

Decolonizing Indigenous Educational Policies

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The paper addresses three educational policy documents created by the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (formerly known as the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities [MTCU]) to target and minimize the ‘achievement gap’ of Indigenous children and youth. The policy documents come at a critical time in which statisticians predict a significant increase in Indigenous populations across Ontario as well as Canada (MTCU, 2011). We critique the policy documents and argue that they represent tools of neo-colonialism that maintain dichotomous power relations in which Indigenous communities are positioned as dependent on the white settler Canadian state as providers. Through an anti-colonial theoretical framework, we interrogate the self-purported altruism on the part of the Canadian government toward Indigenous education initiatives, which masks the neo-liberal agenda of ensuring that the growing Indigenous populations are conforming to the competitive demands of the market-economy.

Keywords: Decolonization, Indigeneity, neo-liberalism, Eurocentric, self-identification, policy

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“I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not want to think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are unable to stand alone...our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department”.

-Duncan Campbell Scott: Head of the Department of Indian Affairs (1913-1932)

Introduction

In 2007, the Ontario Ministry of Education (EDU) created two documents: the Ontario First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education (FNMI) Policy Framework and the Building Bridges to Success for First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Students. These documents were to serve as provincial educational policy for Indigenous students in Ontario’s publicly funded education system, grades K-12. In 2011, following these policies, the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU)¹ collaborated with the EDU to draft the Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training

¹ The Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development was formerly known as the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) and will be referred to as MTCU in this paper as that was the name of the said Ministry at the time of publication of the policy document.

Policy Framework. These three policy documents were implemented at the kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12) level as a mechanism to increase literacy and numeracy, retention of students in publicly-funded schools, graduation rates, and enrolment and acceptance to sites of postsecondary education (PSE). The Aboriginal PSE Policy Framework was drafted to create partnerships between Indigenous communities, school boards and sites of government, to reduce the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous PSE students, and to provide funding and resources (Ontario MTCU, 2011).

Funding and resources were to be delivered on colonial government terms as manifested in the dichotomous power relations of dominance perpetuated by the white colonial government. We argue that terms or conditions bear resemblance to those imposed by Western Imperial nations on former colonized nations of the Global South in the form of SAPs (Structural Adjustment Programmes) regulated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). The conditions include rigorous and invasive data collection concerning 'self-identification' of Indigenous students, performance measures, accountability markers, and transparency for such funds to be released. Although the policy frameworks are outlined as altruistic, well-meaning, committed pledges on part of the provincial government to address educational gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, such policies reinforce the dichotomous oppressor/oppressed power relations embedded in Indigenous and colonial state relationships (Razack, 1998). The policies are platforms, which reproduce tracking, objectifying and subsequently 'knowing' the colonized Other as a strategy of dominance and control according to the will of the colonizers. We analyze and interrogate the ways in which the discursive practices encapsulating the policy frameworks benefit a neoliberal agenda of conformity-demanding, results-based, market-oriented education which seeks to maintain and promote Ontario, and, more largely, Canada as competitive players on both domestic and international fronts.

Our work disrupts the government's asserted altruistic approach to addressing Indigenous educational approaches through an anticolonial theoretical framework deconstructing the imperial/colonial relationship that privileges white settlers at the expense of Indigenous communities. We address and critique the policy context and rationale in which the documents were drafted and implemented, discuss the government imposed notions of Indigenous self-identification and provide a genealogy of settler policies as a mechanism of imperialism.

Theoretical Framework

Anti-colonialism seeks to dismantle past and present colonialisms, which remain embedded and implicated in ongoing white settler colonial states and Western militarized imperial states, as well as neo-colonial states. Anti-colonialism is therefore against colonialism in all of its manifestations. Asante (2006) described the multifaceted pervasiveness of colonialism:

Colonialism seeks to impose the will of one people on another and to use the resources of the imposed people for the benefit of the imposer. Nothing is sacred in such a system as it powers its way toward the extinction of the wills of the imposed upon with one objection in mind: the ultimate subjection. (p. ix)

The Canadian nation-state imposed such an all-encompassing, pervasive colonial structure with its early implementation of the Indian Act (1876), which continues to exist. Dei (2006) articulated the necessity of contextualizing power relations and alternate historical accounts from non-dominant perspectives in order to take up anti-colonial work, in which history and context are crucial and an understanding of our collective past is significant for pursuing political resistance. Anti-colonialism differs from post-colonialism, as post-colonialism assumes that occupation or

colonization has come to a conclusion and that power and autonomy have been restored to the Indigenous communities of a particular land. As Waziyatawin (2010) posited, anti-colonialism challenges power relations in and sets forth Indigenous knowledge recovery as an anti-colonial project, resulting in a “conscious and systematic effort to revalue that which has been denigrated and revive what has been destroyed” (p. 121). Waziyatawin stated that anti-colonialism effectively dismantles the “fallacy of European superiority” (p. 122), thus creating an entry point for systemic change rooted in resistance. Anti-colonial resistance, in the case of decolonizing white settler state Indigenous policy-making, requires the interrogation of power relations in which the white colonial settler state imposes itself, its norms, values, and social systems, on colonized Indigenous people and inherently positions Indigenous people as inferior to white, Euro-Canadian settlers. Dei (2011) described “processes of knowledge production, validation and dissemination, and claims of Indigeneity and Indigenous knowledge” (p. 112), and outlined the implications of colonialism and neo-colonialism on power relations. The three policy frameworks highlighted in this paper are rooted in Eurocentric notions of what education is and what it ought to look like without any consultation of Indigenous communities and leaders for self-determination and agency over educational outcomes. The fact that these documents continue to be drafted by the same white settler populations and institutions which have historically created genocidal legislation is highly problematic. Power relations are also solidified by the very existence of such policy frameworks and educational strategies, as they are indicative of which groups have the power, the right or the autonomy to create such documents and which communities are not afforded such privilege.

Policy-making is yet another tool of the colonization, control and domination of Indigenous communities, in which many of the policies are highly racialized and operate on the homogenization, tokenization and white supremacist stereotypical conceptions of Indigenous communities. Schick (2014) noted:

Stereotypes about Aboriginal people and federal policies that hampered their progress were useful in creating the mythology of the vanishing Indigenous peoples, and later, producing management systems that enabled the state to control the progress of Aboriginal peoples when they refused to go away. (p. 93)

Such tokenized, derogatory depictions of Indigenous people as one homogenous, static group continue to inform and dictate settler government interactions with Indigenous communities. Schick discussed issues of “white resentment” in terms of the colonial settler state and a moral panic, in which white people fear their fate as a possible minority and must therefore re-assert white supremacy or what Schick referred to as “a re-affirmation and re-narration of cultural and social identities” operating to legitimize white privilege and white supremacy (p. 96). Policy-making and legislation are components of the ongoing white settler colonial apparatus, which seeks full domination over Indigenous people, lands and resources.

Although the policy documents express the fact that Indigenous knowledge systems, epistemologies and pedagogical approaches vary from Eurocentric paradigms, this acknowledgement is a colour-blind, multiculturalist, difference acknowledgement (Coulthard, 2014). There is a lack of interrogation of how such Eurocentric legislation, policy-making and implementation, education, social services, and legal and government structures have and continue to serve as systems of genocide and assimilation.

Anti-colonialism disrupts liberal, multicultural, discursive practices, which claim to advocate for Indigenous education and success, yet operate to ensure that the white settler neo-liberal agenda remains hegemonic. Such policies exist to ensure that Canada’s fastest growing demographic remains economically competitive and fills labour shortages (Cherubini, 2010). How can anti-colonialism be implemented through praxis, acts of resistance and Indigenous knowledge systems

at the policy-making level? Is such an anti-colonial coalition as described even possible in a truly authentic way, free from neo-colonial influence?

Policy Context and Rationale

The increasing Indigenous demographic has led to the implementation of the three policy documents that cite Statistics Canada projections, estimating a

16% increase in Ontario's Aboriginal population, to 267,700 by 2017, and the number of young Aboriginal adults aged 20-29 is expected to grow by more than 22%, which is well beyond the projected growth of 9% among those in the same age group in the non-Aboriginal population." (MTCU, 2011, p. 8)

The increase of the Indigenous population has enabled a pathological response on behalf of the government, in which the settler state must frantically formulate policies in order to ensure that such an increasing demographic is productive and conforming to the competitive, neo-liberal, market-economy demands (Cherubini, 2010). It is important to be critical of the purported increase in the population in the first place; it can instead be an acknowledgement of Indigenous demographics and existence in Canada, rather than the historical silencing and erasure of Indigenous populations in such policies (Razack, 1998). We must be critical of why this acknowledgement is taking place now and who benefits. Cherubini (2010) cited the 2007 Ontario First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework which indicates a "28% increase in the Indigenous population, compared to 6% mainstream population" (p. 12). The forecasted increase of the Indigenous populations amounts to the provincial government's panic to fill pending market and labour shortages due to both the aging of Ontario's population and the declining birth rate of non-Indigenous Canadians (Cherubini, 2010). The anticipated increase in Indigenous people has led to the emergence of the noted policy frameworks to aggressively close achievement gaps and increase graduation rates so that Ontario can maintain its status as a productive market economy (Cherubini, 2010). The national on-reserve K-12 drop-out rate of Indigenous students is 58%, the off-reserve drop-out rate is 30%, and the overall Métis drop-out rate stood at 20% in 2011 in comparison to 10% of the non-Indigenous general student population (Dehaas, 2014). The on- and off-reserve disparity is widely attributed to the severity of funding gaps between provincially-funded school boards, which operate off-reserve schools, and federally-funded on-reserve schools (Dehaas, 2014). The funding gaps have been estimated to be as severe as 40% and upwards (Dehaas, 2014). The rationale for the closure of such educational gaps is not meant for the well-being of Indigenous communities and histories but for the purpose and benefit of the labour market agenda and Canada's economic competitiveness and viability (Sharp, 2010). Sharp (2010) asserted:

The desire for GDP increase, closing the education and labour gap by 2026 will allow a \$36.5 billion increase in GDP...this is a direct result of Canada's initiative to compete in a global economy which relies on Canada being able to implement a productive workforce in order to maintain and perpetuate its neoliberal capitalist ideologies and ambitions. (p. 32)

The policies which will be analyzed in the next section emerged as a governmental mechanism to once again deal with the 'Indian problem' by regulating, tracking, controlling and enforcing white supremacist, Eurocentric paradigms of knowledge, education and student success masked by the narrative of equality-driven multiculturalist discursive practices and dialogue (Cherubini, 2010).

Indigenous Education Policies and the White Settler State

Education has historically been a focal point of brutal, white settler colonial government sanctioned assimilationist and genocidal policies toward Indigenous people and the Indigenous

community (Thobani, 2007). There is an inherent degree of mistrust and fear among Indigenous communities in terms of colonial state-sanctioned educational policy initiatives toward Indigenous people (Cherubini, 2010). Education as a means of genocide was enforced through the nation-wide residential school system implemented by the Canadian government and run by the churches with the ambition of assimilating, dehumanizing and ultimately intending the forced disappearance of “the Indian” from the white settler state. The assimilation of Indigenous children was carried out by the indoctrination of children in Euro-Canadian, Christian values, which rendered Indigenous languages, cultural practices and histories as backward, savage and deficit in relation to Eurocentric norms (Thobani, 2007). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) report highlights that the residential school system was based on assumptions of the superiority of European civilization and Christian religions to Aboriginal culture, which were portrayed as being “savage” and “brutal” (TRC, 2015, p. 2). The schools were in place from the 1830s under Prime Minister John A. Macdonald until 1996. Children were forcibly removed from their homes and family members and subjected to violence of all kinds, such as physical, psychological, sexual, and emotional. Abuse was rampant and pervasive, as the TRC estimates that some 4,000 Indigenous children died or were killed at the hands of their abusers in residential schools. An unknown number of children died by drowning or freezing while trying to escape their captors, while others committed suicide (TRC, 2015, p. 58).

The Federal Indian Act was initiated in 1867 and it determined who was an Indian and could claim Indian status under Canadian law. Those who went on to higher education lost their status, and women who married non-Indigenous men also lost their status (TRC, 2015, p. 53). In 1969, under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s White Paper proposal, Indian status was almost entirely revoked in a quest for the final elimination of the “Indian problem” (Turner, 2006). The TRC report highlights that the Indian Act served as colonial legislation by which, in the name of protection, one group of people controlled another (TRC, 2015, p. 55). Much of the discourse of the TRC assumes a post-colonial dialogue in which colonization is something of the past and that Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and government relations are post-colonial. The descriptive language of the TRC is markedly presented in the past tense rather than the present, even though the Indian Act as a piece of colonial legislation continues to exist and continues to dictate who is Indian enough through blood quantum to qualify as Indian and who is not Indian because the goal of white assimilation has watered such Indigenous blood down.

From the 1940s onward, residential schools also operated as orphanages and child welfare sites, as the colonial government conceptualized Indigenous peoples as unfit and incapable parents from white norms of parenting and child rearing (Comack, 2012). Such derogatory discursive practices provided the state with the power to intrusively remove alarming numbers of children from their homes and communities (Comack, 2012). By the 1960s, it is estimated that more than half of all children in residential schools were there as a result of colonial child welfare systems. In the “60’s Scoop” (Razack, 2015), social workers, operating under a Eurocentric, white supremacist paradigm of good parenting, violently and forcefully took children from their homes and placed them into foster care with predominantly settler families. Indigenous children at that time were either institutionalized in child welfare facilities or in residential schools (Razack, 2015). Abuse, neglect, malnutrition and child labour in the facilities was rampant, so much so that all documents concerning correspondence between the schools and physicians was destroyed. The death rates for Indigenous children in such institutions were disproportionately higher than the non-Indigenous school aged population (TRC, 2015). The TRC (2015) noted the following:

The high death rates in the schools were, in part, a reflection of the high death rates among the Aboriginal community in general. Indian Affairs officials often tried to portray these rates

as simply the price that Aboriginal people had to pay as part of the process of becoming civilized. (p. 99)

The document and the passage itself fail to grasp the irony of the continued murder, suicide, displacement, and ongoing genocidal practices and policies of the settler nation.

Indigenous Self-Identification and Policy Making

Until the 1940s, Indigenous people graduating from high school and enrolling into PSE institutions were required to surrender their Indian status and thus assimilate into mainstream, white, Eurocentric, Canadian society (Parliament of Canada, 2014). This loss of status and identity reinforces the notion of education as a predominant facet or agent of colonization, as it resulted in the loss of the right to live on their reserves and communities, and, as Papovich (2011) reinforced, “further destroy[ed] Aboriginal families and communities” (p. 11). In 1989, the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) was created to provide funding opportunities to Indigenous students pursuing PSE. However, as it was funded by the federal government, conditions were attached which only permitted funding to those who held Indian status (Parliament of Canada, 2014). The controversial and problematic issue of status as a colonial divide-and-conquer tool has and continues to plague Indigenous families, communities and bands through rigid measures of blood quantum and authenticity. This conception of blood quantum and status emerge from Eurocentric conceptions concerning ‘what’, ‘who’, or ‘how much’ blood and ancestry constitutes legitimate Indian-ness and subsequently determines the eligibility of a person to claim their own identity, history and heritage. The colonial government-imposed restrictions and definition prohibits the right of Indigenous peoples to self-identify and claim their own identity (Cherubini, 2010).

The issue of status within education policy emerged in the 2007 Ontario EDU’s *Building Bridges to Success for First Nations, Métis and Inuit Students*, which developed policies to facilitate voluntary and confidential student self-identification within Ontario’s publicly funded school boards. However, as colonial patterns demonstrate, conditions were attached to this so-called liberating notion of self-identification. Although the process of self-identification was presented as one which respected confidentiality, the Ontario EDU planned to rigorously track such identification for progress and accountability purposes by mandating that school boards release demographic statistics concerning Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners (Cherubini, 2010). The Education Act asserts the obligation of such disclosure in the following excerpt: “a school board must understand its legal obligations with respect to disclosing the personal information of students to the Ministry of Education and Educational Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)” (Ontario EDU, 2007, p. 12). The Ontario EDU justifies such pervasive data collection and retention as a means to track Indigenous enrolment rates, EQAO test results, and course completion and graduation rates. The Ontario EDU can thus track and publish the Indigenous and non-Indigenous demographic test scores, particularly the racially-biased, standardized EQAO tests (Cherubini, 2010). Self-identification as policy re-emerged in the (2011) MTCU Aboriginal PSE Policy Framework, after the two 2007 policy documents outlined the following:

The self-identification of Aboriginal learners within the postsecondary education and training system will be an integral component of the Aboriginal PSE Performance Measures Strategy. Self-identification is generally understood to be a process which learners/potential learners are asked to identify their Aboriginal ancestry or heritage, often at the time of the application to an institution or program. (p. 20)

We explore the ways in which the proposal of self-identification is not for the well-being, healing and success of Indigenous learners; it is for the government to effectively track, regulate, know and control Indigenous students and formulate policies to exert colonial, paternalistic power and control over Indigenous students and communities. Cherubini (2015) emphasizes such imperialist power relations, noting:

the respective public finances, human capital, and resources associated to the goods and services that the OME promises will be determined and *managed* in the best interest of Aboriginal students and their communities. There may be, at the very least, a scent of the assimilationist practices imposed upon Aboriginal peoples in the not so distant past. (p. 15)

Cherubini argued that such policies fundamentally portray Indigenous people through a deficit-lens in which:

The derogatory depiction is further complicated by Eurocentric and capitalist rhetoric and paradigms...these rhetorical constructions within the policy Framework also seem to accentuate the OME's status as provider of the necessary skills and services that will redeem the Aboriginal population and enhance their potential to more meaningfully contribute to a capitalist and market-driven economy—an intention that may not necessarily be too strikingly different from the assimilationist colonial practices of years gone by. (p. 15)

Rooted in modernity, such paternalistic relationships are similar to those which enhanced the operatives of oppression through colonialism and imperialism. As such, this similarity demonstrates the issues in identifying the 'post' in post-colonialism. Policy-making approaches of today have neoliberalism and the need to compete in the market economy as their historical underpinnings. It takes an anti-colonial framework to reconceptualise, re-imagine and resist such dominant, hegemonic and white supremacist agendas.

Critiquing the Policy Frameworks and Documents through Anti-Colonialism

The policy frameworks have contributed to the perpetuation of the racialization and marginalization of Indigenous people on the part of the white settler colonial state. The dominant white hegemonic agenda imposes itself through the discourses of helping and bridging gaps to achieve its own neoliberal market agenda of economic productivity. The documents claim they are "intended for the benefit of Aboriginal learners" (MTCU, 2011, p. 11). The stated policy documents essentially dictate what Indigenous people need and what is good for conformity and success in a Eurocentric education system. The policy documents cite the ambition for potential partnerships with Indigenous organizations including the Aboriginal Peoples Council of Toronto and Native Child and Family Services of Toronto. However, none of the above groups mentioned for the purposes of facilitating such positive partnerships were consulted in the formation and implementation of this document or the 2009 Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (Cherubini, 2010).

The documents are not consensual or transparent, as they did not consult with Indigenous communities or organizations and thus homogenize Indigenous peoples through colonial, tokenized conceptions of Indigeneity. Cherubini (2010) critiqued the policies' assumption that Indigenous people and communities would even wish to collaborate with such an oppressive system in which white settler privilege remains the hegemonic status quo. The policies and documents do not provide space for Indigenous communities and learners to address their own particular needs and concerns, such as endemic racism, discrimination, bias, institutionalized colonialism and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW). Furthermore, there is a lack

of recognition of proposals and calls for autonomy over Indigenous education, pedagogies and epistemologies as the documents effectively and discursively speak for a homogenized Indigenous entity (Cherubini, 2010).

The policy documents fail to acknowledge the fundamental differences of epistemologies and educational paradigms of Indigenous identities in relation to Eurocentric pedagogical approaches. The documents thus prescribe what and how education ought to look like, be implemented, assessed, evaluated, tracked, monitored and taught. Welton (2013) expands on the issue of whose knowledge is considered valid, important and legitimate and whose is deemed irrelevant. He describes how:

The pedagogical encounters between European and First Nations peoples inhabiting the land were premised on racialized assumptions, which took shape in European thought rooted in Aristotle's strange notion that some people were born as 'natural slaves' and not capable of being educated. (p. 21)

The policy documents operate on multicultural discursive practices which preach equity, inclusiveness and diversity, while refusing to interrogate, disrupt or dismantle ongoing colonial practices masked by multicultural rhetoric. Such documents serve to reinforce colonial dichotomies of oppressor/oppressed, white/Indigenous, dominant/subjective by perpetuating the colonial parent-child relationships in which the white colonial government decides which educational practices are best suited for Indigenous learners. Cherubini (2010) described the racialized discourses embedded in the documents by focusing on two aspects: first, the documents conjure "rhetorical constructions that position the governing body as the 'provider'" (p. 13); this positionality dichotomizes Indigenous people by relegating them to 'children' dependent on their 'parent', the white, settler government. Secondly, Cherubini articulated that the "value-orientations of student achievement and accountability" are both questionable and problematic concerning the proposed methods in which Indigenous students are to be assessed and evaluated. Such assessments follow specific criterion for success which is rooted in Eurocentric values of meritocracy, competitiveness, individuality and marketized educational priorities. Cherubini stated the inherent and incompatible difference in education and knowledge has led to calls for Indigenous educational autonomy. He noted that "Aboriginal scholars have endorsed these calls for control over education and have referred to the notion that Aboriginal epistemologies are distinct from colonial paradigms of teaching and learning" (p. 12). Welton (2013) reinforced calls for Indigenous autonomy of education, citing the "discordant and outcast pedagogies," which he asserts "arise in the interplay between dominant elite control of knowledge and learning processes and the forms of knowledge of those who are objects of control or domination. First Nations, workers, and women objectify discordance" (p. 22). The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) asserts that education is always imposed on Indigenous children "with a blatant disregard for First Nations languages, cultures and collective knowledge and wisdom" (2016, p. 2).

The policy documents omit the necessary conversation concerning the historical, social, geographic and cultural barriers to Indigenous peoples accessing education, particularly PSE. Malatest (2004) indicated that many Indigenous people are distrustful of education and view it as an assimilationist mechanism due to the horrors of the residential school system. As the CSJ articulated, "the legacy of Eurocentric, paternalistic views of the residential school system continues to affect Aboriginal children today in our schools" (2016, p.1). The delivery models used to teach and instruct children are based on European, Westernized thought and culture (CSJ, 2015).

Calls for Indigenous autonomy of education have been administered by colonial governmental systems that dictate what such educational autonomy would look like and how it would operate. For example, the proposal of Bill C-33 *First Nations Control of First Nations*

Education Act under Harper's Conservative government outlined its commitment to allow chiefs and council to administer on reserve schools (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2014). However, as in the past, the document was drafted solely by Harper's government and conditions were attached in order for educational funding to be released. The language in the proposed Bill was racialized and reinforced white settler state control of Indigenous educational affairs, as the Bill would still remain under the control of the Ministry and its decision-making processes (Information on Bill-C33, 2014).

Conclusion

The policy framework documents are inherently problematic and one-sided, and they reinforce power dichotomies based on Eurocentric colonial theories of race, anthropology, eugenics and cultures, which privilege whiteness as the norm. The discursive practices embedded in such documents raise grave concerns in terms of who is speaking on behalf of which community, who decides what needs they have and how to help marginalized people. The ongoing colonial narrative of white settler dominance is evident in the legislated policies to deal with othered Indigenous communities without their consent. These narratives therefore perpetuate ongoing imperialism through assimilationist ambitions which seek to have Indigenous students conform to Western, market-driven knowledge, practices and standards that systematically devalue Indigenous epistemologies, and which are culturally unresponsive and irrelevant. The policy frameworks thus conceptualize Indigenous communities from what Cherubini (2010) refers to as a "deficit lens" (p. 15), by implementing strategies and initiatives to fill labour voids, rather than respecting autonomous Indigenous ways of knowledge and teaching practices.

The notion and pervasive concept of self-identification removes any discourse of failure from the settler-colonial state, as the supposedly altruistic documents encapsulate the fallacy that the nation-state is making all the right decisions and providing the necessary resources; therefore, it cannot be held accountable should Indigenous students not meet Eurocentric, standardized measures of success. Governmental policy-making towards Indigenous education continues to be met with resistance and mistrust by Indigenous communities and leaders due to the implications of past and continuing colonial legislation, which has had devastating consequences on Indigenous communities. As mentioned previously, calls to autonomy over education have been bureaucratized and managed by intrusive and pervasive governmental conditions. Cherubini (2010) argues that only through self-determination can culturally-relevant pedagogical practices be realized; however, even what autonomous Indigenous control ought to look like is prescribed by the white settler colonial state. The significant challenge that remains is the lack of governmental recognition and acknowledgement that Canada is a white settler colonial state, which sustains itself on the ongoing domination and marginalization of Indigenous people. Such 'altruistic' proposals of autonomous educational self-determination remain rooted in colonial systems of domination, which seek to maintain authority and control over Indigenous lives, from overtly racialized control in terms of residential school systems and child welfare policies to covert policies such as the legal inaction concerning MMIW and ongoing police brutality toward Indigenous people. For Indigenous autonomy over education to occur, it cannot be tainted by governmental intrusion and agendas; it must be formed among bands, elders and communities to address the specific needs among various Indigenous communities. The barrier that such activism will continue to face is the removal of the dominant colonial government voice which silences Indigenous voices and reinforces power relations. For Indigenous voices to be heard and autonomous there must be admission that Canada is and remains a white settler colonial state with the ongoing pursuit of

Indigenous assimilation and appropriation of lands. Moving forward, it is essential that policy, similar to education, incorporates what Dei (2006) refers to as a “centric” approach whereby educational policy initiatives do not compete with one another for hierarchical reasons but rather, draw from one another (p. 177). The centric approach to educational policy allows for a multitude of perspectives, narratives and social locations to engage in dialogue as shared policy. When dialogue is facilitated, and power relations among policy makers are interrogated, ‘courageous conversations’ (Singleton, 2005) based on the acknowledgment of one’s relative positions of privilege and oppression can occur, thus allowing binaries to diminish and a multitude of voices to inform educational policy.

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