Presentation to the Joint Task Force on
First Nations and Métis Education and Employment

Submitted by RealRenewal
November 27, 2012

INTRODUCTION

RealRenewal was formed in late 2007 as a means for parents and community members to work across K-12 school communities on issues of common concern. Our interest and involvement in First Nations and Métis education issues was solidified at a community organizing workshop we co-sponsored on March 14, 2010. A high level of First Nations and Métis leadership at the workshop provided an opportunity for learning and dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants from around the province. In a subsequent report to the Regina Public school trustees, RealRenewal representatives summarized the discussion:

> We learned that many of the issues that came up for discussion throughout the afternoon – such as support services, standardized assessment and the role of community coordinators – are deeply tied to Aboriginal/First Nations concerns. We also learned that although education policy originates from different levels of government, it cuts across all systems in the same general direction. For example, we heard that band schools now have funding tied to the implementation of standardized assessment protocols, while other community priorities go unaddressed. It was clear there are many linking issues that ultimately lead to a much needed re-examination of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people within education systems and in the community. (RealRenewal 2010, p.3)

We are pleased that this hoped-for re-examination is now underway through the work of the Joint Task Force, and that we have been afforded an opportunity to contribute.

RealRenewal's broad organizational goal is to increase parental and community voice in education decision-making. We do this by providing accessible platforms for discussion, including forums, workshops, breakfast meetings and, occasionally, online surveys. At the end of the process we roll up the comments received and forward them in the form of reports to whichever decision-making bodies are in a position to respond.

To prepare a presentation to the Joint Task Force, we essentially took the questions the Task Force asked in its consultation meetings, and opened them up to grassroots responses via email and social media. Our outreach was targeted to our membership, which primarily emanates from urban community schools in low-income neighbourhoods, and to First Nations and Métis communities throughout the province. Through this method, we received written input from 85 individuals, among whom 72 per cent self-identified as being of First Nations or Métis ancestry. The methodology is described in the attached survey report, along with a summary analysis and a list of recommendations. We have also appended the raw data, which the Task Force is welcome to use as a resource for further research.

In addition to providing grassroots input into the Task Force's questions, we would like to raise a topic that has factored highly and consistently in all our interactions with parents since RealRenewal was founded – namely, the future of community schooling. Because community schooling was deeply tied to First Nations and Métis aspirations from its outset, and because no other opportunity has been provided for parents to have direct input into policy changes – such as the sudden dissolution of the First Nations, Métis and Community Education Branch – we feel the Task Force is an appropriate body for hearing parental and community perspectives on the subject. Further, you will note that the need for greater parental/care-giver/community governance over education is a factor in our survey responses, with some respondents making specific reference to school community councils and community schooling. To this end, we have included a backgrounder on community schooling from a community perspective, with recommendations arising from a public workshop and follow-up meetings and conversations.

Also included in this submission is a review and analysis of relevant literature, including comments from semi-structured interviews with Regina-based First Nations and Métis citizens engaged with the education system. This broad overview is intended to situate the challenges facing Saskatchewan's education system within a broader historical and social context.   It should be noted the resulting analysis runs counter to an increasingly prevalent policy discourse that overlooks the persistent historic conditions of racializaton and racism that are uniquely experienced by First Nations and Métis students.

The Joint Task Force undertakes its work at a critical moment. As stated in our survey report, the overall picture we have gathered is one of potentially promising, forward-looking First Nation and Métis education initiatives in jeopardy—the result of chronic long term underfunding and the absence of coherent supportive policies at the provincial and school board levels. From this perspective, we call for the following:

1. A public and legislative commitment to the enhancement of First Nation and Métis education.

2. Major commitments of resources, acknowledging the widely published disparity between per pupil funding rates of schools on reserve vs. schools off reserve.

3. Transference of power to First Nation school authorities to exercise control over curriculum, not simply the administrative management of what are now poorly funded reserve schools.

4. Increased attention to Métis-specific education.

5. Commitment to a vision of properly resourced First Nations and Métis schools and programs operating on and off reserve in Saskatchewan that fully engage the knowledge, spirit and energies of the communities and Elders that care so much about our children.

6. Restoration and rehabilitation of the community school model and its attached designated resources, with an emphasis on fulfilling the unrealized promise of genuine democratic participation and community control over the education of our children.

7. Support for the Saskatchewan Community Schools Association and substantial resources to expand its outreach to disempowered communities.

8. Undertake the longitudinal study recommended at the conclusion of the 2005 Community Schools Data Collection Project.

9. Provide community-led training opportunities for education administrators and staff on local community issues and the principles of shared governance.

10. Re-affirmation of the right of School Community Councils, as stated in the Education Act, to advise broadly on policy matters.

11. Include grassroots community members and community organizations in policy-making, investing in them actual powers to shape policy.

12. A commitment by policy-makers to recognize and address the conditions intersection of racism and structural inequality that specifically affects First Nations and Métis students, families and school staff, as a distinct problem with deep historical and cultural roots beyond other forms of discrimination and inequalities that may exist in our schools.

13. Following from the above recommendation, the restoration and expansion of programs and policies at all levels of government that are specifically directed toward supporting First Nations and Métis students and their families.

14. Design and implement a more holistic curricula; fundamentally deepen the notion of culturally responsive curriculum to embody and incorporate the values of living Indigenous cultures, including spirituality and notions of place-based, community-based education.

15. Find the political will to take up issues in students' lives and communities.

16. End 'deficit thinking' in favour of respectful, challenging approaches to teaching and learning.

17. Re-examine school rules and discipline policies as a potential source of institutionalized racism, and consider new policies such as restorative justice.

18. Establish anti-racism structures in government, such as an Anti-Racism Secretariat and cabinet-level anti-racism committee, and mandate school boards to report on anti-racism plans and policies.

19. Improve recruitment and hiring of Indigenous teachers in representative numbers, and find ways to increase the number of Indigenous school administrators and representation at other levels, for example in school divisions' secondary level services and within the Ministry's tertiary level.

20. Re-align the current assessment paradigm and focus resources on heightened professional development for teachers to become context- and culturally-conscious assessors of student learning.

21. To change school outcomes we need changes in social policy, such as the greater promotion of targeted employment policies, better housing policies, and resource revenue-sharing agreements.

22. Pursue alliances and collaborations with parents and teachers working for change.

Further, we respectfully submit the attachments:

1. Report on Survey Responses to the Task Force's Questions
2. Community Schooling and First Nations and Métis Education: Community Perspectives
3. Literature Review and Overview Analysis
4. Raw Survey Data :
   a. Responses by question
   b. Responses by respondent

In closing, please accept our best wishes for the success of your deliberations. Thank you for receiving our submission.

RESPONSE TO TASK FORCE QUESTIONS

Analysis by Larry Sanders, Research Associate, University of Regina
Data Collection by RealRenewal

Submitted to the
Joint Task Force on First Nations and Métis Education and Employment
November 27, 2012

Introduction

RealRenewal is pleased to present the results from an online survey requesting input to the Joint Task Force's questions about First Nations and Métis education. Respondents were given the opportunity to provide text answers online to four questions regarding K-12 education, as posed by the task force, with an invitation to comment further on early childhood education, post-secondary education and employment. A link to the online survey was e-mailed to RealRenewal's 199 members, and shared with RealRenewal's 115 Facebook friends on August 13, 2012. Real Renewal also purchased a Facebook ad which ran from August 13 to September 19, targeted at several related keywords, such as #First Nations, #Métis, #Saskatchewan, resulting in 368 clicks.

A total of 85 completed responses were received before the survey was closed September 19, 2012. This report provides a brief synopsis of the input. We also attach a full copy of the 85 survey responses, since this overview can only provide highlights from the input received.

Who answered the survey?

Respondents to the RR survey were asked to provide information about themselves. These responses indicate that the 85 responses received came from a good cross-section of students, parents and community members interested in the topic. The majority of the respondents self-identified as First Nations/Métis.

	%	N
First Nations/Métis	71.8%	61
Non-First Nations/Métis	22.4%	19
Did not answer question	5.9%	5

About half the respondents were parents, grandparents or caregivers of students attending school:

	FN/M		Non-Ab	
	N	%	N	%
K-12 student	4	6.6%	0	0
Parent/grandparent/other caregiver of student(s)	33	54.1%	9	47.4%
School staff member	3	4.9%	2	10.5%
Community worker/community member	7	11.5%	5	26.3%
Academic*	8	13.1%	2	10.5%
Other (see detailed data for responses)	4	6.6%	1	5.3%
Did not answer question	2	3.3%	0	0

* This category is somewhat misleading. Several respondents indicated they were post secondary students, not "academics" employed in a post secondary institution as the term "academic" implies.
- percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

It should be noted that several respondents provided "multiple identities," as parents but also as community members, teachers, or as a post-secondary student ("academic"). For tabulation purposes, the first answer given was the one counted. Since parent/guardian appeared high on the list of possible responses, it may be that that was the reason it was chosen first by so many respondents, even though they might consider themselves something other than a "parent first."

Responses to question 1: What are the good things that are happening in education in your school/community?

The task force clearly had good intentions in asking this question, by trying to bring to light positive developments that could be supported, if the task force's recommendations were to be adopted by the provincial and federal governments. While there are several positive developments identified by the respondents, the task force should by no means read these results as an indicator that all is well. Of the 75 text responses received, 44 (58.7%) could be read as positive. However, 31 (41.3%) of the responses to this question could be characterized as "mixed." As an example of a mixed response, several respondents indicated that while the graduation rate among aboriginal students was on the rise (a positive), it was still well below the graduation rate for non-aboriginal students (a negative). Responses such as this were classified as

"mixed" because they were indicating that while the glass might be seen as half full, it could still be seen as half empty.

For the examples provided of the responses received to each question, each response is marked to indicate whether it came from a First Nation or Métis respondent [= aboriginal], from a non-aboriginal respondent, or from both.

Here are some examples of positive responses:

- the new treaty curriculum is a good start to a very lacking and true history of Saskatchewan [aboriginal]
- culture and languages are being taught (several responses) [both]
- extra credit programming, courses like carpentry, cooking etc. [aboriginal]
- there is a food program that helps ALL students [aboriginal]
- parents are getting more involved in activities, like fundraisers [aboriginal]
- Adult Basic Education (ABE) now available for adults [both]
- University of Regina is developing an initiative to "indigenize" the curriculum [aboriginal]
- Treaty education; Elders in residence programs; outcomes that specifically focus on history; system and school goals focusing on equity and emphasis on closing the gap [both]
- our separate school system has implemented First Nation and Métis teaching in the school and has realized that we are different [aboriginal]
- increased hiring of First Nations and Métis teachers [aboriginal]

Here are some examples of "mixed" responses to Question 1:

- Nothing positive going on. There are white teachers trying to teach First Nations values and traditions in what most aboriginal students view as a hostile environment. But this survey might be a start [aboriginal]
- education about Treaties is happening. Teachers are struggling to do their best in an increasingly stressful environment [non-aboriginal]
- it's positive when the kids are still willing to show up each day, even though most of their educational needs are lacking in schools [aboriginal]
- some contact with Elders, some new resources (but not enough) [aboriginal]

- very little going on in smaller towns [both]
- it will be a good thing if the province makes aboriginal education a priority [non-aboriginal]
- my grandchildren live in Regina but go to a band school by choice because I don't want them to experience racism from other students. Also they learn about their own people at the band school [aboriginal]
- more graduates than ever before, but still not enough [aboriginal]
- there still needs to be much more real acceptance of different cultures. Racism is still abundant and more effort needs to be done in the community, not just in the schools [non-aboriginal]
- Head Start program started [aboriginal]
- we have some programs but the coordinators are only choosing the same children for the activities, leaving most other children out [aboriginal]
- hands-on cultural experiences are good, but need to be broadened [both]

Responses to question 2: What would you like to see changed?

A total of 78 responses were received to this question, all falling into two broad categories: those suggesting an increase in funding (sometimes called "resources" by respondents), those suggesting policy or program changes, and some which were a combination of funding and policy/program changes.

	%	N
Funding/resource increases needed	11.5%	9
Program/policy changes needed	82.1%	64
Both funding and program/policy	5.1%	4
Total responses to Question 2		78

Examples of responses to Question 2 related to funding/resources:
- funding for reservation schools should be higher than public schools because the needs are greater
- funding! most FN schools are grossly under-funded from the number of teachers, more are needed, funding to provide better housing to recruit more

teachers, especially in northern Saskatchewan. Need more funding to provide better quality classrooms. Right now the classrooms are over-crowded, not enough funding for new textbooks or even the very basic of stationary supplies! Each student needs a desk, I could go on and on!

- more resources for students to succeed and incentives to keep them in school

One point of difference among respondents related to how local control should be exercised. Referring to off-reserve schools, some respondents indicated simply that parents and grandparents needed to be put in charge of local schools. Others off-reserve wanted school councils with broad representation from the community, not just parents and grandparents. Some respondents commenting on reserve schools were concerned that band councils should not be allowed to divert education funds from schools to other areas. This difference was evident among the aboriginal respondents, but one non-aboriginal respondent did comment on this governance question by advocating greater parental involvement. No real solutions to the governance challenges were provided by respondents.

Beyond these differences over governance of schools, the general tone of the policy and program changes suggested by respondents was for greater local control, meaningfully engaging teachers, parents, grandparents and Elders in actual control of what goes on in classrooms. Several wanted more education about Treaties and indigenous languages, but with localized content which respects the diversity of languages and cultures across the province.

Five other examples of responses to Question 2 related to program/policy changes needed:

- would like to see more aboriginal teachers and more aboriginal teacher assistants. Would like to see cultural camps mandatory for all school staff
- better programming in math and sciences
- Retention of First Nation and Métis teachers with some leadership training. More First Nation and Métis teachers in administrative roles and at the board office level. Consistent funding for First Nation and Métis initiatives
- good leadership is needed. That's when changes happen

- Canadian history needs to be truthful about its past and how Canada came to be a country. The sad history needs to be shared and acknowledged

Responses to question 3: What do you know in your heart will work?

There was a great diversity of responses to this question which makes categorization difficult. Many responses suggested that greater engagement was essential. Words like "consultation" or "collaboration" were used frequently to describe how it was essential for parents, teachers and Elders to be treated with respect by authorities and allowed to exercise actual authority, not treated as "token" representatives.

For example, some respondents suggested that the task force itself needed to actually listen to those affected by shortcomings in the current education system, then similar engagement strategies be followed in the implementation of new policies:

- the government and the panel/task force should go to the northern remote communities and ask them directly
- partnerships with various stakeholder groups in Saskatchewan

Other respondents suggested that indigenous worldviews were not receiving appropriate respect from teachers and administrators. For example:

- teaching staff needs to have a better understanding of First Nations and Métis history and acknowledge the intergenerational trauma that is impacting many aboriginal students
- [what will work is] traditional First Nation psychology that is pure and unconditional. Emotional knowledge is the wisdom needed to turn the negative to positive
- More reflective anti-racist activities with teachers, school staffs, administrators and trustees. There are a number of student and faculty presentations that have been developed in the Indigenous Education department at First Nations University of Canada

Here are some other responses to question #3:

- the people are gaining strength and education outside of their communities and they will eventually make a difference
- a school system respectful of First Nations human rights which includes the right to be taught in a safe, encouraging school respecting their unique worldview
- mixing [abstract] teaching with actual application of that knowledge at the elementary and junior high school levels
- positive speakers sharing their stories with students
- providing First Nation and Métis history as "we" know it [aboriginal respondent]
- more supports for parents and families, and more outreach between school and families, with home visits [urban aboriginal respondent]
- engage students in career exploration discussions from an early age
- more input from community as a whole to the school, not just input from parents [aboriginal respondent on reserve]
- tribal council should take over schools with high First Nations/Métis populations. They would hire more aboriginal teachers and have more aboriginal content [aboriginal respondent on reserve]

Responses to question 4: What supports/environments do you need to get the education you want for your children/community?

Several respondents to this question repeated suggestions they made in earlier questions. Others suggested that addressing the physical realities of the environment in which First Nation education takes place would go a long way towards improving student outcomes. Examining the completed surveys provides a wide range of suggestions for physical and environmental improvements.

Here are some examples from the responses:

- clean food, water, good job, safe home, and good honest teachers who care [urban aboriginal respondent]

- lots of sports
- Bigger classrooms, more access to technology i.e. Wi-Fi, computers, etc., desks for each student instead of using tables. Safety is a factor also; students and staff need to feel safe, schools need better security, cameras, etc.
- anti-racism strategies. Physical and cultural resources for more balanced healthy living. Food that nourishes the mind, body spirit
- measure teachers' emotional intelligence before hiring [urban aboriginal respondent]
- the continuation of bully prevention. More native studies taught
- no need to invent new policies. Just look to [names tribal council]. Adopt their employment and educational methods [urban aboriginal respondent]
- community school concept should be supported so it can live up to its potential [urban aboriginal respondent]
- concept of "school" and "community" should really be more seamless. The school should not be an institution but a vibrant part of our community [self-identified urban Métis]
- funding for extra-curricular activities to keep kids out of trouble after school
- more liaison with parents about how to keep their kids attending school [aboriginal respondent on reserve]

Conclusions

The responses received indicated that while there are several positive things going on across the province regarding First Nations and Métis education, these positive developments are overwhelmingly overshadowed by the limitations, challenges and barriers identified by survey respondents. The several worthwhile but largely isolated projects and initiatives identified by survey respondents may not be able to survive in the long term, because of the funding and policy shortcomings in the current school systems and because, as survey respondents themselves indicated, local leadership is key to these initiatives getting started in the first place, and then keeping them going. This precious local leadership eventually burns out, or moves on

as their children graduate from the school system. At the same time, it is encouraging to see a number of responses from community members who do not currently have children attending school who expressed a strong desire to see school authorities operate in a more collaborative manner. In other words, if community schools were actively engaging their communities, there appear to be people interested in stepping forward to be engaged.

The resulting overall picture from the responses is of a potentially promising, forward-looking First Nation and Métis education initiatives in jeopardy—the result of chronic long term underfunding and the absence of coherent supportive policies at the provincial and school board levels. The responses indicate that while much has been accomplished with meagre resources and a lot of good will, much more could be accomplished with policy changes, notably a public and legislative commitment to enhancement of First Nation and Métis education. Survey respondents clearly expressed a need for major commitments of resources, acknowledging the widely published disparity between per pupil funding rates of schools on reserve vs. schools off reserve.

Over and above funding inequalities, there are systemic and organizational issues. For example, respondents identified that racist attitudes are still being demonstrated by teachers and administrators, resulting in First Nation and Métis students being driven from the school system. Other respondents called for organizational reforms, for example to empower First Nation school authorities to exercise control over curriculum, not simply the administrative management of what are now poorly funded reserve schools. Respondents also noted that while there were some improvements such as the introduction of curriculum about Treaties and increasing availability of Elders, the absence of Métis-specific education initiatives was evident.

The picture that emerges about First Nations and Métis education in Saskatchewan from these responses is of a series of fragmented initiatives, with some bright blooms popping up here and there. But they are not being adequately watered, nor do they live in a supportive policy environment where First Nations and Métis education is given the respectful funding it deserves, in keeping with the spirit and

intent of the Treaties. RealRenewal urges the task force to listen to the voices evident in these responses, and the underlying spirit which motivates us all: to see properly resourced First Nations and Métis schools and programs operating on and off reserve in Saskatchewan that fully engage the knowledge, spirit and energies of the communities that care so much about our children.

**Community Schooling and First Nations and Métis Education:
Community Perspectives**

Compiled by Patricia Elliott, B.A., M.A., Ph.D cand. (ABD)
Submitted by RealRenewal to the
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Introduction

The community school concept has been around since the 1920s, however it was not until the late 1970s that Saskatchewan school parents began to seriously discuss how to implement concepts emanating out of Flint, Michigan in their home communities (Bendig, 2012). In the United States, community schooling had been adopted and shaped by racialized and marginalized communities seeking a greater level of self-determination over their children's education. In the Saskatchewan context, a founding member of one of the province's first School Community Councils relates how community-level explorations were similarly informed by efforts of First Nations and Métis people to regain control of their destinies:

> Our band was the first in Canada to get rid of the Indian Agent, in 1965. Then I became a member of our band school committee in 1973. People wanted input, not just to be in charge of school supplies and busing. We transferred these ideas to the constitution of the [School] Community Council, the ideas of autonomy that I learned in the struggle for band autonomy. (Asikinack, *interview,* 2011)

In Regina, the connection to First Nations and Métis self-determination was evident in the types of community organizations that came together to negotiate the establishment of community schooling in the public system. They were:

- Regina Native Community Awareness Society
- North Central Community Society
- Regina Native Women's Association
- Connaught Parent's Group
- Regina Native Race Relations Association
- Regina Native Concerns Committee
- Kitchener Curriculum Committee   (Community Organizations of the
                                     Community Schools Working Group, 1980, p. 1)

While parents were looking toward Flint for inspiration, the provincial Department of Education looked toward Winnipeg, where a community schooling initiative was underway that was more top-down and narrowly focused (Greenburg 2012, *personal conversation*). It was this approach that the province brought to the table, with a proposed primary focus on Aboriginal student attendance and nutrition, rather than democratization of the system. Thus the principles of autonomy and self-determination became a key sticking point in the establishment of pilot community schools. A position paper submitted jointly by Regina-based community organizations stated, "A community school must have the participation, support and involvement of the community. Otherwise, the program will do nothing but provide lunches" (Community Organizations of the Community Schools Working Committee, 1980, p. 4).

   After a months-long stalemate over the question of community empowerment and Aboriginal involvement, the aforementioned organizations wrested an agreement from the province that promised "to provide opportunities for the equal involvement of Native community residents in the community school" and to "actively involve parents and other community residents in the community school decision-making process, through the School Community Council, regarding community school policy, curriculum, finance, facilities and staffing procedures" (Province of Saskatchewan Order-in-Council, 1980). Accordingly, parents participated in hiring panels and reviewed classroom instruction and resources for racist content, among many other activities (Nicholls, *interview*, 2011). The newly formed councils also developed their own autonomous constitutions, which in some cases included measures such as a guaranteed number of seats First Nations and Métis parents, and designated seats for community representatives (Asikinack, *interview*, 2011).

   Under the program, community schools received augmented funding and specialized staffing, including Community Coordinators, Nutritionists and Native Teacher Associates (later called Teacher Associates). These resources arrived under the umbrella of the province's focus on attendance and nutrition, which may have contributed to a continuing top-down view of how community schools should be established and run. Nonetheless, active parents and community took their expanded

role seriously and began working with their school community coordinators to establish after-school and evening community programs. At the aforementioned Connaught Community School, which was among the first four Regina community schools, this included adult education upgrading, AA meetings, and evening classes in car repair, beadwork, traditional dance, Cree language and guitar (Fahery n.d., A12; Bendig 2012). A review of SCC minutes reveals that a lively mix of school-community programs continued into the 2000s, including a pow wow dance group, tipi raisings, community feasts, Families and Schools Together (FAST) meetings and craft nights. By 2011, however, these activities had disappeared from the SCC minutes, along with discussion of First Nations and Métis issues. This change coincides with what can best be described as a simultaneous expansion and dissolution of the community school model.

Recent context

On the surface, the development of community schooling in Saskatchewan appeared to be on a forward trajectory since its inception. In 1983 the Department of Education declared community schooling a success in its 16 pilot locations, and began steadily expanding the program throughout the province to over 100 schools (Marshall 1983, n.p.; SCSA 2012, pp. 62-66). An action plan for 2000-2005 developed by the Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee stated parental involvement in decision-making is part of the equity equation, adding, "Equity implies collaboration, communication and decision-making" (Saskatchewan Education, n.d., p.5).

In 2001 the Role of the School Task Force recommended that a community school philosophy be adopted by all schools in Saskatchewan (Tymchak 2001). In 2004 Saskatchewan Learning updated its 1996 community schools framework document "Building Communities of Hope." Significantly, the subtitle was changed from "Best Practices for Meeting the Needs of At-Risk and Indian and Métis Students" to "Effective Practices for Meeting the Diverse Learning Needs of Children and Youth," signaling a move from the origins of community schooling as an explicit response to First Nations and Métis concerns. What followed was a rapid dilution of community

schooling as a vehicle to address long-standing issues of racism and exclusion that have marred the relationship between schools and First Nations and Métis communities. This was accompanied by an equally rapid expansion of the model.

In 2005 a province-wide data collection project provided a largely positive review of community schooling, while pointing out areas for concern and improvement (Wotherspoon, et. al. 2005). For example, the study revealed community members appreciated the work of community school coordinators, citing statements such as: "Community school coordinators fill a void – they work as a team" (p. 37). Community coordinators were reported to make a significant contribution to dialogue and leadership on community education practices, but it was noted their role was poorly understood by administrators (p. 40). The report's authors also pointed out that policies encouraging continual staff turnover were a frequently reported barrier to community engagement, and recommended that staff with an affinity to the community school model and close ties to specific communities be allowed to remain in those community schools for their working lives (p. 35). The report further acknowledged the importance of all staff and administrators placed in community schools to be well educated on the goals of community schooling, supporting a point raised more or less continually by parents since the 1980s.

In its concluding chapter, the study noted students in economically and socially challenged school communities lagged in math assessments. The data was placed in the report with a strongly worded caution that it should not be interpreted as formative data from which conclusions could or should be drawn, but was rather included as a baseline for a future longitudinal study (p. 85).

As for community involvement, the study found the vast majority of SCCs were willing to participate in or were actively engaged in the life of the school (p. 32). However, parents identified that their willingness to be involved was related to their sense of the school's sincerity about genuine involvement (p. 37). The report emphasized the role democratic decision-making must play in the model (p. 40).

The question of community involvement came to the fore in November 2005, when the province ordered all Saskatchewan schools to adopt the community school model and establish School Community Councils by 2007-2008. In so doing, the

Ministry of Learning drew existing SCCs and parent groups into boilerplate constitutions with more narrowly defined mandates aimed first and foremost at supporting initiatives defined and directed by the province (SSBA 2006). While the rhetoric signaled an expansion of community schooling, the reality gradually set in, offering a different picture at the grassroots level:

> The new rules have resulted in less autonomy for SCCs. Parents aren't interested in being involved under the new structure – it's not fun for them. (Anon. 2010)

This sentiment was drawn to the province's attention at a 2009 meeting between Ministry of Learning officials and the Saskatchewan Community Schools Association:

> We had a successful Parent Council, but since the transition to the new 'School Community Councils,' people are not as confident to get involved. (SCSA 2009, p. 3)

These sentiments merely revealed an existing crack in the system that had long been papered over by education decision-makers eager to show they had community buy-in for their plans, and suppressed among parents who felt their participation often amounted to tokenism. A later review of the 2005 data discovered community and family input into substantive matters such as school budgets, policy-making and hiring was rare to the point of almost never occurring and concluded that "despite increased resources, citizen-centred governance does not exist in many Saskatchewan community schools" (Evitts 2007, pp. 54-56, 71). More disturbing, the study found:

> …while all stakeholders have the ability to communicate, and are formally recognized as important contributors to the dialogue surrounding community schooling, there exists a level of coercion (whether implicit or explicit, real or imagined) in many schools that prohibits any fulfillment of communicative action. (Evitt 2007, p. 81)

This existing situation, combined with new restraints on SCC activity, contributed to the ability of education administrators and technocrats to rapidly unravel the

community schooling model to suit their own policy objectives, 'evolving' the model, in their parlance, outside the arena of community input and control.

This unravelling process was doubtless influenced by upward pressure from school administrators grappling with inadequate resources to deliver on new demands from the Ministry. In particular, "high expectations placed on achievement indicators [left] little room to be concerned with community development issues" (Thompson 2008, p. 29). Beginning in 2009, the Ministry began allowing funds previously earmarked for specific community supports, such as the hiring of school community coordinators, to be used for other purposes. At the divisional level, staffing decisions were "decentralized" to principals, who were "given flexibility around staffing in accordance with their Learning Improvement Plan goals" (Cottrell et. al., 2010, p. 43). From a community perspective, the introduction of 'principal's discretion' in fact amounted to a centralizing – rather than de-centralizing – move, in that SCCs lost considerable policy leverage over the disposition of community school funds and access to specialized, culturally-affirming support staff and programs.

Meanwhile, administrators whose plans may have been threatened or altered by what little power remained to SCCs seized the opportunity to declare community schools a failed experiment (Cottrell et. al., 2010, p. 43), despite the absence of longitudinal data to support their claim. Ironically, the very same 2005 data collection project that commended the community school model and warned against misinterpretation of test score data was cited in public meetings as 'proof' that community schools were ineffective (*personal observation*). At the Ministry level, the terminology of community schooling was replaced by 'community education,' serving to further de-link community schooling from its place-based community context and place it in the realm of educational technocracy. Specific mention of First Nations and Métis concerns began to melt away, along with targeted resources, until ultimately funding was absorbed under the general heading of 'supports for learning' and it was announced that there would be no more community school designations. In this manner a set framework of requirements and accountability was replaced by the individual power of division officials, with no avenue for community members to appeal said decisions.

Community perspectives and responses

Despite the community school model's foundational promise that parents and community members would become partners in educational decision-making, parents were shut out of the major changes to community schooling described in this presentation. While the manner by which formerly designated community school resources have been realigned varies from division to division and from system to system, the experience of Regina Public offers the most prescient view of how resources can now be redeployed outside the knowledge and involvement of parents and community partners. Beginning in late 2009, RealRenewal began receiving reports from school communities that had lost their community coordinators and evening programs without explanation. In February 2010, the Regina Public School Board responded to RealRenewal's inquiries about the number of community coordinator positions since 2007 with a letter stating 8 of 16 designated Regina public schools had switched to "new staffing approaches to meet their emerging needs" (RPS, *correspondence*, 2010). In plainer words, within less than three years, community coordinator positions had been quietly eliminated in 50 per cent of Regina Public's designated community schools. Through other channels, RealRenewal was able to ascertain this amounted to 6.75 FTEs remaining among a staff position had been expressly identified in the 2005 data collection project – and by many parents over the years – as providing important leadership in support of effective community schooling (Wotherspoon, et. al. 2005, p. 40). In various statements, division administrators and school administrators have said the responsibilities of community coordinators have been transferred to other staff members and the Elders program. However, in speaking with affected communities we have seen little evidence that this is so, and we have concerns that Elders – who are not salaried employees – are being expected to pick up the slack of lost staff positions. Regina Public officials have stated the staffing changes were supported by an Elders' Advisory Council, reported to include parents and community members and to hold regular meetings (Cottrell 2010, p. 41). However, when a concerned First Nations parent asked at the board's 2012 AGM how the composition of the Council is determined and how it operates, no answers were forthcoming.

A paucity of information is complicated by the consequences of asking for information. When the member of an affected SCC raised questions about community school staffing with board administrators, the response was a veiled threat against school's future community school funding status. This response correlates with Veritt's observation that community members are subjected to coercion, and is collaborated by comments we have received while investigating this issue:

> If you say anything, you will lose your job. The [school] tour didn't show the reality – what the classes are actually like, the problems. I can't talk to my trustee because the board office will wonder where she got her information from and it will get back to me. (anon., 2011)

> If you try to even remotely involve the community, the response from the administration is like, 'How dare you?' (anon., 2011)

> I brought a copy of the community school framework to an SCC meeting to show to the other parents. The principal flipped out and demanded to know in front of everyone who gave it to me. (anon., 2012)

While shared decision-making is listed as a requirement of community school designation, in fact RealRenewal's work supporting school communities has revealed that today decision-making of any consequence remains largely in the hands of administrators, and SCCs are advised that their mandate is restricted to supporting the Learning Improvement Plan, with a heavy-handed emphasis on providing funds for classroom resources. As one example, although the Education Act's Regulations specifically invest SCCs with the power to comment on school closures and other policy matters (The Education Regulations 1986, Part II.2.3.93), SCCs are routinely advised by school principals that they are not allowed to do so because it is 'outside their mandate.' SCC members have also been informed that parents and community members have never had the right to an opinion on staffing decisions, such as the removal of community coordinators, despite the fact that SCC members originally sat on the panels that hired community coordinators, as well as other teaching positions (Nicholls, *interview*, 2011).

As first-hand accounts of the weakening community role began to emerge, RealRenewal hosted a workshop in September 2012 to discuss the uncertain future of

community schooling. After a morning of information-sharing, some 30 participants spent the afternoon developing a list of final recommendations for action, which included:

- Work on ant-racism so inclusion doesn't turn to exclusion.
- Challenge 'principal's discretion'
- Speak out about the feeling of powerlessness that has been created
- Work in partnership with other communities
- To gain involvement in SCCs, there has to be a purpose and issues that are a priority to people.
- Help the Coordinators gain the power to build the autonomy to do their jobs.
- Advocate for the resources for community activities and after school programs.

(RealRenewal, Workshop notes, Sept. 2010)

This was followed up with in-depth interviews with available participants, who identified the top three key issues for school communities: building community partnerships; resources for after-school and community activities, and; the ability for communities to identify and address their own priorities (Hesch 2011, pp. 1-2). Since this workshop, we have done our best to advocate for these important goals. It is not an easy task in an atmosphere of increasingly heavy-handed control from above over the work of SCCs.

At a Saskatchewan Community Schools Association in-service meeting in 2011, a RealRenewal representative asked a Ministry spokesperson if parents were considered stakeholders and, if so, why they had not thus far been informed or consulted about changes to community schooling. The Ministry response was that of course parents and community members were very important stakeholders and they would be consulted in future. To our knowledge, this has not happened.

Conclusion

Evitts' observes, "While community school policy can be expected to have a positive effect, it cannot happen overnight, nor can it be expected to right all wrongs…especially those that are deeply historic and systemic in nature (Evitts 2007, p. 7). Community schooling has not been perfect, but neither has it been a failure. The 2005 data collection project was very positive about the model's current practice and future potential. But from our meetings and discussions with community members, it is clear the model has been weakened and tilted toward tokenism and administrative control in recent years. The alternative presented – delinking community school resources from First Nations and Métis issues and absorbing resources into more general budget lines – would be more acceptable if it were shown to work. However, in the school division where this approach has the longest and most aggressive history of implementation, success indicators are moving in the opposite direction. For example, while SCC participation among the category 'principals, teachers and student representatives' increased by 3 per cent between 2009 and 2011, the participation of community members *declined* by a corresponding 3 per cent, while participation by parents remained the same (Regina Public Schools 2011, p. 17). Further, between 2008 and 2011, the percentage of Aboriginal students performing at adequate or above in comparative oral reading records declined from 65 per cent to 58 per cent in Grade 1 and from 60 per cent to 46 per cent in Grade 2, leading Regina Public Schools to conclude that "the gap in achievement [between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students] is widening" (RPS 2011, p. 10). Declining reading assessments indicators among Aboriginal students were also noted in Grades 4, 7 and 10 during the same time period (RPS 2011, p. 11). Clearly the absorption of community school resources into other budget envelopes has not been the magic bullet for which school principals may have hoped.

Recent history does not mean community schooling cannot or should not be restored to its original purpose – namely, to allow communities to regain control of their destinies and to reshape an education system that has stubborn roots in a long history of colonialism and racism. The Assembly of First Nations Secretariat recommends the following indicators of success for working in a community context:

- Percentage of schools that are governed by a community-based governing agency
- Percentage of schools with each type of school governing agency
- Number of work experiences opportunities provided to students
- Number of meetings held with other community agencies
- Parent and student satisfaction surveys – is the school part of your community?

(Hurton 2009, p. 15)

In short, rather than giving up on community schooling as a token segregated gesture in its current form, it makes better sense to unleash the model's heretofore constrained potential to genuinely create change. In this manner community schooling can become one important potential inroad to improved First Nations and Métis education, honouring the original intent of its founders. With this in mind, we respectfully make the following recommendations:

1. Restore and rehabilitate the community school model as a means to address longstanding First Nations and Métis concerns with the education system.
2. Support the Saskatchewan Community Schools Association and provide substantial resources to expand its outreach to disempowered communities.
3. Undertake the longitudinal study recommended at the conclusion of the 2005 Community Schools Data Collection Project.
4. Provide community-led training opportunities for education administrators and staff on local issues and the principles of shared governance.
5. Re-affirm the power of SCCs under the Education Act to speak freely on broad educational policy and program issues.
6. Include grassroots community members and community organizations in policy-making, investing in them actual powers to shape policy.

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First Nations and Métis Eduction in Saskatchewan
Literature Review and Analysis
by Dr. Rick Hesch, Ed.D.
Presented to the
Joint Task Force on First Nations and Métis Education
November 27, 2012

The May 7, 2011 Agreement between the Government of Saskatchewan and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations to establish the Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes in Saskatchewan pledged to find "*(e)vidence-based* public policy, program and practical approaches" (emphasis added) (http://www.jointtaskforce.ca) which have proven successful in this field, thus immediately locating itself within the dominant market-oriented education policy discourse of our conservative age (Payne, 2008; Simons, et. al, 2009). Promising liberal and critical advances in Saskatchewan education including a place-based film production in Prairie Valley School Division, the introduction of Treaty Essential Learnings, outcomes related to the document *A Time for Significant Leadership*, the "new" Saskatchewan Social Studies curriculum, revisions to the teacher education program at the University of Regina, locally produced curriculum materials featuring Elders, the development of a culturally relevant Early Years assessment program (Aski), and the Social and Ecological Justice Education Program at the University of Saskatchewan all mark our province as a quite good place to learn. Robust population growth in Indigenous communities and persistent pressure from Aboriginal peoples and their allies have given reason for hope. However, while dominant forms of schooling may have broadened their scope somewhat, these signs also indicate that educational provision is a contradictory process. Recent developments in Saskatchewan Education have actually served to cement an impression that the exclusion of First Nations and Metis youth may continue for some time. This time, the Indigenous themselves will be blamed.

The relatively progressive initiatives found broadly in Saskatchewan make sense from a critical perspective on educational provision. Historically,

there have been at least two characteristics of schooling which prepares young workers for a growing economy. First, the school must prepare students with the skills and know-how to enable them to complete assigned tasks effectively. Second, young workers must be prepared with the necessary dispositions to willingly subordinate themselves as employees of others. (Allman, et. al, 2007). For the purposes of a secure state, educational growth and change has historically been driven by the need to develop citizens who could internalize a meaningful system of self- and time-discipline, and accept hierarchy. (Sears, 2003). Table 6.2 in Volume 1 of the 2012 Provincial Auditor's Report (p. 46) provided abundant evidence that these goals, and others which will be identified below, have not been achieved with reference to self-declared Aboriginal students. Since the adoption of the Directions report and wide-scale curriculum revision in the 1980s, Saskatchewan has joined other provinces in reform to at least in some fashion incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum (Kanu, 2011).

Once again, a call for attention to racism was made by those RealRenewal surveyed. This call merely echoes a substantial recent history in this regard. Aboriginal novelist, playwright and academic Thomas King refers racism as one of "the sounds and smells of empire" (2003, p. 77). In 1996, the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) found that "the schooling experience typically erodes identity and self-worth" and reported "regular encounters with racism" in formal education. These experiences ranged from "interpersonal exchanges" to the exclusion of Aboriginal peoples in the curriculum to "the life of the institution" (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples,1996). Six years after the RCAP report the Minister of Indian Affairs established a body of sixteen respected Aboriginal educators to review Aboriginal education in Canada and recommend reforms.   The Ministers' National Working Group on Education concluded its work in December, 2002 with the presentation to the Minister of *Our Children - Keepers of the Sacred Knowledge*. The report listed twenty-seven recommendations, three of which called for concrete measures to confront racism in education.

The Working Group commissioned a number of research literature reviews from Canada's leading Indigenous education scholars. Verna St. Denis' and Eber Hampton's review on racism concluded that racism was present and active at all levels of public and post-secondary education, including the Aboriginal teaching workforce. The racism experienced on an everyday basis took multiple forms, including verbal and psychological abuse, low expectations of teachers and administrators, marginalization and isolation within the school community, a denial of professional support and attention, the unfair and discriminatory application of rules and procedures, and the denial of Aboriginal experience, human rights, and history. Some advances have been made in Saskatchewan to acknowledge this history, as cited above. However, one key Aboriginal educator, employing the old saw of "the old boys' club," informed us that this is one reason Aboriginal representation in school-level administrative positions remains abysmal. Verna St. Denis' survey of Aboriginal teachers' experience, completed for the Canadian Teachers' Federation in 2010, again revealed multiple forms of racism experienced by these education workers.

There may be good reasons why education policymakers are deeply reluctant to move from acknowledging and celebrating cultural difference to confronting racism directly. First, at the University of Regina, Jennifer Tupper and Michael Cappello's research with preservice teachers and their taking up of the Treaty Essential Learnings problematizes this province's official roots in settler freeholds. Tupper's research resonates with the global analysis of Samir Amin that "imperial rent" can make it difficult for those who benefit in some way from unequal relations to accept their relatively privileged histories and current positions. Second, as Lee Baker (2010) shows in detail, the separation of "culture" from "race" in North American thinking and policy formation regarding the Indigenous has concrete historical roots in late-19th century science, philanthropy, and popular culture. This tendency to exclude racism and antiracism from Aboriginal issues didn't happen by accident and without benefit to some.

Furthermore, a reluctance to explicitly confront racism fits with the times. What Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) labelled some time ago as dysconscious racism is today more commonly known simply as colour-blindness (Giroux, 2005; Lipman, 2011). This is the racial ideology of neoliberalism, a period when "race" exists, but is now reduced to a matter of "racial identity." In many domains, racism has largely ceased to exist and race is a matter of taste, lifestyle, and heritage. Institutionalized White privilege can be comfortably ignored (McCaskell, 2007) in the knowledge that status, wealth, and power differences are explained by Whites' cultural disposition towards individual determination, a strong work ethic and the value of a good education (Giroux, 2005). The responsibility for racial antagonism is on its primary victims for, perhaps wearing a hoody. (See "Shooting of Trayvon Martin" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shooting_of_Trayvon_Martin) Given the level playing field, it is thought, the state should be "race" neutral and the welfare state eliminated. Those who would speak of racism as a current and foundational issue to be highlighted, challenged, and eliminated are seen as foolhardy (Dei, 2007). A lack of uptake of critical perspectives on teaching across cultural difference by preservice teachers and teacher educators was also identified by Sleeter (2000/2001). It was the "colourblind" discourse that Paul Orlowski, now teaching at the University of Saskatchewan, identified as dominant amongst ten social studies teachers he interviewed in 2008.

Nevertheless, it is not as if the meaning of racism for First Nations and Métis people has gone entirely unnoticed in Saskatchewan of late. Prior to the best examples of relevant critical education identified above, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education's Education Equity Working Group released its policy framework Our Children, Our Communities, and Our Future in 1997. While limited, primarily culturalist, and contradictory, the authors recognized that racism exists as an organizational and institutional problem, not merely at the level of attitudes and behaviors. Perhaps elements of an institutional memory regarding systemic and institutional racism remain within the Ministry of

Education. Those charged with developing the Treaty Essential Learnings also have registered their concern that:

> (R)acism continues to be promoted through. . . educational institutions. Many First Nations students decide to leave school. . . because of the racism they face on a daily basis at school. This is not the only reason. . . but it is by far the most damaging. (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, p. 15).

Many, including some members of our own organization, continue to think of "bad attitude" and/or "bias" when reference is made to racism. However, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in 1985 that intent is not a necessary element of discrimination (Lopes, T. & Thomas, B., 2006). Systemic racism is a product of normal ways in which work and social life is structured, monitored, and rewarded. For example, In 2006, the median income for Aboriginal peoples was $18,962 — thirty per cent (30%) lower than the median income for the rest of Canadians. These data are slightly improved from 2001, when the annual income of Aboriginals over fifteen years old in Saskatchewan was fifty-nine (59.4) per cent of non-Aboriginals in this province. At least some of this difference might reasonably be expected to be due to the operations of systemic and institutional racism. Some have argued that the province of Saskatchewan's decision to cut its Aboriginal Employment Development Program and shut down the First Nations, Métis, and Community Education Branch are examples of institutional racism. Others, accepting the colour-blind perspective, will attribute statistics such as these to a "culture of poverty" lament, itself inherently racist (Lipman, 2011).

Leadership and the best solutions to resolving matters of racism in education reside with Indigenous people and other racialized minorities themselves; however, this does not absolve responsible allies from joining the fight and making contributions where and when possible. The voices of Aboriginal educators and parents whom we have consulted both through our survey and semi-structured interviews corroborate our findings in the literature that racism persists in Saskatchewan schooling. It is therefore worth recalling

that antiracism education has enjoyed institutional support before in this country. In the early 1990s, the Ontario government established the Ontario Anti-Racism Secretariat and struck cabinet-level committees on anti-racism. Each school board was mandated to produce a report outlining how it would plan for and meet the expectations outlined in the Ministry's anti-racism policy (Carr, 2006).

It is also worth noting that Saskatchewan currently lacks the means to address one of the more common ways in which racial inequality is reproduced through the school system, American evidence indicates. For over twenty-five years, discriminatory discipline policies exercised disproportionately against African-American and Latina/o students have worked to push too many out of school and into what some call "the school to prison pipeline." (Fuentes, 2011/2012). Yet although the Continuous Improvement Framework requires school divisions to report on discipline practices, and although indicators are now a feature of Saskatchewan educational administration and academic performance by self-identified Aboriginal students is well-reported, there is no indicator which might serve to report on this form of racialized social reproduction. One alternative progressives in education are advocating for regarding student discipline is the adoption of a restorative justice model. Considerable attention has also been paid to the ways in which a numbing, alienating curriculum helps push minority students into the pipeline.

A vast research literature exists to show that the ways in which the dominant curriculum and school infrastructure is organized serves to produce not "drop-outs", but rather "push-outs." However, much of this reportage is eloquently summarized with the observation of one of the aforementioned Aboriginal educators with whom a structured interview was conducted. He addressed Saskatchewan's Continuous Improvement Framework:

> It's the Minister's s*#t. . . . their agenda is all based on literacy and numeracy. I told my (boss), "What you're teaching is all head stuff. You can have the literacy and numeracy stuff all you want and you're not going to get any change. When you focus on the belonging piece first,

then the literacy and numeracy will come. Until people feel like they belong, that they own it, they will not become literate and numerate. You do that first and it comes. So you're backwards. It's not rocket science.

Our informant is getting at the ways in which schooling must become a place for education, a place where the Indigenous adherence to and tradition of holistic education is primary, not simply for Aboriginal students, but for the betterment of all. In *Subtractive schooling: US Mexican Students and the Politics of Caring* (1999, State University of New York Press) Angela Valenzuela analyzes competing notions of caring (aesthetic vs authentic) among teachers and students that are rooted in fundamentally different cultural and class-based expectations about the nature of schooling. These expectations inevitably clash and, when they do, fuel conflict and power struggles between teachers and students who see each other as not caring. As Valenzuela observes:

> The predominately non-Latino teaching staff sees students as not sufficiently caring about school, while students see teachers as not sufficiently caring for them. Teachers expect students to demonstrate caring about schooling with an abstract, or aesthetic commitment to ideas or practices that purportedly lead to achievement. Immigrant and US-born youth, on the other hand, are committed to an authentic form of caring that emphasizes relations of reciprocity between teachers and students. (p. 61)

The relevance of Valenzuela's research to Saskatchewan seems clear.

We suggest that, notwithstanding significant and real progress that has been made in Saskatchewan, it is important to question deeply what is really happening in our schools. Native American education scholar Sandy Grande (2008) suggests that we need to ask not "What is the role of culture in knowledge acquisition," but rather "What is the role of the school as a site of cultural production?" At a time when this province is embracing the neoliberal accountability regime by entrenching standardized testing at every grade level, the current director of the University of Regina's Indigenous

Peoples Health Research Centre, Dr. Jo-Anne Episkenew calls for public education to be measured and evaluated for "its effectiveness as an instrument of healing" (2009, p. 14). And Tewa scholar Dr. Gregory Cajete, one of the world's most accomplished Indigenous scholars in education has advanced "an Indigenous framework" for education which would both foster a sense of belonging and ownership and also focus on community-centred schooling. Cajete says the Indigenous framework

> . . .incorporates the following elements: gaining first-hand knowledge of community needs through "action research"; developing a comprehensive understanding of the history and "ecology" of a community; implementing strategies for regaining control of local communities; . . . and cultivating networks for mutual support. (p. 204).

Cajete's model stands in contrast to schooling as we know it, defining and policing the boundary of, and access to, the norm. Normative thinking and interventions in education are framed as generally benevolent responses to individual need or as corrections to, or compensation for, histories of collective exclusion, disadvantage, discrimination and marginalization. Simultaneously, however, norms operate to identify some individuals and populations as embodying specific problems, while others are designated as those who act on the problems. While ostensibly addressing inequality and exclusion, normative thinking leaves the structures of schooling and society, as well as the terms and effects of the norms themselves, unexamined (Dehli, 2008). We fear that too many initiatives in Saskatchewan's First Nations and Metis schooling continue to leave norms unexamined. Lomawaima & McCarty's (2006) notion of "safety zones," that is spaces where traditional cultural expressions can be safely domesticated and neutralized may not be all that distant. Yatta Kanu's Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into the School Curriculum (2011, University of Toronto Press) profoundly problematizes the case that, even when "culturally-appropriate curriculum" is official policy, Indigenous students' needs are not being met.

One problem with relying on so-called culturally affirming strategies is that, if students still find schooling alienating and exclusionary, they will be blamed (St. Denis, 2007). Drs. Mark Lemstra and Cory Neudorf have conducted research for the Saskatoon Health Region which shows the great impact poverty has on the well-being of Aboriginal citizens and suggests that health status indicators are statistically related more to income than aboriginal status. We also urge attention to the intersections of "race" and class when we consider First Nations and Metis education. When we think about culturally responsive education, after all, we need to remember that "culture is lived materially by ordinary people in their specific circumstances" (Ahmad, 1997).   That is, we cannot divorce notions of culturally appropriate education from the real social conditions experienced by many First Nations and Métis students and their families. As Rita Bouvier once asked rhetorically, "Would educational achievement have anything to do with the relative economic conditions of the Aboriginal students' families?" (2009, p. 12).

Jean Anyon has spent years looking at education policy for inner city communities in the U.S.   Her survey of the history of policies aimed at improving student success in these settings led her to conclude that "the plan for educational change that is most likely to yield long-term success is one that includes a strategy to improve the lives. . . of inner city residents" (1997, p. xvi). Her conclusion had not changed by 2005 (Anyon, 2005). Nevertheless, in her earlier work on the subject, Anyon did make a series of education-specific recommendations. One of these was her advocacy for full-service schools. In Saskatchewan we would have called these institutions community schools as envisioned by Michael Tymchak with Schools[Plus]. This model, however, was crushed due to the fiscal priorities of the Romanow government (LeClaire, 2010). One lesson from the failure of Schools[Plus] which bears recalling now is that when funds supposedly intended for the program were placed in a global budget, they dissolved. How does this lesson affect our predictions for services to Indigenous students and families after the shutdown of the First Nations, Metis and Community Education Branch?

Other experiments in education deserve reflection. In Great Britain, the Cooperative Trust is a form of schooling where the school is governed by a Forum

made up of representatives elected by students, parents, staff, community organizations, and local community members. A two-way form of accountability is formally structured between Forum members and their respective constituencies (Hatchcr, 2010). In Brooklyn, the El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice has been achieving excellent results compared to other schools in NYC according to its most recent Progress Report, a compulsory report made to the NYC Department of Education. Every effort is made to connect schooling to real-life experiences at El Puente. Students pursue Environmental Community Service projects that develop math and science skills by actually measuring the toxic perils that surround them. One humanities class has made a documentary video on the dangers of a proposed incinerator for the nearby Navy Yard, an English class focuses on the hip-hop movement, and biology students work on immunization drives. More information can be found here: http://schools.nyc.gov/schoolportals/14/k685/default.htm

The mission statement for the school states its commitment to

> strive in all activities to create community, develop love and caring,
> achieve mastery and promote peace and justice. These goals are based
> on a view of human beings as holistic, thriving in collective self-help,
> seeking safety and requiring respect.
> (http://schools.nyc.gov/SchoolPortals/14/K685/AboutUs/Overview/default.htm)

The Agreement between the Government of Saskatchewan and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations claimed it would identify "Policies, programs and practices that are not having the desired impact . . " (p. 3). While the new accountability regime announced in this year's provincial Throne Speech is only beginning to unfold in full force, it is not an innovation. Rather it is another evolutionary step in this government's education policy. It is in keeping with the imposition of standardized testing both nationally (Schuetze, et. al, 2011) and globally (Rizvi, B. & Lingard, B., 2010). It is one symptom of the way school culture is shifting from a collectivist and public orientation to norms of individualism. While the province has not entirely stone-walled Indigenous interests in culturally appropriate assessment, we are reminded of the

conclusions of Verwoord, et. al (2011). The authors succeeded in developing a culturally relevant assessment model, but conclude that their model ". . . can only be used in the particular context and for the particular students for which it was developed. . . . in one particular classroom of one particular institution" taking into consideration "the specific context that students are working in and students' individual needs"(p. 64). Thus the very notion of culturally relevant assessment invokes specificity and rejects standardization.

Education policy has historically emerged from a tension involving three often conflicting values: democratic equality, social mobility, and social efficiency (Ibid). Community-based and culturally responsive education are expressions of concerns for both democratic equality and also social mobility. The move to intensify standardized assessment is driven by the valuing of social efficiency and to some extent social mobility. Contrary to the "evidence-based" nostrums, there is enough research demonstrating the failure of standardized assessments to improve the lives of racialized and working-class children to constitute another paper. Simply, this new provincial thrust will not have the desired impact, at least that desired by First Nations and Métis parents and their allies. It should be resolutely opposed while we work to create genuine community-based and anti-racist educational alternatives.

Recommendations

In conclusion, the following recommendations emerge from a review of the research literature and interviews with key informants. Nothing here, however, is meant to substitute for legitimate demands made by Indigenous peoples themselves. I write merely as a Non-Aboriginal ally with an interest in social justice in education:

1. We need to develop ways to collect data from within schools to ascertain the ways in which First Nations and Métis students are being pushed out of schools. One way push-out is occurring is through the maintenance of a still fundamentally academic, alienating curricula which has historically proven unsuccessful for all kinds of learners. The design and implementation of a more holistic curricula is essential for the broad majority of students, including First Nations and Métis. At the same time,

we should not reify perceptions of Indigenous students and claim that they are naturally predisposed to having difficulty with the humanities and liberal arts.

2. At the same time as curriculum is transformed, the notion of culturally responsive curricula needs to be profoundly deepened to go beyond what SUNTEP Regina faculty member Russell Fayant (following others) calls the "adaptive" approach, so that changes in the course of studies and school organization actually embody and incorporate all of the values of living Indigenous cultures, including spirituality and notions of place-based, community-based education.

3. Successful approaches to curricular design and implementation have in a number of cases been those which are actually prepared to take up living, current, and serious issues in students' lives and those of their communities - issues such as youth unemployment, drug use, gang formation, and the celebration of community coherence and solidarity. Models for this sort of work are intact. The issue here is not lack of knowledge by education policy decision-makers, but rather a political willingness to advance and promote these models.

4. Transforming the curriculum and school organizations does not mean that in the meantime we excuse lack of current school success by First Nations and Métis students with explanations of "culture of poverty" and deficit-thinking. Aboriginal students and their parents welcome respectful, challenging approaches to teaching and learning which do not descend to lowered expectations.

5. Another way in which First Nations and Métis students are being pushed out is through the implementation of school rules and discipline policies in ways which may be both discriminatory and also decontextualized. This would count as a case of institutionalized racism. We need to develop ways to collect relevant data in this regard. Policy encouragement and endorsement of a restorative justice approach to school discipline deserves serious consideration.

6. Our provincial experience with the implementation of the TELs has abundantly shown that simply because an approach is mandated by the province does not ensure implementation in classrooms by teachers who are also policy-makers because they make choices. Nevertheless, one way to show that educational leaders at the highest level support change would be to follow the Ontario model from a few years ago. We advocate for the establishment of a provincial Anti-Racism Secretariat and a cabinet-level committee on anti-racism. Each school board should be mandated to produce a report outlining how it will plan for and meet the expectations outlined in the Ministry's anti-racism policy

7. Efforts to recruit Indigenous teachers in representative numbers continues to be a challenge for many provincial schools. At the same time, the situation is even more abysmal with reference to the recruitment of Aboriginal school administrators. Specific mechanisms need to be developed to open this space to Aboriginal placements and effectively secure these positions.

8. Standardized testing and culturally appropriate assessment practices are contradictory. Assessment needs to be driven by the specific learning conditions and socio-cultural context of each educational setting. Contrary to the model currently being implemented, the province should focus its resources on heightened professional development for teachers to become context- and culturally-conscious assessors of student learning.

9. Evidence suggests that if all of the recommendations made in this report and other voices of wisdom we assume this Task Force has an audience to were accepted, the so-called "achievement gap" would still exist. This is because evidence has historically demonstrated that young citizens more or less locked into unequal social conditions do not do as well academically - at least in what currently counts as school knowledge - as more economically comfortable students. To change school outcomes we need changes in social policy, such as the greater promotion of targeted employment policies, better housing policies and, for example, resource revenue-sharing agreements.

10. Steps must be taken to win broad support for initiatives such as those identified in the RealRenewal presentations and others so that we move away from, for example, teacher-blaming or parent-blaming strategies and towards allied work for change. Again, models of this sort of collaboration exist, in Chicago for example. One specific and concrete which could contribute to this is adoption of the well-known Comer School Development Program.

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