls *to Action* to start the healing process. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission created 94 Calls *to Action* to aid in the path towards Reconciliation, eleven specifically geared towards Reconciliation in education. Of these eleven, three have yet to start, four have stalled, and only four are in progress (Yellowhead Institute, 2023). These Education *Calls to Action*, numbers 6–12 under Legacy, address the educational inequalities and inequities experienced by Indigenous children. *Calls to Action* 62 through 65 focus on Reconciliation by including Indigenous people's worldviews, knowledge, societal contributions, and cultures in Canadian education.

Calls to Action numbers 7, 10, 12, 62, and 63 each focus on a request for the federal government to draft new culturally appropriate and relevant Indigenous curricula content with consent and collaboration of Indigenous people and communities as a means to "eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015C, p. 2). This curriculum should include Indigenous language courses (Calls to Action #10), should respect and educate about Treaties (Calls to Action #10 & #62), and should allow for parental and community input, control, and accountability (Calls to Action #10). In addition, it should contain culturally appropriate early childhood education programs (Calls to Action #12), Finally, the document should feature age-appropriate and best practices curriculum content regarding residential schools, and Indigenous contributions to Canada both historically and contemporary for students in

Kindergarten through Grade 12 (Calls to Action #62 & #63) (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015C). Call to Action 63 also includes identifying and addressing educator and teacher training needs related to these curricular changes (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015C).

Numbers 8, 9, 10, 11, 62, and 64 in the *Calls to Action* address the funding disparities with regards to Indigenous students and education on and off reserves (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015C). These call for: funding towards Indigenous education on and off reserves (*Calls to Action* #8); an annual report openly published comparing Indigenous funding for education on and off reserves, including a comparison with non-Indigenous funding, income, and educational attainments (*Calls to Action* #9); funding to identify and eliminate the education achievement gaps (*Calls to Action* #10); adequate funding for First Nations students pursuing post-secondary education (*Calls to Action* #11); funding for Indigenous schools and post-secondary teacher-candidate training to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in the classroom (*Calls to Action* #62); and funding to denominational schools to provide Indigenous content including Indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices in collaboration with Indigenous Elders (*Calls to Action* #64) (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015C).

Lastly, *Calls to Action* 64 and 65 request that the federal government establish senior-level positions in government committed to implementing Indigenous content in education. They also recommend a multi-year funded national research program in collaboration with Indigenous people, post-secondary institutions, educators, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, as well as its partners, in order to advance the understanding of Reconciliation (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015C). In the eight years

since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission presented its *Calls to Action* to Canada, none of the calls relating to education have been fully implemented (Yellowhead Institute, 2023). Indigenous Watchdog's information regarding the *Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action* highlights education as the area with the least current and valid information, largely due to the lack of data provided by the Canadian government (Sinclair, 2023). In total, 13 of the 94 Calls to Action have been completed since 2015 (Yellowhead Institute, 2023).

The data I reviewed for my thesis was drawn from the five curriculum documents focusing on *The Ontario Curriculum: Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6; History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8*, spanning the years from 1998 to the present. The other government documents, policies, and statements I have included are easily accessible through Canadian Government and Parliamentary websites and archives. They consist of government released reports about their actions implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's education *Calls to Action*, education policies, news releases, and other government released reports on their actions regarding the curriculum documents.

In addition to those documents, I have consulted the Truth and Reconciliation *Calls to Action* reports, news articles about the curricular content and the TRC, and the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. I also explored how other researchers analyze Indigenous content, Reconciliation, and education. Through my research, informed by curriculum design theory, I hope to have successfully proposed a revised curriculum which supports Reconciliation using factual Indigenous content, history, and knowledge.

In order to best explore Indigenous frameworks and give hope to students like me who want to learn more about Indigenous content and how it fits into Canada's true history, I hope this research will ignite some flame that can help educators develop a curriculum that incorporates

Decolonizing educational practices in an educational system that is more diverse, honest, and open about Indigenous practices, knowledge, history, and Canada's position within it.

# Chapter Three

## Literature Review: What is Reconciliation?

To begin answering the question, "How possible is Reconciliation with the current Ontario social studies and history curriculum?" is to answer the question, "What is Reconciliation?" and define it within the context of colonization, the Ontario curriculum, the history of what is now Canada, and Indigenous history and rights. This chapter will examine the research on steps toward Reconciliation. The specific focus concerns social studies and history education, the effects of colonization on publicly funded schools in Ontario, and the initiatives taken to right Canada's colonial wrongs through an exploration of the research following the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action* and the United Nations' *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. The analysis will examine the effort and actions, or lack thereof, that educational institutes, the Ontario government and its Ministry of Education have made towards educational Reconciliation.

### Indigenous Content in Social Studies and History Education: Righting the Wrongs

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) defines Reconciliation as "establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, an acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour" (TRC, 2015A, p.6). Focusing on education, *Calls to Action* numbers 10 and 63 ask the federal government to sufficiently fund legislation that incorporates the following principles: "developing culturally appropriate curricula," and "building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect" (TRC, 2015A, pp.2-7).

According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, provincial ministries of education, school boards, universities, colleges, and individual educators must foster in Canadian classrooms the critical historical consciousness, reciprocal respect, and responsibility that build Decolonizing relationships (TRC, 2015A). In order to work towards Reconciliation in education, educators, policymakers, administrators, and parents must work together to ensure that all students and communities thrive in their understanding of history and Indigenous rights.

**Colonialism and Publicly Funded Education**

Non-Indigenous educators often find themselves teaching Indigenous content with little knowledge or understanding of the complexity required to teach about specific cultures or communities. Dion's (2007) concept of the 'perfect stranger' highlights this issue, as many teachers, even with the best intentions, approach Indigenous subjects from a distance, often relying more on secondary sources than on direct engagement with Indigenous communities. As Dion explains, the 'perfect stranger' and 'ethical learning' concept encourages teachers to reflect on their positions as outsiders while exploring ethical learning approaches through acts of remembrance. This process helps educators understand how colonization has shaped the identities of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. Such reflection enables them to examine their personal connections with Indigenous people, communities, and knowledge, fostering ethical awareness that can strengthen relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the education system (Dion, 2007). This promotes a deeper understanding of Canada's true history and Indigenous issues. A similar phenomenon is observed in Hill's (2023) experiment on the challenges of incorporating Indigenous content into a music unit, running the risk of pan-Indigeneity or misinformation. Research has shown that when

educators attempt to include Indigenous content without consulting Indigenous students or counterparts, lessons “meant to assist [Indigenous students] to reconnect them with their ancestral territories” may instead marginalize them or fail to reflect their specific cultural context, resulting in a broad, inaccurate representation of Indigenous peoples (i.e., pan-Indigeneity) (Friedel, 2011, p.533). Some educators refuse to approach the topic entirely due to fear of appropriation, misunderstanding, discomfort, or lacking confidence in the subject (Korteweg et al., 2015). Much of the educator discomfort comes from the lack of required Indigenous courses for teachers in training at the Bachelor of Education level, which does not always expose non-Indigenous teachers to Indigenous studies, theories, and concepts (Korteweg et al., 2015).

An Ontario teacher’s career begins in one of the many universities offering a Bachelor of Education degree, which trains teacher candidates to become educators by experienced educators. This degree can take two years if the teacher candidate already has a three-year undergraduate degree or 5-6 years as a concurrent degree. There, they learn how to develop lesson plans on the various subjects related to the provincial curriculum, and how to teach each subject at their chosen level of specialization: kindergarten, primary-junior, intermediate, or senior. During designated blocks of time in the academic year, teacher candidates are assigned to a selection of schools to practice their professional skills and what they have learned in the program as student teachers. Once they complete their degree, teacher candidates can get a licence in the province where they earned their degree. Educators are recommended and often expected to continue updating their professional learning skills through additional qualification courses that will assist them in enhancing or improving their knowledge and classroom skills, strengthening their teaching abilities, or pursuing career changes.

Some Canadian universities have taken steps to ensure that current and new educators are knowledgeable about Indigenous issues and content. These efforts include promoting decolonial education through personal development presentations, additional qualification courses, and teacher education programs. The Association of Canadian Deans of Education (ACDE) *Accord on Indigenous Education* outlines a collective commitment from Canadian faculties of education to support transformative change by prioritizing Indigenous perspectives, knowledge systems, and education leadership (Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2010). It calls for respectful partnerships with Indigenous communities, creating inclusive learning environments, culturally responsive curricula and pedagogy, and revitalizing Indigenous languages. The *Accord* provides a guiding framework for justice, collaboration, and respect. It encourages institutions to share their progress and work collectively toward educational equity and the flourishing of Indigenous identities in all learning spaces (Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2010). However, despite these intentions, programs such as the ones offered at Ontario's Lakehead University, the University of Winnipeg, and the University of Saskatchewan have not fully developed course content that ensures equitable and consistent learning across all teacher education programs (Lorenz & Gaudry, 2018; Kuokkanen, 2016). Although local, provincial, and national policies mandate the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in schools and teacher education programs, universities would benefit by providing courses that meaningfully integrate Indigenous and colonial worldviews and allow them to challenge their preconceptions and biases using Decolonizing lenses (DiGiacomo & Gutiérrez, 2017; Korteweg et al., 2015). Course-based studies and assignments should accurately reflect the lived realities of Indigenous learners. This is especially crucial for Decolonization and anti-oppressive educational techniques and approaches and in adequately responding to Indigenous learners' needs without "othering" them

(Battiste et al., 2002; Battiste, 2019; Louie et al., 2017). Nevertheless, with limited access to accurate or high-quality learning materials, many educators enter the academic field with an incomplete understanding of Indigenous people's lived experiences (Lorenz & Gaudry, 2018).

Cherubini's study of the experiences of teacher candidates in public school settings found that they developed negative or pessimistic assessments of their professional capacity to embrace Indigenous pupils' traditions, customs, and worldviews in a culturally acceptable and respectful way (Cherubini, 2022). Teacher candidates expressed a need for more confidence in their capacity to accurately assess and evaluate Indigenous children's academic progress while also considering the epistemologies of those pupils (Cherubini, 2022). Additionally, the testimonials provided in Cherubini's study (2022) explicitly referred to the expected disconnect Indigenous students would encounter in the classrooms' social and curricular environments. Teacher candidates enter classrooms with little knowledge of how to accurately and effectively deliver quality Indigenous content to their students. Teacher candidates acknowledge that Indigenous students may feel marginalized in public schools and that these attitudes could significantly impact the teachers' future classrooms' diverse relational and social contexts (Cherubini, 2022).

Due to the historically eurocentric educational approaches in culture, language, histories, and theories, teachers unintentionally maintain the division and detachment of Indigenous education reforms and policy changes (Korteweg et al., 2015). With limited resources available on the subject matter for non-Indigenous teachers in the classroom, this subject discomfort is not always the educator's fault. Non-indigenous teachers frequently feel unprepared and ill-equipped to address important yet underrepresented Indigenous content in the existing curriculum due to limited resources and time (Dion et al., 2010, Korteweg et al., 2015). As a result, educators find it easier to omit the topic altogether rather than integrate the subject incorrectly or use

inappropriate resources (Korteweg et al., 2015). Since most current educators, policymakers, and administrators teach the same curriculum they experienced, the cycle of misinformation, omission, and prejudicial settler-biased education continues to be presented to new students. Korteweg et al. (2015) suggest that teacher education should help educators challenge eurocentric views of Indigenous history and people, while simultaneously helping educators to dismantle stereotypical images of Indigenous peoples, to strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities, to expose educators to contemporary Indigenous cultural practices, and to increase their familiarity with the diversity of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and other global Indigenous peoples.

Once their degree is completed, teachers are placed into classrooms and expected to teach the provincial curriculum to their students. An educator's approaches to Indigenous content can perpetuate various stereotypes through privilege (Kendall, 2006). Education has a part in building a "sense of white superiority and knowledge of racial power codes" as early as preschool (DiAngelo, 2020, p.114). This 'white fragility' maintains the entitlement of white people in their current racial roles and their discomfort when members of minority groups question the status quo (DiAngelo, 2020, p.119). Educators must examine their worldviews thoroughly and critically analyze the existing social constructions, working through the emotional and cognitive difficulties that arise with discovering how current society was built through oppression to benefit the dominant culture (Boler & Zembylas, 2003). Through this pedagogy of discomfort, educators often have difficulty recognizing their own connection and positionality within the dominant culture regarding Indigenous oppression when required to teach Indigenous content (Davis et al., 2017). Educators who avoid the topic of Indigeneity may do so through their attempts at "smoothing over" First Nations-settler relationships (Davis et al.,

2017, p.399). By not acknowledging the historical relationship and imbalance, invisible Indigeneity in education “obscures the damage that colonialism impinges on Indigenous communities” to this day (Diaz-Diaz, 2021, p.563).

Friedel critiques a place-based education strategy that exemplifies the misunderstanding and appropriation involved when white outdoor and environmental educators’ impose the western notions of “getting back to nature” (Friedel, T.L., 2011, p.535) without fully understanding the Indigenous perspectives on their relationship with the land, its culture, relationships, ecosystems, social systems, spirituality, and law. Educators who make assumptions about what constitutes place-based education in an Indigenous context may do so without input or perspectives from Indigenous people or students; when the outcome does not achieve educators expectations, the onus is on the Indigenous students for being “lost,” “disinterested,” and “without identity” (Friedel, T.L., 2011, p.535). Additionally, educators may also task Indigenous students with educating the non-Indigenous about their culture, which can be burdensome and overwhelming, especially when the curriculum overlooks Indigenous perspectives and experiences (Archibald, 2008; Tuck & Yang, 2012). This expectation reinforces colonial structures and limits Indigenous students’ ability to engage fully in their education without carrying the weight of cultural representation as token representatives of their culture (Grande, 2004; Brayboy, 2006).

Fryberg et al.’s (2013) research observes that the cultural identities of the educator are a factor in the prevention of Decolonized education (p.73). Educators need to reflect on their ancestral ethnicity and how the knowledge or lack thereof in their cultural backgrounds affects their approach to teaching different cultures, such as Indigenous cultures (Korteweg et al., 2015). This reflection and reeducation open more dialogue and understanding, which results in teaching

about cultures beyond the stereotypical and imagined portrayals common in society (Korteweg et al., 2015).

Due to a lack of access to resources focused on Indigenous language, culture, and content in schools and curriculum, many non-Indigenous educators, intentionally or unintentionally, force Indigenous students to adhere to their idea of authentic Indigenous content and the "superficial identity prescribed therein" (Friedel, 2011, p.535). Corntassel and Hardbarger (2019) state that educators and students must be exposed to and understand Indigenous culture, stories, knowledge, language, and traditions. Educators and students have a duty to understand and raise awareness of the impacts colonization has had on resources, people, and spirits, recognizing intergenerational trauma and the ongoing colonial impacts on community relationships and the environment (Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019).

Educational policies centring on Indigenous knowledge, pedagogy, relationships, and Indigenous collaboration better serve the needs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Absolon, 2022; Battiste, 2013; Bell & Brant, 2015; Ermine et al., 2005; Hill, 2023; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2021; Toulouse, 2008, 2011, 2013; Wilson, 2008). Teachers become better prepared to Decolonize lessons and classrooms when school administrators and policymakers include Indigenous-led in-school workshops, resources, and training that address Indigenous content and issues (Dion et al., 2010). Educators and administrators should work on collaborating with Indigenous communities to incorporate authentic Indigenous knowledge and traditional teaching techniques into their teaching strategies while working with all students.

Battiste (2010) and Hatcher and Bartlett (2010) each offered the use of Two-Eyed Seeing as a practical framework for integrating Indigenous knowledge and worldviews into all educational curricula to provide equal time to different cultural viewpoints. By encouraging a

deeper awareness and respect of the various cultures in society among all students and enhancing the communication and critical thinking abilities required for fostering cross-cultural interaction, culturally sensitive educators can significantly boost the academic achievement rate of Indigenous students (Wallace-Casey, 2022). Culturally relevant instruction revolutionizes classrooms by providing students with the intellectual tools to deal with conflicts between school expectations and real-world experiences (Hatcher & Bartlett, 2010). This also helps promote better relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, teachers, families, and communities. Corntassel and Hardbarger's research (2019) speaks to the importance of relationships in shaping who we are: relationships with people (Elders and family), the community, the land, animals, plants, and the water. Educators must understand that before any teaching can take place in a classroom, relationships must be built. It is crucial to consider who our students are beyond the classroom walls. Indigenous pedagogy is intrinsically linked with relationships and their resulting reciprocity.

**Colonization, Education, and the Epistemology of Ignorance**

Education has often been used to maintain the inequitable societal status quo (Kuppens et al., 2018). For Indigenous students, this started with residential schools and the motto "Kill the Indian in the child" (Ladner & Tait, 2017, p.269). Duncan Campbell Scott, the deputy superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs, pushed heavily for the eurocentric education of Indigenous people, mandating their attendance at residential schools in 1920, stating that as his prime objective, he wanted to "get rid of the Indian problem" (Ladner & Tait, 2017, p.351). How does one kill the Indian to save the child within? Start by forcibly removing children from their families, homes, and communities (Ladner & Tait, 2017). Take them somewhere far away

from anything they know, forbid them from speaking their language, practicing their culture and traditions, and enforce compulsory attendance laws so they cannot leave (Grande, 2004). Then, subject these traumatized children to indoctrination to kill their Indigeneity, use them for free labour while malnourished, and pump them full of eurocentric ideologies (Grande, 2004).

In current Indigenous education, data shows Indigenous students "are still the most disproportionately affected by poverty, low educational attainment, and limited access to educational opportunities" (Grande, 2004, p.18). Grande (2004) mentions Indigenous students being severely marginalized and engaging in high-risk behaviours, often having high suicide rates on reserves. Battiste (2017) explores the issue of Indigenous student invisibility in postcolonial education due to a lack of culturally relevant curricula and outdated and false educational materials. These materials represent Indigenous peoples as "vanishing Canadians, Indians of childhood, savage warriors, and images of redskins, performing Indians, celebrity Indians and plastic Shamans, exotic and spiritual Indians, and problem protestors" (Battiste, 2017, p.33).

Formal education and the provincial government have a significant impact on preserving what Mills et al. (2018) calls the "epistemology of ignorance." This intentional lack of knowledge surrounding colonization is accepted and encouraged by shaping society into maintaining exploitative settler-colonial relationships, preserving "strategic methods of not knowing that, consciously or not, perpetuate the status quo, privilege, and domination" of minority groups, such as Indigenous, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis (Schaefli, 2018, p.3). As Battiste et al. (2002) explain, even universities like the University of Saskatchewan, recognized for their diversity and inclusivity in educating and training Indigenous teachers and lawyers,

continue to affirm eurocentric and colonial ideology “in the name of excellence, integration, and modernity” (Battiste et al., 2002, p.82).

The result of this epistemological ignorance is the lack of knowledge surrounding the lived experiences of First Nations, Indigenous, Inuit, and Métis students and communities. “Many First Nation communities lack adequate resources due to insufficient Federal funding, and community members are meeting resistance as they endeavor to change this deplorable situation” (Aquash, 2013, p.129). Although the provincial government claims to spend billions annually on Indigenous education, Indigenous schools receive $1,500 per student compared to non-Indigenous schools which receive $12,700-$13,059 per student per year (Indigenous Services Canada, 2019; OME, 2023). Many of the 518 on-reserve schools across Canada do not have high schools, forcing students to go off-reserve and out of the community for secondary and post-secondary education at a young age. Schools on reserve have some of the highest teacher turnover rates while dealing with dilapidated buses, difficulties accessing clean water, buildings requiring maintenance and repairs, and underfunded classrooms (Chiefs Assembly on Education, 2012). Indigenous students graduate from high school at a disproportionate rate from non-Indigenous students, with only 44% of Indigenous students on-reserve receiving high school diplomas in 2016 (Government of Canada, 2018). These issues and living in crowded homes requiring significant repairs (Government of Canada, 2018), are just some of the problems Indigenous students face while vying for education in Canada.

Off-reserve secondary and post-secondary education exposes Indigenous students to both explicit and implicit racism, which is often disregarded or unrecognized (Bailey, 2020). The absence of curriculum-based Indigenous knowledge prior to post-secondary education and a lack of interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outside of academic settings are the

leading causes of this ignorance and misunderstanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Bailey, 2020). Professors must address these racial micro and macro aggressions adequately to prevent silencing Indigenous students within their classrooms. Failure to do so may potentially affect Indigenous students' confidence and self-worth while simultaneously strengthening negative stereotypes and ideologies held by non-Indigenous students (Sue et al., 2009). Research by Bailey (2020) found that university-level Indigenous students are frequently overlooked in research that involves racism, disregarding barriers, discrimination, and isolation that Indigenous students experience. Non-Indigenous students' ignorance about historical and contemporary struggles faced by Indigenous students creates division, perpetuating eurocentric notions, usually with negative connotations. Although education is currently shifting to be more inclusive of Indigenous perspectives, it still upholds eurocentric views of Indigeneity (Battiste et al., 2002). Educators teach Indigenous students in a system that does not value them, their truths, or their point of view (Battiste, 2017). It is the responsibility of educators and legislators to guarantee that Indigenous students feel secure and accepted in classrooms and educational institutions that value and understand their traditions within pedagogical approaches.

Colonization has a hand in many facets of education, impinging on settler and Indigenous students' intellectual and academic development. Aquash (2013) paraphrases Alfred (2005) when he claims that Canadians "remained uninformed and unaware of the history of treaties and imposed legislation that defines legal obligations to First Nations as Canadian allies" (Aquash, 2013, p.129). This only serves to obscure further the present and historical realities of Indigenous students. The achievement of fair socioeconomic and economic growth in Canada is hampered by the educational affirmation of colonialism, which lessens the significance, relevance, and value of Indigenous knowledge in the educational system (Battiste et al., 2002).

Without exposure to diverse knowledge, histories, and viewpoints, non-Indigenous students and educators will likely harbour racial biases against non-white people, communities, and histories (Orfield & Civiles, 2009). As these learners mature, they encounter challenges adjusting to life in diverse communities and careers, perpetuating a continuous cycle of prejudices, division, and inequality (Orfield & Civiles, 2009). Research demonstrates that exposure to diversity outside of the home environment gives students access to a dynamic social and intellectual environment that enriches and challenges their interpersonal and cognitive development (Milem et al., 2005). Culture builds identity. By fostering inclusivity, tolerance, awareness, open-mindedness, and exposure to various viewpoints and connections, an inclusive and diverse education aids students in developing greater empathy; it enables them to comprehend various perspectives and cultural norms and to avoid tokenistic prejudices (Garibay, 2019; Orfield & Civiles, 2009).

**Initiatives in Righting Canada's Colonial Wrongs**

In order to address what the Truth and Reconciliation Commission refers to as a "broad lack of understanding of the unjust and violent circumstances from which modern Canada emerged" (Sinclair, 2015A, 44:28), ministries of education, school boards, and schools of all levels across Canada have made efforts and progressed towards Indigenous inclusivity by adding Indigenous content to various curricula and subjects. Educators across Canada answered the *Calls to Action* after the release of the findings by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015. Publicly funded schools have focused on enacting Reconciliation approaches into curriculums and education "without waiting for governments to act" (Sinclair, 2015A, 47:38). Schools across Canada have implemented land acknowledgements to recognize Indigenous

presence on Turtle Island since time immemorial (Butler et al., 2015). Several schools throughout Ontario have implemented significant changes regarding Reconciliation and Decolonizing practices within the classroom since 2015, such as modifying the curriculum to incorporate additional Indigenous content, approaches, frameworks, and the legacy of residential schools (People for Education, 2023B). Various school boards, such as the Toronto District School Board, have practiced Decolonizing education through personal development workshops in order to "transform [their] education system" at all levels through Decolonizing and Indigenizing practices (Dion et al., 2010, p.iii).

Decolonizing is the acknowledgment of colonialism while implementing strategies that lessen and eventually eradicate its influence (Aikenhead, 2017, p. 78). Education defines Indigenizing as incorporating Indigenous Knowledge, values, perspectives, and teachings in the classroom and throughout the curriculum at all grade levels (Alfred 2004; Battiste & Henderson, 2009). Indigenizing schools is as simple as incorporating Indigenous content into the curriculum by including Indigenous teachings in the lessons, using Indigenous-informed practices, offering an Indigenous studies course, hiring and bringing Elders and Indigenous artists into the classroom, and developing positive relationships regarding Indigenous people, content and histories with students at all grade levels (Dion et al., 2010; Yellowhead Institute, 2022). Schools have added Indigenous content in various curricula, such as land-based activities and lessons, Indigenous language programs, Indigenous drumming and dancing lessons, offering activities such as ceremonies, medicine walks and storytelling, and ensuring that students have access to Indigenous authors in classrooms and libraries as regular school policies (Dion et al., 2010; Hill, 2023; People for Education, 2018; Yellowhead Institute, 2022).

**Reconciliation in Ontario Education**

Eurocentric knowledge systems have methodically suppressed Decolonized content and Indigenous Knowledge in schools and curricula (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Godlewska et al., 2010). It can be daunting for teachers to address Indigenous self-determination and the inherited contributions on the impact of colonization in education while avoiding tokenism and following the school's timetable, instructional and financial constraints regarding the activities, units, and programs, yet many teachers have done what they could to create Indigenous inclusive lessons.

Murie and Kajander (2022) introduce us to a lesson combining Indigenous Knowledge with Grades 9 and 10 reform-based mathematics. This three-year study comprised four iterations of the course taught by three teachers. In order to teach practical applications of measurements, mapping, and transportation, a two-day, three-part problem-based mathematics lesson relevant to a Northwestern Ontario audience on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabek and Métis was developed (Murie & Kajander, 2022). This lesson integrated Indigenous Knowledge material and Decolonized concepts (Murie & Kajander, 2022).

Students were encouraged to share their knowledge and listen to local Indigenous voices during the two-day course (Murie & Kajander, 2022). Students exhibited interest, focus, and understanding of the subject during the Minds On activity. In addition to filling out worksheets and answering questions during the lesson's Consolidation phase, students actively participated in the Action portion of the course, which involved making a model canoe and assessing how it travelled over a "river." Teachers saw a high level of student attendance, engagement, and participation compared to earlier lessons.

While Decolonizing educational practices can be complex, Hill (2023) shows, through her experiment with a music unit centred around Indigenous hoop dancing in collaboration with

Indigenous artist Beany John, that the unit was ultimately a positive step in the Reconciliation project. This is primarily due to the unique nature of their collaboration, which gently challenged the school's traditional educational practices. Hill reflected that the collaboration with an Indigenous expert was the key to their success, as John collaborated in developing a culturally appropriate curriculum, addressing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action number 10 (TRC, 2015A). Students had positive and engaging experiences in the lessons, supporting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action number 63, which focuses on enhancing students' capacity for empathy, respect, and intercultural understanding (TRC, 2015A). Hill reported seeing smiles, laughter, pride, and delight throughout each lesson.

Hill (2023) states that it is reasonable to believe that this experience will have an unpredictable and intangible impact on future attitudes toward Indigenous culture and cross-cultural understanding. One of the project's most important outcomes, according to Hill (2023), was that the hoop dance initiative facilitated in-depth discussions about Indigenous issues and circumstances that might not have been possible to cover in the classroom before the experiment. However, she notes that due to the perception that "the box has already been ticked" by her classroom activity, "[it] may partially prevent this school from engaging in further Reconciliation-based activities" (Hill, 2023, p.11).

**Conclusion: Bridging the Gaps**

Indigenous-non-Indigenous relationships are perpetually evolving. Simply historicizing the events of colonialism and reducing them to focus only on residential schools erases and ignores the ongoing and continuous acts of colonization, colonialism, assimilation, and cultural genocide. Improving the educational experiences of Indigenous students is crucial for their

quality of life and the development and well-being of Indigenous communities as a whole. Through residential schools and eurocentric, settler-based curriculum, the Canadian government and the church have historically used educational institutions for colonization practices. Provincial governments and educational institutions need to focus on Indigenization and Decolonization of education at the systemic level (Battiste, 2017). Current educational trends use outdated curricula and educational practices to define what being Indigenous means to the general public, perpetuating Indigenous stereotypes and single identity perspectives.

Programs for teacher education need to devote adequate time and energy to developing systematic methods for cultivating prospective teachers' critical consciousness in programs that adequately integrate Indigenous knowledge and histories. To better navigate the tensions between their assumptions and classroom realities, teacher candidates would benefit significantly from organized and targeted opportunities to reflect on their perceptions and experiences of racist and oppressive educational practices (Cherubini, 2022). These strategies could include safe and supported conversation spaces, scaffolded critical reflections, and inquiry practices (Cherubini, 2022). Teacher education programs would benefit from integrating Indigenous knowledge into their courses, allowing future educators to challenge internal biases and preconceived notions through a Decolonial lens (DiGiacomo & Gutiérrez, 2017). Course readings, assignments, and research should adequately portray Indigenous student perspectives and lived realities within the classroom and school settings, focusing on anti-oppressive strategies to Decolonize current educational practices and methods better (Battiste, 2019; Louie et al., 2017).

Educators have begun to introduce necessary changes in the curricula and classrooms across Canada by incorporating Indigenous content into their lessons. In doing so, they bridge the gap between Indigenous experiences and eurocentric curricula. They advocate for new,

inclusive education policies that analyze structural inequities that marginalize or exclude Indigenous students within publicly funded classrooms (Cherubini, 2022). Classrooms now include Indigenous land-based activities and teachings in Science curricula, offering Indigenous language instruction. Schools hold powwows, offer Indigenous-led programs in art and music, and ensure that there are accessible Indigenous stories and books available in classrooms and libraries (Dion et al., 2010; Hill, 2023; People for Education, 2018; Yellowhead Institute, 2022). Indigenous students deserve to study in historically authentic classrooms that respectfully combine Indigenous and western knowledge. The key to Reconciliation and a successful integration of Indigenous knowledge into the curriculum starts with educators collaborating with Indigenous knowledge keepers and experts (Hill, 2023).

Implementing the recommendations made in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada *Calls to Action* report is the responsibility of the Canadian government and provincial ministries of education. Each ministry must collaborate with school boards and Indigenous communities across each province to develop a Decolonized and Indigenous educational framework that provides adequate funding for Indigenous material in all Canadian and on-reserve schools with funding on par with non-Indigenous educational institutions. To ensure that all students are knowledgeable in Indigenous history, practices, and ways of knowing, the curriculum must incorporate Indigenous knowledge, ontologies, axiologies, language, and cultures within its framework at all levels of education.

Reforms in education will solve some issues; yet systemic changes are required to manage the educational gaps for all Indigenous students. Government programs should address high poverty rates in Indigenous communities and the social and economic difficulties that prevent Indigenous students from pursuing higher education. Initiatives regarding Indigenous

experiences and barriers must acknowledge both explicit and subtle racism, fostering a respectful and encouraging learning environment (Bailey, 2020). In order to foster and promote tolerance, awareness, open-mindedness, Indigenous perspectives, and connections, educational institutions should ensure that they support diversity, inclusivity, and equitable learning for all students (Garibay, 2019; Orfield & Civiles, 2009). Supporting diversity will help students develop empathy, cognitive intelligence, and equitable thinking (Garibay, 2019; Orfield & Civiles, 2009). However, as Cherubini (2012) points out, the concept of closing the educational achievement gaps must be critically examined to understand how and by whom "success" is defined and measured. The idea of closing the gap may mask deeper issues, as it presents three possible scenarios. The most optimistic outcome is that Indigenous students are improving faster than non-Indigenous students (Cherubini, 2012, p. 45). The less promising scenarios involve either Indigenous student achievements rising while non-Indigenous student success remains stagnant, or Indigenous student achievements staying the same while non-Indigenous student success declines (Cherubini, 2012, p. 46). These scenarios suggest that while the gap may close, it may not necessarily indicate true progress or equality. This brings into question how success is measured. The established standards of success in education often reflect western ideologies, which may not be relevant or inclusive of Indigenous ways of knowing. Success, therefore, requires a more holistic approach that integrates Indigenous knowledge and experiences within its foundation. To ensure that all students, particularly those from marginalized communities, can thrive in a system that recognizes their distinct cultural identities and perspectives, it is imperative that we reassess what educational success truly means.

# Chapter Four

## Research in Education: Curriculum, Policies, Educators

### How The Education System Works in Canada

The federal government of Canada refrains from participating in the design or development of the educational system, instead delegating these responsibilities to the Minister or Department of Education for each province and to school boards, administrators, principals, teachers, and parents. This structure was established in 1867 with Section 93 of the British North America Act (Government of Canada, 2022C). Although some similarities exist between the educational systems in each province and territory, there are also significant differences. These distinctions often represent the provincial or territorial government's priorities and interests. The responsibility to plan, carry out and assess elementary, secondary, postsecondary, technical, and vocational education falls to the departments or ministries of education of the provinces or territories. While one department or ministry oversees adult education, skills training, and postsecondary education, another governs elementary and secondary education. Early learning and development are considered part of the definition of education in eight provinces and territories as of 2021 (Government of Canada, 2022A). In Ontario, the Ministry of Education has structured Ontario's curriculum policy with broad *overall expectations*. Then, it splits them into finer detail under *specific expectations*. The curriculum guide adds *big ideas and framing questions* to help guide teachers around the broader aspects of the frameworks.

### The Ontario Social Studies and History Curriculum

For several generations of Ontario students, their limited understanding of Indigenous history and knowledge has been framed by the provincial Social Studies and History curricula

through eurocentric, settler-centred ideology. Research by Schaefli et al. (2018) illustrates how a systematization premised on Indigenous invisibility is encouraged by optional Indigenous curricular content. This content includes the segregation and omission of Indigenous philosophies, ontologies, axiologies, epistemologies, a denial of colonialism, and the reinforcement of racialized hierarchies. The Ontario Social Studies and History curriculum reveals a drastic need to insert more in-depth Indigenous-focused content into mandatory curricular subjects. A considerable amount of the curriculum surrounding Indigenous topics follows a similar route; it is limited and neither mandatory, accurate, nor relevant.

Educators in Ontario are required to teach according to the curriculum created by the Ministry of Education. Much of the curriculum content is settler-centred and framed, lacking Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous perspective or lived experiences, describing Indigenous people as Aboriginals, as living only between 1780-1850, or within the context of colonization and settler history (OME, 2023B). Within the Social Studies and History curriculum, Indigenous stories, experiences, and placement are often footnoted as additional examples, perpetuating the idea that Indigenous people, history, and placement are also a footnote to the larger Canadian story (Dion et al., 2010). As this chapter will explore, Indigenous content and history in the curriculum are often biased, whitewashed, or marginalized, with their narrative omitted or distorted to protect the status quo of the dominant group, the descendants of european settlers.

As documented in the Literature Review, research shows that due to these discrepancies in curriculum documents, many elementary educators will often place Indigenous content in social studies units focused on ancient or extinct societies such as the Ancient Egyptians, Mesopotamians, and Ancient Greeks. This perpetuates the idea that Indigenous culture is something from the past that does not reflect modern western society. In so doing, it allows

educators to avoid seeing Indigenous content as a meaningful and core subject matter, making it easy to omit. Most required, albeit quite limited, Indigenous content can only be found sparsely within curriculum documents spanning Grades 1 through 8 Social Studies and History. This perpetuates the idea that the significance of Indigenous communities, culture, stories, and experiences is something from the past, implying that current Indigenous knowledge and experiences do not exist or are unimportant in today's Canadian society. A majority of Canadians want to learn about Indigenous traditions, arts and crafts, dances, and music. However, very few seem genuinely interested in talking about their nation's colonial past or its ongoing effects on Indigenous communities, culture, knowledge, and sovereignty (Lemarquand, 2021). Moeke-Pickering et al. (2006) refer to this phenomenon as "white amnesia," a

> strategy used to ignore the historical and ongoing injustices perpetrated upon Indigenous peoples […] White amnesia allows non-Indigenous peoples to continue in their day to day world without seeing or involving themselves in other worldviews that would challenge their understanding of their oppressive practices (p.2).

Another term for this is agnotology. Agnotology, as Proctor and Schiebinger (2008) explain, is the deliberate creation of cultural ignorance through the selective withholding of information. It covers how the media, corporations, and governments intentionally disseminate this ignorance to deceive, influence, or confuse people through information suppression, selective memory, and document erasure (Proctor & Schiebinger, 2008). It aids in understanding ignorance as a product of cultural or political decisions and the exploitation of ignorance to spread xenophobia or gain public favour (Proctor & Schiebinger, 2008). In the context of Canadian education, this appears in how Indigenous histories, knowledge systems, and current struggles are often overlooked or completely ignored. The absence of thorough and accurate Indigenous content in curricula is a

clear example of institutional agnotology, where Indigenous perspectives are either erased or distorted to uphold settler colonial narratives. Indigenous people and cultures have often been portrayed inaccurately or negatively, with particular attention paid to missing and murdered Indigenous women (often while ignoring the men), as ancient and vanishing societies, and their history being relegated to residential schools. However, even this information is presented using a passive voice and an idealized settler-centred lens that perpetuates Indigenous stereotypes and does not generate awareness, or lead to substantial social changes (Lemarquand, 2021). This deliberate omission not only ensures that ignorance remains but also reinforces the dominant story of Canada as a benevolent nation, while conveniently ignoring its colonial past and the ongoing effects this has on Indigenous communities today.

One such issue is currently coming to a head. Water is inherently understood to be a human right; however, as of 2024, more than 30 First Nations communities across Canada continue to live under long-term boil water advisories, a crisis that has persisted for decades despite repeated government promises to resolve it (Forester, 2024). In Ontario alone, several communities still face severe challenges accessing clean drinking water. This persistent issue highlights a profound lack of understanding about why so many Indigenous reserves remain without safe drinking water, with some non-Indigenous people assuming that Indigenous people are suing the government simply for more money or a lack of their ability to govern their communities effectively. In October 2024, Justice Canada's lawyers argued that the federal government does not have a legal obligation to ensure clean drinking water for First Nations (Forester, 2024), further perpetuating systemic neglect. For students in these communities, the lack of safe water underscores the broader inequities they face, reinforcing a cycle of poverty and educational barriers. In the case of the school where I taught, my students always lived under

boil water advisories, and their parents did as well. I remember a colleague posting a photo of himself collecting six pails of lake water he would boil for his family to have water for the week. While the government uses Indigenous communities as photo opportunities and performance gestures for their political campaigns by giving one set of 32 laptops to a school of over 1000 students and putting water fountains in the hallways, these actions do little to address the systemic inequalities that Indigenous communities face. One of my students once pointed at a water fountain in the hallway asking what it was. He pushed the button when I explained it was a water fountain and asked me why no water came out. The reality for many Indigenous students is far from these superficial tokenistic efforts as they continue to live under boil water advisories and experience inadequate access to essential resources. These actions serve to mask the deeper, more widespread issues of neglect and inequality that need to be addressed through sustained, meaningful policy changes.

**Indigenous Curricular Content History: 90s to present?**

*The Ontario Social Studies and History* curricular documents from 1998 to 2023 address Indigenous content. These documents have gradually become more inclusive regarding Indigenous content and issues over the last thirty years. However, there is more work to be done. The 1998, 2004, 2013, 2018, and the newly released 2023 curriculum editions show a gradual shift towards including more Indigenous subject matters and in-depth Indigenous-focused revisions. However, much of the content surrounding Indigenous-settler relationships, colonization, and Canadian history has been and continues to be settler-biased. The following paragraphs will address the absence of Indigenous perspectives in the Ontario Social Studies curriculum. It will explore the lack of fact-based and inclusive representation and the lack of

discussions surrounding Indigenous history. It will also examine Indigenous experiences resulting from past and continuous colonization, education regarding Indigenous worldviews, and how non-Indigenous students learn about Indigenous topics. This section will not examine textbooks that are or may be used by educators, students, or institutions, as these can vary between schools and classrooms.

**Fact-Based and Inclusive Representation of Indigenous History**

The 1998 curriculum materials for *The Ontario Curriculum: Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6; History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8* superseded the 1995 version. Indigenous history in the Grades 3, 6, and 7 1998 curriculum primarily concerns Indigenous relations with european explorers and settlers while lightly touching on some governmental aspects and, in Grade 8, the Indian Act. In Grade 3 *Pioneer Life*, "the contributions of Aboriginal peoples to pioneer communities" (OME, 1998, p.19) is a tacked-on sentence at the end of the Overview section. In one of eleven Specific Expectations, the Grade 3 *Heritage and Citizenship* topic introduces Indigenous people only in connection with the pioneers and first european settlements in Upper Canada. Rather than expand on Indigenous topics, the Grade 4 *Heritage and Citizenship* section focuses entirely on Medieval Times, Christianity, and the Crusades. Indigenous topics are not brought back until Grade 6, under *Aboriginal Peoples and European Explorers*, focusing specifically on Algonquian and Iroquoian (Haudenosaunee) communities alongside european explorers. The curriculum places more emphasis on christianity, europe, and settler communities than any pre-contact Indigenous communities, and there is not any focus on Indigenous sovereignty that is not directly tied to european settlers. Grade 7 *History* concentrates on Nouveau France and British North America, the fur trade, the Seven Years' War, and the War of

1812. Grade 8 History focuses on the Confederation of British Colonies and the Dominion of Canada. Indigenous people are briefly mentioned in the *Development of Western Canada*, but only in the context of european settlements, Métis, and immigration, and as one of ten concepts in *Canada: A Changing Society* under "the impact of the Indian Act of 1876" (OME, 1998, p.53). With its focus on interactions between Indigenous people and colonial and settler europeans, the 1998 curriculum established a low standard for teaching about Indigeneity at that time.

As of September 2005, students were required to learn the updated *Social Studies and History* curriculum, which resulted from the 2004 revisions. The renaming of Aboriginal to First Nations is the most noticeable distinction between this text and the 1998 edition. However, the content of each grade heading remains relatively unchanged from 1998. For example, the 1998 version of the Grade 2 *Heritage and Citizenship Traditions and Celebrations* reads, "make and read a variety of graphs, charts, diagrams, maps, and models *for specific purposes (eg: to compare toys from other cultures)*" (OME, 1998, p.17) (emphasis added). In contrast, the 2004 version ends the passage with "and models to understand information about cultural or religious traditions and share it with members of the class (eg: Festivals of Lights, First Nations pow wows, toys from various cultures)" (OME, 2004, p.23). A similar change in the new Grade 3 *Pioneer Life* theme asks students to "describe what early settlers learned from First Nation peoples that helped them adapt to their new environment (e.g., knowledge about medicine, food, farming, transportation)" (OME, 2004, p.25). The 2004 document threads Indigeneity through pioneer history with a focus on the contributions of various Indigenous communities in Upper Canada. This contrasts with earlier curricula, which relegated their mention to the end of the Overview sentence. Grades 2, 3, and 6 continue the Indigenous narrative alongside the settlers

while adding a focus to differentiate the two groups, however the changes are minor, and the subjects are mostly the same. The Grade 6 title *Aboriginal Peoples and European Explorers* becomes *First Nation Peoples and European Explorers,* adding new expectations focused on Indigenous history, such as:

> describe characteristics of pre-contact First Nation cultures across Canada, including their close relationships with the natural environment; the motivations and attitudes of the European explorers; and the effects of contact on both the receiving and the incoming groups (OME, 2004, p.31).

The Grade 7 History curriculum threads Indigenous interactions with european colonists. Grade 8 History reduces the concepts to six from ten, with three focused on Indigenous-specific history. Added to the 2004 Grade 8 section is a passage headed *Confederation*, focusing on "the creation of the Dominion of Canada in 1867" and "the British North American colonies between 1850 and 1860" (OME, 2004, p.59). The next section, titled "The Development of Western Canada" asks students to "analyse how treaties and the Indian Act of 1876 transformed the lifestyles of First Nation peoples in the Canadian west," adding a section on the "Red River Rebellion of 1869-70" (OME, 2004, p.61), and ending with World War I. The 2004 documents show a gradual increase in Indigenous content in the *Social Studies* curriculum. While the changes are minor and insubstantial, merely a brief sentence tacked on at the end of a paragraph, it shows a positive change in the educational focus regarding Indigenous content.

Revised again in 2013, the *Ontario Curriculum: Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6; History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8* alters the headings and focuses more on inquiry-based learning, away from the direct instruction of its predecessors. The curriculum requirements from 2013 onwards contain more detail emphasizing student mental health and "educator awareness of and

response to student cognitive, emotional, and physical development" (OME, 2013A, p.4). Greater focus is placed on the various roles of educators, students, parents, principals, and community members concerning student support and educational experience. This curriculum version adds more information on instructional approaches, evaluation procedures, curricular expectations, the various learning strands, and the inquiry methods for each subject, process, and skill, covering how to teach the topics and what to teach in each strand. Each Grade chapter contains approximately nine pages detailing the expectations, framing questions, and developmental skills under the headings Application, Inquiry, and Understanding. The 2013 Grade 2 strand, *Traditions and Celebrations,* asks students to "compare some of the past and present traditions and celebrations of different ethnocultural groups in their local community, and identify some of the main reasons for the change." Sample questions encouraging critical thinking include, "Why were First Nations people unable to have pow wows at one time? What reaction did First Nations people have to this law?" (OME, 2013A, p.76-77). Compared to the Grade 3 strand from 2004, which focused on Indigenous communities in Upper Canada within the context of pioneers, the 2013 version examines Indigenous communities independently of pioneers while simultaneously examining the similarities and differences between the two groups. For example, in A1.1, "describe some of the similarities and differences in various aspects of everyday life," the students' discussions compare the Wendat and the "Anishnawbe" (Anishinaabe) cultures utilizing the sample talk, "The Wendat lived in large villages while the Anishnawbe lived in small groups of only a few homes. The Anishnawbe moved each season; the Wendat did not." (OME, 2013A, p.86). The Grade 4 *Social Studies and History* section was almost completely revised in 2013, moving beyond Medieval England, Christianity, and the Crusades and diving into various other cultures and countries, such as Medieval Japan, China

and India, or pre-contact Indigenous communities. Renamed *Early Societies, 3000 BCE–1500 CE,* a more significant distinction is made between the 1998, 2004, and 2013 curricula in the erasure of the Medieval-focused subject for Grade 4, adding greater attention to comparing earlier civilizations to various Canadian ones. For instance, the Application section asks students to "compare social organization (e.g., social classes, general political structure, inherited privilege, the status of women) in two or more early societies (e.g., a slave-owning and a feudal society; a matriarchal First Nation and a society in medieval Asia)" with a sample question, "What were some differences in the position of women in ancient Greece, medieval France, and Haudenosaunee society?" (OME, 2013A, p.98). This introduces students to the concept of a matriarchal society and correctly addresses the Haudenosaunee rather than referring to them as Iroquoians, as did prior documents. One topic, *First Nation Peoples and European Explorers,* assigned to Grade 6 in the 2004 curriculum, is reassigned to Grade 5 under *First Nations and Europeans in New France and Early Canada* in the 2013 documents. This topic asks students to explain the characteristics of pre-contact First Nation communities across Canada, including their connection to nature, the intentions of european explorers, and the consequences of interactions between settlers and Indigenous groups. Grade 6 *Social Studies and History* now focuses on Canadian identity in contemporary and historical communities and how it is viewed globally by examining built, physical, and social structures in Canadian communities such as climate and landscape, traditions, buildings or parks; analyzing cultural and religious contributions to the creation of the Canadian identity; and examining "how various groups have contributed to the goal of inclusivity in Canada" (OME, 2013A, p. 121). This focus plays on the Canadian exhibition of multiculturalism. The Grade 7 and Grade 8 *History* content from 2004 and 2013 are nearly identical, covering the same period in the same number of pages but with an

attempt to focus on fostering inquiry-based learning rather than on new content. The 2013 curricular documents expand upon the Indigenous focus found in 2004, moving away from the Indigenous identity in relation to settlers and colonial europe and exploring the individual Indigenous identity, along with better identification of the communities introduced by using their Indigenous names and not the european monikers.

The 2018 *Ontario Curriculum: Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6; History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8* document opens with the following preface:

> This edition of the curriculum includes a revision of the social studies and history curriculum, developed in collaboration with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit educators, community members, and organizations. The revision was undertaken in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's *Calls to Action* numbers 62 and 63 (OME, 2018B, p. 3).

This is the first of the curriculum documents in this series to acknowledge the Truth and Reconciliation Commission or the *Calls to Action*. Following this statement is an almost verbatim repetition of the 2013 opening paragraphs detailing the framework for student mental health and "educator awareness of and response to student cognitive, emotional, and physical development" (OME, 2018B, p.4); everything that follows prior to the grade lesson breakdown is nearly identical, including many of the page numbers for referencing. The introduction is copied almost word-for-word from the 2013 edition, with an added page on *Indigenous Education in Ontario* and *Cultural Safety*. The first section echoes a statement made in the *Ontario First Nation, Metis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2007), which declares that the framework "raises awareness about First Nation, Métis, and Inuit cultures, histories, perspectives, and contributions among all students in Ontario schools" (OME, 2018B, p.15) and promises that this

2018 revision meets the requirements of *Calls to Action* numbers 62 and 63. The second section, *Cultural Safety*, expresses the need for a learning environment where students "feel comfortable about expressing their ideas, opinions, and needs and about responding authentically to topics that may be culturally sensitive" (OME, 2018B, p.15). The most noticeable change between the 2013 and the 2018 revisions is the reference to First Nations as Indigenous. However, this is inconsistent throughout the document. With the exception of the renamed Grade 5 *First Nations and Europeans in New France and Early Canada to Interactions between Indigenous Peoples and Europeans Prior to 1713*, all other grade headers from 1-8 are unchanged. The course content for Grades 1-3 remains verbatim. Even the sample questions are exact duplicates. Each grade level has the same addition to the Inquiry section that states, "assess the credibility of sources and information relevant to their investigations" (OME, 2013A, p.152), while Grade 4 *Early Societies to 1500 CE* has a small addition. The 2013 version reads that "In Grade 4 social studies, students will develop their understanding of how we study the past, as they use various methods to examine social organization, daily life, and the relationship with the environment in different societies that existed between 3000 BCE and 1500 CE" (OME, 2013A, p.95). This same section in the revised 2018 edition adds "including at least one First Nation and one Inuit society in what would eventually become Canada" (OME, 2018B, p.97). While each Overall Expectation, Application, Inquiry, and Understanding in Grade 4 matches word-for-word that of the 2013 edition, each section adds "including at least one First Nation and one Inuit society" statement (OME, 2018B, p.100). Many of these alterations do not add significant changes to the curricular document, and appear almost as an afterthought. Although the Grade 5 titles have changed, their content overview is identical to the prior version, excepting the change of First Nations to Indigenous and the repeated statement of "in what would eventually become Canada"

(OME, 2018B, p.112). The main changes between the 2013 and 2018 Grade 5 curriculum include “the ethnogenesis of the Métis; the introduction of alcohol; the contribution of First Nation ideas about democratic community governance systems” (OME, 2018B, p.112). Significant change can be found in the Grade 5 content section Understanding Context, asking students to “describe key factors that led to the ethnogenesis of the Métis people in what would eventually become Canada, with specific attention to the Great Lakes and Mattawa regions” (OME, 2018B, p.116). This passage is completely new, highlighting the Métis as a distinct cultural group while also encouraging classrooms to explore the historical factors that contributed to the creation of the Métis as a distinct community. Other modifications are not as profound, with the majority appearing superficial, stating the same thing with slightly different wording to make it look like something new. Many revisions to the 2018 curriculum insert the descriptor Indigenous into various sections. For example, the 2013 passage instructing students to “describe key actions taken by different levels of government to solve some significant national, provincial/territorial, and/or local issues” (OME, 2013A, p.114) in 2018 becomes, “describe key actions taken by governments, including Indigenous governments, to solve some significant national, provincial/territorial, and/or local issues” (OME, 2018B, p.122). Throughout the document, one noticeable change is the removal of references regarding missionaries and religion and the addition of “Indigenous, First Nations, Métis, or Inuit” at the end of various sections. Grade 7 *New France and British North America 1713-1800* and *Canada 1800 -1850 Conflict and Changes* adds two new sections under Application, one with a focus on Treaties and their relevance to Indigenous peoples. The other asks students to “describe some significant aspects of daily life in various First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities in Canada during this period” (OME, 2018B, p.149). One significant change is that the multiple references to Irish

immigration in the 2013 document are replaced with the Arctic exploration and Inuit. The Grade 8 History content adds a barely perceptible change to an otherwise unchanged Overview, instructing that "Students will consider the impact of the Indian Act, the residential school system, the Numbered Treaties, and systemic racism on Indigenous individuals and communities in Canada" (OME, 2018B, p.155). The content from 2013 and 2018 are nearly identical, covering the same period in the same number of pages, but with an additional Application noting that students will "assess the impact that limitations with respect to legal status, rights, and privileges had on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit individuals and/or communities in Canada between 1850 and 1890." This section suggests that students should look into "the Act for the Better Protection of the Lands and Property of Indians in Lower Canada, 1850; the Gradual Civilization Act, 1857; the Gradual Enfranchisement Act, 1869; the Indian Act, 1876; the rights and legal status of "status Indians" on reserves; policies of assimilation; the exclusion of Métis as a collective from most treaties" (OME, 2018B, p.158), and "identify some key factors that contributed to the establishment of the residential school system" (OME, 2018B, p.161). In summary, while the content contains barely perceptible changes between the 2013 and 2018 curricular documents, the minor changes to acknowledge the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action* in the 2018 document are a start toward an inclusive Indigenous curriculum. The Ministry's promises that these revisions meet the requirements of *Calls to Action* numbers 62 and 63 are the bare minimum at best. The Yellowhead Institute annual *Calls to Action Accountability* reports between 2019 and 2023 note that the promises are incomplete. However, the additions focusing on Indigenous governance, Treaties, systemic racism, and the Indian Act suggest that curricular revisions may help with academic Reconciliation efforts in the future.

The newly released 2023 *The Ontario Curriculum: Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6; History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8* document focuses on revisions for learning in Grades 1 to 3 and Grade 6 social studies. The Grade headings from 2018 to 2023 remain the same. The first noticeable change is to Grade 1 with the addition of A1.5, "[Students] will begin to identify how some First Nations, Métis, and Inuit individuals and communities are reclaiming aspects of their identities and cultures that were lost or taken away due to colonization and the residential school system" (OME, 2023B, p.110). The concept is accompanied by sample questions such as

- How did the residential school system impact the children, families, and/or communities mentioned in these picture books written by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit authors? How are communities today learning about the impacts, and what is being done to make sure children learn about this history in school today?
- What First Nations, Métis, and Inuit languages were spoken by the Indigenous nations that lived, or still live, in this area? Do we hear these languages spoken on a regular basis now? Why not? What can someone do to learn an Indigenous language? How might a person choose which language to learn? (OME, 2023B, p.110).

Preceding this is A1.4, "describe the impact that people can have on each other in some different situations" (OME, 2023B, p.109). The sample questions ask, "When you started school this year, how did you feel when you first came into the classroom? If you were shy or nervous, did someone help you to feel better? How did they do that? How could you do that for some other student?" (OME, 2023B, p.110). Given residential schools and their effects as a discourse in Grade 1 following Student Talk examples like, "I was scared on the first day of school. My big brother helped me in the lunchroom that day. That made me feel better," (OME, 2023B, p.110)

the topical transition between A1.4 and A1.5 is thematically disconnected, it aims to build discussions about the effects of residential schools, asking students to reflect on picture books written by Indigenous authors and consider how communities are currently addressing these issues. This revision encourages empathy and a deeper understanding of how colonialism still impacts Indigenous peoples and communities. Grade 1 Strand B3: *Understanding Context: The Elements of the Local Community* adds, "identify the traditional Indigenous and treaty territory or territories on which their school is located" (OME, 2023B, p.122), allowing students to move from comprehending to describing key elements of their communities while discussing Indigenous Treaty territories. The changes to Grade 2 Strand A *Heritage and Identity: Changing Family and Community Traditions* and Strand B *People and Environments: Global Communities* are as minimal as the Grade 1 changes, with an addition in Grade 2 A1.4 that repeats Grade 1 A1.5. Preceding these is A1.3, "compare some of the past and present traditions and celebrations of various ethnocultural groups in their local community, and identify some of the main reasons for the change" (OME, 2023B, p.132), with the tacked-on statement added in each section of "including at least one First Nation and one Inuit society" (OME, 2023B, p.131). Comparing the sequence of topics between A1.3 and A1.4 in Grade 2 reveals a less jarring and smoother thematic connection and a possibility for better-reinforced knowledge (depending on educator approaches) than the flow of subjects in A1.4 and A1.5 in Grade 1. Grade 3 Strand A: *Heritage and Identity: Communities in Canada, 1780–1850* adds A1.2 "compare what life was like between 1780 and 1850 in a few First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities" (OME, 2023B, p.180). This goal is intended to spark a discussion surrounding Indigenous ways of life and the topic of children and residential schools. The Grade 3 Strand A3: *Understanding Context: Life in Colonial Canadian Communities* repeats verbatim a section from the 2018 Grade 7 section *New*

*France and British North America 1713-1800* and *Canada 1800 -1850 Conflict and Changes*, asking students to "identify a few key treaties relevant to Indigenous people in their region during this period, including wampum belts exchanged (e.g., Two Row Wampum), and explain how some of these agreements affected various peoples and communities in that region and beyond" (OME, 2023B, p.189). The Grade 6 Overview relays the often-repeated phrase, "including First Nations, Métis, Inuit" (OME, 2023B, p.247). There are two noticeable changes to the Grade 6 course content—both concerning Jewish communities and the Holocaust, inclusions which will be examined later in this chapter and the next. Few significant revisions appear in the newest Social Studies curriculum framework, while the same sentences are often copied verbatim from the preceding curriculum. Although focusing on residential school impacts in Grades 1 and 2 is a positive step, ensuring that curricular themes are interconnected, and flow easily would help students to retain and understand these otherwise complex concepts surrounding colonial history and Indigenous culture. Based on the evidence of the curriculum content between 1998 and 2023, the Ontario education system, willfully or otherwise, reinforces structural racism through the omission of inclusive and fact-based representation of Indigenous histories and stories. For example, many topics related to Indigenous peoples, like the Indian Act, the ongoing impacts of colonization, or contemporary Indigenous concerns such as land rights, water protection, and Treaty rights, are frequently and insufficiently examined or are presented in ways that do not prioritize Indigenous voices. The lack of resources validating Indigenous knowledge systems, such as oral traditions and governance structures, in conjunction with Western academic methods, further hinders the Decolonization of Social Studies and History education in Ontario. This exclusion upholds stereotypes and biases while allowing students to remain ignorant of the severity of Canada's colonial past. Indigenous knowledge and

histories are not reinforced in the curriculum due to these thematic topical jumps, unclear instructions for educators, and a lack of Student Talk examples.

**Discussions about Indigenous History**

The findings above show that while the amount of Indigenous historical content in the Social Studies curriculum has improved significantly between 1998 and 2023, gaps remain regarding important concepts and comprehensive content that would aid in student retention and understanding of Canadian history and Indigenous history, Treaty rights and obligations. The curriculum also minimizes the roles and actions of the provincial and federal governments and religious institutions that led to the establishment of residential schools, forced assimilation, segregation, and other atrocities against Indigenous peoples. The history of Canada and the relationship between Indigenous peoples are whitewashed, encouraging misrepresentation, omission, and marginalization of Indigenous and minorities within the curriculum. This perpetuates biases and stereotypes, minimizing Indigenous voices in the classroom and creating disparities in the knowledge of Indigenous communities and history in education. At best, in trying to avoid depicting the province negatively, the curriculum delimits the perspectives of minorities by leaving the significance of Indigenous history open to interpretation and educator interest. The following section will dive more deeply into each issue.

**Biases and Stereotypes in the Curriculum**

Students enrolled in the Ontario school system develop an inherent bias against Indigenous people and other minorities through systemic racism built within education (People for Education, 2023A). To address these challenges, the government has begun to develop

anti-racist policies and strategies, but their execution is inconsistent and underfunded (People for Education, 2023A). This bias causes continuous misunderstanding and misconception about Indigenous agencies, rights, and societal contributions. It perpetuates racist ideologies with an ignorance surrounding Indigenous funding, Treaty rights, and the roles and responsibilities of Canadians as Treaty people on Native land. The wording used to describe Indigenous people, communities, experiences, and history in the curricular documents can be viewed as racist and a form of *othering*, pointedly separating Indigenous from non-Indigenous students. For example, the 2013 version of the Social Studies curriculum, under the introductory section Critical Thinking and Critical Literacy in Social Studies, History, and Geography reads,

> Students approach critical thinking in various ways. Some students find it helpful to discuss their thinking, asking questions and exploring ideas. Other students, including many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students, may take time to observe a situation or consider a text carefully before commenting; they may prefer not to ask questions or express their thoughts orally while they are thinking (p.51).

This statement can also be found verbatim in the 2023 curricular documents on page 90. What is the purpose of singling out Indigenous students within that specific framing around those students that "may take time" and "may prefer not to ask questions or express their thoughts" (p.51)? While it is true that some children occasionally exhibit these behaviours, categorizing Indigenous or other minority learners as such poses the potential of perpetuating negative stereotypes, for example, stereotypes about Indigenous passivity, thought, silence, and scholastic attentiveness. It reflects the coercive power dynamics underpinning the Indian residential schools with reinforcing prejudices and misrepresentations of Indigenous people when Indigenous students are singled out under the label "Other students" who "take time," do not ask questions,

or do not express ideas. The history discussed in a classroom may not allow Indigenous students to feel comfortable engaging in classroom discussions. The history they know might conflict with the history presented by non-Indigenous educators working within the parameters of the curricular documents and their accompanying textbooks.

The 2023 curricular introduction under Equity and Inclusive Education emphasizes the "opportunities for students to break through stereotypes and to learn about various social, religious, and ethnocultural groups, including First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people" (OME, 2023B, p. 82). However, teacher expectations for student assessments do not include Indigenous people despite their inclusion in curricula and pedagogical models. Butler et al. (2015) note that there is no mention of the need to teach these subjects in the classroom.

The main focus of the Social Studies curriculum is the settlers and eurocentric historical events, lacking detailed or in-depth Indigenous and minority history, creating a significant disconnect when reviewing the curriculum requirements regarding Canadian history. For example, while the Holocaust and Jewish history are important to learn, they are mentioned 32 times in the 2023 curriculum. The Holocaust and Jewish history were introduced into the Grade 8 curriculum in 2014, covering racial depictions, experiences and perspectives in A2.2 (OME, p.149) and mentioned under B1.1, “analyse key similarities and differences in the experiences of various groups and communities in present-day Canada and the same groups in Canada between 1890 and 1914” (OME, 2014B, p.152). The Holocaust was brought into the Grade 6 curriculum in 2018 under A3.6, “describe significant events or developments in the history of two or more settler/newcomer communities in Canada,” which asks, “What were some challenges facing Jewish people in Canada in the first half of the twentieth century?” (OME, 2018B, p.130). The

mention of the Holocaust in the Grade 8 curriculum 2018 is virtually word-for-word copied from the A2.2 and B1.1 sections of the 2014 version.

In contrast, in the 2023 Grade 8 curriculum, Reconciliation regarding Indigenous history is only mentioned three times (OME, 2023B). Multiple examples of genocidal intent have occurred in the history of Canada. Nevertheless, the curriculum focuses more on europe, presenting colonial powers as good and other countries with similar actions (such as Nazi Germany) as evil. “The indigenous voice is expelled from the Canadian context because the learning that is acquired in our schools presents the european narrative as the logical default” (Lemarquand, 2021, p.119). Pedagogic raises the current framing of eurocentric history within the curriculum to a higher level of importance than Indigenous history and reparations.

Section A3.6 of the 2023 curriculum asks the following questions:

- Why was Canada a main terminus of the Underground Railroad? Where did the former slaves settle?
- What is meant by the term “enemy alien”? Why did the Canadian government place some Ukrainian Canadians in internment camps during World War I?
- What were some challenges facing Jewish people in Canada in the first half of the twentieth century?
- What was Africville? What impact did its demolition have on its residents? (OME, 2023B, p.232).

These Teacher Support Sample Questions are given little detail beyond this first introduction, followed by Section 3.7, which asks students to “describe significant events or developments in the history of Jewish communities in Canada, including some of the ways they have contributed

to Canada" (OME, 2023B, p.233). The additions of Jewish history to the curriculum bring in the following Grade 6 Expectations in B3.5:

> describe the responses of the Canadian government to human rights violations during the Holocaust (e.g., severe restrictions on immigration and the policy of "none is too many"; the turning away of the MS St. Louis; Canada's policy to vastly restrict the number of Jewish refugees admitted from Europe, as shown by the response to the Evian Conference [1938]) and the impact that global changes in understanding and legislation around human rights since World War II have had on the development of Canada's responses to acts of hate and human rights violations) (OME, 2023B, 241).

The curriculum asks, "What are some ways in which antisemitism has affected, and continues to affect, Jewish individuals and communities in Canada? How are Jewish individuals and community groups continuing to fight against antisemitism?" (OME, 2023B, 241). What makes this so interesting is that the curriculum does not ask these same questions concerning Indigenous history, human rights violations, or the government's part and position with these issues. Among these, it does not ask, "What do the Indian Residential Schools tell you about the status of Indigenous people and social organization in this society?" or "What has the Canadian Government's response been to Indigenous human rights violations?". It does not go into detail about residential schools, the status of Indigenous people in Canadian society, or their positionality within the Canadian identity.

**Settler Education on Indigenous Topics: Initial Settler Contact Framed in Curriculum**

The first contact between Indigenous people of Turtle Island and european explorers happened around 1610 to 1632. The 1998 *Ontario Curriculum: Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6;*

*History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8* document introduces this event in the Grade 6 curriculum with very little detail, placing a strong emphasis on european colonialism, explorers, and the fur trade, while the focus of Indigenous communities and people is linked explicitly with settlers and how the Indigenous people aided or warred against Settlers. For the purposes of this study, the 1998 curriculum documents serve as a template for comparison with subsequent curricula. This means that the narrative of Indigenous history it constructs is passed down through generations of educators and students. Unfortunately, and most problematically, it means that Ontario students do not receive adequate education on Canadian history due to its broad learning outcomes and the curriculum, leaving it to the educators to decide what is most important to learn. Frideres and Gadacz (2008) state that western educational institutions present "the history of North America begin[ning] with the arrival of the settlers. In short, there was no 'history' before they arrived" (p.13), a statement I often heard my elementary school teachers make. The curriculum has no first contact story, starting with Canadian history after colonization and the exploits of explorers such as Jacques Cartier, Samuel de Champlain, and Henry Hudson against an *unconquerable* land. It lacks the pre-colonial knowledge passed through oral traditions and Wampum stories surrounding Indigenous societies, sovereign nations with distinct governmental systems, cultures, economies, and laws (McNeil, 2007, p. 6). These communities had sophisticated cultural systems that supported their communities and developed technologies tailored to their specific needs and environments while maintaining a relationship with nature.

**Whitewashing and Marginalization**

From 1998 through 2023, the *Ontario Curriculum: Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6; History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8 Social Studies* documents tout a need for equitable, inclusive,

tolerant, anti-discriminatory education, and social justice practices; however, each document perpetuates oppressive eurocentric whitewashing of Canadian history. Whitewashing, commonly used as a metaphor to depict actions or language that minimizes or ignores wrongdoing, abuses, crimes, or injustice, may also be seen as censorship by absolving blame through a superficially biased presentation of data.

In the 1998 version of Grade 6 Social Studies, the curriculum asks students to identify european explorers and the technological developments surrounding the "exploration of North America" (p.25) without detailing the relationship between Indigenous people and the european colonists. It essentially glosses over the Indigenous history, focusing mainly on the fur trade and the explorers' impact on North America. Jumping forward from the sixteenth to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is Grade 7 History, which highlights european trades, Nouveau France, and British North American wars and colonization.

While similarly focused, the revised version in 2004 threads Indigenous interactions with european colonists more specifically. For example, in the 1998 version, the third expectation reads, "describe the relationship among the various cultural groups in North America" (OME, 1998, p.43), and the 2004 version reads, "identify and explain similarities and differences in the goals and interests of various groups in New France, including French settlers, First Nation peoples, and both French and English fur traders" (OME, 2004, p.53). This slight additional detail enables teachers and students to facilitate a deeper look into the interactions between Indigenous communities and european settlers. However, the nuances are easily lost for educators unfamiliar with Indigenous content. Given the insufficient content about Indigenous subjects in prior curricular documents, much of this interaction may remain untaught.

More than one part of the 2013 Grade 3 Inquiry section focuses on the challenges Indigenous communities face, and their relocation due to european settlements. However, many of the questions in Understanding are still settler-focused: “Why would wealthy British settlers want to live near ports and towns?” “What impact did European settlers’ desire to have the best land for their farms have on the location of reserve lands?”

The Student Talk does not always adequately answer the Sample Question; it may also gloss over it entirely. One such example is A3.3, where the Sample Question asks students, “What impact did European settlers’ desire to have the best land for their farms have on the location of reserve lands?” The Student Talk responses were less complex, simply stating, “If I were going to be a farmer, I would want flat land that had a river nearby so my animals had water to drink. I would not want too many trees. It is hard to plant crops between trees.” “I would want to build my house near a town so I could buy things and have someone to talk to” (OME, 2013B, p.88). These example answers disregard the more complex questions or ignore them entirely. This makes it more difficult for educators to know how to respond to a student asking a similar question, such as, “Why did the settlers take all the good land?” or “Why did the Indigenous communities get moved to other areas?” during the lesson.

Versions of the Ontario curriculum present many examples of structural inequalities in various societies. Starting in the 2013 Grade 4 curriculum and continuing in the Grade 4, 2018 and 2023 documents, the curricula discuss Chinese foot binding (OME, 2018B, p. 215; OME, 2023B, p. 191). Students are asked in the present tense, “What does foot binding of women in China tell you about the status of women and social organization in that society?” This same section asks questions about the societal status of Mayans, Egyptians, Mohawk, and Cree societies. Significantly, the Ontario curriculum does not ask this kind of question about

residential schools. The curriculum does not ask: “What does the structure of Indigenous practices tell you about the status of women in society?” nor does it ask students to reflect on the social status of women in 18th-century european society, which positions women as “inferior, servile, self-sacrificing and as essentially instruments of sexual gratification” (Hazarika, 2012, p. 354). This creates an innate bias regarding minority groups and a disconnect from the positionality of the more *civilized* european society.

The Ontario curriculum reflects and perpetuates profound prejudices by positioning residential school atrocities in the past, and dismissing current Indigenous challenges in Ontario while misrepresenting Canadian history and societal structures in support of maintaining the existing eurocentric state. Children learn about foot binding, associating it with China specifically. Foot binding, which was primarily a Han custom that was not uniformly practiced, and was gradually prohibited starting in 1915 (Shepherd, 2018). As it is worded in the present tense, the curriculum ignores that this practice ended completely by 1949. When discussing residential schools, the curriculum uses past tense language to position these practices and their consequences in the past: “How did the residential school system impact the children, families, and/or communities” (OME, 2023B, p.110). It does not ask, “How has the residential school experience impacted Indigenous families and communities?”. Students are then predisposed to learning racism against minorities (Chinese culture) while ignoring Indigenous relevance or significance as something no longer needing to be considered because it happened in the past. What does this do for Indigenous students in the classroom? The curriculum does not ask about the status of Indigenous women, nor does it mention anywhere outside of the glossary the term “matriarchal” (OME, 2023B, p.357), a societal structure followed by many Indigenous societies worldwide.

In the glossary of the 2023 curricular document, which repeats verbatim the 2018 version, residential schools are defined as the following:

> A network of government-funded, church-run schools for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children, the goal of which was to eradicate Indigenous languages, traditions, knowledge, and culture and to assimilate Indigenous peoples into mainstream settler society.
>
> (OME, 2023B, p. 378).

This definition marginalizes the severe and continued impact of these schools on Indigenous communities. It does not clarify that these schools ran until 1996, nor does it explain the laws surrounding the requirements of Indigenous children being forcibly removed from their families and sent to these schools. Residential schools are not a part of Indigenous culture; they are part of Canada's history, which restricted and controlled Indigenous development.

In many cases, the curriculum mentions residential schools. However, it does not go into enough detail for students to even understand the severity of the atrocities that Indigenous children went through, nor the resilience of Indigenous communities. Many example questions are under Teacher Supports and Sample Questions, with very little addressed within the Student Talk sections, if a Student Talk section is even present; it is not for many of the more complex concepts. While lightly touched on in the Sample Questions of Grade 6 optional topics (OME, p.232), most of the residential school coverage is found in Grade 8 History, resulting in many students being able to pass from Grades 1 through 6 without any knowledge of residential schools despite their impact on Indigenous communities, Canadian history, or current social relations (as in the recent discovery of the mass Indigenous-known unmarked graves in 2021). The Indian Act, a federal government-mandated law introduced in 1876, allowed law enforcement, including the RCMP, missionaries, and teachers to take Indigenous children from

their families and communities and purposely deprive them of all cultural knowledge, is highly significant. However, this significance is obscured by the use of passive language to describe children as "removed and placed in residential schools" (OME, 2023B, p. 281). The definition's passivity avoids explicitly stating that the administrators of these schools had the legal authority to deny students their families, knowledge, languages, and cultures.

How we use language predisposes us to apply or give significance to an action's relevancy. In the 1920s, the practice of Chinese foot binding was outlawed, and was permanently ended in the 1950s with the "last assembly line of the last factory producing shoes for bound feet [grinding] to a halt in November 1999" (Ko, 2005, p.9). By presenting this historical practice in the present tense, the curriculum makes it seem that it is still relevant and needs to be considered a priority. In the same context, residential schools are presented in the passive past tense although the last one closed in 1996 and continues to affect the present. This makes residential schools appear not to be a priority, to be easily dismissed as something from the past.

Indigenous content is often utilized to illustrate one of many ways to satisfy specific expectations; its inclusion in the curriculum could ultimately be seen as detrimental because it creates the perception that teachers are required to teach the basic content with Indigenous information as an addendum. Thus, educators may view Indigenous content as an optional part of classroom learning and may believe they are not required to satisfy curriculum standards by incorporating examples from Indigenous axiology, ontology, or epistemology to teach students.

The bulk of curricular texts uses specific terminology to simplify the identities of the various communities under the umbrella term *Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nation, Métis, Inuit, etc*., when referring to Indigenous content, whether provided as examples or as specific expectations (OME, 2018B, 2023). The fact that these phrases are broad umbrella terms that

contain distinct nations, each with their own values and ideas, is not particularly acknowledged. PanIndigeneity is often mistakenly taught by educators who are not familiar with individual or localized Indigenous communities. Examples of talking sticks (Anishinaabe), dreamcatchers (Anishinaabe), longhouses (Haudenosaunee, Lenape) and tipis (Great Plains) taught as all-encompassing Indigenous practices create an unfortunately common issue I have noticed in schools while as a student, student-teacher, and as a teacher. Though it may be simpler to use catch-all terminology to deftly encompass Indigenous peoples and communities, it is necessary to acknowledge and recognize the localized and regional differences between Indigenous communities and nations and their vast range of beliefs and values. Each Indigenous community's cultural markers and languages are inherently and implicitly tied to the specific land or waters with which they inhabit, and therefore, their knowledge cannot be generalized across all communities. Indigenous knowledge is a reflection of the respect and interconnected relationship that exists between the individual communities, the environment, and natural world.

Kanu (2011) contends that educators seeking equitable Indigenous content and lessons must reframe current curricular approaches and promote Indigenous frameworks, focusing on Indigenous history, perspectives, and realities. By integrating Indigenous issues into the curriculum, these educators help students envision alternative Indigenous realities while building their confidence and identity as treaty people or Indigenous students with their own perspectives, culture, and traditions. In Ontario, this would mean that educators would need to recreate the curriculum around Indigenous issues and concerns while including Indigenous voices and points of view. This approach may empower Indigenous and non-Indigenous to look beyond the stereotypes, micro and macro aggressions, and the Indigenous pedagogy currently lacking within today’s curriculum.

**Reconciliation in the Curriculum**

Significant concepts surrounding the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action* are Reconciliation and reparation. This focus has garnered more attention since the release of the 2015 report. In the 2023 Ontario curricular documents, lessons on Reconciliation outside the context of the TRC first appear in Grade 8; the concept is not addressed prior to that except to mention the TRC, mainly in the introduction. The word Reconciliation does not appear in the curricular glossary and elsewhere only three times, but without directly referencing the Truth and Reconciliation Committee. It appears once in the Introduction under Related Terms and Topics (OME, 2023B, p.112) and twice in the Grade 8 History curriculum (p.276 and p.282). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is first referenced in Grade 6, as one of eighteen study subtopics under B3.5, "describe the responses of the Canadian government to human rights violations during the Holocaust and the impact that global changes in understanding and legislation around human rights since World War II have had on the development of Canada's responses to acts of hate and human rights violations" (OME, 2023B, p.241). The TRC defines Reconciliation as,

> establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. For that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour (TRC, 2015A, p.3).

Page 59 of the Introduction to the 2023 curriculum document states,

> The revisions to the social studies and history curriculum were developed in collaboration with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit educators, community members, and organizations.

> The revisions were undertaken in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's *Calls to Action* numbers 62 and 63 (OME, 2023B).

However, Reconciliation in this context is only referenced with regards to the TRC. Reconciliation as it applies to the TRC is also mentioned on page 71. The curriculum writers explain that the purpose of the *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* document is to help the educators to shrink the education gaps experienced by Indigenous students. It also frames the creation of the curriculum with the claim that it was developed "in collaboration with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit educators, community members, and organizations" (OME, 2023B, p59). This is in contrast to the 2018 cancellation of curriculum consultations, a situation described in detail in the next chapter.

This chapter has delved into The Ontario Social Studies and History curricular documents from 1998 to 2023, demonstrating a deep need for curricular changes by identifying significant gaps and areas requiring improvement surrounding Indigenous historical content within the curriculum. It also covered an organizational overview of curricular contents and deficiencies. The following section will explore steps toward Reconciliation. This includes examining the process of UNDRIP and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, curricular approaches through Seixas' historical thinking framework, Simon's practice of remembrance, and suggest means that effect change. It will describe how blending two-eyed seeing and cultural humility within the curriculum can be implemented and disseminated throughout the education system.

# Chapter Five

# Analysis

## Getting to the Point: Putting it all Together

Indigenous perspectives are Canadian perspectives. The current curricular narrative is framed in such a way as to deny the culpability of Canadian atrocities in order to paint Canada in a positive light while in the same breath demonizing other countries for similar actions (e.g. Germany and the Jewish Holocaust). By offering fewer open and critical examples of Indigenous history, students learn that Indigenous history holds less importance and weight than settler history. This is especially true when the questions about Indigenous history are worded in the past tense (How were some Indigenous women and their families affected by enfranchisement? OME, 2023B, p.232), yet for other groups, present tense is used (How have Holocaust survivors contributed to Canadian society? OME, 2023B, p.233). According to the United Nations and the Geneva Convention, genocide is defined as,

> any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such:
>
> 1. Killing members of the group;
> 2. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
> 3. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
> 4. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
> 5. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (United Nations, 2022).

While this encompasses the Holocaust and Jewish history, it also covers Indigenous history worldwide. Curriculum developers need to balance the presentation of majority and minority histories by avoiding the cyclical nature of bias, stereotypes, and racism upheld in the Ontario curriculum. There needs to be a way for the curriculum to focus on Indigenous history alongside the historical atrocities of the Holocaust and to acknowledge that Adolph Hitler "drew parallels between the Nazi quest for lebensraum, or living space, in the East and the concept of manifest destiny and the treatment of Native Americans" (Westermann, 2016, p. 3). Hitler took these tactics used by the western governments as a basis for his own actions against the Jewish population. Framing the curriculum in this way will allow students to critically reflect on the similarities between Indigenous history and the Jewish Holocaust. South Africa's apartheid system was also based on Canada's segregationist reserve system under the Indian Act (Clarke, 2013, p2), which was formally enacted in 1876 and is still in effect today (with amendments).

It is problematic that the onus is often on teachers and students to dig further into the actual history beyond the biased and tailored rhetoric rather than making Indigenous Studies a core and essential subject. The curriculum does not address the heavier topics within Indigenous history, or engage with Indigenous knowledge, truths, and Reconciliation in complete, age-appropriate contextualization. Thus, the curriculum relies on students' interests and educator knowledge to cover these topics. As a result, it is easier to omit the Indigenous perspectives and uphold ignorance, white supremacy, racism, discriminatory practices, and the normalization of silencing the oppressed, by interpreting and focusing on post-colonization history and Indigenous-settler relationships as the only perspective worth knowing. When whiteness is the marker of society and dominance, everyone else is *savage* or *submissive*.

The curriculum is purposefully constructed using omission or misinformation, not only for settler and colonial descendants, but also the Indigenous ones. Curricular history is distorted in favour of european settler knowledge and culture, while marginalizing, distorting, and suppressing Indigenous and other minority cultures, perspectives, experiences, knowledge, and history. The history of what is now Canada is manipulated for public consumption. This legacy of misinformation is passed down through generations, benefitting specific people, while omitting the difficult truths and experiences of others. As long as an image is maintained, who cares about the depths of its painted façade?

The Ontario Government prominently states on their websites and in media releases that it desires Reconciliation (Tsekouras, 2024; Government of Ontario, 2022; Government of Ontario., 2016A, Government of Ontario., 2016B). However, its actions resemble a political theatre of performative accountability, whether in the abrupt cancellation of the Indigenous committees during the creation of the new curriculum in July 2018 (Cossette, 2018) or the removal of the Indigenous science framework from the Ontario Science curriculum in 2022 before it could be implemented. These government acts of performative Reconciliation do nothing to establish or maintain long-lasting relationships between the Indigenous, Métis, and Inuit and the non-Indigenous of Turtle Island, relationships which are the basis for the *Calls to Action*. In order to implement proper reparations and true Reconciliation, any and all governments must atone for and take systemic action beyond their insincere band-aid approaches of lip service and empty efforts. The Canadian population must be made aware of the housing crisis, lack of accessible clean water, the lack of healthcare, and the lack of jobs available on many, if not most, reserves across Turtle Island and the high costs of food and living on reserves.

Reconciliation in education is more than adding and immediately removing Indigenous frameworks from the curriculum, more than doing Indigenous arts and crafts or dress-up culture days, more than a meaningless repetition of land acknowledgements, or adding an Indigenous staff member to be an expert on all that is “Native” in schools. These are only a start to the Indigenization of educational spaces. Indigenization, as Gaudry & Lorenz (2018) argue, is a complex process of reclaiming Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, while creating space for the revitalization of knowledge through reflection and action that has been subjugated under colonial education systems (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). More significant effort is needed to contribute authentic actions towards Reconciliation and Indigenous truth. Reconciliation in education requires critical reflection, meaningful actions, intentions, and responsibilities. It requires accountability and an understanding of its importance. Reconciliation is deeply rooted in the interconnectedness of relationships. In order to achieve true Reconciliation, actions geared toward it must maintain a reminder of, and a commitment to, individual and communal contributions toward Decolonization. It must recognize the strength, resilience, and many contributions of Indigenous communities against a history of genocide, resistance to colonialism, and cultural reclamation. It must demonstrate support for their resurgence and revitalization. Indigenization and Reconciliation in education is not just about adding Indigenous perspectives to existing systems but about transforming those systems to respect and honor Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Maintaining Treaties is not Reconciliation. It is the bare minimum of the agreement for non-Indigenous people to remain on this land. Rectifying the system beyond the Treaties is Reconciliation. Educators should know the significance and meaning behind Reconciliation and Decolonization to avoid panIndigeneity or tokenistic appropriation while applying Indigenous

axiologies, epistemologies, and ontologies. Studying history ensures that the learner understands where they come from, how societal values were shaped, and what consequential past decisions have created the circumstances of the present (and future). Understanding our history allows students to develop an understanding of our political, sociological, and moral values "to grow into citizens who have the skills necessary to reach intelligent decisions on matters of public policy..... our society will be more democratic—and therefore more equitable and just-if students learn to do these" (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 30).

**Seixas' Curriculum**

Historical thinking, a history-based concept of learning about the past, is now a widely accepted curricular framework in most provinces and territories (Seixas & Colyer, 2014). Developed between 2006 and 2014 by Peter Seixas (2015, 2017), since 2015 history curriculum developers across Canada have based their work on this theoretical research framework (University of British Columbia, 2014). Historical thinking addresses how historians "tackle the difficult problems of understanding the past, how they make sense of it for today's society and culture, and thus how they get their bearings in a continuum of past, present, and future" (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p7). Seixas (2010) proposed this framework for historical inquiry including six historical thinking concepts, which allow students to investigate the past as historians and construct their own historical narratives (Seixas & Morton, 2013). These six concepts are:

- **Establishing Historical Significance** – identifying specific events, people or developments as significant enough to 'occupy a meaningful place in a narrative';
- **Primary Source Evidence** – drawing evidence from primary sources by "asking questions, evaluating sources, contextualizing, interpreting, and corroborating sources";

- **Continuity and Change** – forming chronologies, identifying critical moments, assessing and analyzing progress surrounding declines, and organizing information around specific periods in history;
- **Analyzing Cause and Consequence** – analyzing the complexities of causation (intended and unintended) through the identification of historical events and people while seeking to understand "the conditions and the decisions that allowed, or precipitated" in these events;
- **Historical Perspectives** – ensuring that we avoid presentism by "making evidence-based inferences about historical events" without imposing ideologies of the present onto the past. And;
- **Understanding Ethical Dimension** – learning about the past through ethical judgements without imposing 'contemporary standards of right or wrong' (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p.6) on historical events while using these lessons to inform current decisions (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p.5-6).

This framework designed by Seixas and Morton (2013) aids in constructing a historical and ethical perspective within the curricular discussion of history concerning the experiences of Indigenous people and communities throughout the establishment of what is now Canada. It also somewhat aids in addressing *Calls to Action* 63 iii, "building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect" (TRC, 2015A, p.9). Seixas' historical thinking highlights the dynamic between the learner and what they have learned. Students use critical thinking and critical literacy skills to evaluate, analyze, and understand primary historical documents in constructing a historical narrative. However, this focus poses a significant difficulty for educators integrating the unaddressed concept of Reconciliation into the Social

Studies, History and Geography curriculum. Seixas' approach uses a settler-focused viewpoint in the study of the past, with a eurocentric knowledge system, preventing the integration of Indigenous knowledge, colonial truths, and rationale required in developing the necessary relationship for Reconciliation to be addressed in Social Studies and History lessons (Seixas, 2012). Seixas did not design historical thinking to promote human unity through shared experiences of education, collaboration, and exchanging stories from the past and present. Indigenous epistemologies comprise stories, oral histories, and testimonies shared by elders. One of the most effective strategies for promoting Reconciliation is to listen, read, and learn from Indigenous stories in their given context and to believe these stories contain truth (Cutrara, 2018). Indigenous epistemologies have the potential to enhance historical consciousness. Yet, Indigenous epistemologies may only exist within a colonial grammar of knowing when proponents of historical thinking treat elders' accounts as critically as those of professional historians (Cutrara, 2018). Otherwise, Indigenous narratives and perspectives are subject to reviews which prioritize the needs of the colonizer over the storyteller's realities (Cutrara, 2018). Historical thinking challenges Indigenous knowledge as a valid understanding of past events by upholding that eurocentric logic and knowledge better organize and make sense of historical events. However, it is essential to consider whether Seixas' framework can coexist with Indigenous knowledge and worldviews.

The context in which Seixas conceived the Historical Thinking Project has changed over time, due largely to the creation and release of UNDRIP and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and their *Calls to Action*. Historical thinking cannot address Indigenous stories as testimonies that narrate truths and subvert the colonial gaze. Calderon (2014) asserts that historical thinking imposes colonial language on studying history by extracting stories from their

epistemology and establishing mastery over their representation and interpretation. It is almost impossible to reconcile Indigenous and western epistemologies without acknowledging that the colonial grammar of one has undermined the legitimacy of the other. The following section explores these major concepts and their impact on government policies, education, and the Indigenous perspective. It also addresses Indigenous knowledge and its implications, demonstrating how historical thinking alone is inadequate in political and education frameworks.

**The United Nations: UNDRIP**

According to the 1948 United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 26, education is a human right (United Nations, 1948). In 2021/2022, there were 5,738,181 non-Indigenous and 268,077 Indigenous students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools across Canada (Statistics Canada, 2023). Since the UN's inception, Canada has advocated for human rights, the rights of women and children, and those with disabilities. This includes affirming the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in the 1970s, sanctioning the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in the 1980s, and recognizing the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the 1990s (Government of Canada, 2005; 1999; 1998). However, according to a 2023 review by the United Nations Human Rights Committee, Canada continues to commit serious human rights violations against Indigenous and at-risk people (Human Rights Watch, 2023). These include violations of the rights of marginalized groups including Indigenous peoples, racially discriminating against Indigenous children in the welfare system (Major, 2023), a lack of response to the missing and murdered Indigenous women (Deer, 2022), indefinite holds on immigration detainees (including family separation and child detention) (Evans & Mussell, 2023; Stauffer, 2021), and corporate

migrant slavery (Murray, 2024; Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability, 2022). Other human rights concerns arise regarding those with disabilities, and refugees, with a specific mention of the structural and systemic discrimination against Indigenous people (Human Rights Watch, 2023; United Nations, 2023).

In the 1980s, a UN member released the "Study of the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations." This report spurred the creation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (UNDRIP). In 1985, the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) drafted UNDRIP and submitted it in 1993; it was approved the following year (University of British Columbia, 2009). The UN Commission of Human Rights then established another working group with human rights experts and over 100 Indigenous organizations, including many Indigenous representatives from Canada (University of British Columbia, 2009). The declaration draft underwent multiple reviews to ensure it remained consistent with established human rights guidelines and did not contradict or override them. UNDRIP is the product of almost 25 years of deliberation by UN member states and Indigenous groups worldwide.

Colonial UN Members Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States did not adopt the declaration, arguing that the autonomy recognized for Indigenous peoples in UNDRIP would undermine their states' sovereignty, especially in land disputes and natural resource extraction (University of British Columbia, 2009). However, Indigenous representatives refused to change the draft, arguing that the document gave Indigenous peoples the same rights already guaranteed to colonialists (University of British Columbia, 2009).

In 2006, while Seixas was developing the concepts of historical thinking, UNDRIP was finally accepted by the UN Human Rights Council, and adopted by a majority of the UN General Assembly the following year (University of British Columbia, 2009). Despite its presence in the UN Human Rights Council and support from Canadian citizens, legal experts, grassroots organizations, and the opposition party, the Conservative Government initially voted against UNDRIP, refusing to sign it (University of British Columbia, 2009). The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia was the first to pass UNDRIP into law in November 2019, and the Federal Liberal Government finally approved it in 2021 (Legislative Assembly of BC, 2019; Liberal Party of Canada, 2021).

UNDRIP aims to maintain Indigenous Peoples' human rights and improve government transparency. It focuses on Indigenous self-determination and governance, land and resource rights, ending systemic oppression, ending Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination, and preserving Indigenous cultural heritage, practices, knowledge, languages, and technologies (United Nations, 2007). Article 14 entitles Indigenous peoples to establish and control their educational systems. Although Ontario's curriculum has included more Indigenous content between 1998 and 2023, it continues to primarily reflect a Eurocentric worldview, failing to fully acknowledge Indigenous knowledge systems as equally valid as Western ones. Article 15 of UNDRIP states that "Indigenous Peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories, and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information" (United Nations, 2007, p.14). There is increasing recognition of the need for Indigenous language revitalization and the inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing within the education system. Nevertheless, practical implementation in Ontario's classrooms remains limited, with many schools focusing on Western approaches to teaching History and Social

Studies. Canada endorsed UNDRIP in November 2010 as an aspirational document, finally offering its full support in May 2016 (Canadian Museum for Human Rights, 2024). It was only implemented in Ontario when it became federal law on June 21, 2021. *Bill C-15: An Act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* was introduced to Parliament in December 2020, but it remained in bureaucratic consultation until it received royal assent in June 2021 (Government of Canada, 2022B; Parliament of Canada, 2021). Bill C-15 mandates that the federal government align Canadian laws with UNDRIP, prepare and execute an action plan within two years, and provide annual progress reports on UNDRIP's implementation (Canadian Museum for Human Rights, 2024). Released in June 2023, the action plan for Bill C-15 contains 131 measures to promote the rights of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. However, it still faces criticism from the Assembly of First Nations, who described "the engagement between Canada and First Nations [as] inadequate" (Assembly of First Nations, 2021, p.5). While the Federal Government shares many press releases regarding their action plans, finding proof that these plans have been enacted is more challenging (Government of Canada, 2023A; Taylor, 2023; Government of Canada, 2021).

**The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada *Calls to Action* for Education:**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), names UNDRIP as the framework for their *Calls to Action.* Sixteen of the 94 Calls to Action refer to UNDRIP, repeating its calls for mutual respect, and advocating for change by working with Indigenous people and communities to enact those changes (TRC, 2015C). For over a century, Canada's Indigenous policy aimed to eliminate Indigenous governments, ignore Indigenous rights, terminate Treaties, and assimilate Indigenous Peoples into the settler culture through the establishment of residential schools, an

attempt at “cultural genocide” (TRC, 2015A, p.1). Reconciliation is a crucial process intrinsically tied to the relationship between the federal government and Indigenous people, aimed at addressing the past, present, and ongoing impacts of colonial policies, acts, and practices. As Justice Murray Sinclair stated in Ottawa and in the TRC report *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (2015),

> Reconciliation must become a way of life … [It] not only requires apologies, reparations, the relearning of Canada’s national history, and public commemoration, but also needs real social, political, and economic change.
>
> (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015B, pp. 240-241).

These actions have been forthcoming, albeit limited, and in a variety of forms. According to the Yellowhead Institute *Calls to Action Accountability* report (2023), the *Calls to Action* regarding education funding (numbers 8, 9, 11, and 64) and Call to Action 6 (rescinding Section 43 The “Spanking” Law of the Criminal Code) have not yet been initiated (Government of Canada, 2016). Numbers 7 and 10, each focused on legislation regarding closing educational achievement gaps and developing culturally appropriate curricula, are reported as non-collaborative actions rather than as part of an integrated solution with all First Nations, Métis, and Inuit leadership (Yellowhead Institute, 2023). This means that the federal government claims to have completed 17 Calls to Actions, but Indigenous Watchdog *TRC Status Updates* report that only 14 Calls to Action have been completed, while CBC’s *Beyond94* and Yellowhead Institute’s *Calls to Action Accountability* states that number is only 13 (CBC News, 2024; Indigenous Watchdog, 2024; Jewell, 2024; D. Sinclair, 2022). Numbers 12, 62, 63, and 65, have been announced as in progress for curricular changes and inclusions (Yellowhead Institute, 2023). The updated content

frameworks have been less expeditious. Those implemented are not yet mandatory for Ontario students, and eighty-one of the 94 *Calls to Action* still remain unfulfilled (Yellowhead Institute, 2023). Since the 2021 discovery of residential school mass graves, all *Calls to Action* met have been achieved by non-governmental organizations. No single *Call to Action* has been completed by the federal, provincial, or territorial governments, nor have these governments collaborated to create annual reports on their progress as required in *Calls to Action* number 2 (Yellowhead Institute, 2023; Indigenous Watchdog, 2024). None of the *Calls to Action* were completed in 2023 (Yellowhead Institute, 2023).

Since the TRC report, Ontario's Indigenous education policy has been shaped by reports, frameworks, objectives, and funding adjustments. The Ontario government has made a string of commitments to enhance Indigenous students' outcomes, promises to collaborate with Indigenous partners to increase students' knowledge of Indigenous perspectives, histories, and cultures, and pledges to implement policies to assist school boards in aiding Indigenous students self-identify (People for Education, 2023B). Ontario also promised to update the Social Studies and History curriculum in 2023. As this thesis explains, while some curricula were revised, implementing them has been fraught with challenges. According to the Yellowhead Institute report (2023), although some Ontario schools have established relationships with local Indigenous communities, others require more significant assistance from the Ministry of Education and the school board to succeed. Schools in Northern Ontario are more likely to offer Indigenous education options and programs, while schools in the Toronto area are least likely to do so (Yellowhead Institute, 2023).

The OME *Education Funding Report 2024-2025* projected $120 million for the Indigenous Education Supports Allocation (OME, 2024, p.103) using data from a 2021 census

report. This educational support was designed for “programs and initiatives to support the academic success and well-being of Indigenous students, as well as build the knowledge of all students and educators on Indigenous histories, cultures, perspectives and contributions” (OME, 2024, p.102). According to the report, the Ministry has enveloped the funds, meaning that schools can only use the funding for its intended purpose, which (in this case) is to hire a full-time Indigenous Education Lead responsible for the implementation of the school boards’ *Board Action Plan on Indigenous Education* (OME, 2024, p.105). However, the Ontario annual report about Indigenous and race-based student data is not updated consistently. As educational funding is based on such data, it is impossible to determine if Ontario is meeting its achievement goals.

In order to fulfill the Truth and Reconciliation Commission *Calls to Action* 62 and 63, all students must be educated about Treaties, Indigenous rights, cultures, and perspectives. In 2018, the Ontario government dismissed revisions to the Ontario Social Studies and History curriculums meant to add required Indigenous content to public schools across the province (Crawley, 2018). This left students needing more adequate information to understand and respect Indigenous cultures. The OME announced that they were planning for curriculum rewrites to conclude by September 2023, even as they removed Indigenous land connection frameworks from the science curriculum in 2022. As described earlier in this thesis, these rewrites have been minimal and often copied and pasted verbatim with few noticeable or significant changes made to address the curriculum's main issues surrounding Indigenous content. Given the Ontario Social Studies, History and Geography curriculum as it exists in 2024, students graduating from elementary and high school can do so with minimal exposure to Indigenous experiences, Residential School atrocities, and the ongoing impact of colonization. It has often been left to

educators to tailor their curriculum to be inclusive and diverse, implementing changes that allow students to learn about Indigenous cultures, histories, and knowledge without the resource backing of curricular documents, the Ministry of Education, or the Ontario government (Dion et al., 2010; Hill, 2023). Educators, groups, and organizations have committed to campaigns focused on education and Reconciliation, pushing for mandatory curricular incorporation of Indigenous history, contributions, and Treaty rights into education curricula (Sinclair, 2015B).

**Simon's Social Practice of Remembrance**

The competing ideas behind historical thinking, and the reforms suggested by UNDRIP and the TRC represent a major barrier to developing a History and Social Studies curriculum that embraces Indigenous ways of knowing. The issue with historical thinking is that it does not provide a framework that is compatible with UNDRIP or the TRC. The ideas of Roger Simon (2005) present an alternative way to combine Indigenous epistemology with an inclusive pedagogical approach to history. Simon (1942–2012) was an education scholar whose research centred on the ethical implications of education relating to the remembrance of historical traumas (Simon, 2019). Working the *Calls to Action* requirements into the history curriculum is not simply adding a section on residential schools, but also ensuring that students understand Indigenous history beyond the classroom as an ongoing and continuous colonial action. It is changing educators' and students' thoughts about Indigenous history and its continued effects on present events. While Seixas's historical thinking may help students understand and discover the issues of the past, Simon's (2005) research seeks to explore a more profound outlook by emphasizing the ethical importance of remembering histories from diverse perspectives through the "social practice of remembrance" (p.2). Moving away from the colonial eurocentric view of

global history, Simon asks pointedly, “what it might mean to take the memories of others (memories formed in other times and spaces) into our lives and so live as though the lives of others mattered?” (Simon, 2005, p.9). Arguing that if the lives of others mattered, then their memories of history should be reassessed, revised, and learned from (Simon, 2005). The views and voices of the past, including the recorded testimonials of residential school survivors found in the *The Survivors Speak* (TRC, 2015B), can help educators and students learn different perspectives and worldviews. Children are able to experience a separate history than they may be familiar with, to question settler beliefs, and to view history through an open lens with multiple facets. Listening without academic bias or preconceived judgement can preserve knowledge while sharing stories and hearing historical accounts. This removes a burden in our understanding of the past, changing how we look at and understand this land's truth and narrative history. Respecting testimony as truth can rewrite colonial history, develop new Reconciliation approaches, and create new techniques for Indigenous self-preservation and colonial resistance. When Indigenous history is presented to be just as important as eurocentric history, then Indigenous worldviews are delivered on an equal footing. This allows students to empathize with different voices to which they might not have otherwise been exposed, while disrupting their understanding of colonial history and viewing the effects of the past within the present (Simon, 2005).

Simon’s approach has merit, but like Seixas’ framework, it is also problematic. While historical refocus allows a reconstructed telling of past events, it begs the question of what is history and whose past is worth hearing? In the curricular context, history is record-bias, it often does not take into account Indigenous methods of remembering through storytelling; beadwork, oral history, pictographs and petroglyphs, tattoo designs, tree markers, etc that are passed down

through the generations. Subjective and social reconstruction of past events requires the loss of ego to ensure that what is being recalled is factual, without embellishments. History is not about the vanquishers and the surviving victims; it is about the middle ground wherein lies the truth. Reconciliation is unattainable if past events are overlooked, because "there can be no future – no reparation – without reactivating the past" (Pinar, 2014, p.8). If students are unaware of any history beyond settler and colonial history, Reconciliation will continue to be out of reach. Education is not about upholding one ideology above another; it is about presenting all sides of an account with evidence and allowing the learners to take what they will from the knowledge given.

**Two-Eyed Seeing**

Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall (2018) is credited with developing a more recent strategy worth incorporating into the educational framework. The concept of "etuaptmumk," or two-eyed seeing, is a means to balance multiple perspectives. Marshall (2018) introduced the principle in 2004 as a strategy for co-learning in science. Bartlett et al. (2012) offer a paraphrased description of this approach as

> learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together for the benefit of all

(Bartlett et al., 2012, p.335). Researchers like Simon (2005), Battiste (2010, 2013), and Bartlett (2012) believe that all students would benefit equally from Indigenous knowledge, allowing the non-Indigenous to understand the difficulties surrounding residential schools and the ongoing legacy of colonialism. Two-eyed seeing empowers Indigenous ways of knowing and challenges

settler beliefs about Canadian history. Indigenous knowledge allows for the interconnectedness of students and knowledge, contrary to eurocentric hierarchical thinking, which separates the student from knowledge (Bartlett et al., 2012). Indigenous knowledge relies heavily on reciprocity and relationship building, and two-eyed seeing can enhance this interconnectedness by promoting collaboration, dispelling stereotypes, and fostering intercultural relationships through a Decolonial framework.

Willie Ermine's concept of "ethical space" guides a Decolonial education framework that emphasizes establishing a respectful environment where Indigenous and Western knowledge systems can coexist without overpowering one another (Ermine, 2007). The educational Decolonial framework challenges traditional educational systems shaped by colonial values, structures, and Eurocentric knowledge (Smith, 2012). This framework advocates for a respectful dialogue where Indigenous and minority perspectives are valued equally alongside Western ones, promoting an inclusive and equitable educational environment that restores Indigenous sovereignty, autonomy, and cultural integrity (Ermine, 2007; Smith, 2012). Decolonial frameworks focus on decolonizing curricula by incorporating diverse perspectives, reclaiming Indigenous cultural practices, and fostering critical thinking that questions colonial power dynamics (Grande, 2004).

Ermine's ethical space fits this paradigm by rejecting the notion that Western knowledge is superior to Indigenous knowledge and by challenging colonial hierarchies that have historically marginalized Indigenous ways of knowing. It presents an opportunity to dismantle the dominance of colonial structures while establishing alternative ways of knowing without oppression. According to Ermine, in order to engage with Western power structures and maintain Indigenous autonomy, ethical space encourages the preservation of Indigenous knowledge

systems. Additionally, ethical space stresses conscious, respectful communication in which Indigenous and Western systems acknowledge and resolve power disparities (Ermine, 2007). This concept aligns with the Decolonial framework, which emphasizes cultural preservation, inclusive teaching practices, and the restoration of Indigenous sovereignty in education, seeking to create more equitable, empowering, and respectful learning environments based on mutual respect and critical engagement (Ermine, 2007; Grande, 2004; Smith, 2012). Furthermore, Ermine points out that by recognizing Indigenous knowledge systems as equally legitimate and encouraging dialogue with Western concepts without requiring assimilation, ethical space provides a platform for reviving Indigenous knowledge systems that colonialism sought to erase. Finally, ethical space helps navigate power dynamics in research, governance, and policy-making systems, enabling Indigenous peoples to uphold their rights, knowledge, and interests (Ermine, 2007).

Indigenous educators face difficulties decentering eurocentric consciousness of colonial conventions which marginalize Indigenous students, challenging fictitious colonial history, and contesting constructed privileges and eurocentrically educated non-Indigenous unlearning in a society built on racist ideologies (Battiste, 2010). Marker (2011, 2019) emphasizes the importance of two-eyed seeing in integrating Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies into eurocentric educational frameworks. He also calls for the meaningful incorporation of the TRC *Calls to Action* into curricula and teacher training by examining Indigenous knowledge systems within ecological consciousness, addressing cultural genocide and colonization, and the resilience of Indigenous knowledge (Marker, 2019).

Two-eyed seeing disrupts and reshapes Canadian history by incorporating Indigenous voices, knowledge, and practices. It lets students engage physically and mentally in Simon’s

practice of remembrance, challenging settler beliefs (Wallace-Casey, 2022). However, merely adding Indigenous frameworks and knowledge to eurocentric curriculum is insufficient. The approach requires systemic changes beyond the eurocentric ideology and superiority that frame the current educational narrative.

Universities should ensure that student-teachers are educated and confident enough to incorporate Indigenous content into their teaching while also meeting the needs of Indigenous students and communities. Teachers must ensure that students understand the centuries of mis- and incomplete information about Canadian history, its shaping, and its significance in upholding the dominant eurocentric system. Schools must also ensure that educators teaching Indigenous knowledge have received training in consultations with local Indigenous knowledge keepers, from which the knowledge is derived, in order to avoid panIndigeneity or misattributed knowledge. The concept of cultural humility provides a framework for educators to consider and conceptualize diverse and conflicting perspectives in the classroom by encouraging self-reflection and ongoing growth. This concept, in conjunction with Davis' pedagogy of discomfort and DiAngelo's white fragility, mentioned in the Literature Review, calls for educators to confront their own biases, unlearn biased curricular ideologies, and foster a growth mindset. Cultural humility enables educators to acknowledge their limitations while fostering an inclusive and responsive learning environment through an unlearning of biased curricular ideologies.

**Cultural Humility**

Conceived by Tervalon & Murray-Garcia (1998), cultural humility is a process of self-exploration and self-criticism that involves learning from others and entering a relationship

intending to honour their beliefs, customs, and values (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). In an educational sense, teachers, administrators, and others can devote themselves to unlearning stereotypes and biases about which they might not be aware while learning about Indigenous cultures with intentional respect, honour, and understanding. This process differs from cultural competence, which involves effectively interacting with diverse racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, religious, and social groups, achieved through ongoing learning about their behaviour, beliefs, language, values, and customs (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Cultural competence requires the acquisition of skills and knowledge, implemented systematically; it involves self-reflection, self-critiquing, and balancing power in relationships (Miyagawa, 2023). In contrast, cultural humility is a philosophy that promotes lifelong learning, self-reflection, addressing power imbalances, and fostering institutional accountability (Miyagawa, 2023). It is a practice of lifelong self-awareness and dedication to oneself. The concepts of self-reflection and cultural identity form a dynamic framework, requiring dedication and self-awareness. Cultural humility, in conjunction with two-eyed seeing, provides educators with a collaborative framework which includes continued self-reflection and awareness regarding Indigenous knowledge, history, ways of being, and ways of knowing. It is educators' route to self-reflective practice based upon their positionality within Canadian history as Indigenous, settler, colonizer, or immigrant. Positionality refers to how one's beliefs, values, and location influence a person's interactions with the outside world, and the effects of privilege and power dynamics. Educators' knowledge of their positionality is the embodiment of the self-aware practice of knowing themselves within the larger Canadian story.

**The Process of Reconciliation in the Education Curriculum**

Above, I described the general nuances of systemic adjustments for Reconciliation through Indigenous history and educational content, as well as the process of moving toward a more inclusive curriculum perspective. Now, I will shift my focus to a more in-depth analysis of Reconciliatory efforts in the curriculum and school systems. In response to the TRC *Calls to Action*, and in order to rectify the issues of past Indigenous content within the curriculum, the OME promised to seek consultation with Indigenous, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis educators and organizations in order to accurately revise the curricula for inclusion in future curriculum documents (OME, 2007A). Since 2015, many provincial elementary, high school, and post-secondary educational institutions have made substantial changes towards Reconciliation by rewriting the curriculum to include more Indigenous content, frameworks, and the history of residential schools. The percentage of elementary schools reporting professional development for staff has more than doubled, from 34% in 2012-13 to 76% in 2022-23 (OME, 2018A). Meanwhile, the portion of elementary schools offering Indigenous languages programs has increased from 4% to 13% (OME, 2018A). In 2022-23, 72% of Northern Ontario schools offered ceremonies and land-based activities, compared to 30% in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) (OME, 2018A).

The Ontario government's primary response to Reconciliation is the *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (FNMI Policy) (2007B) and its accompanying *Implementation Plan* (OME, 2014A). This is an Ontario strategy to incorporate Indigenous history, cultures, and perspectives into the Ontario education system. It claims to challenge eurocentricity in the present curriculum. However, it does not meaningfully Decolonize Ontario's classrooms or provide a voice for teachers and students to challenge the cognitive imperialism maintained in the current education system. Battiste (2013) defines

*cognitive imperialism* as "when Indigenous knowledge is omitted or ignored in the schools, and a eurocentric foundation is advanced to the exclusion of other knowledges and languages;" Battiste also refers to it as "white-washing the mind" (p. 26). The FNMI policy, which presents Indigenous education as an option rather than a mandatory requirement, is another band-aid solution that does little to alter the status quo. It is inadequate in addressing the TRC Calls to Action, with deficit-based thinking focusing only on *Calls to Action* number 10 to "close educational achievement gaps" (TRC, 2015A, p.2) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. It fails to include culturally appropriate interconnected relationship-building curricula to encourage empathy and appreciation for Indigenous culture and history.

This push for more Indigenous content should be mandatory in all Ontario schools, not randomly implemented in just a handful of public schools and schools on reserves. The education system was implicit in continuing the cycle of colonization, from residential schools, which remained open until 1996, to ensuring that Indigenous content and perspectives were as underdeveloped as possible, to creating barriers that prevented deeper understanding and hindering identity reclamation. As such, one way to achieve Reconciliation in education is to focus on changes in the provincial government and education at the systemic level.

The path to Reconciliation through the *Calls to Action* ask that the Ministry of Education do the following:

- Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.
- Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.

- Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.
- Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

(Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015C, p.3)

One solution to start to achieve these goals would be to form a task force of diverse locally represented Indigenous educators, Elders, and students to collaborate with the Ministry of Education and all publicly funded school boards across Ontario to address the *Calls to Action* related to education. To ensure government accountability for Indigenous input to the curriculum, an Indigenous panel member should sign off on the curriculum changes surrounding specific topics to keep a record of Indigenous approval/agreements with the subject changes and additions. Ironically, this describes the 2018 Indigenous education committee disbanded at the last minute by the Ontario government prior to scheduled curricular rewrites (Crawley, 2018; Johnson, 2018). Curriculum designers need to familiarize themselves with educators' classroom adaptations and repair the issues in planning and implementation of the current curriculum regarding Indigenous content. Shizha (2014) explores how Indigenous knowledge is crucial for societal and economic development. Indigenous languages and school knowledge enhance literacy, and maintaining one's culture fosters identity, social cohesion, and knowledge-based economic growth (Shizha, 2014). Curriculum planning should consider the target audience, the content, and its effects on students and society. Integrating traditional knowledge into educational subjects and programs can foster collaboration among students, the public, governments, and other institutions, benefiting communities (Shizha, 2014). This approach

effectively integrates learners' cultures into their experiences while acknowledging the unique benefits of different perspectives.

The education system is influenced by a colonial and eurocentric structure, which marginalizes Indigenous history and epistemological diversity. Curriculum in action is a Decolonial approach that prioritizes curriculum knowledge through inclusivity and recognizes education, learning, and knowledge as a dynamic and significant experience (Shizha, 2014). From an anti-colonial perspective, the curriculum comprises shared values and beliefs and a progressive orientation focusing on constructing meaning (Shizha, 2014). An Indigenized curriculum provides an educational system that embraces all experiences and provides a genuine learning environment that is historical, communal, and dynamic (Shizha, 2014). This type of curriculum encourages consistency and connection in the experiences that educators and students bring to the classroom similar to two-eyed seeing and cultural humility. The goal of Indigenization in curricula is to "promote Indigenous knowledge and resources," create equitable opportunities for marginalized communities, and promote a re-narrative of Indigenous existence and experience (Shizha, 2014, p.116). When discussing colonial education, the concept of assimilation is crucial. According to Weightman (2008), contextualization is an essential component of the Indigenization process; without it, any form of Indigenization will prove unsuccessful. Shizha (2010), writing about Africa, states that curriculum content which draws on traditional knowledge of the land can aid in preserving community knowledge when it is applied and valued for intellectual purposes. Traditional knowledge embraces diverse capabilities and experiences by integrating learners' cultures into their educational experiences. Curriculum revisions that seek to offer alternative perspectives to the dominant western eurocentrism must acknowledge that the curriculum uses a cultural practice of ideas, values, and meaning to make

sense of the world (Kanu, 2009). Curriculum knowledge is contextual, supporting a range of educational objectives, impacted by historical and geographical factors. When educators present curricular content or knowledge that conforms to the approaches students are accustomed to or comfortable with, students are able to learn and retain the knowledge better (Shizha, 2014). Curriculum planning and development should consider the audience, the curriculum's purpose and information, and its impact on students and society (Shizha, 2014). Joseph (2011) suggests that examining curriculum as culture offers a comprehensive understanding of education, considering not just planned material but also individuals' lived experiences and their significance. This approach enables educators to challenge the notion of curriculum as a single reality to recognize its profound influence on culture (Joseph, 2011).

**Pedagogical Approaches that can implement Reconciliation**

As crucial as the systemic changes are, changes within the classroom are just as essential. Canadian Social Studies and History classes should consider the origins of Canada before european arrival. They should challenge the honesty of textbooks about Indigenous history, traditional land keepers, and the role of governments and religious institutions in engaging in Indigenous genocide. It is crucial to ensure that schools and libraries use and teach languages that are inclusive of Indigenous culture and preserve them for future generations. Schools and teachers must continue to study how Canada’s history is taught, making thoughtful and meaningful changes to curricula to engage students with a broader, less eurocentric vision of Canadian history while preserving Indigenous languages and promoting a more inclusive understanding of Canada’s past, present, and future.

One such approach many schools are making is Indigenous land-based education, henceforth referred to simply as land-based learning. This prioritizes Indigenous ways of knowing, the nature of being, philosophical methodologies, and their relationship to the land while addressing settler-colonialism (Twance, 2019). Kimmerer (2012) defines land-based pedagogies as a "focus on understanding and managing relationships between land and people for mutual benefit" (Kimmerer, 2012, p.317). Indigenous-led, land-based learning uses an Indigenized and ecologically focused approach to education, recognizing Indigenous culture's profound physical, mental, and spiritual connection to the land while utilizing the knowledge of Elders and Indigenous youth (Kimmerer, 2012).

In a pedagogical sense, land-based learning explores Indigenous values, ontologies, and epistemologies while aiding students in reclaiming a relationship with environmental systems based on "Indigenous principles of respect, responsibility, and reciprocity" (Kimmerer, 2012, p.319). Land-based learning is more than just classroom activities taking place outdoors. This strategy encourages students to understand the land, observe natural processes in the environment, ask questions, and think critically about the world around them. How can we claim Reconciliation when people do not know the history of this land? How is Reconciliation possible when non-Indigenous Ontario people cannot fathom any place in Canada that does not have access to clean drinking water, or proper medical care, or houses that have twenty or more people living in them due to a housing crisis? Decolonizing pedagogies need to be more than performative events with Indigenous dances, art pieces, and repetitive land acknowledgements.

Educators and educational institutions should be more proactive in explaining and educating students about the reasons behind acknowledging Indigenous peoples, lands, and Treaties, and how the acknowledgement is reflected in their institutional practices (Wilkes et al.,

2017). The Truth and Reconciliation *Calls to Action* report never mentions land acknowledgements; however, they are viewed as one of many reconciliatory actions started by the Canadian government (Parliament of Canada, 2016). Land acknowledgements were mentioned under Call 15.2 of *The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* in 2019. The Call urges Canadians to

> Decolonize by learning the true history of Canada and Indigenous history in your local area. Learn about and celebrate Indigenous Peoples' history, cultures, pride, and diversity, acknowledging the land you live on and its importance to local Indigenous communities, both historically and today.

(National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019, p.199). Since 2019, land acknowledgements have become ubiquitous across the country to the point of ridicule and critique by Indigenous peoples (Deer, 2022). Introduced in various educational settings and presentations across Canada, they are frequently taken as superficial lip service to appease Indigenous people (Wark, 2021). Often, these acknowledgements are uttered without understanding or knowledge of their true meaning. A land acknowledgement is only meaningful when it works in conjunction with knowledge and education. As it currently stands, land acknowledgements have become performative acts in recognising First Nations, Inuit, and Métis territories (Wark, 2021). By not teaching the meaning and depth of these statements, land acknowledgements are becoming something to be memorized similar to any other scholarly fact, like one plus one equals two. Acknowledging the land in the past tense also positions Indigenous culture within the past rather than seeing Indigenous people as belonging to current and continuously growing Nations. Even if the speaker does the acknowledgement with understanding and respect, the listener may not always understand. These should be used as

teachable moments in the acknowledgement that the land is stolen and that all those living on the land are Treaty people. Students should know that we are all living and going to schools in a place that once held a completely different culture and history that still exists. It is not enough to acknowledge that Indigenous people once existed; they continue to exist. Parliament itself is on unceded Algonquin territory. Students should be aware of the strength and importance of these acknowledgements, understand why they are said, and remember the land on which they live. Instead of giving statements without care, these acknowledgements should come with the knowledge and history of what came before them and the actions needed to create a world with true Reconciliation for the people of this land. A deeper connection and understanding to these opening statements will give listeners a purpose and meaning that has yet to be truly acknowledged. In order to recognize, build, and preserve ties with Indigenous Peoples, land acknowledgements should be sincere and serve as a poignant reminder of our obligations to one another, the environment, principles, and future generations (Wark, 2021). Copying or hastily writing a statement, however, runs the risk of offending Indigenous peoples and misses the real purpose of Reconciliation. Instead, creating and announcing meaningful land acknowledgements should foster connections with local Indigenous people and promote Reconciliation within these communities and with the land and its history, recognizing Indigenous people as the original stewards of the land. Educators need to build their knowledge of the local Indigenous culture they are positioned with and understand the Treaty they work under or the unceded land on which they live. Singing O Canada “our home and Native land” and delivering the land acknowledgments must be said with the most profound understanding that Canada would not be a country without Indigenous Nations, communities, and peoples (Ladner & Tait, 2017). Educators should collaborate with their Indigenous communities to ensure that the information

they are teaching is accurate and meaningful. They should instruct their students to maintain that meaning, so it does not become a performance act of memorisation.

Authentic Reconciliation is not possible without educating the population on Treaty rights and their duties as Treaty people. Education is a steppingstone on the right path to understanding the need for Reconciliation, preventing more misprojected hate, and slowing the racism that spreads via stereotypes and a growing ignorance of Indigenous culture and way of life. As Schaefli states, “To survive as a political and economic system, settler colonialism requires normalization of the ways of thinking that legitimate denigration and subjugation of Indigenous nationhoods” (Schaefli, 2018, p. II). Unity-building solutions should incorporate education in all forms, as it significantly impacts people’s worldviews, community connections, and future visions (Delors, 1996; Efimoff & Starzyk, 2023; Khawaja, 2021). Education is vulnerable to manipulation by those seeking division, as it can alter values and beliefs. Education is crucial for developing children’s critical thinking and questioning generational hate, as it helps address generational hatred. We require a multilayered approach to education starting in kindergarten as a key component to facilitating understanding of Indigenous peoples, their struggles, and their contributions to our shared land. If children are old enough to experience racism, they are also old enough to understand and be taught age-appropriate lessons that facilitate and prevent racist ideology. Indigenous scholars and educators have emphasized the importance of formal education in restoring Indigenous nationhood and fostering positive relationships, highlighting its role in building the path toward Reconciliation and Decolonizing education (Battiste et al., 2002). Toulouse (2008, 2011) proposes the Anishinabek’s Seven Good Life Teachings, also called the Seven Grandfather Teachings, as a model for inclusive classroom teaching. The Seven Good Life Teachings are:

- Aakode'ewin/Bravery: Commit to educational and curricular changes by including Indigenous contributions, innovations and inventions.
- Gwayakwaadiziwin/Honesty: Acknowledging the need for continuous learning while reviewing factors that promote change in the education system, including increased parental involvement and teacher education.
- Dabaadendiziwin/Humility: Understanding the diverse nature of Indigenous people and utilizing their resources to address the existing knowledge gap.
- Zaagi'idiwin/Love: Committing as educators to ensuring the success of all Indigenous students by embracing their unique learning styles.
- Minaadendamowin/Respect: High expectations for Indigenous students, honouring their culture, language, and worldview within our classrooms and schools.
- Debwewin/Truth: Developing measurable outcomes for Indigenous student success is vital to inclusive curriculum and pedagogy.
- Nibwaakaawin/Wisdom: Effective practices in Indigenous education are shared through professional development and research, promoting equity (Toulouse, 2008, 2011).

These strategies ensure that the learning space includes all students within the classroom or learning environment and promotes respect for Indigenous knowledge and people. It is important to ensure, as with land acknowledgements, that these teachings are not simply acts of memorisation without understanding, and that educators with Indigenous backgrounds teach their significance. Ermine, Sinclair, and Browne (2005) emphasize the importance of an "ethical space" for respectful cultural engagement, asserting that Indigenous knowledge is a right that requires protection and self-examination. Continued equitable exchange, group dynamics, circle learning, and individual voice are necessary to foster mutual appreciation while challenging

conventional learning methods (Ermine et al., 2005). This requires changes in teaching strategies, including inclusive pedagogy taught by localized Indigenous educators incorporating Indigenous culture, language, and worldviews to ensure student success. The path forward is building a foundation of human rights in curricular knowledge. Korteweg, Higgins, & Madden (2015) suggest that teacher education should aid teachers in making connections between colonization, eurocentrism, and whiteness. It should explore how these factors shape the current education system and teaching practices by marginalizing Indigenous knowledge and peoples, while highlighting whiteness as a culture. Teacher education should uncover historical information about their ethnicity and ancestry to connect them to the Indigenous land and its peoples (Korteweg et al., 2015, pp.269-270).

Indigenous researchers Smith (2021), Simpson (2008, 2011), and Alfred (2005, 2009) emphasize the significance of grassroots efforts in changing history, arguing that everyone can be an activist and researcher, and that choices matter. Education and connections between children and Indigenous knowledge holders can bring the national belief system closer to one of justice and equitability. Working with Indigenous knowledge holders is crucial for reconciliation and to meet common objectives. To determine the next steps for Indigenous Education, we must implement the Truth and Reconciliation *Calls to Action* requirements and make Indigenous Education mandatory and as important as eurocentric education. Many Canadians tend to be poorly informed about Indigenous people in general, causing racism and stereotyping (Burns & Shor, 2021; McMaster, 2023). Curricular decisions that sustain bias and stereotyping negatively influence Ontarians' views and attitudes towards Indigenous people and communities. This educational ignorance is why many Canadians exhibit a lack of understanding of the meaning of Treaties, Indigenous people not paying taxes and owning a lot of land and receiving free

post-secondary education. The education system must adequately educate the population about the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. As the land is a blend of both Indigenous and settler cultures, it is essential to create an education system that integrates both forms of learning. Better education leads to more informed opinions and better general policy change or policy creation.

It is up to educators and policymakers to ensure that Indigenous students feel safe and welcome in educational institutions. Euro-Western academia should accurately recognize Indigenous knowledge systems, teachings, and ways of learning about the world. While the federal government allows each province to develop their own approaches to including Indigenous content in its curricula, some provinces are more inclusive and equitable than others.

In addition to deconstructing the messianic complex that western knowledge is the only viable truth, Decolonization is essential to integrating Indigenous knowledge into academia and economic and societal growth (Shizha, 2014). To create a Decolonized education system, we must stop viewing Indigenous studies and language classes as optional, specialized extras. Canada has an opportunity to integrate its Indigenous populations into its educational system and ensure that all Canadians receive access to a sufficient education of Indigenous culture, identity, and realities. Canada is a blend of Indigenous, Inuit, and Métis cultures with european cultural elements; as such, its education system should be diverse and inclusive and take pride in the opportunity to prevent any more loss of its original histories and identities. Decolonizing education is imperative for Indigenous intergenerational trauma to be understood and to aid in moving forward as a society. Educating Canadian people on the past events that have created the current conditions and issues facing reserves is an excellent place to start. The education system needs to blend Indigenous content into the curriculum as mandatory, core subjects from

kindergarten onwards that can alter the education system and become a unique, culturally relevant education that includes Indigenous knowledge at its heart. How this might occur is described in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

# Chapter Six

# Conclusion

## The Path Forward

As this thesis has demonstrated since the release of UNDRIP and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission *Calls to Action*, educators in schools across Ontario re-examined the way history is taught. It is evident that Indigenous content is profoundly lacking in our curriculum. From the atrocities of residential schools lasting until 1996 to the discovery of unmarked graves in 2021, educators and Canadian society can no longer plead ignorance of these events. Indigenous history, worldviews, and knowledge are as relevant to this land as the colonial savageries that took place to create what is now Canada. To effectively achieve the goals of Reconciliation and repair the complex relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canada's colonial past, several significant changes must occur in Ontario's Social Studies and History curricula. These changes will require a deep commitment to Decolonizing the curriculum, re-centring Indigenous voices, and addressing the impacts of colonialism in a more thorough and meaningful way.

Government and educational institutions must focus on Indigenizing and Decolonizing education at the systemic level (Battiste, 2017). Current educational trends are based on outdated curricula and educational approaches, perpetuating Indigenous stereotypes, emphasizing single identity perspectives, and defining what Indigeneity means for the general population. Critical issues presented to the Canadian Government regarding Indigenous education have focused on Indigenous control and sufficient and predictable funding for creating education systems that support the success of Indigenous students (Indigenous Services Canada, 2015). Other efforts concentrated on implementing Indigenous language and culture within education for student

success, development, and well-being. Another priority has been government support to aid Indigenous communities in establishing quality educational institutions catering to culturally appropriate programs and services, extending similar support to off-reserve Indigenous children (Indigenous Services Canada, 2015).

The Government of Canada and the OME should implement the *Calls to Action* found within the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada report. The Ministry of Education must work with Indigenous communities to create a Decolonized and Indigenized education system that offers proper resources for Indigenous content in all Ontario schools and funding for on-reserve schools at a level that matches non-Indigenous educational institutes. While recent curricular updates have included some Indigenous content, these topics are often introduced in a limited, separate context, such as in specific units about residential schools or Treaties. The curriculum must include Indigenous knowledge, ontologies, axiologies, language, and cultures within its framework across all levels of education in order to move forward in these practices. To truly achieve Reconciliation, the curriculum should integrate Indigenous perspectives throughout all subjects (e.g., Geography, Social Studies, and History) and across all grade levels.

However, education reforms will not repair all issues, and many require systemic changes to manage the educational gaps for Indigenous students on and off reserves. Government programs and initiatives should prioritize addressing the unique experiences and barriers that Indigenous peoples face in post-secondary institutions, ensuring that both explicit and subtle racism is recognized and effectively addressed. These programs should aim to educate and foster a respectful, supportive learning environment (Bailey, 2020). School boards and education ministries must also acknowledge the importance of Indigenous collaboration in education by allocating funding to hire localized Indigenous community members, Elders, and Knowledge

Keepers who can contribute to curriculum development, teaching, and planning. The education system must validate oral histories, Indigenous governance models, and traditional ecological knowledge, recognizing their significance in understanding both Indigenous and broader Canadian histories. Additionally, there should be a concerted effort to preserve Indigenous languages and teach about the diversity of Indigenous cultures across Canada, moving away from generalized or stereotypical representations. Universities should educate student-teachers to incorporate Indigenous content into teaching, addressing Indigenous students' and communities' needs. Teachers should understand historical misinformation and work with local Indigenous Knowledge Keepers to avoid panIndigeneity or misattributed knowledge. Facilitating cultural humility can aid educators in conceptualizing conflicting knowledges, recognizing their limitations and concentrating on a lifelong growth mindset. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has set out a series of actions to bring about Reconciliation, which requires systemic and educational reform that includes the integration of Indigenous knowledge, pedagogies, and history into curricular frameworks. The path forward must include critical Indigenous pedagogy that "addresses the challenge of providing students with the competencies they need to cultivate the capacity for critical judgment" (Grande, 2004, p.21). Changing a european curricular approach to an inclusive pedagogy that acknowledges and preserves Indigenous ways will empower settler and Indigenous students to see beyond what society has indirectly, and sometimes directly, dictated is their place. Relegating Indigenous history to a curricular unit theme easily dispensed due to time constraints undermines Turtle Island's history and the strength and struggles of Indigenous communities and settler ancestors who came here. In so doing, the education system restricts the incredibly vast knowledge of Indigenous

communities, their education systems, knowledge of the environment and earth, and the extensive histories of civilizations stolen and disrupted by colonization.

While the main solution to ensuring that the education curriculum is Indigenous-inclusive is to dismantle the european colonial system and create a new one, this author is aware that that solution is not truly feasible. The most glaringly obvious path, then, is to find ways to successfully transform an inherently colonial system, ensuring that all teacher candidates, as well as present educators, are knowledgeable and fully aware of the true history of Canada, Indigenous history and issues, as well as ensuring that educators know how the current system is continually affected by past, and ongoing, acts of colonization. They should encourage students to engage with history critically and challenge colonial narratives, focusing on Indigenous resistance, resilience, and resurgence rather than solely on colonization. Lessons should include opportunities for active learning and assignments that prompt students to reflect on their positionality and role in addressing the legacy of colonialism. Educators should use this knowledge to incorporate cultural humility and two-eyed seeing into their teaching approach and pedagogy while incorporating Shizha's (2014) curriculum in action and Joseph's (2011) curriculum as culture.

Educators must integrate Indigenous content into their classrooms to bridge european curriculum and Indigenous experiences. Teachers should engage in collaborative education, promoting self-reflection and understanding of Indigenous knowledge, history, and ways of knowing by combining cultural humility with two-eyed seeing. They should develop their understanding of Indigenous education culture, and how Indigenous students learn and participate in an educational setting to ensure inclusiveness and understanding in their teaching approaches. This will aid educators in comprehending their place in Canadian history, shaped by

privilege, beliefs, and values, and understanding how they fit into the greater narrative of Canada's story. Decolonized education has to become a central focus if the Canadian population is to understand the repercussions of colonization and the current issues faced by Indigenous people.

Educators should also reexamine the education system's definition of student success with Cherubini's (2009) reflection on success being measured through western standards, which fail to account for the diverse ways Indigenous students learn and succeed. By acknowledging this, educators can better incorporate Indigenous knowledge systems into their teaching practices, ensuring that their teaching approaches are inclusive and respectful of Indigenous and western ways of knowing. This can facilitate more meaningful engagement and improved outcomes for all students.

For on-reserve schools, the path to Reconciliation begins with governmental trust that Indigenous communities know how and what students should learn by allowing them to create pertinent curricula based on societal needs beyond the european push of Canadian education. Whether the school is teaching through a land-based approach or other means, it should be left to the school's discretion on how they will teach their knowledge to the students, as a one-size-fits-all approach does not meet every student's learning needs. Indigenous community members should collaborate with educators to support the education of Indigenous students, ensuring that educators and students are taught culturally appropriate, relevant, and significant lessons that embed traditional teaching methods and authentic content into educator approaches.

A newer development is the education partnership funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) titled *Thinking Historically for Canada's Future*. Carla Peck, Professor of Social Studies Education at the University of Alberta, oversees this project

along with an executive council of researchers and teachers with relevant experience in teaching and researching history. It aims to create a community of interdisciplinary research in collaboration with academic historians, researchers, educators, scholars, Indigenous scholars and researchers, graduate students, museum educators, teachers and teacher candidates, education ministries, and policymakers. This study will examine history education in Canadian K–12 schools and evaluate how effectively it engages students with critical issues and concerns that affect Canadian society (SSHRC, 2020). It will analyze how effectively evidence-based approaches to history instruction, learning, assessment, and resource development work toward providing students with stimulating educational experiences (SSHRC, 2020). The project will attempt to assess the impact of theoretical and empirical research-based communities of practice on history teaching pedagogy. Its findings will advise policy recommendations for history curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation (SSHRC, 2020). While this approach is wholly based on Western European conceptions of what education and assessment are, the need for collaborative research is critical in addressing historical and contemporary injustices and in ensuring that the research is ethical, inclusive, and beneficial to Indigenous communities. Allies are responsible for advocating systemic changes against a system from which they have wholly benefitted while amplifying Indigenous and minority voices in ways that promote equity and social justice.

**Further Research**

Canadian policymakers should conduct further research on faculty training and policies regarding racial sensitivity and awareness towards Indigenous issues and how to respond to discrimination and intolerance that arises in these institutions (Bailey, 2020). Incorporating appropriate Indigenous content through curriculum amendments, educational approaches and

pedagogies by implementing authentic and meaningful changes will enhance Indigenous education experiences and scholarly achievements. The OME should also implement assessments that analyze the accuracy and integration of Indigenous content within educational resources and classroom discussions to determine whether the curriculum effectively covers Indigenous history and promotes Reconciliation. To ensure that students are critically aware of colonialism and its legacies, these assessments should also measure their engagement with Indigenous histories and current issues. Feedback from Indigenous communities should also be compiled to evaluate how well the curriculum reflects their experiences and satisfies their needs. However, these approaches must be structured appropriately and articulated similarly to any other educational process to impact the current education system and curricula.

It is not necessary to be Indigenous to implement Indigenous Reconciliation in a classroom or school. Educators must, therefore, be open to learning about and unlearning settler-colonialism in the educational system with understanding and humility. All people must engage in Reconciliation efforts, regardless of background. Schools must take initiatives using consistent, non-tokenistic, Indigenous-created or centred curricula. Observing how educators in other countries have handled the teaching of such complex topics as the history of colonialism in South Africa, Australia, or New Zealand might aid in educating Canadian curriculum developers and educators on a path forward. Were I to take this research beyond this thesis, my next step would involve conducting interviews with teachers to evaluate their efforts in implementing Decolonization and Reconciliation in their classrooms. It would also be essential to explore how schools can collaborate with local First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into curricular content.

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