

RECONCILIATION: AN EMERGING TYPE OF IGNORANCE AMONGST SETTLERS IN  
ONTARIO

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*we are what we know. We are, however, also what we do not know. If what we know about ourselves—our history, our culture, our national identity— is deformed by absences, denials, and incompleteness, then our identity is fragmented. Such a self lacks access both to itself and to the world. Its sense of history, gender and politics is incomplete and distorted. (p.4)*

- Louis Castenell and William Pinar (1993)

## ABSTRACT

This research project was conducted to critically analyze Ontario's newest version of the Native Studies 1999/2000 courses - the *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 to 12: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies, 2019*. Ontario's curricula have previously omitted and misrepresented Indigenous peoples, and their historical and contemporary realities. Through a conceptual framework of ignorance, the study investigated the developmental process of the curriculum, and its content to understand how the curriculum will educate Ontario's student population.

The data was collected through a thematic analysis of the *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 to 12: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies, 2019* document, and of supporting media articles. The research project's findings suggest a new emerging type of ignorance among settlers regarding the concept of reconciliation. The findings demonstrate that an oversimplified conceptualization of reconciliation is at the base of the new emerging type of ignorance. Reconciliation is simplified to renewing relationships between Indigenous peoples and settlers, while disassociating reconciliation from settler colonialism and critiques. Based on Wolfe's (2006) logic of elimination, I theorize the presence of the new emerging type of ignorance regarding reconciliation is motivated to erase settler colonialism in the contemporary world. Finally, the research project concludes with recommendations for curriculum development and future research.

*Keywords:* Indigenous peoples, settlers, Ontario, education, curriculum, ignorance, reconciliation.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FNMI: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit

NAN: Nishnawbe Aski Nation

TRC: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

## POSITIONALITY

I write as a settler woman who was born and continues to live on and benefit from the ancestral and unceded traditional territory of the Anishinabeg, Algonquin peoples, which I call Ottawa, Ontario. As a settler, it is crucial I acknowledge and challenge the space I occupy as a settler researcher focused on Indigenous-related research topics (Wallace, 2011). Throughout this research journey, it was imperative that I reflected on the ways settler colonial narratives have informed my thoughts, perspectives and approaches to research; moreover, that I reflect on how I portray myself as an expert on Indigenous peoples and their experiences.

To clarify, I am not an expert on Indigenous peoples nor their experiences. I have attempted to centralize Indigenous voices throughout my paper. My main objective is to identify an ignorance settlers' have regarding Indigenous peoples, and to motivate them to educate themselves. I will no longer excuse my fellow settlers for their ignorance regarding Indigenous peoples in this day and age.

## DEFINITIONS

### Historical and contemporary realities

Historical realities of Indigenous peoples refer to the effect settler colonialism has had on Indigenous peoples' lives in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and earlier. These realities can encompass negative life-altering effects of settler colonialism and what Indigenous peoples have done to resist settler colonialism. Contemporary realities of Indigenous peoples refer to the effect settler colonialism has had on Indigenous peoples' lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These realities can encompass negative life-altering effects of the legacy of settler colonialism and what Indigenous peoples have done to resist the legacy of settler colonialism.

### Indigenous peoples

The term Indigenous peoples is used in this research paper to describe the Onkwehonwe (original people) of the land we now know as Canada (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005). Indigenous peoples will refer specifically to people who self-identify as First Nations, Inuit or Métis in Canada (Vowel, 2016). While I mainly use Indigenous peoples, I use other terms to describe Indigenous peoples depending on the political context. I will use the term "Indian" to reflect the political use of the word in the Indian Act. I will use the term "Aboriginal" when discussing a specific political context in which "Aboriginal" was the common official term at the time. I will use "Native" in relation to commonly used stereotypes of Indigenous peoples and to discuss the *Native Studies* curriculum.

## Settlers

The term settler is used in this research paper to identify people who are a part of the settler colonial society. It is based on Barker' (2009) definition: “settlers are those peoples who occupy lands previously stolen or in the process of being taken from their Indigenous inhabitants or who are otherwise members of the ‘Settler society’, which is founded on co-opted lands and resources” (p.328). Moreover, settlers and non-Indigenous people are not the same because it eliminates the severity of settler colonialism (Smith, Tuck & Yang, 2018). To differentiate, a settler refers to “the non-Indigenous peoples living in Canada who form the European-descended sociopolitical majority” (Vowel 2016, p.16).

## INTRODUCTION

An education system largely contributes to the knowledge of school-aged youth. The knowledge being reproduced throughout the education system must be scrutinized. “Language is never neutral” (Smith, Tuck & Yang, 2018, p.25), therefore the language used to reproduce knowledge is never neutral. Language is motivated to perpetuate a message (Regan, 2010). These messages can create social norms, values, ideas, beliefs and a social hierarchy. The messages can be motivated to empower or oppress people. The leaders of the dominant group hold the power to determine the messages that are further reproduced throughout social institutions such as the education system.

In Ontario, the settler colonial provincial government manages the education system, through which settler colonial messages and perspectives are reproduced. Prior to the curriculum reform project that began in 2016, Ontario’s curricula omitted and misrepresented Indigenous peoples and Canada’s history (Butler, Ng-A-Fook, Vaudrin-Charette & Mcfadden, 2016; Ng-A-Fook & Milne, 2014; Schaepli, 2018; Smith, Ng-A-Fook, Berry & Spence, 2011). Indigenous and ally scholars have identified a type of ignorance amongst settlers in regard to Indigenous peoples’ historical and contemporary realities (Dion, 2004; Dion, 2007; McGoey, 2012a; Schaepli & Godlewska, 2014; Schaepli et al., 2018).

This research paper analyses the *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 to 12: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies, 2019 (FNMI Studies curriculum)* using a conceptual framework of ignorance. The research paper questions how the *FNMI Studies* curriculum rectifies the past omissions and misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples found in past curricula.

## CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH ISSUE

In Canada's settler colonial society, settlers continue to maintain power and privilege over Indigenous peoples. Settler dominance is embedded in Canada's education system, including in Ontario's education system curricula where Indigenous peoples, their cultures, and their experiences have been omitted and misrepresented. It is generally accepted that in order to improve the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers, Indigenous peoples must be appropriately included and represented in Ontario's curricula, and that education and awareness are crucial in improving this relationship.

### 1.1 Settler Colonialism

Settler colonial societies, such as Canada, were built on settler colonialism and continue to benefit from settler colonialism. Smith, Tuck and Yang (2018) define settler colonialism as "a term of colonization in which outsiders come to land inhabited by Indigenous peoples and claim it as their own new home" (p.xxi). The primary focus of settler colonialism is the ownership and control of the land (Schaepli, 2018; Tuck, Mckenzie & McCoy, 2014). To gain control of said land, settlers attempt to eliminate Indigenous peoples through physical violence, displacement, suppression, and assimilation (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013; Veracini, 2011; Wolfe, 2006).

Wolfe (2006) established the concept of logic of elimination to represent the objective of settler colonialism. Settlers want the land that is inhabited by Indigenous peoples; thus, the presence of Indigenous peoples hinder that goal. Indigenous peoples must be eliminated for settlers' to successfully gain access to the land. As powerfully claimed by Wolfe (2006) "invasion is a structure not an event" (p.388). To maintain control of land, settlers attempt to permanently eliminate Indigenous peoples. The logic of elimination demonstrates settlers' desire to permanently eliminate Indigenous peoples in order to successfully create a new colonial

society. The new colonial society replaces the Indigenous society that once lived on the land. A particular aspect of the logic of elimination is to acknowledge Indigeneity in the new colonial society (Wolfe, 2006). Indigeneity identifies peoples as being Indigenous to a community, and recognize settlers in settler colonial societies who support Indigenous lifeways (Rhea, 201). Wolfe (2006) argues this identification and support are tactics employed to maintain the power of settler colonialism. Wolfe (2006) claims the advocacy of Indigeneity by settlers has the underlying motive to demonstrate that settlers “could use the land better than [Indigenous peoples] could” (p.389). It shows the changes settlers have made to the motherland, which for settlers demonstrates how settler colonialism has improved it. It is a continuous effort by settlers to eliminate Indigenous peoples and maintain settler colonialism.

The reproduction of a settler colonial narrative throughout social and institutional structures is an example of this continuous effort by settlers to eliminate Indigenous peoples (Milne, 2016). Settler colonialism encompasses the act “to remove Indigenous peoples from desirable land through a process of belittling, dehumanization, and misinformation and/or silence about Indigenous peoples” (Smith, Tuck & Yang, 2018, p.232). A settler colonial narrative aims to erase Indigenous peoples through omission and misrepresentation along with an ignorant fabrication of a heroic settler. In this narrative, settlers are portrayed as heroes for attempting to assimilate Indigenous peoples in the settler population. Moreover, this narrative produces a social hierarchy in which settlers are represented as superior beings to Indigenous peoples. This is a way to maintain settler dominance (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013). This settler colonial narrative is reproduced throughout institutions, social practices and social norms in order to constantly reproduce the social hierarchy that attempts to silence Indigenous peoples (Schaepli, 2018). It is important to acknowledge that Indigenous peoples have always resisted

settler colonialism. In the following sections, I will explore the roles settler colonialism and a settler colonial narrative play in the education system in Canada, specifically in Ontario.

## 1.2 Education in Ontario's settler colonial society

Ontario's education system prioritizes a settler colonial narrative and scientific knowledge in its curricula (Cross, Pewewardy & Smith, 2019; Rhea, 2014). Prior to the 2016 curricula reform project, Ontario's curricula omitted and misrepresented Indigenous peoples along with their cultures, and their historical and contemporary realities. The curricula reform project was launched following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) release of their final summary and calls to action in 2015. The TRC's summary of the final report stated "[t]oo many Canadians know little or nothing about the deep historical roots of these conflicts" (TRC, 2015, p.8). The TRC identified an ignorance present in the settler population and stated that one of the main purposes of the Commission was to guide and inspire Indigenous peoples and settlers to work towards a new relationship that fosters mutual respect (TRC, 2015). The TRC project focused on the history and legacy of the residential school system. The TRC released 94 calls to action which identified "the need for better education across Canada about colonialism and its relationship to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and Canadian society" (Schaepli, Godlewska & Rose, 2018, p.476). As a response to the calls to action, Ontario's Ministry of Education began the curriculum reform project.

Prior to 2016, Indigenous and ally scholars critically analyzed the Ontario education system's inclusion and representation of Indigenous peoples. These scholars found the education system reproduced a settler colonial narrative throughout the curricula by omitting or misrepresenting Indigenous peoples, their cultures and their historical and contemporary realities (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013; Smith, Ng-A-Fook, Berry & Spence, 2011; Ahluwalia,

2012; Mahoney, 2016; Regan, 2010). These omissions and misrepresentations were argued to maintain settler colonial power (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013), and follows Wolfe's (2006) logic of elimination, in which Indigenous peoples are erased to guarantee the survival of settler colonialism. Alongside the logic of elimination, Veracini (2011) states settler colonialism survives by remaining invisible. This invisibility is created through a narrative that settler colonialism has an end point, resulting in a post-colonial society. As put by Veracini (2011) "whereas colonialism reinforces the distinction between colony and metropole, settler colonialism erases it" (p.3). This act of rendering settler colonialism invisible was identified in Ontario's curricula prior to 2016. There was a clear disconnect between Indigenous-related content and settler colonialism. Dion (2004) argues the Ontario government consciously made decisions to exclude Indigenous perspectives in curricula as a way to gain political power by making Indigenous peoples and settler colonialism invisible. Silencing Indigenous voices "was and continues to be the violence of colonization that created conditions wherein Aboriginal people lost the power to control the ways in which dominant society constructs and interprets images of Aboriginal people" (Dion, 2004, p.65). In the following three sections, I will examine how Indigenous peoples were omitted or misrepresented through stereotypes, historical events, and contemporary realities prior to the curricula reform project in 2016.

### 1.3 Past omissions and misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples in Ontario's curricula

#### 1.3.1 Indigenous stereotypes

Ontario's curricula have misrepresented Indigenous peoples' cultural identities; while they are not often referenced, they are depicted through the use of stereotypes when they are included in curricula (Butler, Ng-A-Fook, Vaudrin-Charette & Mcfadden, 2016). Stereotypes are

simplified generalizations of a population that impact the perception of a population's characteristics and diversity. Some stereotypes found in the curriculum were those of Indigenous peoples as being lazy, criminals, uneducated, on welfare, and freeloaders (Butler, Ng-A-Fook, Vaudrin-Charette & Mcfadden, 2016; Clancy, 2019; Vowel, 2016). These stereotypes grew from commonly held myths about Indigenous peoples and the omission of Indigenous voices in the curriculum. The misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in the curriculum as a result of excluding Indigenous perspectives contributes to an ignorant understanding of Indigenous peoples. Some examples of commonly held myths represented Indigenous peoples as: receiving free education, receiving free housing, not having to pay taxes, and being biologically predetermined to become alcoholics (Vowel, 2016). These myths have been displayed in the media, in film, in sports teams and their logos, in costumes, and in summer camps (Clancy, 2019; Vowel, 2016). While some of these myths were not explicitly included in Ontario's curricula, the decision to not discredit these myths reinforces a "truthfulness" behind them, and an ignorance of these myths remain among the settler population. Stereotypes and myths of Indigenous peoples must be confronted, discussed and discredited. For some, these stereotypes are the only knowledge they have of Indigenous peoples and may prohibit any further learning if they are not challenged by curricula (Clancy, 2019).

The most common misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in Ontario's curricula was the uniformity of Indigenous peoples. All Indigenous peoples were represented through the stereotype that Indigenous peoples are savages (Schaepli, 2018). This stereotype was reinforced through the use of the peacemaker myth in Ontario's curricula prior to the 2016 reform project (Regan, 2010; Smith, Ng-A-Fook, Berry & Spence, 2011). The peacemaker myth is a settler produced myth that aims to eliminate the presence of Indigenous peoples while attempting to

eliminate Canada's association with violence (Cook, 2018b; Regan, 2010). This myth portrays settlers as peacemakers who wanted to solve the Indian problem by eliminating them to maintain settler colonial power (Regan, 2010; Wolfe, 2006). In Regan (2010), Alfred writes "Canadians grew up believing that the history of their country is a story of the cooperative venture between people who came from elsewhere to make a better life and those who were already here, who welcomed and embraced them, aside from a few bad white men" (p.ix). Students were taught that Canada was established by peaceful, courageous explorers, who were portrayed as heroes who allowed Indigenous peoples the right to assimilate into the settler society. Indigenous peoples were represented as uncivilized savages who could only benefit from assimilating into the civilized settler colonial society (Ahluwalia, 2012; Iseke-Barnes & Danard, 2007). The use of this stereotype reinforces an ignorance of a social hierarchy in which settlers are superior to Indigenous peoples (Dion, 2007). This stereotype contributes to the elimination of Indigenous peoples by depicting a story of a benevolent settler and a savage Native, in which settler colonialism is represented as a type of assistance provided to the uncivilized savage Indigenous peoples.

Another stereotype associated with the misrepresentation of the uniformity of Indigenous peoples is the universality of cultural artifacts. Prior to the 2016 curricula reform project, Indigenous peoples were often mentioned in association with arts and crafts. The curriculum reduces all Indigenous peoples to teepees, dream catchers, headpieces, and the Medicine Wheel (Butler, Ng-A-Fook, Vaudrin-Charette & Mcfadden, 2016; Furo, 2018; OSSTF, 2012; Vowel, 2016). These sacred items are transformed into basic art projects in the classroom. In doing so, these sacred cultural objects are being represented through a settler colonial narrative that erases the Indigenous significance of the object. Many have argued that these objects must be

introduced by an Indigenous person or through an Indigenous perspective to understand their meaning and use (OSSTF, 2012). Otherwise, the objects become stereotypical representations of all Indigenous peoples. This simplification places all Indigenous peoples into one cultural box (Butler, Ng-A-Fook, Vaudrin-Charette & Mcfadden, 2016; Toulouse, 2016).

In sum, Indigenous peoples were misrepresented as lacking diversity through the savage stereotype and the universality of cultural artifacts in Ontario's curricula prior to 2016. The curriculum did not discredit any common myths associated with Indigenous peoples that were popular in the media, in film, in sports teams and logos, in costumes, and in summer camps.

### 1.3.2 Historical events

In addition, Ontario's curricula have omitted and misrepresented Indigenous peoples in Canada's history (Godlewska, Moore & Bednasek, 2010; Schaepli, 2018; Smith, Ng-A-Fook, Berry & Spence, 2011). Godlewska, Moore and Bednasek (2010) identified key historical events that were excluded or misrepresented in the Ontario curriculum: the Royal Proclamation of 1763; the Indian Act; the treaty-making process; The White Paper, 1969; and the residential school system. Prior to 2010, the Ontario curriculum did not discuss the Royal Proclamation of 1763 through an Indigenous perspective. The entire proposal of The White Paper, 1969 was also not included. These are major events that represent what Indigenous peoples have endured and the way settlers took advantage of Indigenous peoples and the land.

For example, the residential school system was not a required topic of discussion in the curriculum prior to 2016 despite society's gradual awareness of the issue, which contributes to ignorance regarding the mistreatment of Indigenous peoples in the past. Since 2005, the settler population in Canada has slowly begun to learn about the residential school system (Godlewska,

Moore & Bednasek, 2010). Following Prime Minister Harper's apology in 2008, the TRC's report in 2015, and Premier Wynne's apology in 2016, the settler population began learning about the physical, sexual and mental abuse that occurred in those schools (Godlewska, Moore & Bednasek, 2010). While these horrific details begin to emerge, settlers have not been taught the larger scope and effects of this system, namely the assimilationist policies that founded residential schools and the continued intergenerational trauma the system caused. The Ontario curriculum has excluded any in-depth discussion about the residential school system.

Ontario's curricula minimally focus on the Indian Act and other colonial policies (Butler, Ng-A-Fook, Vaudrin-Charette & Mcfadden, 2016). The Indian Act is a colonial policy that has divided First Nations communities. It was "established as separate and distinct systems of governance for First Nations... But simultaneously it undercut the fundamentals of aboriginal identity: community, culture and land" (Godlewska, Moore & Bednasek, 2010, p.420). The underlying colonial ideologies and motives of these key historical events, and the depiction of what occurred were not included in Ontario's curricula prior to the curriculum reform project.

Ontario's curricula also erased settler colonialism when discussing Canada's history. By excluding key historical events and Indigenous perspectives on these events, settler colonialism was omitted from the education system (Cook, 2018b; Schaepli, 2018; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013). This omission can be traced back to the previous discussion of Wolfe's (2006) logic of elimination which effectively requires the elimination of settler colonialism in the narrative produced by the new settler colonial society.

### 1.3.3 Contemporary realities

Lastly, Ontario's curricula have omitted and misrepresented Indigenous peoples' contemporary realities (Godlewska, Moore & Bednasek, 2010; Schaepli, Godlewska & Rose, 2018). The mandatory courses focus on settlers' experiences and perspectives, while content related to Indigenous peoples is often taught on the periphery. As an example, the *Native Studies* curriculum has not been updated since 2000, suggesting no updates are necessary on the contemporary realities of Indigenous peoples. As well, the *Native Studies* curriculum only includes optional courses that are rarely offered in Ontario schools. This prioritizes settler knowledge and perspectives over Indigenous knowledge and perspectives (Schaepli, Godlewska & Rose, 2018).

Furthermore, the inclusion of Indigenous peoples is often done only in a historical context in the Ontario curriculum, thus relegating the discussion of Indigenous peoples to historical events and representing them as peoples of the past (Godlewska, Moore & Bednasek, 2010). This is a well-known assimilationist tactic that erases Indigenous peoples and cultures from the contemporary world and "works subtly to dull students' awareness of inherited injustices" (Schaepli, Godlewska & Rose, 2018, p.481) despite the obvious fact that Indigenous peoples continue to face injustices caused by the legacy of colonialism. As a result, these contemporary injustices and realities, such as the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in the child protection system, the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in prison, the poor living conditions on reserves, and the high rate of missing and murdered Indigenous girls and women, have not been included in Ontario's curricula (Blackstock, 2015; Vowel, 2016). The link between the contemporary world and settler colonialism have in fact been erased from the curriculum.

#### 1.4 Next steps

In the previous section, I identified the major critiques Indigenous and ally scholars have made about Ontario's curricula. Given these critiques, this research questions whether the *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 to 12: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies 2019*, challenges significant issues that have been raised to date by Indigenous families, students, advocates, and scholars. Specifically, this study questions whether Ontario's new *FNMI Studies* curriculum document clarifies the misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples that were supported in the previous curriculums through stereotypes, the misrepresentation and omission of historical events and of contemporary realities.

The vast literature surrounding the changes that must be made to the curriculum demonstrate that Ontario's education system was at a turning-point in the mid-2010s (Furo, 2018). As previously discussed, the education system and the perspectives produced by the curriculum can be seen as having been an another method "of continued assimilation and colonial oppression by transmitting and legitimizing dominant culture and knowledge through what is taught, how it is taught, and how learning is measured" (Milne, 2016, p.275). The curriculum contributed to the exclusion and silencing of Indigenous voices and knowledge (Sinclair, Hart & Bruyere, 2009). Following the TRC's calls to action as well as recommendations from Indigenous and ally scholars, concrete steps were recommended for Ontario's education system. In 2016, the Ontario government decided to commit to the turning-point by starting a curriculum reform project regarding Indigenous peoples and their experiences.

According to many scholars and educators, the education system has a responsibility to educate and bring awareness to the settler population regarding colonialism, Indigenous peoples,

and their historical and contemporary realities. Awareness and education are crucial in improving the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers by contributing to students' "critical historical consciousness, mutual respect, and responsibility" (Schaepli, Godlewska & Rose, 2018, p.476). Settlers have a responsibility to improve their knowledge and understanding of Indigenous peoples' past and present experiences in order to contribute to a hopeful mutual respect amongst Indigenous peoples and settlers. Educational institutions can play a key role in social justice initiatives by including Indigenous voices in curricula to challenge the dominant settler discourse (Smith, Tuck & Yang, 2018). The goal of the new curriculum is to help students "develop a critical discourse that explores the ways colonial relations are and continue to be perpetuated and maintained through relations of power and privilege" (Smith, Tuck & Yang, 2018, p.32). Throughout my analysis, I will determine if the *FNMI Studies* curriculum will deconstruct colonial relations by clarifying past misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples.

## CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

## 2.1 Ignorance

Ignorance is a recurring concept in the contextualization of the problem of this study. Ontario's education system omitted and misrepresented Indigenous peoples and their experience in the curriculum prior to the curriculum reform project that began in 2016. These omissions and misrepresentations contribute to settler ignorance regarding Indigenous peoples and their experiences.

Ignorance is a popular concept in mainstream society. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2020) defines ignorance as “a lack of knowledge or information about something”. Ignorance and knowledge tend to be represented as binary, in which ignorance is viewed as the opposite of having knowledge (McGoey, 2012a). A common expression is *ignorance is bliss*, as the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2020) states, “if you do not know about something, you cannot worry about it”. This commonly used expression suggests that life is easier if people avoid learning about historical and contemporary social and political problems. It can also be an excuse to not act upon social and political problems.

In the context of this research paper, ignorance will not be conceptualized in line with this mainstream definition. Instead of viewing ignorance and knowledge as binary, I will adopt the conceptualization of ignorance as a type of knowledge (McGoey, 2012a). As defined by Schaefli and Godlewska (2014), ignorance is “strategic, produced and upheld by often hidden but staunchly defended interests, linked to significant social inequalities” (p.229). Ignorance, in this sense, does not refer to an individual's nor a collective's lack of knowledge and awareness, but a type of knowledge. Felman (1982) compares ignorance to “an active refusal of information” (p.30). This type of ignorance has a political motive: to produce knowledge in favour of the dominant group that wishes to maintain their power. Structural power thus

produces ignorance as a tool to “perpetuate the status quo, privilege, and domination” (Schaeffli & Godlewska, 2014, p.229).

Ignorance has been discussed to be a political tool in settler colonial societies as a means for settlers to maintain the colonial legacy and their power over Indigenous peoples (Dion, 2004; Dion, 2007). In a settler colonial society such as Canada, settlers are the dominant group and Indigenous peoples are the oppressed group. The Canadian government decides what information will be perpetuated throughout the social structures. This information is disguised as daily teachings, behaviours, beliefs and discourses that are reproduced by the settler population, institutions, and social structures. Dion (2004) claims that ignorance “creates a barrier allowing Canadians to resist confronting the country’s racist past and the extent to which the past lives inside its present deep in the national psyche” (p.58). Ignorance is thus associated with the deliberate act of filtering out knowledge that may harm the reputation of the dominant group (Felman, 1982).

## 2.2 Settler ignorance

Scholars have theorized ignorance in association with settler colonialism. The conceptualization of ignorance in a settler society builds off of Mills’ (1997) concept of white ignorance. Mills (1997) defines whiteness as a political construct of power, rather than a race or culture. White ignorance produces a type of knowledge that provides power to white people, while settler ignorance provides power to settlers. Settler ignorance is defined as “the disavowal of past and ongoing violence against Indigenous peoples...not explainable in terms of a lack of recognition but is rather structural ignorance” (Cook, 2018a, p.11). It can be viewed as “not as presenting a lack of knowledge but as asserting a particular kind of knowledge” (Cook, 2018a,

p.15). Ignorance can be seen as a tool used by the settler government to control the perception of how Canada became a country and how settlers have treated and continue to treat Indigenous peoples. There is a misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples perpetuated through institutions, policies, laws, and practices in Canada to erase settler colonialism. The use of ignorance can be linked to Wolfe's (2006) logic of elimination. Settler colonialism has a need to remain invisible while assimilating Indigenous peoples into the settler culture. As argued by Ahluwalia (2012) "nurturing ignorance is one of the ways to cope with our desire to assert a positive national identity without having to engage with the overwhelming evidence of our greed, theft, and callous disregard for Indigenous Peoples" (p.48). Ignorance is a tool used to erase settler colonialism.

The education system and government play a large role in the production of ignorance by determining the underlying narratives embedded in the curriculum (McGoey, 2012b). Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox and Coulthard (2014) discuss how the current public education system has fostered ignorance among settler teachers and settler youth regarding Indigenous historical and contemporary realities. Studies continue to show how Ontario's settler population is ignorant of the historical and contemporary experiences of Indigenous peoples (Dion, 2007; Schaepli et al., 2018; TRC, 2015). For example, Schaepli and colleagues (2018) conducted a study to gauge the awareness of Indigenous issues amongst first-year undergraduate students from Queen's University who recently graduated from a high-school in Ontario. The majority of the 2,899 students who completed the questionnaire were not aware of Indigenous peoples' past and present realities and lacked awareness of the oppressive laws currently in place to regulate and control Indigenous peoples and land. The authors concluded that the ignorance of the students stemmed from the elementary to secondary school curricula because they are the primary source

of information on Indigenous peoples for students prior to post-secondary learning. McGoey (2012b) suggests that in order to combat the ignorance produced by the education system, it is important to resist and challenge the way curriculum information is represented as truth. Education can provide the space for settlers to understand their identities and how they contribute to settler colonialism. It can be an opportunity to confront one's ignorance by providing an opportunity for critical self-reflection (Dion, 2007). For settlers, modifying their understanding of their country's history would alter their own understanding of themselves (Dion, 2004). Nevertheless, this change is imperative.

Throughout the analysis that is presented in Chapter 4, I used ignorance as a conceptual framework to approach and inform my interpretation of the content of the *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 to 12: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies, 2019* document. This analysis allowed me to identify an emerging type of ignorance among settlers.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Methodological approach

As a settler conducting research related to Indigenous peoples, I had to make a decision regarding my methodology. I am not an Indigenous person; therefore, I do not believe I can apply an Indigenous methodology to research because I have never experienced life as an Indigenous person (Carlson, 2016; Dei, 2013). Indigenous peoples are experts of their own experiences, hence Indigenous research methodologies belong to Indigenous researchers.

For this reason, I decided to use an anti-colonial methodology. An anti-colonial methodology “involves the recovery of traditional knowledge as a strategy that resists the replacement of Indigenous ways and knowledges with Western ways and knowledges, processes endemic in colonialism” (Carlson, 2016, p.5). In Canada, settlers attempt to control the narrative of Indigenous peoples and their experiences, and Canadian science and research is not excluded from this attempt since it privileges settler voices and Western science. An anti-colonial methodology acts to oppose this approach by providing power to Indigenous voices and knowledge.

A central value of an anti-colonial methodology is Indigenous resurgence (Carlson, 2016). Indigenous resurgence involves Indigenous peoples “re-claiming space that had been occupied by settler colonialism” (Carlson, 2016, p.5) and challenges the systemic settler colonialism found within research. Anti-colonial methodologies require researchers to engage in “recognizing the colonial influence in knowledge paradigms and revealing how Indigenous ways of knowing have been marginalized in research” (Kovach, 2009, p.76). Another central value of an anti-colonial methodology is land acknowledgment. Settler researchers must acknowledge the land we have settled on to conduct our research (Carlson, 2016). Settler researchers also have a

responsibility to take action towards protecting Indigenous land from pollution, climate change and exploitation (Carlson, 2016).

While land acknowledgment is important, we must go further than acknowledging the stolen land we continue to occupy. An anti-colonial methodology holds me accountable through critical self-reflexivity which involves, but is not limited to, identifying an individual's settler identity and privilege (Fortier, 2017). While acknowledging settler privilege allows settlers to relinquish the "stolen land and the loss of material benefits gained from living in a settler colonial state" (p.22), critical self-reflexivity gives settlers the opportunity to identify how to contribute to anti-colonial initiatives by making changes on individual and collective dimensions.

In this research paper, I applied an anti-colonial methodology by upholding Indigenous peoples' perspectives on my topic, while encouraging my settler readers to confront their ignorance. I attempted to adopt perspectives and critiques that Indigenous and ally scholars have made concerning Ontario's education system. Furthermore, I held myself and settlers accountable to the collective ignorance settlers have regarding Indigenous peoples and their experiences (Snelgrove, Dhamoon & Corntassel, 2014). Throughout the entire process of completing this research paper, I have engaged in critical self-reflexivity to see how I contribute to settler colonialism, and actions I can take to decolonize my way of life.

### 3.2 Data collection

The data was collected through a document analysis. A document analysis is "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents" (Bowen, 2009, p.27). I conducted a thematic analysis in order to produce themes as results of the document analysis (Mucchielli & Paillé, 2012). For my data collection, I analyzed the *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 to 12: First*

*Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies, 2019 (FNMI Studies)* as my central document, while also analyzing relevant supporting media articles. The curriculum document informed the overall findings of my research paper, while the media articles informed the context of who created, developed and proposed the roll-out of the curriculum. By following an anti-colonial methodology, it was important to depict who was involved in the development of this new curriculum.

Prior to analyzing my document, I had to understand the unique layout of a curriculum document. The *FNMI Studies* curriculum was released by Ontario's Ministry of Education in May 2019 and was implemented in September 2019. The *FNMI Studies* curriculum document is divided into 10 courses that are related to a range of subjects: arts, history, politics, economy, law, English and social sciences. Each course is divided into strands, which are essentially large themes the students will learn throughout the course. Each course in the *FNMI Studies* document is divided into four to five strands. Each strand consists of overall expectations, specific expectations, examples and sample questions. The overall expectations describe the knowledge and skills the students will gain by the end of the course. All of the overall expectations must be taught by the teacher to the students. The specific expectations are more detailed versions of the overall expectations. The specific expectations may resemble daily lesson plans that break down the overall expectations into smaller lessons, discussions, and activities. All of the specific expectations must be taught by the teacher to the students. The examples are provided under each specific expectation as key words that may be used to help the discussion. Examples could be anything from a specific court case, a specific treaty, or a specific Indigenous activist. All of the examples are not required to be shared with the students. It is at the discretion of the teachers to decide what they share in their lesson plans. Sample questions are also provided under each

specific expectation as questions to ask the students to initiate discussions. These sample questions are also not required to be shared with the students. This particular breakdown is important to understand because “while curricula and textbooks are not necessarily what is taught, and what is taught is not necessarily what is learned, their structure and content set standards for instruction and influence how teachers select topics and how they choose to teach them” (Schaefli, Godlewska & Rose, 2018, p.476). Curricula must be critically designed to guide teachers down the appropriate teaching path.

As the *FNMI Studies* curriculum document is divided into 10 optional courses, students do not have the opportunity to engage in all 10 courses. Therefore, the content of this curriculum will not be taught to all Ontario students. However, for the purpose of this research paper, I analyzed the document as a continuous curriculum. The findings are generalized to the entirety of the *FNMI Studies* curriculum document, meaning all 10 courses. For the purpose of this research paper, I analyzed the content of the curriculum based on the overall expectations, the specific expectations, the examples, and the sample questions. While the examples and sample questions are not mandatory in lesson plans, I analyzed the curriculum as if the examples and sample questions were mandatory. Teachers have the discretion to decide which examples and sample questions they will use; therefore, it was too complex to assume which questions will or will not be taught.

### 3.3 Data analysis

The collected data was analyzed through a qualitative thematic analysis. A qualitative approach is common in curricula research because it is more beneficial to find implicit and explicit themes throughout a curriculum document rather than quantitatively finding repeating concepts. In qualitative studies, there is no manipulation of the variables allowing researchers to

analyze social reality. Qualitative research consists of words, behaviours, interactions, and social movements rather than numerical data. The results of qualitative research aim to further understand the social world. Social work fits into a qualitative research field because, as a discipline, it aims to understand social behaviour without manipulating the variables it aims to explain (Maunier, 2019).

In this study, the qualitative approach was applied through a thematic analysis. As defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis “is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p.79). This qualitative method is applied to interpret data from types of studies from interviews to document analysis. The data is divided into themes to provide conclusions from the actual data and the underlying message of the data set. A theme in a thematic analysis is used to capture “something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of pattern response or meaning within the data set” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.82). The final themes collectively portray a story.

A thematic analysis can be applied to a wide range of methods and is adaptable and flexible in its application (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2012). A successful thematic analysis must be guided by a research question and a theoretical framework. Since this analysis is flexible and adaptable, it can be applied through almost every possible theoretical framework. The researcher must only make sure at least one theoretical framework is guiding the thematic analysis. When using a thematic analysis approach, “the theoretical framework and methods match what the researcher wants to know, and that they acknowledge these decisions, and recognize them as decisions” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.80). In the following section, I describe the thematic analysis phases I applied based on Braun and Clarke’s (2012) approach.

### 3.3.1 Data analysis phases

In this research paper, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2012) six phases of a thematic analysis in order to guarantee its proper application. The first phase involves the researcher familiarizing him or herself with the data that will be analyzed. This phase requires a researcher to read and reread the data set as many times as possible and as appropriate. While a researcher reads the data, it is important to take notes on the content and interpretations of it. A common limit of using a thematic analysis identified by Braun and Clarke (2006) is that researchers do not actually analyze the data. The themes get confused with the data retrieved from the research method such as interview questions or sections in a document. Rather than analyzing the data and determining themes, the researcher produces a descriptive report of the data collection. This phase requires a researcher to analyze rather than describe the data. The second phase involves the initial coding of the data. Since it is a qualitative approach, this phase is not numerical, rather it assigns labels to sections of the data. It is up to the researcher, using the research question and the theoretical framework, to determine the size of the data groupings that are coded together. The third phase involves the exploration of themes. This phase is where the researcher develops themes and subthemes by identifying similarities in the various labels created in the previous phase. By grouping labels together, the themes provide a concise version of the initial labels. It is important to identify relationships amongst the themes to understand the direction of the results. The fourth phase involves reviewing the themes chosen in phase three. This step allows the researchers to analyze the quality of the themes and the variety of the themes and is crucial in eliminating a common limit of a thematic analysis, which is weak analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A weak analysis can occur when the researcher does not find a strong relationship between the themes, which could result in a weak conclusion. Additionally, a weak analysis can

be a result of an overlap amongst themes. The fifth phase involves naming the themes and providing a definition to each of them. The name of each theme should be concise and straightforward, and each theme should have one focal point in the description to avoid overlap and repetition; the description should have “a clear focus, scope and purpose” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.66). The name and description of each theme should be produced with the intent of answering the research question. The sixth phase is to produce a report of the data. The report should enumerate the themes in an appropriate order to help tell the story the researcher wants to tell.

### 3.4 Limitations

The most notable limitation of this study is the generalizability of the findings to all classrooms across Ontario. The education curriculum is developed with mandatory expectations teachers must teach their students, along with optional examples they can incorporate into their lesson plans. Curriculum documents are created to help foster creativity and flexibility in how teachers share the information with their students (Smith, Tuck & Yang, 2018). The interpretation of the content of the curriculum may vary across teachers. The findings of this research paper assume the teachers will teach all the material found within the curriculum under the same interpretation; an assumption that is not applicable to reality. Furthermore, Ontario teachers may be ignorant of Indigenous-related content and hold racist and discriminatory perceptions of Indigenous peoples. The teachers who have the responsibility to teach the students Indigenous content may have grown up in Canada in which they were taught the dominant settler colonial narrative of Canada’s history (Dion, 2007). It is difficult to modify the non-Indigenous teachers' understanding of Canada by simply providing them with new curricula documents.

According to Milne's (2017) study, the majority of non-Indigenous teachers who were interviewed were not aware of the violent history of Canada and the assimilation tactics implemented to eliminate Indigenous cultures. This demonstrates the importance of updating the curricula while providing necessary training and resources for teachers so they can properly teach the content as non-Indigenous allies.

A second limitation is the lack of literature on applying an anti-colonial methodology to a document analysis as a settler researcher. In other qualitative research methodologies, Indigenous peoples can be included in various ways. For example, Indigenous peoples can participate in interviews, or a researcher can work in partnership with an Indigenous organization. As I was analyzing the curriculum document, I was not familiar with all of the information of Indigenous peoples in the curriculum document. I did not feel qualified enough to conduct the research as there were details I was not knowledgeable on. I do not feel I was able to fully utilize an anti-colonial methodology in this research paper without directly working with an Indigenous person or community. An anti-colonial methodology approach to document analysis would be beneficial to settlers conducting research on Indigenous topics.

### 3.5 Potential contributions

This research paper contributes to the analysis of the new initiatives put forth by the Canadian government to improve the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers. Following the TRC's final report and calls to action published in 2015, there have been new initiatives and resources created to answer the calls to action. The *FNMI Studies* curriculum document is a prime example. While these initiatives may appear well intentioned, they must be critically analyzed. This research paper will challenge the curriculum reform as produced in the

*FNMI Studies* curriculum document. It is important to note that because the curriculum document is so recent, there is a lack of research published on it and my paper can be seen as a contribution to building research on this curriculum reform.

## CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

This chapter analyses the project's results related to how the curriculum's content may be continuing to contribute to ignorance among Canadians regarding Indigenous peoples historical and contemporary realities. The first section provides details on the developmental process of the curriculum document to contextualize the research. The subsequent sections analyze the curriculum's attempt to clarify the omissions and misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples' history and contemporary realities. A common theme found throughout the *FNMI Studies* curriculum is the focus on reconciliation. I will discuss how a new specific type of ignorance among settlers seems to now be reflected in the curriculum, specifically in relation to the concept of reconciliation.

#### 4.1 - Contextualization of the developmental process of the new curriculum

I analyzed the *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 to 12: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies, 2019 (FNMI Studies)* document regarding its content. However, the context surrounding the development and implementation of the document is relevant to the narrative. There are two major issues surrounding this new curriculum. First, it is crucial to note that Indigenous partners were not consulted in the development of this curriculum change, leading to the continued silencing of Indigenous peoples on the construction of knowledge about themselves. Second, the courses in the *FNMI Studies* curriculum are not mandatory because students in the Ontario education system are not required to take any of the *FNMI Studies* courses. Furthermore, schools are not required to offer the courses if they do not have the appropriate funds, teachers or resources to do so. In the following sections, I provide further detail to contextualize the development of the *FNMI Studies* document.

#### 4.1.1 Consultation process

As mentioned previously, Indigenous peoples were not consulted in the development of the *FNMI Studies* curriculum. The entire curriculum reform project began under the 2013-2018 Kathleen Wynne Liberal Party government. In 2016, the Wynne government launched the curriculum reform project as a response to the TRC's calls to action to focus on modifying history-related courses. The project was divided into two phases. The first phase focused on modifying the grades 4 to 6 social studies curriculum, the grades 7 to 8 history curriculum, and the grade 10 history curriculum (Kabatay & Johnson, 2019). The Ministry of Education collaborated with residential school survivors, Indigenous educators, Elders and other Indigenous partners throughout the entirety of phase one. Tesa Fiddler, an Indigenous education resource teacher in Thunder Bay, attested to be part of the first phase of the project, along with approximately 50 other Indigenous partners (Johnson, 2018). The revisions focused on "the histories, culture and contributions that Indigenous people have made to Canada" (Johnson, 2018, pp. 6). The first phase of the curriculum reform project was implemented across Ontario starting September 2018 (Johnson, 2017). This Ontario curriculum now "covers Treaties, residential school and Indigenous achievements" in mandatory courses (KAIROS, 2018, p.39).

The second phase of the project was scheduled to take place shortly after the implementation of the first phase. The second phase included revisions of the grades 1 to 3 social studies curriculum, the grade 9 geography curriculum, and the grades 9 to 12 Native Studies curriculum (Kabatay & Johnson, 2019). This was to be an opportunity for Indigenous peoples to teach Canadian youth an accurate portrayal of Canada's history and Indigenous peoples. The last revision of the *Native Studies* curriculum had occurred in 2000. In June 2018, Doug Ford of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario was elected as premier. Following the election, the

Ford government cancelled the second phase of the curriculum reform project (Kabatay & Johnson, 2019). The government justified the cancellation of the second phase as a means to save money. In May 2019, Lisa Thompson, Ontario's education minister announced the release of the *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 to 12: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies, 2019* document. Lisa Thompson also announced that the curriculum had been developed in collaboration with Indigenous partners including Alvin Fiddler, the Grand Chief of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), which represents 49 First Nation communities in Northern Ontario. Lisa Thompson said that she had met with Alvin Fiddler to discuss the curriculum updates. However, Alvin Fiddler says the two of them never had a meeting together (Jung, 2019). He confirmed having been heavily involved in the first phase under the Wynne government but that Indigenous partners were not involved in the creation of the *FNMI Studies* document.

Tesa Fiddler had initially believed in the second phase of the project saying, "It was really about giving teachers the opportunity to explore in more depth the history around Indigenous Peoples, and not just the tragic history" (Johnson, 2018, pp.15). However, after the exclusion of Indigenous voices in the second phase, she considered it to be more of a setback on the path towards reconciliation (Johnson, 2018). For Indigenous peoples, curricula content must come from survivors of the residential school system, Elders, Indigenous educators and other Indigenous partners to engage. In the words of Senator Murray Sinclair, the silencing of Indigenous voices in the preparation of phase two "indicates a total lack of commitment to the whole issue of reconciliation and the importance of it" (Maharaj, 2018, pp.20).

#### 4.1.2 Optional courses

To further contextualize the *FNMI Studies* curriculum, it is important to recognize that the 10 courses are not mandatory. The NAN Grand Chief, Alvin Fiddler, an active partner in improving the Ontario education curriculum, was angered with the announcement that the *FNMI Studies* courses are not mandatory. Fiddler stated:

Learning about the colonial history of this country should not be optional... As long as we make these courses as electives, I think the system will continue to fail our students ... Imagine training the next generation of leaders, whether they're in politics or judges or lawyers or teachers, without this critical piece. It's very troublesome (The Canadian Press, 2019, pp.4).

Colinda Clyne, an Anishinaabe educator, believes this curriculum will only impact a few select students. Just like Alvin Fiddler, she stated that the courses need to be mandatory in order to impact the entire student population (CBC News, 2019). These ten optional courses were released as the Ford government was actively making cuts to education funding which resulted in the removal of many other optional courses (The Canadian Press, 2019).

The previous data regarding the older versions of the *FNMI Studies* courses justify Indigenous leaders' concerns. The 2015 Ministry enrollment data showed that only 2% of students in Ontario took the courses of the *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: Native Studies, 1999* and the *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 11 and 12: Native Studies, 2000*. The low rate of participation is a result of students' interests, students' flexibility to take optional courses, and the schools' consistency in offering these courses (Schaepli, Godlewska & Rose, 2018). Additionally, Godlewska, Moore and Bednasek's (2010) study demonstrated that the majority of the schools' that offered any *Native Studies* courses were located near reserves. Between 1999

and 2005, there were only 39 Ontario schools that offered one or more *Native Studies* courses, although at that time the province had 4,886 publicly funded elementary and secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2008). Thus, an overwhelming majority of schools in Ontario did not offer any of the courses in the *Native Studies* curricula (Godlewska, Moore, & Bednasek, 2010; Schaepli, Godlewska & Rose, 2018).

Furthermore, the decision to make the *FNMI Studies* courses optional impacts textbook production and teacher education (Schaepli, Godlewska & Rose, 2018). Companies who make textbooks are incentivized by the mass production of textbooks for mandatory courses they know will be taught year after year (Lee-Shanok, 2017; Schaepli, Godlewska & Rose, 2018). With optional courses, “there is less incentive for textbook publishers to ensure accuracy and quality” (Schaepli, Godlewska & Rose, 2018, p.492). Making these courses on Indigenous peoples optional also affects the education and training provided to teachers who may teach these courses. Currently, Ontario teacher colleges do not prioritize educating future teachers on topics such as settler colonialism and Indigenous peoples. If these courses were mandatory, teacher colleges in Ontario would be required to offer Indigenous-related compulsory courses to their students. The information about the development and implementation of the document provides a context for the findings presented in the following sections.

#### 4.2 - Reconciliation as an emerging type of ignorance among settlers

A recurring concept throughout the *FNMI Studies* curriculum is reconciliation. In the *FNMI Studies* glossary, reconciliation is defined as “the act of restoring peaceful relations. In Canada, the term is used to refer to the process of restoring and renewing relationships between First Nations, Métis, and Inuit and the rest of Canada” (p.291). In the *FNMI Studies* curriculum,

reconciliation is centered around restoring and renewing relationships between Indigenous peoples and settlers. In the definition, there is a clear association between relationships and reconciliation. A major goal of the *FNMI Studies* curriculum focuses on reconciliation: “[to] build respectful and reciprocal relationships to support reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and Canadian society” (p.6).

Because the support of reconciliation is a primary goal of the entire *FNMI Studies* curriculum, it is a prominent concept throughout the document, as the following excerpts show:

As students increase their awareness of Indigenous belief systems through First Nations, Métis, and Inuit studies courses, they will develop and refine their own thoughts and beliefs on key themes such as stewardship, peace, justice, power and authority, democracy, rights and responsibilities, identity and culture, **reconciliation**, and our relationship with the natural world (p.7).

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities also have a long history with the French and English settler communities and, subsequently, with the government of Canada. This history ties these groups together in ways that are distinct from the connections between other groups in Canada. The Constitution Act, 1982, formally recognizes Aboriginal and treaty rights, which represent one of the essential understandings in the study of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in Canada. This understanding provides the context for a theme that runs throughout the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit studies curriculum – that is, the crucial importance, for all peoples and nations in Canada, of truth, **reconciliation**, and renewed nation-to-nation relationships (p.8).

All subjects in the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit studies curriculum provide multiple opportunities to incorporate aspects of citizenship education, with particular

consideration given to concepts of importance to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, including, but not limited to, reciprocity, **reconciliation**, justice, and truth (p.11).

Students may also draw on these attributes to support and promote healthy, respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals, such as through active participation in groups that promote **reconciliation** and reciprocity (p.49).

Education in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit arts not only deepens students' understanding and appreciation of Indigenous art making, both past and present, but also prepares them to be active participants in bringing about social change by supporting **reconciliation** and promoting mutually respectful relationships (p.64).

D3.1 analyse the methods and results of a variety of government and non-government policies/ initiatives to build educational capacity in partnership with Indigenous communities (e.g., with reference to workplace training and professional learning regarding Indigenous realities; education about renewal and **reconciliation**; government recognition of the forms of knowledge expressed through the languages, values, and actions of Indigenous peoples; healing strategies; the development of educational materials and training opportunities that are relevant and responsive to Indigenous realities and aspirations) (p.261).

Responsibilities and Self-Determination: identify responsibilities associated with the goals of self-determination, sovereignty, self-governance, and **reconciliation**, and analyse strategies and practices that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit individuals and communities have used and are using to pursue these goals (p.278).

These excerpts are some examples of the use of the concept of reconciliation within the *FNMI Studies* curriculum. On the surface, the frequent use of the concept of reconciliation demonstrates Ontario's Ministry of Education's ability to understand and implement the TRC's calls to action and overall objective of obtaining reconciliation. Within the *FNMI Studies* curriculum, every course individually incorporates the concept of reconciliation in at least one of the strands.

In the same excerpts, the concept of relationships is also often present. In the *FNMI Studies* curriculum's conceptualization of reconciliation, the achievement of reconciliation depends on the ability to renew relationships between Indigenous peoples and settlers. The *FNMI Studies* curriculum therefore provides opportunities for students to reflect on the role that mutual understanding and awareness play in relationship renewal. For example, it suggests that teachers ask the following questions to students, to stimulate reflexion and discussion:

Why should all Canadians be educated about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit realities?

How can improving your own and your peers' understanding of Indigenous histories, current realities, and cultural protocols help change **relationships** between Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals in Canada? (p.222).

How do the calls to action expressed in the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada reflect First Nations, Métis, and Inuit aspirations and world views? What are some specific ways in which the report encourages renewed **relationships** based on mutual understanding and respect? (p.228).

The *FNMI Studies* curriculum's underlying theme of relationships is focused on "renewal". As mentioned above, the definition of reconciliation is the restoring and renewing of relationships between Indigenous peoples and settlers and the *FNMI Studies* curriculum uses

reconciliation as synonymous with the renewal of relationships. The concept of reconciliation and renewing relationships are often used in the same sentence, and reconciliation is defined in the glossary as renewing relationships, which leads to a blurring of the differences between the two concepts. Examples of this blurring appear throughout the document, as the relation and differences between the two concepts continually change:

Students realize the vision for the [*FNMI Studies* curriculum] as they...build respectful and reciprocal **relationships** to support **reconciliation** between Indigenous peoples and Canadian society (p.6).

Education in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit arts not only deepens students' understanding and appreciation of Indigenous art making, both past and present, but also prepares them to be active participants in bringing about social change by supporting **reconciliation** and promoting mutually respectful **relationships** (p.64).

What is **reconciliation**, and how does it affect the process of building or changing **relationships** between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples? (p.218).

Overall expectations. By the end of this course, students will... demonstrate an understanding of how building recognition and respect for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit knowledge, world views, and aspirations contributes to truth, **reconciliation**, and renewed nation-to-nation **relationships** (p.240).

As presented in the document, the blended and unclear meanings of reconciliation and renewed relationships gloss over the complexity of reconciliation. It is important to note that Indigenous and ally scholars believe educating the settler population on the historical and contemporary realities of Indigenous peoples will *begin* the process of renewing relationships between Indigenous peoples and settlers (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Angel, 2012; Corntassel,

Chaw-Win-Is & T'lakwadzi, 2009). Green, 2019; Madden, 2019; TRC, 2015). However, contrary to the *FNMI Studies* curriculum, Indigenous and ally scholars agree that renewing relationships through education is not equivalent to reconciliation.

#### 4.2.1 - The risks of equating reconciliation with relationship renewal

The risk of presenting renewed relationships and reconciliation as essentially synonymous is that it leads to an oversimplified conceptualization of reconciliation. Reconciliation is a highly criticized concept that many argue should not be used (Clancy, 2019; Corntassel, 2012; Daigle, 2019; Freeman, 2014; Green, 2019; Koelwyn, 2018). It is much more complex than renewing relationships between Indigenous peoples and settlers through education because the proper conceptualization of reconciliation has a structural component that focuses on eliminating settler colonialism.

A clear example of a structural action – and the complexity – of reconciliation is the return of the right of self-governance and self-determination to Indigenous peoples. Self-government refers to allowing Nations the “room to exercise their autonomy and structure their own solutions” (Joseph, 2018, p.96). Self-government is identified as the foundation of Indigenous Nations and was eliminated by settler colonialism. Self-determination is defined as “the right to decide who your people are” (Joseph, 2018, p.103). Currently, under the Indian Act, the federal government determines who is considered a status-Indian. It also refers to the right to educate, monitor and control their people the way they see fit. For example, the education system, child protection and crime management for Indigenous peoples is still controlled by the government rather than Indigenous peoples. Another example of a structural action of

reconciliation is to return to Indigenous peoples the land that was stolen from them by settlers (Madden, 2019).

These are significant actions that are not included in the conceptualization of reconciliation in the *FNMI Studies* curriculum. In this sense, students in Ontario are being taught an overly simplified version of reconciliation that downplays the actions Indigenous peoples need from settlers to rectify the oppression they live under. In fact, I would argue that it contributes to a specific type of ignorance surrounding what settlers need to do. The specific use of reconciliation in the *FNMI Studies* curriculum is linked to a larger movement that began prior to the TRC, but that accelerated after the unveiling of the TRC report. Reconciliation has become a popular word to use in the context of Indigenous issues and is a buzzword used by individuals, organizations and institutions when discussing Indigenous rights as a way of presenting themselves as allies (Clancy, 2019). This simplifies the complexity of settler colonialism and the effects it continues to have on Indigenous peoples. In the next section, I explore the emphasis in the *FNMI Studies* curriculum on learning about the diversity of Indigenous peoples as a means to achieve reconciliation through relationship renewal.

#### 4.3 - Diversity

##### 4.3.1 - The association between diversity and reconciliation

As mentioned in the research issue, a common issue with prior Ontario curricula was the misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples as a homogeneous group, through the silencing of the diversity that exists among them (Regan, 2010; Schaepli, 2018; Smith, Ng-A-Fook, Berry & Spence, 2011). The new *FNMI Studies* curriculum attempts to address this shortcoming by teachings on the diversity of Indigenous peoples. The curriculum proposes that simply teaching

Canadian youth about the diversity of Indigenous peoples will deconstruct misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples and renew the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers.

It is indeed a common misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples that they are all the same. By expressing the diversity within Indigenous cultures, these stereotypes and myths can be eradicated (Dion, 2004; Dion, 2016). The discussion of diversity can be done through lessons on Indigenous knowledge, values, traditions, languages, and worldviews (Dion, 2016; Furo, 2018; Toulouse, 2016). In the *FNMI Studies* curriculum, there is a focus on deconstructing those stereotypes by representing Indigenous peoples as diverse. The following excerpts show how the notion of diversity is included throughout the curriculum:

The First Nations, Métis, and Inuit studies curriculum introduces students to the rich **diversity** of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit histories, cultures, perspectives, and contributions, and to the critical importance of Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing in a contemporary global context (p.6).

Indigenous peoples and cultures have **diverse** and distinct ways of life, beliefs, values, languages, and traditions (p.9).

A3.3 analyse and compare the ways in which the **diversity** of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit lives, knowledge, cultures, and world views is represented or under-represented in various contemporary and historical text forms (p.121).

The course expectations provide numerous opportunities for students to break through stereotypes to learn how the **diverse** beliefs, values, and traditions of Indigenous peoples are reflected in the community (p.48).

Students realize the vision for the [*FNMI Studies* curriculum] as they...think critically and creatively about issues of concern to Indigenous peoples and apply the essential

understandings and key concepts of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit studies to real-world inquiries about **diversity**, nation-to-nation relationship building, the environment, social justice, and cultural identity (p.6).

In the *FNMI Studies* curriculum, the diversity of Indigenous peoples is taught through three concept areas which are identity, relationships, and self-determination.

While the many Indigenous nations in Canada are **diverse** in their governance practices, traditions, protocols, ceremonies, dances, songs, rites of passage, creation stories, languages, and other experiences, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit world views have certain constant elements in common. In this document, we refer to these constants as “essential understandings” in the study of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in Canada. They provide a lens through which to develop a deeper appreciation of **identity, relationships, and self-determination**, three concept areas that are central to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit studies (p.8).

These three concept areas are represented as knowledge Ontario students must learn in order to be able to renew the relationship with Indigenous peoples and the curriculum document continuously connects reconciliation with learning about the three concept areas. In the *FNMI Studies* curriculum introduction, learning about identity, relationships and self-determination is represented as a means to achieve reconciliation:

This understanding [of the essential understandings] provides the context for a theme that runs throughout the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit studies curriculum – that is, the crucial importance, for all peoples and nations in Canada, of truth, reconciliation, and renewed nation-to-nation relationships (p.8).

Learning about the diversity of identity, relationships and self-determination is compared to taking action towards reconciliation because, it is assumed that settlers will then be better educated on Indigenous peoples and their experiences. The concept area of identity focuses on the diversity of cultural identity of Indigenous peoples: “Indigenous peoples and cultures have diverse and distinct ways of life, beliefs, values, languages, and traditions” (p.9). The concept area of relationships focuses on the diversity and similarities among Indigenous peoples and their relationships with family, the spiritual world, the land, and the interconnectedness of all living things. The concept area of self-determination focuses on how Indigenous peoples have distinctive Aboriginal and treaty rights. By learning about these three concepts, Ontario students are taught they will contribute to reconciliation.

#### 4.3.2 - The risk of the associating diversity and reconciliation

Although Indigenous and ally scholars believe learning about the diversity of Indigenous peoples will help debunk commonly held stereotypes and is crucial to begin the process of decolonizing Canada, it is not the only and final action that needs to occur (Dion, 2004; Dion, 2016; Furo, 2018; Toulouse, 2016). Despite this, one of the core assumptions throughout the *FNMI Studies* curriculum is that if settlers learn about the diversity of Indigenous peoples, this knowledge will renew the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers, which, as mentioned above, is how the curriculum suggests reconciliation will be achieved. The *FNMI Studies* curriculum document therefore associates being educated with renewing relationships, meaning if settlers learn more about Indigenous peoples, this will result in reconciliation.

In my view, this is a misrepresentation and an oversimplification of reconciliation that contributes to the ignorance among Canadians regarding how difficult and complex it is to

actually achieve reconciliation. In essence, the oversimplification eliminates settler colonialism from the entire conceptualization of reconciliation. While many Indigenous and ally scholars agree on the importance of education and awareness, they also affirm that this will not suffice in the fight to decolonize Canada. Decolonization is defined as “a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power” (Iseke-Barnes, 2008, p.123). In its simple form, decolonization is the undoing of colonialism, specifically settler colonialism (Schaepli, 2018). Decolonization and reconciliation work hand-in-hand. If a settler colonial society is not decolonized, reconciliation cannot be achieved because settler colonialism continues to oppress Indigenous peoples. If settlers learn about the diversity of Indigenous peoples, it will help rebuild relationships between Indigenous peoples and settlers, but it will not achieve reconciliation.

When becoming educated on the diversity of Indigenous peoples is portrayed as a means of achieving reconciliation, it eliminates the discussion surrounding the colonial structures embedded into Ontario’s society that must be eradicated to attain reconciliation. There is no mention of returning the land to Indigenous peoples that settlers stole. The *FNMI Studies* curriculum simply associates the concept of reconciliation to the renewed relationships that will occur specifically when settlers learn about the diversity of Indigenous peoples. The risk of this oversimplification is that it silences the complexity of settler colonialism and what needs to be done to eradicate it. In the following section, I will elaborate on the complex definition of reconciliation that should be included in the curriculum.

#### 4.4 – The critiques of reconciliation and their omission from the curriculum

The *FNMI Studies* curriculum does not include critiques of the concept of reconciliation. By excluding differing perspectives on the concept of reconciliation, students are only being taught one version of it. This limited representation of the concept contributes to the type of ignorance surrounding reconciliation because the settler population is being taught that reconciliation only has positive attributes and is an objective desired by all Canadians, both Indigenous peoples and settlers.

Perhaps to the surprise of many settlers, reconciliation is a highly criticized concept among Indigenous and ally scholars. Some Indigenous and ally scholars do not even support the use of the word reconciliation (Clancy, 2019; Corntassel, 2012; Daigle, 2019; Freeman, 2014; Green, 2019; Koelwyn, 2018). As the TRC report outlined, across all the Indigenous cultures and languages of people they interviewed, the only culture that has a word for reconciliation is that of the settlers. Some Indigenous languages could describe the concept of reconciliation, but there were no Indigenous languages that had a direct translation for the word (TRC, 2015). Reconciliation has been critiqued for “supporting a top-down, government defined and controlled agenda” (Freeman, 2014, p.213). The prefix ‘re’ insinuates Indigenous peoples and settlers have previously had a conciliatory relationship. The relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers has always been an asymmetrical power relationship. Indigenous peoples do not have a responsibility to renew an asymmetrical relationship in which settlers have always had more power over them.

Other Indigenous and ally scholars justify the use of the word reconciliation only if it is defined on an individual and structural level (Madden, 2019). At the individual level, this can resemble renewing relationships and becoming educated on Indigenous peoples’ experiences. At

the collective level, this must be done through widespread systemic changes and substantive restitution. While relationship building must occur between Indigenous peoples and settlers, it must come after substantive restitution (Alfred & Cornthassel, 2005; Cornthassel, Chaw-Win-Is & T'lakwadzi, 2009; Madden, 2019). Madden (2019) states “substantive restitution may involve homeland return and permanent sovereignty over traditional territories, material/monetary reparations, and/or justice for survivors” (p.301). Substantive restitution involves concrete action and change, whereas the Canadian government continues to especially engage in symbolic gestures such as formal apologies. Substantive restitution guarantees a concrete change will be made, while a symbolic gesture resembles acknowledgments and promises. The term reconciliation “should come only after justice has been done - after the Indian Act has been abolished, reparations made, land and resources returned, and political and economic nation-to-nation relationship restored” (Freeman, 2014, p.214). The conceptualization of “reconciliation often fail[s] to acknowledge that the seizure of land, resources and power must be concretely addressed in order for reconciliation efforts to succeed” (Green, 2019, p.8).

Moreover, reconciliation should not only focus on renewing the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers but the relationship all people have with the land (Madden, 2019). Reconciliation is about healing trauma endured by Indigenous peoples and constructing a new relationship between Indigenous peoples, settlers, and the land through societal and structural changes. “Land dispossession, disputes, and devastation continue to be at the heart of Indigenous settler relations in Canada” (Madden, 2019, p.296), which is why land is central to reconciliation. To achieve reconciliation, the Canadian government and the TRC rely heavily on settler colonial structures and institutions to educate the population of Indigenous peoples' lived experiences. Indigenous and ally scholars argue that Canada should be “looking to Indigenous

law, leadership, and governance for traditional learning and practical guidance” (Madden, 2019, p.296) to teach settlers what our next actions should be.

Likewise, Truth Commissions such as the TRC have been critiqued by Indigenous and ally scholars. They have been critiqued for assuming survivors will voluntarily participate in the process (Angel, 2012). By sharing their testimony, the truth telling process can retraumatize the survivors by making them relive the traumatic experience (Hayner, 2010). It may also occur that the public places blame on the survivors, which can further traumatize the survivors (Fast & Drouin-Gagné, 2019). Furthermore, this process tends to focus on loss and wrongdoings rather than on the resilience of Indigenous peoples (Nagy, 2013). Finally, the truth telling process and Truth Commissions place a strong emphasis on the benefits of language in the healing and justice process. This may reduce the importance of other forms of healing such as Indigenous healing rituals.

Reconciliation, through the perspective of the TRC, focuses on the residential school system, tying the concept to fixing a past colonial wrongdoing (Madden, 2019). Corntassel (2012) refers to the compartmentalization of reconciliation as a major critique of the concept. Compartmentalization refers to how reconciliation can be isolated to colonial injustices that occurred in the era of the residential school system. In this perspective, Indigenous and ally scholars have accused the Canadian government and the TRC of representing colonialism only as a historical problem in Canada. Such a view of reconciliation “is isolated and disconnected from ongoing injustices committed by the Canadian government centred on land dispossession and diminishing self-determination” (Corntassel, 2012, p.301).

These Indigenous perspectives and critiques have been excluded from the curriculum to maintain a flawless positive image of reconciliation. Such a misrepresentation of reconciliation

contributes to an ignorant portrayal of reconciliation, and of what Indigenous peoples actually need from settlers. As such, it continues to contribute to the silencing of Indigenous voices and perspectives and teaches students in Ontario a very specific and simplified version of reconciliation that glosses over the complexity of settler colonialism and ignores what Indigenous peoples actually need from settlers.

The *FNMI Studies* curriculum views reconciliation through the same perspective as the TRC and associates the restoring and renewing of relationships between Indigenous peoples and the rest of Canada with reconciliation. To the TRC, reconciliation “is fundamentally about establishing and maintaining respectful and healthy Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal relationships in Canada” (Madden, 2019, p.291). The exclusion of the critiques described above therefore lead to an understanding of reconciliation through a settler’s perspective, oversimplifies the concept and disassociates it from settler colonialism.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

## 5.1 – Reconciliation as a new type of ignorance

As I have shown in the previous chapter, reconciliation is a prevalent concept in the *FNMI Studies* curriculum. As demonstrated in the findings, the definition of reconciliation is reduced to the renewal of relationships between Indigenous peoples and settlers through education. This simplified definition in turn eliminates the presence of settler colonialism in contemporary society and excludes critiques of reconciliation. In essence, Ontario students are being taught a simplified version of reconciliation that limits their understanding of the concept. I view this limited understanding of reconciliation as the creation of a new type of ignorance among settlers. Reconciliation has become a buzzword used to demonstrate an allegiance to Indigenous rights, but this buzzword is rarely appropriately defined (Clancy, 2019).

Based on Wolfe's (2006) logic of elimination, I perceive this simplified view of reconciliation as a new type of ignorance that is being used as a tool to eliminate settler colonialism. Wolfe (2006) understood settler colonialism as needing to eliminate Indigenous peoples through any means necessary, from physical violence to assimilation. Another important aspect of Wolfe's (2006) logic of elimination is the preservation of the invisibility and ignorance of settler colonialism's existence in order for it to remain powerful (Cook, 2018a). As discussed in the conceptual framework section, ignorance is a strategic, produced type of knowledge; it is used politically by the dominant group to maintain power (Schaepli & Godlewska, 2014). The *FNMI Studies* curriculum represents reconciliation in the following manner: as settlers becoming educated on Indigenous peoples there will be renewed relationships between Indigenous peoples and settlers. There is no discussion of the structural settler colonial aspects of reconciliation, which includes discussions surrounding land, self-determination, self-governance and settler colonial policies. Additionally, critiques and Indigenous and ally scholar perspectives of

reconciliation are not included in the curriculum. Because of this simplification of the concept and the exclusion of its structural aspects and critiques, I would argue that the *FNMI Studies* curriculum contributes to the ignorance needed to maintain settler colonial power; ultimately, and contrary to its stated intentions, the curriculum can be seen as a strategy used to maintain the invisibility and power of settler colonialism (Kizuk, 2020; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013).

Daigle (2019) compares reconciliation “to a spectacle of settler sorrow coupled with a state-led production of good-feeling reconciliation” (p.2). Building off Daigle’s (2019) concept of the spectacle of reconciliation, I consider reconciliation as a type of ignorance. For Daigle (2019), Canada is acting as if “they have entered a new era of reconciliation that is restoring ethical and responsible relations with Indigenous peoples” (p.4). The spectacle of reconciliation is “a public, large-scale and visually striking performance of Indigenous suffering and trauma alongside white settler mourning and recognition” (p.4). Reconciliation is critiqued for being a performance of recognition and remorse and for its association with the celebration of multiculturalism. Although learning about cultural diversity in Canada can often resemble a celebration of Canada’s willingness to accept and respect so many cultures in one country, the multiculturalism lens tends to focus on these cultures in terms of traditions, practices and rituals, and not on the oppression of the group. In this sense, the multicultural approach may “undermine the distinct cultures and histories of Indigenous peoples amidst conversations about cultural and racial diversity” (Clancy, 2019, p.27). Reconciliation and celebrating multiculturalism are methods used to eliminate settler colonialism by creating a renewed society in which Indigenous peoples and settlers cohabit respectfully (Kizuk, 2020; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013).

## 5.2 – Recommendations for the curriculum development process

While the *FNMI Studies* curriculum has many positive aspects, the context of the development of the curriculum cannot be ignored. As mentioned in the opening sections of the analysis, the development process of the *FNMI Studies* curriculum was not undertaken with the collaboration of Indigenous peoples (Johnson, 2017; Johnson, 2018; Kabatay & Johnson, 2019). Indigenous partners were consulted in the initial phase of the curriculum reform project under Kathleen Wynne's Liberal Party government but, in 2018, the Doug Ford Progressive Conservative Party government cancelled the collaborative writing sessions between the Indigenous partners and the Ministry of Education of Ontario (Johnson, 2017; Johnson, 2018; Kabatay & Johnson, 2019). Indigenous voices were therefore silenced in a curriculum designed for Indigenous peoples to tell the stories of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada. In addition, the development of the *FNMI Studies* curriculum was designed as being comprised of optional courses only. As demonstrated by the previous *Native Studies* curricula, these optional courses are not widely offered and only reach approximately 2% of Ontario's student population (Godlewska, Moore, & Bednasek, 2010).

Settler colonialism is the driving force attempting to silence Indigenous peoples, and the exclusion of Indigenous peoples in the curriculum development process is an act of this settler colonialism. To combat the ignorance among settlers regarding Indigenous peoples and their experiences, settlers need to be educated on Indigenous peoples by Indigenous peoples, not settlers themselves. In this perspective, I propose the curriculum development process must be led by Indigenous peoples and organizations; it needs to be more about giving a voice to Indigenous peoples and allowing them the opportunity to teach settlers what they believe settlers should learn. This is a question of returning power to Indigenous peoples to tell their stories. As

Dion (2004) argues, “It was and continues to be the violence of colonization that created conditions wherein Aboriginal people lost the power to control the ways in which dominant society constructs and interprets images of Aboriginal people” (p.65). Giving a platform to Indigenous voices and their truths throughout the school curricula is a way to produce counter-narratives that empower Indigenous peoples, knowledge and traditions while challenging the dominant discourse in the education system (Iseke-Barnes, 2002; Nakata, Nakata, Keech & Bolt, 2012; Regan, 2010).

Furthermore, the inclusion of Indigenous voices in the curriculum will allow Indigenous peoples to include critiques of commonly praised concepts such as reconciliation. The current *FNMI Studies* curriculum strongly emphasizes that students need to develop critical analysis skills to analyze political and social problems from multiple perspectives. This includes a historical inquiry process that supports students to investigate historical events, gather and analyse historical information, and make informed opinions regarding the historical event. However, without the perspectives and critiques from Indigenous peoples on concepts such as reconciliation, students do not receive all the information necessary to develop informed points of view and to make informed decisions.

There are multiple benefits of integrating Indigenous perspectives in curricula, such as: “1) increased intercultural understanding, 2) respect and appreciation for Indigenous cultures, 3) awareness of past and present injustices to Indigenous peoples in Canada, and 4) a broadened knowledge base that develops the ability from problem-solving and higher-order thinking skills” (Furo, 2018, p.39). However, these benefits are contingent on collaborating with Indigenous partners as Dion’s (2014) study shows. This study was based on *The Listening Stone Project* in which the “purpose of the research and evaluation was to learn from the inquiry how educators,

policy makers, and community members contribute to FNMI student well-being and achievement in provincially funded schools” (Dion, 2014, p.4). The study demonstrated the importance and successes of collaborating with Indigenous educators to build resources for the education system. Additionally, collaboration with Indigenous educators has a positive impact on the well-being of Indigenous youth and leads to increased participation, increased positive attitudes towards school and increased knowledge (Dion, 2014). The inclusion of Indigenous cultures in the school curricula also has benefits for the well-being of Indigenous students. Milne (2017) discusses multiple studies showing “[s]chooling environments that include Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, languages, traditions, and cultures are considered to positively influence the academic performance and outcomes of Indigenous students” (p.3). By including Indigenous cultures and teachings throughout all subject matters in the curricula, it increases the attachment and comfort level of Indigenous students (Milne, 2017). Finally, recent studies show that Indigenous peoples see the education system as way to build hope for the future of their youth and communities and that positive steps to integrate Indigenous perspectives in curricula contribute to this sense of hope (Furo, 2018).

### 5.3 – Future research

This study analysed the content of the *FNMI Studies* curriculum through a conceptual framework of ignorance. The findings cannot be generalized to all classrooms because the curriculum is designed to allow teachers flexibility in constructing their lesson plans, which can lead to a wide variability throughout Ontario classrooms regarding the emerging type of ignorance associated with reconciliation. As a future step, it would be interesting to research how settler teachers create their lesson plans to teach Indigenous-related course content. This would

push the findings of this study further by observing if and how, concretely, a new type of ignorance surrounding reconciliation is being taught in Ontario classrooms. This future research could also examine if the racist and discriminatory biases or prejudices of teachers are contributing factors in the fabrication of ignorance regarding Indigenous peoples. Future action-oriented research could also be conducted amongst Indigenous and ally educators, focusing on creating a lesson plan handbook for teachers teaching the *FNMI Studies* courses. Such a handbook could help teachers counter ignorance in their teachings and in the classroom, for example by promoting Indigenous-approved lesson plans, class activities, and projects. Seeing as there is no training for teachers in Ontario regarding Indigenous content, a collaborative action research project focused on creating a handbook may lead to the development of a useful teaching tool.

#### 5.4 – This project’s relevance to social work

This research paper sheds light on the ignorance present amongst settlers regarding Indigenous peoples and their experiences. Moreover, it shows that a new type of ignorance is emerging around the concept of reconciliation among settlers, in which settlers have an oversimplified understanding of reconciliation that is disconnected from settler colonialism and critiques. Rather than focusing on educating the settler population on Indigenous peoples and their experiences, the *FNMI Studies* curriculum focuses on reconciliation. In this sense, the education system continues to disseminate information about Indigenous peoples in a way that contributes to ignorance of what they need from settlers. To truly contribute to the advancement of Ontario, the *FNMI Studies* curriculum reform must be led by Indigenous peoples to properly educate the settler population on the historical and contemporary realities of Indigenous peoples.

This aspiration is critical to the discipline of social work for the simple reason that ignorant settler social workers can be harmful to their Indigenous colleagues and clients. All people have biases, prejudices as well as social identities that inform their perspectives, beliefs and values. If settler social workers remain ignorant to the realities of Indigenous peoples, they will continue to reproduce settler dominance over Indigenous peoples by contributing to the legacy of settler colonialism.

Social work is a discipline that has long been associated with settler colonialism due to the role of social workers in placing Indigenous children “in care”. Because of this, Indigenous youth have long been overrepresented in the child protection system. During the existence of the residential school system and the Sixties Scoop, social workers were authority figures who took Indigenous children away from their families and communities. Today, social workers continue to take Indigenous children from their families in disproportionate numbers, resulting in their overrepresentation in the child protection system (Blackstock, 2015). In 2016, 52.2% of children aged 0 to 14 in foster care were Indigenous, while that population of Indigenous youth only represented 7.7% of the Canadian population (First Nations Child and Family Services, 2020). This overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in child protection services “is driven by neglect fueled by poverty, poor housing and substance misuse linked to the multi-generational impacts of residential schools” (Blackstock, 2015, p.8). If social workers were properly educated on the realities of Indigenous peoples, it would help them understand that Indigenous peoples may be very reticent to engage with social workers (Milne, 2016). Social workers would also be aware of the contributing roles of settler colonialism and intergenerational trauma in the contemporary social problems in the Indigenous population. From this point of view, an Indigenous-led

curriculum reform would benefit Indigenous peoples receiving and providing social services and the settlers who provide social services.

## CONCLUSION

As demonstrated in this research, the *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 to 12: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies, 2019* represents reconciliation as oversimplified, disassociated from settler colonialism, and viewed solely through a settler perspective. This conceptualization of reconciliation can be associated with a new emerging type of ignorance among settlers. Although the curriculum reform was meant to allow Indigenous peoples to develop a curriculum designed to educate Canadian settlers on their historical and contemporary realities, Indigenous peoples were actually excluded from the curriculum development process, and all the courses were made optional. The Ontario Ministry of Education also chose to promote reconciliation and progress through a narrowly focused view of the concept of reconciliation. As such, the *FNMI Studies* curriculum portrays the attainment of reconciliation through settlers becoming educated on the diversity of Indigenous peoples and their cultures. According to the curriculum, this new awareness should in turn result in renewed relationships between Indigenous peoples and settlers. Unfortunately, the *FNMI Studies* curriculum does not incorporate the structural requirements of reconciliation, which is based on the deconstruction of settler colonialism. The *FNMI Studies* curriculum also fails to incorporate critiques of reconciliation, which would better equip Ontario students to understand what Indigenous peoples require from the settler population. Based on Wolfe's (2006) logic of elimination, this new emerging type of ignorance can be seen as a tool fabricated to eliminate from view the fact that settler colonialism is maintained in contemporary society.

In order to eliminate the perpetuation of ignorance through Ontario's curricula, settlers should no longer have the right to tell the stories of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples must

be the main voices creating the content because hearing their voices will allow for diverse perspectives and critiques on settler-related practices and concepts.

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