

**University of Alberta**

Gaps and Tensions Within Reconciliation in Secondary Education: A Review of Current  
Literature

by

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## **Abstract**

I first set out to write this paper as a policy analysis on the revised Alberta Education Teaching Quality Standards (TQS), which has become one of the central policies in secondary schools to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action. I wanted to analyze the policy to understand what is clearly stated and what is missing, and how this might impact how secondary schools are currently practicing reconciliation. As I reviewed the literature related to reconciliation and decolonization in education, I found that the literature in these areas presented some gaps and tensions. In light of this, I found it to be important to shift my focus. In response to the literature, the purpose of this paper will be to provide a review of the literature on reconciliation and decolonization as they relate to secondary education.

## **Keywords**

Literature review, education, Reconciliation in school contexts, Decolonization, Indigenous perspective, Indigenous theoretical framework.

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## Introduction

As a Cree and Metis woman currently working as an Indigenous graduation coach, and who previously worked as a secondary school teacher, reconciliation and decolonization policy and practices within secondary education is of great interest and concern to me. Having experienced some of the hardships many Indigenous students face within education systems and institutions, such as racism and low expectations, I was excited to see changes such as the revised Teaching Quality Standards (TQS) come into the educational landscape. Yet, some years after the TRC calls to action and the implementation of the revised TQS, I see little in the way of meaningful change. As more Indigenous people and scholars begin to question reconciliation as the way forward, I am left wondering if reconciliation will lead us to where we need to go. Speaking for myself, if the path does not lead towards decolonizing education and Indigenous resurgence or revitalization, it brings to question if it is just a new path with colonization and imperialism as the same destination.

The purpose of this paper will be to provide a review of the literature on reconciliation and decolonization as they relate to secondary education. I believe that this is important as the literature on these topics has expanded within the years since the TRC was released, and it is vital that we understand what is being discussed in the literature and what is being missed. As academic discourse often influences policy and practice within secondary education, we need to critically question what we are discussing, how we are discussing it, and whose voices we are privileging within the discussion. Battiste (2017) notes,

What was made clear to me was that education, like the institutions and societies it derives from, is neither culturally neutral nor fair. Rather, education is a culturally and socially constructed institution for an imagined context with purposes defined by those

who are privileged to be the deciders, and their work has not always been for the benefit of the masses. Education has its roots in a patriarchal, Eurocentric society, complicit with multiple forms of oppression of women, sometimes men, children, minorities, and Indigenous peoples” (p.159).

As colonization and imperialism are embedded deeply within our society, we must continually ask critical questions to ensure we know where we are heading and to avoid causing the same harm in new ways.

As I journey through this paper, I will begin with the theoretical framework that I employed for this review. I also provide some reasoning for my choice of the theoretical framework and the contributions I hope to make with this paper. This is followed by a literature review, categorized into headings to highlight background information, areas of tension, and gaps within the literature. Weaving in my personal experiences and stories, I discuss the findings from my review of the literature. My goal is that my personal perspective will provide some context to the literature review through an Indigenous lens.

### **Cree Theoretical Framework**

Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, especially from my own Cree ancestral knowing, weaved with personal stories and experiences, and a decolonial focus makes up the Cree theoretical framework I will be using in this paper. To begin to explain the Cree theoretical framework I am using, I must first explain some key aspects of epistemology and ontology. Shawn Wilson (2001) states, “[. . .]knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all of creation” (p. 176). This relationality makes up a large part of Indigenous epistemology and ontology. Shawn Wilson (2008) explains this further, stating, “reality is relationships or sets of relationships”(p.73). He contextualizes this through the example of the Cree language in which

“objects themselves are not named; rather what they might be used for is described” (S. Wilson, 2008, p. 73). This relationality is connected to many other aspects of Indigenous epistemology, including respect. Linda Tuhiawi Smith shares,

the term ‘respect’ is consistently used by indigenous peoples to underscore the significance of our relationships and humanity. Through respect the place of everyone and everything in the universe is kept in balance and harmony. Respect is a reciprocal, shared, constantly interchanging principle which is expressed through all aspects of social conduct.” (Smith, 2012, p.125).

Alex Wilson shares the following on Cree epistemology,

In our traditional spirituality, we find guidance in a Great Mystery, that is, that we are connected to everything by spiritual energy, joining us in a limitless circle that encompasses the past, present, and future. Following from this are the Cree principles of *kakinow ni wagomakanak* (we are in relationship with the land, waters, plants, animals and other living creatures), *a-kha ta neekanenni miso-an* (we are all equally important), *sakihiwawin* (a commitment to act in ways that express love), and *mino pimatisiwin* (we are responsible to live in conscious connection with the land and living things in a way that creates and sustains balance – or, as my father translates from our dialect, to live beautifully). We understand that the nature of the cosmos is to be in balance and that when balance is disturbed, it must and will return. (A. Wilson, 2015, p.1)

These explanations on relationality, respect, and balance help to form the Cree theoretical framework for this study.

In using a Cree theoretical framework, I am also incorporating my own experiences as well as the experiences and knowledge of my family and community, which have been given to

me through stories. Kovach explains, “stories ... are the relational glue in a socially interdependent knowledge system” (Kovach, 2009, p. 108). It is beyond the scope of this paper to speak in-depth about the importance of stories, but other scholars such as Jo-Ann Archibald (2008) have shared more about this. For now, I will simply state that the stories and experiences I carry will frame how I understand the literature, which ideas I privilege, and which voices I am attuned to.

A decolonial focus is also incorporated into the theoretical framework. This is largely in response to the history of research and the ongoing colonization and imperialism, which continue to shape the systems we must exist within. As Linda Tuhiawi Smith shares, “the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary.” (2012, p. 1). Smith explains further, “research is an important part of the colonization process because it is concerned with defining legitimate knowledge.” (Smith, 2012, p. 175). Research is not the only area impacted by colonialism and imperialism, secondary education systems also continue to be vital sites for this. In light of this, I acknowledge that I will also be using a decolonizing lens that is largely inspired by the works of Marie Battiste (2008, 2013), Tuck and Yang (2012) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012). In this, I do not view decolonization as a metaphor but as a vital approach. In relation to theory, Smith shares,

Decolonization, however, does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes (2012, p. 41)

### **Theoretical Framework Purpose and Reasoning**

Smith (2012) states, “research is an important part of the colonization process because it is concerned with defining legitimate knowledge.” (Smith, 2012, p. 175). Conducting research as an Indigenous graduate student, I am called to do this work in a good way which honors my personal integrity, my ancestral Indigenous knowledge systems, and all my relations. Inspired by Indigenous scholars across the world, who are entering into research from their own Indigenous epistemologies and ethics, I seek to utilize a theoretical framework that allows me draw upon my ancestral knowledge in a way that honours that knowledge and allows me to view issues in ways that account for all my relations. In choosing a Cree theoretical framework, I heed the words of Indigenous scholars such as Cora Weber-Pillwax (2001), who shares,

Any research that I do must not destroy or in any way negatively impact or compromise my own personal integrity as a person, as a human being. This integrity is based on how I contextualize myself in my community, with my family and my people, and eventually how I contextualize myself in the planet, with the rest of all living systems and things (p. 168)

Brayboy and Deyhle (2000) state that it is important to ask the following questions, “Why are you doing this research? and Who will benefit from the results?” (p. 163). Intentions are important here, as Meyer (2008) states, “intention shapes our language and creates our realities” (p. 10). All of this is important to attend to if I am to have any hope of conducting research that resists continuing colonization and imperialism.

These words inspire me and call me to conduct this literature review through a theoretical framework that honors my ancestral ways of knowing. I will therefore utilize a Cree theoretical framework within this work. Although this Cree theoretical framework draws from Indigenous



ontologies and epistemologies, which are shared amongst many Indigenous groups across the world, I specify Cree to acknowledge the differences that also exist and avoid causing the belief that all Indigenous peoples share the same knowledge system. Meyer (2008) explains, “all peoples have their own distinct beliefs of what knowledge is and what knowing entails. This idea is an example of epistemology specific to place and people.” (p. 2).

### **Contributions**

Using this theoretical framework expands the existing literature in this field by contextualizing the topic of reconciliation practices and policies within secondary institutions through my own perspective as a Cree Metis woman, grounded in my personal experiences.

By employing a Cree theoretical framework that weaves together an Indigenous Cree epistemology and ontology, personal and ancestral experiences and stories, and a decolonial focus, this study contributes to the existing literature on reconciliation practices and policies within secondary schooling institutions. The use of this theoretical framework begins to answer the calls of Indigenous scholars such as Meyer (2008), who states, “We must develop new theories from ancient agency so we can accurately respond to what is right before our very eyes.” (2008, p.2).

There is a lack of Indigenous voices and perspectives within the existing literature, which this study begins to address. Using a Cree theoretical framework means the voices and stories of Indigenous peoples will be privileged within this paper. This contributes to the field as Indigenous voices and perspectives are imperative to understanding the impacts of current policies and practices in order to identify whether we are heading in the right direction or if we are simply dressing colonization and assimilation in new clothes. In the spirit of reconciliation and decolonization, Indigenous voices and perspectives need to be present and valued within the

academic literature, especially on topics in which we stand to be impacted with greater harm. This must also be done in a way that does not continue colonization or imperialism.

There is also a lack of literature on the topics of reconciliation and decolonization within secondary education contexts. The majority of the literature is focused on post-secondary education policies and practices. Although there are similarities between the two institutions, significant differences require our attention, especially since Indigenous youth continue to experience higher dropout or non-completion rates within Alberta high schools, making these institutions sites of continued colonial aggressions. This paper will begin to address this by reviewing the literature to show these gaps exist and suggest further research in this area.

### **Method**

On this second journey through the literature, I will focus on the intersection of the literature to find places of tension, cohesion, and gaps. The purpose is to identify which stories are missing and whose stories are being told and where the stories disagree. As always, the choice of the stories here is important. I chose the articles I included in this review based on geographical location, relevance to secondary and post-secondary education policy, and practice/action in regards to decolonization and/or reconciliation. I also included literature that provided historical contexts, current contexts, and suggestions for the future.

I used the University of Alberta library's article database to search for relevant articles. I focused primarily on scholarly journals written by Indigenous scholars and allies. Key terms such as Indigenous, First Nation, Native, Aboriginal, and Indian were used along with reconciliation, indigeniz\*, decoloniz\*, policy, practice, Alberta education, education, academic institutions, classroom, school, and Canada were used. A Google Scholar search was also used to

broaden the search results. Some articles came from previous graduate studies courses where the focus was on Indigenous education.

This review is organized into the following categories to help walk readers through the intersections and gaps within the literature. First I provide a brief background to contextualize the landscape of Indigenous education in Canada. This is important as we cannot see clearly where we need to go until we understand where we are within the context of where we have been. Second, I provide background on the terms decolonization and reconciliation as these are commonly used and too commonly confused within policy and practice and to some extent within the literature as well. Knowing the difference between these terms is important as they call for very different practices and policies to be enacted within education. It is also important to know the critiques of these terms and the advice from other scholars on where we should be heading. Third, I provide an overview of the literature and research studies focused on Indigenous policies and practices within secondary education institutions. Lastly, I focus on literature that provides frameworks or suggestions for policies and practices which will lead to the future which will benefit Indigenous and Non-Indigenous youth.

### **Literature Review**

Originally the purpose of this literature review was to provide a brief background of the historical and contemporary moments that led to current reconciliation policies and practices. However, upon completing a draft literature review for my original research paper outline focused on policy analysis, I found that the literature review demonstrated gaps and tensions which I feel are important to explore further. Therefore, I decided to change this paper from a policy analysis to a literature review with the purpose of providing a deeper review of the

literature in order to understand those gaps and tensions better. This is important in order to gain a clearer picture of where further research is needed.

### **Historical Context: Indigenous Knowledge and Colonization**

All peoples have knowledge and ways of transferring knowledge that are derived from their relationships with each other, the land, and other beings, this is supported by scholars such as Battiste (2017) and Meyer (2008). Indigenous peoples of what is now known as Canada have had distinct ways of knowing since time immemorial (see the following for more information Battiste, 2010; Battiste & Henderson, 2017; Styres, 2011; Meyer, 2008; L. Simpson, 2017). In general, Indigenous knowledge has been described by Battiste (2010) as being a spiritual journeying to find one's purpose in life. Guided by Elders and community members, children discovered and honed their unique gifts through listening and observing the people in their lives and the land, animals, and other beings. Battiste (2010) supports this, and Leanne Simpson (2017) shows this through her writing and the sharing of the stories. These explanations/ explorations of Indigenous knowledge are generally found within Indigenous peoples' traditions and current practices around the world. However, it is important to remember there are differences as well. As the geographies of this land are diverse, so are the knowledge systems of the diverse Indigenous peoples that have originated on this land. Although Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing are still present and thriving in areas today, mine and many others' knowledge of traditional Indigenous knowledge and specific pedagogies and practices for the transfer of that knowledge is limited due to the impacts of colonization.

Prete (2018) states, "the arrival of the Europeans in the Americas forever altered the existence of Indigenous Peoples" (p. 26). Early on, Europeans became focused on educating the Indians. This task began with the Jesuits who wished to 'save' the savages from damnation and

assimilate them into civilized Christian society. These early attempts were met with limited success (see Miller, 1996, Milloy, 1999) until a shift in relationships between Indigenous peoples and Europeans occurred. What began as trade relations and alliances eventually turned towards a relationship of oppressor and oppressed as the newly formed Canadian state focused on 'progress' and expansion which shifted the position of Indigenous peoples from allies to problems (for more in-depth information, see Fallon & Paquette, 2010). What resulted was a long history of policies focused on providing education for Indigenous peoples (including the Royal Proclamation Act, 1763; British North America/BNA Act, 1867; and Indian Act, 1876).

Some significant policies which influenced the course of Indian education by the state included the Report on the Affairs of the Indians in Canada, otherwise called the Bagot Report (1842), which focused on assimilating Indigenous children by educating them in segregated federally controlled schools where manual labor and industrial agriculture made up the majority of the curriculum (Milloy, 1999). The Indian act is perhaps the most oppressive policy created against Indigenous peoples, allowing the federal government to assume control over many aspects of Indigenous peoples' lives, including their education. Finding that boarding schools had limited success in assimilating children as children were allowed to return home and attendance was not mandatory by law, amendments to the Indian act were enacted to create what we now know as the Indian Residential School era. In the June 11th, 2008 apology statement by the Federal Government of Canada, the then Prime Minister Stephen Harper stated,

Two primary objectives of the residential schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed,

some sought, as it was infamously said, ‘to kill the Indian in the child (Government of Canada Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, 2008).

This often resulted in the death of the child as approximately 50% of children attending residential schools died as a direct result (AAAND, 2011; Bryce, 1907; Kirkness, 1999).

Prete (2018) explains that “residential schools left Indigenous children disconnected from their culture and their way of life” (p.29). This resulted in students often being disabled from functioning in either their Indigenous way of life or in the Eurocentric world (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003). The impacts of Indian Residential schools are still acutely felt by Indigenous peoples and communities today. Indigenous scholars such as Battiste (2008) and Sockbeson (2012) raise the issues that impact Indigenous peoples and communities, such as intergenerational trauma, loss of cultural traditions and identity, which in turn cause other challenges faced by Indigenous peoples, including higher dropout rates, drug and alcohol addiction, cycles of abuse and poverty and high suicide rates.

### **Education as a Tool for Colonization**

Education has long been a primary weapon of colonizers to suppress, erase or assimilate Indigenous peoples and knowledge as a means to control territories. As Battiste (2017) explains, Education has been used as a sword of cultural imperialism to assimilate Native North America into a hegemonic system, not so that they might take their rightful place in the market economy after their economies were destroyed, but to be held hostage to systems of economy created outside the Aboriginal context (p.162).

This was certainly the objectives of the residential school era. Children were only taught basic skills and spent the majority of their days labouring to equip them to enter into the lower paid positions within western economies. Fallon & Paquette (2010) reveal that it was well recognized

during the time of residential schools that many Indigenous people emerged from these schools with neither the skills to actively participate in the western economies nor the ability to return to their Indigenous communities as active members. In the TRC (2015) summary of the final report, this impact is noted,

Children who returned home from the residential schools were unable to relate to families who still spoke their traditional languages and practised traditional spirituality. Survivors who wanted to learn the spiritual teachings of their ancestors were criticized and sometimes ostracized by their own family members who were Christian, and by the church. Survivors and their relatives reported that these tensions led to family breakdown—such is the depth of this spiritual conflict. The cumulative impact of the residential schools was to deny First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples their spiritual birthright and heritage. (TRC, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling the Future Report*, 2015, pp. 225-226)

Similar issues are experienced today as Indigenous youth experience the highest high school dropout rates leaving them with fewer economic opportunities within the growing knowledge based economy while also depriving them of meaningful cultural knowledge.

High dropout rates and lower streaming trends experienced amongst Indigenous youth have often been explained away as deficiency on the part of students, their families, and cultures. Paraphrasing Prete (2018), this deficit thinking/blaming has been confronted by Indigenous scholars and allies who identify such explanations as excuses used to shift blame and maintain the notion of schools as culturally normative and fair. This idea of educational institutions as being fair and normative is contested by scholars such as Battiste (2017), who instead position it as,

[ . . . ] a culturally and socially constructed institution for an imagined context with purposes defined by those who are privileged to be the deciders, and their work has not always been for the benefit of the masses. Education has its roots in a patriarchal, Eurocentric society, complicit with multiple forms of oppression of women, sometimes men, children, minorities, and Indigenous peoples (Battiste, 2017, p.159).

Schools continue to be sites of Eurocentricity which uphold and perpetuate settler colonial ideologies and narratives/myths and settler grammars (Calderon, 2014; Battiste, 2017; Daza & Tuck, 2014), while ‘othering’ the histories and knowledge of Indigenous peoples and minorities. Indigenous scholars and allies have noted educational institutions as sites of continued colonization, assimilation, and cognitive imperialization for Indigenous youth. Battiste (2017) frames cognitive imperialism experienced by Indigenous students as,

[ . . . ]not just symbolic cultural assimilation, but wholesale cognitive whitewashing, working through the loss of Aboriginal languages that themselves inform the perspectives and values and world views of the peoples. As a result, success has been closely associated with Aboriginal students’ losing their languages and cultural connections; many often do not see the merit of holding to Aboriginal language systems, cultures, or world views, nor understand the wealth of knowledge within their own systems. This self-doubt, coupled with racism, continues to sabotage their expectations for their own futures. (p.162)

### **Understanding Reconciliation**

Understanding the history of Canada’s control of Indigenous education is important for understanding the climate we find ourselves in today and why the need for breaking down the



current education system and rebuilding it in line with decolonizing education is vital for all. As Dr. Erica Irene Daes (as cited in Battiste, 2017) shares,

Displacing systemic discrimination against Indigenous peoples created and legitimized by the cognitive frameworks of imperialism and colonialism remains the single most crucial cultural challenge facing humanity. Meeting this responsibility is not just a problem for the colonized and the oppressed, but rather the defining challenge for all peoples. It is the path to a shared and sustainable future for all peoples. (p. 158)

Out of this history of assimilative education came multiple movements headed by Indigenous peoples to reclaim and resurge Indigenous knowledge and systems of knowing. These include but are not limited to decolonizing education, indigenizing education, and, more recently, reconciliation for education. Madden (2019) warns that it is important to avoid the temptation to group these movements as being the same, although they each have arisen in response to the issues and challenges presented by the Canadian education system as a site for continued colonial and imperial violence, decolonization, indigenization, and reconciliation have differences that are important to attend to.

As reconciliation is the current focus within education policy and practice (at least in rhetoric), it is important to understand this term and how it entered into the Canadian education landscape. Reconciliation came about as a result of Canada's largest class action lawsuit, which saw survivors of Indian Residential Schools across the country bravely recount their experiences within the schools. Although there are many critiques of the way this was carried out and addressed, this process gave rise to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and ultimately the 94 calls to action. These, along with subsequent policies, frame reconciliation within education. The TRC identified education as a key site for reconciliation, as former chief commissioner of

the TRC Justice Murray Sinclair affirmed, “[e]ducation is what got us into this mess – the use of education at least in terms of residential schools – but education is the key to reconciliation” (Watters, 2015, p. 17).

Further, the TRC positioned reconciliation as a Canadian problem, not an Indigenous one (TRC, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling the Future Report*, 2015, p. vi). In this, all Canadians have been called to do reconciliation work. However, it was soon noted that not many Canadians understood how to do this work. This is evident in the numerous papers dedicated to providing teacher education courses and training to help educators prepare for reconciliation work, such as Robinson and Tompkins (2019). Yet, a few years later, we face many of the same challenges as well as rising critiques of reconciliation as it is framed within the TRC and with how it is largely being practiced within education.

The literature around reconciliation uses varying definitions. Reconciliation is generally described within the literature as addressing past harms largely from the residential school era and mending relationships for a better Canada (Antoine et al., 2018; Madden, 2019; George, 2017). Some common critiques of this include that positioning reconciliation in the past limits real change to occur as colonization is an ongoing process that is still impacting our society today (Madden, 2019; George, 2017). This also frames Indigenous experiences within the box of colonization, neglecting various “counter stories” (Madden, 2019). There is a danger in allowing colonization to be the only story of Indigenous lives. It must be recognized that colonialism is a narrative in which Settler’s power is the fundamental reference and assumption, inherently limiting Indigenous freedom and imposing a view of the world that is but an outcome or perspective on that power (paraphrasing Madden, 2019, p. 296).

This leads to another point in which George (2017) noted that reconciliation runs the risk of fetishizing Indigenous pain for the consumption by settlers and places much of the work of reconciliation on the backs of Indigenous peoples who are often dealing with the pain of sharing/learning hard truths while also being asked to give forgiveness and guidance immediately. Another critique is focused on the positioning of reconciliation's purpose as to create a better Canada. This is at odds with the reconciliation goals of many Indigenous people who view reconciliation as a means to build Indigenous collectivities back up in spite of the years of assimilative and harmful Canadian policies. (Gaudry, as cited in Stirling, 2017).

### **Reconciliation (in)Action**

How reconciliation is being practiced is also in question. Scholars note that too often, reconciliation in education takes the form of reconciliation in rhetoric with Indigenous inclusion actions and policies (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). George (2017) raises that reconciliation often takes the form of a spectacle in which grand apologies or one-off events are hosted as a way for settlers to prove they are good people and reconciled. These actions show little thought or ongoing commitment towards destabilizing settler colonialism which is still present and ongoing. Scholars suggest that for reconciliation to have any true meaning, we must tread carefully, slowly, and deliberately, focusing not only on actions but on shifting our mindsets and the systems we inhabit. We must not only reconcile our relationships within the human world but also with the land and other than human beings, as Madden (2019) supports. But this notion of reconciliation is not specifically described within the TRC.

### **Decolonization in Education**

Some Indigenous scholars point towards decolonizing education to be the way forward to meet the goals of a just and fair education for all, one that does not require students to assimilate,

hide who they are, or walk in another world in order to be successful. Decolonization within education has been described within the literature as a process that dismantles the colonial systems of education and rebuilds an educational system which honors and privileges diverse ways of knowing (Gaudry & Lorenz; Battiste, 2017; Madden, 2019). As Spivak reminds us, “as the margin or ‘outside’ enters an institution or teaching machine, what kind of teaching machine it enters will determine its contours” (1993, p.ix).

Decolonization is about challenging “the injustices of colonialism, dispossession, and racist oppression while reaffirming the worldviews of our ancestors” (Gaudry & Cornthassel, 2014, p.167). Like reconciliation, the definition of decolonization is not straightforward. According to Madden (2019), decolonization can not simply be seen as the opposite of colonization but as a call for “consistent examination of colonial logics and productions that seep into settings like Indigenous education and teacher education, which, our intentions and plans notwithstanding, often become hybrid experiences of colonizing and decolonizing.” (p.287).

### **Secondary Education Context**

According to Richmond and Smith, “[m]any urban schools suffer from systemic racism and colonial imperatives that linger from decades past” (2012, p.3). This continues to impact how Indigenous students view themselves within education (Prete, 2018) and contributes to obstacles which Indigenous students must overcome if they wish to successfully complete secondary schooling and transition onwards into post-secondary studies. Despite continuous efforts over the past decades to create a more equitable education system for Indigenous youth, statistics continue to show that Indigenous students experience the lowest success rates (high school completion) out of any demographic in Canada (Chiefs of Ontario, n.d.; Statistics Canada, 2008). There have been numerous attempts to explain this phenomenon, yet many of these

explanations focused on framing Indigenous youth, families, and culture as the key problem to be solved.

The cultural deficit theory remains a popular rhetoric to explain the challenges Indigenous youth face in schools, this is supported by McCarthy (1994). This theory is predicated on the assumption that minority students' lack of academic achievement is due to their inadequate cultural teachings (González, 2005). Further clarified,

[. . .] the deficit model asserts that racial/ethnic minority groups do not achieve as well as their White majority peers in school and life because their family culture is dysfunctional and lacking important characteristics compared to the White American culture. (Salkind, 2008, p.217).

This theory and others that similarly position Indigenous youth, families, and culture as the problem to be fixed can have detrimental impacts, such as the heightened possibility for Indigenous youth to internalize this belief that they are not enough. Similarly, Non-Indigenous students may internalize this thinking as well and view Indigenous students as less than, thus spreading racism and discrimination. Cultural deficit and similar theories that rely on framing Indigenous people as the problem have also shown no evidence of improving high school completion rates for Indigenous students and has contributed only to hollow half measures (George, 2017) for Indigenous education, which take the form of Indigenous inclusion failing to make significant changes towards decolonization.

In her research, Prete (2018) found that a school in Alberta was not implementing a required FNMI policy from Alberta Education because they did not see the value in doing so. In interviews with students, Prete found that Non-Indigenous students felt that Aboriginal Studies and other Indigenous programs were not important for their futures, they were not encouraged

and made to feel welcome to take those courses, and felt that Indigenous content in their core classes were too repetitive.

In a survey Prete (2018) conducted within the same school, she found that 40% of the students viewed Natives as being racist, and 33% felt that Natives experienced racism. Prete interpreted this data to show that a lack of Indigenous content and the neglect of the school to implement FNMI policy created division between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous students and left students with little understandings of Indigenous peoples (students said they mainly learned about Indigenous peoples during the years of early contact/colonization) and little understanding of racism (students clarified that they saw Natives as racist because Native youth called white students racist). Within this school, Indigenous knowledge and perspective were brought into the school only within certain programs, which were not mandatory and were not fully explained to students leaving Non-Indigenous students to believe these classes were for Indigenous students only and were not beneficial to their futures.

Focusing on the voices of primarily non-Indigenous pre-service teachers, Deer (2013) presents a different perspective of how the enactment of reconciliation is proceeding within schools. One participant within Deer's paper is quoted stating,

It's interesting because a lot of the Aboriginal presence in the school was injected by the employees. For example, the EA and the math teacher, and two student teachers were Aboriginal, and they brought a lot of that focus into the school. It seemed to go quite smoothly. I saw kids even on their shirts, I mean they come out with a new shirt for their teams every year and this one had a dream catcher on it, so that kind of stuff that may seem on the surface, but I think it does help with that kind of climate (2013, pp. 200-201).

In this quote, we see that Indigenous staff members are identified as bringing in the culture. We also see a focus on additive/inclusion-focused methods such as placing a logo on a shirt. There is no mention of meaningful change that would signal a decolonial approach or even a reconciliation approach. Interestingly, I could not find much for research focused on Indigenous educators or pre-service teachers' perspectives. Some papers focus on the voices and perspectives of students or former students and community members; however, the literature points to a lack in this area that would benefit from being addressed.

### **Ways forward**

In their study, Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) found that a majority of Indigenous and ally scholars called for decolonial approaches within post-secondary education institutions. More specifically, Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) found “[. . .] not only were these scholars likely to argue for foundational, decolonial change, they were also highly skeptical of half-measures, watered down policies, and other approaches that downplayed the need for major shifts in how universities operate” (p.219). They explain further stating,

decolonial approaches require that how this knowledge is shared or brought into the academy is on its own terms. Much of this knowledge may best be left to reside in the community, as a rush to “include” this information into the academic canon can also strip the authoritative power to interpret it from community. Therefore, by engaging Indigenous knowledge systems in a decolonial approach to academic teaching and research, the university cannot aspire to include or control knowledge in a way that undermines community intellectual power. (Gaudry and Lorenz, 2018, p.225)

Additionally to this point, Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) found that these approaches must be Indigenous-led so as to avoid further colonization (see p. 222).

As we can see, it is difficult to bring about decolonization as colonization has infiltrated many aspects of our daily lives and, for some, our minds. Battiste (2013) refers to this occurrence as cognitive imperialism. Thus, we must be careful that we do not become agents of colonization while we believe we are doing decolonization work.

The literature also points to the need to include healing relationships with the land as a requirement to enact reconciliation and decolonization. Scholars, including Leanne Simpson (2017), have argued that the healing of Indigenous peoples and bodies must coincide with the healing of these lands as well. Reconciliation with the land was noted within the TRC (2015) summary of the final report by Elder Reg Crowshoe who states,

Reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians, from an Aboriginal perspective, also requires reconciliation with the natural world. If human beings resolve problems between themselves but continue to destroy the natural world, then reconciliation remains incomplete. This is a perspective that we as Commissioners have repeatedly heard: that reconciliation will never occur unless we are also reconciled with the earth. (TRC, Honoring the Truth, Reconciling the Future Report, 2015, p.18)

However, Madden (2019) points out that, “how diverse sectors, including education, might approach reconciling with the Earth is noticeably absent in the calls to action” (Madden, 2019, p.293). Further, secondary school practices rarely include reconciliation with the land and if they do it tends to take the form of an additive action within the school and not as a shift in school culture or structure. This work is difficult and complex, but Indigenous scholars stress the importance of decolonization not only for Indigenous peoples but for all of humanity.



## Findings and Discussion

My review of the literature highlighted that there exist both gaps and tensions within the literature. The gaps within the literature include a) a lack of literature focused on reconciliation policies and practices within secondary education, b) within this policy and practice focus, there is also a lack of literature which looks at this issue through an Indigenous, decolonial, or resurgence lens, and c) there is a lack of literature which privileges Indigenous voices such as educators, parents, students and community members on the matter of reconciliation within schools. The tensions present within my review of the literature are a) tensions around the term reconciliation and b) tensions around the direction we should be heading towards.

The first gap within the literature, which focused on reconciliation policy and practice within secondary schools, is problematic since secondary education remains a vital site for colonization, imperialism, and continued harm towards Indigenous students as well as students of color or students of visible minorities. The lack of literature in this area demonstrates a lack of critical inquiry and investigation into the policies that are shaping reconciliation practices within secondary education, which leaves a greater potential of continuing trends of colonization and imperialism. The second gap within the literature concerned with a lack of policy and practice within secondary education being analyzed through a decolonial, Indigenous resurgence, or Indigenous perspective lens is also concerning as this continues to privilege white narratives and knowledge systems. The third gap in the literature showed a lack of research that privileged Indigenous peoples' voices, such as educators, parents, students, and communities. This is problematic as Indigenous peoples have long been negatively impacted by policies created on/for them rather than with them. These gaps also go against the TRC Calls To Action and significant discourses on reconciliation.

The first tension present within the literature is around the term reconciliation. I found that there can be multiple ways of understanding what the term reconciliation means. This impacts how the goals of reconciliation are understood and impacts how reconciliation is implemented. The second tension is concerned with the direction we should be heading towards in regards to reconciliation and Indigenous education within Canada. In the literature, we have seen that there are some critiques of reconciliation and arguments that reconciliation is not the direction we need. In Gaudry and Lorenz (2018), for example, participants of the study (mostly Indigenous scholars) called for a decolonial approach rather than a reconciliation approach.

### **Conclusion**

My original intention with this paper was to produce an analysis of the Alberta Education revised Teaching Quality Standards as they relate to reconciliation and decolonization. This intention shifted in response to the preliminary literature review, which showed gaps and tensions within the literature on reconciliation and decolonization within Canadian education systems. The gaps present within my review of the literature are, a) a lack of literature focused on reconciliation policies and practices within secondary education, b) within this policy and practice focus there is also a lack of literature which looks at this issue through an Indigenous, decolonial or resurgence lens, and c) there is a lack of literature which privileges Indigenous voices such as educators, parents, students and community members on the matter of reconciliation within schools.

The tensions I found within the literature are a) tensions around the term reconciliation and b) tensions around the direction we should be heading towards. I felt it was important to explore these gaps and tensions further by performing a literature review for this paper. The literature review presented here shows that there are multiple areas for future research. I still

believe that a policy analysis on the TQS through an Indigenous lens is important and needed. Other areas that may be considered for future research in light of the gaps and tensions found in this review include research which works with Indigenous communities, students, parents, and educators to understand their perspectives, stories, and experiences around where schools currently are located within reconciliation efforts as well as to understand where they believe we should be heading.

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