



BC Antiracism Research

Final Report

Submitted To:

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Racism in Schools: A Barrier to Education among Aboriginal Students

Since the late 1960s there has been no shortage of public reports condemning the state of Aboriginal education in Canada and calling for system wide efforts to improve conditions and outcomes for Aboriginal students. The seminal Hawthorn Report (1967) made clear the unmitigated failure of public schools to educate Aboriginal students. In addition to reporting a 94% dropout rate among Aboriginal students, the report concluded that:

“It is difficult to imagine how an Indian child attending an ordinary public school could develop anything but a negative self-image. First, there is nothing from his culture represented in the school or valued by it. Second, the Indian child often gains the impression that nothing he or other Indians do is right when compared to what non-Indian children are doing...They have little reason to like or to be interested in the school in any way, in or out of the classroom, and it does not provide a path to the jobs some expect from it” (Hawthorn, 1967, p.6, 142).

The Sullivan Report (1988), published 20 years after the Hawthorn report, concluded that the educational needs of Aboriginal students in BC were still not being met and that “extraordinary measures” would be required to address this issue. Similar to the Hawthorn report, the Sullivan report noted that:

“For the most part, the school represents a new and strange cultural atmosphere to which they cannot easily adapt. In addition, many Native youngsters face a crisis in terms of their identity and must suffer the low esteem in which they are held by the majority of their classmates” (Sullivan, 1988, p. 207).

A decade later, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) reiterated the myriad ways in which public schools fail their Aboriginal students, including: racism; the use of biased standardized assessments; guiding Aboriginal students away from rigorous academic programs; the absence of Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum; a lack of Aboriginal teachers, staff, administrators and decision-makers; and inadequate funding. Five years later, the BC Human Rights Commission (2001) reported that: “It is obvious from the literature and observation of the situation in British Columbia that Aboriginal children and youth still do not receive equal education” (p. 9).

BC’s Auditor General reported recently that, although there has been some progress, the BC government’s commitment to close the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal gaps in education by 2015

has not been fulfilled. Persistent gaps remain and Aboriginal students continue to face barriers to success in public schools—including racism.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission moved beyond previous calls to address racism and barriers to success in education and called for Canada’s public education system to contribute meaningfully to reconciliation. “Our public education system needs to influence behaviour by undertaking to teach our children—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal—how to speak respectfully to, and about, each other in the future” (TRC Background & Elaboration).

BC has re-committed to improving learning conditions for Aboriginal students and to addressing racism in schools in order to support improved education experiences and outcomes for Aboriginal students. As part of this commitment, the BC Ministry of Education—in collaboration with the First Nations Education Steering Committee—has commissioned the current research on racism directed toward Aboriginal students. The research consists of a review of the literature on racism toward Aboriginal students; an environmental scan of practices to address racism toward Aboriginal students in provinces and territories across Canada; and an environmental scan of practices to address racism toward Aboriginal students in school districts across British Columbia.

Literature Review

The goals of the literature review are to specify a definition of racism, identify the forms of racism that arise in schools, and to identify effective strategies for addressing such racism.

Racism: A Definition

The BC Human Rights Code defines racism as: “a belief that some people are better than other people because they belong to a particular race or ethnic group” (BC Ministry of Justice, 2015, p. 1), and defines racial discrimination as including any mistreatment, denial of benefits, harassment or insults based on race, colour, ancestry, or place of origin.

This definition is broad enough to capture the wide range of race/ethnicity based grievances that may legitimately motivate human rights complaints, but the literature on racism indicates that this and similar definitions leave out a key feature of racism: the dynamics of power and privilege. Racism carries real force in “situations where there is an imbalance of power which permits the ‘racist’ behaviour to have effect” (Chartrand, 1992, p. 7). The effect of power-driven racism is the unequal distribution of privilege, advantages, and benefits. In short, the distinction drawn in the literature is “between being insulted and being oppressed” (St. Denis & Hampton, 2002, p. 11). A racial insult hurled at a member of the larger culture may sting, but

that message is not reinforced by the multiple forms of overt and covert racism that members of minority cultures often endure.

Defining racism as “**a series of persistent practices that systematically and unjustly allocate advantages to certain groups and individuals**” (Ryan, 1998, p. 2) acknowledges both the harm that results from racism perpetuated in the context of power imbalance and the systematic nature of power-based racism. The role of power and inequitable distributions of privilege in racism has been acknowledged by many other scholars, who refer to exploitative intergroup relations (Miles, 1989), the propagation and justification of unequal treatment (Essed, 1990), producing disparities in life chances (Pettman, 1986), and maintaining or exacerbating inequality of opportunity (Berman & Paradies, 2010).

Form of Racism in Schools

As alluded to in the discussion above, racism in schools arises in many different forms. St. Denis and Hampton (2002) described several categories of racism, including: verbal attacks, psychological abuse, low expectations, social isolation and marginalization, professional indifference, systemic racism, and denial of racism and its effects.

Verbal Attacks

Verbal attacks, ranging from derogatory comments about Aboriginals as a group to racial remarks (e.g., name calling, racial slurs), are the overt forms of racism that many people associate with racism. Verbal attacks can be directed toward Aboriginal students, teachers or staff by other students, teachers/staff, and parents.

Psychological Abuse

Psychological abuse includes many different ways of demeaning and humiliating Aboriginal peoples and individuals. This form of racism includes “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people...because they belong to a racial minority group” what Sue and colleagues (2007, p. 273) call microaggressions. Microaggressions can form pervasive and automatic features of daily conversations and interactions. Although microaggressions are often dismissed as innocent or innocuous, the effects of multiple incidents can be cumulative and devastating (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007).

A wide range of incidents can be included in this category, including:

- Mockery and cultural appropriation (Clark et al., 2014)
- Epistemic racism (e.g., assuming that Western knowledge systems are the standard against which Aboriginal knowledge systems should be measured; Reading, 2013)

- Failing to acknowledge the contributions by Aboriginal people to Canadian society (RCAP, 1996)
- Assumptions about the pervasiveness and causes of problems within Aboriginal communities (e.g., alcohol and drug addiction, unemployment, violence; Backhouse, 1999);
- Accusations based on misinformation (e.g., “Aboriginals don’t pay taxes”; Clark et al., 2014);
- Singling out Aboriginal students as cultural experts (Clark et al., 2014);
- Questioning Aboriginal teachers’ qualifications and capabilities (St. Denis, 2010);
- The portrayal of Aboriginal peoples through historic negative stereotypes (St. Denis, 2010);
- Inaccurate historical accounts of Aboriginal peoples and their customs and beliefs (Manitoba Aboriginal Education Directorate, 2015)
- Resistance to or trivialization of efforts to include Aboriginal content and perspectives (St. Denis, 2010);
- A lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate programming (Manitoba antiracism document)

Low Expectations

The impact of teachers’ expectations on student outcomes has been well-studied and documented. Teachers can support effective learning by maintaining high expectations for all students, and they can undermine student success by holding low expectations for some students. In a recent pair of studies, Riley and Ungerleider (2012; 2008) demonstrated systematically that some pre-service teachers in BC have lower expectations for Aboriginal students than for non-Aboriginal students. Teacher expectations set the tone for all student/teacher interactions and have a significant impact on classroom learning. Teacher expectations also have an impact on the decisions teachers make and the guidance they provide to students regarding pathways through school. In discussing the racism of low expectations, BC’s Auditor General noted that Aboriginal students are overrepresented on non-academic pathways (e.g., as recipients of the Evergreen certificate rather than the Dogwood diploma) and underrepresented in the pathways leading to post-secondary studies (e.g., in courses required for university admission).

Social Isolation and Marginalization

Aboriginal students report feeling isolated, excluded and marginalized in schools (Battiste, 2005; Silver, Mallett, Greene & Simard, 2002). Persistent negative narratives of Aboriginal people, distorted images of Aboriginal people, and a perspective that positions First Nations as

troublesome and stuck in the past (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011) contribute to a sense of marginalization among Aboriginal students. Deliberate exclusion, as well as deliberate and unconscious racism, contributes to students' sense of isolation. In addition, the practice of treating Aboriginal students as a "separate division of the school population with identifiable learning characteristics" (Cherubini, 2010, p. 20) also contributes to the isolation of Aboriginal students. Efforts designed to foster the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in school, such as the development of the First Nations 12 course, can also inadvertently lead to the marginalization of Aboriginal students. Because the course is optional rather than mandatory for all students, it can become another context in which Aboriginal students become a separate division of the school population.

Aboriginal teachers also report feeling isolated and marginalized in school (St. Denis, 2010). They describe regular occurrences in which their credentials and/or capabilities are questioned by their colleagues, who assume that Aboriginal teachers have not had to earn the same qualifications as non-Aboriginal teachers. They describe colleagues who do not befriend them, associate with them or collaborate with them, who question the validity of Aboriginal knowledge or treat Aboriginal content as "entertainment," and who make jokes about the historical oppression of Aboriginal people.

Professional Indifference

Professional indifference includes teachers' behaviour toward students and other ways in which Aboriginal students are not offered support or resources. Many Aboriginal students experience professional indifference in their daily interactions (or lack thereof) with teachers. For example, Wilson (1991) reported student experiences with teachers who gave detailed explanations when non-Aboriginal students asked questions and brief, terse answers in response to Aboriginal students. Teachers often had their backs to Aboriginal students throughout entire class periods, and did not engage in informal banter with Aboriginal students as they did with non-Aboriginal students. Other researchers describe commonplace incidents of insensitivity that leave Aboriginal students to conclude that they are not welcome in class (Deyhle, 1995; Kitchen & Velasquez, 2002).

More extreme forms of professional indifference include the failure to provide services and supports to students who need them—as reported, for example, by BC's Representative for Children and Youth in her 2014 report, *Lost in the Shadows: How a Lack of Help Meant a Loss of Hope for One First Nations Girl*. The report details the many ways in which services and supports are not provided to Aboriginal children, including (though not at all limited to) Special Needs services in school. The Aboriginal child in question was assessed with a language delay in Kindergarten and was diagnosed with a "mild intellectual deficiency" in Grade 1, but an

Individual Education Plan (IEP) was not developed and implemented for her until Grade 2. A second IEP was developed in Grade 3. Though she continued to struggle and had a “severe receptive and expressive language delay,” no subsequent IEPs were developed.

Systemic Racism

This form of racism includes policies that have a particularly negative impact on Aboriginal students. These include “zero tolerance” policies for violence and other misbehaviours, which have been shown to have a disproportionate impact on children from minority and low socio-economic backgrounds (Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2000).

This form of racism also includes hiring and retention practices that result in small numbers of Aboriginal teachers and administrators; identification and selection procedures that leave Aboriginal students overrepresented among Special Needs categories (except Gifted, where they are underrepresented); decision-making processes that guide Aboriginal students out of rigorous academic programs and into pathways that include obtaining an Evergreen certificate rather than a Dogwood diploma.

Denial of Racism and its Effects

Racism in schools is often denied, ignored or trivialized (BCTF, 1999; St. Denis, 2010). The denial of racism contributes to further oppression by silencing those who suffer it and wish to speak out (Larocque, 1991). Through denial, racism becomes a problem that cannot be addressed and cannot be investigated as an obstacle to the success of Aboriginal students. Instead, students and their families and communities are blamed for educational failures (St. Denis & Hampton, 2002). The denial of racism is sometimes subsumed within well-intentioned “colour blindness,” an ostensibly anti-racist approach that attempts to treat race as a meaningless construct. But colour blindness “perpetuates inequity because it does not recognize that people are, in fact, treated differently based on the racialized or ethnic category to which they are socially assigned” (Reading, 2013, p. 6).

The denial of racism also includes failing to acknowledge that historical forms of racism have an ongoing impact on Aboriginal students. Discounting the effects of historical racism as a contributor to the lack of success of Aboriginal students provides an excuse for blaming students for their educational failures (Ledoux, 2006).

Effective Strategies for Addressing Racism

Multicultural and Anti-racist Education

The literature on addressing racism in schools distinguishes between two approaches: multicultural education and anti-racist education (e.g., Kehoe, 1994; McGregor & Ungerleider, 1993; Mansfield & Kehoe, 1994; Segawa, 1994). Multicultural education (also called cross-cultural training) includes: removing ethnocentric bias from the curriculum; adopting culturally responsive pedagogies; fostering the participation of students' communities; teaching critical thinking and the ability to recognize fallacious arguments; providing information about other cultures; encouraging the retention of Indigenous languages; encouraging students to explore their cultural identities; acquainting all students with their own and other cultures. Anti-racist education (also called racism awareness) addresses racism directly through discussion of past and present racism and by examining the economic, structural and historical roots of inequality. It also includes self-examination to identify internal biases and unacknowledged race based privilege. The purpose of anti-racist education is to develop an understanding of the dynamics of racism and to build capacity to respond to racism.

Scholars have argued about the relative merits of each approach. Both approaches have been shown to be effective for achieving particular goals in particular contexts (Segawa, 1994), but neither approach is consistently effective. In a review of the research on attitude change in teachers, McGregor & Ungerleider (1993) observed that, while both multicultural and anti-racist approaches can be effective, 30% of interventions yielded negative effect sizes. In other words, racist attitudes worsened as a result of some interventions.

Multicultural approaches have been consistently recommended in public reports on Aboriginal education published since the 1960s. For example:

- The Hawthorn report (1967) recommended including accurate information about Aboriginal cultures in the curriculum;
- Indian Control of Indian Education recommended the inclusion of relevant Aboriginal curricula with programs that balance Western academics and Aboriginal culture and that non-Aboriginal teachers should take compulsory courses in Aboriginal culture and history;
- The National Review of First Nations Education recommended the inclusion of Aboriginal languages, culturally relevant curricula, and cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity training for all non-Aboriginal teachers, staff, administrators, and policy makers;

- The Sullivan report (1988) recommended teaching about the history, culture, status and contributions of First Nations, supporting the maintenance of heritage languages, and encouraging teachers to learn about Native cultures, heritage and traditions;
- The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended cultural education in the classroom and informal settings;
- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommended developing culturally appropriate curricula and protecting the right to Aboriginal languages.

The multicultural approach has consistent and widespread support and has been adopted—at least to some extent—by a large number of schools and school boards across Canada. Research on this approach indicates that when Aboriginal culture, knowledge, and worldviews are deeply integrated into pedagogical practices, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students show measurable and educationally meaningful improvements in learning (Kisker et al., 2012). Deep integration is not a rapid process. For example, *Math in a Cultural Context*, which has been shown to be very effective for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, is the result of a 20-year collaboration between educators, Yup’ik elders and teachers, mathematicians and math educators, and Alaskan school districts.

Though multicultural approaches have been widely adopted, in most cases this has not included extensive integration into pedagogy, curriculum and school processes or careful evaluations of their effects (Friedel, 2010). Aboriginal scholars have argued that appending cultural education to the curriculum is ineffective and potentially detrimental (Deyhle, 1995; Kaomea, 2000; Marker, 2006; St. Denis, 2005). Kaomea argues that “seemingly benign or progressive efforts, such as the adoption of a culture-focused curriculum can have unanticipated, counterproductive, and hegemonic effects.” In the absence of a carefully and collaboratively developed multicultural approach, cross-cultural education can trivialize Aboriginal cultures and allow for essentialist, unidimensional representations of Aboriginal identity. “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” (Hermes, 2005, p. 10).

From this perspective, Friedel (2010) argues that cross-cultural efforts that are non-challenging and maintain an emphasis on romanticized notions of culture can support racist ideas. She calls for a “shift in education policy towards critical anti-racist education as a means of addressing the persistent education gap in Canada (p. 16). Similarly, Dei (2013) argues for educational approaches that help all students to deeply examine racialized oppression. Without this explicit attention to racism, Lentin (2005) argues that multicultural education “runs the risk of essentializing difference and denying the existence of racism.” Multicultural education that fails

to identify and address racism can alienate members of minority groups by reinforcing binary notions of identity and failing to recognize within-group diversity; it leads to a focus on lack of knowledge about the dominant culture among members of minority groups which allows for victim-blaming and denial of underlying racist practices; and it can discourage members of minority groups from seeking redress for their experiences of racism.

Anti-racist education has received less attention in public reports on Aboriginal education, with the exception of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which recommended education to support critical analysis of Aboriginal experience. As well, the BCTF *Report and Recommendations of the Task Force on First Nations Education* recommended that:

- Unlearning racism and skills for students to respond to racist incidents be included in the personal planning and the career and personal planning programs at all levels; and
- The BCTF make widely available to teachers workshops on inter-cultural communication and assist them to address all forms of racism, including individual racist incidents in classrooms, stereotyping of Aboriginal students and peoples, and systemic and institutional racism.

The literature on anti-racist education points to several key features of successful anti-racist interventions (Pederson, Walker, Paradies & Guerin, 2011):

1. Dispelling false beliefs. As a stand-alone intervention, providing information about marginalized groups can have the unintended consequence of confirming negative stereotypes (Fozdar, Wilding & Hawkins, 2009). However, when integrated into multi-faceted interventions, myth busting can be very effective. Providing accurate information regarding widespread beliefs (e.g., Aboriginals receive free post-secondary education) can decrease negativity toward marginalized groups (Barlow, Louis & Pederson, 2008).
2. Audience participation. Response to intervention improves when participants engage in discussion about their own views (Pederson & Barlow, 2008). This requires the assistance of trained moderators who can guide participants in acting respectfully with others.
3. Fostering empathy. Empathy and prejudice are often incompatible and empathy is associated with increased positivity and altruism toward others (Pedersen, Beven, Walker & Griffiths, 2004).
4. Commonalities and differences. Emphasizing the commonalities between groups can result in decreased negativity; however, this approach requires some finesse as it is important to avoid treating the dominant culture as the standard against which other cultures are compared and contrasted. It is equally important to note salient differences—particularly

relative disadvantage—between groups and to discuss inequalities of opportunity that arise between groups (Pederson & Barlow, 2008).

5. Local conditions. Interventions are more effective when they address the specific local needs of the target audience (Guerin & Guerin, 2007).
6. Dissonance. Highlighting the incompatibility of various racist beliefs can be an effective strategy, although many people hold contradictory beliefs without any apparent concern (Gawronski, Peters, Brochu & Strack, 2008). This approach is most effective with highly racist individuals.
7. Social norms. Racism can be reduced in response to information indicating that racist views are not shared by others and contravene the social norm.
8. Appropriate contact. Positive contact among groups can ameliorate racist attitudes (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), although some forms of contact can have the reverse effect.
9. Address individual experiences. Some individuals hold racist attitudes because of specific negative experiences with members of minority groups. Acknowledging the impact of such negative experiences is important and must be addressed respectfully, in coordination with strategies such as highlighting the spurious nature of stereotypes based on individual experiences.
10. Nationalism. Nationalist identities are often linked with racist attitudes. Thus, anti-racist interventions must examine the basis of nationalism.
11. Whiteness. When participants are primarily white, anti-racist education must include an examination of White privilege.
12. Alternative conversations. Relationship status is often increased or maintained through the use of racist conversations or jokes (Guerin, 2003). Developing conversation skills for addressing racist talk, including for bystanders, is key to effective anti-racist practice.
13. Source and function of attitudes. Before attempting to change racist attitudes, it is important to understand the source and function of such attitudes (Herek, 1987).
14. Longer interventions. Longer interventions that allow for some time to reflect on the issues tend to be more effective than short-term interventions (Hill & Augoustinos, 2001).
15. Multiple perspectives. Racism must be approached from several different angles in order to address the various forms in which it occurs.

The Contact Hypothesis

Multicultural and anti-racist education rely on rational approaches to racism reduction, teaching people to think differently. Other strategies rely more on affective approaches, teaching people to feel differently.

In the 1940s and 50s, a theory began to emerge about the role of intergroup contact in reducing intergroup bias and conflict. Watson (1947) observed that: “Spreading knowledge is

useful, but it too seldom stirs the heart. Programs which arouse feelings are several degrees better than those that rely wholly on cold fact and logic. Still better are projects...designed to help people in face-to-face contact with persons of a different race, religion, or background” (as cited in Dovidio, Gaertner & Kawakami, 2003, p. 6). Allport (1958) formalized the Contact Hypothesis, specifying that intergroup contact can reduce intergroup conflict under the following conditions:

1. Both groups enjoy equal status;
2. Both groups share common goals;
3. The common goals can be achieved only through the cooperative efforts of both groups; and
4. Intergroup harmony is supported by authorities, laws and/or customs.

Subsequent research has validated the four conditions that Allport hypothesized. The evidence indicates that equal status is a particularly important condition and makes its largest contribution when groups enter the contact situation with equal status and maintain that equal status throughout the contact situation (Moody, 2001). The value of cooperative interdependence is also well supported (Blanchard, Weigel & Cook, 1975) and interventions based on this factor—such as the Jigsaw method¹—can be very effective in reducing intergroup bias and conflict (Walker & Crogan, 1998). Common goals are also important, but only to the extent that they stimulate cooperative interdependence. Further research has also identified factors that mediate successful intergroup contact. Based on a large meta-analysis, Pettigrew (1998) concluded that “emotion is critical in intergroup contact” (p. 71). In particular, “intergroup contact can reduce bias by enhancing empathy toward members of the other group” (Dovidio et al., 2003, p. 10).

Extensive and even intimate contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities can reduce some forms of racism, especially overt hostility, without disrupting more subtle racist attitudes and a sense of group superiority among non-Aboriginals (Denis, 2015). Within schools, it is important for educators and school leaders to understand the conditions under which contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities can lead to reductions in all forms of racism.

¹ In the Jigsaw method, students are divided into small Jigsaw groups. Each student in each group learns a unique piece of information. The full set of pieces of information is necessary in order to fully understand the lesson or solve a given problem. Thus, the students must work together in cooperative interdependence to teach each other what they have learned and to pull the information together and make sense of it.

Teacher Expectations

The forms of racism described above include the racism of low expectations which may be invisible to teachers and require interventions above and beyond multicultural and anti-racism education. Rosenthal & Jacobson (1968) first demonstrated the powerful relationship between teacher expectations and student outcomes. In this study, teachers were informed that a group of randomly chosen students were expected, based on intelligence testing, to “bloom” during the school year. In fact, these students did not differ in any way from their classmates, but after manipulating teacher expectations for these students they did show greater intellectual gains than their classmates. Subsequent studies confirmed the effect of teacher expectations and revealed the link between teacher expectations, teacher behaviour, and student outcomes (Brophy & Good, 1974; Clifton, Perry, Parsonson & Hryniuk, 1986; Good & Nichols, 2001; Jussim, 1989).

Given the evidence that teachers hold systematically lower expectations for Aboriginal students (Riley & Ungerleider, 2008; 2012), it is clear that addressing racism toward Aboriginal students in schools must include addressing the impact of low teacher expectations on Aboriginal students.

The literature identifies several differences in teacher behaviour toward students for whom they have low expectations versus those for whom they have high expectations. Brophy (1985) showed that teachers call on low expectation students to answer questions less frequently than they call on high expectation students. When they do call on low expectation students, they allow them less time for answering questions than they do for high expectation students. They criticize the lows for failure more often than the highs and praise them less frequently for success. Babad (1990, 1995) found that teachers provide more emotional support to high expectation students than to lows, although teachers reported the opposite.

Although most teachers have high expectations for some students and low expectations for others, some teachers have generally higher expectations for all students while others have generally lower expectations. Recent research suggests that all students benefit from teachers with generally high expectations and all students suffer under teachers with generally low expectations. Rubie-Davies and her colleagues (2015) have shown that teachers can modify their behaviours associated with high and low expectations and that teaching in a manner consistent with generally high expectations leads to significant improvement in student learning. The relevant behaviours include: allowing flexible groupings of students during learning activities (rather than grouping by ability level); creating a warmer classroom climate; supporting students and engaging with them constructively; setting mastery goals for all students based on formative evaluations; providing clear feedback regarding progress toward

goals; promoting student autonomy and motivation. Although the effectiveness of this approach with Aboriginal students has not yet been investigated, the results to date are promising.

Conclusion

The literature on racism toward Aboriginal students identifies several different forms of racism, including: verbal attacks, psychological abuse, low expectations, social isolation and marginalization, professional indifference, systemic racism, and denial of racism and its effects. Addressing these varied forms of racism requires a multifaceted approach, that includes multicultural education, anti-racist education, contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities under appropriate conditions and interventions to address teachers' low expectations for Aboriginal students.

Provincial/Territorial Scan of Practices to Address Racism toward Aboriginal Students

The data-gathering methodology for the provincial/territorial scan of practices to address racism toward Aboriginal students consisted primarily of searching Ministry/Department of Education websites in each jurisdiction. Websites were searched for anything related to Aboriginal students and Aboriginal education. Any documents discovered through that process were then searched for any references to racism, discrimination, bias or stereotypes. In some cases, Ministry/Department representatives were also contacted to seek clarification or additional information. Additional documents were also forwarded to the research team from the BC Ministry of Education.

Manitoba: Critical/Courageous Conversations

The scan yielded material specifically relevant to racism toward Aboriginal students in only one province, Manitoba, which has produced a document entitled: *Creating Racism Free Schools Through Critical/Courageous Conversations about Anti-Racist Practice in the Classroom*. The document was produced by the Aboriginal Education Directorate of the Manitoba Ministry of Education and Advanced Learning, in consultation with partner organizations, antiracism experts, and Elders.

The document proposes that school districts and education partners engage in critical/courageous conversations on race and racism in education. The notion of critical/courageous conversations is derived from Critical Race Theory, which posits that an understanding of racism requires an understanding of the ways in which racism is embedded in

society and social institutions. The embedded nature of racism makes it invisible to most members of the dominant culture, who must engage in conscious critical analysis in order to fully understand racism and appreciate its impact. The document argues that “engaging in critical conversations about race, racism, and racial identity and their implications for culturally and linguistically diverse students helps educators in their unlearning of racism and towards the development of a critical perspective and transformational pedagogy.”

Critical conversations are not just for teachers: the document argues that educational leaders need to engage in such conversations in order to address systemic racism. Educators also need to support critical conversations with students by teaching critical literacy, “which focuses on building students’ awareness of how systems of meaning and power affect people and the lives they lead.”

The document describes case studies in the application of critical/courageous conversations, including: *Making Equity Work in Schools*. This three-year anti-racist professional development project was implemented in 21 schools in Winnipeg. To address educators’ reluctance to talk about equity issues, the project challenged and encouraged educators to identify equity issues and consider actions to make changes in schools. The program designer engaged educators in critical conversations and worked with individual schools as a critical friend, providing support and feedback. Participating schools reported student, educator and community benefits.

Manitoba also developed an Anti-Racism Joint Action Plan. The plan is based on activities taken from the Journey from Cultural Awareness to Cultural Competency training program. The plan engages several stakeholder groups, including students and their families, as well as educators.

Saskatchewan: Following Their Voices

Saskatchewan has launched an initiative called *Following Their Voices* designed to improve Aboriginal student outcomes by engaging and supporting students through changes in:

- Student-teacher relationships and interactions;
- Teacher instructional practices; and
- The learning environment.

The initiative is based on New Zealand’s Te Kotahitanga, which has had a measurable impact on student success among Maori students. Te Kotahitanga was adapted for use in Saskatchewan with extensive input from Aboriginal students and their families, teachers, school administrators, and Elders and knowledge keepers.

Following Their Voices is a job-embedded teacher development initiative that invites teachers to reflect on their relationships and interactions with Aboriginal students and on the classroom learning environment through the Critical Learning Cycle. This involves cycles of teacher training, application of new knowledge in the classroom, classroom observations by trainers, and feedback to teachers. Though the initiative is not specifically designed to address racism, it does include anti-racist components, including: challenging teachers to examine their own values, beliefs, and biases with respect to Aboriginal students and worldviews; learning about the history of residential schools, the First Nations experience in Canada, the Indian Act and other oppressive laws; and experiential learning, such as the “blanket exercise,” which takes non-Aboriginals through the experience of colonial oppression in North America.

Following Their Voices was initially piloted at six schools. During the current school year, the pilot project was expanded to 17 schools. Further expansions are anticipated.

Nova Scotia: Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey

In Nova Scotia, graduation rates among Mi’kmaq students are substantially higher than the Canadian average for Aboriginal students: in 2012-2013, the Mi’kmaq student graduation rate was 87.7%. Mi’kmaw communities in Nova Scotia have the right to manage their children’s education. Local Mi’kmaw schools deliver language immersion courses, culturally appropriate pedagogy and other initiatives to promote student success. They are supported by Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey, a central education authority that provides services and resources to its members and negotiates on their behalf with the Nova Scotia and federal governments.

Approximately half of all teachers in Mi’kmaw schools are Mi’kmaq. This has been made possible through a sustained collaboration between Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey and the Faculty of Education at St. Francis Xavier University, where a large number of Mi’kmaw-speaking students have earned their bachelor of education. The faculty also delivers on-reserve programming for students to complete their teaching degree or earn a certificate in Mi’kmaw language pedagogy.

Environmental Scan of District Practices to Address Racism toward Aboriginal Students

The data-gathering methodology for the environmental scan of district practices consisted of conducting telephone interviews with one representative from each district (representatives from 22 of the districts were interviewed). The representative was typically the District Principal or Vice-Principal of Aboriginal Education. In some cases, the interviewee was that Director of Instruction or the Superintendent or retired personnel from any of the above positions. The

interviews ranged from 20 to 60 minutes and were based on an interview protocol that was developed by the *Directions* team with input from FNEESC, the Ministry of Education, and the Anti-Racism Committee of the Education Partners Table. The interviews were guided by the protocol but did not strictly adhere to the questions specified in the protocol. A copy of the protocol can be found in Appendix I.

The interviews were recorded (with the explicit consent of interviewees). A researcher subsequently reviewed the recordings and transcribed sections deemed relevant to the issue of racism toward Aboriginal students. The interview data makes it clear that all of the different kinds of racism identified in the literature review exist in BC schools. The interviewees discussed many different existing practices—some of these practices are specifically designed to address racism, but most are aimed more broadly at supporting educational success among BC’s Aboriginal students. In the discussion below, the incidents of racism that were identified by the interviewees are categorized into the 7 forms of racism described in the literature review. For each form of racism, specific examples are provided through direct interview quotes. The district practices identified by interviewees are also organized into descriptive categories, with examples provided to illustrate the range of practices within each category. The process of categorizing forms of racism and practices that address racism is strictly for the purposes of organizing the information that was gathered and does not in any way imply that racism and practices for addressing racism fall into neat and non-overlapping categories. It should also be noted that the evidence supporting the practices described below is anecdotal and based on the interviewees’ experiences and impressions.

Forms of racism

Verbal attacks

A small number of interviewees reported that Aboriginal students experience the blatant racism of verbal attacks and racist slurs.

*Is there racism here? Do First Nations people have things thrown at them that are deeply racist?
Oh yeah, I’m sure that happens.*

At the middle school they will tell you that they feel it quite significantly. There are general slurs about Native people: they don’t pay taxes, they’re all drunks, they’re lazy, you can’t get off your ass, what’s wrong with you guys, you’ll never amount to anything. Anytime you bring anything up around the Indian Act or residential schools, the response is “just get over it.”

So sometimes it’s that subtle, all the way up to some overt racism.

Psychological abuse

Various ways of demeaning and failing to respect Aboriginal people and communities and their values were reported.

The majority of our teachers, of our principals, of our employees are not Aboriginal. Because of our country's history, most of them have received from the media and from the education system backwards ideas and misinformation about Aboriginal people. So they have a rather jaundiced opinion of Aboriginal people. Although it's usually not overt racism, our staff may—because of the lessons they have learned—see our Aboriginal students as “less than.”

Questioning the value of spending Education money on language revitalization.

Fifteen years ago, because of the immensity and quality of Aboriginal Programs and services in the district, the Aboriginal Education Council advocated for a place, a place of pride, to house our programs and services. And then we managed to get it. It's a respectful place, open door. We provided the space and meeting place and the food for every committee. Now the district wants the Aboriginal Education Council and department to move out of their place, the House of Building Strength, and into a building with all the other departments and board office staff. That has been an ongoing tension for the past 4 or 5 years. No matter what the Aboriginal Education Council says, it just falls on deaf ears. They're just not getting it. They don't see the sense of place, the value of a sense of place and belonging and pride in that one little space. It's tied to the lack of respect and the issue of racism.

And also being questioned: “Why are the kids doing so well in the language class and they don't do well in the other classes?” There was quite a bit of that over the years and that continues. Just a questioning of...because the kids have a sense of belonging and welcome and the curriculum and teaching are relevant to them and they are more engaged and focused. There were questions about that and about the quality of the teaching and the value of the teaching. There were questions about why are we spending time teaching the language and culture when we should be focused on teaching more literacy. That kind of thing.

We know racism exists in the community, but in the age of political correctness, it has gone underground. We know it is there, but we can't put our finger on it. It's the sneering, the incorrect terminology.

They refer to outdated ideas of blood quantum directly to students, saying things like: “What are you, one thirty-second Aboriginal?” Which is especially damaging to us here. About 25% of

our students of Aboriginal ancestry have at some time been cut off from their family and they don't know what their background is.

Sometimes we get staff members who come here and they think they're going to save us. They don't even realize that they're doing that sometimes.

Low expectations

Several interviewees described ways in which educators hold lower expectations for Aboriginal students. Interviewees often ascribed positive intentions to perpetrators of the racism of low expectations, while recognizing the harm done to students whose educators do not hold them to high standards.

The most profound impact that I believe as an educator that is happening with Aboriginal learners is the soft bigotry of low expectations which is a racism perpetrated on Aboriginal students by educators who do not believe that they can achieve the same outcomes or the same level of understanding as non-Aboriginal students.

There are individual teachers, especially older teachers, who may report their experience that Aboriginal students do not do as well as other non-Aboriginal students.

We get that a lot. Sometimes, regarding grad rates for example, people think "if I lower the bar, then this person will graduate and this one and this one, and we'll have a higher grad rate."

After our longhouse visit, after hearing personal stories of residential schools and learning about the intergenerational trauma, many of the teachers wondered if they should have different expectations for Aboriginal Students.

Aboriginal learners perform better on standardized tests than on classroom assessments—the reverse is true for non-Aboriginal learners.

It's a sentiment that has been felt in our district and expressed by the First Nations community quite clearly that the Evergreen system is just a way of getting kids through school.

Discrimination is also about not having the courage to look at the real issues. Low expectations are reassuring: change is scary. The typical Achievement Contract, the typical report, will look at how Aboriginal students are doing compared to non-Aboriginal students. For example: "89% of our non-Aboriginal students meet expectations and Aboriginal students are 5, 6, 10 points behind." Those statistics only consider the students who are regularly attending or who

happened to be attending on the day of the assessment. What about the 15 to 30% of Aboriginal students who are absent on any given day? Guess what would happen if those kids were included in our statistics? The gap would be closer to 17 or 20 points between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. We cannot address the real issues, we cannot have high expectations for all our students until we have the courage to look at the real statistics.

Social isolation and marginalization

Some of the interviewees reported ways in which Aboriginal students are held apart from other students.

There is such a division between Aboriginal kids and non-Aboriginal kids—it was so glaring to me.

Listening to students, which I do, they have experiences of uncomfortableness. For example, one student reported “whenever they’re talking about Native stuff, the kids turn and stare at me.”

I worked with the language teachers on a monthly basis for many years and just the stories they told me. Just in terms of our language program itself: they felt very separate from the rest of the school.

In the years since Aboriginal Education staff first began working in our school system is that it was very easy to take those pieces of an educator’s role, like phoning home when the child isn’t at school, and leaving them to the First Nations support worker. And it happened with the best of intentions, I believe, by having people who are representative of the community to help build relationships. But I think what has happened is that anything to do with Aboriginal students has become the responsibility of the Aboriginal Education staff. We are all responsible for all the students.

Historically in this district Aboriginal Education has been really siloed and not part of the regular mainstream program, and people really didn’t have very much understanding or awareness of Aboriginal issues.

This is what the kids themselves have told me: “How come we’re the ones that get the racism training? How come it’s brown kids being told about racism but not the white kids?” We have to find a way where we address these things without singling our Native kids out and putting the spotlight on them because that’s really uncomfortable.

Provincially we have rolled out this emergency management plan. We have all these protocols about what to do in various scenarios. I have been working with the province—because I’m the Safe Schools Coordinator—and I’ve been really frustrated because I don’t see Indigenous people represented. They get invited, but they are invited to get on board with a plan that has already been developed.

Professional indifference

Interviewees reported professional indifference stemming from a lack of understanding or awareness of the challenges many Aboriginal children face.

What I see more in the system is intolerance. I don’t think we have any educators who would treat students differently because they are Aboriginal. What I see over and over again is a misunderstanding or an inability to view kids differently. It is a very common sentiment for teachers to say “every kid gets a fair shake with me, I treat every kid the same.” Well that doesn’t honour what a student is bringing to the class. This is not just an Aboriginal thing, but a kid who hasn’t had breakfast can’t do math. Not caring about whether a kid is fed and just worrying about math is intolerance. If you don’t honour the fact that Johnny’s mom was in residential school, not honouring that is a colonial perspective. When you call Johnny’s mom and say “hey we have a problem” that means something way different to her. It’s not in terms of targeting a student because they are Aboriginal. It’s a matter of showing intolerance toward a student in not recognizing their background.

There is a pocket of teachers that are a little more resistant to it. They don’t see the problem or how it is impacting here.

There is a lot of resistance. In my experience there is a lot of denial and anger. Teachers tell us that they are working really hard. No one is denying that they are working hard but if all we’ve gotten for the last 15 or 20 years are these same results then perhaps we should be doing things differently.

Another kind of professional indifference was observed in educators’ lack of interest in Aboriginal education.

Does the school administration or teachers express interest in the language program or come in and visit or try to learn a few words here and there? That’s limited.

Yes there is a non-instructional day focused on Aboriginal learning, but from the Aboriginal Education Department point of view, it was very loose. It wasn't a strong, focused, planned event by the partners that should have been planning that event.

We had a student forum in the fall and we asked the principals to send five students with ancestry who would enjoy a leadership opportunity. Some of our principals had a hard time identifying who those students might be. They don't really know the students as individuals.

It exists in ignorance or in a lack of willingness among educators to move along in their understanding. For example, we can spend a lot of time on Confederation and Sir John A. Macdonald—who was an Indian agent—but we can't spend a lot of time on local history. That is an example of racialized barriers and a colonial mindset that we have to move away from in public education.

Interviewees also reported professional indifference among leaders who show a lack of commitment to Aboriginal students and fail to form truly collaborative relationships with Aboriginal educators and communities.

How can districts be in compliance with the policy that requires districts to expend their targeted funds in collaboration with Aboriginal communities when one third of districts do not have an Aboriginal Education Council in place?

Districts hold all the power in Local Education Agreement negotiations. Districts make the final decision, they can ignore the wishes of local First Nations because they will get their money whether they have a Local Education Agreement or not. No matter what, districts will get their money. There is no incentive to sit and negotiate with the First Nation.

The work of infusing Aboriginal content into the curriculum and providing pro-D opportunities for district staff, that was totally led by the Aboriginal Education department and it definitely made a difference. We worked really hard to develop those relationships and we did make a difference for our learners, but there is still evidence that we never got even close to developing honest, genuine relationships—even though at times we compromised our own integrity to try to develop those relationships. Many times in my position—I was at pretty much all the tables in our district—we always had to push to make sure that important focus was on the table. And when we weren't at the table, the focus either wasn't there or it wasn't as strong.

We have an Aboriginal Education Council and we are supposedly equal partners with the Board of Education. We're supposed to be equal partners and have a half decent respectful relationship. That is an issue, as well, a struggle, an ongoing struggle.

This building houses two alternative education programs: one is specifically for Aboriginal students and the other is not. Both programs serve approximately the same number of students. The Aboriginal program occupies the top floor of the old wing. The classrooms, bathrooms, kitchen, eating area, and administrative offices are all squeezed into this space. Our students call this "The Dump." On the bottom floor of the old wing, occupying the same square footage as the entire Aboriginal program, are just the administrative offices for the non-Aboriginal program. The non-Aboriginal classrooms and other learning spaces are housed in a separate, much newer wing. Our students see this disparity very clearly. We work on self-esteem with our students. We tell them that they are valuable, that they are worthwhile and they look around at The Dump and roll their eyes.

Systemic Racism

Several of the interviewees discussed systemic racism and ways in which aspects of the public school system could be harmful to Aboriginal students without specifically targeting them.

Just recently an email came out and it made me think—not so much from a racist perspective—but made me think. We have an opportunity across the district to have a bunch of students involved in an extracurricular activity that involves travel for educational reasons. Again, it just makes me think. Each school can have 5 or 6 or 7 kids. And then I wonder if this is accessible to our Aboriginal kids. Or how...it's not racist in the sense there's anything that says this isn't open to Aboriginal kids or we don't expect Aboriginal kids or because kids are Aboriginal this won't make sense to them or be good for them or we don't want them. Yet I wonder if there's been any attempt in this specific information for this trip, this opportunity, to in a sense level the playing field for Aboriginal kids. There was nothing in the email that said "and we would like you to consider Aboriginal kids."

The system doesn't hire First Nations teachers. We need a mechanism to account for that. There is the inability of the system to recognize the importance of hiring more Aboriginal teachers. Only 85 Aboriginal teachers graduate every year. We need 4,600 Aboriginal teachers in the classrooms to be roughly representative of our population. This must be an area of focus and needs to be fixed. We can't change the system without having more First Nations teachers involved.

Several interviewees also noted that Aboriginal parents are not deliberately excluded from PACs, but noted that the standard PAC format tends to alienate Aboriginal parents.

What happens on PACs are the really vocal parents who are mostly non-First Nation. Sometimes you get a parent who has agreed to take part and just feels that they have no voice there.

I can't say it doesn't exist—it's the subtle things. For instance, we don't have a high number of First Nations parents that participate in PAC. The reasons are quite varied, but it's quite an intimidating setting for many. Without their involvement that sometimes can mean that things PAC do may not be what First Nations parents want to happen.

Denial of racism and its effects

Interviewees noted different forms of denial, including an unwillingness to address some forms of racism and blaming of students and their families for the conditions they live in and for poor educational outcomes.

There is a denial of racism. It's never called that. It's the students who are blamed. The student doesn't have the background, the parents live in poverty, the students come to school ill-equipped, they don't have the readiness skills—we hear it all. That doesn't absolve the system of the responsibility to educate children.

You'd mention it, but people don't want to address it...in terms of building those relationships and building the respect and the understanding and the connections between all students.

There are comments I hear or are reported to me by teachers that suggest we are judging parents and families for the conditions. For example: "Those children have been unschooled for 4 months! What's wrong with those parents?" Not understanding the challenges that that single parent has been facing—poverty, or they didn't have a home, or whatever it was.

The number one problem in Aboriginal education is school absenteeism, and that ties to racism as well. We have to understand where absenteeism comes from: until we rebuild the trust with Aboriginal communities we will not be able to get those kids to school. A lot of educators just see a kid who is disconnected from school, a kid that has an attitude. Many of these kids come from families with complex histories—facing poverty issues, social issues. We are educators: we should understand the root of the problem, we should be educating the parents, we should be rebuilding the bridge, we should be helping those children, but we are unable to see that. Instead the stereotypes kick in. We think: those Aboriginal kids, those Aboriginal people...they

don't like schooling, they are lazy. We judge the child instead of understanding where he or she comes from. Of course it's not everyone, but from some educators that is the response.

Contested racism

Several of the interviewees discussed an additional way in which racism could arise as an issue: they noted that Aboriginal students and parents sometimes interpret educators' behaviours as racist while educators insist that they are dealing fairly with a difficult situation.

It's a fine line of discussion, in my opinion, because there is racism that is really discriminatory and then there is racism that is kind thrown out as almost an attack when something isn't going quite right. I have had families accuse me of being racist, families that have been much more wounded from residential school experiences and they are still developing trust in the school system. And I have maybe had a situation with their child and if I had any accountability on the table at all I have been a "racist". But I am not counting that because that is just a reaction.

If a student is not necessarily behaving well in school—and kids participate deeply in identifying self-regulating processes, work together as a class to come to a conclusion about how they are going to be together as a class—but if a teacher were to have to address with a student that they are not living up to the things we promised each other in this classroom. That child might feel stung and go home and tell his parents about it. Occasionally parents leap to the conclusion that their child has been treated in a racist manner.

It's kind of a...we're not sure how to handle this. Because there's no doubt there are times when a race card can be pulled when it isn't racism. And there are sometimes when a race card should be pulled because it is.

District Practices

Interviewees described a range of different practices that they found to be effective in addressing the forms of racism described above.

Investigate Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal Gaps

Reviewing data to identify and investigate gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students can address racism in several ways. It can signal the existence of racism (especially lowered expectations and systemic racism) and point to specific issues that need to be addressed; it can be used to reinforce the message that such gaps are not acceptable; and it can be used to monitor progress in addressing racism.

We are always poking holes to look for achievement gaps, to look for areas where there is variance in success between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Our Aboriginal Education Department is just learning this year about the Ministry SharePoint. Our data monitoring is becoming more focussed. We know the graduation rate, but now we are asking why aren't they graduating?

Our Aboriginal completion rates are on par with our non-Aboriginal students, but we know through the data that there is an achievement gap (e.g., in FSA results and provincial exams). We're trying to figure out why that is and close that gap.

Monitor individual student progress

Several of the interviewees indicated that Aboriginal Education departments maintain high expectations for every Aboriginal student by monitoring each student individually, helping each student to plan a successful pathway through school, and addressing issues that threaten student success as they arise.

The Aboriginal Education worker who works with secondary students meets with them weekly and she is constantly reviewing academic progress and helping where needed.

We haven't so much focussed on the individual teacher as we have focussed on the success of students in the school. For example, if we note there are the 7 kids in Grade 11 who do not have Math 10, the focus is on developing a plan for the students, not on talking to individual teachers about their expectations. This applies to all students, not just Aboriginal students.

The other thing that we have done is a kind of quick, snapshot survey of every Aboriginal identified student that our staff are expected to complete every September. Going through and identifying how is reading, how is writing, how is numeracy, how is attendance, how is behaviour. And is the child on an IEP or are they doing really well. The purpose is to ensure our staff are aware of the needs of all the students on our list. Then we can look at what additional services our department can provide—whether they are doing well or struggling.

One of our support workers, actually a couple of them, took the next step of looking at what students said they are interested in studying and then they sat down and cross-referenced the courses the students were enrolled in and worked with students on aligning goals/course requirements with enrollments. I think there is momentum going in that direction...we're starting to monitor more.

We have success advisors that sit with every single Aboriginal student in our district and support them, make sure they have all their courses needed for grad, their grad transitions, and develop a post-secondary plan for every child. And if they are not at school, then we go to the reserve and we bring them back. A post-secondary plan for every single student. Even students who want to take a year off, we get them registered and then get a deferral, so they have something in place after their year off.

We have a growing level of sophistication with identifying any learner that is struggling. We triangulate between district assessments, classroom assessments, and FSA. We pull it all together so the Director of Instruction has a report looking at those aspects of where students are struggling. Among our Aboriginal students, if they meet expectations on FSA4 and FSA7 and score 60% or better on English 10 then they outperform non-Aboriginal students on the 6-year completion rate. We consider anyone who isn't on that trajectory to be off-target, intervene and have a discussion with the principal and teachers as to what intervention looks like to get them back on track.

We have student learning plans for every Aboriginal student in the district. Our 2nd Enhancement Agreement was based on the work of Martin Brokenleg and the circle of courage, that underlies the philosophy and practices that we used in our Enhancement Agreement. Two Aboriginal support teachers and a teacher who was interested in it created a student learning plan with the circle of courage as the starting conversation of where kids were at in terms of their physical being, their spiritual being, their intellectual being, and sense of belonging. The Aboriginal support workers or our cultural facilitators and Aboriginal teachers will sit down with every Aboriginal child—and this goes on yearly and often it's just an update and especially making sure we're prioritizing those students that we know are challenged by academics or by social-emotional or by family distress and they have a conversation around the Circle and it gets filled in and goals are developed and we track attendance and track their success on FSAs and letter grades, etc. Especially as we're getting into grades 9, 10, 11, 12, we're tracking very closely to make sure that those kids are going to get the supports they need to graduate. Of which probably 80% are on-track and we're just touching base and seeing what's new in their lives and connecting that way, but we do have our 20 – 25% of kids who are on our keep-an-eye-on list.

Foster student self-empowerment

Interviewees held strongly that Aboriginal students are the most effective agents for addressing racism toward Aboriginal students.

We have started our own leadership program. A lot of the self-identified students would not necessarily go out to a district leadership program. The district leadership program tends to be more for the gregarious, outgoing, overachieving students. Some of our students are quieter, more reserved, so we have our own leadership program. We have brought in Elders, we have been talking about volunteerism, we do team building, self-awareness.

We have 60 students Grades 8 to 12 participating in raising awareness in our Aboriginal Leadership class. Our focus and purpose is student voice, social justice, and raising awareness about issues that affect our students at school and in community. Last year they chose to talk about racism and missing & murdered women. We made a 32-min documentary film, 24-Hour Drum, about this process and their journey and them speaking out. This film is now travelling across Canada. The day of the 24-Hour Drum, our youth travelled throughout the district and spoke at 5 middle and high schools, one was a band school, and did 1-hour performances at every school: spoken word, songs, drumming, all presentations to raise awareness about being Aboriginal today. Their role in terms of leadership is providing that student voice and that sends a pretty strong message to younger Aboriginal youth across the district.

My students are saying they feel safer. Once you step out and speak up and use your voice, people look at you differently because you're not shrinking anymore. Because you have a voice. Once we empower our youth, change will come. We have to listen to what their reality is so that we can help them. It's not about somebody else helping them. It's about them being scaffolded and supported to help themselves. So that they can walk forward knowing that they are resilient, that they are able to make the change that they need.

The very best way to combat racism is to have our kids who are feeling this stand up and use their voice, and speak about what they are experiencing.

It's about diversifying learning and giving students opportunities to show their strengths and meeting requirements for graduation, and setting the bar high so that students know that it's hard work that makes you graduate and that anything they do outside of school requires commitment and a work ethic.

Empowering students also includes teaching them to recognize racism in all its forms.

Anti-racism material has got to be required - particularly at the high school level. It needs to be in the curriculum. It has to be taught in one grade every year and probably revisited. There's a great anti-racism kit: it's called The Kit. It's produced by students through the United Nations Association in Canada.

Listen to students

Other interviewees noted that Aboriginal students need the adults around them to know what they experience and to intervene. Listening carefully to students and making space for them to speak up is perceived as critical to addressing the racism that they experience.

We also have consultation events with students. Students are surveyed as a whole. And student representatives who have had conversations with other students come and share with us in a very frank and open process. We go out in canoes so they know there is no one around who can hear them, they can say whatever they need to say, and it will be received and respected and taken seriously.

The kids spoke about their experiences [with racism] and they had suggestions: “If you hear this, if you see this, please stop right at that moment, right at that time and take action.”

We are just trying to listen to the kids, to be open to hearing some difficult things, and then take to action in supporting our students to walk forward. It’s about lifting them up but having them do the work. First you have to listen...that’s important for educators to hear.

We borrowed a survey from First Nations schools to conduct with all students in the district—over and above the provincial student satisfaction survey. It asks very blatant questions around experiences of racism at school.

Create safe spaces

Interviewees described the importance of creating spaces where Aboriginal students feel safe. These include separate spaces where Aboriginal students can find refuge and connection to their Aboriginal community, and making all school spaces safe for Aboriginal students.

We spent a lot of time and effort this year to try and make a safe place for our kids to gather. We have a First Nations room now. We supply their room with food for our kids, support, and our 24-hour Drum & Leadership group is taking strong hold of that school. There are lots of systems set in place to support Aboriginal students in having them feel connected and safe in our schools. Is that always working? Not always.

We have a district strategic plan and the #1 goal in that plan is to create safe, purposeful learning environments. That is a powerful statement.

How do you create the learning environment to support resilient learners? Having kids work cooperatively in groups, co-planning, co-learning, group feedback, assessment as learning, using circles to create learning communities. Those are viable practices that support all students, as well as our Aboriginal students.

We've been culling our libraries. We have a helping teacher who works with the teachers in regards to building their capacity in the classroom...she and the district librarian have been visiting every library and going through to make sure that we're getting rid of the stereotype reinforcing books that are on the shelves that are old, that shouldn't be on the shelves anymore but no one has taken the time to do that work. And we're really pushing for authentic literature.

They definitely are champions about providing an Aboriginal Education room so that students have a place that they can call their own when they come into our schools. They have created welcoming environments at the front door, with different Aboriginal displays. They will have welcome signs in the traditional language. That's the window dressing that helps students be comfortable. They are also doing things at the school level such as acknowledging the traditional territory at assemblies, our board does that, the superintendent does that at every meeting,

Reach out to parents and Aboriginal community members

Several of the interviewees noted that it can be difficult to connect with Aboriginal parents, who often do not feel comfortable in the school environment. Reaching out to parents and other members of the Aboriginal community by going into the community, rather than requiring them to come to the school, was cited by several as an effective approach.

When I meet with the principal of the on-reserve school, I go there. I don't say come to the board office. Our Enhancement Agreement meetings, our review committee meetings, etc. are not at the board office. That's about relationship building. Why have every meeting at the board office?

For example, calling a grandmother into the principals' office. People have to understand the background and when that grandmother was in the school herself it was a different place. And maybe that's the time to go have the meeting somewhere else.

Every year every family that we can possibly communicate with by telephone or by meeting is consulted with. Usually happens in September...chatting on the phone, visiting in Tim Hortons, visiting at home, sometimes they come to the school. We have a series of questions that we ask.

We call the whole process Nurturing the Learning Spirit. About school satisfaction, feeling a sense of belonging, feeling safe, are you experiencing anything that feels like racism.

We have a formal committee called Parent Engagement...that's all parents but there's a subset involved in engaging Aboriginal parents. We have Aboriginal Family Gatherings, potluck evenings where Aboriginal families are welcomed and there is usually an Elder who leads it where there is a bit of a talk, a bit of background, cultural sharing, drumming, singing, then we eat, then we do a cultural activity related to that Elder's background.

We have a program of choice, Learning through Land, Language & Culture, a public school program in partnership with the X Nation. This program is k-6 and for all students. The community, the knowledge keepers, Elders, school district representatives, teachers, and the students gather to co-plan and co-create for that program—so that involves the whole community.

In the north, where there seems to be quite a divide between comfort zones in terms of having Aboriginal parents coming to the schools and feeling safe, we're having PAC meetings on the reserve. We are actually going to the reserve and having PAC meetings and bringing all the teachers. Most teachers haven't even walked on the reserve before. Having them come out to the reserve and be on the reserve and see where the kids live, how they're living and be part of community is very, very important. They see—regardless of the poverty—if they get to know community, there are many networks of caring and love and connected communities and families. Every reserve is different and relationships and communities are complex, but we have to get teachers out on them and in them in order for some clarity and understanding.

All of our secondary schools have been doing multi-year community based feasts. Almost the entire school goes over [to the community], there's a water taxi hired, they go over for an evening, it's hosted by the band operated school, which is a demonstration of our willingness to throw away jurisdictions and work with communities. It is hosted in collaboration with X First Nation—there are as many as 60 to 80 attendees at the community level.

In addition, there is daytime release for face-to-face parent teacher meetings—and that's not just for Aboriginal parents, that's for all parents in X Bay—cohorts of staff and administration go over to meet face to face in the community. And that's a big investment because it's a 45 minute ferry ride each way. We could just wait in our schools and say "our door is open, come see me if you have any questions" and if they don't come, they don't come.

We have dinners in the community. I gather up the school's people. We had a really good turn-out. And that's the time that parents sit around...around the table, and you've had your meal, and they start asking questions. It's not an official parent-teacher and it's not necessarily about the child. They're asking questions about school, about classes, about courses. They have an opportunity to have those conversations.

The interviewees noted that Aboriginal parents will come to the school when particular efforts are made to include and welcome them.

Definitely when there is an event, when there is a purpose, when there is a welcome, our families come out. They come out in droves. But they just need it to be purposeful and to know that they will feel welcomed.

We started the PALS program (parents as literacy supporters) at the Kindergarten level. We invited families in and they got to see what their kids were learning and activities. And they got a goody bag of activities to do with their kids. Over the years, that really developed the welcome and the sense of belonging for our parents. Some of them then would take part in PAC. Some schools really embraced it and got out 85% of the families. We really encouraged our Aboriginal family resource workers to go out and connect with families, remind them. We got the dates from the schools when they scheduled the sessions, we put them on magnets for the parents to get at the first session, the family resource workers reminded the parents through a phone call the day before...we did whatever it took to get families out.

Build relationships and reconciliation

Relationship building was a persistent theme throughout most of the interviews. Strong relationships are seen as foundational to respect, collaboration, and sharing the responsibility for successfully educating young people.

The essence of the TRC recommendations is about building a new relationship with Aboriginal communities based on trust, based on an appreciation of what they bring to Canadian society. If we work toward this in the school system then we will be fighting racism and discrimination based on stereotypes.

As the years go by and the school communities have a greater understanding of the reconciliation process and what needs to be done, then people become much more understanding of the need to build relationships in local community and even how to do that.

We have started in the last year to have meetings with 2 Elders from X First Nation, 2 Elders from Y First Nation, and two Metis nation representatives...they join us with our superintendent and deputy superintendent and director of learning services and myself and we have some smaller more intimate meetings and just talk about directions. The agendas are not always as formal, but we have been having much more conversation in the way of protocols, how we might bring protocols into the schools, what is a reasonable way to start doing it. Part of that conversation has been about bringing Elders into the schools more.

There are a lot of local people wrestling with the new and deeper knowledge that people have of residential schools and other government policies that have deeply hurt and deeply impacted First Nations people. So there is a lot of work being done here in terms of reconciliation. And our kids all go to school together. The school district and the First Nations people of this place have long had this kind of relationship of...we need to get to know each other and we need to get to an understanding of what you have just been through. We want to know about it and what we can do together.

What it's going to take is a partnership between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. For example, I saw a presentation on First Nations communities who, on their reserve, had created a professional development day for teachers. The teachers were bussed out there and the community led them through and shared with them a cedar brushing ceremony, shared some of their historical sites, showed and explained the spirit houses that are placed on top of burial mounds. It's that bridging and sharing—which is a hard thing to ask from the Indigenous communities, given that for so long so much of their culture was oppressed and shut down...why in the world would they want to share it with us now?

Building relationships with the communities is important. All of our schools at various times and to various degrees of success have gone into the local First Nation communities to hold parent-teacher meetings.

Two of the nations have regular education meetings, and invite the principals and anyone else who may need to be there, to go over what's going on that month. So there's regular ongoing communication, so that helps a lot. Those are really good because it helps to foster the communication piece. A lot of it is the communication and the understanding. Those are good things that are in place, that are supporting teachers and schools in developing relationships so those kinds of misunderstandings don't happen or there's a greater degree of understanding.

An important part of relationship building involves establishing trust by fully addressing every report of every form of racism—including contested racism. In one district the interviewee

described a process that is followed to address student and parent reports of racism. The process is reported to work well in instances of contested racism, and to simultaneously contribute to establishing trust and building relationships.

When that happens, we very quickly ask the people involved to sit with each other. And the teachers are asked to listen carefully to the parents' concerns, what are the feelings of the child—the child participates if possible. Only after seeking to understand, if the teacher needs to be understood then the teacher makes an offer to say this is what was happening and where I was coming from. My role, or my staff, is if people would like us to be a presence there, we become advocates for a good resolution and restoration if need be. Normally, after the family hears what happened they are usually very pleased and saying "ok, this wasn't a situation where the teacher was coming from a racist place." Most of the time people go away saying that wasn't racial at all.

Respectful inclusion of Aboriginal ways and perspectives

Integrating Aboriginal content and perspectives into the school system is seen as a necessary strategy for addressing racism—particularly psychological abuse and marginalization—as well as for building relationships and contributing to Aboriginal students' academic success. Interviewees recognize the importance of respecting protocols and focussing primarily on local traditions when integrating Aboriginal content and perspectives.

We have not formally acknowledged the territories in our district on a widespread basis and we have been working on wording to get out to the schools. It will be done soon and out to schools. And what we would like to do is bring some of the Elders in to speak to the protocols so that it's not just a script, we don't just email a sentence or two and say "read this at each assembly." We actually will have conversations about: this is what it says, this is why it says it, this is the context, this is the history, these are the values. We are hoping to bring a couple of Elders in to speak to the administrators and also to speak in a conference setting so that people can really begin to understand. I think we have some momentum and it's accelerating.

Rather than saying there won't be any racism, we've made a series of statements in our enhancement agreement and in our strategic plan that say we very much acknowledge diversity, Aboriginal people in particular, and that is to be done in a very, very respectful way. What we did put into a regulation was the protocol acknowledging Aboriginal territories, acknowledging the Aboriginal people who may be at any of our meetings, acknowledging Elders and so forth.

Our Aboriginal community participate in special events like our graduation ceremony. They all have a cultural element to them and the Aboriginal community helps us plan what that will look like. We have Heritage Days, but the heritage we are celebrating is Aboriginal heritage at some of the schools where we have over 50% Aboriginal students. The whole community comes to that school and prepares fish in the traditional way and prepares food and shares their culture with everyone in the school.

The Aboriginal community is very much engaged and involved in our Culture and Language Program. Community members come to the school, the kids go to the community and out on the land and out on the water, learning and practicing the language and engaging in the culture.

At each entrance to every school is an image, Raven chasing the sun in a circle which has become our school district logo designed by a local teacher who left teaching to be an artist. There is a large scale print at the entrance of every school and board facility, along with an explanation of the meaning. Beside the print is an acknowledgement of our Aboriginal community, of the territories and the people, and beside that is another frame with the symbol of our Aboriginal Programs & Services – a medicine wheel and some key words: relationship, protocol, etc. When a person walks into our schools, that is one of the very first things that they see.

To get First Nations Studies 12 operating at our schools, Aboriginal Education had to pay for one block at each school because the numbers were always low. They would get 10 or 12 kids wanting to take the course, and then the course wouldn't make the cut. I finally paid out of my learning budget for one block at each of our secondary schools to get the course going. And it worked. That little bit of seed money support worked. Because the course is a great course. And once that word of mouth got out to the kids, then we had no problem filling the seats.

Support teachers in developing knowledge and understanding

The interviewees frequently commented on the need for teachers to understand their Aboriginal students, to understand their own racism and how racism affects their students, and to build the capacity to integrate Aboriginal content and perspectives into their classrooms. Resources and cultural training were frequently mentioned, but in-person support from Aboriginal resource people (Aboriginal support workers, Knowledge Keepers, etc.) is considered essential.

His official title is Aboriginal Arts & Cultural Advisor. He is working with kids, but it's really been great for building relationships. He's a gem of a staff person who can comfortably just weave stories in and tell history in a comfortable way. And staff members have built enough of a

relationship with him that they can ask some uncomfortable questions and they can explore a bit without feeling shame that they don't know. They can ask about what the protocol is, and when that Elder is here what does that mean? So that people are feeling safe to have some conversations. He is an artist, carver, painter, and story teller. So he does this with the kids and with the adults, so everyone is learning at the same time. And he is present in staff rooms and he's working with people and they will call him up and ask questions. Between him and myself, there's enough relationship that people feel comfortable to call and ask us questions.

We have changed the role of our Aboriginal Support Worker...now we have an Aboriginal Student Success and Culture Facilitator. We have an Aboriginal sculptor who is in our high school everyday, and in other district schools as well, supporting teachers in the new curriculum and cultural awareness, working with Aboriginal students. And he is highly connected with the staff and moving that agenda forward.

Our new teacher orientation focusses on learning about local Aboriginal peoples. They learn about the traditional lands; the local creation stories; they get some historical perspective, including the role of residential schools; and they learn about the five local bands.

We began integrating Aboriginal content and perspectives 15 years ago. We have a team of 7 that is reflective of our Aboriginal student population. Our staff visit all of our schools at least once a week, many times twice a week. At the elementary level, every class is visited by one of these teachers at least once a week for cultural inclusion in their learning. The teacher stays in the class and takes part. The new curriculum is not such a big transition for us, other than our classroom teachers are really excited about taking the lead on some things. Paper canoes and plastic teepees...we have gone from that to people with deep, deep understanding and deep respect for culture and knowing how important it is not to cartoonify or mock or pretend, but to do it in an authentic way and bring authentic people in to share their culture. And you help kids understand particular peoples in particular places, to understand that there are many, many, many First Nations, Metis and Inuit people who have different ways of looking at the world, different stories. By the time they finish Grade 7, the kids get that.

In 15 years I have had maybe 5 times when I could tell the teacher was coming from a negative perspective, then afterward the teacher and I do some work together, and I have enjoyed the support of their union on that: books to read, invitations to spend time in the Aboriginal community, history to read. Most teachers do not mean to be racist...there is a huge personal piece of work that gets done and those people become huge champions of anti-racism.

Whenever I get a chance to speak, my message is that there is not to be a different set of expectations but there sometimes need to be distinct ways of supporting students because of family experiences, cultural experiences, and history, past government policy. I think our teachers are really beginning to understand that...that there are effective ways that work for Aboriginal students. And often if it works for Aboriginal students it will work for many other students in the class.

We are in the process of restructuring the department so that it is more included in the district, where everyone takes ownership of Aboriginal Education. We are building teacher capacity by bringing that awareness through professional learning. We have held many, many workshops at the school level, at the district level around residential schools—bringing that awareness so that they have some context about Aboriginal peoples. Through workshops, parent meetings, teacher meetings, principal meetings. On the student side, in terms of staving prejudices or misconceptions, we are moving away from the pull-out program where the students with ancestry would leave the classroom and meet with the Aboriginal support worker. Now we are bringing the support worker, or we have a teacher mentor, into the classroom and teaching lessons with the whole class so that everyone starts to learn and understand and appreciate.

It comes back to mindset. When new teachers come to our district, we have an opportunity to welcome them at the outset of the school. We do that work in community, we do that with Elders, we do it at the cultural centre. It's a welcome to the territory, with an historical overview and an invitation to get onboard and to be part of that continuum of understanding. It's taking the opportunity to always model that that is part of the work and that is priority.

And just recently, our board adopted and endorsed the TRC calls to action. A part of our implementation plan is building teacher and student capacity for empathy. We're rolling out a 5-year plan that addresses just that.

Just building that capacity in teachers to be able to recognize situations in their classrooms—because some teachers don't know how to handle those kinds of things. They invite Aboriginal Education staff into the classroom to address the questions, then we take that as a teachable moment and then we go into the classroom and address those questions with the teacher and the kids. We also do that for our teachers. We had a session at the beginning of the year to ask those awkward questions. We said come on down and ask those questions that you need to ask so that you can understand. Just the preliminary questions, and everyone asks this: "What do we respectfully call you? What terminology do we use? Who is Native and who is not?" All those really good questions, so when kids ask those questions the teachers are equipped to answer them. We're also having Darryl Dennis [author of Peace Pipe Dreams] come to the district to do

a number of classes and a full school assembly to talk about just that. And he's going to do an evening for our principals and our community as well.

The first step, as an educator, is to be aware of your own personal perceptions. And what are those things in how you were raised in your home or your school that are biased against Aboriginal communities. It's something that needs to happen at the heart, as well. The first step is to be aware of our biases. The next step is to do something about it. That's the beginning of changing those low expectations. It's about an awareness, a personal awareness of what are my perceptions, how have they been tainted, and how do I move that forward for me and how to I move it forward for my class and school.

Experiential learning

In order to recognize the impact of racism, interviewees suggested that some educators require a change in mindset. They described several types of experiential learning events that they believed to have had a powerful effect.

There will be a full day pro-D where 5 of our secondary schools plus 3 or 4 elementary schools will spend the entire day there. Part of that is going to be a residential school simulation. It has happened yearly, this is the third year. It's been very powerful. Many of the teachers have reported that it has really shifted their mindset. By the time we're finished in April, every secondary school teacher will have had this experience.

In November, all teachers from K-12 spent the day at the X Nation Longhouse, spent the day listening to stories, listening in particular about residential schools, about reconciliation, ideas about place, ways of knowing, ways of learning. So the entire teaching population took many steps forward in one day about how we can do this together as a teaching group.

The Village Workshop with Kathi Camilleri.

Every single employee in our district—clerical, accounting, bus drivers, EAs, Aboriginal support workers, teachers, administration, and all senior management—we all came together as an entire school district and learned from Aboriginal students, knowledge keepers, Elders in our community who took us through the story since colonization. We put on this huge amazing event and had people telling their stories pertaining to each policy in governance that the feds put into place since 1876. The impact of that day, teachers when they were surveyed and chose to comment or reflect on it, across the district: it was so powerful, they learned so much, they were so appreciative.

It's going to be a very long process to get everyone involved. We started at the top, because they needed to model that leadership role, we had our trustees and central staff do an experiential workshop, building bridges, and learning about the shared history that we have. And we do that work at the principals level.

*We started 5 years ago with *The Fallen Feather*, a documentary of the Kamloops residential school. At that time, the superintendent said: every teacher needs to see this, every principal, and every student. At that time we did a blitz in our district, and people still use that as a resource in their classrooms. It's a wonderful documentary. It's local, so some of the kids recognize their own relatives in the film. That opened a lot of doors for the conversation. Now we're moving on to empathy building experiential exercises. Two years ago, we invited the Grade 10s to come for a Reconciliation Day. They watched the *Fallen Feather* and then they did the Blanket Exercise. We've done quite a bit of work in our district in terms of building awareness and knowledge.*

Self-assessment

Some interviewees suggested that addressing racism requires a degree of self-reflection and discussed ways in which to foster that self-reflection among educators.

We have an Aboriginal Student Success Councillor and she often brings forward racism in her work and includes teachers in some of the workshops that she does. She has some "Do you come from a place of privilege" checklists. If you can check off so many of these then...do some thinking.

We all have to keep thinking everyday, all the time: where am I coming from? To be aware of all the different discourses that we use to explain away racism.

We need to be able to map the phenomenon [of low expectations] and to have a mechanism or tool whereby educators do a self-assessment on their attitudes and beliefs toward Aboriginal learners.

We propose an equity scan of five different areas:

- 1. School districts need to look at their policy and governance. Are there employment equity statements? Are there local education agreements? Is there a consultation structure with local communities for the provision of educational services? Whether that comes through the province or from the federal government, communities are*

purchasing our professional services and they have a right to some accountability around that.

- 2. Need to “peel back the layers” of the HAWD report to look at: transitions, FSA, mark to exam ratios. E.g. gaps between classroom assessment and standardized testing.*
- 3. How is the school experienced by the community? Are we open, transparent, welcoming, culturally relevant, responding to the aspirations and supporting community in where they want to go. Rather than the usual approach: you send your kids to us, we’ll tell you how that is going to go, and we’ll tell you when it’s no longer going according to our plans and here’s your kid back.*
- 4. Attitudes and beliefs of adults. Is there evidence that adults believe that all students will be successful?*
- 5. Close look at the learning environment. Is it culturally relevant? Is the environment reflecting the FPPL? Are we creating the attributes of a responsive learning environment, which was a major undertaking in the Aboriginal Worldviews & Perspectives Document that the Ministry published.*

I’m talking with our principals about privilege, white privilege and we’re doing a series on White privilege because they need to examine their paradigms so that they can examine their teachers’ paradigms or be aware of their teachers’ paradigms, and to carry that message back to the schools as well, that we need to be careful how we...and not lower our expectations but realize that our kids come with a different set of cultural values.

Be patient and make time for the process of change

Several of the interviewees noted that the process of changing racist attitudes, of building relationships and reconciliation, and of improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students is a lengthy one, and expressed hope that there would be enough patience within the school system to effect real change.

We very often see education as a pendulum. Something is the fad of the day for two, three, five years and then it quiets down and something else comes in. Right now the fad is Aboriginal education, because the TRC report came out and then the Auditor General’s report came out, so everyone is gung ho. How long is that going to last? That’s the problem. If we see this as a fad or a swing of the pendulum, we might as well save ourselves a lot of time and money because there are no short term solutions for Aboriginal education issues. If we are intent on doing something for Aboriginal students, it has to be a long term project.

Justice Sinclair said that it took generations for us to get here, and it will take generations to move out of it. But what are we going to do here in this generation?

Recommendations

Several different approaches are necessary to fully address racism

The interview data revealed large differences across districts in the extent, severity, and forms of reported racism and in the extent to which practices to address racism have been implemented. The literature identifies several different ways of addressing racism and, given the wide variety of forms of racism, it is clear that no single practice will completely address the racism that Aboriginal students encounter. As well, given the differences across districts, it is clear that no single strategy will be suitable for every district.

Initiatives that are already in place may address some forms of racism. For example, the ERASE BULLYING Strategy provides a strong focus on preventing and addressing critical incidents, particularly those involving violence. Though race-based bullying certainly exists and may be effectively addressed through ERASE BULLYING, Aboriginal students encounter many other forms of racism that cannot be addressed through a critical incidents approach.

Districts need to self-assess their own status regarding racism

Within that context, we suggest that each district needs to be able to assess its own status regarding racism toward Aboriginal students. And, based on a rigorous and thorough self-assessment, each district needs to develop its own plan to address any identified deficiencies and move toward full equity for all students.

Each district must be responsible for self-assessment and for developing and implementing strategies to address the particular forms of racism that arise in the district. In addition, the Ministry and other education partners have a role to play in developing, implementing, and monitoring the implementation of a self-assessment tool, and in supporting the implementation of district plans to address racism. The equity scan proposed by one of the interviewees provides an excellent model on which to build a district self-assessment tool. Based on the proposed equity scan and on district practices identified by interviewees, we recommend that the self-assessment tool include the following elements:

1. District policy and governance
 - Are there employment equity policies to ensure that Aboriginal communities are represented among school and school board staff?
 - Does the board have policies and practices that address discrimination and harassment based on ascribed characteristics?
 - Is there an Aboriginal Advisory Council?

- Does the School Board work in full partnership with the Aboriginal Advisory Council?
- Are there local education agreements?
- Is there an Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement?

2. Data analysis

- Are analyses conducted to determine whether there are gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (e.g., in completion rates, assignment to Special Needs categories, participation in extracurricular activities, mark to exam score comparisons)?
- What steps are taken to address any identified gaps?
- How is the progress of individual students monitored at regular intervals?
- What interventions do educators employ when students begin to fall behind their peers?

3. Aboriginal communities' experience of the school system

- Do Aboriginal parents participate in the PAC?
- Are parent-teacher meetings held in the community? Are other public meetings/events held in the community?
- What is done to ensure that Aboriginal parents feel welcome in the schools?
- What steps has the school community taken to actively build relationships with members of local Aboriginal communities?

4. Attitudes and beliefs of adults

- Do educators maintain high expectations for all students?
- What experiential learning events have been organized to build understanding of Aboriginal experiences among educators?
- Is there evidence that educators see the value of including Aboriginal content and worldviews?
- How do educators honour the experiences and backgrounds of Aboriginal students?

5. The learning environment

- Where are the safe spaces for Aboriginal students?
- What visual representations are there of Aboriginal cultures?
- How are Aboriginal perspectives respectfully integrated into curricula, classrooms, and schools?

- What help do teachers receive to develop their understanding of their Aboriginal students?
- What support do teachers receive to build their capacity for integrating Aboriginal content and perspectives in classrooms?
- How is student self-empowerment fostered?
- Do educators listen to Aboriginal students and make space for their voices?
- Are incidents of racism fully addressed?

The self-assessments should set the foundation for developing plans to address the forms of racism that are evident. The plans should include the development of logic models that set out the logic of the relationship between resources, activities and the intended outcomes of the plan.

The self-assessment exercise and subsequent planning and implementation of practices to address racism could become part of the process of developing, negotiating, and implementing Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements. This would ensure that local Aboriginal Education Councils are included as partners and would provide a mechanism for monitoring implementation.

The Ministry might use financial grants to support the implementation of the anti-racism action plans developed. Each school board, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation and the British Columbia Principals' and Vice-principals' Association should be eligible to apply for grants for the implementation and evaluation of the anti-racism action plans. The plans would vary in content and duration depending upon the issues addressed. The proposals from each organization might be adjudicated by a working group representing the Ministry of Education, the First Nations Education Steering Committee, and representatives of the other education stakeholder groups. Grant recipients should be accountable for the outcomes the plans have achieved. The Working Group might be responsible for monitoring the progress that grant recipients make toward the achievement of the outcomes sought, and determining if the funding should or should not be continued.

Adopt successful practices from other provinces

Saskatchewan and Manitoba are rolling out new strategies to address racism and improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. We recommend monitoring the outcomes of those strategies and making use of any successful practices that they develop.

In Nova Scotia, Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey and St. Francis Xavier University have successfully partnered to train Aboriginal teachers. We recommend considering the feasibility of developing a similar kind of partnership to train larger numbers of Aboriginal teachers in BC.

Be patient

Finally, we echo the call for patience and perseverance that we heard from the educators who were interviewed for this project. Racism toward Aboriginal students arises in many different forms and appears to be firmly embedded in BC's public school system. Addressing that racism is a long-term project.

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