Macrothink Institute™

Journal of Studies in Education
ISSN 2162-6952
2024, Vol. 14, No. 4

The Need for Decolonized Education: A Textual Analysis of Existing Literature in the Public Domain in Support of the Canadian National Inquiry Documents Calls for Education

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Received: August 10, 2024 Accepted: Sep. 16, 2024 Published: November 1, 2024

doi:10.5296/jse.v14i4.22202 URL: https://doi.org/10.5296/jse.v14i4.22202

Abstract

The significance of this study sits in the importance of restorying for decolonial education. The textual analysis of literature in public domain in support of the Canadian national inquiry documents (2015, Truth and Reconciliation Calls (TRC) and the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Calls, 2019) highlighted the magnitude of story to curriculum and Indigenous culture. Barriers included contemporary issues in mainstream schooling. The prominence of culture within the interconnected relationship with land-based learning in curriculum development and programming for wellness/well-being on Turtle Island (North America) are paramount. The present-day state of affairs in the mainstream educational Canadian landscape is not aligned with Indigenous appropriate methodologies and culture as a subjective measure and therefore falls short. Cultural, societal and land-linked factors must be considered as indicators.

Keywords: Indigenous storying, mainstream schooling, land-based learning, environmental education, Indigenous methodologies, Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

1. Introduction

This unobtrusive research examines literature available in the public domain to analyze the role of restorying interpretation for Indigenous education through three overall themes (Kovach, 2009; Young, 2005). The three-themed scope used for this analysis were: the importance of story to Indigenous culture, contemporary issues in mainstream schooling and the position of culture in the structure of Ceremony/Sacred Sites and land in relation to overall or subjective measures of wellness and well-being for Indigenous peoples. Within the Canadian mosaic, a number of national inquiry documents have been produced such as the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Calls (TRC) and the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Calls (2019) as a result of a need for change (i.e. Education) within Canada. Incarceration rates, educational attainment rates, rates of disease and life expectancy are commonly understood to be interrelated within education (e.g. curriculum content, completion) of a population. When people can provide for themselves in the current economic system, most social scientists would agree that they lead better lives. It is universally accepted that in education, Indigenous students are falling behind. Cultural, societal and land-linked factors must be considered as indicators for Indigenous peoples in order for the Mshiigaade Miikan or path to clear.

2. The Importance of Story to Indigenous Culture

The first theme of the scope of this analysis is cultural with an emphasis on the importance of stories to Indigenous peoples. Indigenous stories and oral history do not receive the recognition that they are worthy of within the established school book or textbook knowledge archetype (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008). That may seem like a very strong statement for some, however, experience in mainstream society indicates that generally speaking, people have been schooled to not acknowledge non-familiar ways of knowing (Gatto, 2005, 2009). Indigenous stories are not bedtime or the carpet read aloud story variety of conventional schooling, rather they are teachings involving both history and prophecy as well as cultural transmission for Indigenous peoples. Some people might compare Indigenous stories to the telephone game, where someone says something and it gets changed as it gets passed on. Sadly, to make this comparison between the cultures is a dichotomy between worldviews. Contrasting the importance of Indigenous stories with a child's party game would be alike to comparing a sacred belief of Catholicism such as transubstantiation as being an imaginative costume performance, it ought not to happen. Indigenous stories and the meticulous and precise nature of passing on our cultural knowledge through Elders, Knowledge Carriers/Keepers and Pipe Carriers ensures that these teachings and cultural elements are preserved (Iseke, 2013; Sutherland, 2014).

Many aspects of Indigenous culture share a close kinship with the natural environment, our Mother Earth, the four directions of the medicine circle and our Creator/Great Spirit. Indigenous stories and teachings also reflect this close relationship, as the environment's sustainability has been central to the survival of the Original People of Turtle Island for tens of thousands of years (Geniusz & Geniusz, 2015; Kimmerer, 2013). Indigenous Peoples often

say, since time immemorial. In contrast, Canada as a country has existed for just over 150 years, as the colonialism of Canada was celebrated in nationalistic fashion for the occupation of Turtle Island while ignoring the ancient and existing history of Indigenous Peoples (Switzer, 2017).

Sharing teachings and stories, like many things involve the four directions and seasons of the medicine circle. It is commonly understood amongst the Anishinabek that the North direction or winter (Biboon) is the time which these stories are shared. Winter is the time of year when our Ancestors rest in the Spirit World. Although stories could be shared at other times of the year, it is the practice of sharing teachings, stories and history that is deeply connected to the winter when harsh conditions could bring shortages of food and hardship and sharing of stories and oral history as being a support for mental wellness during the toughest of all times in the year for the Anishinabek. Unlike mainstream schooling which requires students to learn according to birth years, learning of culture and history in Anishinabek tradition does not adhere to this social construct. Within sharing circles and teaching circles we see all ages from the young to the very old listening and learning from each other. Some proponents of the structures of schooling might argue that this is not effective instructionally, although this is not the case from the Indigenous perspective as children learn prodigiously from these approaches globally in Indigenous cultures. Survival prior to the advent of Europeans was dependent upon this cultural transmission and until the advent of modern conveniences such as electricity, indoor plumbing, appliances and the mass production of goods; Indigenous knowledge sharing would be central to survival (Gatto, 2005, 2009; Kimmerer, 2013).

When we think of Indigenous teachings within the context of survival, the persistence for subsistence and endurance for existence is clearly visible. In mainstream society, often when we hear the term stories, we think of our schooling experience with stories, perhaps the fable, *The City Mouse and Country Mouse* or other familiar text and this experience could lead us frame understanding of Indigenous stories and oral history in the same amusement or pleasure diversion instead of the cultural context required to understand and appreciate Indigenous teachings (Dion, 2004; Lynore, Hayes & Usher, 2013).

Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding have not received the recognition and appreciation as a result of the dominance of western scientific approaches (Absolon, 2011; Kimmerer 2013). It is remarkable that Indigenous methodologies have survived in the mainstream given the lack of support Indigenous academic scholars receive. Indigenous worldviews and paradigms have only recently been given status or position in academia on a larger scale as western scientific methodologies are being re-examined as they are now understanding and exploring the beliefs and cultural elements Indigenous researchers have struggled to maintain under settler society's oppression (Absolon, 2011; Kimmerer, 2013).

The implementation and understanding of oral narrative in Indigenous cultures has been since time immemorial the foundational element in preserving and transmitting Indigenous knowledge systems. Storying in the form of teachings are meticulously preserved and passed on as the Ancestors intended (Archibald, 2008; Sutherland 2014). Indigenous narratives allow

for the original intention of culturally appropriate education for Indigenous peoples. Elders and storytellers integrating Indigenous perspectives, values and theory into contemporary education based on traditional tribal-centered relationships is essential (Cajete, 1994; Lewis, 2006; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). Indigenous methodologies should inform academic research, policies and the social justice politics of academia (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith 2008; Kovach, 2009; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). According to Pinar, "A central problem facing Indigenous scholars and communities arises when Indigenous identity, shaped through historical falsehoods and cultural misrepresentations deforms and incompletes the sense of self." (Pinar, 1993, p. 61 in Dion, S.D., 2004).

Indigenous culture has deep spiritual correlations to storytelling (Edler, 2007; King, 2003; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). Oral storytelling is a form of cultural transmission which carries on culture and is a central focus of Indigenous epistemologies or the theory of knowledge. In addition, stories are the foundation of traditional pedagogy and Indigenous research methodologies. Stories sustained from Elders, Pipe Carriers and Knowledge Carriers/Keepers are deeply respected within Indigenous culture and communities as both sacred, historical, knowledge-based and prophecy pedagogical tools (Ermine, 1995; Iseke, J., 2013; Iseke & BMJK, 2011; Sutherland, 2014).

According to Sutherland (2014) stories and knowledge are not restricted by time and space and enlighten the past, the present and the future of identity and knowledge systems (Sutherland, L., 2014., p. 36-37). Storytelling like our DNA holds memory and is transcendence of time and space. Memories are like an essence of time passed that you will never get back. Our stories hold our truth of who we are and where we come from as Anishinabek people. Storytelling is such an important part of survival. Each Anishinabek story holds teaching in which helps us to survive in day-to-day life in the contemporary world. Storytelling reminds us about the relationships we carry with ourselves and *All Our Relations.* The reason we say Boozhoo (hello, formally) is to always give thanks and acknowledgment to Nanaboozho; who is in a majority of Anishinabek Stories. He is half-man half-spirit that is somewhat of a trickster that teaches life lessons; making you critically think about life's teachings and meanings. Storytelling is the foundation of our Creation stories, colour stories (Medicine Circles/Wheels), they are in our beading and crafts, ceremonies, Sacred Stories (Atis'kanak) and narratives of exceptional experiences (Tabatacamowin), traditional stories (Aadizookaan), prophesies, dreams, songs, dance, music, reflection, sharing, protocols every aspect of our lives. We often don't write things down as we are taught to do "traditional notetaking" and it is through the heart, mind and spirit. Every time we hear a story and it has been repeated (Sutherland, 2014; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019) we learn something new; the beauty of stories you cannot know every story. All stories make up who we are and that's a Spiritual story in itself. We didn't have any formal schools before pre-colonial times as learning started from birth and was a life-long process. The language component is paramount in itself when it comes to storytelling because of the language loss our stories of what makes us is now lost and must be revitalized. We will not be able to ever reach our full potential of Mino Biimaadzowin (the good life) without revitalization of our language. All

that will be left of us are our stories.

3. Contemporary Issues in Mainstream Schooling

The second theme used in this inquiry relates to the contemporary issues in mainstream schooling as previously stated, Indigenous students are not keeping up with their non-Indigenous counterparts in the measure of educational attainment. There is not a paucity of literature regarding the problems within the current and past schooling system. Since the 1960's and 1970's theorists such as John Holt and Ivan Illich have been writing about this phenomenon which more contemporary theorists such as John Taylor Gatto have highlighted. It should be noted that although there exists an understood conception of the problems of schooling, there is no panacea which has been proposed that could eliminate the contemporary issues within mainstream schools. Holt (1964) notes that:

> "To 'rebuild this child's intelligence' is the wrong phrase. We did more than enough harm in school when we thought we were only teaching facts. If the day comes when we think our task is to build or rebuild intelligence, we will do far more harm. Human beings are born intelligent. We are by nature question-asking, answer making, problem-solving animals, and we are extremely good at it, above all when we are little. But under certain conditions, which may exist almost all of the time in almost all schools, we stop using our greatest intellectual powers, stop wanting to use them, even stop believing that we have them." (Holt, 1964, p. 189)

The reason for this, could perhaps be that in order to remedy the situation the potential solution does not lie in adding additional schooling principles and outcomes but in reducing them, which has not been tried on a large-scale sample and studied with a multivariate analysis. The cost of such as undertaking would be expensive, however, it would be small in comparison to the expenditures linked to the current models (e.g. Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) and Ontario Public School Board's Association (OPSBA) endeavours) being utilized today that would appear in the attempts to fiddle and repair pieces of the larger schooling schema.

> "Everywhere the hidden curriculum of schooling initiates the citizen to the myth that bureaucracies guided by scientific knowledge are efficient and benevolent. Everywhere this same curriculum instills in the pupil the myth that increased production will provide a better life. And everywhere it develops the habit of self-defeating consumption of services and alienating production, the tolerance for institutional dependence, and the recognition of institutional rankings. The hidden curriculum of school does all of this in spite of contrary efforts undertaken by teachers and no matter what ideology prevails." (Illich, 1971, p. 74)

Indigenous peoples have suffered and continue to endure within schooling and will continue to cope with the long-term lasting effects of residential schools which lasted from the 1830's until 1996 when the last residential school finally closed (Borrows, 2008).

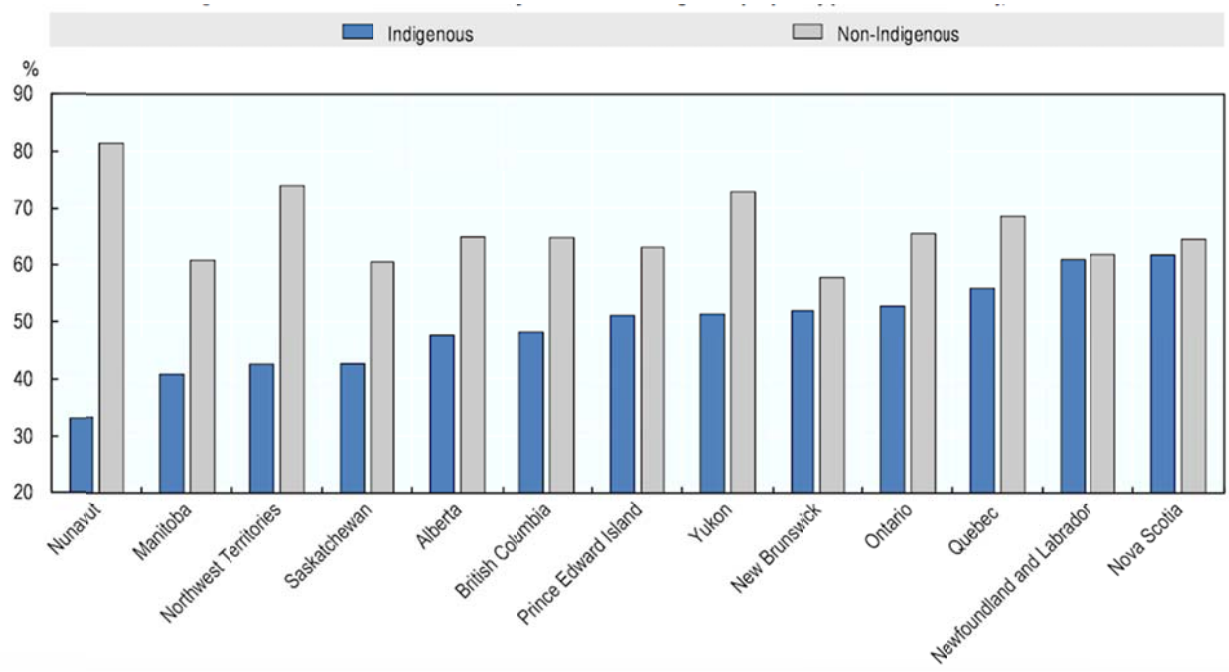

Figure 1. Comparison of Educational Attainment Between Indigenous and non-Indigenous by Province/Territory from Statistics Canada (2016), 2016 Census of Population.

Source: OECDiLibrary. Statistics Canada 2016 Census of Population.

Although residential schools may have closed the painful legacy lives on in the form of intergenerational trauma and as a remnant of schooling within communities that reminds survivors and their families to this day. The horrors of this schooling system as former Prime Minister Steven Harper said in his 2008 apology for residential schools sought "to kill the Indian in the child" in the form of cultural genocide against identity, language and spirit through physical, sexual and emotional abuse (Canadian Federal Government Residential School Apology, 2008). One would think after such a catastrophic experience in Canadian history that funding for First Nations schools on a reserve would be on par with mainstream schools as former Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Chief Atleo worked tirelessly for, however, this is still an issue today (Obomsawin, 2014). Mainstream schooling also has a plethora of problems associated with both non-Indigenous and Indigenous learners. The latter, being further subjected to the schooling system that no longer pricks the tongue of children who speak their language but puts their culture in curriculum content boxes such as Social Studies (e.g. not told from an Indigenous perspective), allows Indigenous language to be taught but in many cases only if students are willing to miss another subject or the Anishinaabemowin teacher is asked to teach Indigenous language combined with Music curriculum. This dilemma is then set against the backdrop of tokenism in schools which include sacred cultural teachings in the form of symbolism such as posters of traditional teachings on walls in hallways and dreamcatchers in windows. The school system is failing our Anishinabek people; the colonial narrative that has been continuing for over 150 years must stop. Gatto (2009) asserts that "Government schooling is the most radical adventure in history. It kills the family…Socrates

foresaw that if teaching became a formal profession, something like this would happen" (Gatto, 2009, p. 84).

As soon as Indigenous children get off the bus their Anishinaabayaaing (identity) and Knowledge are rejected. Knowledge is Spiritual gift for us, and people should be reminded of that. There is a spirit connecting process that empowers the gifts, visions, and spirits to emerge in each person- how is one to obtain this when our culture and very essence of who we are is just pushed aside. Canadian policy and legislation have been and still are designed to remove the social and cultural differences. Our Indigenous people are failing and will continue to fail if the education system does not change. Institutions of all kinds offer people very little (Foucault, 1995).

The delicate argument that someone who does not know the culture cannot consciously be making contrived or improper practices is a false dichotomy. Not knowing about a culture on lands which a Nation occupies and purporting to be inclusive and champion diversity is wrong, period. As Anishinabek we are in no position to travel to a Black community anywhere and incorporate or pretend to be support diversity without having both consultation and consent of that culture and at a minimalistic standard a working knowledge of another culture. However, that is what takes place all across the Dominion of Canada on Turtle Island daily with Indigenous peoples.

The question generally speaking, is that if what teachers want is the "best" for kids, thinking about their own personal philosophy of education, then a consideration of Indigenous students' wellness is paramount. Wellness for Indigenous learners is connected to three things: identity, belonging (e.g. sense of family/community) and connection to culture (e.g. Akinoomaage/land as teacher). Identity is shaped by the media, mainstream society, schooling and the narratives taught of history. Indigenous language is treated in schooling resembling core French, which is disconnected within the larger schooling schema. The overall emphasis in schooling leans in a Eurocentric/Western or a white cultural way and correspondingly disconnects Indigenous children with what they need the most, within these three themes. There often is no connection to Indigenous culture outside of tokenism, such as the Seven Grandfather teachings used in isolation from the original intent or the use of pan-Indian symbols like tipis in social studies and dreamcatchers in math. The biggest issue is two-fold, a lack of awareness and appreciation for the Original People which can be considered as cultural ignorance because it unsettles the settler and the euro-centric methods of schooling which continue to promote a false narrative of history and the second is the mainstream notion of Canada as better. What the latter point means is that an attitude of superiority is racism, which we see being relayed in both historical and contemporary contexts as former Prime Minister Steven Harper said in his 2008 apology for residential schools in that Indigenous culture was viewed as "inferior" (Canadian Federal Government Residential School Apology, 2008; King, 2007; Switzer, 2017).

The demographic of most teachers according to the 2019 Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) is female (primarily Caucasian) at almost 75% as shown in the figure below from the Ontario College of Teachers, which does often not reflect a multicultural country.

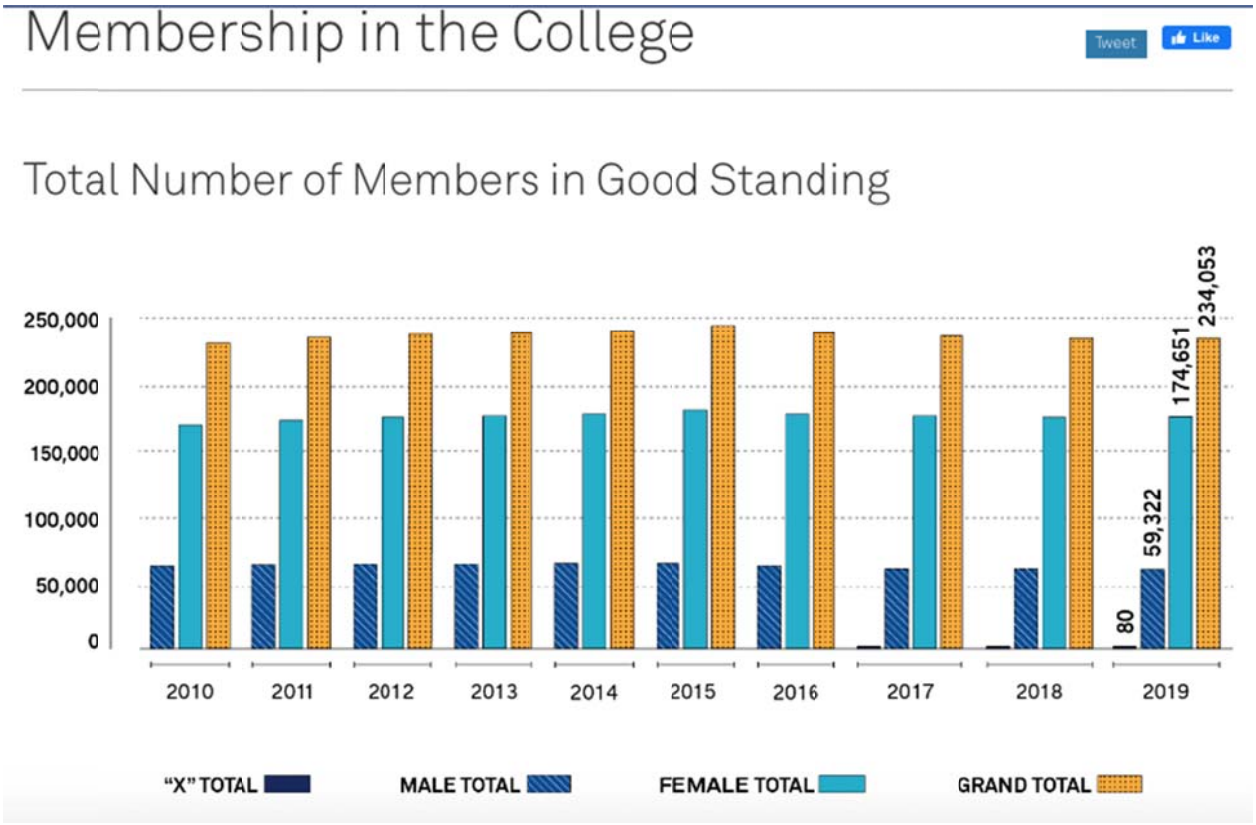

Figure 2. Ontario College of Teachers Membership Statistics
Source: https://reports2019.oct.ca/Statistics/Membership-in-the-College

The general sentiments experienced is that mainstream society sees nothing wrong with Canadian ways. A visible example, would be the celebration of the 150th birthday of Canadian colonialism in 2016 and the broad aggressive policy of assimilation that is still trying to annihilate Indigenous people (i.e. *Indian Act*), (Switzer, 2017). It has often been said, it is only difficult because it unsettles the settler and the school book stories of celebratory Canadian history they still believe in (Regan, 2011). As a result of these processes a great number of Indigenous people are very colonized themselves and don't see any of these issues mentioned as a problem as Gatto says "they have colonized the minds" (Gatto, 2007).

4. The Position of Culture in the Structure of Ceremony/Sacred Sites

The third theme within the analysis of this inquiry is the position of culture in the structure of Ceremony/Sacred Sites and land in relation to overall or subjective measures of wellness and well-being for Indigenous peoples. The importance of ceremony and sacred sites to Indigenous peoples is often misunderstood and precluded from a discussion of authentic understanding by mainstream researchers and academics. Often when researchers do accept Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge systems as "suitable" it is not properly empathized, as some contemporary researchers still consider Indigenous ways as "secretive sorcery" (Zawadzka, 2016). For many years our ways were outlawed and illegal under the

Indian Act, we could not gather in groups or practice our Spirituality as it was against the White Man's Law (Harring, 1998). Our brave Elders and Knowledge Carriers/Keepers had to practice our ways in secret, often going deep into the forest and continuing our culture while in fear. With the advent of Europeans and Christianity many of our customs, rituals and traditions which were seen as witchcraft. The heterogeneity of Indigenous practices varies widely between Indigenous groups, such as between Nations, e.g. Haudenosaunee and Anishinabek as well as amongst these groups and dialects. For example, there exist differences in how ceremony is done when comparing neighbouring First Nations living on the same geographic region. The desire for one set or inflexible way of doing ceremony from what our Elders and Knowledge Carriers/Keepers have told us has arisen from the advent of Christianity on Turtle Island and the one way of doing ceremony as outlined in Christian beliefs such as the catechism of the Catholic Church or book of common prayer (BCP) and book of alternative service (BAS) used by the Anglican Church of Canada. The requirement of homogeneity of Christian rituals and practices has been a worldview applied to the First Peoples of Canada since the first missionaries arrived.

With the growing settler population and desire for land and capitalist sources of revenue in the form of mining and forestry after the fur trade, colonial powers sought to enter into Treaty relationships with First Nations. For instance, the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850 (Anishinabek News, 2020; Macdonald, 2020). From what we know from our Elders, there exists a difference in worldview between Indigenous and settler populations regarding treaties. Typically, in Europe, treaties were signed at the end of a conflict or war in European history, for example, the Treaty of Utrecht 1713, the Treaty of Paris in 1763. In contrast, for Indigenous Peoples, treaties represented what my ancestors believed to be the beginning of a relationship and that as the Treaty of Niagara in 1764 represented would be "As long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the river flows" (Switzer, 2016). After these treaties were signed, much like former prime minister Steven Harper's apology for residential schools, which as he said had the goal "to kill the Indian in the child" that is where these documents once signed, lose steam (Canadian Federal Government Residential School Apology, 2008). Contemporary examples today are observed with professional athletes signing contracts and when they no longer wish to honour them will ask to renegotiate or hold out for more money while refusing to play the sport. In the broader colonial desire for lands and resources, residential schools with church sponsorship/running began in 1830 in Ontario, the policy of assimilation was intensified with the imposition of the *Indian Act* in 1876, which outlined nearly all aspects of life for Indigenous Peoples. The *Indian Act* outlawed our ways and our ceremony and spirituality. The only way Indigenous Peoples could meet in groups was to congregate as a church group. Some First Nations still have elements of the church in their meetings to this day. Gatto (2009) emphasizes that:

> "School disconnects, as it was charged to do. It is Caesar's "divide and conquer" strategy brought to peak efficiency. Children are divided from their families, their traditions, their communities, their religions, their natural allies - other children - their interests and on ad infinitum. They are, as Walter Lippman deplored, disconnected

> from the entire Western intellectual tradition which gave societies the greatest gift of personal liberties they had ever seen, disconnected from experiences of risk-taking and adventure…young men and women emerge from school unable to much of anything…" (Gatto, 2009 p. 130)

The lasting legacy of both the residential school system and the *Indian Act*, created a significant loss in Indigenous Knowledge systems related to ceremony, it has only been in recent memory that elements of ceremony and sacred sites have become mainstream. For instance, some sacred sites now have been misunderstood and still carry names associated with racism, witchcraft or sorcery as Spiritual Sites in Northern Ontario such as Conjuring Rock and Devil's Rock are insensitively known as (Steer, 2020). Nevertheless, the racist comments posted and shared on news sites and social media regarding stories pertaining to Indigenous Peoples suggest there is still work to be done for Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) in Canadian society with the settler worldview. The gap or loss of knowledge and reclaiming identity and spirituality lost to colonialism is ongoing today. For Indigenous learners, as it has often been said amongst our Elders, Knowledge Carriers/Keepers, Pipe Carriers, and Medicine Men/Shamans that ceremony is education and ceremony is also research (Wilson, 2008). The social construct that learning must take place in a classroom or schoolhouse is a Eurocentric/Western leaning argument and has not served Indigenous Peoples or Indigenous cultures arguably well to this point in history. Most unschoolers and alternative learning advocates would argue that schooling has likewise not served a portion of the non-Indigenous population (Holt, 1964; Illich, 1971; Gatto, 2009). Learning does not need to take place within a brick and mortar building, as the pandemic demonstrated, there are alternatives to learning at school. The contemporary push for land-based learning and Indigenized learning further emphasizes this quest to tinker with or fix school by doing things that are less like traditional schooling. Gatto (2009) illustrates that: "Because you choose not to see the dark world school represents, because you only pay attention to its stupidities, it gets worse all the time" (Gatto, 2009 p. 188).

Our sacred sites and ceremonies as previously discussed have often been conducted in secret and many of today's existing medicine societies (e.g. Medewin) still do not openly practice rituals and ceremony as our ways have been misunderstood and desired to be integrated into the mainstream and thus assimilated into the larger population impacting on overall identity and well-being for Anishinabek. We know that our sacred sites and rituals have long been misunderstood by Europeans and as mentioned, even contemporary non-Indigenous researchers in many cases do not seek the guidance or wisdom of the local First Nation and honour the Nation to Nation relationship that was at the basic level of early treaties. Academic researchers should be asking First Nations what the First Nation would like researched rather than the particular intemperance the researcher has with Indigenous Peoples (Kovach, 2009; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019).

The oral teachings we have been taught since we were young remind us that our shamans could communicate at our sacred sites through ceremonies like shaking tent, the way it has been explained to some youth is to think of the process as a Spiritual cellphone using the

smoke (i.e. perhaps using one of our four sacred medicines cedar to help communicate with the Spirits) to communicate up through another plain of existence. We know that ceremony often took place at these sites and could involve changing of seasons, for fasting and cleansing or to find our pathway in life such as vision questing. In many cases, as Elders and Indigenous scholars such as Basil Johnson (Ojibway Ceremonies author) have taught us, that although women could vision quest, they had a pathway of the sacred feminine or life givers (Johnson, 1987).

> "In the Great Lakes area, Vision Quests would prepare young people to enter adult tribal life by providing information on their real names and future careers. These Vision Quest sites are generally kept quite secret because of their continuing use. Unless and until a young person receives a Vision, they cannot have an adult career of any significance. Many Vision Quest sites are deliberately misidentified in order to keep people away from the actual sites. Whatever powers are bestowed on the successful seeker are generally exercised away from the sacred site."

Deloria, V. (1998, June). Sacredness among Native Americans. In Deloria, V. , & Stoffle, R. W. (Eds.), (p. 38).

At the conclusion of a solitary vision quest, some Anishinabek would create pictographs using ochre to represent their vision or dream. Our sacred sites are often considered portals to the Spirit World, here we can commune with the Spirits.

> "These sites may be understood as "Portals "3 where it is possible to pass from one universe to another. With the advent of chaos theory and the elaboration of knowledge of the potential of black holes in the space -time fabric of the universe, these traditions now take on added significance. The Sioux suggest that there are several portals in the Black Hills area and some of the emergence traditions of the Navajo and Mandan suggest that we may be dealing with similar experiences. In general these locations are held in utmost secrecy and outsiders will only find out about the location if there is the threat of physical destruction of the site. Ceremonies are performed at these locations on rare occasions and then under the most secure conditions."

Deloria, V. (1998, June). Sacredness among Native Americans. In Deloria, V. , & Stoffle, R. W. (Eds.), (p. 36).

Today we see smudging ceremonies used as a way to purify and cleanse, it has only been in recent memory that western science now understands that the burning of one of our four sacred medicines, sage purifies the air and kills bacteria. Our ceremonies can teach us many things not only about ourselves, but also holistically about our well-being as Anishinabek people (Portman & Garrett, 2006). Ceremony, unlike in some of the world's major religions, however, does not need to take place in a predictable homogenous way, it can even be more personal and solitary as we have mentioned. This is part of the influence of Christianity on our culture that has created blended beliefs among my people such as Christian burial

practices with Anishinabek practices mixed in. Ceremony should not be feared as a strawberry (Ode'min) ceremony honours the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and we listen at these gatherings to the stories from the families who have lost a mother, a daughter, a sister, a cousin or a friend and we learn, we educate and we heal through ceremony.

There are three elements associated with land-based learning that often are misunderstood. The first issue with land based-learning is the misunderstanding that if something is land-based, then it is Indigenous. When a narrow view of what genuine land-based learning (the contemporary buzz word used) is employed we see that it easily loses heterogeneity and becomes a homogenous product that can be utilized or rather assimilated into the larger schooling culture. Land-based learning, in the truest sense is an Indigenous knowledge system or way of knowing and should not be treated as a curricular integration opportunity. To fully understand land-based learning, educators must look at the cultural and spiritual elements, to not do this is to essentially create a facsimile of land-based learning in the form of outdoor or environmental education with Indigenous symbolism. The Anishinabek term used for authentic land-based learning in Anishinaabemowin is Akinoomaage or land-as-teacher. Akinoomaage is connected to our worldview, in that Indigenous Peoples do not view ourselves as superior to our environment, our Mother Earth. When the Creator put us on Turtle Island, we were taught to respect our environment or we would perish. We believe in reciprocal relationships with the natural world, or giving back to nature. Our traditional teachings of the Original Laws, such as the honourable harvest or taking only what you need have been paramount to our survival on Turtle Island for tens of thousands of years. When we are young and are taught to hunt, to fish, to harvest medicines and food from the land, we learn Spiritual protocols such as the offering of tobacco and giving thanks to the plant, tree, animal that has given it is life for us. We always try to use our language which is Anishinaabemowin when we do this, thanking the Creator the great mystery as well (Geniusz & Geniusz, 2015; Kimmerer, 2013).

For example, when I go for my daily walk, I might encounter a deer and if I say "Hello, how are you deer?" I often have the deer run or walk away, however, if I great the deer in the language that the Creator has given and that we have been taught that the animals used to speak with us, the deer does not run away. If I were to say "Aanii waawaashkesh" meaning "hello (informal) deer" the deer often will stay and not be alarmed, which is different when compared to when I use the tongue that was not spoken until Europeans arrived. Land-based learning in the absence of language and Spirituality is not what the Ancestors intended for us.

As mentioned, Akinoomaage is an Indigenous knowledge system and way of knowing that is considered Traditional Ecological Knowledge or TEK. Previously it was referred to as Aboriginal Knowledge and later Indigenous Knowledge after the Canadian federal government changed their usage of the term from Aboriginal to the global term Indigenous in 2016. TEK is heterogeneous and varies from location to location and is heavily dependent on the geographic location and the knowledge that would be used to survive in the particular homeland or traditional territory on which Akinoomaage is being shared (Kimmerer, 2013).

For example, the traditional land-based teachings of the Haudenosaunee in southern Ontario such as using the three sisters of corn, squash and beans when looking at food sovereignty practices would be different than Anishinabek harvesting practices in Northern Ontario when hunting Mooz (Moose). It is this heterogeneity that often is a struggle for some to appreciate, as the desire to codify and categorize or oversimplify as primitive practices has been the lore of schoolbook stories in Social Studies curriculum since the discovery narrative was taught in schooling and still exists today to a great extent (Switzer, 2017).

Akinoomaage requires language and culture as it is as much about cultural transmission as it is teachings of survival. Using the medicine circle is one of the more common ways Ekinoomaged (teachers) help to connect Akinoomaage to language, culture and Spirituality. Using a medicine circle which has four colours, white in the north, yellow in the east, red in the south and black in the west also connects with the directions with the four seasons of winter in the north, spring in the east, summer in the south and fall in the west. These directions and seasons also represent our life cycle of being a young child in the east (Waabanong) or spring (for birth), being a youth in the south (Zhaawanong), or summer an adult in the west (Ningaabii'anong) or fall and then as the elderly in the north (Giiwedining) or winter. When we begin Akinoomaage we start by sharing the language and Spirituality such as giving thanks to the Creator, laying down tobacco and how what we are learning connects to culture. It is in the notion of 'All My Relations' or we are all related that we see the fundamental difference between Indigenous and Eurocentric worldviews. For us as Anishinaabe we believe that our family is not just our mother, father, sister, brother, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, grandparents and cousins but the rocks, the trees and all of creation on Mother Earth. We are the younger siblings of all living things and our first teachers have always been plants and animals. For example, we learned how to make the fishing net to catch our fish from the spider's web (Kimmerer, 2013).

Modern science now knows how trees share nutrients in the soil and know when to bloom and flower. When we are teaching the harvesting of plants for food or medicine, we know there are certain times of the year to harvest based on our local TEK and that our protocols of laying down tobacco and not taking the first or second plant we see is important to sustainability for what modern society calls natural resources. When we fish, we use the guts and bones of fish to put back into the soil for nitrogen as many Indigenous Peoples have practiced. These are our ways, they are not chemicals, clear cutting, and over harvesting that has put much of the Creator's gifts in jeopardy (Geniusz & Geniusz, 2015; Kimmerer 2013).

The second element that is over and over again misunderstood is that knowledge must come from a textbook, which is a Eurocentric/Western schooling construct that often views the teacher in the role of knowledge holder or as some of the local vernacular might refer to it as, empty bucket filler (i.e. banking model), the teacher viewed as filling the buckets or minds of learners. As Anishinabek we do not force our children to learn based on age groupings as is the common practice in traditional mainstream schooling. We know that children and adults learn together as our Ancestors did. For example, a traditional Anishinabek practice of gathering maple syrup in the east (Waabanong) or spring would involve all members of a

community both young and old coming together and everyone played a role. Whether that role was gathering the sap in birch bark containers, looking for places to tap, making birch bark baskets or heating the sap with stones, it required everyone working together as this was a time when smaller family units in Anishinaabe tradition came back together after going off to winter locations. In textbook knowledge this was referred to as being nomadic or transient as we did not live in cities, yet our ancestors knew that over harvesting in one area would decimate a food source and the north (Giiwedining) or winter this was a time when sickness was more common so as we see today in 2020-21, we were early adopters of self-isolating. Winter was also a time when many stories and traditional teachings were learned. When we share stories and TEK outside of this time, we remind the youth of the way and time for all things.

The third element, being the interconnectedness of the relationship with land and culture for Indigenous well-being and health. We know from our sacred traditional teachings, such as the Seven Grandfather Teachings that our Ancestors gave us the tools to live a good and healthy life. Through colonialism and the broader and aggressive policies of assimilation (i.e. Residential Schools, Indian Act), these ways have been diminished, however, they are experiencing a comeback or rebirth as we now have the right to gather in numbers beyond church meetings, vote in federal elections in Canada since 1960, have legal representations in courts, practice our traditional ways and Spirituality (no longer in secret), and more amendments to the Indian Act will hopefully come as it is still designed to annihilate us based on who we choose to marry and have children with. Our race, our reserve system and what defines wellness are established by the federal government and our well-being is dependant as the Elders tell us based on our sense of identity, our connection to our community and family which as we know with 'All My Relations' is connected to our well-being in our relationship with culture and the land. A commonly used mainstream index of well-being as being life expectancy in Table 1:

Table 1. Comparison of Life Expectancy Between Indigenous (First Nations, Metis & Inuit) and non-Indigenous from Statistics Canada (2016), 2016 Census of Population.

	Men	Women
First Nations	73	78
Métis	74	80
Inuit	64	73
non-Indigenous	79	83

Source: OECDiLibrary. Statistics Canada 2016 Census of Population.

5. Conclusion

The present-day state of affairs is not aligned with Indigenous appropriate methodologies and culture as a subjective measure and therefore falls short. Cultural, societal and land-linked factors must be considered as indicators for Indigenous peoples in order for the Mshiigaade Miikan or path to clear. If the true Nation to Nation relationships are to be honoured then the

limited success of the current model needs rethinking. One of the Anishinaabemowin terms I have learned is “Biskaabiiyang” which describes the process one must go through in order to become decolonized-one must examine one's teachings and worldview like looking back at yourself by looking around the entire world too. The verb biskaabii means to "return to ones self.” Reform rather than wholesale removal of existing policies initially is a recommendation for further study and analysis. Further examination is needed.

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