Our Schools/Our Selves

The Voice Of Progressive Education In Canada

Canadian Centre For Policy Alternatives

Summer/Fall 2021

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“Canada has not adequately responded to the Calls to Action. This has left the full truth of the residential schools concealed and Indigenous peoples vulnerable to waves of unspeakable trauma, as we have seen these past weeks. There must be a new determination and diligent action by Canada on the key priorities like the missing children and burial sites. The world is watching, and a bright light must be shone on those things that were swept aside six years ago. The Survivors, and all Indigenous peoples deserve to know their voices were listened to when they told Canada there were children who never made it home, and someone did the right thing — they found them.”

— Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond (Aki-Kwe)
Director, Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre (IRSHDC)

215 Children

PHOTO BY CLAYTON THOMAS-MULLER

Double glazed

Is Manitoba repeating Nova Scotia's flawed education reforms?

Molly Hurd

Is Manitoba's education system underperforming, inefficient and over bureaucratic? Its government seems to think so. In January 2019 it commissioned a K-12 review of education. They likely had a fairly clear idea of what the review would say since the consultant they hired, Avis Glaze, had previously authored the report that provided the basis for Nova Scotia's Bill 72 which upended their education system[1].

It was therefore no surprise when the Manitoba government quickly drafted Bill 64, "The Education Modernization Act"[2], which had its second reading less than a month after the release of the report this spring. Similar to Nova Scotia's, Manitoba's bill proposed, among other changes, (1) to eliminate elected school boards (note that this went beyond Avis Glaze's recommendations, which suggested amalgamating Manitoba's school boards, not eliminating them entirely), replacing them with a government appointed Provincial Education Authority Board and Provincial Advisory Council on Education (PACE); (2) the removal of principals and vice-principals from the definition of teacher in the legislation, thus restricting their roles to that of management and (3) the creation of a College of Educators to monitor teachers[3] (this provision had been dropped in Nova Scotia after sustained protest).

The two Glaze reports are part of a movement that seems designed to undercut public education and promote increasing privatization. In 2020, Manitoba's previous minister of education attended a seminar sponsored by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) which has pushed numerous states along the road to education privatization (charter schools), and is part of the larger Global Education Reform Movement (GERM).[4]

But will Bill 64's "reforms" improve anything? It's been 2½ years since the implementation of Bill 72 in Nova Scotia, and enough time has passed for its effects to be felt. Indeed, this type of reform has been tried by many governments who have adopted a neoliberal, "business can do it better", top-down managerial control approach to education — and it does not actually work very well.

Manitoba teachers and parents are rightly concerned that the elimination of school boards will sever the connection between schools and their communities.They need look no further than Nova Scotia for some real-life examples as to how this has played out in the past 2½ years since they were eliminated, leaving parents with nowhere to turn if they have a school related concern. Initially, the slogan "Better Call Zack (the Education Minister)" was bandied about if someone had a concern about a broken window or a problem with a school bus. But as

time went on, it became clear that it was not a joking matter when calls to school administrators or "Regional Centres for Education" were not returned. Parents had to resort to airing their concerns on the 18,000 member NS Parents for Public Education Facebook group — but it is far from clear that anybody in power is listening.

The government-appointed PACE, which Manitoba has also replicated in Bill 64, is a lame duck organization whose members do not report to any community, and whose numbers have dropped from the original 15 to 11 as terms expired. It is difficult to find out what they actually do — minutes of the quarterly meetings are sketchy with little mention of any actual "advice" given. Indigenous Nova Scotians had fought for years to get designated seats on school boards, which they achieved not long before the boards were eliminated, but those designated members of PACE have left and not been replaced, silencing diverse voices. As well, school boards were the only level of government where gender parity had been reached, and they were springboards for many women (and others) to jump into future political careers.

The severed connection between schools and their communities in Nova Scotia has meant the loss of the institutional knowledge that school trustees build up over years. Their ability to question their board about issues and get the facts made them a lifeline for parents and teachers. One rural teacher told me about their trustee, who used to come to school assemblies and PTA meetings, who when the school began exceeding its class caps was able to advocate for another teacher. A former school board member described some of the types of people who seek election to the school boards, especially in rural areas, as "education nerds" who follow international trends in education, who have the patience to wade through survey/testing data to parse out what works and to get to the bottom of intricate policy decisions. School Advisory Councils, meant to be revitalized, have difficulty attracting volunteers at all, let alone people with that level of expertise.

Manitoba teachers and parents are rightly concerned that the elimination of school boards will sever the connection between schools and their communities. They need look no further than Nova Scotia for some real-life examples as to how this has played out in the past 2½ years since they were eliminated, leaving parents with nowhere to turn if they have a school related concern.

There are myriad examples of situations that have had negative repercussions which would have been handled better by a functioning school board. Recently, a student was unjustly suspended for complaining about another student's misogynistic t-shirt and it instantly hit the media, before the school or the Regional Centre could respond. Without a school board member to consult, the media became the go-to for frustrated parents.

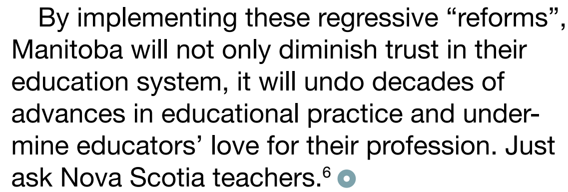
The pandemic has provided concrete evidence of the importance of the school board link between the schools and the community. Last summer, Nova Scotia was justly proud of its low COVID-19 numbers and lack of community spread. But when a back-to-school plan with no upgrading of ventilation in classrooms and no provision for physical distancing in classrooms was announced, teachers and parents protested that it was not sufficient in the event of another outbreak, to no avail. The fact that seemingly no parents or community members were involved in creating the plan caused fear and lack of trust in the bureaucrats which reached a fever pitch when the third wave hit, and schools were badly affected. The government's refusal to close all schools when it was clear there was transmission within them caused a near strike. Although in the end the government had to back down after a day of chaos, the damage done by top-down management methods remains.

And it is useful to look at the situations of New Brunswick and PEI, both of which got rid of school boards, but then a few years later brought them back. Democracy can be messy, but better to have it than not.

Manitoba's Bill 64 also proposes the reclassifying of principals and vice-principals as management instead of teachers. When a similar edict was implemented in Nova Scotia, many principals with years of experience either took early retirement or asked to return to the classroom. Years of institutional knowledge were lost, but more importantly most of those people's careers were spent when collegiality and collaboration among teachers and administration was the norm. Principals were leaders among teachers, sharing responsibility for the students' well-being and progress — and they were advocates for their students and their communities. In the new "management" model, the people who stepped up to replace them found that their role was restricted to that of a "site manager" — as one teacher put it, "making sure the fire alarms work". When it becomes necessary to advocate for something for their school, the principal can make a request, but

without union protection may not be willing to risk their job to be more forceful than that.

As PISA and other studies have demonstrated, “When students, teachers, parents and the school principals know and trust each other, work together and share information, ideas and goals, students — particularly disadvantaged students — benefit.”[5]



By implementing these regressive “reforms”, Manitoba will not only diminish trust in their education system, it will undo decades of advances in educational practice and undermine educators’ love for their profession. Just ask Nova Scotia teachers.[6]

Molly Hurd, the author of ***Best School in the World: How students, parents and teachers have created a model that can transform Canada’s public schools***, Formac Publishing, 2017, has spent her career teaching in Indigenous communities in Canada, Africa, Britain and Nova Scotia. She is now on the steering committee of Educators for Social Justice—Nova Scotia, as well as that of CCPA-NS.

Notes

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Nova Scotia's education overhaul

A cautionary tale for Manitoba

Molly McCracken and Pamela Rogers

Public education is a public good that promotes well-being and citizenship for all. Efforts to improve public education should be done for this purpose.

Manitoba has instead joined a concerning trend across Canada demanding constant improvement in education with less and less resources led by private consultants such as Dr. Avis Glaze. Glaze reviewed education systems in PEI, Nova Scotia and most recently, Manitoba. The day the Glaze report was publicly released is the day the province released Bill 64 the Education Modernization Act. The resultant changes centralize control over education under the guise of cost-savings, resulting in privatization and a loss of accountability to the public.

Manitoba can look to Nova Scotia for the implications of abolishing school boards and replacing them with Parent Advisory Councils on Education (PACE). When Nova Scotia school boards were wiped out, historically oppressed groups lost representation as school trustee seats reserved for Indigenous and Black Nova Scotians disappeared.

Information about PACE is hard to come by for parents — agendas and minutes hard to find and contact info for representatives is not available. Paul Wozney, President of the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union (NSTU) called the implementation of School Advisory Councils (the N.S. version of PACE) by the Department of Education "an ocean of unkept promises". Parents face barriers to participation in PACE, receive no training and promised communications with the Minister of Education were not fulfilled.

Without school trustees, parents have nowhere to turn. Parents on PACE do not have the training or time to advocate for and advise parents on the school system that School Trustees had.

In jurisdictions where school boards have been abolished, they have been brought back due to necessity — New Brunswick and PEI for example. Research shows that replacing democratically elected school boards with alternative structures does not improve student achievement. Here in Manitoba local democratic oversight is proven to foster innovation. For example, in Winnipeg a new community hub model is improving educational outcomes and poverty in the Louis Riel School Division. Abolishing school divisions does not advance inclusion and equity.

High child poverty rates plague both Manitoba and Nova Scotia: Manitoba has the highest rate of child poverty and Nova Scotia the third-highest in Canada. Economic insecurity is proven to impact educational outcomes. In Manitoba, 86% of students perform as

The aims of neoliberalism — over-reliance on data, school success accountability, and privatization — undermines the democratic process and moves away from collegiality and community, to punitive, performance-based models.

expected on standardized tests, based on socio-economic standing. Research by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy finds that for the 14% of those students who do not perform at the expected level, "marked differences in school achievement among Manitoba students...tend to be related to factors beyond education", including poverty. Instead of addressing the conditions of poverty through social housing or better income transfers, neoliberal governments blame or suggest responsiblity lies with the education system.

Standardized testing itself as a measure is problematic. International experts have called for a moratorium on PISA as it creates an illusion of education quality based on multiple choice questions and simple solutions to complex problems. Standardized tests like PISA are often used by neoliberal governments to justify authoritarian top-down approaches under the guise of improving test results. The result is a race to the bottom, whereby the education system is judged by test results and not about supporting well-rounded students, which is essential to a healthy democracy.

The Glaze Report (*Raise the Bar*) in Nova Scotia led to the removal of administrators from the NSTU, and suggested the creation of a college of teachers as an additional level of bureaucracy for school accountability and to discipline educators. While administrators were removed from the union's membership, the NSTU fought against the creation of a College of Teachers and won. In Manitoba, Bill 64 would remove principals and vice-principals from their bargaining unit and introduce "business managers" for schools. The aims of neoliberalism — over-reliance on data, school success accountability, and privatization — undermines the democratic process and moves away from collegiality and community, to punitive, performance-based models.

The forced removal of school administrators from the NSTU supports the model of privatization, since principals are no longer curriculum and learning leaders. In this model, administration exists first and foremost to enact disciplinary measures, carry out performance assessments on their staff, and report on school success data. Such changes lessen teacher and administrator professional autonomy, and add greater reliance on strict structures to dictate how they will work in their own school communities. Administrators in business models of leadership become gatekeepers for the Department of Education, not educational leaders.

Nova Scotia's K-12 education overhaul is a cautionary tale for Manitoba. Removing democratic oversight makes public education less accountable and more difficult for parents to navigate. Centralizing administration stifles innovation and local ability to respond to local needs. Poverty remains unaddressed when the system is run like a business for quantitative results only.

Public education is a public good: any reforms must be predicated on equity, public accountability and democracy.

A version of this commentary previously appeared in the *Winnipeg Free Press*.

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"Organized abandonment"

Bill 64's impact on racialized communities

Fadi Ennab

Racism is built into Canada's education system. This will only be further entrenched if Bill 64 is passed into law in Manitoba because the legislation fails to explicitly focus on systemic or equity issues, and proposes changes that actively undermine voices from equity-seeking groups.

At a time when communities of colour continue to call for advancing racial equity through education and justice, Bill 64 demands attention and outrage.

Let's start with the very name of Bill 64: the Education Modernization Act. Using the language of "modernization" assumes that the proposed policy is designed for "progress", obscuring the reality that what is being offered will actually have a negative impact on equity-seeking groups. It also assumes that our colonial institutions and racial capitalistic relations are something to be reformed, instead of abolished and rebuilt.

However, the issue with Bill 64 is more than semantics or epistemology.

Bill 64 does not adopt an explicit anti-racist approach to address inequities in education, and thus fails to address the systemic issues facing families who self-identify as Black, Indigenous, or other equity-seeking groups. The Bill is related to the K-12 Education Commission Report, within which there is no mention of racism, equity, or poverty in its 309-pages. There is one mention of "anti-racism" along with "gender equity", in the context of a liability issue to be "accommodated" as part of "respect for human diversity". This contradicts the acknowledgement made at the beginning of the document: "the philosophy of inclusion is a foundational principle of the education system in Manitoba".

In 2020, the Newcomer Education Coalition released *The State of Equity in Education Report* to advocate for more representation of racialized newcomers among school staff and boards in Manitoba. As the report states, "In 2018, of the 54 school trustees on the school boards of the six school divisions in the city of Winnipeg, only three are trustees who are persons from racialized communities." The report also emphasizes the important role that school boards can play in leading and influencing decisions on equity policies and practices. For these reasons, community advocates want school divisions to be more "intentional and accountable" about addressing equity in schools to ensure that the curriculum, programs, and activities are more appropriate

Racialized students, especially those who identify as Indigenous and Black, continue to face racism in schools. Racialized students also are often streamlined into lower track education programs and disproportionately represented in school discipline and suspensions, the first step in what's often referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline.

and responsive to the education needs of racialized families.

Bill 64 does not respond to this call, or to the realities of racialized students as addressed in the 2020 report.

Racialized students, especially those who identify as Indigenous and Black, continue to face racism in schools. Racialized students are often streamlined into lower track education programs and disproportionately represented in school discipline and suspensions, the first step in what's often referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline. They frequently must cope with negative educational outcomes and the impact on their mental health and well-being with insufficient supports. By neglecting to focus on equity-seeking groups, Bill 64 promotes the "organized abandonment" of racialized communities (a term used by Ruth Wilson Gilmore to refer to a strategy of capitalist state development to exploit the most vulnerable and racialized communities).

Bill 64's elimination of school boards will further undermine racialized communities by excluding their voices. The proposed changes will reduce the province's 37 school divisions to 15 catchment areas, each with one representative, not proportional to student population. In doing so, Winnipeg's catchment area will be given one voice to represent 55% of Manitoba's racialized and Indigenous population.

The decrease in public accountability is accompanied by increased government control of schools, under the guise of "equity-blind" policies. With their hashtag #StopBill64, Communities Not Cuts Manitoba has highlighted that the government's plans to "eliminate elected school boards and replace them with an appointed — unaccountable — panel to oversee education for the entire province" will further privilege white-middle-class lives and reinforce a school culture that already accommodates white supremacy.

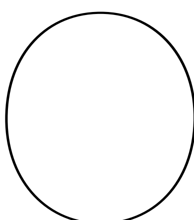
We need to work towards dismantling racist policies and institutions to create conditions of care, but Bill 64 will make it more difficult than it already is to advocate for opportunities and supports for racialized communities by silencing their voices. This is very damaging in a province that already maintains and is maintained by systemic inequities.

Fadi Ennab is an instructor at the University of Winnipeg, a researcher with the Manitoba Research Alliance and a Research Associate with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternative—Manitoba. A version of this article was previously published in the *Winnipeg Free Press* on May 7, 2021.

The effects of Law 21 on education faculties in Quebec

“We don’t want people like you here”

Bronwen Low, Marilyn Steinbach, Maryse Potvin, Stéphanie Tremblay, Emmanuel Doré, David Lefrançois, and Stéphanie Demers[1]

ne day a student in Bronwen’s Bachelor of Education course at McGill University asked to share a story from her day substitute teaching in an elementary school. A child wondered why she wore a hijab, and this young teacher took this opportunity to say some of what this symbol meant to her as a Muslim woman. She was thrilled by the children’s engagement and excitement at the chance to ask questions they hadn’t voiced before, and she described this kind of exchange as one of the reasons she wanted to be a teacher.

Unfortunately, these kinds of opportunities for learning across differences are now less possible in Quebec.

In the summer of 2019, the Quebec government passed Bill 21 into law: *The Act Respecting the Laicity of the State*. The process of creating this legislation long predated the government which passed it, with three[2] previous failed attempts to pass laws prohibiting public sector employees from any display of religious symbols in the workplace.

The purpose of Law 21 (la Loi 21):

> is to affirm the laicity of the State and to set out the requirements that follow from it. To that end, the bill provides that the laicity of the State is based on four principles: the separation of State and religions, the religious neutrality of the State, the equality of all citizens, and freedom of conscience and freedom of religion... The bill proposes to prohibit certain persons from wearing religious symbols while exercising their functions (National Assembly of Quebec, 2019).

In Quebec, these “certain persons” include public school teachers, which means that teachers who wear a religious symbol such as the hijab are no longer eligible to be hired by school boards. Teachers who already had a permanent position were not fired; the law affects substitute and new teachers employed by a *Centre de Services Scolaire*. This law is

not to impact student teachers completing their teacher education programs and their mandatory teaching practica. As a group of teacher educators from five universities in Quebec, we were concerned about the effects of this legislation on student and staff populations in university education faculties.

Under the auspices of the OFDE (*Observatoire sur la Formation à la Diversité et l'Équité*, an academic observatory on teacher education for diversity and equity), we conducted a survey[3] that aimed to determine the effects of Law 21 on faculties and departments of education in Quebec universities, their students and staff (Potvin et al., 2020).

Seeking to understand the impact of Law 21 on members of Faculties of Education as comprehensively as possible, the survey asked questions about institutional responses as well as individual experiences and observations. We found that institutional responses largely sought to denounce or mitigate any potential adverse effects of Law 21 on their students. For instance, university staff unions, faculties, and departments publicly came out against the Law in statements on websites and other communications.

The Law does not apply to students, and so should have no impact on student teacher placement and evaluation; many departments made this clear to school boards, supervising teachers, and students. Some departments and unions issued statements of support for students, including Muslim students in particular. A few communicated that they would find alternatives for any students experiencing hostility in their school placements, or if they were denied a practicum position by any school board or school (which would be against the law).

Despite this, there were many reports, particularly from student teachers, about having either experienced or witnessed discriminatory and negative treatment related to the new Law. Several factors increased the chance of survey respondents having experienced or witnessed this treatment: being female (20% of female respondents said yes, versus 7% of male respondents); belonging to a visible or religious minority (50% responded yes); being first or second generation immigration (67% responded yes); and most of all, having a first language other than French (76.1% responded yes).

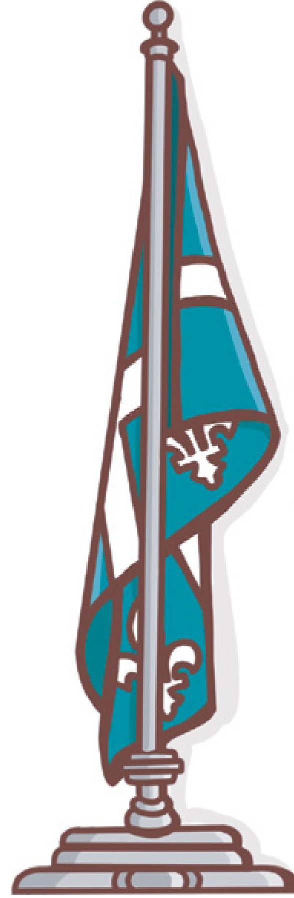
Specific comments indicate that negative or discriminatory effects of the Law were largely directed at women who wear a hijab: this should come as no surprise to the many who warned that these measures would especially marginalize or harm Muslim women. Most of the reports from students related to acts or comments seen as hurtful or discriminatory (37%). Some respondents described hateful comments from their cooperating teacher or field supervisor, such as : "We don't want a teacher who'll convert our students" or "this isn't Hallowe'en, we don't want women wearing costumes at work", or "Go back to your country. We don't want people like you here." One respondent described hostile treatment as a student teacher from other teachers in the staff room, including comments that the veil was a sign of religious indoctrination forced upon her by her parents, or a political act to control women.

Another 24% of reported negative experiences related to individual rights and freedoms. Respondents spoke of having their choice of school placement limited, or of being told by a university instructor that other students did not want to work in a group with them.

Other impacts included hostile attitudes and looks, as well as adverse effects on mental health, including feelings of isolation, vulnerability, and experiencing "stress emotionally and physically." Respondents also described

37%

of reports from students related to acts or comments seen as hurtful or discriminatory.



16.5%

of students indicated that they had been victims of or witnesses to the adverse effects of the Law.

adverse effects of the Law on their academic achievement or professional journey, including students either choosing or being asked to leave their Bachelor of Education program because of lack of career prospects, failing their student teaching placement because of wearing a hijab, or being called upon less for substitute teaching because of suspicions about religious adherence or having an Arabic name.

Respondents also described an altered culture in university classrooms, with “lesser integration of students who wear the headscarf in the class dynamics” and these students experiencing discomfort. Others spoke of a newly charged atmosphere of debate in university classrooms, including students with strong opinions about Law 21 challenging classmates wearing headscarves with questions such as “what do you think?”.

University personnel were largely unaware of experiences of discrimination faced by student teachers: almost half indicated not knowing if there had been any reports made by students, and only 6.6% of personnel were aware of reports of negative and discriminatory treatment. In contrast, 16.5% of students indicated that they had been victims of or witnesses to the adverse effects of the Law.

However, when aware of discriminatory treatment, some universities acted, with respondents from two universities noting that student teachers had been moved because of hostile treatment in their placements and another saying they were working to support students in dealing with “islamophobia and xenophobia”. In response to the Law, faculty members also described modifying their curriculum to include more information about inclusion and diversity and to emphasize the need to respect differences in schools. Instructors also included direct instruction on the Law and its potential impacts in their courses.

Law 21 reflects and seems to foster populist anxieties about religious and cultural difference, including a growing islamophobia in Quebec and many other places, whose starkest expression was the 2017 terrorist attack on the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City in which six were killed and five injured. However, it also reflects a particular theory of social cohesion and integration, what gets referred to in Quebec as *vivre ensemble*, reflected in its intercultural policies.

Canadian multiculturalism has been rejected in Quebec as ghettoizing minorities, resulting in social fragmentation rather than a strong shared sense of identity and belonging. (It was also rejected as an official policy in the early 1970s by some sovereigntists and nationalists as minimizing Quebec’s claims for special status as a distinct people and society.) Quebec’s dual majority/minority status drives the story of interculturalism by placing greater emphasis on integrating newcomers into a common public culture, with the French language as its cornerstone (along with the same commitments as multiculturalism to democratic institutions, rights and freedoms). According to the theory of integration informing Law 21, religious symbols are a barrier to social cohesion. Worn by anyone in a position of public authority, such as a judge, police officer, or teacher, they are also seen as potentially jeopardising impartial treatment and justice, as well as undermining the value of state secularism or *laïcité*. (Why teachers are seen as needing to be impartial in this same way is never explained; while the Bouchard-Taylor Commission had recommended this for judges and police officers, they did not do the same for teachers.) However, the original purpose of secularism was the separation of the political state from religious authority to guarantee freedom of religion for all citizens, particularly religious minorities. In terms of

the Law's own definition of the laicity of the state, the last two principles about "equality of all citizens, and freedom of conscience and freedom of religion" are neglected in favor of the first two principles about "the separation of State and religions, the religious neutrality of the State".

Unfortunately, if Law 21 was designed to reduce religious tensions, our survey results suggest that it has had the opposite effect, inflaming existing social suspicions and prejudices. Our data portrays an increasingly hostile university and school environment for female Muslim teachers. Newly qualified teachers committed to wearing their headscarves are withdrawing applications for employment.

According to our survey, potential teachers are already switching out of Bachelor of Education programs, and an unknown number of others will no longer consider teaching at all. By effectively barring Muslim women with hijabs from working as teachers, the Law diminishes the religious diversity of the population of Quebec school teachers. With a large and growing gap between a racialized and culturally minoritized student body and a teaching contingent that remains predominantly White, middle class, and of European extraction, the teaching staff will remain even less representative.

The Quebec interculturalism policy of *vivre ensemble* is meant to encourage positive relations and interactions between citizens of diverse cultures, faiths, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. Removing Muslim female teachers from the teaching staff not only screams of inequity, but deprives the whole school population of the opportunity to be exposed to religious diversity and learn to respect differences. Banning religious symbols for professionals sends a message that symbols such as hijabs or turbans are less professional, less cosmopolitan, and ultimately inacceptable. How can we expect to foster understanding and respect for differences by giving the impression that some differences are negative, inferior, undesirable? This is not a constructive way to promote the *vivre ensemble* of Quebec's intercultural policies.

Proponents of this law argue that religious beliefs are not forbidden, but are simply not to be visible in the public workplace, because they are divisive. As in French republicanism, all humans are equal before the law. However, in order to achieve social cohesion, does everyone have to dress the same? What does this say about accepting other differences (gender, racial, ethnic, or ability)? The implication that physically removing a visible symbol changes the faith, values, ethics or professional capacities of an individual demonstrates a limited understanding of how people enact their ideas and beliefs, creating even more barriers to the promotion of *vivre ensemble*.

Rather than impeding positive relations and inclusion, we argue that religious symbols are a way of promoting peaceful relations and respect for diversity. We have only to consider our opening anecdote describing the positive, educational exchange of a young Muslim teacher with her primary students to illustrate how visible differences are a rich resource and advantage for promoting intercultural understanding, respect and positive relations. Fortunately for this student teacher, a Quebec Superior Court judge ruled on April 20th, 2021 that the Law violates minority-language education rights and so cannot be applied to English schools (a decision the Quebec Justice Minister has announced it will appeal). However, this Court has upheld the general constitutionality of the Law.

The **OFDE (Observatoire sur la formation à la diversité et l'équité)** is the structural body that coordinates the work of a network of professors and lecturers from twelve Quebec universities. This community of practice includes those who teach on ethnocultural, religious and linguistic diversities in education.

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Notes

1 Thank you to Lucian Nenciovici for his quantitative analyses of the data and work drafting the report.

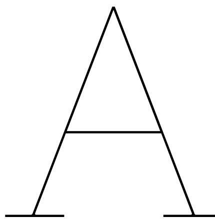
2 Law 21 is the latest response to the media-fuelled debate in Quebec on the topic of reasonable accommodation for ethno-cultural and religious minority groups; previous versions of this response include the 2007 Bouchard-Taylor Commission (Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences), as well as Bill 60, or the Quebec Charter of Values, proposed by the Parti Québécois in 2013 (which did not pass), and the Liberal government's Bill 62, An Act to Foster Adherence to State Religious Neutrality (which did).

3 972 questionnaires were completed and considered in our study. 94% of these were completed in French, although the questionnaire was sent to all French and English universities in Quebec. Most of the surveys were completed by undergraduate students (28%) and cooperating teachers (26 %). Many graduate students (16 %), professors (15 %), and sessional lecturers (13 %) completed the survey, along with a few administrators. 78% of the respondents identify French as a first language, 75% are female, and 72% are non-immigrants. 12 % belong to a visible or religious minority.

Law 21: secularism or intolerance?

A student's perspective

Jana Naguib

lthough Law 21 supposedly only affects public workers in "coercive authority"(as identified in Schedule 2 in the text of the legislation), the reality is that it impacts others as well. As a kindergarten and elementary education student who wears the hijab, I have been directly affected.

I had just turned 18 in 2018 when François Legault was elected Quebec's premier, and had not really given voting much thought. But in the summer of 2019, when Law 21 was passed and as thoughts were rushing through my mind about what I was going to do next, I promised myself never to skip voting again.

The first thing I decided was that it was too late for me to change my program of study; the second thing was that I should not have to reconsider my future and my educational path because of how I dress or how I choose to observe my religious beliefs. I decided to apply to the teacher education program anyway in hopes that by the time I graduated, change would occur.

However, as soon as I started university, I immediately began thinking about a plan B career as I did not see any changes in policies. While our government should be making us feel at home and safe in our province, I and many more students are forced to think of careers that might welcome us with our headscarves, or even consider moving to a different province.

I am only in my first year at McGill and have not yet engaged in in-person learning, which has limited the impact of Law 21 on my experience in the teacher education program. But according to the survey described by the OFDE team, many students have experienced unpleasant encounters in their field experiences, and I can understand why this would have become more evident since the law was passed. So many women who wear the hijab have all experienced several instances of micro-aggressions but, unfortunately, we learn to tolerate them because that is just how life is for us.

I started wearing the hijab when I was 15 years old, and I wore it by choice. Mere days into making this decision, one of the security guards at my high school walked up and, very casually, said to me "But why would you do that to yourself? Why would you trap yourself like that?". I remember looking at my friend and feeling like there was nothing I could do or say to make this situation less awkward or offensive, so I stared at the woman in disbelief until she walked away without adding another word. The interesting thing about this situation is that this same woman, who used to work at my elementary school a few years before, had made a comment that, as a child, I found

quite striking. After she separated two boys who were fighting and who happened to be of Middle Eastern origins she said jokingly "Ah all Arabs are like that, every time they're upset, they throw a punch here and there".

When people such as this woman, who are victims of their own ignorance, are told that our government does not want women wearing the hijab to work in schools or other public offices because they pose a threat to Quebec's values, what message is the government sending? The last thing we need is for a government to come and indirectly tell people that all the xenophobia they have been feeling towards the "aliens" wearing hijabs is legitimate.

I believe discrimination and racism are different, and I believe that Law 21 has allowed racist individuals to openly practice discrimination disguised as secularism. It is for this reason that governments must evaluate the consequences their decisions will have on the population.

Francois Legault stated that "The crucifix hanging in Quebec's National Assembly is a historical symbol, not a religious one, even though it represents the Christian values of the province's two colonial ancestors". I do not see any problem with religious symbols but let us reflect on the word "symbol": something that summarizes or represents something else. In my faith, my religion is something very personal and what I do to observe my religion belongs to me.

I feel sad and I feel angry about Law 21 but, perhaps to the surprise of those people who are convinced that hijabi women are oppressed, I do not feel helpless. I wear the hijab because it is *one* of many things I do as a practicing Muslim. We are 1.8 billion Muslims on this planet: representation is the least of our worries and our religion is much bigger than one single aspect of it can represent.

Jana Naguib is a student in the kindergarten and elementary education program at McGill University. She shares her story in the hopes that readers will better understand the impact of Law 21 on her future, and that of other hijab-wearing students in her program.

The 'best fit'

Educational administration and the racialization of hiring practices

Dr. Zuhra Abawi and Dr. Stephanie Tuters

The last two years were arguably some of the most tumultuous in the history of education in Ontario. Pandemic-related challenges were paralleled by a global awakening to racial injustice, spurred by events in the U.S. including the murder of George Floyd on May 31, 2020. The protests that followed stemmed from hundreds of years of racial injustice experienced by Black, Indigenous and racialized people all over the world. Canada is not exempt, only admitting in 2015 to having committed cultural genocide against Indigenous peoples.

While many wonder "when things will return to normal," there are continual calls from Black, Indigenous and racialized people to not return to the way things were before — but to change our practices and ways of thinking so we can work towards a more racially just world.

In many ways, principals and educators will lead the charge, modelling what should be done, and so an important first step in creating more racially just schools is by ensuring hiring practices are equitable and inclusive.

Ontario prides itself on being one of the world's most diverse regions, and for a public education system that is known for equity and excellence. However, the provincial teacher workforce has not kept pace with the province's demographic diversity. In fact, the term 'teacher diversity gap' was coined by Turner (2014/2015) to describe the relationship between the predominantly White teacher workforce and overwhelmingly racialized student demographics across the province.

This racial disparity in hiring is not unique to education; the entire Canadian labour market was described as "color coded" by researchers Block and Galabuzi (2011) in analyzing the magnitude of racial bias in hiring that exists in Canada. The overrepresentation of Black, Indigenous and racialized people in precarious labour, significant wage gaps between racialized and White Ontarians and, more specific to education, a lack of targeted mentorship opportunities to navigate the hierarchies of school boards (Abawi, 2021; Jack & Lobovsky, 2016, United Way, 2019) are significant barriers to permanent employment in the teaching profession for Black, Indigenous and racialized people.

This raises another related issue. Ontario's teacher diversity is negatively disproportionate to its population, with similar trends existing for administrators in terms of diversity and representation. More than 90% of principals and vice-principals are White while 29% of Ontarians identify as non-White (Statistics Canada, 2016), with a significantly higher proportion of racialized Ontarians in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Unfortunately, data collection on the demographics of educators and educational leaders in Ontario is scarce. For example, the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) only reports data on age, gender, and spoken languages of certified teachers in Ontario (OCT, 2019). Similarly, the Ontario Ministry of Education reports the gender of principals and teachers, and they only report gender categories of "male" and "female" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017). The lack of data collection and reporting undermines attempts to make changes.

Teacher diversity and hiring practices

While calls to diversify the teacher workforce have impacted policy initiatives, the teacher diversity gap cannot be addressed without looking to school administrators — namely, principals and vice principals — who hold considerable authority in making hiring decisions for their schools.

The previous teacher hiring policy was designed to help ensure this bias was less present in the education job market. Regulation 274/12 was introduced by the previous provincial government to help curb widespread nepotism prevalent in teacher hiring practices. While far from flawless, it outlined a clear path to securing permanent employment and ensured that qualified candidates with the top five seniority positions, regardless of their background and who they knew, would receive an interview for the position they applied to.

The *Draft Interim Policy Program Memorandum* (PPM), introduced in 2020 by the current government to replace Regulation 274, highlights teacher diversity and merit as central to teacher hiring practices: "Encouraging diversity of the teaching workforce in the school board is vital because the workforce should be reflective and representative of the community" (p. 4). However, these concepts are highly subjective and fail to acknowledge systemic, structural and institutional whiteness and white privilege which led to the implementation of the Regulation in the first place. So-called merit-based hiring lacks sound evidence as to how it will increase diversity in the classroom and, without substantial transformational, anti-racism policy in place, risks widening already steep teacher and administrative diversity gaps (Abawi, 2021) by providing administrators with increased discretionary powers to make hiring choices with limited accountability and oversight.

Administration and the reproduction of whiteness

The underrepresentation of Black, Indigenous and racialized teachers in the education system, especially permanent teachers, cannot be understood without drawing explicit attention to how predominantly White school administrators make hiring decisions for their schools. Research indicates that individuals are significantly more likely to hire someone that looks like them (Rivera, 2012). The current hiring legislation allows administrators to effectively take a "colour-blind" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) approach to their hiring practices and fails to acknowledge or address larger structural factors that push Black, Indigenous and racialized teachers and applicants out of publicly-funded education.

The Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) outlines how the role of school leaders is to ensure schools are equitable and diverse. However, the little demographic data available demonstrates this is not how many administrators are operating when it comes to their hiring practices. Now more than ever, school administrators, especially White administrators, must be charged with critical self-reflective practice to unpack their identities, positionality, and social location, and how these racialized power relations inform conscious as well as subconscious biases that impact hiring decisions.

As Abawi's recent study suggests, Black, Indigenous and racialized teachers have markedly different experiences in accessing permanent teaching positions than their White colleagues. Some of the many differences the study noted are: microaggressions, such as having to show proof of their Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) membership, the questioning of English-language proficiency, and even assuming that Black, Indigenous and racialized teachers signing in for supply work were members of the janitorial staff (Abawi & Eizadirad, 2020). This correlates with Turner's (2015) findings outlining the experiences of Black educators in Ontario, where 68% of respondents believe that hiring is based on personal connections rather than community connections, education, and qualifications.

The patterns and themes of both studies were again solidified by the *Review of the Peel District School Board* that cited endemic levels of nepotism, inconsistent hiring practices, mismanagement of candidate files and reports of Black, Indigenous and racialized candidates being passed over for interviews, positions and promotions time and again despite being more than qualified for the respective positions.

Tuters' study (2015) demonstrated that while teachers would be celebrated for addressing surface level inequities, when they attempted to address structural inequities in their schools they were often ostracized by their administrators, peers, and the school community. Similarly, the *Review of the York Region District School Board* conveyed that teachers engaging in equity and anti-racism work were often isolated and sidelined from consideration for administrative positions—presumably a considerable obstacle to being promoted to principal or vice principal.

Moving forward: the responsibility of leadership

Although the OLF identifies social justice and equity as desired leadership qualities, work must be done at the ground level to ensure these values are understood and modelled by all school leaders. While teachers are often charged with unpacking how their identities impact their pedagogical approaches, the same opportunities and support must be provided for principals and vice-principals when it comes to hiring.

In order for administrators to engage in more equitable hiring practices, we recommend: ongoing antiracism professional development, and the expansion of targeted mentorship programs for Black, Indigenous and racialized educators and aspiring leaders. Current mentorship programs, such as the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP), a requirement for permanent teaching employment in publicly-funded boards, requires mandatory mentorship for new hires who must successfully complete two Teacher Performance Appraisals (TPA). School administrators select the mentors for the NTIP, who are overwhelmingly White and hold significant autonomy and authority over whether a mentee will pass the program. Providing targeted NTIP mentorship programs will allow for racialized mentees to be partnered with racialized mentors to build community and create networks of support for racialized educators in a white supremacist system.

We propose the following suggestions to reduce racial disparities in teacher hiring:

- Census data collected on board staff to include more details that correlate ethno-racial identity with position. For example, rather than the category of 'teacher', the data should indicate if the teacher is an Occasional Teacher (OT), Long-term Occasional (LTO) or permanent.
- Collection and release of demographic data disaggregated by race, by teacher and Principal governing bodies such as the Ontario College of Teachers and the Ontario Principals' Council.
- Mandatory release of application files and posting information to both human resources and board equity officers.
- Mandatory professional development for administrators, such as the upcoming anti-Black racism AQ (Additional Qualifications)
- Reframing of equity, diversity and inclusion policies based on consultations with parents and community members.
- Changes to the PQP (Principals' Qualification Program) that embed anti-racism education in hiring practices, such as inclusion of data on the racism embedded in the Canadian labour market, application reviews, and mock interviews to unpack conscious and unconscious biases.

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Dr. Stephanie H. Tuters is an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership and her work investigates how educational leadership, policy, and practices can become more equitable and inclusive.

Authors' note: The original draft of this article used the term BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) but we have changed the text to reflect growing discomfort with the lack of precision in this terminology. As researchers we can find ourselves limited to available data that is insufficiently disaggregated, which underscores the need for institutions—from Statistics Canada to school boards—to collect and provide data in as disaggregated a format as possible.

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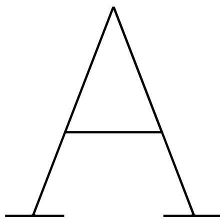
Send Alberta's draft curriculum back to the drawing board

Heather Ganshorn



lberta is in the midst of a full-fledged battle over curriculum. On one side: the provincial government, which is implementing a campaign promise to scrap a nearly finished K-6 curriculum developed under previous Progressive Conservative and NDP governments.

On the other side: a constellation of parents, Indigenous groups, teachers, education scholars, and school boards (at this writing, 51 of 61 school boards or divisions in the province have indicated they will not pilot the draft curriculum). In a matter of weeks, a Facebook group called Albertans Reject Curriculum Draft had attracted 39,500 members, organized several in-person and virtual protests, and partnered with Support Our Students Alberta to create a resource website, Students Deserve Better, to share information, distribute thousands of lawn signs and host a letter-writing template that has been used over 1,500 times.

This is an incredible level of engagement for a province not generally known for political protest or opposition to conservative policies.

Why are people so opposed to this curriculum?

Teachers and scholars have raised concerns that the curriculum is a return to an era of rote memorization of facts and times tables, rather than focusing on development of 21st-century skills. Concerns have been raised about the social studies curriculum in particular, which is heavy on concepts and learning outcomes that have been criticized for being developmentally inappropriate (learning about the Mongol Empire and feudal society in Grade 2, for example). The curriculum has also been criticized as racist for its centring of white Christian European history, and its depiction of other religions and cultures. Indigenous groups, including the Confederacy of Treaty No. 6 First Nations Chiefs and the Métis Nation of Alberta, have raised concerns about the content and the lack of input from Alberta's Indigenous communities.

Many parents, myself included, are uncomfortable with the quantity and quality of religious content in the social studies curriculum. While the comparative study of religion has its place in the curriculum, this curriculum centres Christianity and marginalizes other religions. Atheism is not mentioned. The Grade 6 draft requires students to learn concepts, such as the Sermon on the Mount, heaven and hell, and the

nature of the Trinity, that in my childhood were reserved for Sunday school, not Monday-to-Friday school. Dr. Carla Peck, a curriculum scholar whose specialty is the teaching and learning of history, has written several blog posts on this curriculum, but the one I found most insightful as the parent of two K-6 children was her post on the questions we can ask to assess a curriculum; questions such as, "What and whose knowledge is included?" and "What types of learning outcomes are included?"

While the social studies curriculum has come under the most criticism, concerns have been raised about other subject areas as well, from the suggested use of javelins in Grade 2 phys ed to the introduction of fractions in much younger grades than is currently the case. The Alberta Association of Deans of Education has compiled these critiques at https://alberta-curriculum-analysis.ca/. (The provincial government has also compiled a list of academics and others who endorse elements of the draft curriculum, and some of whom advised on its development.)

Two years is a very short time to develop a quality curriculum from the ground up, and the results of this rushed approach are evident. Musicians have noted errors in basic elements of music theory. The science curriculum has been criticized for its lack of emphasis on scientific literacy. Climate change is not covered in depth, despite a recent survey showing that Alberta students feel they lack knowledge of climate science and want it included in the curriculum. Many factual or conceptual errors are obvious to even a casual reader, such as the learning outcome in kindergarten social studies that students know "location of key features of our Earth on a globe, including gravity" or that students use a map of Alberta to "calculate the distance in kilometres travelled by the North West Mounted Police from Regina to Duck Lake during the 1885 Métis uprising" (while it is true that many Albertans, myself included, hail from Regina, both Regina and Duck Lake are located in Saskatchewan).

Eagle-eyed readers have also identified examples of content plagiarized from sources like Wikipedia and the website of a North Vancouver recreation centre. Dr. Sarah Eaton, an expert on plagiarism and academic integrity at the University of Calgary, wrote a blog post reviewing examples of plagiarism in the curriculum after her inbox "exploded" with examples from people around the province.

Concerns have also been raised about the process, particularly the concern that this is an overt effort to take the curriculum in a much more American-style conservative direction. A 2019 *Alberta Views* article cites several examples of the Alberta premier framing the previous draft curriculum process as "socialist" and secretive. In fact, the previous curriculum rewrite, which this government scrapped, was initiated under the Redford Progressive Conservative government. In retrospect, this framing allowed the current government to present their own ideological curriculum project as merely an equivalent action, even a course correction. However, the process under this government has been a significant break from the past.

Under the previous government, eight subject-specific curriculum working groups were established, with representatives from public, Catholic, francophone private and charter schools, as well as Indigenous teachers, academics and the Northwest Territories and Nunavut (both territories use the Alberta curriculum). These groups worked with Alberta Education staff to develop curriculum. Participants interviewed in this *Edmonton Journal* article were emphatic that the process involved diverse stakeholders and was not subject to interference by the governing party. While participants, many of them volunteers, were not all named, the process was not secretive. As a parent, I received at least two surveys about the previous draft curriculum; for the current draft, I am not aware of any surveys sent to parents.

The current government's approach to curriculum development was to appoint an eight-member advisory panel. This panel did not include any current K-12 educators, and had a conservative bent. Chair Angus McBeath, a former Edmonton Public School Board superintendent, was a fellow with the conservative Atlantic Institute for Market Studies, which has now merged with the Fraser Institute. Committee member Ashley Berner, an education policy scholar at Johns Hopkins University, does not appear to have any particular expertise in the Canadian K-12 context, but she is a conservative academic who has argued for increased funding of private and charter schools, an issue that is echoed in UCP party policy. She has also served as an advisor to several conservative think tanks.

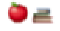
In addition to this advisory committee, the government also appointed 19 experts and Indigenous elders to advise on particular aspects of curriculum. One of the advisors on the social studies curriculum was Chris Champion, a historian who was previously

United Conservative Caucus
April 17 ·

Make no mistake, for the NDP and their activist union friends, the fight against the new curriculum is all about politics, not about our kids.

They want to cancel everyone and everything not full of socialist ideology.

Alberta's new K-6 curriculum is a modern curriculum that reflects the diversity and history of Alberta and provides students with essential knowledge. But we want to know what you think. You can have your say on the new curriculum at www.unitedconservativecaucus.ca/k6-curriculum.



employed as an advisor to the premier when he was a federal minister. Champion lacks any experience in K-12 education, and has expressed opinions in his self-published history journal, the *Dorchester Review*, that seem dismissive of Indigenous historical perspectives and reconciliation. An early leaked draft of the social studies curriculum that appears to have been authored solely by Champion caused an uproar for content that was widely panned as regressive and problematic.

Teachers themselves appear to have been involved rather late in the game. In December 2020, a working group of 102 teachers was presented with a nearly-finished draft and invited to provide feedback. This is obviously not the same as participating in the actual development of curriculum. The Alberta Teachers' Association has called for a halt to curriculum implementation, citing a lack of confidence in both the content and design of the draft, and calling for an independent review that "must meaningfully involve a broad cross-section of certificated Alberta teachers and faculty members from Alberta faculties of education and must be properly inclusive of francophone, First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives." A recent member survey by the ATA found that 91% of respondents were unhappy with the draft curriculum.

Where does this leave us, and where do we go from here? Despite widespread public upset over the curriculum, the government caucus is still sticking to the line that opposition comes primarily from unions and NDP partisans, as illustrated in the above Facebook post.

As a public education advocate and a parent of elementary-age children, I am deeply worried about the impact on our children if this curriculum is implemented in the face of overwhelming opposition from teachers, school boards and parents. I am also alarmed at the increasing American-style politicization of the curriculum development process. All curriculum is political, because curriculum is about what we think children should learn about the world and their place in it. No curriculum will satisfy everyone. But curriculum development should not be the plaything of the governing party of the day; our kids are not a political football. We need to revert to the process that made Alberta a world leader in education in the past, a process that:

- Is guided by the public service in Alberta Education, with minimal political interference;
- Engages both practising teachers and academic experts in the actual development of curriculum (not merely late-stage review);
- Involves Indigenous experts and responds directly to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action around education;
- Seeks appropriate input from parents and other members of the community.

It is the view of Support Our Students Alberta that the government needs to return to the drawing board with a more inclusive, transparent process.

Heather Ganshorn is Research Director of Support Our Students Alberta, a non-profit public education advocacy group fighting for the rights of all children to an equitable and accessible public education system. She is also the parent of two elementary-aged children in the public school system.

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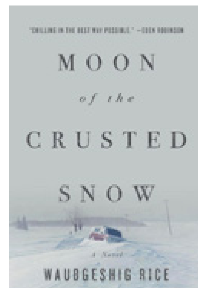
Apocalypse, meet resurgence

Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow: A Novel*

Brian Pastoor



"I was once advised by an elder that there is a reason for storytelling — winter."
—Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, "Stop Stealing Native Stories"[1]

Something is wrong in "the South" (Rice, 14, 24, 59, 96), but no one knows what it is. Two 19-year-old students from a northern Ontario reserve who manage to return from the city report just how fast things deteriorated: police directed traffic "at most of the big intersections" the first day, but not the second (79, 81). As dead-phone, satellite and TV clues coalesce in the rez setting, it becomes clear that Waubgeshig Rice's bestselling 2018 novel is a thought experiment on what life might be like without "food…power…gas" and with no communications "from Toronto or anywhere else" (75).

It is a thrilling dystopian work — and a timely title for students at Grade 10 level or higher (as recommended by *Strong Nations*).[2] Published about 18 months before the WHO's pandemic declaration, there are not many COVID-19 advance-echoes, aside from a panic-buying scene at the

1. The epigraph is from Lenore Keeshig-Tobias's excellent 1990 essay, "Stop Stealing Native Stories" (page 72). Thanks to Daniel Heath Justice for including it in his "Indigenous Lit Twitter Project" (April 7), page 223 in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*.

2. See "Waubgeshig Rice." https://www.strongnations.com/gs/show.php?gs=3&gsd=858. This education-focused, Indigenous-owned retailer of Indigenous literature and art has a great website, newsletter and reliable shipping. Strong Nations co-founder and author, Terri Mack, is quoted on the back cover of Tomson Highway's *From Oral to Written*.

reserve general store (60–62). Still, the science fiction plot feels more like non-fiction now. This is because students and teachers have lived in lockdown, though power (and Google Classroom) mostly stayed on. Moreover, we have hoped (against history) that geography will protect Indigenous and northern communities, just as readers hope that distance will protect Rice's protagonist Evan Whitesky, his wife Nicole McCloud, their son Maiingan, daughter Nangohns, and their Anishinaabe community over the six-month winter, "the great annual test" (13).

Moon of the Crusted Snow matters. With the passing of world events, it becomes more timely, but as I hope to show in this spoiler-free essay/review, it also transcends time — and history. Rice artfully reframes apocalypse as both historic and ongoing,[3] and with beauty amid horror, he limns life and love, culture and connection — in a word, resurgence.

Apocalypse

Rice's novel is forward-looking. From the first page, Evan is ensuring food supplies for winter, which Nicole's "nookomis keeps saying…is gonna be a rough one" (11). However, the novel is also backward-looking; readers need to know the past. The lack of a glossary is intentional, as Rice explains in an early 2019 interview with Rosanna Deerchild: "There's some work that people need to do on their own…that's part of active learning." This work requires researching "historical context," digging for the requisite truth part of truth and reconciliation.

In *My Conversations with Canadians*, Lee Maracle notes that "women once carried the bundle of keeping the backward and forward vision of the nation" (Maracle, 28). In *The Truth About Stories*, Thomas King anticipates writers who will imagine "panoramas of contemporary Native life by looking backward and forward with the same glance" (King, 112). Enter Waubgeshig Rice. In the voice of an elder, Aileen,[4] whose strength and wisdom recall Aunt Kathy from his 2014 novel, *Legacy*, Rice links past/present apocalypse to present/future resurgence:

> Our world isn't ending. It already ended. It ended when Zhaagnaash came into our original home down south on that bay and took it from us. That was our world. When the Zhaagnaash cut down all the trees and fished all the fish and forced us out of there, that's when our world ended. They made us come all the way up here. This is not our homeland! But we had to adapt and luckily we already knew how to hunt and live on the land… / But then they followed us up here and started taking our children away from us! That's when our world ended again. And that wasn't the last time (149).

Aileen calls apocalypse "a silly word…no word like that in Ojibwe." She adds, "We've had that over and over. But we always survived. We're still here. And we'll still be here, even if the power and the radios don't come back on" (149–50).[5]

Resurgence

While many dystopian works focus on survival, "survival is not a life," as one character in Yvette Nolan's *The Unplugging*

3. Justice writes, "Our apocalypse isn't a singular event, it's an ongoing and relentless process, not unlike settler colonialism itself" (167). In Maori storytelling, "all time is a now-time…not distant…no past or future," Patricia Grace writes in *Potiki* (34).

4. Rice mentions his "grandmother Aileen Rice" on page 218.

5. This recalls Yvette Nolan's *The Unplugging*: "It's not over. We're not over" (5), and Marilyn Dumont's "Letter to Sir John A. Macdonald" in A Really Good Brown Girl (52): "I'm still here and halfbreed… / We're still here." "Zhaagnaash" recalls the same word in Indian Horse, 2012: 1, 5, 7–10, by Rice's "close friend and enormous support" (Rice, 217), Richard Wagamese.

insists (Nolan, 49). Daniel Heath Justice in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* explains it this way: "When Indigenous and other writers of colour imagine apocalypse, they think about what endures *beyond* it, and they imagine the living, loving, and connecting that takes place in the ruins of settler colonial excess" (Justice, 167).

"Living, loving and connecting" echo the "social rebuilding, psychological renewal and cultural renaissance" that Harold Cardinal envisioned in the sheer-survival days of the White Paper.[6]

This is resurgence,[7] with apologies for oversimplication. It pervades Evan's and Nicole's actions (and dreams/visions) as they apply ancestral lifeways to the present — what Daniel R. Wildcat calls "Indigenuity."[8] While Ojibwe language and ceremony "are a little new" (Rice, 5) to Evan, he is learning and performing each.[9] After "the violent erasure of…culture, language, and ceremonies" (Rice, 44), he is doing what Nishnaabeg scholar/writer, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, outlines in *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, "re-investing in our own ways of being: regenerating our political and intellectual traditions…language learning…ceremonial and spiritual pursuits" (Simpson, 17). From forest to band office to home, Evan, always thinking, is "a strategist and a warrior…embracing connection in the face of utter disconnection."[10]

Arguably, connection starts at home. Nicole's "parenting fit[s] in to the teachings" Evan is learning. "She guide[s] their children, patiently and with love and respect" (16); she reads them a children's book in Anishinaabemowin (48). Her story-reading cues context from Thomas King: "the truth about stories is that that's all we are."[11] In light of the gratitude expressed by Rice, Cherie Dimaline and Lee Maracle for being raised in story,[12] students should see narrative's formative power. And with "the TV and that computer off" (Rice, 11), as Nicole says, students might also reflect on digital dependency, nature-culture connection or even agree with Daniel Heath Justice: "Disconnection is cause and consequence of much of this world's suffering. We are disconnected from one another, from the plants and animals and elements upon which our survival depends, from ourselves and our histories and our legacies" (Justice, 4–5).

Students should thus view even the hunting scenes through a resurgent lens — and mino bimaadiziwin. In *Legacy*, a character resolves "to live in a more positive way, *Mino bmaadziwin* [sic] is what they called it in their language — 'the good life'" (151). Here, Evan offering "semaa" (4, 126) to a moose is part of living "in a good way…the Anishinaabe way…as he took from the earth, he gave back" (5, 126). "Mino bimaadiziwin" for Simpson "means living in a way that promotes rebirth, renewal, reciprocity and respect,"[13] but the natural world tends to be viewed as resources, not relations. Consider the state of the Great Lakes alone.[14] As students explore such context, their worldview is Evan's, and he exudes awareness, humility and responsibility.

Future story

Recalling the epigraph, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias's essay insights apply to Rice's modus:

6. Harold Cardinal, *The Unjust Society*, 1969: 142.

7. Louise Erdrich movingly frames resurgence as continuation, a "wavy line" joining ancient Ojibwe pictographs to Norval Morrisseau, et al. "[N]ative art…is a continuation," she writes in *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country* (45).

8. Daniel R. Wildcat argues that to save the planet from "global burning" (1), we need to return not to the past, but to "Indigenuity…situating our solutions in Earth-based local Indigenous deep spatial knowledges" or "lifeways" (48). These are "found anywhere on the planet where peoples and place maintained long-standing symbiotic relations…emergent in a nature-culture nexus, a sort of first-order…experiential positioning system" (54). In this context, my son and I always remember an August 2014 "medicine walk" led by Shawn Corbiere (Anishinaabe) on Beausoleil Island, Georgian Bay Islands National Park.

9. Here I imagine Evan reciting Rosanna Deerchild's "where ceremonies go" (50) from this is a small northern town, 2008: "these ceremonies listen / these ceremonies remember / these ceremonies speak for me."

10. Daniel Heath Justice excerpts Simpson's 2013 poem, "caged," on page ix of *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*.

11. Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories*, 2003: 2, 32, 62, 92, 122, 153.

12. Just as Rice thanks his grandmother who "shared ancient Anishinaabe tales to build a foundation of culture" (218), Cherie Dimaline thanks her family: "you had the foresight to raise me with our stories and within our territory" (Dimaline, 234). This hyperlinks to "the ever-powerful Lee Maracle" (Dimaline, 234) who writes, "I was brought up in story. No one disciplined me by spanking or scoldings…I was expected to figure out my behavioural issues from the story" (Maracle, 40). As Simpson notes, "colonizers" since Champlain have "mistakenly interpreted (and continue to interpret) Nishnaabeg parenting…as 'a lack of parenting' because of the absence of punishment" (Simpson, 123).

13. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 2011: 27. See also pages 13, 17, 26, 68, 80–81, 108–109.

14. See Erdrich on the Great Lakes sturgeon population crash from "greed and overfishing of non-Indians…turn of the nineteenth century" (62–63). See Basil Johnston's *Indian School Days* on nearly extinct Georgian Bay trout in 1945 (174). See also the "diseased livers…deliquesced into a bloody sludge" of moose (from herbicides) noted by Anishinaabe trapper, Tom Morriseau Borg, in the Dec. 2020 "Saving the Great Lakes" issue of *National Geographic* (46). Borg offers "tobacco" and "prayers of thanks" to a moose just like Evan does in the novel.

> Stories, you see, are not just entertainment. Stories are power. They reflect the deepest, the most intimate perceptions, relationships and attitudes of a people. Stories show how a people, a culture, thinks. Such wonderful offerings are seldom produced by outsiders (Keeshig-Tobias, 71).

For Lee Maracle, "stories are keys to the national treasure known as our knowledge" (Maracle, 40). Tomson Highway recalls the seminal 1970s: he and "other young Indigenous people" began telling "their own stories about their own people in their own voice from their own perspective" (Highway, xxviii). Teleporting to 2004, Uppinder Mehan encouraged postcolonial writers to "imagine how life might be otherwise" via science fiction. "The time is ripe," he wrote, "for us to begin creatively addressing our futures."[15]

The time is ripened. Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* protagonist saying,"None of the stories I read in English had anything to do with my life," is, hopefully, so 1980s (Robinson's setting).[16]

For science fiction alone, Canadian English teachers have first-rate options to *The Chrysalids*: *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline (Métis), *The Unplugging* by Yvette Nolan (Algonquin), *Moon of the Crusted Snow* and its sequel by Waubgeshig Rice (Wasauksing First Nation), *Take Us to Your Chief and Other Stories* by Drew Hayden Taylor (Curve Lake Ojibway) and more.[17] Most importantly, Indigenous students "have a literature that paints them in colours that are psychologically complex and sophisticated" (Highway, xxx). Resurgence is taking place across Canada, U.S., Australia and New Zealand, "the only four countries that did not initially sign" the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples[18] — Canada being "the only country in the world to have twice voted against the UNDRIP."[19] As a Dimaline character affirms, "You can't let what's not here, what's missing…slow you down" (Dimaline, 11).

Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair is "happy with the way the educational system has begun to react, the way that the story is being told in most schools, and the interest that teachers are taking." This, from him, means a great deal. However, "poor housing, poor water supplies, the cost of nutrition" — Rice especially satirizes the latter (58–59) — "all have a long way to go."[20]

Can fiction help? This is no idealistic question.[21] "Fiction can hothouse reality" (Maracle, 61); it can sweatlodge reality, Rice might say. It can open up paths to learning — and unlearning. As Daniel Francis observes in *National Dreams*, "Canada is being reimagined. But this should be a cause for celebration, not concern."[22] "From the experience of the colonizee," Nalo Hopkinson writes, "science fiction…makes it possible to think about new ways of doing things"[23] just like Rice, interviewed by Dennis Ward (May 26, 2020), hopes we can "find ways to hit the reset button and renew and find a positive path forward."

15. Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan, Eds., *So Long Been Dreaming*, 2004: 270.

16. Eden Robinson, *Monkey Beach*, 2000: 166. See also Patricia Grace in Potiki, 1986: "All I learn at school [is] that I'm not somebody, that my ancestors were rubbish and so I'm rubbish too… / I'm not learning one thing…to do with me, or us" (71).

17. Eden Robinson's dystopian short story, "Terminal Avenue," in Hopkinson and Mehan's *So Long Been Dreaming*, deserves mention (likely more suitable for post-secondary study). I have not read *Wrist* by Nathan Niigan Noodlin Adler or *Shadows Cast by Stars* by Catherine Knutsson; Justice cites all three works. Indigenous writers beyond Canada who "imagine…otherwise" (Uppinder Mehan) include Rebecca Roanhorse (USA), Patricia Grace (NZ) and Alexis Wright (Australia).

18. Tanya Talaga, *All Our Relations: Finding the Path Forward*, 2018: 183.

19. Arthur Manuel, *Unsettling Canada: A National Wake-up Call*, 2015: 175.

20. Listen to the January 31, 2021 interview with Michael Serapio, https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1850799683988 at the 3:28 mark: "Liberals have spent nearly $100 million over the last three years fighting Indigenous claims..."

21. See Erdrich, 82–83, on "pressing needs" and a Rainy River First Nation library inspired by poet and former chief, Al Hunter.

22. Daniel Francis, *National Dreams*, 1997: 173. See my review in *Our Schools/Our Selves* (February/March 1998). Francis' study identifies settler Canadian myths and propaganda about Indigenous peoples, national unity and more.

23. Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan, Eds., *So Long Been Dreaming*, 2004: 9.

Last imaginative word goes to Drew Hayden Taylor who defines "Native science fiction"[24] with a backward and forward glance — and a wink: "Welcome to the new *terra nullius*."

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Notes

Musician and **Chief Dave Mowat** (Alderville First Nation) and **Verna St. Denis** in *Our Schools/Our Selves* (Fall 2010) share the teaching that an ally, no expert, knows when to give up the mic. By each quotation, I mean to honour Sto:lo orator/writer, **Lee Maracle**, each Algonquin, Anishinaabe, Cherokee, Cree, Haisla/Heiltsuk, Maori, Métis, Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, Curve Lake Ojibway, Secwepemc and Yuchi/Muscogee writer, and **Waubgeshig Rice** (Wasauksing First Nation).

In that same spirit, I have not asked **Waubgeshig Rice** for an interview as **Rosanna Deerchild** (January 27, 2019) and **Dennis Ward** (May 26, 2020) have, by their interviews, beautifully covered and enriched the novel's ground, like leaves in Dagwaagin. See the bibliography. I am very grateful, though, for the author's time via e-mail and for his very kind words regarding this essay/review.

Finally, the non-fiction works by **Tomson Highway** (2017) and **Daniel Heath Justice** (2018) in the bibliography are invaluable for anyone interested in Indigenous literatures. Highway writes superb summaries for 176 Canadian Indigenous works (humbly excluding his own), covering six genres. Justice includes his complete 2016 "Indigenous Lit Twitter Project" list, comprised of 365[25] Indigenous multi-genre writers from Canada, U.S., Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Scandinavia, the South Pacific and more.

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24. For genre, is *Moon of the Crusted Snow* allegory, horror, Indigenous futurism, science fiction, speculative fiction? Students can explore. It may be horror since "hockey as we know it is done (Rice, 154), I say with levity. Taylor's question on page viii of his "Foreword" to his 2016 SF short story collection is also fun: "At its essence, isn't all fiction speculative?" Final quotation by Taylor is from page vii.

25. Justice mentions 366 writers, but states on page 214 of his "Appendix" that one is "inadvertently repeated" (Jordan Wheeler, April 11 and August 29). Justice may be a *North of 60* fan, for which Wheeler wrote.

Deconstructing anti-Black racism

A high school course

At the beginning of the 2020–21 school year, four TDSB teachers moved the ball forward for anti-Black racism education. ***Tiffany Barrett****,* ***D. Tyler Robinson****,* ***Remy Basu*** *and* ***Kiersten Wynter*** *presented a course about the language and history of anti-Black racism, what it means to students trying to understand themselves within it and what change could look like. The course entitled "Deconstructing anti-Black Racism in the Canadian and North American Context" is a grade 12 university prep or foundation course that ought to be mandatory learning for students across the province.*

The authors described both the curriculum and the thinking behind it in a conversation with ***William Paul****, Editor of* School Magazine*. It is transcribed and edited below*

White as the default normal

To understand anti-Black racism, students need to grasp all its assumptions and pervasiveness. We have to help them look at white supremacy in all its forms. But we need to clarify for kids that talking about white supremacy is not only talking about overtly racist Ku Klux Klansmen, Proud Boys and the like. It's also talking about how sociologists, historians and academics are asking us to speak about white supremacy. This is the notion that white is the default normal: white culture and white values. White people are what's normal and everything outside of that is levelled in degrees away from normalcy.

As we help kids really understand that, we can dig deeper. We can look historically, at how that default normal has affected everything from slavery to the Black Lives Matter movement. We can also look at it in the present, how it appears in the media now and how pervasive and powerful is this idea of white supremacy.

Most important, we can teach all kids whether they're white, Black, Indigenous, South Asian, whoever they are, they have a responsibility to understand the systems and structures of white supremacy and that these can be replaced by new systems when the public understands and moves to change.

For example, look at the renaming Vaughan Secondary School. The York Region board ended up naming the school after Somali-Canadian journalist Hodan Nalayeh, but not before a lot of debate about who ought to be listened to. The school was originally named after Benjamin Vaughan, who owned about 300 slaves. While there were different groups putting in their thoughts about whose name should be on the front of the school, the reality was that Vaughan was a slave owner. The harm created by Vaughan and his family was done to Black people. So, if we're going to redress that harm, we should be asking the Black community what that new name should be. But battling a "white as the default normal" perspective, it took a lot of strain to get this point across.

At the same time, something like renaming a school offers its own challenge. There's a danger in getting rid of evidence of racism,

making it seem as though it never existed. For instance, as we were developing our curriculum, we did research for the course into the use of the "n — –" word. There were all these relics that had n — –" word all over them that used to appear in grocery stores, on packaging — all over the place. Instead of talking about these historical artifacts — how they're racist and why they were there, we've just hidden them. So, students may not even know about them and not see the problem they present.

The Aunt Jemima brand just went through a similar process. The people at PepsiCo which owns the brand woke up and said "Oh!, for generations, we've been exploiting this racist caricature of Aunt Jemima as the 'mammy' who is working in the kitchen — she's such a great cook. We'd better change 'Aunt Jemima' to the Pearl Milling Company." That image was exploited for a long time in the interests of capitalism and profit. The racist caricature had to go, but the question remains: "What was the harm, who was harmed and how do we address the harm?"

You can rename a school or a company but you have to talk about the old name and why you had to remove it. It involves digging into that history, that language and the effect of white supremacy on people that makes this course extend beyond discussing superficial brand changes and famous people. Our curriculum asks students to think about anti-Black racism in a broad way. This isn't just a Black History Month topic.

We've divided the course up into four units:

Unit One: Language

Unit One is where we introduce the high frequency terms that come up when we talk about anti-Black racism, oppression and marginalized groups. We have a word bank of all of those words like privilege, white supremacy, micro-aggressions, overt racism and such. Students need to understand the language that is used in discussions about racism to be able to converse. This alone gives them power; they can put words to vague feelings and uncertain exchanges they might have had or seen take place as racialized people are treated differently, miss out on opportunities are insulted through media images and so on.

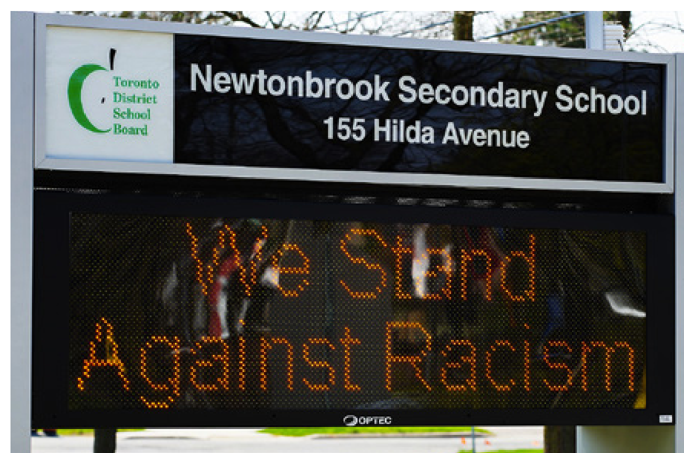
We also want to make sure that students understand how to have respectful discussions because we know there are prickly topics that are going to have to be approached with some understanding. So, we purposely introduce some articles, images, ideas that would really provoke some students — trigger them in a way. For instance, any discussion of the killing of George Floyd is bound to trigger some kind reaction. This is something we can use to help kids acknowledge their feelings, but put them to use to understand the history and racist attitudes that brought about such horrific events.

It's also important for students to learn how to have conversations about these hard topics with compassion and respect.

Unit Two: Critical race theory

In Unit Two we address the fact that the Black experience is very much left out of Eurocentric curriculum. To explain that, we go backwards and teach about critical race theory. We look at where racism first occurs, where we first start hearing the words Black and white. Why was this social construct created? How was it connected it to imperialism, capitalism and the enslavement of Black bodies.

We want our students to look backwards and realize that the construct of race and racism was necessary to dehumanize people in order to enslave them — in order to bring them to the new world and exploit their free labour. It's



important that students understand that systemic purpose — that it was also about empire building. At the heart of empire building — there was competition between nations in Europe about money, land and power.

It's important that students *not* begin their understanding of Blackness with the focus on slavery. That was how it was framed when we were all coming up through the system. When we talk about slavery, we talk about the enslavement of people by other people, so we can put the onus of responsibility where it belongs, but we put that in a larger context.

Beyond that we want students to go back before enslavement. They do a major project on Black civilization, its mathematic and scientific contributions, for instance. This way as kids explore their history, they can realize it is not only about the intersection of European white men and slavery.

There's a lot to cover, as we pick and choose components of Black history in the Americas all the way up to the present. We include more Canadian content too so kids aren't thinking, like we were taught, that Canada was the safe space for slaves to escape and once they got here, life was good. We want to tell them real stories of slavery in Canada along with its racist policies. We look at news clippings of slaves in Nova Scotia being posted in the local newspaper along with the price to buy them.

We also look at the United States and the legislation that valued Black people as 3/5 human beings, something that enabled injustice to continue unabated. It underscored the entrenched, self-serving belief that normalcy is white; that Black people can be exploited, segregated, neglected and killed.

The harm created by Vaughan and his family was done to Black people. So, if we're going to redress that harm, we should be asking the Black community what that new name should be. But battling a "white as the default normal" perspective, it took a lot of strain to get this point across.

This ideology didn't stop at the U.S border. There is a common thread that runs through the experiences of Black people from the U.S. the West Indies as well the experience of Black people who have been in Canada for six or seven generations, that goes beyond the social construct of borders. So, we don't only want to be tied to the Canadian experience because we see all of these experiences as a component of the African diaspora. They are all part of the same story.

As we do this work and as we teach kids about this history, they can see the systemic mechanisms that led to racism and come to realize or affirm that there's nothing wrong with Blackness in itself. The experience and the social location of many Black folk now is the direct result of white supremacy and systemic racism: "I don't have to feel bad about my Black skin, because I understand that the problem is actually with the systems and structures. We need to change these systems and structures."

Unit Three: What our students see and hear

This is where we discuss where the students themselves are positioned — what they see; what they hear. So, this unit focuses on the media and images of blackness — what it is and why it's there. We look into racist caricatures like blackface and similar stereotypes. There's a lot of analysis and discussion with students about images they observe in their music, their everyday lives and in the news and what these images mean to them? We're trying to draw from them their interpretation of these images and why would bias occur in them

At this point, we start introducing the notions of action and what civic change looks like. We look at police brutality; we look at Black Lives Matter. We consider other movements for justice like Black excellence, Black business — teaching about trailblazers before and today who are still doing the work of finding equality and equity. The discussions we have all pertain to and extend from the students' immediate experiences: what they have seen and understood about Blackness now that these ideas have been framed in Unit 1 — the tools to talk about it; Unit 2 — the history up until present day. Now we ask: "What do you see in the broader picture of anti-Black racism? What makes you see that, what do you think and feel about that?"

This unit is about how to understand Blackness. All of it is student-centred so we start with the students' grasp of what Blackness means. Unit 3 is one in which students choose: What do we want to talk about? What areas of that do we want to focus on? How do we want to steer the conversation? Do we want to look at sports — at the systemic oppression there? Do we want to look at music? It's all about what students see, what they want to dig deeper into and how they interpret it.

This notion of action is essential here. We're not just going to passively take in and analyze and say this or that story is awful. We're going to consider: what can we do? What have we done?

Unit Four: Other marginalized groups

Now the students have the language, the knowledge, the terminology. They understand the history. They've had an opportunity to define and redefine Blackness as they see it through their personal lens.

With that in mind, we talk about connecting Black oppression to other forms of oppression: the idea that Black oppression maybe isn't a singular event or experience. The students explore other marginalized groups and discuss issues like intersectionality, how different people share common experiences of racism and homophobia for instance. This is where all they've learned about the pervasive effects of white normalcy applies to other situations. Students also get an opportunity to analyze past and present activist movements and how they've facilitated progress. What were the positives and the negatives?

Now, we connect the oppression of Black people to other marginalized groups or how Black people are further oppressed within other marginalized groups. We're talking here about Afro-Indigenous people, Black people who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. So now we're making the connections beyond just Black oppression but what that looks like in other parts of society and in other marginalized groups.

If the students who take our course understand just that white is not the default normal, then we'll have gone a long way to dispel the myths, the assumptions and hatred that crush our society. If we can help them understand their responsibility for change and locate the tools to bring it about, then we've gone some distance towards helping them become engaged and self-confident.

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New resource weaves together history and present day anti-racist work in our province during 150th year

Together with the UVIC History project *Asian Canadians on Vancouver Island: Race, Indigeneity and the Transpacific* the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives–BC Office published *Challenging Racist "British Columbia": 150 Years and Counting* in March of this year.

The 80-page, illustrated booklet — available as a free download from www.challengeracistbc.ca — was Co-authored by Nicholas XEMŦOLTW̱ Claxton, Denise Fong, Fran Morrison, Christine O'Bonsawin, Maryka Omatsu, John Price and Sharanjit Kaur Sandhra. The resource is being released during the 150th anniversary year of British Columbia joining Canada.

Challenging Racist BC has been designed to assist anti-racist educators, teachers, scholars, policymakers and individuals doing anti-racism work to help pierce the silences that too often have let racism grow in our communities, corporations and governments. Throughout the booklet the authors examine the long history of racist policies that have impacted Indigenous, Black, Asian and racialized communities in the province over those 150 years, tying those histories to present day anti-racist movements and individuals.

You can learn more about the book, download a free copy and watch a video of a launch event at www.challengeracistbc.ca

The Laurentian University crises and public university education

Dr. David Leadbeater

The CCAA — Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act — is federal corporate bankruptcy legislation dating from 1933. On February 1st, for the first time in Canadian history, the CCAA was applied to a public educational institution. According to Ontario Chief Justice Geoffrey Morawetz: "This Court orders and declares that the Applicant [Laurentian University] is insolvent and is a company to which the CCAA applies."

Laurentian characterizes itself as "publicly-funded, bilingual and tricultural postsecondary institution," claiming about 8,200 undergraduate students and 1,098 graduate students. For now, Laurentian is said to be the largest of five universities in Northern Ontario. Based in Sudbury, the largest hardrock mining centre in Canada, it has taught many first-generation and working-class students, and has recognized responsibilities to the FrancoOntarian community and Indigenous peoples in Northern Ontario.

Laurentian's CCAA insolvency claim was mobilized as a rapid attack — in the context of a pandemic — to slash academic programs and faculty complement. It enabled the Laurentian Board to break important labour protections, especially faculty collective agreement articles on redundancy and financial exigency.

Numerous reports surfaced, undermining Laurentian's credibility. Alan Harrison of Queen's University, appointed January 22 as a Special Advisor to the Ontario Minister of Colleges and Universities, had found the Laurentian Administration had been hiding deficits since 2014. Some media reports and angry public letters revealed research grants and private donations had disappeared as they had been intermingled with the regularlymanaged funds. Varsity men's and women's hockey and swim teams were

cut. And, of course, Arts programs and cultural values were hit most severely.

Within two months, Laurentian succeeded in slashing programs, full-time faculty, and research. By the official count, 38 of 101 English-language programs and 27 of 65 French-language programs were closed. Around 200 faculty members and staff, not including at universities federated with Laurentian, were eliminated. The faculty association lost about one-third of its 360 full-time members; the staff union lost 42 of 268; the non-union including administrative, professional, and senior management lost 37 of 134.

Another destructive stage in the CCAA process was reached when Laurentian unilaterally terminated its agreements with the federated universities, Huntington University (United Church), Thorneloe University (Anglican), and the University of Sudbury/Université de Sudbury (Catholic), thus driving its former partners — which largely provided Arts programs — to bankruptcy. The Université de Sudbury also had a historic relation to the FrancoOntario community predating the foundation of Laurentian in 1960, and housed the second oldest Indigenous Studies program in Canada.

Then, long overdue, the provincial legislature's public accounts committee by unanimous vote dispatched Ontario's Auditor-General, Bonnie Lysyk, to investigate the Laurentian situation.

In spite of formulaic phrases about Laurentian's commitments to Laurentian's bilingual and tricultural mandate, the administration's actions would eliminate the French department, Francophone Economics, Francophone History, and Francophone Theatre, and destroy Indigenous Studies, including its efforts at Indigenous language preservation. While extolling Laurentian's role in educating first-generation university students and Laurentian's role in this major working-class community, the administration destroyed the Labour Studies program. While speaking of the need for a strong university in the region, Laurentian's corporate strategy destroyed, in English and in French, such basic university programs as Environmental Studies, Geography, Math, Music, Philosophy, Physics, and Political Science. (The *Regroupement des professeur.e.s francophones*, including both terminated and still-employed faculty members, voted unanimously in support of establishing an autonomous Francophone university and for transfer of all francophone programs out of Laurentian to the new university.)

By this market logic, Laurentian will cease to be a university with a wide range of accessible programs serving Northern Ontario and become a narrow polytech heavily dependent on limited enrolment programs with more tuition-fee leverage and even higher outside enrolment.

Mismanagement at Laurentian and in Ontario's public university system

The Laurentian debacle is an epic crisis of university mismanagement and local/regional irresponsibility. However, it also reflects a structural crisis rooted in Ontario's neoliberal university system, particularly years of privatization through ever higher tuition fees coupled with corporate managerialism.

The public line of the Laurentian administration has been typically Thatcherite: there was no alternative but bankruptcy or a scorched campus strategy. They continuously repeated that Laurentian had too many courses with low enrolments and that in recent years enrolments overall had declined — while covering up their own irresponsibility and slowness to disclose.

Little has been said about why enrolments were low or declining — certainly nothing about system factors — other than fleeting mentions of Northern "demography" (declining population). But most students in Northern Ontario come from away; as well, university participation rates in Northern Ontario are far below those of Southern Ontario, something that is well known and should be at the top of a serious regional mandate but is not.

Not mentioned are other factors affecting Northern Ontario, which include the negative enrolment and allocation effects of rising tuition fees and student indebtedness, and deteriorating employment prospects in Northern Ontario. Northern Ontario has structurally disadvantageous conditions given by its hinterland-colonial history: a population of about 780,000 (about 6% of Ontario) across a land area of 800,000 km^2 (about 87% of Ontario), a multinational make-up including Indigenous nations and Francophone communities, lower employment rates and higher unemployment rates, weaker educational, media, and cultural institutions, lower educational attainment and university participation, and, not least, ongoing ravages of colonialism.

The problem of low enrolments or excess capacity in some programs is not historically new for Northern universities. But today's conditions are in certain ways worse. Not only is there a more widespread deterioration in employment and social conditions in Northern Ontario,

but also neoliberal Ontario governments have succeeded to a greater degree in privatizing the provision of public university education and research.

- Ontario governments have reduced their public grants for university operating revenues from a level at about 80% in 1980 to around 50% in 2004, and to only 38% in 2017. Ontario provincial documents and some senior administrators speak openly not of public universities but of "publicly assisted universities" and "publicly supported universities."
- Over these years, domestic and international tuition fees and miscellaneous fees paid by students jumped from 15% of operating funds in 1980 to 45% in 2004 to 56% in 2017, becoming by far the largest source for operating funds.
- Ontario now spends less per university student than any province in Canada and has among the highest tuition fees in Canada. At Laurentian, full-time annual undergraduate Arts and Science tuition fees had increased in 2017–18 to $6,473, a nearly 9.4-fold increase in nominal terms and 2.6-fold increase in real terms since 1979–80.
- Tuition fees in undergraduate professional programs such as Engineering and Business were "differentiated." Graduate and post-undergraduate professional faculty fees were increased even further. Miscellaneous user fees to students were also increased and new ones created.

Increased tuition-dependence in a context of slower system growth has intensified competition among universities for students and increased administrative expenditures for advertising, recruiting, public relations, and alumni and corporate-oriented fundraising campaigns. It has also become fertile ground for increased managerialism, ostensibly necessary for cost control and market-narrowed educational objectives. At Laurentian this has increased stratification in salary structures and has shifted staffing away from teaching and research.

What have been the results for Northern Ontario, especially the full-time undergraduate enrolments which are most crucial to the Northern universities?

- For Ontario as a whole, full-time undergraduate enrolments grew in all years from 2000 to 2018, except in 2007 (the end of the double-cohort boom of 2003–06) and remained higher than population growth. Part of this expansion has been due to larger numbers of international students.
- For Northern Ontario universities, by contrast, full-time undergraduate enrolments peaked in 2011 at nearly 18,000 and have since declined. As a share of the Ontario university system, the Northern universities reached a relative peak of 5.2% of full-time undergraduate enrolments in the years 2004–06 (during the double-cohort period), but by 2018 had declined to 4.2%.
- Every Northern university has been affected by enrolment decline. Full-time undergraduate enrolments peaked at Lakehead University (6,426 students) and at Nipissing University (3,874 students) in 2010, at Algoma University (1,218 students) in 2013, and at Laurentian University (grouped with l'Université de Hearst, 6,624 students) in 2015. These numbers include the Southern campuses of Northern universities.

Of course, Northern universities are not unique in facing enrolment declines, but the Northern universities are more vulnerable due their generally smaller scale, larger declines proportionate to their size, and greater variability in enrolments.

Overall, rising tuition fee-dependence has had at least four intertwined and negative consequences on Northern universities and especially Arts programs: (a) decreased student accessibility in the midst of below average university participation, (b) enrolment bias against Arts programs, especially the Fine Arts and Humanities, (c) increased corporate rather than collegial behaviour, and (d) weakened long-term regional development objectives.

For neoliberal administrations, especially in disadvantaged regions, university planning has become less about educational need or even regional development, and more about "aligning" programs and faculty complement to student demand and corporate labour-market pressures which are increasingly system-wide. By this market logic, Laurentian will cease to be a university with a wide range of accessible programs serving Northern Ontario and become a narrow polytech heavily dependent on limited enrolment programs with more tuition-fee leverage and even higher outside enrolment.

The pattern is clear in Laurentian's own data on full-time faculty members before and after "restructuring." Laurentian's faculty complement

was slashed by 30%, but for Arts it was 55%; Education 29%; Science, Engineering, Architecture 27%; Health 17%; and Management 12%.

What next?

This is an historic turning point. By one path, the crisis is framed as confined internally to Laurentian, resolvable by one-time cuts and better management, but separate from failed government policy. This framing does not deal honestly with regional enrolment issues and will disproportionately hit Arts programs and Francophone and Indigenous programs, although it will also affect some Sciences. In the end, however, all programs will be affected; the neoliberal hawks will come after larger programs too as long as the path to higher tuition fees and privatization is open.

The alternative path, one to halt program and faculty cuts, is to recognize two failures: local administration failure and provincial policy failure. This means including not only emergency funding to save programs and jobs, but also reforming the current enrolment system to stabilize and broaden enrolment, especially full-time undergraduate enrolment.

First, there should be an immediate reduction and eventual elimination of tuition fees (without means-testing), both provincial and international, beginning with programs with excess capacity at all Northern universities. The universities should be compensated per student by the Ontario government.

The alternative path, one to halt program and faculty cuts, is to recognize two failures: local administration failure and provincial policy failure. This means including not only emergency funding to save programs and jobs, but also reforming the current enrolment system to stabilize and broaden enrolment, especially full-time undergraduate enrolment.

Second, the province should regionally balance the allocation of system enrolments to stabilize Northern university enrolments. Northern Ontario has about 4.2% (and declining) of Ontario's full-time undergraduate enrolment. Even a one-percentage point reallocation in the system would have a major effect towards stabilizing Northern enrolments, including at Laurentian.

Third, there also exists a major federal responsibility in the current underfunding and privatization of postsecondary education in Ontario and in conditions in Northern Ontario. These include fulfilling treaty responsibilities for educational funding of Indigenous students, strengthened support for French-language programs, regional research and cultural program support, and a non-exploitive approach to international student exchange that supports both universities and international students.

Faculty members have often heard that Laurentian should become "the mining university." There is an important role for earth sciences, mining engineering, and related mining programs at Laurentian and the region has legitimate pride in these Laurentian activities. But Laurentian students and the region also benefit from Arts and other non-mining programs. Northern Ontario and its peoples are a lot more than mining, and mining itself is in employment decline in Northern Ontario. In practice, the talk of making Laurentian a mining university is a code for abandonment if not outright destruction of Arts programs.

Some university administrators might think opportunistically that continuing to play to mining corporations will solve the current crisis. But there is little to no prospect for this working out well for Laurentian, while it carries a prospect of destruction for the Arts and crucial areas of the Sciences as well. What further subordination to corporate mining in Northern Ontario would achieve is turning Laurentian into a full-monty neocolonial university.

Faced with deteriorating university conditions, Ontario university administrations, faculty associations, and student organizations from their varying perspectives have been critical of the inadequacy of provincial funding and the consequences of protracted austerity. Inadequate total public funding has done major harm to Ontario's universities and, currently, the system is faced with further damage as the provincial government implements "performance-based funding."

However, a simple return to enrolment-based funding in a tuition fee-driven system is not a solution to the deepening crisis, especially for Northern Ontario and for Arts education. Neither will it be enough to save Laurentian nor another public university from becoming the next predictable debacle.

Dr. David Leadbeater was an Associate Professor of Economics before being one of about 200 employees terminated by Laurentian University. He and Caitlin K. Kiernan are authors of the study "Decline and Protracted Crisis in Ontario's Northern Universities and Arts Education" (2020). The study contains references for the data used in this article.

Editorial

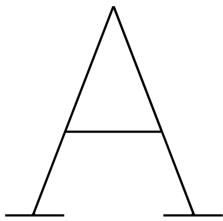
Recalibrating

Erika Shaker

*Readers will note that the editorial appears at the end of the summer 2021 issue of **Our Schools/Our Selves**. Instead, the issue begins with recognition of the violence and ongoing trauma enacted by settler colonialism on the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc community, and on all Indigenous peoples.*

This shameful legacy is not just part of history. It is the present; the last residential school in Canada was closed in 1996.

In December 2015, the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was released, and called what happened in the schools cultural genocide. The TRC's Calls to Action 71 through 76 focus on the children who went missing during their attendance in residential schools (Missing Children and Burial Information). Based on death records, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation estimated about 4,100 children died at the schools; this number is considered to be low, and does not include the 215 Indigenous children — as young as 3 years old — whose remains were found buried at the site of a former residential school in Kamloops, BC, in May 2021.



s I finalize the summer issue of *Our Schools/Our Selves*, I've been reflecting on what I'm looking forward to for July and August.

I'm looking forward to the space to recalibrate myself when it comes to time and distance.

I'm looking forward to the opportunity to look beyond the immediate, and to regain a sense of perspective.

I'm looking forward to having time to see, reflect, and contextualize what I've learned, rather than having to react in the moment.

I was reminded of the importance of this need for time and perspective to reflect and recalibrate, while working with Molly McCracken, director of the CCPA Manitoba office, on recent changes to public education in her province.

So much of what's being posited as the way forward in Manitoba's public education system isn't new at all—it's based on a tired template that other provinces have had plenty of experience with. The erosion of local democracy. Less capacity to respond to local needs. A reliance on volunteers to perform responsibilities once guaranteed as part of the mechanism of public education administration. The prioritization of a managerial-based approach to education leadership. Increased reliance on standardized assessment mechanisms. The further deprioritization of the needs of the most vulnerable students.

We've seen this before, of course, in other provinces. Nova Scotia is a prime example, but it's not the only one. After all, despite assurances from policymakers, none of these initiatives are particularly innovative. And as someone who's been monitoring public education reform for over two decades, I've seen little evidence that removing mechanisms for democratic engagement has made public schools more responsive to the pedagogical, social, equity and public health needs of kids and communities.

(Whether it's more responsive to the needs of wealthy families is a very different question.)

But the speed with which these changes are being proposed and legislated undermines the ability of communities to grapple with the implications of these actions; to have a clear picture of the intentions behind them; to learn from experiences of other jurisdictions; and then to strategize and act — with the benefit of others' hindsight, and our own forethought.

While COVID-19 has upended our lives, it's also revealed like an X-Ray the systemic inadequacies, flaws and injustices that were invisible to a privileged handful, inconvenient for some, and utterly devastating for others. In many cases it's made those flaws worse for almost everyone — or at least impossible to ignore (or to afford a work-around). Though as was the case before the pandemic, even in recovery we're not "all in this together," as the subsequent shut-downs, reopening, and vaccine rollouts have demonstrated.

And still the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action have yet to be implemented, and teaching children about our shameful past and its ongoing presence is still seen in far too many jurisdictions as controversial or unnecessary.

We are in a moment where long-required progressive system renewal seems possible. But it is also abundantly clear that some elected representatives and decisionmakers are using the current and unprecedented disruption to inflict massive change to the programs and services on which we depend—changes that will erode the progress we have made; progress that we have a responsibility to continue making.

Centralized authority. Decentralized responsibility. Standardized, market-based approaches. Less funding. Fewer resources. Reduced opportunities for authentic engagement.

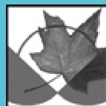
None of this is new. But the speed with which these changes are being threatened and implemented makes it even more difficult for communities to learn from each other about what the neoliberal catchphrases mean, and what has resulted from this restructuring. And, perhaps most importantly, how to prepare for the onslaught and the arguments...and organize against them.

There's no question we need to become much more adept at organizing and supporting each other across sectors and jurisdictions — and online platforms can play a pivotal role.

We also have to get much better at recognizing patterns as they evolve — looking for the similarities and the variations. And this is where a bit of distance and context is so important — the responsibility to know our history and the ability to read the early warning signs, to adapt to changing circumstances, to support each other throughout, to lay the groundwork for our necessary pushback...and, in that pushback, ensuring we are practicing the progressive principles we profess.

We can afford no less. And together we can achieve so much more.

Wishing you all a summer of recalibration, and a reclamation of space, time and personal and professional perspective.



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