

**ARE WE THERE YET? THE ROAD TO RECONCILIATION IN ONTARIO PUBLIC  
SCHOOL CURRICULA SINCE 2007**

by

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## **Abstract**

This research is a multi-layered examination of existing policy frameworks and curricula surrounding Indigenous education in Ontario public elementary schools: how these documents have evolved and been adapted within the Ontario public elementary school system, focusing on the years since the turn of the 21st century. Since 2007, the Ontario Ministry of Education has taken a new approach to Indigenous education within public school classrooms. They have certainly made strides towards providing an equitable workspace for Indigenous students within mainstream classrooms and curricula, but have policy makers and educators alike gone far enough? Does the existing framework adequately provide for the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for teaching and learning by upholding Indigenous world views and knowledge systems within the constraints of colonial curricula and pedagogy? Or do these provisions simply mask a modern and more covert form of assimilation within the public education system? If this is so, why should we, and how can we, provide a more authentic Indigenous educational experience within Ontario's public elementary school classrooms?

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ACDE: Association of Canadian Deans of Education

OME: Ontario Ministry of Education

P4E: People for Education

TRC: Truth and Reconciliation Commission

UNDRIP: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People

UN: United Nations

# **Are We There Yet? The Road to Reconciliation in Ontario Public School Curricula**

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

*When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department [of Indian Affairs], that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men. (Kennedy, 2015)*

Assimilationist policies have a long history in Canada. The above now infamous words, spoken by Sir John A. MacDonald, facilitated a brutal cycle of residential schooling, the forced removal of Indigenous children from their birth communities, and a series of land appropriations enacted by the Canadian government against the Indigenous population. These atrocities, committed across Canada, amounted to systemic genocide and cultural deprivation in the name of assimilation and “civilizing” the “savages.” This overt oppression lasted for over a century, from MacDonald’s inflammatory words of 1883 until the last residential school (the Gordon Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan) closed its doors in 1996 (Talaga, 2018; Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC], 2015).

### **Colonial Impact on Indigenous Education**

The actions of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries have had a lasting impact on the Indigenous communities of Turtle Island. The original Indian Act of 1876 effectively put education of Indigenous children solely in the hands of Christian-based educators in residential schools sponsored

by the federal government. Here, the majority of, students faced physical and sexual abuse and systematic attempts to shed them of their “Indian heritage.” The generational (and intergenerational) trauma, still being experienced, has resulted in incidents of lateral violence, high rates of suicide and incarceration, and impoverished communities (Talaga, 2018; TRC, 2015). Throughout this period, the Indigenous peoples were victims of social and economic policies deliberately implemented to negate their identity as separate and thriving cultures within this country, including forced adoption of Indigenous children, as evidenced in the “sixties scoop,” and public schools run by non-Indigenous administrations (Talaga, 2018). Treaty rights have been ignored and homelands destroyed, and Indigenous peoples continue to be victims of racial discrimination and social injustice (TRC, 2015). The population of Indigenous people has been growing steadily in the last 25 years, though many more now live off-reserve, and the scars from the mistreatment of the previous century have begun to heal (People for Education [P4E], 2017). Establishing historical context is crucial to this study. There are new generations coming of age not directly afflicted by the residential school experience (although intergenerational trauma is still evident) and yet still living within the throes of assimilation and colonization. Without a deeper understanding of Indigenous colonial history, particularly since Confederation, the importance of this study is diminished.

Historically, Indigenous education was the “duty and responsibility of parents, Elders and members of the community . . . sharing experiences with children rather than isolating them in a non-active environment such as closed classrooms” (Neegan, 2005, p. 4). This all changed with the introduction of colonial pedagogy. Even outside of the brutal regime of the residential schools, Indigenous students have been subject to methods of learning and assessment in conflict with traditional ways of knowing; as Tanya Talaga points out in *All Our Relations*, “Indigenous people have been forced to measure up to a definition of intelligence that undermines and devalues their

culture, tradition, history and knowledge” (2017, p. 26). The after-effects of residential schooling and the inadequate funding and staffing of subsequent Indian Day Schools, coupled with a lack of cultural awareness within mainstream public education curricula, have led to faltering success rates (as defined by western education standards) of Indigenous students in Ontario, both on- and off-reserve, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Talaga, 2017). This is important to note because it is here in Ontario where I base my research.

The turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century became a turning point for Indigenous peoples. This century has begun to witness an Indigenous renaissance in Ontario and across Canada. By Indigenous renaissance, I am referring to a large-scale return to Indigenous roots within Indigenous communities, particularly among younger generations (Battiste, 2017). This includes revitalization of Indigenous languages and traditions, resulting in a revitalization of cultural pride and empowerment among both old and young members of Indigenous communities. This has been a period of growth and empowerment for Indigenous communities across the country, reflected in Ontario through the rise of protest groups, such as Idle No More, as well as greater Indigenous control of some schools, such as Dennis Cromarty High School in Thunder Bay (Battiste, 2017; Neegan, 2005). This empowerment has also begun to be reflected in Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) policy frameworks, beginning with the *First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Policy Framework of 2007*, although public policy still has a long way to go. Recent OME policy statements have sought to provide a more equitable workspace for Indigenous students to succeed both on- and off-reserve. These initiatives have been met with varying degrees of success, albeit a success which is measured within the confines of colonial-style curricula and pedagogies and standardized methods of assessment. The OME’s stated idea of success is to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students’ completion of secondary school and subsequent entry into post-secondary

education, eventually leading to gainful employment (OME, 2007). While these intentions seem honourable and are certainly practical, the result of this success may necessarily also result in the further assimilation of Indigenous students into mainstream culture, particularly since a growing number of Indigenous peoples are living off-reserve or have been raised outside of Indigenous communities and attend schools with a primarily non-Indigenous student body.

A 2017 survey conducted by People for Education, or P4E, found that 82% of Ontario's Indigenous students attended provincially funded schools, which makes public policy in Ontario even more important (P4E, 2017). This number is important to realize that a vast majority of Indigenous students are not necessarily living on-reserve or do not come from fully Indigenous backgrounds. This leaves a large portion of the Indigenous student population who may not be receiving equitable opportunities within their classrooms; as Talaga has pointed out, "The publicly funded education of Aboriginal children is a social and spiritual abyss that will need to be bridged if the journey to Aboriginal self-determination is to continue to flourish" (2018, p. 33). Canadian society at large has created a cultural vacuum within which Indigenous peoples struggle to thrive and flourish. While the 2007 policy framework assured that "all students in Ontario will have knowledge and appreciation of contemporary and traditional First Nations, Metis and Inuit traditions, cultures and perspectives" (OME, 2007, p. 7), over a decade later, studies have shown that many incoming teacher candidates at university faculties still lack a fundamental knowledge of Indigenous traditions and cultures (Peters, 2018; Tanaka, 2016). This lack of awareness and historical understanding must be examined through the lens of policy and curriculum before a deeper understanding can be gained.

### **Autobiographical Signature**

So why is this important to me, a non-Indigenous Canadian? I first became interested in Indigenous studies with the release of the findings of the TRC and its calls to action. As a university

student, I have completed undergraduate degrees in both history and education. Most of my historical studies have focused on the role of the colonizer in shaping the political and social systems in place in the world today. My studies of Africa, India, and Canada were all from the perspective of the colonist. I realized that my own historical consciousness lacked the perspective of the communities which had been subject to colonization. This became particularly relevant to me when surveying Canadian history and the effects of colonization on the land's original occupants. I realized that these communities were not only the subjects of colonization but were also communities of people here today, a living, breathing culture from which we have much to learn and share. As a student of history, it became apparent to me that I had been studying from a Eurocentric viewpoint and that I needed to broaden my perspective. As a student of education, I came to understand the need to realize new beginnings, for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike, through curricular change. To gain a greater appreciation for and an understanding of the Indigenous communities in Canada, the research in my master's program has been geared towards Indigenous studies in Ontario public elementary schools, including curricula, philosophy, and pedagogy. I believe that education is the greatest pathway to bridge the gap between cultures. The inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing in the public school curriculum is beneficial not only for Indigenous students but for non-Indigenous students also. The focus of my research is on Ontario elementary school curricula, as it is especially important for students to gain an understanding during these formative years.

## Chapter 2 Purpose of Study

In 2007, the OME released the *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework*, a document instituting policy changes in the direction of Indigenous education in Ontario public schools. Among the stated goals of this framework are to “improve achievement among First Nation, Metis, and Inuit students and to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the areas of literacy and numeracy, retention of students in school, graduation rates and advancement to post-secondary studies” (OME, 2007). This document also states the intent that these goals will be reached by 2016. In 2014, the OME released its *Implementation Plan: Ontario First Nations, Metis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (OME, 2014). This policy document is designed to re-establish the goals of the original policy framework in anticipation of the 2016 expectations. Does the existing framework provide for an equitable workspace for teaching and learning while upholding Indigenous world views and knowledge systems within the constraints of colonial curricula and pedagogy? If not, why should we, and how can we, provide a more authentic Indigenous educational experience within public school classrooms? Paradoxically speaking, does the attempted Indigenization of settler-based institutions negate the authenticity of Indigenous ways of knowing? (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

### **Building Blocks to Indigenous Representation?**

The introduction of the 2007 policy framework for Indigenous students in Ontario spurred an evolving emphasis on Indigenous studies and ways of knowing within mainstream Ontario classrooms. In 2015, Kaitlyn Watson, then a master’s student at Trent University, published her thesis dissertation entitled *Ontario’s Aboriginal Education Strategy: Successes and Areas for Improvement* (Watson, 2015). The dissertation is a comparative analysis to determine the merits and shortcomings of the 2007 framework and its translation to transformational education within Ontario

classrooms (Watson, 2015). While acknowledging that the strategy does have value for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike, Watson also points to its shortcomings, “because it does not explicitly problematize the history and continued marginalization of Aboriginal people in Canada” (2015, p. 59); nor is it fully inclusive, as “Aboriginal students need to feel they have a place in formal education which embraces their cultures, ways of knowing and experiences” (2015, p. 87).

The purpose of my study is to follow in Watson’s footsteps through the latest curricular amendments and policy frameworks, looking more deeply into her recommendation that “curriculum expectations for elementary and secondary education across all subject areas should be analyzed to determine the extent to which there is an ongoing process of Aboriginal infusion” (Watson, 2015, p. 94). My study will focus on elementary curricula only. The reason for focusing on elementary schools is that according to data gathered by P4E, a non-profit educational review organization, elementary schools in Ontario have lagged continuously behind secondary schools at initiating the incorporation of Indigenous content and ways of knowing into their curricula (P4E, 2017).

The central question to my research, as framed by the questions I have listed, is this: does current elementary school curriculum adequately reflect the terms of the 2007 OME policy framework and the 2019 policy framework? Underlying this, one must also query whether all of the above are also reflective of the calls to action outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report. Through a document analysis incorporating elements of discourse analysis theory, I undertake the task outlined by Kaitlyn Watson and make further recommendations, as necessary. My intended audience includes not only future policy makers but also teachers and administration already immersed within the system, who may find my conclusions informative or useful.

## Chapter 3 Literature Review

For my literature review, I studied both primary and secondary documents to explore aspects of Indigenous education policies, concepts of decolonizing classrooms, and other discourse and document analyses pertinent to my own study. My focus is primarily on 21<sup>st</sup> century Indigenous education policy frameworks and curriculum documents. These sources were used to help establish an historical context within which to frame my research and to analyze what steps have been taken towards Indigenizing elementary school classrooms in Ontario public schools since the turn of the century. The central focus of my study is to interpret and discuss Indigenous education policy frameworks and how these have been translated into elementary school curricula. I will discuss the merits and limitations within Ontario public school curricula and how they measure up to the expectations of the OME frameworks and the recommendations put forth by the TRC. This review surveys the literature surrounding these documents. I have arranged both my primary and secondary sources in chronological order to preserve a sense of continuity within the literature.

### **Indigenous Policy Frameworks Since 2007**

In 2007, the OME released the *Ontario First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy*, outlining new goals for the direction of Indigenous education in Ontario public schools. This document was conceived amidst rising concerns regarding the dropout rate among Indigenous high school students within Ontario schools, coupled with a noticeable gap in academic achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students within the public system at both elementary and secondary levels. The framework reflected a more progressive attitude towards Indigenous studies than previous initiatives. The two main goals stated in this document were to increase levels of Indigenous student achievement, thereby reducing the gaps in student achievement, and to instill public confidence in the educational system (OME, 2007). Outlining a policy plan spanning ten years, the OME strove to close

the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the areas of literacy and numeracy and to increase graduation rates for Indigenous students by the year 2016 (OME, 2007). The OME stated that “to achieve these goals effective strategies must be developed to meet the particular educational needs of First Nations, Metis and Inuit students,” identifying a need for differentiated learning and teaching styles and an “understanding of Indigenous cultures, histories and perspectives” (OME, 2007, p. 3). Although this document assured a positive first step towards Indigenous policy reform, its nuances of language will be explored further in this paper.

Also in 2007 the United Nations (UN) released their Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) (UN, 2007). However, Canada did not accept the terms of this declaration until 2016, after the TRC’s calls to action had been released. The aim of UNDRIP is to guarantee rights and civil liberties to Indigenous peoples around the world. Among these is the affirmation that “Indigenous people are equal to all other peoples” yet are also to be recognized as unique, independent cultures, as “all peoples contribute to the diversity and richness of civilization and cultures” (UN, 2007, p. 2). The terms of this document condemn ideologies, whether practised or preached, which advocate superiority of race, ethnic, or cultural differences. Particularly important to Canada, and to my research, is the stressed need to “honour treaty rights and to repair historical injustices” wrought by colonialism (UN, 2007, p. 3). The declaration of these and other rights is put in place to affirm equity in educational pursuits, social status, and cultural traditions of Indigenous peoples. Within this declaration are three articles of importance to the education of Indigenous people within Canada. Article 13 states that Indigenous people have the “right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures” (UN, 2007, p. 13). This article is also reflected in the TRC calls to action, which will be discussed later in this paper. Article 14 affirms that:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language. (UN, 2007)

This is also reflected in the TRC calls to action. The UNDRIP Article 15 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” (UN, 2007, p. 14). While these rights, affirmed by the UNDRIP, are very important to the Indigenous people within Canada, and its terms are important also for the future of Indigeneity in Canada, these terms are fairly unimportant to my study of public school education in Ontario, and I will explain why. The terms of Articles 13 and 14 are binding only on schools either located within reserves or whose administrations are under Indigenous control. Such schools receive funding and primary direction from the federal government of Canada in conjunction with Indigenous community groups and the Assembly of First Nations and, although bound by Ontario curricular guidelines, they function separately from Ontario public schools. The students and practices of these schools do not fit within the parameters of the OME Indigenous initiatives which I am studying. There are, however, increasing numbers of Indigenous students in Ontario living off-reserve and attending mainstream publicly funded Ontario schools, and it is these students and their non-Indigenous peers most

affected by the OME initiatives. For this reason, Article 15 does share importance in conjunction with the TRC recommendations and its relation to the public school curricula in Ontario.

Established in 2008, the federally appointed TRC set out to study the residual effects of residential schooling on Indigenous survivors and the social status of Indigenous people within Canadian society. The commission released a summary of its findings in June of 2015, voicing 94 “calls to action” regarding reconciliation between the Canadian government and Indigenous peoples (TRC, 2015). This was a multi-volume report which detailed many categories in need of change, ranging from public health and welfare to criminal and civil justice to educational needs. Although not issued as an actual policy directive, the findings of this report have been the basis for policy revisions within many government ministries, including the OME curricular changes. Indigenous studies have recently gained renewed importance within mainstream classrooms, particularly with the rise of the calls to action outlined in this report. While most of the attention is centred upon opening opportunities for Indigenous students to succeed, it is also important that non-Indigenous students develop a greater understanding of Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing. This is stressed in TRC recommendation 63 iii. “building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy and mutual respect” (TRC, 2016). Although not an actual policy directive, the findings of this report have been the basis for policy revisions within Ontario Public School curricula. The following recommendations have held sway among OME policy directives:

7. We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

10. We call on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples . . .

62. i. 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 . . .

63. i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.

ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.

iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.

iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above. (TRC, 2015)

Although there is still debate on both sides about the legitimacy and efficacy of the commission's findings, they hold many salient truths and have proven invaluable in guiding policy directives in Ontario education curricula.

In 2010, the Association of Canadian Deans of Education (ACDE) met to produce the *Accord on Indigenous Education*. This accord lays out guidelines for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators and students to open up discourse and begin to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous philosophy, pedagogy, and ways of knowing in Canadian universities, including the declaration that “the vision is that Indigenous identities, cultures, languages, values, ways of knowing, and knowledge systems will flourish in all Canadian learning settings” (ACDE, 2010, p. 9). Recently, the Ontario public school curriculum did make headway in creating a more informed student experience, but the level of success has been varied and difficult to measure. Post-secondary institutions have also begun to address this gap in knowledge and understanding, but it can be argued that few, if any, have gone far enough. The mandate of the

ACDE is very clear, with its expectations of achieving deeper learning and a greater awareness of Indigenous cultures within Canadian schools through Indigenous studies, but so far, this mandate has not been realized in all quarters, particularly at an elementary school level, which is in fact the chief focus of this paper (P4E, 2017).

In 2014, the OME released an *Implementation Plan* (OME, 2014). This document was a review of measures taken thus far to ensure the expectations of the 2007 framework would be met by 2016, as indicated in the original document. While reiterating the goals of the 2007 framework, the 2014 plan also introduced new initiatives to expedite a process in danger of not meeting expectations. This included an updated list of resources for teachers and a stronger emphasis on professional development. This was also the first document to highlight the “well-being” of Indigenous students (OME, 2014). Although there had been some improvement of Indigenous graduation rates since the 2007 framework was introduced, teachers were still hesitant to introduce new pedagogical and curricular tools within their classrooms.

The year 2019 saw the introduction of an updated ministry framework (OME, 2019). Very similar in scope to the original 2007 document, this framework reinstates a commitment to “working with Indigenous and education partners to continue improving Indigenous student achievement and wellbeing and increasing all students’ knowledge and understanding of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit histories, cultures, contributions and perspectives” (OME, 2019, p. 1). This was partially achieved through curriculum revisions established in 2018 and partially guided through collaboration with Indigenous stakeholders (OME, 2019). Curricular provisions have been re-established in social studies, history, and geography but are still absent in mathematics and science. This absence and a deeper look at the latest curricula are included in my data analysis, as is the language used in this and other documents.

## **Elementary School Curricula Since 2004**

I also studied curricula, released by the OME at various intervals, for grades 1–8 from 2004 to the present. These curricula are divided into Primary, Junior, and Intermediate sections. When looking at the social sciences and history curriculum, Ontario is unique in offering social studies from grades 1 to 6 and then a specified focus on history in grades 7 and 8. Curricular changes generally follow seven-year cycles, at which time they are updated to suit the times. The most recent curricular change, in 2018, will be the central focus of my data analysis, but I have also looked at preceding documents to witness evidence of change evolving within the curriculum. One example of this was the lack of any Indigenous content available previous to grade 6 in the 2004 curriculum (OME, 2004), although recent amendments have included some form of Indigenous content, in certain topics, beginning in grade one.

The 2016 *First Nations, Metis and Inuit Connections Scope and Sequence of Expectations* gives an overview of elementary school curricula “designed to assist teachers with incorporating First Nations, Metis and Inuit perspectives into the classroom by highlighting opportunities for students to explore themes, ideas and topics related to Indigenous peoples in Canada in every subject from kindergarten to grade 8” (OME, 2016). Rather than doing an individual document analysis of each specific course curriculum, I used this document to focus specifically on where Indigenous content is included within each document. This document itself reviews, grade by grade, course by course, the inclusion of a variety of recommendations and opportunities to incorporate Indigenous content into the classroom, as stated by the OME. For teachers, this can be an invaluable tool with which to address their own classrooms, and as a researcher, this became an invaluable resource for me when examining elementary school curricula in terms of Indigenous content. Both this and the revised 2018 Social Studies/History and Geography curricula will be examined in-depth in my data

analysis. Three points of note at this time, however, are that 1) there is no formal inclusion of Indigenous content in Mathematics curricula at any grade level or strand, 2) until very recently, the mathematical curriculum itself had not been revised since 2005, and 3) Indigenous language had also been sorely neglected until the time of this document, although there were revisions made in 2018. These curricula and all other documents mentioned above will be examined and evaluated in the main body of this paper. I have found that while there have been some forward strides, there are also still many causes for concern.

In 2018, the OME released the revised curriculum for Social Studies, History, and Geography. This curriculum continues its claims to support “high quality learning while giving every student the opportunity to learn in the way that is best suited to their individual strengths and needs.” While focusing on academic success, there is also a continued emphasis on student well-being and mental health by “creating, fostering and sustaining a learning environment that is healthy, caring, safe, inclusive and accepting,” as outlined in the 2014 *Implementation Plan* (OME, 2018, preface, p. 3). The ministry makes use of a medicine wheel diagram to illustrate the four elements of well-being (cognition/emotion/physical/social) surrounding the self, or spirit, core. This curriculum does make some advances in Indigenous content and pedagogy but in many ways still simply pays lip service to the concerns raised by the TRC calls to action. Although noting that the document was designed in consultation with Indigenous representatives, the OME does not explicitly state who they were, and it also refers to “other stakeholders” (2018, p. 4) Due to the heightened importance of Indigenous content within social studies and historical thinking, this document will be the focal point of my data analysis, at which time I will engage in a deeper examination of its contents.

## **Indigenizing Education**

There is an abundance of secondary literature which supports the need for incorporating Indigenous content and pedagogy into Ontario elementary school classrooms (Battiste, 2000, 2017; Tanaka, 2016; Tuck and Yang, 2012). What has become most clear through my research is the need for progressive educational reform in Ontario public school classrooms, as will be discussed in a later chapter of this paper. Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island have a long and storied past. However, the story most familiar to the settlers of this land is that of the past 200 years since the onset of colonial control. While this period may be prominent when examining the history of the confederated nation of Canada, it is a small and often tragic landmark in the history of the Indigenous peoples of this land. Theirs is a much richer history than simply the years of colonization, bringing with it the traditions, languages, and philosophies of once vibrant civilizations. For this reason, various methods of Indigenizing public classrooms have gained prominence within the circles of social reformers and progressive educators (Battiste, 2000; Tanaka, 2016).

Marie Battiste's collection, *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, highlights a series of essays describing Indigenous culture set against a backdrop of colonial domination. From this collection, two essays were of note in my own studies: one by Leroy Little Bear and one by Battiste herself. Leroy Little Bear's "Jagged Worldviews Colliding" contrasted social and political philosophies between western and Indigenous scholars. Born on-reserve in Alberta, Little Bear went on to become professor emeritus at the University of Lethbridge. Throughout his career, he has advocated for the inclusion of Indigenous world views and pedagogy within public education. His essay examines the Indigenous perspective within a Eurocentric society, noting that "different ways of interpreting the world are manifest through different cultures, which are often in opposition to one

another” (Little Bear, 2000, p. 77). The dilemma he associates with Indigenous people within Canadian educational institutions is that they have been indoctrinated with two opposing philosophies, resulting in a “jagged Worldview” (Little Bear, 2000, p. 78). This jagged world view is framed by the conflicting nature of holistic learning vs. Eurocentric western teaching techniques. Little Bear (2000) reinforces an understanding of the dichotomy between Indigenous and colonial ways of knowing and of learning, which says that incorporating these philosophies within western institutions is not an easy transition.

Battiste is an Indigenous professor at the University of Saskatchewan Faculty of Education. She is a graduate of the universities of Maine, Harvard, and Stanford, specializing in educational curricula and teacher education. In her own essay, “Maintaining Aboriginal Identity, Language and Culture in Modern Society,” she confronts the difficult transition between western and Indigenous world views and pedagogy. Battiste outlines methods by which Canadian schools, and society in general, can uphold Indigenous ways of knowing with respect and integrity and how this may be accomplished both within and alongside the colonial system of education. One striking feature of this piece is that it was written 15 years before the TRC had released its findings and before the concept of Indigenizing classrooms was even widely discussed within academic circles.

In their 2010 paper, “Cultivating ignorance of Aboriginal realities,” Godlewska et al. confront a Canadian education system deliberately promoting a program of assimilative learning for Indigenous students and, for that matter, guiding the perceptions of non-Indigenous students towards their Indigenous peers. These authors’ work is an examination of a post-residential school system embarking upon kinder, gentler, yet still pervasively assimilative learning policies. Although many of these policies were born through the best of intentions, they have still fallen short of achieving their goal. Although designed to equalize educational pursuits for Indigenous students, the system

was built through assimilative western ways of knowing and assessment rather than making a place for Indigenous ways of knowing within the system (Godlewska et al., 2010). This, often scathing, report surveys the state of awareness within school populations regarding Indigenous histories and world views. The authors find a system long negligent on these issues: “Ontario’s education system is a prime instrument in ensuring that colonialism remains unchallenged” (Godlewska et al., 2010, p. 417). These authors outline what they describe as purposeful ignorance displayed in the Ontario school system towards both the historical mistreatment of Indigenous communities and the continued misrepresentation of Indigenous cultures. The authors note a need for more effective and intensive Indigenous curricula for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, covering Indigenous history, pedagogy, and world views. Many of the concerns in this article are addressed in the TRC’s calls to action but still need to be fully resolved within Ontario’s public classrooms.

Marie Battiste is perhaps the most eloquent and studied voice on the concept of decolonization. Since 1995, hers has been one of the most prominent voices speaking for Indigenous rights both within the education system and within the greater Canadian society. Her 2017 book *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit* further stresses the need to re-examine western ways of knowing in the classroom and allow for a revamping of the educational system for it to become truly accessible for Indigenous students: “Through this book, I share my critical perspective, activism, research, and scholarship that have put me solidly in the camp of advocating for systemic change and trans-systemic reconciliations” (Battiste, 2017, p. 14). This systemic change includes differentiating styles of learning to accommodate Indigenous youth, including land-based learning, language instruction, and more in-depth curricular content pertaining to Indigenous philosophies and contextual history. She addresses the fundamental disparities in education between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, exploring possibilities of an emerging Indigenous

renaissance, so to speak. Battiste points out that “education can be liberating, or it can domesticate and maintain domination” (2017, p. 175). My study intends to examine which side the OME curricula falls upon, whether that of a liberating force or that of a continuance of assimilationist ideals.

When discussing reconciliation, one must inevitably review the residential school system in place in Canada for over one hundred years and the effect it has had upon Indigenous communities across the country and across generations. Award-winning author and journalist Tanya Talaga has devoted much time and energy to bringing awareness of the effects of colonial education practices on Indigenous peoples. While initially focusing upon the mysterious deaths of seven Indigenous youth in Thunder Bay, Talaga’s *Seven Fallen Feathers* also offers a detailed overview of the residential school system. She studies the origins and application of the residential school system and its residual impact on Indigenous communities, specifically those of Northern Ontario. She also illuminates the problems with modern-day “residential” schools monitored by Indigenous boards and the lack of equitable means of education within the northern reservations, despite public policies guaranteeing this right. Although beginning as an investigative narrative studying the plight of these students, *Seven Fallen Feathers* has become a study of the colonial impact upon Indigenous communities and an examination of racism inherent in Canadian society.

An interesting concept of Indigenous education, introduced originally by Mi’kmaq Elder and educator Albert Marshall, is that of “two-eyed seeing,” or incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing with western knowledge, particularly in the realms of scientific research. Western ways of knowing and Indigenous ways of knowing each have distinctive principles and characteristics. However, these are not necessarily mutually exclusive methodologies. Two-eyed seeing is a marriage of western and Indigenous sciences and world views, joined to see together:

We often explain *Etuaptmumk*—Two-Eyed Seeing by saying it 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 learning to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all. (Institute for Integrative Science and Health, 2021)

Margaret McKeon (2012) gives further insight into this way of knowing. McKeon views two-eyed seeing as a higher level of transformational teaching and learning, not only intertwining belief systems and practices but also intertwining cultures and people:

What follows is my vision for such a guide, using the Two-Eyed Seeing model of weaving knowledges from my perspective as a non-Indigenous environmental educator. I use themes of Indigenous knowledge and points of educational theory as a framework into which to extend concepts by non-Indigenous environmental education scholars. Weaving between systems of knowledge, I focus on the core concepts of environmental education that can be enriched by Indigenous understandings of storytelling, interconnectedness, wholeness (holism), nature/land experience, caring/caretaking, relationships, transformational change, and lands/place. (McKeon, 2012, p. 133)

One of the biggest ties to modern western research is the idea of interconnectedness within the systems of the natural world, an idea which has some acceptance in modern science. As McKeon puts it, “The key to respecting Indigenous knowledge are the implicit ideas of relationships and interconnectedness as full circle for wholeness or holism,” indeed, a “return to a way of thinking that enabled tribal peoples to sustain themselves for thousands of years” (2012, p. 138). One of the complications noted by McKeon is that two-eyed seeing requires a reductionism of western viewpoints, as Indigenous education involves personal transformation and “environmental education

is about re-storying our lives, the land and our relationship to it . . . an Indigenous environmental education speaks for education that tells a new, holistic creation story” (2012, p. 143).

This concept has been explored further by Hatcher et al. (2009). These authors draw a distinct line between Eurocentric “science” and Indigenous “sciences” but also try to draw them together where there is common ground. The major philosophical difference they see between the two is that “western science involves a disconnection between the observer and the observation,” to exert control over nature (Hatcher et al., 2009, p. 142), while Indigenous sciences do not draw this distinction. Rather, all things are interconnected: “Indigenous ways of living in nature are strongly place based and the goal of Indigenous sciences is to become open to the natural world with all of one’s senses, body and spirit” (Hatcher et. al., 2009, p. 143). Co-author Elder Albert Marshall was himself an Indigenous student who suffered through an Indian residential school, and this experience led him to reconnect with his Indigenous roots, both spiritually and philosophically. His quest has been to find ways to bring together elements from both his Indigenous heritage and the settler culture within which he was raised, to join the physical objectivity of western science with the spiritual subjectivity common to Indigenous sciences (Hatcher et al., 2009).

### **Criticisms**

There are also criticisms of the OME framework and curricula. Among these voices are Tuck and Yang (2012), who caution against the settler appropriation of the concept of decolonization. While I may find solace and support in the writings of Battiste and Tanaka in studying methods of decolonization as an approach to assuring awareness and social justice within the classroom, Tuck and Yang express a very different idea of decolonization: “Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools” (2012, p. 2). Tuck and Yang see decolonization as presented by

many researchers and educators (myself included) as a well-meaning approach to social justice, yet one which keeps the power in the hands of the controller. Tuck and Yang term this as “settler moves to innocence;” while admitting the sins of the past, one redeems oneself with a promise of a brighter future yet never relinquishes control (2012, p. 10). According to Tuck and Yang, this very power of control is the biggest divider between reconciliation through social justice and reconciliation through decolonization. Settlers are too ready to identify the two as one and the same. Tuck and Yang’s concept of decolonization takes the power away from the controller (settler) and places it firmly within the Indigenous community. As they phrase it, “Decolonization is not accountable to settlers or settlers’ futurity” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 35). Even the very land acknowledgements which we so espouse and confidently assert publicly as a settlers’ tribute to reconciliation are simply a symbolic tribute to land that *was*, not a return of land that *is*. Herein lies an almost unbridgeable gap in philosophy between settler and Indigenous intent.

Kaitlyn Watson, in her 2015 dissertation (as mentioned previously in this paper), conducts a critical pedagogy examination pertaining to Indigenous ways of knowing and their incorporation into Eurocentric institutions of learning and curricula. She references policy frameworks, curriculum documents, and other resources such as People for Education to arrive at her results (Watson, 2015). Watson seeks learning activities through a curricular structure which encourages inclusion of Indigenous cultural practices and content to enable students to “move beyond mere tolerance to the acceptance of the equality of all cultural perspectives” (2015, p. 60) She asserts that this could be accomplished if the OME would actively incorporate “elements of critical pedagogy” to “provide the means for a meaningful and transformative educational experience for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students” (Watson, 2015, p. 90). However, she also suggests that this has yet to be accomplished, either within formal curricula or within individual interpretations of said curricula.

Watson suggests instituting greater awareness for teachers of Indigenous colonial history, greater accountability for schoolboards and schools to pursue the proposed initiatives, responsible funding of resources, and curricular changes across all subject areas.

A 2017 report by Currie-Patterson and Watson concurs on many levels with Watson's earlier report. This report studies the progress made since the original 2007 ministry framework to determine whether it lived up to its stated intent of being accomplished by 2016. They identify a paradox consistent with the implementation of the policy framework: "We are concerned with the ways education policy supports and inhibits efforts to decolonize education" (Currie-Patterson & Watson, 2017, p. 70) They examine contradictions within the language of the policy framework and the difficulties experienced by teachers when translating it to their curriculum. The authors identify four areas of problematic discourse within the policy: achievement, capacity, incorporation, and absence (Currie-Patterson & Watson, 2017). In conclusion, they advocate a need for "further research aimed at understanding the ways policy, and specifically the Framework, is understood and enacted by teachers" (Currie-Patterson & Watson, 2017, p. 77); they also advocate for "research around this lack of action and its causes, in order to support a new phase of Indigenous education policy development in Ontario" (p. 77). My study will attempt to shed some light on the latter question through a deeper look at the language used in policy framework and curricula enacted before and since the Currie-Patterson/Watson report.

Samantha Cutrara objects to western methods of "historical thinking" and their application to Indigenous social studies and history lessons (Cutrara, 2018). She contends that Ontario curricula have failed to recognize that "the TRC has called for more than just an acknowledgement of residential school history. It has called for a decolonization of education in ways that lead to an Indigenizing of history in Canada" (Cutrara, 2018, p. 251). While the relatively new concept of

historical thinking is designed to widen interpretations of traditional historical narratives and open new forms of historical pedagogy, Cutrara argues that it may in fact “impose a settler grammar over the study of the past in such ways that widen the gulf between Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian knowledge systems” (Cutrara, 2018, p. 253). She confronts the works of Peter Seixas and his definitions of historical thinking, as he has come to be known as the leading architect in the concept of historical thinking. While Seixas’ concept of historical thinking claims to embrace diversity, Cutrara argues that it, in fact, understates the need for Indigenous historical consciousness, practically dismissing it outright. Under such circumstances, Cutrara sees only a dichotomy of historical interpretation with little authenticity or space for compromise (2018).

### **From Policy to Practice**

The transition from policy to practice will never be easy. Marie Battiste referred to this difficult transition (1997). However, she believes that Indigenization of Canadian classrooms can be accomplished both within and alongside the colonial system. She outlines ways in which Canadian schools, and society in general, could acknowledge and uphold Indigenous ways of knowing with respect and integrity. Battiste signified that “the initial educational struggle for Indigenous educators . . . has been to sensitize the Eurocentric consciousness . . . to the colonial and neo-colonial practices that continue to marginalize and racialize Indigenous students” (Battiste, 2017, p. 69). This requires an unlearning of philosophical and pedagogical norms within the Canadian education system.

One of the more progressive pursuits of “unlearning” is the call for decolonization within Canadian classrooms. How far this movement may be realized is still to be seen, but it is gaining momentum. Decolonization, although often loosely defined, is essentially an attempt to bring Indigenous philosophies and ways of knowing into Canadian classrooms, not simply as a footnote

but on a par with standard western teachings. Battiste points out that “the concept of education as either an Aboriginal right or a treaty right established in Canada the right for Aboriginal people to decolonize the existing education system” (2017, p. 70), as stated in the Constitution Act of 1982. Sandra Styres comments on a disconnect between policy and practice evident within elementary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions in Canada:

There is a general unwillingness to engage in the uncomfortable process of decolonization because decolonization is an unsettling process. . .there is also an issue of widespread purposeful ignorance relating to the history of decolonization and the issues of pressing concern to Indigenous people across Turtle Island. (Styres, 2019, p. 30)

This disconnect will continue to exist without deeper learning on the part of pre-service and in-service teachers alike and a concerted policy effort towards such training enacted from administration.

Kaitlind Peters conducted an in-depth study of graduates from the Queen’s University Concurrent Education program who had taken the Indigenous studies course as part of their curriculum. She prefaced her study with two research questions:

1) What baseline knowledge and attitudes towards Indigenous curriculum integration are pre-service teachers entering and leaving the Faculty of Education with 2) Does course work adequately prepare pre-service teachers to confidently integrate Indigenous content into the general classroom? (Peters, 2018, abstract)

Peters noted that both present classroom teachers and students entering the program “lack an awareness and understanding of Indigenous cultures, histories, and political issues” (2018, p. 1).

There are now many initiatives in place to try to change this. Peters also noted an abundance of research ascertaining the need to incorporate Indigenous knowledge in school curricula but noted

few studies tracing the preparedness of teachers to do this. Her study mixed qualitative and quantitative research methods to answer the above questions. Her participants were a cohort of Queen's University BA students studying in the Faculty of Education. Each was involved with an Introduction to Aboriginal studies course. Peters surveyed their attitudes pre- and post-course to test their knowledge of aboriginal content and pedagogies, including their personal attitudes towards the cultures. Most pre-service teachers demonstrated limited previous knowledge of Indigenous ways of learning but a definite willingness to learn. After the course, there was definite positivity among attitudes towards Indigenous knowledge but still some hesitation about their ability to bring this knowledge with them to the classroom. One of the biggest concerns was that the course was not long enough to adequately instill the learning needed. However, despite some lingering reservations among pre-service teachers, their enthusiasm and willingness to learn show that the results are promising. Perhaps as time goes on and there is greater incorporation of Indigenous studies into the mainstream curricula, these teacher candidates will arrive with a greater understanding and the ability to develop more complex Indigenous studies for future generations of teachers and students.

In her master's thesis, Sarah Parker examined the practices of three non-Indigenous elementary school teachers within the metropolitan Toronto district who had successfully incorporated Indigenous studies into their classrooms. Much like Peters, Parker found

non-Indigenous educators have reported feeling ill prepared or incompetent in relation to the incorporation of Indigenous content or pedagogies . . . there is also a reported lack of structure and support supplied by provincial ministries of education for this purpose. (2018, p. 1)

Parker's research question was simple: "What are the experiences and best practices of non-Indigenous elementary teachers in Toronto as they integrate Indigenous content and pedagogies into

their urban classrooms?” (2017, p. 6). Using qualitative, semi-structured interviews, she examined appropriate teaching methods, resources, and supports. Each teacher had achieved successful integration of Indigenous studies within their curriculum through “cultural incorporation from an outsider’s perspective” (Parker, 2017, p. 29). One thing Parker found in common among all three participants was a commitment to learning and understanding by drawing connections to Indigenous communities, both literally and through classroom study: “Their time spent learning about Indigenous peoples led to life changing perceptions of Indigenous cultures and inspired [them] to become major advocates in their field” (Parker, 2017, p. 40). They each self-identified as settlers within their classrooms, so as not to assume ownership of or expertise in the knowledge of which they were purveyors. While each found support from Indigenous communities and local parents and students, resources and support from the framework of policy were harder to obtain: “Due to a reported lack of support from Ontario’s Ministry of Education and void of Indigenous perspectives in their teacher preparation courses, my participants found the most support by reaching out to local Indigenous communities” (Parker, 2017, p. 47). In this way, these teachers were able to navigate the challenges of incorporating Indigenous students within the classroom, but this was a very small sample, representative only of the teachers involved in this study.

Michelle Tanaka’s study of pre-service teachers in British Columbia had an even more positive outcome. She surveyed pre-service teachers involved in Indigenous immersion courses working with Indigenous wisdom keepers and learning how to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing into mainstream classrooms, helping to bridge the gap across cultures. She found that this form of instruction promoted the engagement of the students in hands-on learning activities, including experiential learning techniques. The wisdom keepers hoped to “bring the strength of the old teachings into the modern world” (Tanaka, 2016, p. 48). The biggest challenge she found was

legitimizing western methods of assessment with “letting students guide their own learning” (2016, p. 180). What stuck with me in my own research was Tanaka’s early observation that “Indigenous approaches can be useful not only for youth of Aboriginal heritage but also for all learners, especially those who are steeped in the traditions of the dominant Western paradigm” (Tanaka, 2016, p. 6). Unfortunately, the success of Indigenous integration in British Columbia has yet to be realized in Ontario, but Ontario is on the right track.

Haudenosaunee scholar and researcher Frank Deer found similar results in Alberta. The biggest problem he noted was how to incorporate Indigenous education into programs run by non-Indigenous teachers. Deer studied the levels of comfort or apprehension expressed by pre-service teachers towards Indigenizing classrooms. Over a period of twelve months, he interviewed a small sample of 26 teacher candidates regarding “perceptions of and attitudes towards Aboriginal perspectives in mainstream education” (Deer, 2013, p. 175). These interviews were then coded into general themes to guide his findings. These candidates generally showed a great deal of apprehension about introducing Indigenous content to their work. Issues raised were a lack of practical knowledge, few resources available, and negative attitudes among their peers towards Indigenous education. Most respondents did not identify as Indigenous, which may highlight a need for more Indigenous representation within the profession (Deer, 2013).

## **Chapter 4 Research Methodology/Data Collection**

I have used a qualitative document analysis to examine OME policy frameworks and elementary school curricula established since 2007, paying particular attention to curriculum changes of 2018 and the latest Indigenous policy initiative released in 2019. This study examined both the content and the intent of Indigenous education policy frameworks as outlined by the OME

and how these guidelines are reflected (or not reflected) in corresponding curricula. Mine is a document study which engages elements of “textual analysis” as referred to by both Fairclough and Johnstone, incorporating elements of critical discourse to explore the ideological effects of the texts in question (Fairclough, 2003) and concepts of ideological language as uncovered by Johnstone (2008). This document analysis examined both OME policy frameworks and contemporary elementary school curricula and how the language is framed within each. I examine deeper meanings behind the language itself, using elements of critical discourse analysis to determine what this means for the future of Indigenous education in Ontario. Two questions which I have kept in mind throughout this portion of my study are who the participants (or stakeholders) are and what the message is. In preparation for my data analysis, I gathered curricular documents and policy frameworks released by the Ontario Ministry of Education from 2004 to the present. Using these documents, I examined the expectations set out by the 2007 policy framework and the content as outlined in curricula, seeking evidence of both relevant content and curricular growth pertaining to Indigenous studies. I also examined documents released since the 2015 TRC calls to action to determine if these recommendations had been heeded within mainstream curricula and policy. Within these documents I studied the language itself, establishing certain prevalent themes developing through the language, including understating the power dynamics within a colonial state (historical reductionism), instances of colonial justification and expectations of students and teachers alike as constructed by these documents.

To gain a better understanding of the use of language within these documents I also studied works by Fairclough (2003) and Johnstone (2008). Each text deals with aspects of language use and discourse analysis. Fairclough and Johnstone both lay out the groundwork of techniques for discourse analysis when conducting a document analysis. Both have similar methods, but there are

also some differences between them. Each author stresses the importance of the relationship between the document text and the social phenomena surrounding it, suggesting the ideological nature of the document. Although I did not engage in a thorough critical discourse analysis, I did incorporate elements of both Fairclough and Johnstone in my examination of the language within curricular documents. Their conceptual analyses became particularly important when examining ideological themes which appeared within OME documents, highlighting concepts of assimilation, colonial justification and historiography.

In his book, *Analysis Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*, Fairclough describes a “need to develop approaches to text analysis through a transdisciplinary dialogue with perspectives on language and discourse within social theory and research” (2003, p. 7) when approaching a linguistic textual analysis. To Fairclough, discourse analysis is a “qualitative social analysis” involving critical discourse to break down the language and meanings within a document (2003, p. 7) combined with an in-depth textual analysis of the document’s contents. Discourse analysis concerns itself with “the relationship between language and other elements and aspects of social life” with an “emphasis on grammatical and semantic analyses” (2003, p. 7). He describes this process as uncovering systemic functional linguistics. Fairclough describes the use of internal (semantics/grammar/vocabulary) relations and external (relation to outer social structures) relations within documents (2003, p. 16). My research examines both internal and external relations and how the ideology behind these frameworks affects the society to whom they are introduced, mainly the teachers using these curricula as guidelines for classroom instruction. What Fairclough (2003) also examines, which became particularly valid to my own research, is the concept of “legitimation” or what makes the context of a document necessary. This is an important concept, because the very information communicated within these documents is designed to provide a strategy of success for

all students. My study will unveil the language behind these strategies for success and any underlying meanings within.

Barbara Johnstone (2008) initially describes discourse analysis as simply “the study of language,” but she does take it much deeper than that. For Johnstone, this study of language promotes an understanding of “ideas about what language is and how it works” (p. 66). She also confronts language ideology within policy documents and how this ideology translates to the written form. Language ideology is a concept relevant to my own examination of both OME policy frameworks and curricula. My document analysis will incorporate elements of both Fairclough and Johnstone’s theories.

My data collection and analysis also included statistics recorded by P4E in their annual reports. P4E is an independent, non-partisan organization designed to “create evidence, instigate dialogue, and build links so that people can see—and act on—the connection between public education and a fair and prosperous society” (P4E, 2020). P4E releases reports annually to review the Ontario public education system based upon the results of public surveys which they have conducted. Some of these statistics will be used within my data analysis.

The 2019 Annual Ontario School Survey conducted by P4E had some good news, but it also continued to stress the importance of stronger Indigenous education initiatives on all levels—by teachers, teachers in training, principals, policy makers, and both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities at large. The survey reported huge improvement on the part of Ontario secondary schools: 95% of secondary schools offered Indigenous education opportunities, and there is a “significant increase in the proportion of schools that consult with Indigenous communities on Indigenous priorities” (P4E, 2019, p. 23). Unfortunately, few of these gains were reported in elementary schools. Indigenous staffing has proven to still be an issue, despite the rising availability

of Indigenous professionals. Twenty percent of Ontario's elementary schools report employing staff who self-identify as Indigenous, but in the greater Toronto area, only 14% have at least one Indigenous staff member of whom they are aware. This illustrates the regionalization of such workers (P4E, 2019). Further, and more troubling, evidence of such regionalization is seen in other reported statistics. Forty-three percent of elementary schools with Indigenous staff had specifically designed programs to boost Indigenous achievement, while only 24% of schools lacking Indigenous staff employed such programs (P4E, 2019, p. 25). More concerning was that although marginal gains in literacy and numeracy gaps had been reported, graduation rates were still much lower than the provincial average (P4E, 2019). What is more interesting is that literacy and numeracy, which engage the majority classroom time, are the two curriculum areas with the least Indigenous context.

### **Indigenous Studies Initiatives**

Progressive Indigenous policy frameworks date back to the original 2007 policy framework and culminate in the 2019 framework. The 2007 framework, however, has laid the foundation for Indigenous education in Ontario schools and is still the primary reference directing all Indigenous policy guidelines. There have been reflective curricular reforms made periodically throughout. Three common themes within each of these documents are achievement, awareness, and accountability. By achievement I refer to both student success and the methods of assessment. Awareness refers to the growing body of knowledge made available to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. as Watson puts it,

Education should provide learning experiences that promote questioning and active participation to explore social issues . . . such an understanding is necessary to address the ways in which education has been used to perpetuate inequality among particular social, economic and cultural groups. (2015, p. 8)

These are the themes which I examined, beginning with an overview of policy frameworks enacted from 2007 to the present and curricular changes which have followed. These themes will be examined specifically in terms of curricular content. I will focus more deeply on the most recent policy framework and curricular changes.

So, what messages do the policy frameworks convey? The 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed a definitive progression of Indigenous education policy in Ontario. This cannot be disputed. However, it is important to study more deeply the merits and drawbacks of these educational policies and how they have been reflected in elementary school curricula. OME policy frameworks are well thought out and well worded dedications to equalizing the field for Indigenous learners within public education institutions. I believe that the intention behind these documents is to serve the best interests of Indigenous students within the mainstream public school system. The real question is whether these interests are in fact best served through these strategies and which stakeholders have determined these best interests. Fairclough discusses the importance of establishing the “legitimation” of documents, what makes such a text even meaningful. Two concepts he links closely with legitimation are authorization and rationalization. Both concepts were crucial in the construction of both the 2007 framework and the 2019 Indigenous strategy as well as corresponding curricular revisions. Authorization is evident in the institutional authority relevant to public education and the role of the Ontario ministry in upkeeping a fair and effective institution (Fairclough, 2003, p. 99). The immediate rationalization behind the documents is somewhat simple—the system is failing to meet the needs of Indigenous learners to be successful students and, by implication, empowered citizens. Success is measured in academic terms—people should graduate high school, continue to higher education, and enter the job market, thereby becoming contributing citizens. The job of the ministry, then, is to find equitable means by which to raise them

to the level of their peers. But paradoxically, this may in effect assimilate them to the dominant culture in a bid to achieve success by fitting the dominant mould. Although the intentions are made clear, how well do these policy frameworks reflect or address the needs of Indigenous students? Are they effectively incorporated in curricula? On the surface, these documents serve as guidelines to deliver equity and empowerment to Indigenous learners, but is there also a cost to these learners? By this I mean that equity on these terms may in fact result in further assimilation into the dominant culture, whether by circumstance or by design. These questions have guided much of my research.

## **Chapter 5 Data Analysis**

Ontario public schools have an important role to play in promoting an inclusive school climate and a learning environment in which all students, including First Nations, Métis and Inuit students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and in which all students have opportunities, across the Ontario curriculum, to learn about and appreciate contemporary and traditional First Nations, Metis and Inuit cultures, histories and perspectives. The Ontario curriculum promotes active and engaged citizenship, which includes greater awareness of the distinct place and role of Indigenous peoples in our shared heritage and the future of Ontario. (OME, 2016, p. 3)

There are three main questions which I ask the reader to keep in mind through my examination of these OME documents: does the curriculum reflect a commitment to deeper learning regarding Indigenous world views and philosophies, or does it simply provide lip service to the terms of the framework? Kaitlyn Watson questioned “if the strategy’s policies or resources reduce Aboriginal cultures to such things as food, dance and dress without acknowledging the values and beliefs behind them” (2015, p. 22). Do the policy frameworks themselves, in fact, offer a valid commitment to

reconciliation, or are they simply superficial responses to the TRC recommendations? Does providing equity for Indigenous students' success necessitate assimilation to western ways of knowing, rather than opening a space in classrooms for Indigenous ways of knowing? There is an ideological framework behind every policy document. These questions are used to help determine the ideology framing the documents being studied. The ideological foundations I will be exploring within the ministry frameworks and corresponding curricula are those of assimilation, Indigenization, and the grey areas in between.

Due to Covid 19 restrictions in place throughout my data gathering, I was unable to obtain physical copies of documents or to engage in personal contact with school administrators or educators. However, there was a full range of Ontario Ministry documents available digitally. I obtained copies of numerous curricula and policy frameworks through the Queens University digital library which provided sufficient evidence for my analysis. My study concentrated on the 2007 Framework and related documents released thereafter, including Ontario Ministry of Education elementary school curricula. I also surveyed the 2004 Social Studies / History curriculum for comparative purposes with curricula released after the 2007 Framework was put in place. Rather than scan individual curricular documents prior to 2016, I obtained a digital copy of the *First nations, Métis and Inuit connections: Scope and sequence of expectations*, an Ontario Ministry of Education document outlining existing Indigenous content across curricula in Ontario's public elementary schools. This was sufficient to obtain data regarding availability of all Indigenous studies within elementary school curricula. However, I did obtain individual copies of the 2004, 2013 and 2018 Social Studies /History and Geography curricula to conduct a rigorous analysis on the subjects which have both a greater substance of Indigenous content and which have gone through the most

revisions pertaining to the 2007 Framework. Other documents such as UNDRIP were also made available digitally.

### **Relevance of Documents**

A closer look at the UNDRIP document shows that overall, it has had little effect on the Ontario Public School system. Much of the UNDRIP document appears to pertain specifically to “status” Indigenous peoples or First Nations living on-reserve. However, there are two articles which should help guide the policy frameworks of Ontario’s public schools. Article 15 states, “Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of the cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information” (UN, 2007, p. 14). The utilization of UNDRIP is also made problematic, at least in Canada, through issues of representation and legal definition of Indigenous peoples. Alvin Fiddler voiced his concerns at the 2018 Moving Beyond the Indian Act meeting of First Nations:

Indigenous self-governance must not be dictated by the Indian Act . . . communities and nations should no longer be forced to abandon their culture and spiritual practices, assimilated into the dominant society, adhere to federal governance of reserves and have to register to be considered real Indians by law in order to receive their treaty rights. (Talaga, 2018, p. 196)

The 2007 *First Nations, Metis and Inuit policy framework* has laid a strong foundation for Indigenous education policy in Ontario’s public school system. In the interest of this dissertation, I only examined how this framework and resulting curricula are pertinent to Ontario’s elementary school system. The ministry states the primary intentions of this framework early: “to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal students in the areas of literacy and numeracy” (OME, 2007). To achieve these goals, the OME makes it clear that “it is essential that First Nations, Metis

and Inuit students are engaged and feel welcome in school, and that they see themselves and their cultures in the curriculum and the school community” (2007, p. 11). The framework also boasts having acquired insight from many Indigenous “stakeholders” in the framing of this document. Unfortunately, this participation of Indigenous communities has been undermined by a lack of teachers and administrators themselves seeking input from their local Indigenous communities, particularly in the elementary schools. But thankfully, these numbers have been growing (P4E, 2017).

### ***Achievement***

The expected achievement level is expressed early in the 2007 framework. For the purposes of this study, achievement refers mainly to the OME expectations. What are the students expected to achieve from these studies? What constitutes success? Such student success seems to be a high priority of the OME guidelines, but what form does this success take? Standards of achievement are found within the realms of standardized testing (i.e., literacy and numeracy) and other standard classroom evaluations. The primary goal is to reduce the gap in academic achievements between Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous peers. This includes higher levels of high school graduates and entrants into post-secondary school, thereby also instilling greater confidence in the public. The aim of this expectation is to create more “socially contributive, politically active, and economically prosperous citizens of the world” (OME, 2007, p. 7). There are two messages conveyed here. Firstly, there is an acknowledgement that Indigenous students are being failed by the system put in place to help them succeed and that there is an urgency to correct this injustice. The second message is less altruistic, as it suggests, or at least implies, that Indigenous peoples of Ontario are generally not socially contributive, politically active, and economically prosperous citizens of the world. Success is then defined by academic achievement based on a settlers’

understanding. This concept, in and of itself, may need to be remedied. But how? Watson suggests that “in defining success more broadly, we also make progress towards Indigenizing the education system and bringing about the reconciliation called for by the TRC” (2013, p. 8).

### ***Awareness***

Student awareness is also an initiative found within the framework. A secondary goal expressed in the 2007 framework is to “provide a curriculum that facilitates learning about contemporary and traditional First Nations, Metis and Inuit cultures, histories and perspectives among all students, and that also contributes to the education of school board staff, teachers and elected trustees” (OME, 2007, p. 7). The message conveyed here is that the ministry recognizes the necessity of cultural awareness among all students, as outlined in article 63 iii. of the TRC recommendations. Awareness is probably the most common thread within both policy framework and curricula awareness of Indigenous identity, history, and culture experienced by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. While perhaps the most important element of Indigenous education for non-Indigenous students, the language regarding awareness and inclusion can also be contentious, particularly within curricula. There are many examples of colonialist language evident within the curriculum even when attempting to create awareness and inclusion of other perspectives and cultures (much as I have just done, ironically, when referring to the “other”).

However, before examining problematic wording, there has been some positive progression in the language of policy frameworks. To begin with, the 2019 *Indigenous Education Strategy* has replaced the word “aboriginal” with “Indigenous.” There is some symbolic merit to this development. A more important, also welcome addition is a new concern expressed for the “well-being” of Indigenous students included with an aim for success (OME, 2019, p. 15). This concept was not specifically addressed in previous OME documents. The ministry continues to declare that

“a culturally safe learning environment is one in which students feel comfortable about expressing their ideas, opinions, and needs about responding authentically to topics that may be culturally sensitive” (OME, 2019, p. 15).

Also new to the strategy is a call for teachers themselves to “reflect on their own attitudes, biases and values . . . they may wish to seek out current research resources on instructional approaches, mentors, and/or professional development and training opportunities as necessary” (OME, 2019, p. 17). Although this does acknowledge a need for teacher training and awareness, the onus is on the teachers themselves to pursue this should they “wish to.” Statistics underline the need for teacher training but also the lack of initiative being taken by many teachers. As of 2015, only 31% of elementary schools and 53% of secondary schools report providing professional development for staff (P4E, 2017). Although that number has increased, it is still below acceptable levels. Furthermore, also as of 2015, only 13% of elementary schools and 38% of secondary schools reported consulting with Indigenous community members (P4E, 2017). Even more discouraging was the tell-tale statistic that “some survey respondents commented that their schools contained too few [Indigenous] students to warrant a specific focus on Indigenous education, illustrating the need to ensure that educators understand that Indigenous education is important for all students” (P4E, 2017, p. 3). This should simply not be a qualifying statement for a lack of Indigenous content or understanding, as these studies are valuable for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike.

### ***Authenticity***

The framework also claims authenticity in its development. In its opening pages, the 2007 framework claims the “strategies outlined in this framework are based on a holistic and integrated approach to improving Aboriginal student outcomes” (OME, 2007, p. 7). There is some evidence of this offered in the terms of the framework, but little evidence of this has been reflected in curricula,

particularly outside the realms of social studies and history. Whether the content is authentic or not, Kaitlyn Watson (2015) raises a salient point, noting that “there is also a lack of accountability of school boards and schools to the strategy due to the rhetoric used in policy documents” (p. 88). I use “authenticity” as a very broad term in the scope of this study. This refers to the actual authenticity of sources, but it also umbrellas accountability of the teachers and administration in delivering an authentic Indigenous experience. Both factors contribute to the delivery of an authentic Indigenized curriculum. Without each in place, the curriculum becomes flawed. If the sources of information are not authentic, the teachers and administration are not held accountable to the framework, and assessment policies do not show flexibility. Ultimately, the inclusion of Indigenous content becomes merely a showcase rather than a diverse and authentic experience.

Unfortunately, authenticity may be the biggest flaw within these Indigenous initiatives, yet also the hardest to address. Again, I am sure this curriculum is laid out with the best of intentions; however, much of the language and content remains problematic in terms of authenticity. Authenticity also becomes problematic early in the 2018 curriculum. Although there is an early assurance in the 2018 Social Studies curriculum that “this edition of the curriculum includes a revision of the social studies and history curriculum developed in collaboration with [Indigenous] educators” (OME, 2018, p. 3), there is also a referral to other stakeholders. This leads one to question which other stakeholders and which viewpoint was more prevalent in the decision-making process. Authenticity issues also arise in the presentation and assessment of material. The curriculum is heavy (although not heavy enough) in content but makes no mention of pedagogical tools or assessment techniques familiar to a more holistic form of educating and ways of knowing.

## *Strategies*

The *2019 Indigenous Education Strategy* (OME, 2019) is mostly a reiteration of the values of the 2007 framework. The primary goal of this strategy remains the improvement of “opportunities for [Indigenous] students, to increase the knowledge and awareness of all students about Indigenous histories, cultures and perspectives” (OME, 2019, p. 1), culminating in a greater success rate of graduating Indigenous students. New to this strategy is the introduction of the reciprocal education approach. This initiative is designed to offer eligible Indigenous students “a consistent and transparent process when choosing where they wish to study—whether it be at a provincially funded school or a First Nation operated or federally operated school” (OME, 2019, p. 1). As this initiative is still its infancy, it will be interesting in the future to review the results of its success.

Included in the Indigenous strategy is the third progress report regarding implementation of the 2007 framework within Ontario’s public schools. This report identifies four key priorities: “supporting students, engagement and awareness, building supporting educators and using data to support student achievement” (OME, 2019, p. 1). The report is positive on the value of increased visibility of Indigenous content within curricula and improvements in cultural awareness among these students’ peers, contributing to increased attendance rates and voluntary self-identification and coupled with higher graduation rates of Indigenous students. However, racism is still reportedly an issue, and “although [Indigenous] students reported feeling more included in their schools, only 26% of those who participated in the online survey felt that their points of view were really valued,” suggesting that more work is needed to increase cultural awareness within both the staff and student body (OME, 2019, p. 3). Greater partnerships are being formed, as survey participants also reported that “[Indigenous] parents needed more local and culturally relevant opportunities to engage in the school system” (OME, 2019, p. 5). This includes initiatives to train and hire more Indigenous staff

within Ontario schools. The report also noted some improvement in graduation rates of Indigenous students but still a noticeable gap between them and their non-Indigenous peers. The focal point of Indigenous policy initiatives directed by the OME remains the establishing of greater academic achievement of Indigenous students and greater cultural awareness among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peers, both staff and students. The language accompanying these directives will be examined more closely later in this paper.

### **General Curricula Since 2004**

These policy guidelines have been reflected, to varying degrees, in elementary school curricula. Before delving into the latest curricular reforms of 2018 (Social Studies /History/Geography), I would like to take a wider overview of all curricula available to teachers in the public school system. Curriculum changes since 2007 are reflective of the policy framework to varying degrees. As of 2016, most curricula have had some inclusion of Indigenous content. For instance, when last revised in 2009, the Arts curriculum included some ideas for inclusion in dance, drama, and visual arts available to most grade levels (OME, 2016). However, these are for the most part superficial offerings with little regard to the context of the activity.

The Science and Technology curriculum, which was last revised in 2007 (the year of the first Indigenous framework) makes some reference to Indigenous ways of knowing, yet still lacks depth. Indigenous content is mentioned in grade one, developing life skills, and similarly in grade two. But Indigenous content is noticeably absent after this until grade seven. At this point, there is some improvement, offering “Indigenous perspectives on sustainability and stewardship in relation to understanding life systems” (OME, 2016) as well as a reference to Indigenous knowledge in understanding connectedness between life forms, which does open opportunities for later discussions

on environmental issues and a glimpse into the concept of two-eyed seeing. This is important, as it does provide an opening for a more holistic approach to learning. As Talaga notes:

The circle is a fundamental concept of Indigenous intelligence underscoring how everything is interrelated and life operates in a circular pattern . . . Being of the Earth, we are connected to the Earth. Being of the spirit we are connected to the spirit and to each other” (2017, p. 25).

This interconnectedness is hinted at in the curriculum instructions. The onus to make this connection, however, is squarely on the teacher and is not sanctioned within the curriculum. Apart from a mention in passing concerning “Understanding Structures and Mechanisms” in grade 8, there is no other mention of Indigenous content within this curriculum (OME, 2016). The official Native Languages curriculum has not been updated since 2001, six years before the Indigenous Framework was enacted. However, this is deceptive, as there are separate curricula guiding the use and teaching of “native” languages in Indigenous schools, which has improved dramatically but mostly within secondary and post-secondary institutions. The availability of Native language learning for non-Indigenous students, on the other hand, is practically non-existent. This may be due to lack of interest or lack of initiative.

The French as a Second Language curriculum was last updated in 2013, yet it still holds only a vague reference to Indigenous content at the grade 2 level, which fails to meet the needs of many Métis learners, among others. Similarly, although the Languages curriculum does reference talking circles and talking sticks for grade two students, there is no other formal mention of Indigenous content (OME, 2016). The Health and Physical Education curriculum references Indigenous communities when reflecting on Indigenous backgrounds and cultures, within the first grade Living Skills unit, but it makes no other mention.

As of 2016, the Social Studies/History/Geography curricula were understandably the most prominent in the use of Indigenous knowledge. The greatest strides have been made here, but often the content lacks depth. The Grade One heritage and Identity and People and Environment units suggest ways to include Indigenous content. The Grade Two Traditions and Cultures unit also mentions Indigenous communities. But there is little mention of significance throughout grades 3–5. The Grade 6 History unit examines Indigenous history but primarily in relation to colonization and the Indigenous peoples colonized people, exploring their role as allies/enemies and trade partners but not as separate entities. The Grade 8 Geography unit reads, “No overall specific expectations explicitly address First Nations, Métis and Inuit” (OME, 2016). Similar language accompanies Mathematics units and Science and Technology.

As one can clearly see, there have been glaring omissions of Indigenous inclusion in the general scope of Ontario elementary school curricula. Although there has been a concerted effort at curricular reform since 2007, it has translated almost exclusively to Social Studies. The Language and Mathematics curricula each use vague wording in defence of the lack of specific Indigenous content, to imply that the teachers themselves may develop their own concepts for classroom use: “Although no overall or specific expectations explicitly address First Nations, Metis and Inuit connections, in each of the strands the learning content . . . could be used to foster in students an appreciation and understanding” (OME, 2016, p. 14). These are important omissions, as numeracy and literacy invest huge portions of actual class time. This is compounded by the fact that until very recently (and still employing similar language), the Mathematics curriculum had not been revised since 2005, two years previous to the 2007 Indigenous framework. The latest rendition still lacks any concrete Indigenous connections. The Science and Technology curriculum, while containing some

good Indigenous context, particularly relating to environmental issues, has still not been updated since 2007.

### ***2018 Social Science/History/Geography Curriculum***

This brings us to a deeper examination of the revised 2018 Social Studies/History and Geography curriculum from grades 1–8 and how it has evolved and addressed issues which arose from the previous revision. Before going any further, I feel it important to note that had plans for an Indigenous curriculum revision project, initiated by the previous Ontario government, not been dismantled at the last minute by the incoming Conservatives, this chapter of my study may have turned out very differently. In 2016 the provincial Liberal government Ministry of Education set forth to establish a committee of educators to discuss further substantial revisions to public school curricula in the province. This committee was formed and arranged to assemble in July of 2018. This assemblage was cancelled two weeks before they were due to meet with few reasons given (Cossette, 2018).

The 2018 Social Studies/History/Geography curriculum prefaces by stating that “history involves the study of diverse individuals, groups and institutions as well as significant events, developments and issues in the past” (OME, 2018, p. 3). This is true of the curriculum, and yet it is still designed through the lens of colonialism. The stated overall vision of the 2018 Social Studies, History, Geography and the Canadian and World Studies programs is to

enable students to become responsible, active citizens within the diverse communities to which they belong. As well as becoming critically thoughtful and informed citizens who value an inclusive society, students will have the skills they need to solve problems and communicate ideas and decisions about significant developments, events, and issues. (OME, 2018, p. 6)

So how are these visions and goals reflected in Indigenous studies within the 2018 curriculum? Let me begin by reviewing positive aspects of the curricula. For the first time in 2018, the curriculum included an introductory segment outlining its commitment to Indigenous studies. Among the assurances found within this section is the following statement:

Consistent with the strategy, the present revision of the social studies and history curriculum was developed in collaboration with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit educators, community members, and organizations in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action numbers 62 and 63. The revision strengthens learning connected with Indigenous perspectives, cultures, histories, and contemporary realities, including those related to the residential school system and treaties. (OME, 2018, p. 15)

Has this been adequately reflected within the curriculum? First, let us review calls to action 62 and 63:

62) We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

- i. 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.
- ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.
- iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.
- iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

63) We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

- i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
- iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

(TRC, 2015, p. 331)

I cannot comment on issues of funding or teacher training, but a closer look at connections between curriculum and TRC recommendations section 62, article 1, and section 63, articles 1 and 3, is very revealing.

Between grades 1 and 3, there are minor approaches made to introduce students to some of the issues and concepts surrounding Indigenous studies. The Grade 2 Heritage and Identity unit requires students to “describe some of the similarities and differences in various aspects of everyday life . . . of selected groups living in Canada between 1780 and 1850” (OME, 2018, p. 88). The examples list Indigenous peoples among those to study, an agreeably positive early inclusion. The same unit later highlights a sample question, “What can we learn from the ways in which First nations lived in harmony with their environment?” (OME, 2018, p. 88). This question raises opportunities to discuss Indigenous ways of knowing both in the past and the present, which may also open engagement in a brief (and age-appropriate) foray into climate change issues and

environmental stewardship, in turn laying the foundation for later discussions of two-eyed seeing. This is a theoretical assumption, however, as such inclusion and continuation of content is left to the initiative of individual teachers. Some will engage in these discussions, others not. This first grade lesson also highlights an early entry to “formulate questions to guide investigations into some of the major challenges facing different groups and communities,” including in their examples “encroachment of European settlers on traditional First Nations territory [and] racism facing First Nations people and black loyalists” (OME, 2018, p. 89). This may help to lay the foundations of social justice, even for children at that age, to better understand colonial injustices in later studies.

By Grade 4, we find other examples of positive inclusion of Indigenous content. One such inclusion can be found on pages 101–102, encouraging students to “gather and organize information on ways of life and relationships with the environment in a few early societies,” using a variety of sources, including “religious or spiritual stories that provide evidence of a society’s view of the environment; agricultural artefacts; traditional stories, creation stories, legends and/or oral history” (OME, 2018, p. 102). Here we have concrete acknowledgement of Indigenous epistemology, if only in terms of environmental apparatus. These are but a few examples of positive inclusion of Indigenous content within the document, but they should inform the reader of the general gist of the approach the document takes towards framing this content.

Despite an obvious effort at positive inclusion of Indigenous content, there are still some negative issues within this curriculum. One major point of importance is that at no place within this curriculum does it discuss an examination of the history or lasting effects of the residential school system in place for over a century. This is a heinous oversight and without a doubt deliberate. Some of my other examples may seem petty at first glance, but they are indicative of a bigger picture of colonial justification and a Eurocentric world view expressed within official documents. For

instance, the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade strand Land Use and the Environment states, “Describe some major connections between features of the natural environment of a region and the type of land use and/or the type of community that is established in that region” (OME, 2018, p. 92). What is missing from the examples (although it is possibly implied in the question itself) is any mention of Indigenous communities past or present. Although I trust that many teachers will use this opportunity to introduce Indigenous communities, doing so is not explicit in the instructions. Other similar examples will be explored later in this paper when examining the actual use of language within the document.

### ***Comparative Curricular Growth***

An important aspect of this curriculum is to take a comparative look at it and other Social Science, History and Geography curricula since 2004. For the sake of clarity and organization, I have devised tables to highlight, contrast, and compare important aspects of curricula as evidenced in examples from the 2004, 2013, and 2018 curriculum documents, highlighting major points which have changed and others which have stayed the same.

*Table 1: Introductory Text i.*

<b>Category</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2018</b>
<b>Curricular Goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “to understand the basic concepts of social studies, history, and geography</li> <li>• develop the skills, strategies, and habits of mind required for effective inquiry and communication, and for the application of the basic concepts of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “develop the ability to use the ‘concepts of disciplinary thinking’ to investigate issues, events, and developments</li> <li>• develop the ability to determine and apply appropriate criteria to evaluate information and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “develop the ability to use the ‘concepts of disciplinary thinking’ to investigate issues, events, and developments</li> <li>• develop the ability to determine and apply appropriate criteria to evaluate information and</li> </ul>

	social studies, history, and geography to a variety of learning tasks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• relate and apply the knowledge acquired through social studies and the study of history and geography to the world outside the classroom.”</li> </ul> (OME, 2004)	evidence and to make judgements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop skills and personal attributes that are needed for discipline-specific inquiry and that can be transferred to other areas in life</li> <li>• build collaborative and cooperative working relationships</li> <li>• use appropriate technology as a tool to help them gather and analyze information, solve problems, and communicate.”</li> </ul> (OME, 2013)	evidence and to make judgements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop skills and personal attributes that are needed for discipline-specific inquiry and that can be transferred to other areas in life</li> <li>• build collaborative and cooperative working relationships</li> <li>• use appropriate technology as a tool to help them gather and analyze information, solve problems, and communicate.”</li> </ul> (OME, 2018)
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There have been subtle, yet definitive, changes made in curricular goals between 2004 and 2013. An important difference of note in the use of language is the switch to “disciplinary thinking” and differentiated learning techniques through “collaborative and cooperative working relationships” (OME, 2013). This change of wording suggests a greater emphasis on critical thinking and a more holistic technique of learning, both important for a greater appreciation and understanding of Indigenous studies. The 2018 curriculum simply uses the same wording as 2013.

*Table 2. Introductory text ii.*

<b>Student Well-Being</b>	<b>N/A</b>	“Educators play an important role in promoting children and youth’s well-being by creating, fostering, and sustaining a learning environment that is healthy, caring, safe, inclusive, and	“Educators play an important role in promoting children and youth’s well-being by creating, fostering, and sustaining a learning environment that is healthy, caring, safe, inclusive, and
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		accepting. A learning environment of this kind will support not only students’ cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development but also their mental health, their resilience, and their overall state of well-being. All this will help them achieve their full potential in school and in life.” (OME, 2013)	accepting. A learning environment of this kind will support not only students’ cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development but also their sense of self and spirit, their mental health, their resilience, and their overall state of well-being. All this will help them achieve their full potential in school and in life.” (OME, 2018)
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I have included this table only to stress the emphasis put on student well-being since 2013; this is echoed not only in the 2018 curriculum but also in the 2019 Indigenous framework. This is an important step towards providing cultural sensitivity within the classroom policy. Well-being was also reflected in the inclusion of Equity and Inclusivity clauses within the 2013 and 2018 curricula, which had been left out of previous curricula. A positive contribution to the 2018 curriculum is the inclusion of an Indigenous Education section within the introductory remarks, absent in previous curricula, including the 2013 revision.

**Use of Language and What This Means**

The more deeply we explore concepts such as reconciliation and Indigenization within classrooms, the more deeply we also need to delve into the language used and underlying intentions of OME Indigenous education policies. In terms of interpreting the language, I feel I must revisit my original question: does the existing framework provide for an equitable workspace for teaching and learning while upholding Indigenous world views and knowledge systems within the constraints of

colonial curricula and pedagogy? Or, conversely, do these provisions simply mask a modern and more covert form of assimilation within the public education system? An answer to these questions may lie in the language itself as it is used in the framework guidelines.

Why is a study of the language important? The reason studying the actual language within a document is as important as studying the content itself is that the language can be manipulated to convey its own message or can be left to the interpretation of the reader. This can be problematic, particularly when these possibly conflicting messages have been planted deliberately. Johnson and Fairclough both address the importance of studying the language itself within a document analysis. Studying the actual language of documents, rather than simply the content, can help determine three elements of the text: i.) the intention, or ideology, behind the words, ii.) developing themes within the text, and iii.) ultimately any hidden or more nefarious meaning contained within the text (Fairclough, 2003). Most of the language contained within these documents contains outwardly positive connotations exploring themes of knowledge exploration and investigative and critical thinking. However, another issue to consider is how language speaks to intent, whether directly or indirectly. Sometimes the intent is hidden within the words. This intent may be addressed directly or simply implied. Often it is framed by the ideology surrounding the content or is simply a reflection of the biases inherent to the documents' creators. This is not always intentional or malicious, but it can have negative consequences for the reader or other stakeholders. Whatever the intention, this kind of language may be viewed as reductionist or insensitive to people who have long been victimized and whose power has long been kept in check by the dominant society. The implications of such language are often derisive or at least devaluing of entire communities or cultures. Behind such implications often lie ideological statements, in this case projected by the dominant society (Fairclough, 2003).

There are some insidious concepts which appear in the language throughout OME curricula documents, particularly within the 2018 Social Studies/History/Geography curriculum. These language concepts take the form of colonial justification, misplaced national identity (when there are, in fact, many nations within the greater nation), and what I would call historical reductionism. By historical reductionism I simply refer to a tendency to understate the consequences of, and continuing power dynamic within, colonial settlement and cultural dominance. These three concepts are troublesome to me and, I feel, need to be identified within the scope of this research. Whether these messages are intentional or not, the possible impact of this use of language is very important for my study. There are many instances, within both the ministry policy guidelines and the 2018 curriculum, in which the language itself implies a deeper meaning beneath the collective surfaces.

### ***Problematic Language***

There are many examples within the 2018 curriculum where the language may be viewed as problematic or emoting misleading concepts or images within its context. The 2<sup>nd</sup> grade Heritage and Identity unit coaxes students to “identify some key components of the Canadian identity (e.g., bilingualism, multi-culturalism, founding nations, religious freedom) and describe some of the ways in which communities that were in Canada around the early 1800’s have had an impact on Canadian identity” (OME, 2018, p. 88). This is problematic, because the very nature of the multiculturalism, as included in the examples, suggests a society with multiple identities, including that of the Indigenous peoples. Many Indigenous and otherwise marginalized groups have not experienced an open, multicultural society. Instead, they have experienced assimilation, segregation, and hostility, and many continue to experience this. The same unit becomes more controversial by instructing students to survey maps “that show First Nations territory prior to and after contact” (OME, 2018, p. 114). This may become very contentious, due to treaty rights violations, unlawful land

development, and land appropriation experienced by the Indigenous peoples throughout time. One of the stated goals of the 2018 Social Studies curriculum is that students will “develop the ability to determine and apply appropriate criteria to evaluate information and evidence and to make judgements” (OME, 2018, p. 7). The problem with this language is that a word such as “appropriate” becomes an arbitrary term in this context. Who deems criteria as “appropriate,” and by what criteria or methodology has this been determined?

The 2<sup>nd</sup> grade curriculum discusses differences in cultures and lifestyles, inquiring in a sample question, “Why might some children in Central Africa or in the Amazon region of South America never have played a video game or watched tv? In what other ways is their lifestyle different from that of children in Canada?” (OME, 2018, p. 81). This becomes a very loaded question, despite the young age of its intended audience. Three problems arise with such a seemingly simple question. The most troubling is the phrase “children in Canada”, which suggests, even encourages, the idea of a homogenous society. This kind of generality is not reflective of the population of Canada in all its diversity and is particularly neglectful of communities “off the grid” or in remote locations, or whose socio-economic status or cultural values do not allow for such extravagance. This sets up an assumption that children in Canada have, or by implication, should have, watched television or played video games, an assumption that “others” these off-grid communities and more. Although these things may seem commonplace, it is dangerous and at times misleading to apply such normative standards in a country as large and diverse as Canada. Such images may exclude members of various Indigenous communities, Mennonite communities, and others who would not fit the model of “Canada” which this question sets up. This would also be an opportunity to look at some similarities between communities in underdeveloped countries and underprivileged communities within Canada, but this is also ignored.

An overview of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade 2018 Social Studies curriculum introduces other instances of problematic language. Among expectations for students was to “learn about key characteristics of various Indigenous nations and European settler communities prior to 1713 in what would eventually become Canada” (OME, 2018, p. 109). Although this is standard language describing what is considered by many to be a generally innocuous idea, the phrase “what would eventually become Canada” is repeated often on pages 109–112. Although it is wording which I also may be tempted to use, this phrase can be considered contentious, as it negates both historic and lingering issues of broken land treaties and continued encroachment by corporations, government entities, and private ownership on still unceded territory. This leads me to question whose Canada is being referred to.

The unit continues to discuss the “differences between First Nations, and European settlers . . . with respect to views on land use and ownership. How have some of these differences led to conflict in present day Canada over Indigenous land rights?” (OME, 2018, p. 113). Although this presents a good opening for discussion, one still witnesses the language of colonial justification; theft, impropriety and deception have been described simply as a “difference of views.” Such reductionist language is again used in the Big Ideas section claiming that “cooperation and conflict are inherent aspects of human interactions/relationships” (OME, 2018, p. 110.) Again, the language of colonial justification rings loud and clear, using a western (Little Bear, 2000) construct of human nature to justify the taking of land, assimilation of the people therein, and destruction of their cultures. This idea is supported further by the claim, in fact a reductionistic understatement, that “interactions between people have consequences that can be positive for some people and negative for others” (OME, 2018, p. 110). If by negative one refers to the genocide and continued repression of a culture, certainly there have been some ‘negative’ consequences for some due to certain

interactions. Another innocuous sounding statement, on the surface certainly, is that one must take into consideration all points of view. This language is evidenced in the discussion of stakeholders, also stated in Big Ideas: “When examining an issue, it is important to understand who the different stakeholders are and to consider their perspectives” (OME, 2018, p. 111). Certainly, it is important to critically examine the perspectives of all stakeholders. However, this can become a two-edged sword as, while allowing for the perspective of the colonized, this language also forwards more justification for the colonizer. However, such a critical examination must then necessarily also carry a value judgment. Although a more humanist viewpoint communicates that the perspective of those with the most to lose (or lost) should have precedence, this view is lost within the rhetoric of cultural biases. Here we are confronted with opposing philosophies between western and traditional Indigenous world views. The importance of community, reciprocity, mutual respect, and cooperation common to Indigenous philosophies becomes overwhelmed by western constructs of individuality and competition. (Little Bear, 2000)

The 5<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies curriculum introduces a section entitled “Framing Questions,” with an open-ended inquiry, “How does colonialism still affect Canada today?” (OME, 2018, p. 111). Again, even this question becomes problematic. There is definite merit in examining the impact of colonialism on various aspects of modern Canada. This can be taken for granted. This does open opportunities to discuss residential schools, land displacement, treaty rights etc. I do not want to minimize the importance of asking this question. However, one may take issue with the suggestion that colonialism is a thing of the *past* which has a lasting impact despite the efforts of contemporary society when colonialism is in fact a *continuing* entity in Canada despite the efforts of some members of contemporary society. This may seem like mere semantics, but it is an important distinction.

Furthermore, on a much deeper note, the stated ministry goal for Indigenous students' achievement is to create "socially contributive, politically active, and economically prosperous citizens of the world" (OME, 2007, p. 11). This does not sound like too much of a stretch from acquiring "the habits and modes of thought of white men" (MacDonald, 1883). We may need to dissect this statement. On the surface, does this mean that assimilation defines success? If so, is assimilation not a counterpoint to Indigenous growth? Or conversely, is just such assimilation necessary for Indigenous peoples looking to compete in a modern economy? Each answer probably holds some truth to some people. The very vision expressed early in the curriculum can then become problematic in interpretation: "Enable students to become responsible, active citizens within the diverse communities to which they belong. As well as becoming critically thoughtful and informed citizens, who value an inclusive society" (OME, 2018, p. 7). Is "inclusion" now the new "assimilation," a systematic integration of societal values and cultural mores assembled under a unified banner? While conforming to this vision of a successful citizen of the world may be the most practical solution to equalizing the field between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, it may also fail the growing number of Indigenous peoples who are seeking a return to their cultural roots. This very concept is one which I may examine more thoroughly at a later date, but is a valuable question to pose at this time.

### **Reconciliation Through Indigenization**

Indigenizing mainstream classrooms is an ambitious task and can often be a hard sell to both teachers and administrators. Many teachers go forward with good intentions, incorporating elements of Indigenous ways of knowing into their daily lesson plans, but do not have the resources or wherewithal to invest in true methods of Indigenization or, ultimately, decolonization. This must be addressed through more in-depth professional development for current teachers and greater emphasis

on Indigenous studies for those training to be the teachers of tomorrow. Other teachers do not have the interest or feel the need to invest in more than the bare minimum outlined by curricular policy. To these teachers I would point out that Indigenous ways of knowing are as valuable to non-Indigenous students as to Indigenous students to develop human empathy and cross-cultural understanding and may encourage new ways to differentiate learning for all. After all, shouldn't education be about breaking down barriers rather than erecting walls? Three concepts which particularly need to be addressed more deeply within both Indigenous frameworks and curricula are two-eyed seeing, historical thinking, and traditional ways of knowing.

### ***Two-Eyed Seeing***

One glaring omission within policy frameworks or curricula is any mention of the concept of “two eyed seeing” (Hatcher et al., 2009; McKeon, 2012). More widespread acknowledgement and employment of this concept is becoming more and more valid, particularly as an increasing number of Indigenous students are becoming entrenched in a colonial school system while at the same time attempting to reaffirm much of their own heritage and traditional ways of knowing. Described as “learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing and from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing and to using both of these eyes together” (Hatcher et al., 2009, p. 146), this is a powerful research tool and insightful methodology to explore both the physical and spiritual worlds of scientific discovery. Both curricula and policy frameworks ignore this concept, which could be so valuable an asset in the lives of reawakened Indigenous peoples and for society generally. This now becomes a question of values and the imposition of Eurocentric, capitalist values upon a cultural philosophy based upon community and consensus.

Margaret McKeon is convinced that two-eyed seeing must accompany all environmental science research: “It is time for the environmental education field to turn to Indigenous education to enrich, renew, and refocus its goals and concepts” (2012, p. 131). Hatcher et al. (2009) concur:

The Indigenous worldview, exemplified by language, teaches us about interdependence. People must look at our natural world with two perspectives. Western science sees objects, but Indigenous languages teach us to see subjects. Indigenous languages teach us that everything alive is both physical and spiritual. Humans are a very small part of the whole. (p. 146)

McKeon (2012) agrees with this, stating that within a systems theory, every living organism is a system in and of itself. Although this theory is reflected within the science curriculum, it is presented as a western formulation without identifying its place in the Indigenous sciences. This is, admittedly, a difficult concept for many to grasp, as it marries two very different philosophies and world views:

Indigenous sciences contain deep and subtle wisdom, which Mother earth needs, but that it is difficult for those with a Western culture to practice authentically because they generally do not have the underlying beliefs, values and cultural connections to nature and each other. (Hatcher et al., 2009, p. 145)

However, these values can be learned.

Hatcher and colleagues discuss the guidelines of creating a transformative learning space within which two-eyed seeing can become a reality. They describe an environment where a teacher is a “facilitator” rather than an authority figure, “guiding” the process without domination (Hatcher et al., 2009, p. 149). The authors list many factors common to a transformative learning environment particularly aimed at, but not exclusively for, Indigenous students. This list includes recognizing the “importance of the non-verbal” and the messages contained therein, the importance of aesthetic

surroundings, reflective learning processes, storytelling, the use of celebrations and rituals “to give students a sense of connection,” freedom of speech, and the use of learning circles (Hatcher et al. 2009, p.151).

Although the application of two-eyed seeing principles is generally reserved for post-secondary research, there is no reason for it not to be applied, or at least discussed, in other learning institutions, including elementary school classrooms. We are reminded, in conclusion, that “inherent in the Two-Eyed Seeing approach is a respect for different worldviews and a quest to outline a common ground while remaining cognizant and respectful of the differences.” Keeping these ideas in mind, two-eyed seeing may become a “powerful model for all human discourse” (Hatcher et al, 2009, p. 152).

### ***Historical Thinking***

Early in the 2018 curriculum, it is also stated that students will apply concepts of historical thinking within their studies, which involves the study of four key concepts: historical significance, continuity and change, historical perspective, and cause and consequence (OME, 2018). Historical significance involves determining the importance of an issue, event, person etc., which is generally determined by the “impact of something on a group of people and whether its effects are long standing” (OME, 2018, p. 138)—for example, Sir John A. MacDonald’s contributions to building the framework of Confederation which led to the creation of modern Canada, or conversely, Sir John A. MacDonald’s role in the cultural and physical genocide of Indigenous peoples and its continuing generational impact in his quest for the creation of what is now modern Canada. Even with these examples, however, we are still confronted with a colonialist viewpoint. Continuity and change often involve an exploration of

what has stayed the same and what has changed over a period of time with reference to ways of life, political policies, economic practices, relationship with the environment, social values, and beliefs, and so on. Students make judgements about continuity and change by making comparisons between some point in the past and the present, or between two points in the past. (OME, 2018, p.138)

This may open a great forum for discussion about Indigenous traditions and philosophies but also about the cultural genocide and overt racism faced by Indigenous people throughout colonial history. Historical perspective involves an analysis of “past actions, events, developments, and issues within the context of the time in which they occurred” (2018, p. 138) and how that might differ from the attitudes of today. This can be deceiving and requires the use of many sources to determine the context of the time in which they occurred.

To use Sir John A. MacDonald as another example, it has been too easy for historians in the past to dismiss MacDonald’s efforts at cultural genocide and overt racism as simply being a product of his time—in which racism was a prevalent feature of members of the British Empire. There is evidence to support this theory. However, a closer look at primary documents will show that there was also much opposition to his policies on simply humanist terms. The study of cause and consequence requires students to determine the factors that affected or led to something (e.g., an event, situation, action, interaction) as well as its impact/effects:

Students develop an understanding of the complexity of causes and consequences, learning that something may be caused by more than one factor and may have many consequences, both intended and unintended. (OME, 2018, p.

This also sets up a great forum for a frank discussion of Indigenous history (See Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1. Concepts of Historical Thinking 1

Overall Expectations	Related Concepts of Historical Thinking	Big Ideas	Framing Questions	Sample Spatial Skills/Activities to Be Introduced/ Developed
<b>Strand A. New France and British North America, 1713–1800</b>				
A1. analyse aspects of the experiences of various groups and communities, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, in Canada between 1713 and 1800, and compare them to the lives of people in present-day Canada	Continuity and Change; Historical Perspective	Understanding the experiences of and challenges facing people in the past helps put our experiences and challenges into context.	Do we experience any of the same challenges people in Canada experienced in earlier times? What types of developments permit us to respond to them in different ways than people did in the past?	<b>Maps* and Globes</b> Analysing and constructing political maps to show alliances (see, e.g., A2.4)  Analysing demographic or population maps related to settlement patterns, territorial expansion (see, e.g., A2.4)
A2. use the historical inquiry process to investigate perspectives of different groups and communities, including First Nations, Métis, and/or Inuit communities, on some significant events, developments, and/or issues related to the shift in power in colonial Canada from France to Britain	Historical Significance; Historical Perspective	Different groups responded in different ways to the shift in power in Canada from France to Britain.	Why might different people view the same event in different ways?  How do we determine what is historically significant?	Analysing and constructing flow maps on movement patterns and/or displacement of different groups (see, e.g., A2.4)
A3. describe various significant people, events, and developments, including treaties, in Canada between 1713 and 1800, and explain their impact	Historical Significance; Cause and Consequence	The significance of historical events is determined partly by their short- and long-term impact.		

(continued)

Figure 2. Concepts of Historical Thinking 2

Overall Expectations	Related Concepts of Historical Thinking	Big Ideas	Framing Questions	Sample Spatial Skills/Activities to Be Introduced/Developed
<b>Strand B. Canada, 1800–1850: Conflict and Challenges</b>				
B1. analyse aspects of the lives of various groups and communities, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, in Canada between 1800 and 1850, and compare them to the lives of people in Canada in 1713–1800	Continuity and Change; Historical Perspective	Throughout Canadian history, people have struggled to meet challenges and to improve their lives.	What can we learn from the ways in which people met challenges in the past?  Why is it important to consider various perspectives when analysing events or issues?  What types of forces can bring about change?	<b>Graphs</b> Analysing and/or constructing graphs related to immigration to Canada (see, e.g., B2.5)  <b>Maps* and Globes</b> Analysing and constructing political maps to show alliances (see, e.g., B2.4)  Analysing demographic or population maps related to settlement patterns, territorial expansion (see, e.g., B2.4)  Analysing and constructing flow maps on movement patterns and/or displacement of different groups (see, e.g., B2.4)
B2. use the historical inquiry process to investigate perspectives of different groups and communities, including First Nations, Métis, and/or Inuit communities, on some significant events, developments, and/or issues that affected Canada and/or people in Canada between 1800 and 1850	Historical Significance; Historical Perspective	The first half of the nineteenth century was a time of major conflict and change in Canada.		
B3. describe various significant people, events, and developments, including treaties between Indigenous nations and imperial powers, in Canada between 1800 and 1850, and explain their impact	Historical Significance; Cause and Consequence	Social and political conflicts and changes in the first half of the nineteenth century have had a lasting impact on Canada.		

\* The term *map* refers to print, digital, and interactive maps. Students may analyse and create maps on paper or using mapping programs.

Historical thinking has been problematic in some academic circles, especially when it pertains to Indigenous education. Cutrara (2018) has found a general lack of teaching initiatives designed for decolonizing techniques, both through lack of knowledge and a fear of failure. She finds also little room within historical pedagogy to explore what she terms “different interpretations of the past” (p. 253). Rather than open up a wider, more diverse lens with which to view historical

events and world views, she claims that historical thinking in fact denies “the presence of Indigenous epistemologies as legitimate ways for understanding the past” (Cutrara, 2018, p. 268). Indigenous epistemology includes storytelling as primary resources, holistic philosophies and pedagogies, and world views incorporating the physical and spiritual worlds as a whole. Without these epistemologies in place, historic thinking lacks authenticity. As Cutrara points out, “We have to engage in history education in ways that invite us to respect the different ways of seeing into the past and present, to believe these stories as truths and to court relationships that allow those ideas to exist together” (2018, p. 268).

Heather McGregor (2017) also confronts the quandary of historical thinking when applied to Indigenous studies. She examines the concurrent phenomena of Indigenous education initiatives within social studies programs and the concept of historical thinking being adopted within these same programs, both popularized within the last decade. She imagines a scenario in which discipline-based history education and Indigenous education meet in the same classroom. Her fictitious scenario depicts a class studying Inuit land claims history, illuminating differing historical perspectives. The teacher (teacher 1) arranges a visit from a local Inuit elder, facilitated by a colleague (teacher 2). Teacher 1 is a social studies teacher, and teacher 2 is an Inuit language instructor (McGregor, 2017, p. 4). McGregor proceeds to compare the possible questions each teacher may ask of the class, based on their fields of study, personal perspectives, and cultural knowledge. As she puts it, “These two sets of questions are derived from different assumptions about the way knowledge circulates and the verifiability of knowledge . . . they are sourced from different epistemological foundations” (2017, p. 5). This scenario illuminates possible conflicting methodologies and viewpoints when incorporating historical thinking into Indigenous studies. This

is where we discover a quandary within the realms of historical thinking and how it relates to Indigenous history; as the author points out:

Indigenous knowledge relies on openness to, and the credibility of, orality for a continual (re)making of meaning in the present . . . Memory work in Indigenous traditions is a practice often connected to a place that can facilitate recognition of the presence of the past, moral lessons for individuals, as well as collective cultural continuity. (McGregor, 2017, p. 7)

Historical thinking approaches may not be as accepting or as fluid. If there is no place for such epistemology in Seixas' historical thinking process, then we have come to the impasse discussed by Cutrara. However, McGregor seems more confident than Cutrara that the two methodologies can work side by side, if not hand in hand: "I support the historical thinking approach as part of the solution to improving history education" (McGregor, 2017, p. 9). However, she does caution that "historical thinking comes from a particular group of people in particular places, with culturally situated understandings of the past, of the flow of time and of meanings derived from human experience" (p. 13). While helping to engage students in the process of critical thinking and historical perspective, students must also be aware that this "particular group of people in particular places" are not the be-all and end-all of historical knowledge and there are other perspectives to consider. McGregor reasons that although the relationship between historical thinking and Indigenous knowledge has yet to be better defined and incorporated, there is still room for negotiation and compromise, or at the very least, parallel learning strategies. Perhaps two teachers are necessary, as illustrated in her scenario, to represent different perspectives and angles of study.

McGregor concludes on a pausing though cautiously optimistic note: "It is crucial to begin considering how each of these educational reform movements may necessitate adaptation in relation to each other" (2017, p. 15). If this is not done, one risks the continued marginalization of

Indigenous world views and a failure to provide authentic Indigenous methods of study and a failure to meet the needs of the calls to action forwarded by the TRC. Without a well measured structure in place, the concept of historical thinking may remain a problematic concept for the teaching of Indigenous studies. There need to be adequate foundations of Indigenous history, ways of knowing, and philosophies in place, both in teacher training and student learning. Indigenous communities also have such diverse histories and cultural mores that it would be nearly impossible for most students to form an historical consciousness without some basis of deeper learning.

How can students and teachers apply historical thinking when the very definition of history may be contingent upon opposing world views and concepts of time and relationships to place? Gibson and Case (2019) make convincing arguments in favour of historic thinking to ensure that Indigenous education becomes an authentic and positive in-class experience for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike: “Students must be taught to think historically by interpreting historical evidence, challenging problematic assumptions, and identifying the perspectives inherent in the historical narratives they encounter” (p. 254). They contest Cutrara’s claims that differing Indigenous and settler world views place immovable barriers in the way of historical thinking, instead claiming that introducing concepts of historic thinking to history lessons is, in fact, an effective method of “opening up the discussion of events and people currently present in the curriculum to include alternative Indigenous perspectives” (Gibson & Case, 2019, p. 257). They further critique Cutrara on two other major points. Cutrara’s charge that racism is inherent in the teaching of history is countered with Gibson and Case’s (2019) claim that Cutrara is ignoring recent trends in progressive thinking within historic academia, evolving from its positivistic pedagogical roots. Gibson and Case also counter Cutrara’s claim that western scholars are prejudicial against Indigenous sources of knowledge, preferring written documents to oral history, by pointing out an

openness to Indigenous oral accounts yet holding them accountable also to critical thought and assessment (Gibson & Case, 2019). Gibson and Case list four ways in which historic thinking can aid in bringing TRC recommendations for reconciliation to the classroom:

- Problematize the study of history to enable more sensitive and complex investigation of Indigenous topics.
- Create space for alternative conclusions and interpretations, including room for Indigenous students to express their conclusions.
- Nurture examination of history from Indigenous perspectives.
- Invite ethical judgments about the historical treatment of Indigenous people. (2019, p. 267)

Gibson and Case acknowledge that to achieve reconciliation through historic thinking, both instructors and students must be more grounded in fundamental Indigenous world views and philosophies, but that this is not an impossible task:

We have argued that reforms to Canadian history education articulated in the TRC's Calls to Action can be achieved by modifying current educational practices in three ways: strengthening the representation and centrality of Indigenous histories and perspectives in current Canadian history and social studies curricula; teaching students to think historically so they are better prepared to interpret and question the ethnocentric and colonialist assumptions in the narratives they encounter; and developing at least one integrated, multidisciplinary course on Indigenous studies in each province and territory that focuses on teaching about Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing. (Gibson & Case, 2019, p. 276)

As an historian I, also applaud this method of study and agree that it is an effective way to critically examine the past while also looking at its relationship to the present. However, the very use

of historical thinking within Ontario public school curricula is immediately compromised by the omission of two of the original categories of historic thinking, using primary source evidence and considering ethical dimensions (Seixas & Morton, 2013). Author and academic Peter Seixas, himself an acknowledged architect of the concept of historical thinking, has voiced apprehension with the way its application has been demonstrated in Canadian schools. Seixas (2017) is concerned with the categories by which Canadian schools determine historical thinking. Not having included these important concepts, particularly within the studies of Indigenous content, negates much of the Gibson and Case argument about progressive curricula and non-prejudicial sources of knowledge. However, challenges such as this can be overcome, and historical thinking can become an effective bridge between Indigenous and settler knowledge within historical studies. This will require time and effort both on the part of instructors and administrators alike, but it is an attainable goal.

### ***Ways of Knowing***

Kaitlyn Watson pointed out that “research suggests that, in general, Aboriginal students lean towards holistic education in which students learn from whole to part, and benefit from the use of visual organizers, work with hands-on manipulatives and engagement with reflective learning and collaborative tasks” (2015, p. 68). While differentiated learning and the use of physical manipulatives has certainly been employed, and quite effectively, within Ontario classrooms for a number of years, there are a number of elements common to traditional ways of knowing which may merit greater attention within Ontario elementary school pedagogies, and not only for Indigenous students. This is not a point I will dwell too much upon except to point out the lack of Indigenous pedagogy, such as experiential and outdoor learning techniques, being applied in mainstream Ontario elementary school classes.

## Chapter 6 Conclusions

In response to my title question “Are we there yet?” I must answer that no, we are not, but we may still get there. Although policy frameworks, initiatives, and curricula have been improved and are heading in the right direction, there is still a long way to go to meet the terms of reconciliation within Ontario public schools. Tanya Talaga noted that “while education has played a huge role in damaging relations between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, it is also going to play a crucial role in reconciling that relationship” (2018, p. 214). To achieve this, teachers must instill a greater sense of deeper learning within classrooms for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike. This can be achieved by greater inclusion of not only Indigenous content but of Indigenous ways of knowing and greater ties with Indigenous communities (including greater numbers of Indigenous staff), while engaging in a more thorough cross-curricular approach to Indigenous ways of knowing, particularly in mathematics and literacy. Development of more holistic methods of teaching, including land-based learning and the concepts of two-eyed seeing, should take more of a place in teacher training as well in the field itself. Reflective methods of assessment and evaluation should also be developed; as Talaga points out, “Standardized tests are manifestations of Eurocentric measures of educational achievement that do not represent diverse Aboriginal learning paradigms, linguistic traditions and holistic epistemologies” (2018, p. 339).

One other conclusion also remains clear—the language of colonialism still pervades the Ontario elementary school curricula and policy frameworks. While professing an inclusive, diverse curriculum, there remain many instances of “othering” within. This use of language, nay, this very process of thought, will continually hamper any true attempts at reconciliation with the Indigenous population. Although I sound very critical, there have been some great strides made in Ontario education policy regarding Indigenous studies, but it is not only public policy which needs to be

altered—it is also public perception. This can only be achieved through strong educational practices reflective of the society surrounding the public.

## **Recommendations**

Ultimately, it may one day prove beneficial to all learners for Ontario to take a leading role in transforming the current educational system into a more holistic, cooperative form of experiential education. However, until we reach the point where all concerned stakeholders (parents, educators, government, students, administration) are willing to cooperate to advance a structural overhaul of the existing system of education (which can only realistically be implemented from the top down) there are some recommendations for curricular changes which I feel could be effectively put into place. In anticipation of this future scenario there are smaller changes which can be put into action in the very near future.

Perhaps most importantly, the language of Ontario curricula needs to become more inclusive and less colonial in nature, as I have outlined in detail through the course of this paper. One example of this is the reference to “what would eventually become Canada.” This reference may be considered intrusive regarding issues of treaty rights and unceded territory. Although I am sure some well intentioned consideration was put forth in choosing this language, simply referring to Canada would perhaps be less of a direct reminder of the appropriation involved in the naming of Canada. This also seems to put stewardship of Indigenous land, additional land claims and disputed treaty rights as simply matters which have been resolved, which is anything but the truth. This language relegates sovereignty of Indigenous communities and land claims as articles of the past rather than also as articles of the present and the future. From this perspective, a more appropriate referral may be to “what many eventually called Canada.” While I stand firmly on that claim, my stance on defining Canadian identity may soften if it is made clear in individual classrooms that there is in fact

no standard Canadian identity, but that Canada is made up of unique and diverse communities and cultures framing said identity. Such evidence, however, is outside of the scope of this report.

Secondly there needs to be a more concerted effort to include forms of holistic pedagogy and incorporate concepts of two eyed seeing into Ontario classrooms. Although there have been great strides in the inclusion of more authentic Indigenous content within curricula, the methods of disseminating information within the student body are still overwhelmingly colonialist in nature, and deliberately so. Perhaps the most effective route to achieving dramatic curricular and pedagogical change in Ontario's schools is by incorporating elements of holistic and experiential techniques incrementally and observe results as they unfold. One method to achieve this is to increase the visibility of Indigenous knowledge keepers not only in primarily Indigenous population schools but in mainstream classrooms also. Relating to this, differentiated learning techniques of all kinds are valuable for all students. The availability of a wider variety of these learning methods can also be achieved through the adoption of Indigenous ways of knowing into classroom pedagogy. A more holistic approach to teaching may also be achieved with a greater emphasis on environmental issues through land or place-based learning techniques and experiential learning practices. This could be facilitated through greater contact and associations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous instructors and community members.

I would also recommend further research be conducted on the transformation of the hearts and minds of non-Indigenous students across Ontario public schools as they become gradually more immersed in Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies. This project may sound overly ambitious and will certainly take considerable time and effort but may be the only way to truly obtain reconciliation in a way which benefits Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike.

## **Importance of my Study**

There have been various studies examining different aspects of Indigenizing public school curricula. Each has been important in bringing attention to the ongoing discussion. Notably influencing my study were the studies by mentioned above by Currie-Patterson and Watson and the continuing work of Marie Battiste. My study is important for three reasons. Firstly, it is a further investigation of suggestions raised in Kaitlin Watson's earlier paper and her later paper with Currie Patterson. My study addresses the need for a deeper examination of Ontario curricula as it evolves, as called for by Watson. To gain an understanding of the lack of action commented upon by Watson and Currie Patterson, the first thing to look at is curricula and the limitations and/or freedoms within. Although teachers do have some leniency in their interpretation of curricula, the foundations upon which the curricula stand are still rather colonial in nature. Secondly, it may be useful for future policy makers to examine the continuing colonialist nature of curricular language, as has been revealed through my study, in further reconciliatory revisions. Within this language lingers a legacy of othering spoken by the dominant voice of colonialist ideology. For this reason, it may also be useful for teachers to be aware of the nuances of language within the curriculum and adjust their practices and interpretations accordingly. Thirdly, this paper may act as a springboard into my own or others' further study of the effectiveness and application of Indigenous ways of knowing within mainstream Ontario classrooms. This could lead to more in-depth studies of curricular policy in action.

## **Limitations**

While I have conducted a thorough examination of policy frameworks and curricula set up to guide teachers in their work, without spending time in classrooms and seeing how teachers are actively incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing into their studies and talking to the primary

stakeholders (the students themselves), this was more of a theoretical study, looking at curriculum alone. This is, in fact, the biggest drawback to my study. My research is limited by a lack of knowledge stemming from actual work within Ontario's classrooms. My research has also been limited to Ontario elementary school curricula and is therefore only relevant to Ontario elementary schools.

As a result of COVID-19 restrictions, I was unable to obtain an insider's view of how these guidelines and curricula are presented in actual classrooms. My contact with Indigenous representatives was also hampered by these restrictions, and I adopted a theoretical approach through document analysis and an examination of curricular text in the interests of time. However, this does not negate the nature and accuracy of my findings, although it has limited the scope of my research.

Due to these limitations, I would recommend that one take into consideration my findings as they prepare a further investigative approach to actual classroom activity. My own interest in further research has been bolstered by this concept, and I intend to pursue a follow-up report which involves the experiences of actual teachers and students and how they have navigated or will navigate both the OME requirements and the TRC recommendations within their classrooms and studies.

## **Final Word**

My study appears to unearth more questions than it answers. Perhaps the most important question I am left with is this: does the "equitable" achievement sought by the ministry necessitate the further assimilation of Indigenous students into western modes of thinking and learning, or can Indigenous ways of knowing be equitably incorporated into mainstream classrooms for the benefit of all students? My contention is that despite the promises suggested by these ministry guidelines, they will not functionally allow for the structural realignment necessary to realize reconciliatory Indigenous education through greater decolonization within Ontario's public school classrooms. So

how can reconciliation be attained? This conclusion adds another level to an already paradoxical argument. Will providing culturally responsive pedagogy and epistemology for Indigenous students enable them to succeed in a world founded on colonial principles and values? How can this be reconciled within the school system or even the greater social system within Canada? While talking circles and land acknowledgements are useful tools and should not be disregarded outright, have we maybe come to a point where more is expected, not only for the sake of Indigenous students but for the advancement of all students?

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