

BEYOND RECOGNITION: INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY AND EQUITY IN ONTARIO'S
K-12 LANDSCAPE

ALYSON MCMULLEN

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Abstract

While efforts have been made to include culturally relevant, anti-oppressive, and decolonizing pedagogy and curriculum within Ontario's public education system, these efforts take place within a system built to reproduce its own colonial values. Grounded in Nêhiyaw (Cree) principles of research and informed by broader theories of resurgence and refusal, this thesis explores conceptual tensions between equity and Indigenous sovereignty in Ontario's K–12 educational landscape. Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition, it uses an Indigenous Literature Re-view methodology with four interrelated phases: *Searching, Analysis, Yarning, and Re-view*. This research traces policy narratives that shape educational discourse in Ontario. What emerges is a vision of equity that is highly reliant on a theory of change based on the politics of inclusion and is limited within frameworks prioritizing student achievement. This framing confines Indigeneity, neutralizing resurgent possibilities and rendering settler colonialism and land invisible.

Kinanaskomitin

Kinanaskomitin askiy. Gratitude to the land who has taught me so much and who has held so much for me. The land and waters have deepened my understanding of myself, what it means to teach, to learn and be *in relation*.

Kinanaskomitin nokum. Gratitude to nokum who survived residential school, out-of-community adoption, and a lifetime of being separated from land and loved ones. I am grateful for and acknowledge that you held what you could and through your stories planted seeds for intergenerational healing. Not a completed project, I refer to healing as an ongoing process that is connected to my ancestors, my children and future generations.

Kinanaskomitin nīcisānak. Gratitude to my family whose love and support afford me the time and space to work on projects that fill my spirit.

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Chapter One: Opening

Waciye, Alyson ndishnikasowin. Ottawa ochi nina, Toronto, niwikin. My name is Alyson and I have both settler (mixed European) and Swampy Cree ancestry and working to untangle my identity has been and continues to hold its own complexities. Among these complexities are holding positionalities and life experiences that are rooted in privilege and oppression. The removal of my family from Swampy Cree lands and community, across 2 generations, resulted in loss of land, language and culture. What took its place were colonial values viewed by many as privilege. I can recognize this while also challenging the notion that the loss of our Cree cultural knowledge and lifeways was any privilege at all. In fact, in details I won't include in this paper, the echoes of that loss impacted myself and my family deeply across many generations. I can't reject my Cree ancestry because it is part of who I knew/know myself and my family to be. I also don't claim to hold Indigenous knowledge from community raising. My experience is specifically urban and specifically removed across two generations. My story is one of wayfinding some of what was lost and working to recover and heal for my future ancestors. This research is informed by my lived experience as a student and teacher in an education system that served to separate me from recognizing my Mushkegowuk relatives, ancestors and ultimately myself. As an urban Indigenous person living in Toronto, far from the lands and water of the Hudson Bay, my worldview is also greatly informed by local First Nations (Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe) teachings, language, and knowledge about the land I am living on.

1.1 Background and Context

This conceptual research project attempts to understand and reimagine the relationships between Indigenous sovereignty and equity in the Ontario K-12 curricular landscape, through the lens of rejecting settler colonial politics of recognition (Coulthard, 2014). Despite promising articulations of commitments to decolonization (e.g., Ontario

Ministry of Education, 2007), the reality of Canadian schooling continues to be structured by settler colonialism (Cote-Meek, 2014; Talaga, 2017). While there have been important strides made in decolonizing education theory (Dion, 2007; Dion et al., 2010; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Toulouse, 2018), Canadian educational institutions still have a long way to go to meaningfully implement these concepts in practice (Battiste, 2013; People for Education, 2023). It is important to challenge how decolonization in education continues to be understood and applied as a *metaphor*, as a *settler move to innocence* at individual, institutional, and system levels (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), Article 14, states that Indigenous sovereignty over education is a *right*, and so it is critical to examine efforts towards equity and inclusion in relation to sovereignty in education for Indigenous peoples. It is also vital to consider the complexities and incommensurabilities (Tuck & Yang, 2012) of Indigenous education in the K-12 curricular landscape in Ontario.

Grounded in Nêhiyaw (Cree) principles of research (Kovach, 2021), this research project will deepen critical understandings of how to meaningfully implement the concepts of decolonization and Indigenous sovereignty into practice in Ontario's K-12 curricular landscape.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The public education system in Canada reflects the Eurocentric views, values and perspectives of its Creation story (Donald, 2012). Creation stories are powerful influences on what we believe and are deeply connected to who we are and how we view the world. Canada's Creation story is one told around literal and figurative *forts* through what Donald (2012) calls *colonial fort logics*, meant to create and perpetuate the idea of 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. When outsiders are brought into the fort, they transform into insiders - *the fort does not transform* (Donald, 2012). The fort does not transform because, structured on the

myth of progress, and through a process of assimilation, everyone is either brought into the fort and assimilated or they are excluded. This process doesn't allow for differences beyond what is established as common based on Euro-Western standards (Donald, 2012). The concept of colonial fort logics is important because while efforts have been made to include culturally relevant, anti-oppressive, and decolonizing pedagogy and curriculum within the public education system in Ontario, these efforts take place within a system that reproduces dominant narratives of Eurocentric values (Battiste, 2013). To borrow Donald's (2012) language, the *fort* reproduces Eurocentrism to its insiders, where Indigenous knowledge, history, and identity stand on the outside looking in. Turning a lens to the Creation story of the Ontario Ministry of Education, this reproduction of Eurocentric values is a stated mandate in the Education Act of Ontario, when it called on teachers to uphold values of "Judeo-Christian morality" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990). These historical threads leave me wondering about the liberatory possibilities of decolonization within a colonial system meant to reproduce its own values and narratives. In Ontario, curriculum policy documents are starting to reflect the concerns of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples but continue to do so in a way that avoids acknowledging and addressing fully that the Ontario schooling system itself was built through the dispossession of Indigenous lands and knowledges (Ng-A-Fook, et al, 2018).

It is important to consider the foundation, both historical and contemporary, from which Indigenous-Canadian relations stem as this space of relationality impacts the possibilities of Indigenous education (Donald, 2012). Many Indigenous scholars have shared that a framework of resurgence of Indigenous ways practiced and embodied in relationship *with each other* and *with the land* is what will generate a future where Indigenous knowledges and practices thrive (Battiste, 2013; Ermine, 2024; Simpson, 2017; Smith, 2021). This is especially important in a curricular climate where attempts to address inequity - such as

multiculturalism, critical race theory, and browning - tends to be co-opted and *replaced* by frameworks and identities that continue to uphold settler colonialism (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). When considering the priorities of inclusion models, the invisibility of Indigenous people contributes to the ongoing exclusion of Indigenous knowledge, people and history from equity and inclusion models in a meaningful way (Lawrence & Dua, 2011; Battiste, 2013). Decolonizing education has become linked to efforts to create a more inclusive education system, however; issues specific to Indigenous peoples are often not the foundation of inclusive education models (Lawrence & Dua, 2011). The present moment we are in is born from the past, and so it is important to acknowledge that this invisibility is not by accident or oversight. There is a history of explicit curriculum mandates to assimilate and subordinate Indigenous knowledge and sovereignty (Ryan, Tocci & Moon, 2020). I would add that there is a running subtext to these narratives whereby assimilation operates as a form of destruction, and subordination as a means of control. In curriculum, the absence of Indigenous peoples can be felt in the sidelining of perspectives, issues and content that are *unsettling*. Dion (2024) points out that not teaching about Canada's settler colonial history works to uphold the settler colonial present and ensure its futurity. Within colonial frontier logics (Donald, 2012), there is no space for deconstructing the fort, and so when Indigenous perspectives are included, it is with the *recognition* of having value to settler society and presented through Western epistemologies (Ahenahkew, 2016). In the interest of centering Indigenous futurity within the context of decolonization I will focus on Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination as a model for meaningful efforts towards equity.

Glen Coulthard (2014) wrote about rejecting the colonial politics of recognition in *Red Skin, White Masks*. The colonial politics of recognition is a form of assimilation whereby recognition is imposed on or granted to Indigenous Peoples by the settler state (Canada) in

order to reproduce its own power. Coulthard (2014) describes this recognition as being *asymmetrical* and *non-reciprocal*. The colonial politics of recognition plays an important role across the education system in Canada. As an example, the policy *Indian Control of Indian Education* (ICIE) was introduced in 1972 by the National Indian Brotherhood (now Assembly of First Nations) in response to the widely rejected *White Paper* that sought to repeal the Indian Act and transfer federal responsibilities to the provinces (Battiste, 2013). Canada's adoption of ICIE in 1972 meant that there was a transfer of management (not fiduciary responsibility) from the federal government to First Nations with the goal of revitalizing First Nations cultures, languages, and economies rather than continue being assimilated into colonial schooling (Battiste, 2013).

The ICIE defines the role of education in supporting the development of “a good life” (National Indian Brotherhood [NIB], 1972, p. 1); it outlines educational principles that guide the implementation of Indigenous education; and defines the role of Provinces and Territories in supporting Indigenous access to a culturally relevant education (NIB, 1972). The term *a good life* is expressed in the Cree language as *mino pimatisiwin* referring to a lifelong journey to live in balance, with one's emotional, physical, mental and spiritual self, and also understanding one's interconnectedness with the natural world (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, n.d.). The ICIE outlines guiding principles that it says come from clear ancestral ideas of what makes *a good life*; pride in one's self, cross cultural understanding, and living in harmony with nature (NIB, 1972). Indigenous language program development is also named as a priority for Indigenous education by the ICIE, calling language a “dynamic force” that shapes how one sees the world, and instills a sense of knowing and pride (NIB, 1972, p. 14). The ICIE calls integration a “broad concept of human development which provides for growth through mingling the best elements of a wide range of human differences”, emphasizing that integration is not a “one-way process”

(NIB, 1972, p. 25). The educational reform promise of ICIE was ultimately undermined by intersecting systemic forces contributing to unacceptable living conditions and health outcomes such as, high infant mortality rate, high youth suicide rates, above average unemployment rates, below average literacy rates, and poverty (Battiste, 2013). In 1973, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Jean Chretien, officially recognized and committed to implementing the vision outlined in this document, yet, over 50 years later the vision of ICIE has yet to be realized, highlighting that the politics of recognition are a significant barrier to Indigenous education.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Research Design

2.1 Research Questions

This conceptual research project seeks to specifically provide answers guided by these questions:

- i) How has the settler colonial politics of recognition (Coulthard, 2014) shaped the relationship(s) between Indigenous sovereignty and equity in education, and what possibilities might emerge if we move beyond it?*
- ii) What are the implications of critically examining the tensions and intersections between Indigenous sovereignty and equity in the context of Ontario's equity and Indigenous education policies?*

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this research study is to explore the relationship between Indigenous sovereignty and equity work in Ontario K-12 schooling and how this relationship impacts the curricular landscape. My focus is on rejecting the colonial politics of recognition in an effort to view Indigenous education and perspectives on curriculum on its own terms as part of a generative process. This project is grounded in *Miyo-wîcêhtowin* (*good relations*) and *tâpwê* (*truth and trust*) as core Nêhiyaw guiding principles in research (Kovach, 2021). *Miyo-wîcêhtowin* foregrounds relationality and responsibilities to the knowledge created and shared through the research process. *Tâpwê* contextualizes the research as subjective, within a context of specificity and accountability to community (Kovach, 2021); critically centering Nêhiyaw relationality and positionality, in order to generate new understandings based on my own relationships to make meaning towards Indigenous futurities (Rogers, 2023).

I endeavour for this project to be a contribution to build on decolonial work in educational research, and for that reason I worked to do the literature re-view through a decolonial lens. Tynan and Bishop (2023) share their examination of the literature re-view

through an Indigenous lens(es) and promote a relational approach that centres respect and relational citation practices. In many Indigenous worldviews, silence does not mean lacking, or emptiness. Just like in sharing circle teachings, choosing to "pass" or remain silent does not mean "you don't have anything to say", nor does it mean apathy to the conversation. It simply means there is not the right relationships or contexts established to say something in that moment. And that, perhaps in time, there may be something else to add in the spaces of silence (K. Brant-Birioukov, personal communication, June 9, 2025). But for now, it is not appropriate to fill that space just for the sake of saying something. It does not mean there is something missing and this extends to situating the literature re-view within a relational research process (Tynan & Bishop, 2023). Rejecting the idea that my work exists where there was or is a gap in knowledge means that I am reframing my work as being done within a specific context of time and space, one that exists only because of the work that came before me and would not be possible without it. There is no *gap* but instead an opportunity to continue the work of others within my context as I hope others will continue the work I (we) do into the future within their own context.

The relational aspect of research, even when it is a literature review, is central from an Indigenist, decolonial perspective. We don't ever do this work in isolation. The work that I find in my research often comes from recommendations from trusted professors, mentors, and friends. There are relationships within the works I am reading and listening to that come forward as relevant and helpful to my own. The other aspect that makes this work relational in nature is sharing it along the way. This can be talking about it, sending drafts and thoughts to friends and colleagues. These relationships greatly inform my work and are an important part of the process. Where Western education practices value individualism and competition, my approach will centre relationships and community knowledge wherever possible.

2.3 Methodology

This project was guided by an Indigenous Literature Re-view Methodology (ILRM) (Rogers, 2023) to conduct a comparative literature review of Indigenous sovereignty movements (Baskatawang & Daschuk, 2023; Davis, 2013; Simpson, 2020) and equity and inclusion frameworks (e.g., Government of Ontario, 2009) to learn more about how decolonization is conceptually engaged in the Ontario K-12 educational landscape. Within the academy and other Western institutions of knowledge production, Indigenous ways of searching, and coming to know are often not seen as valid. One of the advantages of using an ILRM is that themes are identified as *most relevant* rather than *most common* which is a result of the methodology being developed within an Indigenous paradigm that prioritizes relationality (Rogers, 2023).

2.3.1 Research Phases

There are four phases to the research:

Phase One (*Searching*): In the *Searching phase* I established inclusion and exclusion criteria to guide the document review based on the objectives outlined in my research questions. I included works by Indigenous authors from settler colonial societies, focusing on Canada but including New Zealand, Australia and the United States when examining Indigenous sovereign education models and thought, ensuring the research is grounded in Indigenous perspectives. While Ontario is the primary site of analysis in this study, I draw on International Indigenous scholarship from other settler colonial contexts to inform and frame my lens of investigation. This broader grounding supports a deeper, more nuanced exploration of the relationship between equity and Indigenous sovereignty within Ontario's curricular landscape. Additionally, I incorporated government frameworks and policy documents from Ontario and other settler colonial contexts to analyze the relationship between equity and Indigenous sovereignty within provincial/state education systems. To maintain an Indigenous-

centred approach, I excluded works by non-Indigenous authors on Indigenous sovereignty in education, as my focus is on Indigenous knowledge and vision. The timeline of the work I reviewed will follow the release of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), to Glen Coulthard's work on rejecting the politics of recognition (2014), to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Final Report (2015), and Canada's adoption of UNDRIP in 2021.

With these dates in mind, I applied the exclusionary criteria of 2007 or later as a publication date. A preliminary search was carried out through university library catalogues, academic databases, publication lists, along with the reference section of key texts. My search included Google scholar searches. Once I completed a preliminary search, I reached out to trusted mentors and colleagues to see if there are any key sources I should consider that are not yet included from my searching so far. The keywords that I identified and used in my search include; *settler colonialism in education, politics of recognition, educational sovereignty, Indigenous perspectives, equity in Indigenous education, Indigenous methodologies in education, Ontario Indigenous education policy, Indigenous curricular frameworks in Canada, curriculum studies in Canada, curriculum theorizing*. I also included the terms *Aboriginal, Native, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit* in place of *Indigenous* in my searches to ensure that I am finding relevant readings within the timeframe and places that I am searching.

Phase Two (*Analysis*): In the *Analysis* phase I began by creating a table of sources where they were organized by author, Indigenous authorship, year, title, and a type of publication. I worked to identify Indigenous authorship from positionality statements included in the readings. If no positionality statement was included, I used Google to search for a public profile of the author(s) to help determine whether the author(s) is Indigenous. If the author(s) didn't identify themselves as Indigenous through positionality statements in the work, or in a public profile I chose to (possibly incorrectly) catalogue their work as non-Indigenous. As a non-

status urban Indigenous person myself I understand deeply the nuance and care that is required when labeling others as ‘Indigenous’ or ‘non-Indigenous’, and while there are some failures within the self-identification method of determining Indigeneity, I relied on public self-identification so as not to position myself as determining the Indigeneity of others. I am aware that this method may have resulted in the inclusion of authors who falsely identify as Indigenous. Additionally, I am aware and am attentive to the importance of consistent transparency and accountability in positioning oneself clearly by naming their Indigeneity upfront. I chose to apply this method of identifying Indigenous authors as a way of applying accountable and relational standards of positionality and identity.

I catalogued the literature using Nvivo coding software, identifying common themes and subthemes in relationships. When reading, I noticed the themes of *settler colonialism and the politics of recognition, reconciliation, resurgence, refusal, Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination*. In my analysis of the policy documents I paid particular attention to terms used and what their use signaled in terms of emphasis. I noted word frequent counts for terms such as *settler colonialism* and *land*, examining the frequency or absence in relation to other equity concepts being discussed with the policy documents.

Phase Three (*Yarning*): In the *Yarning* phase I have interwoven concepts learned through my theoretical and methodological approach. Bessarab & Ng’andu (2010) outline four different types of yarns that can be part of the research process; *social, collaborative, research and therapeutic*. The collaborative yarn is one that involves two or more people in a reciprocal conversation about the research topic, and it is an important part of the research process because it is through these informal conversations that ideas can emerge and/or come into focus (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010). The collaborative yarn upholds the value of *miyo-wicetowin* in the research methodology because Indigenous forms of validity are relational in nature, and it is through our relationships that we are able to conceptualize and validate our research

(Shotton, et al., 2018). In this phase of the research project I reached out through email with authors of some of the key work I have included in the re-view. However, due to the time and scope constraints of a Master's thesis, I was not able to schedule collaborative conversations with these authors. The process of reading their work and reaching out with a snapshot of my own work along with an invitation to have a dialogue is part of my commitment to be *in good relation* and *accountable* through the work I do. This invitation to yarn was also in recognition of the living and changing nature of written work, and my engagement with it, and this process invites the texts—and the authors—an opportunity to answer back.

Phase Four (*Re-view*): Spelled in this way, the re-view draws attention away from a typical Western literature review and towards the concept of 'looking again' with a shift in perspective. In the *re-view* phase, the findings (themes and subthemes) were re-viewed through a lens of decolonization and Indigenous futurities framed by an Indigenous research agenda. Smith (2021) describes an Indigenous research agenda that centres the goal of Indigenous self-determination spanning local to the global efforts. This research agenda includes the elements of *decolonization*, *healing*, *transformation*, and *mobilization*. Smith (2021) shares that these four elements are, "processes which connect, inform and clarify the tensions between the local, the regional and the global." (p. 133). As I am re-viewing the literature for this project I looked to these same four elements to examine the tensions between Indigenous sovereignty and equity frameworks in the K-12 curricular landscape in Ontario. Additionally, the re-view process provided an opportunity to consider the role that the colonial politics of recognition play in this process and what it means to consider the themes and subthemes outside of that lens.

2.3.2 Limitations

As an urban Indigenous scholar whose family has been impacted by colonial policies of assimilation, my research is informed by my lived experience and academic

journey. This positionality brings important insights into the analysis *and* it also means that my perspective is shaped by specific cultural, geographic, and educational contexts. While I draw on a range of Indigenous scholars and knowledge systems, this research project does not claim to represent all Indigenous perspectives, particularly those from remote or northern communities whose educational experience and relationships to sovereignty may differ in important ways from those in urban settings.

Another methodological limitation of this research project is that it is primarily focused on analyzing curricular policies, government frameworks, and theoretical scholarship rather than direct classroom practice. While these documents shape the broader discourse around Indigenous education, they don't always reflect the realities of how educators and students engage with policies in practice. The space between policy and practice is a well-documented challenge in education, and while this study aims to provide critical insights into curricular frameworks, further research involving educators, students, and community members would be necessary to fully understand how these policies are embodied in classrooms in Ontario.

Chapter Three: Settler Colonialism and the Politics of Recognition

3.1 Settler Colonialism

Colonialism is conceptualized through forced dispossession of land and forced assimilation that leads to dependency on the state and reinforces the mythology of colonial logics that hold up Canada as a benevolent nation (Alfred, 2009; Simpson, 2011; Tuck & Yang, 2014). An important part of the colonial narrative is created through the mythological hierarchy that is structured to appear as a 'natural order' where settlers are at the top and viewed as belonging there due to being superior and normal (Tuck & Yang, 2014). In a story about "Canada the Good" (Dion, 2022, p. 25), in order to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands, in past and present day, Indigenous peoples must be understood as either inferior or disappeared (Alfred & Cornthassel, 2005; Simpson, 2011). The mythology that has been created in Canada is that the settlers here (Canadians) are "well-intentioned, harmless, and hardworking caregivers of Indigenous people", and this narrative is evident across the educational landscape (Howell & Ng-A-Fook, 2022, p. 4).

Canada is a settler-colonial state that has employed different strategies over time, ranging in violence, to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their sovereign relationship to land (land, water, cosmos, human and more-than-human). The methods used to achieve this dispossession have changed over time but have not ceased (Coulthard, 2014). Practices of dispossession are tenants of settler-colonialism, and in the liberal democratic context of Canada, this often relies on producing and reproducing the perception that its structures and hierarchies are natural rather than products of settler-colonialism itself (Coulthard, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Coulthard (2014) expands on this idea of *naturalness* through Fanon's explanation of 'internalization' which refers to how "the social relations of colonialism, along with the forms of recognition and representation that serve to legitimate them, come to be seen as 'true' and 'natural' to the colonized themselves" (p. 112–113).

This is important because education is one of the critical ways that ideas, knowledge and social norms are created and perpetuated. Education in Ontario contributes to the 'internalization' of settler-colonialism, even/especially within the politics of equity and reconciliation. Oftentimes confronting settler colonialism is seen as bringing up difficult emotions and for this reason is avoided by educators all together (Dion, 2007; 2022).

Coulthard (2014) makes the important point that the difficult emotions, sometimes seen as harmful and destructive, are avoided; while the harmful and destructive impacts of colonialism are rarely discussed, allowing them to permeate our lives, systems and structures unquestioned. When difficult emotions, as a response to and as an acknowledged impact of colonialism, are relegated to a harmful and destructive realm - their generative possibilities are ignored. When emotions labeled as difficult are imagined within the context of being generative, they hold possibilities for resurgence and refusal which can create a path to healing and imagining a new relationality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. For instance, resistance and resurgence movements in Canada such as *Oka* and resistance to the *Meech Lake Accord* led to the creation of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) (Coulthard, 2014) which was created as an attempt to establish a more just relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. In order to build a more just relationship between Indigenous Peoples and Canada, we need to start from a place of ethical relationality. Ethical relationality is a term that Donald (2012) introduced and describes a relationality that acknowledges and seeks to understand different historical, cultural, and social contexts that position us in relation to each other, rather than collapsing differences. For ethical relationality to be actualized, it begins with holding space for the truth about the emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual consequences of settler colonialism.

Settler colonialism operates as a structure, not an event that can be relegated to the past (Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2016). The structure and history of our public education system is rooted in attempts to separate Indigenous peoples from their lands, languages, cultures and knowledge, family and political systems. Now in a recognition-based and reconciliation era, efforts to 'decolonize' and 'indigenize' the system by adding in content - rather than changing the system – do the same work of what Audra Simpson (2017) calls the 'trickery of consent' (p. 20).

3.2 The Politics of Recognition

The settler colonial politics of recognition shapes the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the state in important ways. The Canadian government frames its relationship with Indigenous peoples as one of mutual recognition, but it continues to be in a position to grant recognition through things like treaty rights, land claims, and self-government and education packages (Coulthard, 2014; Daigle, 2016). In this way, Indigenous-State relations are shaped by the government's failure to address the historic and contemporary impacts of colonialism in any meaningful way and instead of transforming systems, it reinforces its own power and control (Lawrence & Dua, 2005). The language of recognition in the Canadian context has become commonplace in terms of the framework used to determine Indigenous self-determination (Coulthard, 2014; Daigle, 2016). The framework of recognition being used to govern the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canada can be traced back to the 1996 *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP). The report outlined a vision of reconciliation and central to this vision was mutual recognition, respect, sharing and responsibility (Coulthard, 2014).

As the politics of recognition evolves from Hegel to Fanon to Taylor, we observe a shift from a need (and possibility) for reciprocal recognition (Hegel), to self-recognition (Fanon), and, finally, to the critical impact of non-recognition and mis-recognition (Taylor, et

al., 1994). That is, the very same terms of recognition used to constitute existence are also the terms that can be used to deny existence. The harms caused by mis-recognition and non-recognition are significant and include an erosion of cultural identity and capacity for individual and community self-recognition (Daigle, 2016). Non-recognition and mis-recognition are entrenched in policy, frameworks and systems that aim to reproduce colonial power and assimilate Indigenous peoples into settler society (Coulthard, 2014). Two historic examples of how non-recognition and mis-recognition have impacted and caused harm to Indigenous peoples through forced assimilation is the *1884 Potlatch Law*¹ and the *Indian Residential School System*² (Daigle, 2016). Taylor (1994) argues that one way to address non-recognition and mis-recognition is through the inclusion of marginalized voices in the education system. This approach is grounded in the idea that excluding marginalized voices from the curriculum perpetuates an image of Europeans - men, in particular - as the sole holders and creators of knowledge and modernity. In doing so, it simultaneously creates a derogatory image of excluded groups (Taylor, et al., 1994). As I will argue below, this recognition-based rationale for inclusion is evident in contemporary education policies designed to promote equity (e.g. Ministry of Ontario, 2007).

In relation to this last point, Daigle (2016) further points out that within a colonial framework there are certain spaces, such as reserves, that are marked as natural spaces for Indigenous self-determination, while the rest of Canada is “available for privatization,

¹ Potlatch, a central ceremonial practice of the Haida people, was outlawed by the Canadian government in 1884. The government targeted Potlatch, which shaped social organization, passed down cultural knowledge, and facilitated the redistribution of wealth, because it was viewed as a barrier to the government's assimilation agenda (Davidson & Davison, 2018).

² The Indian Residential School System was in operation in Canada for 150 years with the last school of its kind closing in 1996. The Indian Residential School System was a central element of Canada's policy to eliminate Indigenous governments and assimilate Indigenous peoples. (Vowel, 2016).

capitalist accumulation, and settlement” (p. 264). Within a recognition-based framework, it becomes evident that this view of naturalized Indigenous spaces versus “Canadian” spaces is part of the process of dispossession. Within education, parallels can be drawn to the spaces that Indigenous education occupies within the broader curriculum and how it got to be there. As it is today, Indigenous education occupies a separate space within K–12 education, being contained to certain subject areas (i.e. social studies, history), months (i.e. June is National Indigenous History Month), and days (i.e. Orange Shirt Day or the government named National Day for Truth and Reconciliation). The inclusion of Indigenous education or any decolonizing practices within K–12 education falls under the jurisdiction of the provincial government, creating a recognition-based dynamic. Through this recognition-based dynamic, the provincial government has the determining authority to confine Indigeneity to certain places and times. The separateness Indigenous education from education more broadly speaks to how politics of recognition works to confine Indigeneity.

3.3 The Politics of Reconciliation

In Canada, reconciliation is largely understood and defined through the lens of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC), released in 2015. The TRC defines reconciliation as, “establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples” and furthers that for this to be possible, “there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour” (p. 3). The TRC is a *discursive institution*, relying on its power to “inform and persuade” (de Costa, 2017, p. 188) in order to bring about its vision and *94 Calls to Action*. Since the release of the TRC Final Report and *94 Calls to Action*, “reconciliation is emerging as a priority for the Canadian education system” (Brant-Birioukov, et al., 2020, p. 40) and is largely understood through the work of the TRC and the specific *Calls Action* (62, 63, 64) that pertain to education. Two of the ways these

shifting priorities can be seen are through changes to teacher competency expectations through provincial and territorial governing bodies and changes to K-12 curriculum. For example, beginning in 2019, teachers in Alberta are required to demonstrate foundational knowledge of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in order to maintain their teaching certification (Hare, 2020). In response to the TRC's Calls to Action 62 and 63, the Ontario government made curriculum revisions to Social Studies, Grades 1–6; History and Geography, Grade 7 and 8; Canadian and World Studies, Grades 9 and 10; First Nations, Métis and Inuit Studies, Grades 9–12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d.). The politics of recognition are deeply embedded in reconciliation as it exists in current curriculum making it an important site for critical examination.

Colonial conceptions of reconciliation differ greatly, and in important ways, from Indigenous ones, in fact, as noted by Indigenous scholars, reconciliation is not an Indigenous concept and not rooted in Indigenous languages or epistemologies (Corntassel et al., 2009; Métis Nation - Saskatchewan, 2023). The TRC acknowledges this in its Final Report (2015) saying, "Elders and Knowledge Keepers across the land have told us that there is no specific word for 'reconciliation' in their own languages" noting that this linguistic difference reflects a deeper divergence of ideas when it comes to moving forward in a good way (p. 12). Outlined below are key ways reconciliation is framed through a colonial lens, followed by Indigenous conceptions, and the tensions that arise when attempting to unify divergent ideas that are presented as the same.

Within the discourse of reconciliation exists an explicit discourse of recognition because, through a colonial lens, institutional recognition and inclusion of Indigenous perspectives is framed as the foundation of reconciliation (Coulthard, 2014). Reconciliation has the potential to become a casualty of colonialism, shaped by colonial fort logics (Donald, 2012), which suggests that when outsiders are brought into the fort, they are

expected to assimilate and become insiders. As mentioned earlier, *the fort does not transform*. By this logic, as reconciliation has been brought into our institutions (forts), notably education, without a critical eye on its conception within the ‘fort’, it stands to not only benefit the institutions but also to neutralize Indigenous claims to justice and sovereignty (Coulthard, 2014; Lowe, 2021). For Madden (2019), the TRC outlines priorities for reconciliation from an Indigenous perspective and without knowledge of the TRC and its lineal connection to reconciliation in Canada, it becomes obscured through a Eurocentric lens. She furthers that this contributes to the thinking that “education for reconciliation is just another iteration of Indigenous education as cultural programming.” (p. 293). The colonial framework of reconciliation contains and neutralizes Indigenous resurgence by committing harms to the past, and by creating binary narratives of perpetrator (apology)/victim (forgiveness).

The discourse of reconciliation is centred around a narrative that relegates the harms of colonialism to the past, in large part, because it tends to focus on the specific harms caused by residential schools (Coulthard, 2014). The problem with framing reconciliation by containing it to residential schools and committing it to the past is that it becomes impossible to redress ongoing harms in the present and into the future. From this place of impossibility, attention shifts to reparation of some of the damage that was caused avoiding any attention paid to current colonial structures and policies that continue to cause harm and uphold unhelpful binaries such that, “Indigenous subjects are the primary object of repair, not the colonial relationship” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 127).

Apologies have become part of the public reconciliation of Indigenous-Canadian relations (Coulthard, 2014) in what Henderson (2013) refers to as a “national hug” (p. 115). The apology discourse of reconciliation works to reduce the “political to the therapeutic so that restorative justice is defined solely within support for personal healing from the wounds

of colonialism” (Simon, 2013, p. 132). It further functions to reinforce the public’s own humanity by feeling good about feeling bad through the commodification of stories of suffering (Simon, 2013). Public apologies, vague in nature and often lacking in action, reaffirm a colonial fantasy of “Canada the Good” (Dion, 2022, p. 25) as being in need of *and* deserving of forgiveness and Indigenous peoples in a position to grant it, often with an implied obligation to do so. This apology-forgiveness dynamic is seen as the first step in a process of reconciliation but this process recentres and is largely determined by colonial and namely Christian religious logics - *not Indigenous ones* (Corntassel, 2012; Madden, 2019). Another binary that exists within the colonial reconciliation framework is settlers as *perpetrators* and Indigenous peoples as *victims*, often with the effect of creating an unbridgeable chasm and barrier to creating ethical and good relations moving forward (Dion, 2022). Similarly, through colonial logics, settler childhoods are constructed as *innocent* while Indigenous ones are constructed as *damaged* (Farley, 2018). For education to serve as a site of transformation, Indigenous Peoples and Canadians must move beyond colonially produced binaries that uphold abstract platitudes and erase complexity and agency.

Without a shared goal to transform structures of colonialism, the focus of reconciliation diverts attention away from meaningful change and continues down a path of assimilation through what Corntassel (2012) calls the *politics of distraction*. To turn towards Indigenous concepts of reconciliation and perspectives on ethical relationality (Ermine, 2007; Donald, 2012), we can look to shifting the concepts of *reconciliation* to *resurgence*, *rights* to *responsibilities*, and *resources* to *relationships* (Corntassel, 2012). Through these shifts in conceptual understanding, reconciliation through education requires much more than including apologetic asks for forgiveness and even more than including Indigenous perspectives in curriculum. It would require teaching to transform the system itself.

Chapter Four: Sovereignty, Self-Determination, Refusal, and Resurgence

The term *sovereignty* is a colonial term used to describe a state as having the ability to govern itself (Oxford, 2025). When using this term in relation to Indigenous Nations it speaks to the right and recognition to independent governance and Nation to Nation relations. Sometimes the term self-determination is used in a similar context as sovereignty but they are not interchangeable. Self determination refers to the process by which both individuals and Nations make decisions about their own lives and governance (AFN, 2023). As I consider the relationship between equity and Indigenous sovereignty in education, I wonder about using a colonial term as I work to highlight the role of colonial politics of recognition within this relationship. My wonderings are informed by Taiaiake Alfred (2009), who argues that when Indigenous Nations pursue sovereignty, they are perpetuating a notion of power that is inherently incompatible with Indigenous ways of being.

However, Courchene (2021) explains that from an Anishinaabe perspective, Indigenous sovereignty is spiritually-based rather than *nation* based. In this second sense, Indigenous identity is connected to language, land, ceremonies which come from and are part of the spiritual realm. Some important ways that the word sovereignty shows up in Indigenous discourse that is tied to education are *intellectual sovereignty* and *inherent sovereignty*. There has been a struggle over the last 150+ years for what Smith (2020) calls, *intellectual sovereignty* of Indigenous knowledge. International law recognizes Indigenous peoples' *inherent sovereignty* in lands they traditionally occupied and continue to inhabit (Lawrence & Dua, 2005). This struggle for *intellectual sovereignty* and Indigenous peoples' *inherent sovereignty* brings into view an important connection between knowledge generation and the land. If Indigenous peoples embody *inherent sovereignty* to place [land, water, cosmos], and knowledge is generated from

these embodied relationships to place, then it can be understood that sovereign Indigenous education is deeply connected to a sovereign relationship to land, language and ceremonies.

My own use of the term sovereignty acknowledges it is a term that holds tension and is not used in an uncritical adoption of a colonial framework. I acknowledge that the concept has a colonial definition rooted in state power, while it is also used within Indigenous worldviews that are grounded in land, spirit, and relational knowledge. In this thesis, I use the term sovereignty to gesture towards Indigenous constructions of sovereignty rooted in Indigenous epistemologies that centre land, spirit, and relational knowledge, even as they remain entangled with ongoing structures of recognition.

4.1 De/colonization

Before moving ahead, I want to discuss de/colonization, a concept that has become a buzzword in education and has important intersections with the concepts Indigenous sovereignty, resurgence and refusal. Madden (2019) uses the spelling form “de/colonization” to highlight the complexity of the work and to delineate it from a colonization/decolonization dichotomy. Instead of decolonizing work being neatly separate from colonizing structures, Madden (2019) shares “de/colonizing calls for consistent examination of colonial logics and productions that seep into settings like Indigenous education and teacher education, which, our intentions and plans notwithstanding, often become hybrid experiences of colonizing and decolonizing.” (p. 287).

Madden’s (2019) approach to de/colonizing goals in the Canadian education context is through the processes of deconstructing and reconstructing. Deconstruction works to highlight the inequities generated by a colonial system and specifically in education concerned with reconciliation. As Madden (2019) explains, “deconstruction

illuminates and creates openings to address how colonial norms of intelligibility are produced, organized, circulated, and regulated” (p. 287). Deconstruction, which is often the focus of decolonizing work, can only happen within the confines of recognition because it sits in opposition to a colonial structure that it operates within.

Deconstruction is therefore the de/colonizing work to be done within institutional schooling - a colonial structure - and should be driven by Indigenous priorities as laid out in the TRC. I further propose that deconstructive work is primarily work that needs to be taken up by non-Indigenous peoples to attend to the harms of the colonial systems they benefit from. Within colonial systems, the work of de/colonizing must be undertaken by those situated within these systems, who hold the most power, and who benefits from them. The role of non-Indigenous peoples doing de/colonizing work within education is to examine their own positionality, the meaning that positionality holds, and their role in upholding or deconstructing systems of harm. While this work is the responsibility of non-Indigenous educators, an essential component of that responsibility is to do the work in relationship with Indigenous peoples and guided by Indigenous priorities, in order to de-centre themselves.

Quite divergently, reconstruction refers to a resurgence of Indigenous ways of knowing, teaching, learning and being and is deeply relational in nature (Madden, 2019). Reconstruction (understood as resurgence) is marked by its happening outside of colonial structures as much as possible on the terms of and for the benefit of Indigenous peoples and communities. It is through reconstruction that colonial systems can come into relation with Indigenous ones in a way that is ethical. Focusing on resurgence is a choice to shift attention away from colonization and the work of undoing the oppressive structure from within it. Resurgence offers a reframing that de-centres the colonial gaze and centres Indigenous flourishing, in what Simpson (2011)

calls a concern with “how we (re)build our own house[s].” (p. 32). De/colonization framed as resurgent work is less concerned with the deconstruction involved in de/colonization and rather attends to reconstruction in the service of de/colonization on Indigenous terms and towards Indigenous futurities.

4.2 Resurgence

Resurgence means bringing Indigenous cultural, political, and ceremonial knowledge into the present within a place-based contemporary context in order to support the well-being of Indigenous peoples and nations today and into the future. (Corntassel, 2012; Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2016). While resurgence does not act in direct opposition to colonial power, because it does not consider it at all, it holds the power “to radically transform the colonial power relations that have come to dominate our present.” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 156–157). Because settler colonialism is an inherently dispossessive force, resurgence, as lived Indigenous relationships and ways of being, works to reconstruct an Indigenous existence (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005). What Coulthard and Simpson (2016) call *grounded normativity* “refers to the ethical frameworks provided by [Indigenous] place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge.” (p. 254). *Grounded normativity* as a resurgence framework highlights the centrality of Indigenous relationship to land in generating, “Indigenous processes and knowledges that make up Indigenous life” (Simpson, 2016, p. 22). Grounded normativity offers a resurgent practice that turns away from the colonial dispossessive forces, through the (re)building, and (re)claiming of relationship to land as a central practice of knowledge generation and spiritual connection.

Unlike the term *reconciliation*, within different Indigenous languages there *are* words that represent the concept of what we call in English *Indigenous resurgence*. For example, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2011) shares the Anishinaabemowin term

Biskaabiiyang, which in some contexts can be translated to mean *returning to ourselves*. Biskaabiiyang is not about returning to the past, but about revitalizing Indigenous cultural, political, and intellectual life in ways that support contemporary well-being, embrace the fluidity of traditions, and support self-determination and resurgence (Simpson, 2011). Similarly, within an Omushkegowuk context, Daigle (2016) explains the law of *awawanenitakik* to mean, “the importance of living an Omushkegowuk Cree way of life by actively upholding our responsibilities to our ancestral lands by engaging in place-based customs such as learning and speaking Omushkego, the Cree language, taking part in our annual ceremonies, and harvesting and sharing our local foods” (p. 261). *Biskaabiiyang* and *awawanenitakik* reflect how Indigenous resurgence is embedded in language, practice and place, offering a path forward that is rooted in nation-specific ways of being.

Cree-Métis scholar Verna St. Denis (2007) critiques frameworks that situate cultural revitalization as the only path to liberation for Indigenous peoples, arguing instead that cultural revitalization can unintentionally generate and support “a form of cultural fundamentalism that leads to an informal...cultural hierarchy that can encourage notions of authenticity among Aboriginal people” (p. 1069). She suggests instead that, “[b]y acknowledging a common experience of colonization and racism educators can enact solidarity and join together to challenge racism and racialization” (p. 1087) as a foundation for social justice education. Still, I suggest that it remains important to understand Indigenous educational sovereignty in solidarity with other anti-oppressive struggles, while also holding true to its unique context and specificity through resurgent practices. Walcott (2018) warns that, “anti-racism as a performative discourse functions to obscure rather than specify” (p. 94), which raises important questions about what, and who, is obscured within anti-racism discourse in education.

4.3 Refusal

Refusal asserts its own terms rejecting assimilation by inclusion, consent by recognition, and assessment according to colonial norms that threaten Indigenous sovereignty and ways of knowing (Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2016; Grande, 2018; Madden, 2019; Flipper, 2021). Indigenous scholars have offered refusal as a deliberate alternative to other forms of decolonization, such as resistance (Simpson, 2014; Grande, 2018; Flipper, 2021). Refusal is distinct from resistance in that it operates outside of a recognition of authority and in doing so it generates different ways of knowing and being (Tuck & Yang 2014; Flipper, 2021). In this way refusal is not seeking recognition in its relationship with the state and instead operates on a premise of sovereignty.

In their critical discussion of decolonization, Tuck & Yang (2012) emphasize incommensurabilities which can be understood as refusal; refusal to be resolved on the terms of the settler. Further to this, in her open letter *Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities*, Eve Tuck (2009) urges researchers, communities, and educators to refuse a damage-centred narrative that takes a “pathologizing approach in which the oppression singularly defines a community” (p. 411). Similarly, Audra Simpson (2017) posits ethnographic refusal as an alternative to recognition - one which, unlike recognition, holds possibilities for producing alternative ways of being while also stands in “critical relationship to states” (p. 19). According to Audra Simpson (2016), “consent is bound with recognition and its refusal, symptomatic of truth itself and a mechanism for other possibilities” (p. 330). One of the examples that Simpson (2017) gives of this refusal is Kanien’kéha’ka refusal to be defined by citizenship granted by the nation state, such as Canada and the United States. According to Simpson (2017) acceptance of the structures of Canadian/U.S. citizenship and all that entails would signal consent and work to “move Mohawks out of their sovereignty” (21). Refusal asserts itself in place of dominant structures and in doing so

holds space for emerging decolonial possibilities. In settler colonial contexts, education has been used as a tool of assimilation and erasure. The Indian Residential School system, which operated in Canada for 150 years with the last school closing in 1996 (Vowel, 2016), is one of the most cited examples of this attempt at assimilation and erasure by way of education. Counter to this example of attempted assimilation and erasure exist stories of refusal such as families who hid their children to keep them out of the schools or refused to return them after a summer at home (Ryan, Tocci, & Moon, 2020; Simpson, 2017). These counter-stories highlight that as long as there have been structures of colonialism, there has been Indigenous refusal.

Indigenous sovereignty as a concept, co-opted from colonial frameworks and understood within Indigenous epistemologies, brings forward resurgence and refusal to support *inherent* and *intellectual* sovereignty of Indigenous peoples. As Tuck & Yang (2012) point out, decolonization is distinct from other forms of social justice frameworks and when enacted as metaphor it becomes nothing more than “an empty signifier to be filled by any track towards liberation” (p. 7). Importantly, Tuck & Yang (2012) also assert that decolonization, not meant as metaphor, means the literal return of land (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The centrality of land as a mechanism of settler colonial power cannot be ignored when conceptualizing Indigenous sovereignty, resurgence and refusal. Through the concepts of *grounded normativity*, *Biskaabiiyang*, and *awawanenitakik*, we see that the interconnected concepts of resurgence, refusal, and sovereignty are inherently connected to land. Where other justice frameworks are based on recognition, Indigenous approaches to justice are grounded in refusal, and the goal of refusal is *resurgence* (Grande, 2018). For de/colonization to transform the education system it must be on Indigenous terms and within Indigenous frameworks for liberation and justice, and for this to be possible Indigenous sovereignty must be centred and enacted through refusal and resurgence.

Chapter Five: The Ontario Educational Landscape

5.1 Critical Equity Frameworks in Education

It is important to acknowledge at this point that there are frameworks to guide the inclusion of people considered to be outside of the dominant group in the name of equity. Often Indigenous peoples are considered one of many equity-deserving groups within anti-racist and multiculturalism frameworks. However, without Indigenous sovereignty and rights at the foundation of these frameworks the way that they are taken up in education continues to support the project of colonization (Lawrence & Dua, 2012; Pete, 2022). There are important differences and specificities between anti-racist frameworks, those from different racialized positions, and decolonizing frameworks. Because of these differences, scholars working within critical race theory and cultural studies - including those within Black Studies - have thought about what it means to forge solidarities with Indigenous scholarship without collapsing differences. In the pages to come, I include some of their thinking, particularly when it intersects with Indigenous critiques of equity frameworks in education to show how scholars are working to soften binaries that can congeal between communities and in so doing, show how new formations of community may emerge through meaningful solidarities.

Over time there has been a shift in language from multiculturalism to equity, diversity, and inclusion but the underlying currents remain the same (Ramachandran, 2024). Indigenous education in Canada moved from policies of assimilation, to integration, and finally toward the unrealized policy of Indigenous control over education (Hare, 2007). Until Indigenous control over education is realized, Indigenous education continues to operate within colonial institutions and is lumped in with broader frameworks of equity and inclusion.

In Lawrence and Dua's (2005) article *Decolonizing Antiracism*, they outline the ways in which Indigenous peoples and perspectives have been excluded from antiracism work. Lawrence and Dua (2005) point out, Canadian anti-racism theory is "written on land that is still colonized", and yet still fails to centre decolonization as a priority (Lawrence & Dua, 2005, p. 132). From a Black Studies perspective, Walcott's (2018) critique of anti-racism discourse in Canada, too, highlights how the narrative within education functions as a *move to innocence* (Tuck & Yang, 2012), ultimately reinforcing existing structures and the narrative of a benevolent Canada. Lawrence and Dua (2005) point out that at the heart of Indigenous survival are concerns of nationhood and reclaiming a relationship to land, which are two topics rarely taken up within anti-racism work (Lawrence & Dua, 2005). All of this is to say that when Indigenous priorities of decolonization get lumped in with anti-racist frameworks, as they often are within education policy and curriculum objectives, decolonization is de-centred and anti-racism continues to be conceptualized within a colonial framework limiting its liberatory possibilities for Indigenous (and all) peoples.

The Multicultural Act, introduced as law in 1988 under the Mulroney government, was intended to address concerns of and increase understanding between Francophones, diverse ethnic groups, alongside the need to address racial discrimination. (St. Denis, 2011). From Indigenous perspectives, one of the main criticisms of multiculturalism is that it operates within, and therefore validates, current colonial structures and in doing so also ignores ongoing colonization (St. Denis, 2011; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). Further to this, multiculturalism creates the appearance of inclusion, while at the same time perpetuating the exact structures that dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands and culture by placing Indigenous peoples alongside other marginalized groups within a liberal pluralist framework that

decentres decolonization (St. Denis, 2011). According to Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández (2013), “Multiculturalism is perhaps the most widespread response to white supremacy in the curriculum...” (p. 81) and it supports the narrative of Canada as a benevolent and inclusive nation, but the politics of recognition highlight the limits placed—by dominant Western structures—on how Indigenous peoples (and Others) are permitted to participate. For example, Tuck & Yang (2014) share that Indigenous peoples are often invited to share their stories as long as they are stories of “pain and humiliation” (p. 812). St. Denis (2011) highlights how multiculturalism invites only decorative forms of culture to be shared by “cultural others” (308) which has no meaningful impact on a deeper understanding of a cultural worldview, or contemporary political concerns and priorities. Although the language of multiculturalism has shifted to that of equity, diversity and inclusion (Ramachandran, 2024; Segeren & Kutsyuruba, 2012), “the theme of equity seems to have emerged as the ideological foundation of the policy and practice of multicultural education in Ontario” (Segeren & Kutsyuruba, 2012, p. 24).

Walcott (2018) points to “late modern capitalist life” (p. 92) as being deeply entangled with the logics of inclusion which he says ultimately acts as a barrier to “think of life otherwise” (p. 92). This entanglement of neoliberal economics, capitalism and equity within education are echoed by Rezai-Rashti, et al., (2017) when they discuss the shift towards equity in economic terms rather than social democratic ones (Rezai-Rashti et al, 2017). This shift or “re-articulation of equity education” (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2017, p. 163) attends to test scores, outcomes and performance of students rather than attending to inequities that are structural and systemic (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2017). Further to this, *Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009) highlights that equity and inclusion are central to “creating a cohesive society and strong economy

that will secure Ontario's future prosperity" (p. 5) pointing to a justification for equity that serves the current structure of the settler colonial nation-state of Canada, rather than for its intrinsic value rooted in social justice.

5.2 Equity and Indigenous Education Policy in Ontario

Turning my attention to the curricular landscape in Ontario's K-12 publicly funded school system, I re-viewed key policy documents through the lens of Indigenous sovereignty, framed as resurgence and refusal, and with a rejection of the colonial politics of recognition. This approach was used to better understand tensions and intersections between Indigenous sovereignty and equity in Ontario, and their implications for the province's K-12 curricular landscape. The documents were selected for their relevance to the topic of equity and Indigenous education in Ontario, as official policy documents on which school boards strategies and policies rely for directives and are held accountable to. Since both Ontario's equity policy and its Indigenous education policy are almost 20 years old, I also re-viewed more recent supplemental provincial education documents on equity to better understand any shifts in the tensions and intersections between them over time. Notably, there have been no comparable updates to the Indigenous education policy since the release of the *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework* in 2007, which remains in place.

The equity policy documents that I re-viewed were *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009) and *Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017). The Indigenous education document that I re-viewed was *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Together these documents provide a foundation for considering how Ontario's equity frameworks have evolved and how they continue to sit in relation and

tension with Indigenous rights and sovereignty. Attending to the persistence of older Indigenous policy alongside evolving equity discourse allows for deeper examination of how inclusionary frameworks operate through the politics of recognition thereby limiting self-determining goals of Indigenous education.

5.3 Education Equity Policy in Ontario

In Ontario's *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009) the Ontario Ministry of Education defines equity as, "[a] condition or state of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people" (p. 4). Ontario's *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009) is organized into sections that outline the responsibilities of the Ministry of Education, school boards, and individual schools in supporting and implementing the strategy. It follows a top-down model, with "direction, support, and guidance to the education sector" provided by the Ministry of Education (p. 11). This model is a colonial structuring that positions the Ministry as an "agent of change and social cohesion" (p. 6) and capable of addressing systemic barriers to student achievement. What is more, the language used in *Ontario's Equity and Inclusion Strategy* (2009) reflects that engrained narrative of "Canada the Good" (Dion, 2022, p. 25) through its neoliberal framing, stating that "our education system supports and reflects the democratic values of fairness, equity, and respect for all" (p. 6). This framing positions Ontario's education system as already rooted in these values, suggesting that only minor adjustments are needed to make them more visible.

Not only are the stated values of this document debatable, they also overlook a number of important differences. In upholding universalized ideas of "fairness, equity, and respect for all", *Ontario's Equity and Inclusion Strategy* (2009) also glosses over intersectional social locations that people differently embody and that affect *and often limit* access to these very ideas. What is more, the claim that Ontario's education

system supports and reflects equity is silent on the implication of this same system in perpetuating so much harm, particularly for Indigenous communities. Instead, the narrative that is woven throughout *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009) and *Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan* (2017) is one of tolerance and innocence through the language of *diversity, inclusion, respect*, and *safety* through addressing *bias, barriers*, and *discrimination*. For example, Ontario's *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009) describes the policy as a "noble project" in which all Canadians are engaged (p. 2), suggesting an all-encompassing commitment to tolerance and innocence.

According to St. Denis (2011), when Canadians are "[p]roduced as advocates of fairness and equality", they may feel justified in rejecting Indigenous claims to justice (p. 310) from a defended position of being "good" people. She furthers that, through a narrative of tolerance and innocence, Indigenous people are "constructed as the oppressors of ordinary Canadians" (Légaré, 1995 as cited in St. Denis, 2011). The narrative of tolerance and innocence embedded within the stated values of Ontario's *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009) works as a settler move to innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012) which relieves settler guilt or responsibility while requiring very little change, if any at all. Furthermore, when non-Indigenous Canadians see themselves through the lens of innocence, it is often produced through the politics of recognition, which works to achieve inclusion through recognition-based frameworks. These frameworks assume that cultural recognition is sufficient for justice, thereby positioning further claims, such as those related to land rights and sovereignty, as *disruptive* and *unfair*, and even *oppressive*.

In addition to discourses of tolerance and innocence, *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009) also leans on a related politics of inclusion as

measured by student “achievement”. For instance, the strategy stipulates that, “student achievement will improve when barriers to inclusion are identified and removed...” (p. 2) indicating that the strategy is highly reliant on student achievement as a measure of equity and the politics of inclusion as the theory of change. Inclusion is defined using George Dei (2006) definition, “Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making new space, a better space for everyone” (Dei, 2006, p. 2 as cited in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 2). Despite this promising framing, there is little indication that the strategy is intended to be implemented in this way. For example, the Ontario Ministry of Education outlines the broad goals of education as high levels of achievement, reduced gaps in achievement, and increased public confidence in publicly funded education. As a result, the politics of inclusion are measured within an already predetermined framework, leaving little room for structural change. The discourse of inclusion works to assimilate students into the system instead of transforming the system itself. Within Ontario’s equity education policies, the focus is on supporting students to succeed, with academic success often equated with equity, stating that, “[e]quity and excellence, therefore, go hand in hand” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 6).

Working to increase students’ ability to navigate and succeed within colonial systems does not necessarily lead to increased well-being or genuine equity. As Barrera Jaramillo (2023) argues, “the language of achievement and opportunity gaps in educational policies operates within the logic and structure of settler colonialism” (p. 4) and through doing so contains the possibilities for structural change. Still, these very ideas - achievement and closing the achievement gap - are two of the main guiding principles used across Ontario’s education policies including *Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Framework (2009)*, *Ontario’s Equity Action Plan (2017)*, and

Ontario's First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework (2007). The discourse of “closing the gap” is also what has largely contributed to the deficit theorizing of Indigenous learners in Ontario, where they are conceptualized as broken, behind and in need of catching up with white students.

Settler colonialism is made invisible in both *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009)* and *Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan (2017)*, despite a noticeable shift in language marked by the increased use of the term *systemic*. In *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009)*, *systemic*, appears only four times in relation to barriers, whereas in the 2017 *Education Equity Action Plan*, it appears twenty-one times. Even with this increase in the use of the term *systemic*, the system itself—settler colonialism—is mentioned only once. In *Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan (2017)*, *colonialism* is used to reference the “legacy of colonialism” (p. 22), a phrase that reinforces a narrative of innocence by framing colonialism as a *thing of the past* through the use of the word *legacy*. Referring to colonialism in the past tense works to ensure colonial futurity by characterizing it as a historical event rather than an ongoing structure that requires redress (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The increased use of the term *systemic* in *Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan (2017)* demonstrates a consciousness of anti-oppressive and equity discourse, while at the same time not wanting to be revealed as part of an oppressive system itself.

Another way that settler colonialism is rendered invisible within Ontario's equity policies is through the framing of education as a vehicle for Ontario's economic prosperity and responsible citizenship. *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009)* describes education as a means of creating “engaged, productive and responsible citizens” (6), while *Ontario's Education Equity Plan (2017)* emphasizes that the plan will enable students to “reach their full potential and to become personally

successful, economically productive and actively engaged citizens” (p. 4). While none of these outcomes are inherently negative, this framing reveals an underlying purpose of Ontario’s education and equity policies—to continue producing through education, individuals who sustain the settler colonial system we continue to live within—a system that produces and benefits from ongoing inequities. As dominant norms become institutionalized, the institutions function to reproduce these values and structures (Pete, 2022). Furthermore, systems of oppression—like settler colonialism—are continued to be made invisible through Ontario’s equity policy documents through their framing of discrimination as *isolated* and *unintended*.

Ontario’s *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009) frames discrimination as, “incidents of discrimination” while simultaneously asserting that Canadians embrace “multiculturalism, human rights, and diversity as fundamental values” (p. 7). This framing functions to continue to deny systemic and structural forms of inequity by characterizing discrimination as “incidents” implying they are isolated and untethered from broader systems of oppression. While the shift in language from the 2009 *Strategy* to the 2017 *Action Plan* appears to signal a growing acknowledgement that barriers to equity are systemic, and that change must therefore also be systemic, there remain limited possibilities for such change within the framework itself, as it continues to shield itself from explicitly acknowledging its own part in discriminatory policies and practice. While Ontario’s equity policies have stated values that sound ideal, the *hidden values* are revealed through the language that *is* used and what is *not* named.

5.4 Indigenous Education Policy in Ontario

In order to help situate Indigenous education within Ontario’s K–12 education system, I re-viewed Ontario’s most recent Indigenous education policy document, the *First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework*, published in 2007. Within

the politics of recognition, the absence of an updated *First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy* in nearly 20 years—despite expanding public consciousness following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Final Report (2015), Canada’s adoption of the United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples³ (2021), and the confirmation of unmarked graves in Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc Kúkpí⁴ (2021)—suggests that Indigenous education can not be a priority for the Ontario Ministry of Education. While the province affirms its commitment to Indigenous education throughout the 2007 *First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Policy Framework*, the absence of an updated policy reflects how recognition can function as a symbolic gesture rather than a living relationship grounded in ethical relationality.

The *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2007) is structured around three goals, each of which outlines specific strategies and performance measures. Indigenous education is identified as one of the Ministry of Education’s “key priorities” (p. 5), within the overarching goal “to improve achievement among First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students and to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the areas of literacy and numeracy, retention of students in school, graduation rates, and advancement to postsecondary studies” (p. 5).

³ On June 21, 2021, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act received Royal Assent and immediately came into force. This legislation advances the implementation of the Declaration as a key step in renewing the Government of Canada’s relationship with Indigenous peoples. (Government of Canada, n.d.)

⁴ On May 27, 2021, the Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc Kúkpí (Chief) Rosanne Casimir announced that ground penetrating radar had confirmed the remains of up to 215 children who were students at the Kamloops Indian Residential School (Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc, 2021).

A focus on closing the gap as a central goal fails to consider or address the underlying causes of the difference in student experiences and outcomes. Instead, it offers targeted strategies to “meet the particular educational needs of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students” (p. 5). This gap-closing approach, tied to achievement, measures Indigenous students against, “the white racial experience as the standard for progress and success” (Barrera Jaramilo, 2023, p. 5), framing achievement through Eurocentric perspectives. Framing success in this way marks Indigenous students as the *dysfunction* in need of improvement, rather than identifying the institution of schooling itself as a site for harm. For example, performance measures include goals such as “improving Aboriginal student outcomes” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 6) and “ensuring that Aboriginal students succeed at a rate comparable to that of other students in the education system” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 6). These examples emphasize individual student success within an unchanged colonial education system, rather than transforming the system to be accountable to Indigenous students and communities.

Integrated into the *closing-the-gap* narrative there are paternalistic strategies that position the Ontario Ministry of Education, school boards and schools as “helpers” of Indigenous students. For example, it uses the term *helping* in describing a strategy to close the achievement gap as “helping First Nation, Métis and Inuit students succeed in school” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 18). The comparative narrative of Indigenous students’ achievement versus non-Indigenous students’ achievement, is told outside the context of historical experiences of schooling and government funding formulas that privilege non-Indigenous students, in turn creating a damaging view of Indigenous students rather than the systems that create inequities (Battiste, 2010). As Mi’kmaw scholar Marie Battiste (2010) shares, learning is a holistic, lifelong journey

guided by our learning spirit where we “come to learn about ourselves through our ecologies, land and environments” (p. 14). Instead of honouring the learning spirit, public schooling has created barriers to learning for Indigenous students through colonization and racism (Battiste, 2010). Closing the gap narrative ignores this context and works to uphold the current system as desirable and conceptualizes Indigenous students within a deficit lens. This framing strips Indigenous students and families of their agency and sovereignty, positioning them as passive recipients of support rather than as agents of their own educational and cultural resurgence. In addition, what is noticeably absent is any mention of community well-being, Nation-based educational goals, or cultural resurgence.

As part of its vision, Ontario’s *First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Policy Framework* (2007) states: “They [Indigenous students] will have the traditional and contemporary knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to be socially contributive, politically active, and economically prosperous citizens of the world” (p. 7). This narrative, that the framework will bestow these qualities upon Indigenous students, stands out to me as an attempt to repair something that did not need fixing before it was destroyed and replaced by colonialism. As Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) assert, within settler colonialism, the colonizer, “come[s] to stay, making himself the sovereign, and the arbiter of citizenship, civility, and knowing” (p. 73). Within the context of education policy, this self-appointed position of sovereignty advances the state as the authority on what constitutes success, belonging, and knowledge, ultimately working to replace Indigenous sovereignty, resurgence, and self-determined educational pathways. It is another way that settler colonialism is made invisible throughout Ontario’s *First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2007).

Interestingly, while the framework positions student achievement and closing the gap as key metrics of success, it also acknowledges a lack of relevant data, stating: “Aboriginal student-specific data is not available to support improvement planning, accountability, or to inform policy and funding decisions, measurement, and reporting” (p. 10). This contradiction creates an impossibility within the framework’s own logic of accountability. It also sets up the perceived need for more data collection on Indigenous students, an approach that does not align with Indigenous perspectives or serve Indigenous students. Data has been used by settler-colonial states for centuries to “control, erase and enact genocide against Indigenous Peoples..” and continues to be used today to the benefit of non-Indigenous Peoples (Carroll, Duarte, & Liboiron, 2024, p. 210). Additionally, measures taken to create transparency, public reporting and open data often function to support asymmetrical power dynamics, regardless of intention (Carroll, Duarte, & Liboiron, 2024, p. 211). It is for these reasons that data collection based solutions to equity issues fall within a colonial framework, rather than an Indigenous one.

Ultimately, the *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2007) does not describe or mandate transformative change. Instead, it uses language like *foster, endorse, promote, encourage, support, and offer*—terms that signal *suggestion* but not *requirement*. The framework reinforces existing settler colonial structures, rather than committing to policies that would uphold Indigenous self-determination, promote cultural resurgence and educational sovereignty.

5.5 Policy Implications for Curriculum in Ontario

The policy documents that I re-viewed all leaned on curriculum to carry the transformation described within them. Ontario’s *First Nation, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework* (2007) shared that a contributing factor to Indigenous student success is a

“curriculum that reflects First Nation, Métis and Inuit culture and perspectives” (p. 6), while Ontario’s *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009) commits to revising curriculum documents to be “reflective of Ontario’s diversity in all curriculum” (p. 18), and Ontario’s *Education Equity Action Plan* (2017) speaks of “strengthening inclusive and culturally responsive” (p. 22) curriculum in addition to, “include mandatory learning about the history of residential schools, treaties and the legacy of colonialism” (p. 22). Ontario’s *First Nation, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework* (2007) relies on the curriculum to create a sense of belonging for Indigenous students, while at the same time doing the heavy work to educate all students, school board staff, teachers and elected trustees about contemporary and traditional Indigenous cultures, histories, and perspective. Within this framing, curriculum becomes one of the main vehicles for recognition through inclusion. The assumption is that if students’ cultures are included in the curriculum, they will *see themselves*, and in turn be engaged and experience a sense of belonging. It also aims to educate non-Indigenous students, staff, teachers and trustees *about* Indigenous peoples in specific ways (culture, history, perspectives) assuming that this discourse will translate into a more equitable relationship.

However, discourse can activate existing individual beliefs and make adjustments to current social, cultural, and institutional mechanisms, but is limited in its capacity to create new social relations (de Costa, 2017). Relying on curriculum to create belonging and improve social relations doesn’t attend to the structures of schooling that reproduce the harms of a provincial system that was built to reproduce Eurocentric values and perspectives, and serve to establish a superiority that “justified the taking of Indigenous land, the confinement of Aboriginal people to reserves, and their subjugation to Christian education” (St. Denis, 2007, p. 1072). Instead, Indigeneity continues to be managed and *contained* within the context of curriculum in

Ontario through the politics of recognition, constructed through an equity discourse of diversity, inclusion and reconciliation.

This *containment* works to limit Indigenous rights by limiting resurgence, refusal, and sovereignty in curriculum through policy frameworks aimed to define equity as separate from Indigenous *rights*. St. Denis (2011) argues that Indigenous teachers' experiences of trying to integrate Indigenous content and perspectives is a "microcosm of what happens at the political and national levels in regard to Aboriginal peoples' claims to land and sovereignty in Canada" (p. 307). This idea of a microcosm that mirrors Indigenous-State relations from within educational settings can be extended to educational policy, and the implications on curriculum can be viewed through this mirror. For example, with the recent passing of *Bill 5 - Protect Ontario by Unleashing Our Economy Act, 2025*, without meaningful consultation from First Nations, we can start to see a picture of the current state of the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and Ontario and how this is mirrored in educational policy and the curricular landscape.

Like the educational policy reviewed, and under the guise of *protection*, and *economic prosperity*, Bill 5—a bill stewarded under the former Education Minister, now Minister of Energy and Mines, Stephen Lecce—seeks to contain Indigenous rights in Ontario to give the government unrestricted access to land by declaring "*special economic zones* that are linked to the province's security and economy" (Chiefs of Ontario, 2025, emphasis added). Similarly, under the guise of *equity* and *economic prosperity*, the K-12 curricular landscape in Ontario seeks to *contain* Indigeneity by framing inclusion within a recognition-based colonial framework of *achievement* and *economic prosperity*. An important way that Indigeneity is *contained* within the curriculum is through controlling what revisions are made to the curriculum often while

working in consultation with Indigenous people. Bringing in Indigenous partners for curriculum revisions and consultations serves to give the appearance of working *in a good way*; however, the partnerships are often not ethical ones where both parties are on equal footing.

For example, in 2022 after working with Indigenous partners to make revisions to the Science and Technology Curriculum for grades 1-8, the Ontario Ministry of Education removed or significantly changed the sixteen Indigenous related expectations just three weeks before its release (People for Education, 2023). This move mirrors the verbiage of consultation and partnership while at the same time making unilateral decisions in opposition stated intentions that can be seen in Ontario's relationship with First Nations, like in the passing of Bill 5. While on the surface there are some promising articulations of equity and Indigenous education policies, a closer examination reveals an assimilative project that continues to *contain* and separate Indigenous peoples from resurgent practices, rights and sovereignty.

5.6 askiy kiskinwahamākēwina (Earth Teachings)

From within Indigenous ontologies, equity cannot be separated from sovereignty, which is rooted in a sovereign relationship to land. Land is inherently connected to the concepts of resurgence, refusal and sovereignty and also represents literal and figurative ways that Indigeneity is contained by government policies, for example reserves. The only time that *land* is mentioned in *Ontario's First Nation, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework* (2007) is for the purpose of defining *reserve lands*, *land claims settlements*, and *traditional lands*. The terms on which land is mentioned and its otherwise absence is notable, especially given the importance of land within Indigenous education. Ermine (2024) shares:

“We gain knowledge through the slow, deliberate interaction we have with the earth and particularly through our sensual experience of that natural world. The embodiment of those experiences with the beings of the land is what we call knowledge. To have embodied experience is to increase our awareness about ourselves, our world, and our purpose” (p. 62).

As Ermine highlights from a Cree perspective, within an Indigenous paradigm, land itself *is* education and therefore cannot be conceived of separately.

Chapter Six: Closing

Within a decolonial paradigm, it is important to acknowledge that what exists in academic literature and government policy is not reflective of the knowledge base and ideas that exist altogether. With reverence and gratitude I acknowledge the work of Indigenous scholars working to decolonize education. I reject the assertion of a *gap in literature* and instead propose that a new relationship can be formed from the work already gifted to us when applied within a different context. Existing literature on the politics of recognition and sovereignty often focuses on issues related to land claims, governance, and resource management. While these areas are undeniably important, there is also an opportunity to explore how these concepts intersect with education—particularly within the context of Ontario’s Equity and Indigenous education policies. Given the prevalence of decolonizing education theories as the basis for transformative educational discourse, there is a critical need to engage self-determination and sovereignty in efforts to understand and practice decolonization in relation to equity and inclusion.

What emerges from this re-view is a vision of equity that is highly reliant on a theory of change based on the politics of inclusion, and is limited within a framework that is contextualized through the *Education Act* (1990), and using the Ontario Ministry of Education priorities of: high levels of student achievement; reduced gaps in student achievement; increased public confidence in publicly funded education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). While Indigenous education is named as a priority in *Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009) and *Education Equity Action Plan* (2017), and is the focus of its own document, the *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2007), it continues to occupy *limited and contained* spaces within curriculum and equity policies. These efforts often operate through the

politics of recognition and inclusion, rather than advancing frameworks grounded in Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and relational accountability.

There is an inherent paradox in how education is understood from colonial and Indigenous perspectives. This paradox is rooted in distinct relationships to land, which inform how equity, sovereignty and education is conceived. Colonial relationships to land shape the curricular landscape most notable through its absence in equity and Indigenous education policy. The colonial relationship to land also perpetuates settler-colonial visions, where some (most) land is naturalized as *Canadian* while the rest is Othered as *Indigenous* (until desired by industry for capital, like with Bill 5). This framing is replicated within Ontario's equity and inclusion policies, where Indigeneity is *contained* through a discourse of inclusion that works to limit the possibility of refusal—refusal that signals sovereignty. Inclusion, in this context, also serves to neutralize and obscure refusal by positioning inclusion itself as the means through which equity is achieved.

Through this research project, I have come to better understand the specific narratives through which Indigeneity is *contained*, even when these narratives are presented as benevolent. Indigenous sovereignty within education is obscured through the discourses of equity, inclusion, and reconciliation. Attempting to bring together two distinct systems and understandings of education and curriculum is only possible within what Ermine (2007) describes as *ethical space*— a space where both parties must arrive with their autonomy intact, valued and respected. To imagine how we might arrive at this space, I turn to Ahenakew's (2016) concept of *grafting*—a process through which Indigenous knowledge is transplanted into dominant systems for inclusion. *Grafting* happens, not as an autonomous exercise, but an assimilative one (Ahenakew, 2016). An assimilative process is inevitable based on the asymmetrical dynamics

between a colonial system and Indigenous ones, but we can disrupt “the systemic production of ignorance” through making visible the invisible (Ahenakew, 2016, p. 337).

Through this research project I hope to have contributed to this process of disruption—to have helped make visible the ways in which Ontario’s K–12 curricular landscape continues to be an assimilative project despite language of equity, inclusion and reconciliation within educational policies. We can work towards a more *ethical space* by making visible the assimilative process while also turning towards resurgence (rather than reconciliation), and refusal (rather than inclusion) that can work to strengthen systems that generate Indigenous educational sovereignty on its own terms and within its own ontologies.

Future research could further examine how the erasure or *containment* of land in policy frameworks impacts the implementation of Indigenous education in practice and explore how land-based education offers pathways for reclaiming sovereignty and shifting what counts as knowledge within the curricular landscape.

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