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OUR SCHOOLS

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

OUR SELVES

21ST CENTURY
LEARNING INC.

SMALL SCHOOLS – A VIEW
FROM ATLANTIC CANADA

RETHINKING FUNDING
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION





**BLOG
TWEET
POST
DEFEND,
THE INDIGENOUS
RIGHTS
REVOLUTION
#IdleNoMore**

DUWAYNE BIRD

**INDIGENOUS RIGHTS
REVOLUTION**

OS
OS



BULLYING

Working
together
to break the
silence





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ERIKA SHAKER

Standing Up to Oppression — Inside and Outside the Classroom

Standing up against bullying and calling out and naming oppressors is taking on an even greater resonance these days.

Idle No More, a wide-ranging, grassroots movement, initiated by three Indigenous women and one settler ally is sweeping Canada and finding international support. It has given voice to thousands of Indigenous peoples and their allies frustrated with legislative, economic and policy decisions that do not reflect a commitment to collective justice, wellbeing or sustainability.

The grievances are not new. And neither is resistance to them. But Idle No More has managed to interrupt the seemingly impenetrable “business as usual” government approach to resource management, limited public consultation, and self-governance for First Nations. It has also shone a spotlight on resistance to change: from those in power to acknowledge how the most vulnerable among us are paying the largest price for systemic oppression, and those who might not “agree” with oppression (as, you know, a concept) but refuse to acknowledge how they themselves have benefitted and continue to benefit from it.

I’m currently writing this editorial from my seat on a train, speeding through the snow-covered countryside. And as I pass fields blanketed in white and marked with cross-country ski trails and lonely footprints under a watery blue sky, I’m reminded that while we live in a country

of profound and breathtaking beauty, it (barely) hides an ugly culture of unacknowledged oppression and racism that far too many people confront every day of their lives.

That racism spilled out into the cold light of day with increased media coverage of Idle No More and Chief Theresa Spence's fast in protest of the untenable conditions so many Indigenous peoples live with. The protests were called "disorganized", more of that "incessant complaining", and protestors were simply "unreasonable" (Jeffrey Simpson suggested that far too many Indigenous peoples are living in some kind of a "dream palace". Chief Spence's courageous stance was referred to as a "detox" (*National Post*) and "reduced caloric intake" (by the PMO) and her reputation as chief of Attawapiskat was dragged through the mud, while much was made of her "exorbitant" \$70,000 salary.

But through the smears, the "I'm just telling it like it is", "I'm not a racist but" commentary and the ignorance, Idle No More continued to capture the attention of thousands of Indigenous peoples and allies from coast to coast to coast and around the world. It has become a global movement intent on rewriting the rules around how power is shared, maintained and distributed; how decisions are made; how we ensure sustainability; how we care for each other; and how those in positions of power take responsibility for benefiting from the injustices upon which our society has been built.

Idle No More is not the subject of this issue of *Our Schools/Our Selves*. But it is tremendously important — a pivotal moment in how we "do" social change. It puts anti-oppression at the centre of any actions we take to improve and care for the world we share. And it serves as a reminder of how and in whose service privilege is used; who benefits from seemingly "apolitical" decisions; how we care for each other; who speaks; who listens (and who doesn't); how we need to learn how to be allies (a skill far too few people have), and how we can move forward together in a way that does not inadvertently or deliberately reproduce power imbalances. Nora Loreto provides additional background on the significance and successes of Idle No More, and deconstructs some of the tactics employed by the mainstream media and politicians to discredit the movement and its messages.

Power dynamics is the explicit focus of two articles about bullying in this issue; one by Clare Mian and one by Cassie Bell. Both provide thoughtful analysis about how bullying plays out in educational en-

vironments and how students and adults are impacted, and propose several solutions for identifying and working through oppressive situations that victimize the most vulnerable. As Cassie Bell explains: 'Examining and discussing race, gender, (dis)ability etc. and privilege within a framework of power is never easy precisely because it forces those with privilege and power to acknowledge they exist and question why they have them, however, it is just these types of self-reflective and critical discussions which must happen in order to effectively eliminate the "culture of silence".'

Len Wallace looks at the Quebec Student Strike, another recent and profoundly important example of how social movements can successfully fight back against oppressive policies that overwhelmingly impact some of the most vulnerable among us. And Diandra Jurkic-Walls provides a hilarious exploration of the way in which job markets are increasingly letting

down young people who are already indebted by the defunding of the higher education system. My BC-based colleague, Iglia Ivanova, examines the economic impact of the underfunding of higher education and reminds us of the economic and social benefits we reap when we publicly invest in education and other forms of social infrastructure to ensure their accessibility and viability.

Other articles in this issue explore the relationship between vulnerable students and schools and the education community. David Komljenovic examines at the recent BC Supreme Court ruling on Special Needs Education. Gail Stromquist looks at Indigenous kindergarten programs. Vana Pistiolis discusses how the role of school fundraising

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and private money deepens existing inequalities, disproportionately impacting students and schools who already have less. She explains: “the equity gap is widening and an equal educational opportunity is not being provided for all students. If this trend continues, not only is the public education system in real danger of becoming privatized, the model of critical thinking that defines our democratic values today will eventually be lost.”

It’s not as though we have no research on or practical experience in designing schools and curriculum that respond to the needs of parents, teachers, students, and quality education. In fall 2010 David Chudnovsky talked about the BC-based initiative “The Great Schools Project,” and now provides an update for readers, along with a Toolkit for School Evaluation and Assessment to help communities determine how and if schools are meeting their broad needs.

Michael Corbett also provides insight into the relationship between schools and their surroundings by examining the impact of closing small schools on their communities. “Rural citizens have watched what has happened to their neighbors and they know what the loss of a school means. Once the school is closed, the community is never the same again, and in rural communities where services have been cut time and again, the school is often the last remaining public institution.... In the case of village and small town elementary schools, it is the place where the children of the community come together for at least a brief period in their childhoods. It is in school where these children effectively become integrated into life in the community.”

In spite of what we know, and what common sense tells us about the importance of creating schools that respond to the needs of kids and communities, and the deeply personal relationships communities develop with their schools, we still confront the mindset that sees schools first as part of a highly profitable “knowledge sector”. Donald Gutstein and Tara Ehrcke discuss, respectively, the growing role that the education corporation Pearson is playing in Canadian schools, assessment and curriculum; and the technology-laden, corporate-backed 21st Century Learning model calling for a sweeping overhaul of schools that promises even more privatization.

Sheelah McLean reviews *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education* which “provides students with a crucial power analysis which critiques the social, political and

economic inequities in our society today.” Sheelah makes explicit links between this book and the experience of her students: “In Canada, our historical context has been shaped by the colonial relationship between Indigenous peoples and white-settler society.” Given the current political context, the need to teach anti-racism in such a way that it identifies the “impact of white-settler invasion on Indigenous peoples and lands, as central to our understanding of colonial identity making practices that (re)produce markers of sexuality, gender, race, class and other subjectivities has never been more important.”

And in his Roundup Larry Kuehn provides an overview of events in the education world ranging from the provision of Special Education to the “slow death of playtime,” to an increase in education funding in some American states.

The Public, a fantastic design group in Toronto, contributed the cover art for this issue. And I want to also acknowledge the incredibly talented Dwayne Bird who designed the Idle No More graphic on the inside front cover of this issue of *OS/OS*. Dwayne is Creative Director at Birdwire Media Inc., and as an Aboriginal entrepreneur and professional, he works to steadily progress the advancement and storytelling of Aboriginal people through the digital medium.

Finally, my thanks to Nancy Reid who is, as always, a pleasure to work with, and who makes every issue of *OS/OS* a visual feast.

ERIKA SHAKER is Executive Editor of *Our Schools/Our Selves*.



The Public is an activist design studio specializing in changing the world.

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