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# Policy Brief

## ***Finding a Place for Race at the Policy Table: Broadening the Indigenous Education Discourse in Canada***

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*by*

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## Introduction

A significant challenge facing those working in education today is the gap between Indigenous<sup>1</sup> and non-Indigenous educational achievement. With increasing globalization – the logics of which contribute to ever-increasing numbers of Indigenous people living in cities across the country – educational attention is paid not only to improving the performance of Indigenous students in order that they might better participate in Canada’s economy but also to effectively managing the difference that Indigenous students represent in the schooling context. The predominant approach to addressing both the education gap and difference has been a focus on culture. Prevalent in educational research since the 1970s and in policy making since the 1980s, this focus on culture derives from two separate streams of thinking: on the one hand, a theory of cultural discontinuity, and on the other hand, ideas related to liberal multiculturalism.

This policy brief critiques the predominant and often problematic focus on culture. It argues that culture, segregated from the ‘academic’ curriculum and added on in non-challenging ways, not only ignominiously ignores the fundamental epistemological foundations of what it means to be Indigenous, it also renders indistinct a historical and contemporary experience of racialization in the Canadian context. Referring to recent studies including my own research, this brief offers that the issue of race is a relevant problem for urban Indigenous youth – and one to which provincial ministries of education fail to respond. Although the racism that Indigenous peoples experience, producing both material and psychological effects, is a

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<sup>1</sup> By *Indigenous*, I refer to the diverse individuals and groups who make up the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, referred to by Sec. 35 (2) of the Constitution Act, 1982. In keeping with the language commonly used by Indigenous peoples themselves, I also use the term *Native* throughout the paper.

longstanding issue in the Canadian context,<sup>2</sup> it receives little or no direct attention in the realm of educational policy making.<sup>3</sup> This also leaves unexamined the often-unintended effects of programming that places youth in a position whereby they are encouraged to reclaim Indigenous identities that are predicated on historic and current practices of racialization.

## Background: Educational Policy and Indigenous Peoples

Various historians have argued that education for Native peoples in Canada, from the latter part of the nineteenth century through to the late 1960s, was based on the idea of assimilation.<sup>4</sup> Others emphasize that, rather than facilitate equitable assimilation, residential schooling and the substandard academic education it provided was meant to prepare Indian youth to occupy the lowest socio-economic echelons of Canadian society.<sup>5</sup> In either case, by the middle of the twentieth century, federal policy shifted and

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<sup>2</sup> Verna St. Denis and Eber Hampton, *Literature Review on Racism and the Effects on Aboriginal Education* (Ottawa: Minister’s Working Group on Education, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> An exception is the 2005 *A Canada for All: Canada’s Action Plan Against Racism* (Gatineau: Canadian Heritage), an initiative, meant to combat racism across a handful of federal government departments. No similar plan has been formulated by any of Canada’s provinces or territories.

<sup>4</sup> James Rodger Miller, *Shingwauk’s vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). See also: Brian E. Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986) and John L. Tobias, “Protection, Civilization, Assimilation: An Outline History of Canada’s Indian Policy”, *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology*, 6, no. 2, (1976), 13-30.

<sup>5</sup> Jean Barman, “Separate and unequal: Indian and White girls in All Hallows School, 1884-1920”, Jean Barman, Yvonne Hebert and Don McCaskill (eds.), *Indian Education in Canada, The Legacy - Vol. 1* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986), 110-31.

many Indian children began to be integrated into public schools. Subsequent high rates of failure for these children became more clearly visible in this era.<sup>6</sup>

The release of the policy paper *Indian Control over Indian Education*<sup>7</sup> spawned a new dawn in education for Indigenous peoples. Low levels of educational achievement began to be addressed in part through a focus on culture, a direction tied to a larger movement of Indigenous cultural revitalization. Realizing that colonization has complex and traumatic impacts – from the perversion of identity<sup>8</sup> to the dispossession of land and resources<sup>9</sup> – many considered cultural revitalization a way to foster respect for the Indigenous peoples of Canada, reinstitute pride in Native people themselves, and provide the means for achieving self-government and healthy Native economies and communities. This shift in policy and practice – from ‘trying to eradicate the Indian in Indian youth’ to revitalizing cultural traditions and practices – extended to the realm of schooling.

For some First Nation, Métis and Inuit individuals, education has proven to be a liberating force, leading to self-sufficiency and more equitable participation in Canadian society. However, now, nearly four decades later, too many Native students

remain unsuccessful in school, often leaving without even a high school diploma. In the face of an inability to overcome the serious gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners, it is necessary to examine strategies tied to cultural discontinuity and liberal multiculturalism – two predominant forces informing educational initiatives for Indigenous students in the twenty-first century. Each is examined in turn.

### **The Cultural Discontinuity Hypothesis**

Cultural discontinuity stems from the idea that minority children raised in a culture of their own face disjuncture when entering a school system that reflects the culture of the majority. Thus, different language usage and socialization patterns among culturally and linguistically diverse students, when incongruent with the teacher’s style of interaction, are used to explain relatively poor academic achievement.<sup>10</sup> Even in the face of decreasing Native language use and lack of familiarity with traditional cultural practices among Indigenous learners, the cultural discontinuity hypothesis holds that, by acknowledging culturally based differences related to communication and interaction styles, educational inequalities can be overcome.

Because cultural discontinuity is a predominant lens through which the experience of Indigenous students is examined, many policy papers and commission reports advocate a greater focus on culture as the means to address the education gap.<sup>11</sup> In such research, however, participants themselves raise the challenge of racism as a key issue. Recent studies in

<sup>6</sup> Harry Bertram Hawthorn, *A Survey of Contemporary Indians in Canada: A Report on Economic, Political, Educational Needs and Policies - Vol. 1* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1966/67).

<sup>7</sup> National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations, *Indian Control of Indian Education: Statement of the Indian Philosophy of Education* (Ottawa: Author, 1973).

<sup>8</sup> Robert F. Berkhofer, “White Conceptions of Indians”, Wilcomb E. Washburn (ed.), *Handbook of North American Indians - Vol. 4* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1978), 522-547

<sup>9</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Susan Ledlow “Is Cultural Discontinuity an Adequate Explanation for Dropping Out?”, *Journal of American Indian Education*, 31, no. 3 (1992), 21-36.

<sup>11</sup> Jim Silver, Kathy Mallett, Janice Greene, Freeman Simard, *Aboriginal Education in Winnipeg Inner City High Schools* (Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2002).

Calgary and Edmonton<sup>12</sup> find that racism and discrimination are the most serious issues facing Indigenous youth, having detrimental effects on quality of life. A study I conducted among a group of urban Native youth in a prairie city produced similar findings.<sup>13</sup>

In 1996, after many years of turning to culture to address early school leaving among Indigenous learners, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples noted that:

The majority of Aboriginal youth do not complete high school. They leave the school system without the requisite skills for employment, and without the language and cultural knowledge of their people. Rather than nurturing the individual, the schooling experience typically erodes identity and self-worth. Those who continue in Canada's formal education systems told us of regular encounters with racism, racism

expressed not only in interpersonal exchanges but also through the denial of Aboriginal values, perspectives and cultures in the curriculum and the life of the institution.<sup>14</sup>

The focus on cultural continuity in schools is now more than three decades old. After all this time, we should expect achievement gaps to be vastly improved and the issue of cultural identity to be of much less concern than it was in the early 1970s. Yet the statistics belie this expectation. In 2006, two out of three (66%) Aboriginal persons aged 25 to 64 completed high school; this compares to a national average of 85%. Data show that Aboriginal students living on-reserve complete high school at a lower rate than do their counterparts in urban areas; however, in both instances completion rates are lower than for Canada's non-Aboriginal population. Aboriginal people are also much less likely to have a university degree (8%) than are their non-Aboriginal counterparts (23%). Despite the fact that there are more Aboriginal people with a university degree than in any prior Census year, the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people holding university degrees has actually widened since the previous Census.<sup>15</sup>

St. Denis<sup>16</sup> interrogates the notion that an exclusive focus on culture will lead to enhanced educational improvement, arguing

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<sup>12</sup> UTAF, *Final Report*; City of Calgary, *Removing Barriers: A Listening Circle 1999-2000 – A Consultation Report* (Calgary: Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative Business, Planning Research and Marketing Department, 2000); "Focus group consultations express the sentiment that there is an invisible hierarchy of racism in both Canada and Edmonton, with Aboriginals at the bottom", John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, *Building a Human Rights City: Edmonton's Progress and Road Ahead - The Human Rights City Edmonton Project* (Edmonton: Author, 2007), 12.

<sup>13</sup> Tracy L. Friedel, "Urban Indigenous Youths' Perspectives on Identity, Place and Place-based Learning and the Implications for Education," *Unpublished doctoral dissertation* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 2008). Ten youth aged 14 to 16 and of Cree (*Nèhiyawak*), Iroquois-Cree, Cree-Métis, Métis, and/or Blackfoot (*Piikáni*), participated in this study, the context of which was a summer and fall place-based educational program especially designed for urban Native youth. While this sample is limited, the perspectives of participants regarding challenges in education share much in common with studies such as UATF (2007) and Canadian Heritage (2007).

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<sup>14</sup> RCAP, "Gathering Strength", 434. Many of the issues raised by RCAP participants in the 1990's remain paramount today. A recent report by Paul Cappon states: "The challenges First Nations, Inuit and Métis face exceed those facing non-Aboriginal people." Paul Cappon, *Measuring Success in First Nations, Inuit and Métis Learning: Policy Options* (Ottawa: Canadian Council on Learning, 2008), 60.

<sup>15</sup> Source: Statistics Canada, *Educational Portrait of Canada, 2006 Census* Catalogue No. 97-560-X (Ottawa: Minister of Technology, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Verna St. Denis, "Exploring the Socio-cultural Production of Aboriginal Identities: Implications for Education", *Unpublished doctoral dissertation* (San Francisco: Stanford University, 2002).



that this policy direction is the continuance of a long history of ineffective policy shifts that misconstrue the problems in Aboriginal education. It is often assumed that learning about ‘culture’ in schools<sup>17</sup> is a viable solution to the oppression that Native students face. In addition to concerns about how culture is interpreted, for the most part, this emphasis in education disregards obstacles such as racism and poverty.

This policy focus also ignores complex issues concerning identity – an issue that continues to encumber Canada’s Indigenous youth in the twenty-first century. In the context of generations of oppression, a focus on ‘culture’ in dominant educational realms can serve to essentialize Indigenous students. Hermes submits: “teaching beadwork or Native dance without a deeper cultural context can intersect with mainstream stereotypes of students’ notions of equating a Native identity with these traditions.”<sup>18</sup> An examination of how racialization may be perpetuated through curriculum and how this links to educational policy focused on ‘culture’ is thus vitally important.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Hermes, “Complicating discontinuity: What About Poverty?”, *Curriculum Inquiry* 35, no. 1 (2005), 23. In keeping with Hermes’ critique, I enclose the word culture in single quotation marks not to indicate depth of meaning; rather, it is to reflect the problematic way that culture is employed in educational and other realms.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 10. In a classroom-based study situated in Hawaii, Kaomea argues that, in the context of historically oppressed and traditionally marginalized communities, seemingly benign or progressive instructional efforts such as the adoption of a culture-focused curriculum can have unanticipated, counterproductive, and hegemonic effects. Julie Kaomea, “A Curriculum of Aloha: Colonialism and Tourism in Hawaii’s Elementary Textbooks,” *Curriculum Inquiry*, 30, no. 3 (2000).

### **Liberal Multiculturalism: Constructing Difference, Erasing Race**

Moving from the cultural discontinuity hypothesis to broader strategies, the focus on cultural difference in Canada’s public schools extends far beyond Indigenous peoples, emanating as it does from liberal multicultural citizenship theory.<sup>19</sup> As an educational project, liberal multiculturalism has been widely accepted as contributing to social justice. However cultural theorists such as Bannerji<sup>20</sup> criticize recognition of cultural differences in Canada’s brand of liberal multiculturalism on the basis of its ignoring issues of unequal power. Describing Canada as an unsettled ground of contested hegemonies, Bannerji contends that such a theory of recognition is part of a larger ideology of governing, used by elites to organize communities on the basis of racialized ethnicities without ever having to address Canada’s history of deeply rooted White supremacy and racism.<sup>21</sup> In Canada’s imagining of itself as a cultural mosaic,<sup>22</sup> racism is ignored and tolerance is mobilized.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) and Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> Himani Bannerji, “On the Dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of ‘Canada’.” In Himani Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2000), 87-124.

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of such history, see Constance Backhouse, “The Historical Construction of Racial Identity and Implications for Reconciliation”, *Ethnocultural, Racial, Religious, and Linguistic Diversity and Identity Seminar*. (Halifax: Canadian Heritage, 2001). Available on-line at [www.metropolis.net](http://www.metropolis.net)

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Statistics Canada. *Canada’s Ethnocultural Portrait: The Changing Mosaic* (Ottawa: Author, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Similar to Bannerji, critical ethnographer Mackey is critical of this institutionalization of difference in Canadian society, concluding that Canadian multiculturalism is a Western project

Understanding how difference is constructed in Canada is urgently important. As sociologist Razack argues in analyzing racialized and sexualized violence against Aboriginal women and women of other minority groups:

Cultural differences perform the same function as a more biological notion of race (for example, the idea that Black people have smaller brains) once did: they mark inferiority. A message of racial inferiority is now more likely to be coded in the language of culture rather than biology.<sup>24</sup>

Cultural politics are highly relevant for thinking about education for today's Indigenous youth. Culture designated as 'Other' is highly visible in Canadian life, arguably most evident in schools. The cultures of 'Others', on display as "fragments of folklore, food, dancing, music and customs,"<sup>25</sup> have become *part of* a larger Canadian culture and identity (singular) based upon Western liberalism and its "concepts of individualism, equality, rationality, universality and progress."<sup>26</sup> This emphasis on 'culture' is not about making Indigenous logic systems core to the nation's enacted identity.<sup>27</sup> Rather, the

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underpinned by power and dominance and functioning through: "liberal, inclusionary, pluralistic, multiple and fragmented formulations and practices concerning culture and difference." Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999/2002), 5.

<sup>24</sup> Sherene Razack, *Looking White People In The Eye: Gender, Race, and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 19.

<sup>25</sup> Mackey, *House of Difference*, 89.

<sup>26</sup> Mackey, *House of Difference*, 157.

<sup>27</sup> In response to a long history of racialization of Canada's Indigenous peoples, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples produced a description of Aboriginal group identity based on a multitude of factors including culture. The RCAP report describes Indigenous identity as

tendency is for local knowledges to be thought of as superficial, unchanging, and located in the past.<sup>28</sup> Not only does Canada's contemporary national identity ignore the philosophical and spiritual premise of diverse Indigenous knowledges and practices, it disavows a long history of racialized oppression and inequities in the present.

Rather than talk about identities in trivialized ways in educational realms based upon superficial notions of cultural difference, a critical focus on processes of identity construction is needed for a fuller understanding of what underlies the education gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth. When thinking about these processes, it is necessary to recognize the fact that, very often, identities have been defined not by colonized people themselves but rather by colonizers. In the context of uneven power, identity, like 'culture', is construed of as homogeneous, static and essentialized – while the long history of racializing Indigenous people, constructing them as inferior, is ignored.<sup>29</sup>

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based upon collective life, history, ancestry, culture, values, traditions and ties to the land, *People to People, Nation to Nation: Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Author, 1996), <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ap/pubs/rpt/rpt-eng.asp>

<sup>28</sup> Marie Battiste, *Indigenous Knowledge and Pedagogy in First Nations Education: A Literature Review with Recommendations* (Ottawa: National Working Group on Education and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2002); Michael Marker, "After the Whalehunt: Indigenous Knowledge and Limits to Multicultural Discourse," *Urban Education* 42, no. 2 (2006).

<sup>29</sup> As Backhouse argues: "We cannot begin to debate strategies and devise policies to eradicate racism if we remain ignorant of the pervasive history of racism in Canada. Societies are not shaped by accident. The level of white privilege that exists today within the Canadian political framework, economic structure, social landscape and legal system is not the result of white merit. It is the direct result of individual and systemic



## Bringing Race Back to the Table: Opportunities and Challenges

In spite of the ubiquity of Indigenous youth in urban areas,<sup>30</sup> their experience remains largely ignored in scholarly, and to an even greater extent, policy discourse. It is clear that this segment of Canadian society continues to be challenged by racism both within and outside the formal school setting.<sup>31</sup> Race, understood as a complex of politically contested social meanings,<sup>32</sup> is profoundly relevant to understanding a plethora of contemporary social issues affecting Canada's Native peoples – whether youth homelessness, deep poverty among Aboriginal women and their children, youth suicide, high rates of unemployment, Aboriginal people's health status, the incarceration and gang involvement of Native youth; or school dropout.<sup>33</sup> A review

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race discrimination. Backhouse, "The Historical Construction of Racial Identity and Implications for Reconciliation." (p. 21)

<sup>30</sup> In 2006 54% of Canada's Aboriginal people lived in urban areas. The Aboriginal population is younger than the non-Aboriginal population and this gap is expected to grow even larger. Currently, almost half (48%) of Canada's Aboriginal population consists of children and youth aged 24 and under, compared with less than one-third (31%) of the non-Aboriginal population (see Margaret Michalowski, Shirley Loh, Ravi B.P. Verma, Marie-France Germain and Claude Grenier. *Projections of the Aboriginal populations: Canada, Provinces and Territories 2001 to 2017*. Catalogue no. 91-547-XIE. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> See Urban Aboriginal Task Force, *Urban Aboriginal Task Force: Final Report* (Ontario: Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, Ontario Métis Aboriginal Association and Ontario Native Women's Association, 2007), 23.

<sup>32</sup> As a concept, Michael Omi and Howard Winant describe race as "an unstable and 'decentered' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle", *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul Inc. 1986), 68.

<sup>33</sup> Debra Sider, *A Sociological Analysis of Root Causes of Aboriginal Homelessness in Sioux*

of the literature describes the racism that Aboriginal students experience as complex: racism as curricular expression, as verbal and psychological abuse, as low expectations/self-fulfilling prophecy, as social marginalization and/or isolation, as denial of professional support and/or attention, and as rules and procedures to facilitate failure.<sup>34</sup>

Racialization<sup>35</sup> has been shown to be a fundamental principle by which social relationships are organized both at the micro (identity) and macro (structural) levels; the

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*Lookout, Ontario* (Toronto: The Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2005); Mylène Jaccoud and Renée Brassard, "The Marginalization of Indigenous Women in Montreal", David Newhouse & Evelyn Peters (eds.), *Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Policy Research Initiative, 2003), 131-145; Laurence J. Kirmayer, Gregory M. Brass, Tara Holton, Ken Paul, Cori Simpson and Caroline Tait, *Suicide Among Aboriginal People in Canada* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2007); Wesley Crichlow, "Western Colonization as Disease: Native Adoption & Cultural Genocide", *Critical Social Work*, 3, no. 1 (2003), 88-107; Jacqueline Luffman and Deborah Sussman, "The Aboriginal Labour Force in Western Canada", *Perspectives on Labour and Income* (2007). See also Carol La Prairie and Phillip Stenning, "Exile on Main Street: Some Thoughts on Aboriginal Overrepresentation in the Criminal Justice System", David Newhouse & Evelyn Peters (eds.), *Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples*, 179-193; Michael Mendelson, *Aboriginal Peoples and Postsecondary Education in Canada* (Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, 2006); Policy Research Initiatives, *Aboriginal Youth in Canada: Emerging Issues, Research Priorities, and Policy Implications – Report of the Roundtable on Aboriginal Youth* (Ottawa: Author, 2008); Canadian Council on Learning, *Students on the Move: Ways to Address the Impact of Mobility among Aboriginal Students* (Ottawa: Author, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> St. Denis and Hampton, *Literature Review on Racism*.

<sup>35</sup> Omi & Winant, *Racial Formation*, 61.

diversion of attention to what are superficial notions of ‘culture’ has the effect of perpetuating current inequities.

### **Recommendation: Critique current indigenous identity discourses**

Part of what needs to be done to eradicate the racism aimed at Indigenous people today is to critique discourses associated with Indigenous identity. One such discourse is historic ‘authenticity,’ “a powerful and shifting set of ideas that worked in a variety of ways towards a variety of ends.”<sup>36</sup> Closely tied to the myth of the vanishing Indian<sup>37</sup> and notions of Native people as uncivilized /White people as civilized, authenticity served in the nineteenth century to delimit opportunities for Indigenous peoples by advancing, for instance, the idea that Aboriginal cultures and identity were incompatible with urban residence and that urban migration marked a decision by Indigenous people to leave behind ‘who they are.’<sup>38</sup> These notions resonate today, to the detriment of a multitude of urban Indigenous youth attempting to navigate the contested terrain of identity constructions. St. Denis argues that authenticity in the contemporary context imposes a cultural absolutism on the Native ‘Other’, thus encouraging particular forms of cultural restoration.<sup>39</sup> The current

emphasis in schools on teaching authentic notions of ‘culture’ encourages Native students to affiliate with a racialized identity – one equated with perverse stereotypes produced in the colonial era. Such an identity also proves highly deficient in forwarding any sort of understanding of the profound sagaciousness of Indigenous peoples’ place-based experience.

Marker offers a complex analysis of cultural inclusion in today’s public schools, making it starkly clear that deep-seated Indigenous knowledges and claims to a pre-colonial identity pose epistemic challenges for liberal multicultural schooling.<sup>40</sup> We should therefore view the current emphasis on ‘culture’ in schools as not only unproductive but as also potentially supporting racist ideas when the emphasis is on romanticized notions (for example, Indigenous people as exotic, or as hunters only in the past). This should also lead us to ask not only whether the current, exclusive focus on ‘culture’ is ineffectual, but whether it serves even to worsen the outcomes for Indigenous students.

### **Recommendation: Anti-racist education**

Beyond a critique of identity, and related to this ‘culture’ and fundamentalism in the context of an incessant education gap and tensions surrounding Indigenous identity, what is needed is a much more complete examination of the ongoing challenge of racism for Indigenous youth.

A shift in policy making that acknowledges the role of racialization and racism in producing difference and educational failure<sup>41</sup> supports the rights of Indigenous peoples specifically and the goals of anti-

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<sup>36</sup> Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth Century Northwest Coast* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>37</sup> Robert F. Berkhofer, “White Conceptions of Indians,” Wilcomb E. Washburn (ed.), *Handbook of North American Indians – Vol. 4* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1978).

<sup>38</sup> Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*. David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters make the point that when Aboriginal people move into cities often they are traveling within their traditional territories, “Introduction”, in David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters (Eds.), *Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Policy Research Initiative, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> Verna St. Denis, “Real Indians: Cultural Revitalization and Fundamentalism in

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Aboriginal Education”, Carol Schick, JoAnne Jaffe and Alisa M. Watkinson (eds.), *Contesting Fundamentalisms* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2004), 35-47.

<sup>40</sup> Marker, “After the Whalehunt”.

<sup>41</sup> Schick & St. Denis, “Troubling Nationalist Discourses in Anti-racist Curricular Planning,” *Canadian Journal of Education* 28, no. 3 (2005).



oppression more broadly. An example of such a policy is Ontario's Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119, the "*Development and implementation of school board policies on anti-racism and ethnocultural equity*," enacted in 1993 in response to the Yonge Street Riots of 1992<sup>42</sup>. The policy required that all school boards in Ontario develop a race relations policy and outline its specific parameters. Policies were vetted by a Race and Ethnocultural Equity Unit within the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training to ensure that these went "beyond a broad focus on multiculturalism and race relations to focus on identifying and changing institutional policies and procedures, as well as individual behaviours and practices that may be racist in their impact."<sup>43</sup> This dynamic and insightful policy was meant to expose the roots of the racialized oppression that young people endure. Yet the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training's *Anti-Racism, Access and Equity Division* disappeared soon after the election in 1995, resulting in "a decline in anti-racist initiatives at the government/ ministerial levels in Ontario" and also at the district level.<sup>44</sup>

The current version of Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119,<sup>45</sup> entitled "*Developing and implementing equity and inclusive education policies in Ontario schools*" purports to recognize the effects of racism regarding educational outcomes. However, the formal move away from anti-

racist education is important because, as Dei describes, "we cannot simply collapse anti-racist work into the 'human/social relations' paradigm (e.g. liberal notions of 'social justice for all')."

Concerns about the shift away from an explicit focus on anti-racism and towards less direct notions of diversity, inclusion and citizenship are warranted.<sup>46</sup> In a general assessment of the policy post-1997, Dei surmises that, "By and large the policy has been toothless except, perhaps, in individual cases where school boards have a strong commitment to anti-racism."<sup>47</sup> Without explicit policy attention to the matter of race in schools, it falls upon individual educators and school boards to address the reality of the hierarchies of race that exist in Canadian society. The challenge of racism, as with all oppressions, is that it operates not only at the level of the individual and the institution, but at the level of ideology and structure as well. Given this, the efforts of random well-intentioned teachers and school boards, although admirable, will be limited in terms of creating any sort of longstanding systemic change.

## Conclusion

A critical anti-racist education that connects with class, gender and other oppressions is a necessary response to the failure of education's promise of equal opportunity through liberal principles such as meritocracy. The interminable education gap that separates Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians calls for politicizing schooling for all students specifically in relation to race, for engaging in practices that directly confront the structural and ideological sources of racialized oppression and group inequities. Critical anti-racist education offers the means to critique how

<sup>42</sup> George J. Dei, "Communicating Across the Tracks: Challenges for Anti-racist Educators in Ontario today", *Orbit*, 33, no. 3 (2003), 2-5.

<sup>43</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education, *Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* (Toronto: Ministry of Education, 1993), 7,

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curriculum/antiraci/antire.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Dei, "Communicating Across the Tracks", 3.

<sup>45</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/119.html>

<sup>46</sup> Marker has described the stark limits of equity discourses for Indigenous students in the context of cultural revitalization. Marker, "After the Whalehunt".

<sup>47</sup> Dei, "Communicating Across the Tracks", 3.

identities are constructed in Canada, how liberal notions and racialized discourses influence these constructions, and how these constructions underpin the ongoing oppression of Indigenous peoples and their knowledges.

Canada has recently received a series of rebukes from the United Nations for its lack of progress in addressing discrimination against women and Aboriginal peoples.<sup>48</sup> As an educational approach, critical anti-racism enables schools to directly confront the reality of racialized oppression. Certainly, there are multiple challenges to shifting to such an emphasis – the largest impediment being the disproportionate political, economic and social power the predominant identity of Whiteness continues to carry in education and elsewhere.<sup>49</sup> Despite these challenges, engaging both the history and the present of race and racism through curriculum, instruction, and schooling practices more generally is requisite if we are to have any chance at fostering vital systems of dynamic, complex Indigenous knowledge in educational realms.

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<sup>48</sup> United Nations Human Rights Committee, *Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee in relation to the report submitted by Canada under Article 40 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations, 2005).

<sup>49</sup> Paul Carr and Tom Klassen, “Institutional Barriers to the Implementation of Anti-racist Education: A Case Study of the Secondary Education: A Case Study of the Secondary System in a Large, Racially Diverse, Urban School Board”, *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations*, 12, no. 1 (1997), 46-68. For a discussion of Whiteness as a key concept for sociological analyses, see Raka Shome, “Whiteness and the Politics of Location: Postcolonial Reflections,” Thomas K. Nakayama and Judith N. Martin (eds.), *Whiteness: The communication of social identity* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 108.