Wii Niiganabying (Looking Ahead): Rearticulating Indigenous Control of Education

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Fifty years ago, Indigenous Elders and leaders drafted their response to the Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy (White Paper of 1969). Their formal rebuttal, *Citizens Plus* (Red Paper), published in 1970, was a turning point in Indigenous education policy. It marked the beginning of the shift away from government-controlled, assimilationist educational policies to greater Indigenous control over funding and pedagogical methods. The Red Paper refuted the White Paper's main conclusions and stated that Indigenous Peoples are citizens plus because the federal government is legally bound to provide Indigenous Peoples with services in exchange for the use of the land they occupy. The most important Indigenous rights to be upheld included education, health care, Aboriginal status, and Aboriginal title. These unique rights recognized that Indigenous Peoples are the original owners of all the natural resources on their traditional treaty lands. The Red Paper became a political turning point for Indigenous Peoples in Canada by presenting an Indigenous vision for a new political and legal relationship between Canada and Indigenous Peoples based on Aboriginal and treaty rights. Since the 1970s, Indigenous leaders have struggled to maintain control of educational funding while having to abide by provincial standards of educational curricula. Indigenous communities want to provide more positive learning experiences and positive identity through reconceptualizing educational curricula. They are exploring ways to indigenize the educational experience by igniting cultural resurgence through the integration of Indigenous languages, knowledge, culture, and history by reconnecting students to their Elders, land, and communities.

Keywords

Decolonization, Indigenization, Anticolonial, Aboriginal Rights, Treaty Rights, Indigenous resurgence, Indigenous education, Liberalism

Introduction

For nearly seven decades, Indigenous leaders have been advocating for more control of the social and political policies regarding educational infrastructure and funding, and curriculum development. The treaties negotiated in the 1870s, known as Treaties 1-7,

contained clauses that stipulated that the Crown, in exchange for the use of First Nations' lands, would provide education that was equitable to the provincial system and that would operate in tandem with traditional education systems. Furthermore, these clauses indicated that the communities would be responsible for selecting where and how the schools would operate. However, these treaty obligations were quickly abandoned, and colonialist ideology and assimilationist educational models prevailed. For a century,

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Indigenous communities did not receive equitable educational opportunities and did not have any control over their children's education. In the 1970s, Indigenous communities began to apply pressure for education reforms, and education reform acts began to emerge. However, "the promise of a treaty right to education, the opportunity not only to gain quality formal education but also at the same time to maintain their own linguistic and cultural identity, remained elusive" (Carr-Stewart, 2001, p. 139).

Indigenous educators and parents have come to recognize that the Eurocentric educational system has failed to meet the learning and developmental needs of Indigenous students in Canada. There are increasing demands for the decolonization of the educational system: demands that Indigenous Knowledge and Knowledge Holders, teaching methods, and learning styles achieve parity with European education models. Academic achievement, attendance, and retention/graduation rates for Indigenous students are significantly lower than for non-Indigenous students, along with higher rates of depression, substance abuse, and suicide (Little Bear, 2009). Indigenous educator Marie Battiste states that "Aboriginal peoples in Canada and Indigenous Peoples throughout the world are feeling the tensions created by a Eurocentric education system that has taught them to distrust their Indigenous knowledge systems, their elders' wisdom, and their own inner learning spirit" (Battiste, 2013, p. 24).

Battiste (2013) also asserts that the privileging of European knowledge over Indigenous Knowledge leads to cognitive imperialism and an educational assimilation model that has resulted in Indigenous children developing a cultural identity of inferiority and impotence. To ameliorate the "traumatic, nihilistic effects" of the Eurocentric educational model requires "decolonizing the assimilation model, . . . Indigenous the compulsory curricula, and creating a balanced compulsory curricula reform based on respect for constitutional rights of Aboriginal peoples" (Battiste and Henderson, 2018, p. 567). This article examines the history of educational policies for Indigenous students in Canada and the underlying ideologies that supported the policies and practices that were detrimental to Indigenous students to provide an understanding of the current demands for major educational reforms.

History of Educational Policies in Canada

The first Canadian educational policies were contained in the education clauses of the numbered treaties of the 1870s. From the time of these signings, there was disagreement as to their intent. Indigenous signers believed that they had been given a right to a lifetime of education that would prepare them for a new way of making a livelihood. Within that system, the federal government would provide an education equivalent to that of provincial schools, while including Traditional Knowledge and skills. Indigenous People also believed that the treaties gave them the responsibility of implementation and control of education, including where and when schools would be constructed. However, the Crown "did not fulfill its constitutional obligations and, from the outset, chose to provide limited educational services not as a treaty right, but as an assimilation mechanism through its criteria, the Indian Act" (Carr-Stewart, 2001, p. 126). The Indian Act of 1876 was based on the colonialist ideology that it was the duty of the dominant society to civilize and protect the primitive race, eliminate tribal systems, and rapidly assimilate the tribes into the dominant culture. It imposed Euro-Canadian social structures and cultural values on Indigenous communities, and through its educational system, sought to eliminate Indigenous languages, cultures, and beliefs, as well as traditional ways of knowing and of imparting knowledge.

The model for the dismantling of Indigenous Knowledge Systems was developed during the mid-19th century, when Egerton Ryerson, the superintendent of education, created a report (1847) for the Department of Indian Affairs regarding Indian education within the province of Canada. This report provided a design that would eventually become the Canadian Indian Residential School system. Ryerson argued that Indians should be schooled in boarding schools away from their community, based on Christian principles and habits, in gender-separated, English-only, industrial education institutions (Ryerson University Aboriginal Education Council, 2010, p. 3). Following the passage of the Indian Act, the Department of Indian Affairs formed a partnership with three religious organizations to construct, operate, and main-

tain schools, which were primarily residential schools rather than the day schools on reserves that the signers of the treaties had expected (Carr-Stewart, 2001). In 1894, amendments to the Indian Act made education for Indigenous children compulsory from ages 7 to 16. From their inception, residential schools were underfunded and poorly supervised, resulting in children living in inadequate housing, being poorly nourished, and suffering from frequent illnesses, neglect, and abuse (Wilk, Maltby, and Cooke, 2017). Residential students' education also suffered in part due to the practice of half-day labour. Children were expected to work in the fields, take care of livestock, clean, cook, and sew, which greatly limited the time available for schooling. This inadequate education led to chronic unemployment or underemployment, poverty, poor housing, and poor health for residential school survivors (Wilk, Maltby, and Cooke, 2017).

The residential schools remained the predominant form of education available to Indigenous communities until the 1970s, when Indigenous parents began to demand greater involvement in the education of their children (Carr-Stewart, 2001). These studies identified the psychological and cultural identity damage incurred by residential-schooled children and the intergenerational trauma caused by the loss of family life. Reviewing 61 studies of the long-term impacts of residential schooling, Wilk, Maltby, and Cooke (2017) found that the studies reached similar conclusions: loss of attachment bonds and community ties, loss of language and culture, and subjection to physical, psychological, and sexual abuse had profound effects at "every level of experience from individual identity and mental health, to the structure and integrity of families, communities, bands and nations" (n.p.). On self-rated health inventories, residential school survivors reported higher rates of chronic and infectious diseases, and on mental health questions, reported high rates of mental distress, depression, addictive behaviours, and suicidality (Wilk, Maltby, and Cooke, 2017).

In 1969, in response to increasing demand for more community-based and community-controlled educational systems and more equitable funding for Indigenous schools, the Trudeau government released the Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy, which became known as the White Paper. Based on a Eurocentric, assimilationist perspective,

the White Paper proposed abolishing all existing legal documents relating to Indians, including all treaties and the Indian Act. First Nations peoples were to be fully incorporated under provincial governments as equal citizens, and private property laws would be imposed on reserves. First Nations education administration and funding would be transferred from the federal government to the provinces. This policy was a part of Pierre Trudeau's plan of a "just society" in Canada.

Indigenous opposition to the White Paper and increasing demands for recognition of Aboriginal rights surprised Canadian government officials. During this time, the government became overwhelmed with trying to amend Indian Policy. The government had hoped to disrupt Indigenous People's unity and weaken Indigenous leaders by scattering federal funds for Indigenous People's social and economic needs, including education, to the provinces. Marie Battiste (2013) comments on this era as follows,

Transferring the failed federal efforts of Indian education entirely to the provinces through a process of federal transfer of treaty obligations for education was a proposal that was firmly rejected by First Nations leadership across Canada, as well as by the provinces, that were willing to take on these extraordinary new responsibilities. The uproar was heard throughout Canada. This left the Liberal government of Canada with few alternatives except to find an alternative solution proposed by the First Nations people themselves. (p. 61)

Indigenous Elders, leaders, and scholars immediately began developing their responses to the White Paper. One year following the release of the White Paper, the Indian Chiefs of Alberta, under the leadership of Harold Cardinal, published their foundational document titled *Citizens Plus* (Turner, 2006), informally referred to as the Red Paper. Since that time, Indigenous Peoples have constantly been working with the settler state of Canada to address various issues surrounding Indigenous rights and control of financial funding for Indigenous curricula. The Red Paper rebutted the White Paper's main conclusions and stated that Indigenous Peoples are citizens plus because the federal government is legally bound to provide

Indigenous Peoples with services in exchange for the use of the land. According to the Red Paper, the most important Indigenous rights to be upheld included education, health care, Indian status, Aboriginal title, and land claims. These unique rights recognized that Indigenous Peoples are the original owners of all the natural resources on their traditional treaty lands. One of the main points that this paper argues is that what the Canadian federal government defines as Crown land (non-Indigenous lands) is also in fact Treaty land, where the economic values of the natural resources for off-reserve Treaty lands are supposed to be shared with the First Nations within their respective treaty areas. There are both Treaty Lands and Unceded Lands within British Crown lands, and until all Canadians realize this fact, we can never have any authentic reconciliation in Canada. New Indigenous organizations were formed on both the federal and provincial level, including the National Indian Brotherhood, now known as the Assembly of First Nations, and the Union of Ontario Indians. These new political entities increased the Indigenous presence in Canadian politics. The 1970 Red Paper became a political turning point for Indigenous Peoples in Canada by presenting an Indigenous vision for a new political and legal affiliation between Canada and Indigenous Peoples.

Following the publication of the Indian Control of Indian Education report in 1972 (ICIE), the Canadian government recognized the principle of parental involvement and control. However, the administration of education did not change, and the funding arrangements continued to follow the policy and governance framework of the 1876 Indian Act. This funding arrangement limited the communities' jurisdiction over education and their capacity to integrate Indigenous Knowledge into the curriculum and to revitalize their languages and cultures. By the end of the twentieth century, Indigenous communities were assuming administrative control of education services. Still, they were required to follow the provincial curriculum requirements, with funding remaining under the guidelines of the Indian Act. Gaining more control of their children's education did not result in significant improvement in academic achievement, because Indigenous schools continued to be poorly funded, and the curricula and teaching approaches were not under their control. In a previous study on the experiences

and perspectives of Anishinaabe Elder educators on Indigenous education, several reported that, during this period, Indigenous Knowledge was still devalued, and little time and few resources were allotted for including Indigenous language and culture in the curriculum (Manitowabi, 2017).

The push for local community control coincided with the push for legal recognition of Aboriginal and treaty rights. In the 1980s, Indigenous communities turned to the legal system to have their treaty rights honoured, including their right to an education and for the government to fulfill their fiduciary responsibility in fulfilling treaty obligations. In 1982, the Canadian Constitution was created, and the Supreme Court's decisions in the *R v. Sioui* case in 1990 and the *R v. Badger* case in 1996 affirmed existing Aboriginal and treaty rights with positive implications for communities gaining control of the curriculum and teaching methods, as well as receiving adequate funding to pursue programs beneficial to their communities (Carr-Stewart, 2001).

Aboriginal rights are interpreted by the Canadian state as international law and not domestic Canadian law. These legal compliances originate from the Royal Proclamation of 1763, where the British Crown recognized Aboriginal title to their lands (Henderson, 1995). When treaties were made between various Indigenous nations and the British Crown, they included education rights. The treaties defined education as a treaty right because traditional education for Indigenous Peoples is based on Indigenous Knowledge and cultural traditions that are rooted in the land and protected by Aboriginal rights. Aboriginal peoples, through these nation-to-nation negotiations, agreed to share the land with settlers as described in the treaties with the understanding that the British Crown agreed to educate Indigenous Peoples so that the two cultures would live peacefully and coexist equally within the same geographic space.

One of the first treaties between Europeans and Indigenous Peoples was the Two Row Wampum, made in 1613 between two nations: the Dutch and the Mohawk. This treaty is notable not only for its priority as a basis for later understandings and treaties but because of the powerful visual metaphor of the two parallel rows signifying the independence of the voyages of the two nations. The Mohawks and other Haudenosaunee peoples were governed by a so-

phisticated democratic system and respected those of other nations as well. Indigenous Peoples, including the Mohawks, have considered treaty agreements to be perpetual. In contrast, Canadian and other governments have not accorded them the same respect, and in fact, violating most of them. Wampum belts are considered the “text” of diplomatic relations between two sovereign nations (Turner, 2006). As Indigenous philosopher Dale Turner (2006) states, “this process was respected for every issue that affected the welfare of the Confederacy. This kind of democratic representation was grounded in the principles of reciprocity and renewal” (p. 49). In continuation of the spirit of the Two Row Wampum, in 1988 the Assembly of First Nations rearticulated the ideas of Indigenous control over Indigenous education. The Assembly “emphasized Aboriginal peoples’ inherent right to self-government as the basis for control over education” (White and Peters, 2009, p. 24). They argued for a constitutional amendment or federal legislation that would “ensure future dealings between First Nations and the federal government were on a government-to-government basis” (White and Peters, 2009, p. 24).

Iverson (2002) argues that, from a postcolonial liberal perspective, Aboriginal rights refer to a distinct set of claims based on the prior occupancy of their homelands by Indigenous Peoples. Aboriginal rights then were viewed, in opposition to colonialism-liberal concepts, as collective group rights that are tied to an Aboriginal title to land and the right to their own cultures and self-determination. Aboriginal rights, however, are bound to existing norms and institutions and were not fully defined in the revised Canadian Constitution in 1982 and, therefore, still require ongoing negotiation and compromise. If a dominant culture attempts to assimilate or oppress a minority culture into the larger cultural group, then that minority culture has unique collective rights which protect them, such as Section 35 of the Constitution Act pertaining to Aboriginal rights. As Duncan Iverson (2002) states, “Applied to indigenous peoples, the argument would be that the nature of indigenous difference is such that without the preservation of their culture, they are left at a severe disadvantage in terms of coping with Western institutions and practices” (p. 125).

The push for the recognition of treaty rights would eventually lead to Aboriginal rights being rec-

ognized in Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution, where it states, “the existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed” (Turner, 2006, p. 3). The successful defense of Indigenous rights has been tied to the liberal principles of promotion of equal freedom and well-being, both individually and collectively, through relationships that Indigenous Peoples have with their families, clans, nations, and the natural world (Alfred and Cornthassel, 2005). However, there first had to be successful challenges to the liberal tenets that had been used to justify colonialism: the prioritizing of individual rights over collective rights, the obligation to “civilize” by imparting capacity for reason, the establishment of self-government and private property ownership, and the idea of assimilating and homogenizing Indigenous Peoples into the Canadian political system.

The recognition of Aboriginal and treaty rights by the Supreme Court was significant for gaining recognition of education as a treaty right with treaty-stipulated obligations for equitable educational services, community control, and retention of Indigenous educational practices. Since the publication of *Citizens Plus*, various federal commissions have created documents attempting to address Indigenous education issues between Indigenous Peoples and the federal government. Tensions rose between the government of Canada and Indigenous Peoples during the Oka crisis in the summer of 1990. In response, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) was founded in 1996 with the intent of improving relations between settler Canadians and Indigenous Peoples. RCAP produced important work using research by Indigenous Elders, leaders, and scholars and was a continuation of the foundational Indigenous report in 1972, titled *Indian Control of Indian Education* (ICIE). The international treaties upon which the nation of Canada was founded influenced the formation of ICIE after the *Citizens Plus* report was initially developed. These two foundational reports in the 1970s are based on Aboriginal rights, which are embedded within the Treaty relationship between Indigenous nations and the British sovereign, which is represented by the British Crown and the Governor-General of Canada.

The failure to meet the educational needs of Indigenous children and their communities and the

recognition of the psychologically damaging consequences of the residential schools and racism were addressed in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC issued 94 Calls to Action intended to “address the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation” (TRC, 2015). Indigenous scholar Basil Johnston (2011) believes that to create positive change in Canada towards enhancing the settler–Indigenous relationship, we must educate all Canadians at a younger age about the history and culture of Indigenous Peoples. Among the Calls to Action, recommendations include providing funding to train teachers how to integrate Indigenous Knowledge and teaching methods and for Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous Knowledge and teaching methods, and requiring curricula from kindergarten to twelfth grade to include material on residential schools, treaties, Indigenous People’s historical and contemporary contributions to Canada, and on antiracism (TRC, 2015). As Priscilla Settee (2013) states, “Indigenous Knowledge Systems can play an important role within the larger society, where misconceptions and misinformation exist about Indigenous people. Formal educational institutions do not adequately teach about Indigenous history, culture, and the history of colonialism” (p. 47).

While most Indigenous students now receive their education in their communities, academic performance and school retention rates appear to have been negatively affected by the lack of equitable funding, limited community control over educational policies and practices, the slow pace of incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into the curriculum, and effects of intergenerational trauma. Kulmann (2012), in a study of knowledge transmission between Elders and Anishinaabe youth at two First Nations in Ontario found that a history of land dispossession, removal to residential schools, and loss of language, cultural knowledge, and traditional practices of knowledge transmission were associated with high levels of social and psychological distress, hopelessness, depression, and suicide. Similarly, efforts to revitalize traditional language and cultural beliefs, incorporate practices and traditional methods of knowledge transmission, and increase control over educational, health care, and child welfare policies and practices, were associated with lower rates of depression and suicide.

There is also growing evidence that a resurgence of traditional culture, reclaiming history, geographic knowledge, and a reconnection to land, can promote a greater sense of stability and positive identity in Indigenous youth and lead to improved academic performance (Manitowabi, 2017).

The TRC reports brought awareness to the problem of racism in the Canadian educational system and the need to teach how racism has been a dominant force in policies and practices constructed by the federal government throughout the history of Canada. Conceptions of race are seen as a social construction that justifies colonialism and the domination and control of Indigenous Peoples. As Marie Battiste (2013) noted, “a theory of scientific racism established by scientists then provided a coherent account of observed differences and originated a comprehensive theory of European superiority over other peoples” (p. 131).

There is currently a high demand in settler-colonial nations such as Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and some regions of the US, to decolonize education not only for Indigenous students but for non-Indigenous students and educators as well. Decolonization in education refers to the undoing of racist beliefs that, among other problems, made the colonized feel inferior. This involves raising awareness of overt and hidden racist ideology, cultivating respect for and inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, having high expectations for Indigenous students, and developing policies and practices for retaining Indigenous students in secondary and post-secondary schools (Kanu, 2011).

Frantz Fanon’s (1952) and Paulo Freire’s (1970) work has been influential in the reconceptualization of education for Indigenous students. They discussed the nature of colonialist oppression, its impact on suppressed peoples, the persistence of racial and social hierarchies and power imbalances in embedded colonial ideologies in social, cultural, and political narratives and education systems, and the need for critical pedagogy and decolonization of the mind. Their work on the decolonization of the mind and self-identity has provided intellectual space for Indigenous Peoples to reclaim their cultures, their ways of knowing, and their histories.

In his foundational book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Fanon described how the dehumaniz-

ing, oppressive experiences of marginalized Indigenous People under colonialism had a profoundly negative impact on their mental health and self-identity. He also asserted that resisting oppression is essential to restoring and maintaining positive mental health. Fanon (1952) recognized that the process of decolonization is required to resist the self-identity of inferiority that accompanies culturally identifying with the dominant colonizer. The colonized have to become socially conscious and move away from an assimilation stance. Fanon (1952) saw the recovery of one's Indigenous culture as an important step in the decolonizing of the mind. His work provided insights into the need to decolonize education and how Indigenous cultural resurgence, such as integration of Indigenous oral traditions and true history, may be beneficial to the development of Indigenous children.

Like Fanon (1952), educator and philosopher Freire (1970) recognized that oppressed people needed a new form of education, one that was anticolonial and offered them a path out of their oppressed condition. His *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970) formed the basis of the educational philosophy and social movement of critical pedagogy. The aim of critical pedagogy is to reform oppressive power structures by raising a critical consciousness in oppressed and marginalized individuals through a pedagogical approach that emphasizes interaction and dialogue, and that respects Indigenous knowledge. Freire's (1970) philosophy of education stressed the political nature of teaching and learning. He asserted that in order for subjugated peoples to overcome their condition of oppression, students and teachers need to be able to critically analyze political and social power structures that are inherent in educational agendas.

Freire (1970), like Fanon (1952), recognized that the process of decolonization is complex, in part because the internalization of an identity of inferiority and marked ambivalence toward the dominant culture create stress and confusion. However, his raising of awareness of the impact of oppression in the educational system on the academic performance and school retention of Indigenous children has contributed to a reevaluation of Indigenous schools and curricula and to efforts to decolonize the education of Indigenous children. Freire (1970) considered social, race, and class dynamics to be interlaced in educational systems.

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, there was a myriad of Indigenous cultures, with many governance systems, across the vast territories of the Americas. Although Indigenous Peoples in North America share similar cultures and ways of knowing, there is no pan-Indigenous identity, but various forms of traditional health and well-being, education, and organized political systems. These types of histories need to be utilized and taught to the next generation of Indigenous youth while our Elders still carry these types of knowledges within their Indigenous languages and cultures (Manitowabi, 2017). Indigenous resurgence must be cultivated to further improve the sense of cultural pride by integrating more values and norms of Indigenous cultures. This mental wellness framework is the foundation for incorporating a culturally specific holistic intervention to advance the overall wellness of Indigenous individuals, families, and community mental health (Boksa, Joobar, and Kirmayer, 2015).

Postcolonial Liberalism and Indigenous Political Theory

The moral and political foundations of recent educational reform acts are based on the goals and ideals of postcolonial liberalism, which emphasize justice, equal rights, individual rights, and human well-being, recognition of Indigenous cultural, land, and resources claims, and a belief in accommodation to differences and ongoing dialogue for reaching reconciliation (Iverson, 2002). The ICIE paper (1972), the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) Recommendation 3.5.2, and the 2015 TRC 94 Calls to Action reflect many of the goals and ideals of postcolonial liberalism. However, Indigenous political theorists question how liberalism, with its Eurocentric biases and embedded hierarchies, and its history of having been used to justify colonialism and assimilation policies, can help Indigenous People to bridge the gap between educational attainment and the needs of their communities (Carr-Stewart, 2001).

While postcolonial theories have been useful to Indigenous scholars in providing methods for examining the social and political relationships that sustain colonialism and neocolonialism, and ultimately subjugate Indigenous Knowledge, there is growing debate about the utility of these theories for addressing the material conditions of Indigenous Peoples in

“decolonized” countries where economic, cultural, and linguistic domination continues. Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) cite this continued domination and control of Indigenous and minority populations as evidence that we are not really in a postcolonial era, as postcolonial theorists assume. They also question whether the current definition of colonialism is adequate to address the intersections of race, gender, and class oppression for marginalized peoples in neocolonial situations and whether postcolonial theories can lead to agendas of social change. Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) argue that social theories must be anticolonial and fundamentally transformative and that the postcolonial theories are not.

Indigenous Peoples from various parts of the world share a common history of systemic racial oppression and have survived extensive periods of colonization. Most modern Indigenous Peoples share a common worldview that is based on resistance to colonial policies that have contributed to the degradation of their culture. This worldview can also be called an anticolonial framework. Dei and Asgharzadeh define an anticolonial framework as “an understanding of power relations that originated from the oppression of marginalized people” (Dei and Asgharzadeh, 2001). This can lead to the formation of alliances and partnerships among anti-oppression activists. Indigenous political theorists Simpson (2007), Coulthard (2007), and Corntassel (2008), have argued for a more comprehensive understanding and broader definition of settler colonialism that can better address multiple forms of oppression in various geographic and cultural spaces, including education. They assert that we are not in a postcolonial period, as demonstrated by the oppression experienced by Indigenous People in health, education, and justice, the control by settler colonialists of Indigenous land and resources, the lack of Indigenous Peoples’ political power, and their occupation of the lowest level of the socioeconomic hierarchy. These authors argue that it is necessary to reject the conditions of domination that perpetuate the settler-colonial relationship to advance Indigenous interests. They recommend, instead, advocating for Indigenous Peoples’ self-governance and recognition of their sovereignty, as well as collective, group rights within the context of cultural revitalization and reintegration. It is a framework in which Indigenous rights to control the education of their children would

be inherent.

Iverson in *Postcolonial Liberalism* (2002) argues that, despite the rejection of liberalism by postcolonial theorists, being Euro-centrally biased, valuing individual rights over Indigenous group rights, and failing to address the critical issues of self-determination, sovereignty, self-government, and Indigenous claims to preserving and re-finding cultures, liberalism can still provide a framework for establishing a just and peaceful coexistence. He asserts that the liberal goals of justice, freedom, individual rights, and human well-being when combined with the recognition of group or collective rights, can meet the challenges of multiculturalism and diverse society. Iverson (2002) recognizes that there are multiple definitions of Indigenous rights, including human rights, specific cultural rights, and entitlement and common-law rights derived from treaties. These Indigenous rights derive from original occupancy, a constitutional relationship to the Crown, a legacy from colonialism and forced assimilation, and continuing challenges to community and individual well-being. Iverson (2002) believes that people can work towards the ideal of reconciliation based on recognition of differences and historical injustices, and a commitment to equality, dialogue, the empowering of Indigenous People, and an ongoing accommodation to different and changing situations.

Audra Simpson (2007), on the other hand, questions whether accommodation aimed at reconciliation is in the best interests of Indigenous Peoples or whether it just reproduces the power imbalances that perpetuate the original settler-colonial relationship, because the politics of reconciliation remain within a system still guided by colonial liberalism with its embedded hierarchies. She sees the democratic practice of recognition of Indigenous rights as transforming Indigenous Peoples from sovereign nations to minority citizens. Simpson (2007) asserts that Indigenous self-governance requires a politics of refusal aimed toward sovereignty and self-government and a resurgence of Indigenous culture. Coulthard (2007) supports Simpson’s theoretical approach of refusal and resurgence, and rejects the politics of reconciliation, because its methods tend to minimize the violence and trauma of Indigenous displacement from their lands and culture. He also agrees that settler colonialism persists, with its attendant inequities and conditions

of oppression, and stresses that Indigenous Peoples should not rely on the politics of recognition from the Canadian state for their inherent land rights to be recognized, but instead advocate for sovereignty and cultural revitalization through Indigenous resurgence.

Alfred (2009) cautions that it is important for Indigenous communities to understand that, in the discourse and framework on Indigenous rights, it is recognized that “Indigeneity is legitimized and negotiated only as a set of state-derived individual rights aggregated into a community social context—a very different concept than that of collective rights pre-existing and independent of the state,” (p. 112) and that only the latter concept can lead to sustainable self-determination. Indigenous leaders today have to be wary of modern, state-recognized political legislation that provides frameworks for Indigenous self-government because these Canadian state derived policies are created by the state itself and not Indigenous governments. New political frameworks or modern treaties are created mostly to benefit the state rather than Indigenous communities. If Indigenous Peoples want to achieve authentic self-determination and reconciliation with Canada, then political policies that affect Indigenous Peoples must be created by the Indigenous Peoples themselves and only then implemented by the federal government.

Turner (2006), in *This is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy*, rejects liberalism as an approach for resolving disagreements between settlers and Indigenous Peoples in Canada and for framing policies on Indigenous rights. Turner examines several proposals made during recent decades that aim at resolving conflicts and determines that none are successful, because they do not accept Indigenous People on their terms. Instead, the proposals assume a single version of Canadian culture based on liberalism’s core values of individualism and individual rights, to the disadvantage of the group rights of Indigenous Peoples, and thus they are seen as assimilationist in nature. Turner (2006) asserts that “Indigenous rights are a sui generis form of group rights and not merely a class of minority rights” (p. 31). The question remains whether the Canadian educational system has rejected assimilationist models and fully accepted the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge and philosophy, as well as Indigenous rights to self-determination and control of Indigenous education.

Conclusions

Despite efforts to restructure and improve educational results and secondary school retention rates, Indigenous students in federal and provincial schools continue to have lower achievement and retention rates than Euro-Canadian students. They also show elevated levels of social and psychological difficulty, as demonstrated by increased rates of substance abuse, depression, and suicide (Chandler and Lalonde, 2008). Ideas of classical liberalism in the postcolonial era have had to be modified to meet the realities and challenges of culturally diverse, culturally pluralistic societies. Policies with regards to Indigenous populations and Indigenous-settler relationships reflected a shift from the liberalism of the colonial and federal eras — with its emphasis on individual rights, paternalistic assimilation policies, and Eurocentric conceptualizations of human well-being and justice—to the recognition of Indigenous, collective group rights, rights to language, culture, and self-governance, a duty to honour treaty obligations protecting land and natural resources, and rights to health, welfare, and education (Iverson, 2002).

The shift towards postcolonial liberalism in Canada began with First Nations’ rejection of the White Paper’s recommendation that would have dissolved all treaties and forced assimilation. The implementation of the Indian Control of Education report in 1972, and the recommendations by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, marked recognition of Indigenous communities’ rights to education, control of educational services, and integration of Indigenous knowledge and skills into curricula and pedagogy. The TRC Calls to Action expanded these recommendations to include training of all teachers in the histories of Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous-settler relations, in the integration of Indigenous culture and knowledge into all curricula, and in anti-racism.

Indigenous political theorists continue to question whether liberalism can lead to fulfilling Indigenous goals of self-governance, control over their lands and education systems, fulfillment of treaty obligations, and cultural revitalization, as there is a hierarchy of power implicit in the practices of recognition and reconciliation in which rights are state-derived individual rights rather than the pre-existing collective

rights present during the nation-to-nation treaty negotiations. In addition, these Indigenous political theorists all stress the importance of cultural revitalization and, in particular, look to a reformed educational system that can produce land and community-based intellectuals, philosophers, and historians who revive and produce cultural knowledge (Simpson, 2014).

Indigenous communities in Ontario, Canada are currently taking control of their education systems through government funding and community-based research initiatives. The Anishinaabek Education System (AES) agreement was ratified in the fall of 2016 so that participating First Nations in Ontario could establish more control over their education. In the same year, there was also the development of a committee, between eight Ontario First Nations who did not accept the AES but wanted a right to control their education, called the First Nations with Schools Collective (FNWSC). These First Nations are Wikwemikong Unceded Territory, Bkejwanong, Chippewas of the Thames, M'Chigeeng, Mississaugas of the New Credit, Sagamok Anishinaabek, Oneida on the Thames, and Six Nations of the Grand River (the last currently participating as observers). The FNWSC was motivated by the guidance of the late Elder Louis Debassige-baa of M'Chigeeng First Nation. Louis-baa was a member of the consultation team for Citizens Plus in 1970, as well as one of the original drafters of Indian Control of Indian Education. These FNWSC communities are creating curricula by utilizing their tools, resources, and Indigenous educators and scholars.

Between November 2017 and May of 2018, I was fortunate to be part of the Anishinaabek research and curricula development team at Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute at M'Chigeeng ON, made up of Elders, scholars, and educators. There we developed secondary and post-secondary courses on decolonizing education by utilizing Anishinaabe ecological knowledge and regional treaty history.

The development of the Indian Control of Indian Education (ICIE) policy paper took place from 1970 to 1972. The ICIE was formally presented to the Canadian government on December 21, 1972, and accepted by the Minister of Indian Affairs on February 2, 1973. The Ojibwe Cultural Foundation (OCF), also located in M'Chigeeng, was inspired by ICIE, and recently collaborated with Kenjgewin Teg

to bring more Indigenous Knowledge into schools, and also into the minds of the general public on what it means to be Indigenous in Canada today, and how the Indigenous relationship with settlers can move towards true reconciliation. It is current initiatives like the FNWSC, Kenjgewin Teg, and collaborative Indigenous museum education like the OCF that honour the Indigenous Elders and educators of our past. We remember the fiftieth anniversaries of the Red Paper in June 2020 and Indian Control of Indian Education in the year 2022 and the struggle since the 1970s to attain control of educational funding. Indigenous communities want to provide more positive learning experiences and better academic outcomes for their students and want to promote positive identity by reconceptualizing curricula and practices. They are exploring ways to both decolonize and indigenize the educational experience by integrating Indigenous language, knowledge, culture, and history into curricula, and by reconnecting students to their land and communities.

Leanne Simpson (2011) has advocated to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge within curricula by using oral history. She motivates Indigenous Peoples toward cultural resurgence on an individual level through their traditional education systems by utilizing their languages and stories from the knowledge of their Elders. Indigenous resurgence must begin within the individual and then move towards family and community, building strength within their specific nations. Indigenous Knowledge is rooted within Indigenous languages, "which carry rich meanings, theory, and philosophies within their structures" (Simpson, 2011, p. 49).

Health and wellness within Indigenous communities are maintained by holistically addressing all the spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental aspects of the people. This approach is largely absent from current systems of education, resulting in detrimental effects on the mental health of Indigenous youth, including loss of languages and positive identities, and lower levels of self-esteem (Boksa, Joobar, and Kirmayer, 2015). If a decolonized understanding is applied to educational curricula, Indigenous philosophies could be utilized to strengthen the overall health and well-being for all Indigenous nations across Turtle Island (known as North America) by using the knowledges still retained by Indigenous Elders (Manitow-

abi, 2017). The symptoms and psychiatric disorders from this specific type of trauma can be combated by enhancing the cultural resiliency of Indigenous Peoples through self-determination and continued development of cultural identity (Boksa, Joobar, and Kirmayer, 2015). Indigenous parents can begin to turn to cultural revitalization and language restoration to help heal the traumas of the past and to promote the psychological well-being of their children and youth.

The federal government can begin to implement more of the recommendations which were first introduced in the RCAP report (1996) and then carried over into the TRC Final Report (2015). Post-secondary curricula can start to include Indigenous humanities, visual art, and culture, Indigenous literatures and social sciences, which explore decolonizing methodologies within various interdisciplinary academic disciplines, thus becoming collaborative and embedded within the existing university curricula. As Marie Battiste, Lynne Bell, and L.M. Findlay (2002) state,

As university educators who have been working towards a postcolonial education, we find our current efforts underscore and animate RCAP (1996) research recommendations adopted by us as a postcolonial agenda of writing back and teaching back to established research and institutional practices, and in this way beginning to reveal how institutions can transform themselves and their capacities to affirm and achieve justice (p. 86).

The education system can be a tool for Indigenous Peoples to exercise Indigenous self-determination and renewal of the treaty relationships between the federal government and First Nations. If the organization and development of curricula are structured differently than in the past, the education system can be a powerful tool for reconciliation in Canada.

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