

## BUILDING FROM WITHIN: ONE PROVINCES PUSH TO INCREASE THE REPRESENTATION OF INDIGENOUS TEACHERS IN THE K-12 SCHOOL SYSTEM

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**ABSTRACT.** This article critically examines the initiatives that the province of Manitoba has implemented to increase the representation of Indigenous educators in its school systems. The article highlights the policy directives in place to ensure that Indigenous people a historically underrepresented group are included in more meaningful numbers. We use policy analysis to explore policies that school division boards and post-secondary institutions have implemented to indigenize the White normativity in the teaching profession. For a framework, we explore tribal critical race theory and its potential to confront continuing colonization attempts within school systems and the potential of altering those structures to benefit Indigenous students and teachers.

**Keywords.** Indigenous Teachers, Non-Indigenous Allies, Tribal Critical Race Theory, Policy Analysis, Aboriginal Teacher Education Programming

### 1. POSITIONALITY STATEMENTS

#### Lucas's Story

My name is Lucas Skelton. I identify as a White male English speaker and fourth-generation Canadian. I have worked in education since 2008, when I graduated from the University of Manitoba with a Bachelor of Education. I have taught primarily in adult education, including several classes in teaching English as an Additional Language (EAL) to adult immigrants and refugees. I returned to the University of Manitoba to complete a Masters in 2012 and have been pursuing a PhD in education since 2018. At the post-secondary level, I have taught courses in education and academic writing, including courses designated for Indigenous learners and pre-service teacher candidates. As a result of working as a university instructor, I have become cognizant of the privilege that I hold. White settlers reap several benefits from structures that marginalize Indigenous people, including the ongoing maintenance of White solidarity and the perpetuation of systemic racism (Combs, 2019; DiAngelo, 2018). As a White educator, I do not have to

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grapple with the challenges that face Indigenous teachers, including discrimination in the hiring process and cultural isolation inside the school system (Dunham & Lawford-Smith, 2017; Tessaro et al., 2021). These are but a modest sampling of the privileges that White settler educators must be cognizant of in the field of education. White pre-service teachers often have an inadequate understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems, racial identity, and anti-racist practices (Macdonald et al., 2023), so becoming aware of these issues is imperative in building confidence among White teachers to implement these practices successfully.

While I am writing an article about the importance of Indigenous representation in the teaching staff, I must acknowledge the lack of Indigenous-infused epistemologies and ontology in my educational background. Throughout my K-12 schooling and my Bachelor's of Education training, I received very little education on Indigenous knowledge systems. My education was infused largely by Eurocentric history and the misrepresentation of Indigenous people (Madden, 2014). For example, I recall school textbooks that depicted Indigenous people as diverse but not as the original inhabitants of Canada, who had their lands stolen from them by colonizers. Harmful narratives tend to depict Indigenous people as examples of diversity and equate them to newcomer groups. This multicultural framework is problematic because it fails to acknowledge the deeply troubled history between colonizers and Indigenous people (Lawrence & Dua, 2005; St. Denis, 2011). As an educator working in the post-secondary system, I have a key role in facilitating the aims of reconciliation in my classroom, including working toward achieving TRC calls 62 and 63.<sup>1</sup> White educators cannot take on the role of saviours but must work in harmony with Indigenous educators (Boulding, 2001); that is crucial to advancing reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in educational contexts.

### **Ella's Story**

My name is Ella Flett-McMahon. I am Anishinaabe and come from Treaty 3 territory. My father is from Couchiching First Nation, and my mother is from Sandy Bay First Nation. I am currently enrolled in the University of Winnipeg in a teacher preparatory program. As an Indigenous woman, my positionality is deeply rooted in the rich cultural heritage and lived experiences of my community. Growing up, I experienced both the beauty of my traditions and the challenges of systemic barriers. My early educational experiences were in predominantly white spaces because I attended school in an upper-middle class neighbourhood with primarily white residents. I did not have many Indigenous teachers or classmates, and I often felt like the odd one out, desperate to fit in. I did not learn about

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<sup>1</sup>Calls 62 and 63 involve education and reconciliation (TRC, 2015a). Call 62 is for the creation of an age-appropriate residential schooling curriculum, funding post-secondary institutions to educate teaching staff on Indigenous knowledge systems, and funding Indigenous schools to use Indigenous pedagogy in classrooms. Call 63 involves the implementation of an Indigenous curriculum in the K-12 school system, sharing best practices to incorporate Indigenous teachings and building intercultural understanding and mutual respect among students (TRC, 2015a)

my peoples true history in school, and much of my knowledge on the topic was outsourced. My heritage was something I hid for fear of being ostracized, which I now recognize as a form of privilege, as the ability to conceal aspects of ones identity is not an option afforded to everyone (Downey, 2018). The challenges that I have faced strengthened my resolve to become an educator who can serve as a role model and advocate for Indigenous students. I did not have an Indigenous role model in school, so I want to become the teacher I wished to have when I was younger. The successes that I have experienced thus far, such as working in classrooms as a student teacher and witnessing the positive impact that I can have on students, have been beyond rewarding and affirming.

The importance of Indigenous teacher representation resonates deeply with me because it means providing students with role models who reflect their identities and experiences. As an Indigenous educator, I have an opportunity to integrate Indigenous perspectives, histories, and ways of knowing into the curriculum, creating a more inclusive and respectful learning environment. Nearly 30 years ago, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, one of Canadas most comprehensive studies on Indigenous people, imagined rebuilding post-colonial systems to be more inclusive and equitable for Indigenous learners and educators (Battiste, 2017). This goal remains largely aspirational and deeply relevant today. As an Indigenous educator, I can address injustices and foster a sense of pride and belonging among Indigenous students. Indigenous learners can succeed and graduate in higher numbers by seeing themselves in their learning and feeling safe and welcome in schools (Louie & Prince, 2023). I am committed to empowering the next generation of Indigenous youth, promoting understanding and respect, and keeping our traditions, languages, and cultures alive in the education system. Reconciliation is not just a concept for me; it is a guiding principle in my life.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

This article explores the policies and initiatives that have been implemented in the province of Manitoba to increase the representation of Indigenous students in the K-12 teaching profession. Considerations are given to policies from teacher education institutions and school divisions. The implications of these policy directives and initiatives are examined in terms of how a historically underrepresented group, indigenous peoples, can gain a foothold in the K-12 school system. A representative sample of Indigenous teachers serves many purposes, including the wealth of knowledge they bring to the teaching profession (McDevitt, 2021), the crucial mentorship they can provide to Indigenous youth (Santoro et al., 2011; Villegas et al., 2012), and dispelling the harmful rhetoric that BIPOC individuals cannot assume teaching positions (Nevarez et al., 2019). The discussion also focuses on how post-secondary institutions can best support Indigenous student teachers, enabling them to graduate in greater numbers to match the proportion of Indigenous students in the provinces student body demographics. The positioning of each author, one a White settler, male university instructor, and the other an Indigenous female pre-service teacher candidate, supplements the analysis. The researchers cannot separate themselves from the social

processes under investigation and the social world in which they live; therefore, sharing their positionality helps identify underlying assumptions and perspectives regarding increasing the representation of Indigenous teachers (Holmes, 2020). Non-Indigenous educators must work in harmony with Indigenous educators to ensure calls 62 and 63 from the 94 calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) are fulfilled.

The concluding portion of the article presents specific, research-informed recommendations on how post-secondary institutions and school boards can increase the inclusion of Indigenous teachers in the school system and support them throughout their careers. The final section also provides a glimpse into what the future holds for Indigenous individuals who aspire to enter the teaching profession. By advocating for an increase in Indigenous teacher representation, this article can serve as a call to action to de-homogenize the White settler teaching body, help achieve the aims of reconciliation, and best support Indigenous pre-service teacher candidates. Increasing the number of Indigenous teachers is necessary to disrupt Eurocentric modes of teaching and learning and transfer power back to Indigenous people. However, for this to be achieved, Indigenous teachers need access to non-European methods and pedagogies.

**2.1. Rationale and Context.** Manitoba was chosen as the province to profile because it has a sizeable portion of Indigenous people. The 2021 census reported that 237,190 Indigenous people reside in the province, ranking Manitoba fourth among the provinces in total number of Indigenous people but first based on population per capita at roughly 18% (Cram, 2022). Winnipeg also has a large population of Indigenous people; an estimated 90,990 Indigenous people lived there in 2021, which was 12.4% of the city's population. Of Winnipeg's Indigenous population, 44.3% identify as First Nations, 52.7% as Metis, and 0.5% as Inuit (Statistics Canada, 2021). Indigenous students also comprise a significant proportion of the student body in Manitoba schools. The Winnipeg School Division, the province's largest, enrolls roughly 8,400 students who identify as Indigenous, which is approximately 27% of the division's student population (Macintosh, 2022; Winnipeg School Division, 2019). In the Seven Oaks School Division, self-identified Indigenous learners comprised 25% of the student body population based on 2018/2019 demographics (Seven Oaks School Division, 2019).

While Indigenous learners comprise a significant proportion of the student body demographics in Manitoba, the number of Indigenous teachers does not reflect the indigeneity of the student population (Janzen & Cranston, 2016; Sulz et al., 2023). According to the Winnipeg Indigenous Executive Circle (WIEC),<sup>2</sup> approximately 19% of the student body in Winnipeg's six school divisions identify

<sup>2</sup>The Winnipeg Indigenous Executive Circle (WIEC) is a collaboration created in 2015 to improve the delivery of services and systems for Indigenous people in the city. The organization comprises executive directors of Indigenous organizations in Winnipeg (WIEC, 2023). The WIEC prioritizes policy development regarding education, employment, well-being, and access to housing for Indigenous people. The WIEC's 2023 State of Equity in Education (2023) lays out equity-based education policies to improve the outcomes of Indigenous students. Data is gathered from surveys sent to the provincial government, school divisions, and teacher training

as Indigenous. Winnipeg School Division data indicates that roughly 9% of its teaching staff identifies as Indigenous, which pales in comparison to the 26% of the student body that identifies as Indigenous (WIEC, 2023). Statistics from other divisions also reveal a considerable lack of representation. St. James-Assiniboia has a 14% gap between the proportion of Indigenous students and teachers, while Louis Riel School Division reports a 10% difference between Indigenous teachers and learners, and River East Transcona has a 9% divide (Macintosh, 2024). The WIEC states that Manitoba is approximately 900 Indigenous teachers short of the number that would parallel the Indigenous composition of the student body. More strikingly, that number has gone up: the WIEC indicated that the province was short roughly 600 to 700 Indigenous teachers in 2020 (Macintosh, 2024). It could take nearly 25 years to bridge the gap and make the Indigenous teaching body in Manitoba reflective of the provinces Indigenous population (WIEC, 2023).

The WIEC also indicates that an insufficient number of Indigenous teachers are graduating from the provinces two largest post-secondary institutions—the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg. Data shows that both universities have been graduating an annual average of 35 Indigenous teacher candidates for the past two decades (WIEC, 2023). The University of Manitoba typically graduates 170 Bachelor of Education students per year, so the current graduation rate of Indigenous teacher candidates is insufficient (WIEC, 2023). The data indicates that much work needs to be done in Manitoba to rectify the under-representation of Indigenous teachers.

The University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg, however, have done credible work in the past decade to bridge the divide between the number of Indigenous students and teachers. In 2016, Manitoba's teaching body lacked a sufficient representation of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) people. Estimates indicated that approximately 70% of Manitoba's teachers at the time were White females, with the majority of those White female teachers employed in elementary schools (Martin, 2016). To combat the lack of racial diversity in the provincial teaching body, the University of Manitoba overhauled its Bachelor of Education admission protocols in 2017 to increase the diversity of its applicants, including an increase in Indigenous applicants (Martin, 2016). The University of Winnipeg has also implemented programming to increase the representation of Indigenous teachers. The university has launched several programs that cater to Indigenous people interested in pursuing a teaching career, including the Winnipeg Education Centre (WEC), the Community-based Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (CATEP), and Build from Within (BFW). This article provides an overview of the various policies and programs that Manitoba's universities have implemented, including the successes experienced and the challenges encountered.

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institutions to address the organizations calls to action, including a call to increase Indigenous teacher representation.

### 3. WORKING IN HARMONY

Collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers is essential for cultivating an inclusive and equitable educational environment. This partnership enriches the curriculum with diverse perspectives and fosters a deeper understanding of Indigenous histories, cultures, and worldviews. The late Murray Sinclair, former chair of the TRC, noted that education is what got us into this mess, but education is the key to reconciliation (CBC News, 2015). The marginalization and eradication of Indigenous knowledge systems, cultures, and practices took place through government policies, such as the Indian Act and the residential school system-injustices that assimilated Indigenous children and suppressed their identities. This legacy of suppressing Indigenous cultural identities highlights the importance of prioritizing Indigenous content and perspectives in school curricula to promote understanding and reconciliation (TRC, 2015b). By working collaboratively, Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators can address curriculum gaps, challenge stereotypes, and create learning experiences that integrate and honour Indigenous knowledge systems, rather than relegating them to the periphery (Schnellert et al., 2022). Battiste (2017) argues that the inclusion of Indigenous communities, Elders, and knowledge keepers can enhance this pedagogical approach. A collaborative approach benefits Indigenous students by providing culturally relevant and respectful education and helps all students develop a greater appreciation for diversity and reconciliation.

Educators with different backgrounds share unique perspectives and pedagogical approaches. This enhances the educational experience for students and teachers alike and promotes a more empathetic and comprehensive understanding of Indigenous issues (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). The lived experiences of educators can inform either their understanding or their ignorance. This means teachers from Indigenous or non-Indigenous communities will bring complexity and nuance to their understandings and how they share information with learners. Robust relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers are a powerful mechanism for advancing reconciliation and respect within the school system (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). This kind of collaboration models effective communication and cooperation, demonstrating to students the value of working across cultural boundaries. Reconciliation requires individuals to prioritize relationships in ways that create equitable and positive relations as a starting point (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). These relationships enrich the educational environment and embody the principles of reconciliation in everyday teaching.

### 4. THE IMPORTANCE OF A REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLING OF INDIGENOUS TEACHERS

Indigenous educators play critical roles in the development and education of all learners. Previous studies have focused on how more racialized and Indigenous teachers are needed to decrease the gap between the number of diverse students and teachers and the importance of mitigating the systemic marginalization perpetrated against teachers from BIPOC backgrounds (Ryan et al., 2009; Schmidt,

2010). In Manitoba, although Indigenous students represent 27% of the student body in the provinces largest school division, fewer than 10% of teachers identify as Indigenous (Macintosh, 2022). A more significant number of Indigenous educators, therefore, is imperative as a matter of fairness to align with the number of Indigenous students in the school system.

Indigenous educators bring a wealth of knowledge to the teaching profession, including differences in language, culture, and experience (McDevitt, 2021). There is value in exposing settler and newcomer students to experiences that differ from their own. Othman (2022), for example, notes that non-Indigenous students benefit from the curricular approaches offered by BIPOC educators, approaches that tend to be labeled as negative by the Eurocentric school system. Cherng and Halpin (2016) determined that BIPOC teachers tend to be more proficient in facilitating essential conversations on race and social justice than non-BIPOC teachers. These conversations are vital to negate settler colonialism as a discursive frame and improve relations between historically marginalized groups and White settler Canadians.

While employing more Indigenous teachers is critical, Indigenous teachers are much more than symbolic representatives. They are role models who can inspire and encourage Indigenous youth in their academic and life pursuits (Santoro et al., 2011; Villegas et al., 2012). Indigenous teachers, for example, can dispel the harmful myths that BIPOC individuals cannot play an important role in the workforce, such as teaching (Nevarez et al., 2019). Indigenous teachers can also stand up against historical and social acts of oppression and help all learners take a stance against racism and engage in social justice (Janzen, 2016; Ryan et al., 2009). For example, Indigenous teachers can play key roles in educating all learners about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, and the Search the Landfill campaign in Manitoba. Indigenous teachers can also boost the confidence of BIPOC students and facilitate an understanding that BIPOC individuals are worthy and capable of academic and professional success (Othman, 2022; Villegas et al., 2012). The lack of representation of BIPOC teachers is detrimental to the diverse student population, as it hinders equitable and inclusive access to education (Abawi, 2018). Including more teachers from Indigenous backgrounds should be an ongoing priority of school boards and educational institutions, as the literature cited above reveals numerous benefits beyond symbolic representation to employing these educators.

## 5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: TRIBAL CRITICAL RACE THEORY

As a theoretical framework, we explore tribal critical race theory (TCRT) and its potential to confront the continued colonization attempts within the school system and the potential of altering those structures for Indigenous students. TCRT branched off critical race theory (CRT) as a way for Indigenous scholars to examine the effects of race, racism, and power on Indigenous people. Brayboy (2005) introduced the TCRT concept to explore how laws and policies have

affected the lived realities of Indigenous people in the United States. CRT was developed to address the racism perpetuated against African Americans and is more oriented toward a Black-White binary (Brayboy, 2005; Writer, 2008). TCRT, on the other hand, explores how settler colonialism has had detrimental effects on Indigenous people through oppressions such as the residential school system. It emphasizes that colonization is endemic in society and continues to have ill effects on Indigenous people (Writer, 2008). In the Canadian context, this translates to an overrepresentation of biased police practices, inequitable court systems, and incarcerated Indigenous people (Skelton, 2022). Scholars must be mindful of exploring these oppressions to produce marketable research (Tuck, 2018); instead, solutions are needed to mitigate these hardships for Indigenous people. In the educational context, this means increasing the number of Indigenous teachers to parallel the Indigenous student population and shifting away from an education system awash in Eurocentric philosophy.

In Manitoba school systems, this inequity can be seen in the underrepresentation of Indigenous teachers in the teaching body. Several school divisions in the province report striking gaps between the number of Indigenous students and teachers (Macintosh, 2024; WIEC, 2023). By employing TCRT, scholars can expose the inconsistencies in policies and structures and confront the systemic marginalization perpetuated against Indigenous people (Writer, 2008). For example, an examination of post-secondary graduation rates indicates that Indigenous students have fewer degrees and graduate at lower rates than non-Indigenous students (Friesen, 2022; Layton, 2023). Data also reveals that 72% of young non-Indigenous adults were likely to have attended or completed post-secondary studies compared to 37% of young Indigenous adults (Layton, 2023). These troubling statistics can be critiqued by employing TCRT, and meaningful solutions can be applied to bridge the divide between the two groups.

While increasing the number of Indigenous teachers is a noble aspiration, mere symbolic representation and inclusion should not be the end goals. A greater participation of Indigenous teachers in a Eurocentric education system serves little purpose. Landertinger et al. (2021) note that including Indigenous teachers in greater numbers in a mainstream, Western education system is a colonial tactic. Instead, Indigenous teachers should be tasked with disrupting and making headway in dismantling Eurocentrism as a discursive frame (Landertinger et al., 2021). As a framework, TCRT is a means to critique injustices such as the lack of meaningful representation of Indigenous teachers among Manitobas teaching staff.

## 6. METHODOLOGY: POLICY ANALYSIS

We have decided to employ policy analysis as a research methodology. This method can explain how and why educational institutions such as school divisions and universities enact certain policies and measure their effectiveness (Browne et al., 2018). Einbinder (2019) likens policy analysis to the type of inquiry needed to guide and influence important decisions and explains that it can generate

scholarly, high-quality findings that help decision-makers determine what to do next and is persuasive (p. 3). By engaging in policy analysis, researchers identify the interests and contexts that underpin the development and evolution of various policies, and advocate for the implementation of more effective policies in the future (Browne et al., 2018). By engaging in policy analysis, researchers strive to improve school conditions for K-12 students and advocate for increasing the representation of Indigenous educators in the teaching body.

To conduct the study, we chose to analyze policies and initiatives that school boards and post-secondary institutions in Manitoba have implemented to increase the representation of Indigenous teachers. The research carried out by WIEC and the data shared by the Winnipeg School Division indicate that the Manitoba teaching corps lacks Indigenous representation and that the gap between the proportions of Indigenous students and teachers has been increasing since 2020 (Macintosh, 2024; WIEC, 2023). The lack of Indigenous teacher representation is not a unique phenomenon, as several Canadian provinces are understaffed in terms of Indigenous educators, including Saskatchewan (Vangool, 2020) and British Columbia (Marom, 2018). The policies and initiatives we are examining are strategies that some school boards and post-secondary institutions in Manitoba are implementing to increase Indigenous teacher representation in the face of systemic obstacles. These hurdles affect the graduation rates of Indigenous teacher candidates and Indigenous teacher retention. It is vital to acknowledge these systemic barriers when engaging in policy analysis, as they disproportionately impact Indigenous people in the teaching profession.

## 7. THE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS: AN OVERVIEW

For the University of Manitoba, we decided to focus on the Diversity Admissions Policy that the Faculty of Education enacted in 2017. This purpose of this policy was to increase the number of diverse applicants applying to the facultys Bachelor of Education program, including applicants from Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIA+, and racialized backgrounds (Martin, 2016). In terms of University of Winnipeg initiatives, we explored programming that caters to Indigenous teacher candidates through the universitys Access Education programs, including the WEC, CATEP, and BFW. These programs and policies significantly influence the certification process for many Indigenous pre-service teacher candidates, making it imperative to analyze them. As Manitoba continues to employ a teaching body lacking in Indigenous representation, the benefits and limitations of these policies and initiatives will be scrutinized.

**7.1. The Diversity Admissions Policy at the University of Manitoba.** In 2016, the Faculty of Education of the University of Manitoba amended its admission policy in hopes of attracting more diverse teacher candidates to its teacher education program in 2017. The modified policy, which aligns with the Manitoba Human Rights Code, increased the number of spots for pre-service teachers identifying as Indigenous (15%), LGBTQ (7.5%), and racialized (7.5%). It also allotted additional spots for teacher candidates with disabilities (7.5%) and

those who were disadvantaged <sup>3</sup> (7.5%; Dunfield, 2016; Martin, 2016). Overall, the Diversity Admissions Policy was enacted to better align the ratios of students to educators in terms of diversity, including the ratio of Indigenous students and teachers.

The benefits of the Diversity Admissions Policy at the University of Manitoba are twofold. First, it adheres to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and reflects the findings of the TRC (Janzen, 2016). Canada's Indigenous population has suffered tremendous oppression and historical injustices from the settler-colonial practices imposed by all levels of government (Skelton, 2022). By implementing a Diversity Admission Policy that targets a 15% representation of Indigenous applicants, the University of Manitoba acknowledges the historical harms inflicted on Indigenous peoples and, more importantly, recognizes the vital role Indigenous educators play in enhancing the educational attainment of Indigenous youth. Indigenous teachers should not shoulder the sole responsibility of educating the public about Indigenous issues but play a crucial role in creating social change within a decolonized education system (Skelton, 2022; Morcom & Freeman, 2018). By amending its admissions protocol, the University of Manitoba recognizes the need for social change and is willing to do its part to see it achieved.

Due to the implementation of the Diversity Admission Policy, the Faculty of Education has been successful in admitting a greater number of teacher candidates meeting diversity criteria, including an influx of Indigenous teacher candidates. For example, the faculty admitted 27.8% diverse candidates in 2017, 32.8% in 2018, and 29.3% in 2019 (Froese, 2020). These are significant increases over the 11. 6% and 14. 5% diverse candidates admitted in 2015 and 2016.<sup>4</sup> While the faculty has yet to reach its target of 45% diversity admissions, it has nearly doubled the number of teacher candidates that meet diversity criteria (Froese, 2020). This means that more Indigenous teacher candidates are being admitted.

Despite that seemingly welcome development, graduation rates of Indigenous teacher candidates continue to lag behind those among non-Indigenous people. The universities of Manitoba and Winnipeg graduate approximately 35 Indigenous teachers yearly (Woelk, 2024), which does not parallel the 19.1% of Indigenous learners comprising the provincial student body. Various barriers, including tuition fees and living expenses, have impacted Indigenous teacher candidates' ability to fulfill teacher training requirements (Woelk, 2024). Mitigating these barriers is imperative to increasing the representation of Indigenous educators.

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<sup>3</sup>The University of Manitoba's disadvantaged category includes applicants who have not had the opportunity to apply for teacher training admission due to various factors, including social, economic, or cultural reasons. These may include individuals in remote areas, applicants facing financial barriers, and applicants facing barriers to admission because of religious or linguistic disadvantages (Dunfield, 2016).

<sup>4</sup>The increase in the number of diverse teacher candidates who gained admission for teacher training at the University of Manitoba was published in a CBC News article by Froese (2020). The University of Manitoba shared the relevant data with CBC News.

**7.2. Access Education Programs at the University of Winnipeg.** The Access Education programs at The University of Winnipeg are an off-campus extension of the university's Integrated Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education Program. The WEC, CATEP, BFW, and the Immigrant Teacher Education Program together comprise the Access Education programming at the University of Winnipeg. While they support a range of students, they include specific components designed to support and develop Indigenous educators (Kelly, 2020). The programs are tailored to address the challenges faced by underrepresented groups, including inner-city residents, Indigenous students, mature learners, immigrants, and individuals from low-income backgrounds. These programs respond to the social, financial, and cultural barriers that often impede access to higher education and careers in teaching (Kelly, 2020). By providing targeted support and resources, Access Education aims to create a more equitable and inclusive academic environment, helping to ensure that adult students have the opportunity to succeed in university and in their future teaching careers.

**7.3. The University of Winnipeg Education Centre.** WEC supports adult learners from diverse backgrounds who are often underrepresented in the teaching profession. WEC offers a comprehensive curriculum focused on the historical relationships between Canada and its diverse populations (University of Winnipeg, n.d.-b). Graduates of the program receive a Bachelor of Arts with a major in history and a minor in English, along with certification to teach the early and middle years (K-8) in Manitoba. This five-year program runs from September to July each academic year and ensures small class sizes, so students benefit from increased interaction with peers and instructors. The program also provides financial support, academic advising, counseling, Elder programs, and tutorial services to ensure a holistic educational experience (University of Winnipeg, n.d.-b).

**7.3.1. *Community-based Aboriginal Teacher Education Program.*** CATEP is tailored to Indigenous individuals in Manitoba who work as educational assistants (EAs), allowing them to earn a Bachelor of Arts and Education degree while continuing their full-time work with a partner school. CATEP aims to address the shortage of Indigenous educators, acknowledging the persistent underrepresentation of Indigenous individuals in the teaching profession (University of Winnipeg, n.d.-a). This initiative is a collaborative effort involving The University of Winnipeg's Faculty of Education, Manitoba Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade, and various partner schools. Students in CATEP work as EAs in partner schools from September to April and attend classes part-time, in the evening; the students engage in full-time coursework during the spring and summer. CATEP students typically complete the program in an average of six years (University of Winnipeg, n.d.-a).

**7.3.2. *Build from Within.*** BFW a collaboration between the Winnipeg School Division, the University of Winnipeg's Faculty of Education, Indspire Canada, and various service providers aims to guide Indigenous high school students toward becoming teachers. Its objective is to harness the unique strengths and

experiences of Indigenous students, developing them into skilled, motivated educators dedicated to giving back to their communities (Winnipeg School Division, 2024). The BFW program supports students in their journey from high school to becoming educators. Initially, participants graduate from high school and complete a 300-hour Education Assistant Diploma Program. They also engage in at least 48 hours of culturally relevant professional development and undertake a practicum placement in the Winnipeg School Division (Winnipeg School Division, 2024). The program continues with students serving as student teachers while earning their Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education degrees at the University of Winnipeg. It offers support for its participants, including paid tuition, bus passes, language and cultural activities, mentorships, and summer job opportunities. BFW aims to nurture students holistically while fostering a sense of community (Winnipeg School Division, 2024).

## 8. WHY INDIGENOUS TEACHERS ARE STILL UNDERREPRESENTED

While these policies have been successful in increasing the number of employable Indigenous teacher graduates, the gap between the proportions of Indigenous students and teachers in Manitoba is widening. Indigenous students continue to face many barriers that contribute to their lack of representation in the provinces teaching staff, barriers that have prevented the University of Manitoba from attaining its 45% target of diverse admissions. Programming and policies at both universities are vital to increasing Indigenous representation in the teaching body, but challenges and systemic hurdles remain. This section profiles the distinct barriers that may prevent Indigenous students from enrolling in and graduating from teacher training programs in larger numbers. This section also presents the key challenges that many Indigenous teachers face in the school system and why Indigenous teacher retention is affected by them.

**8.1. Teacher Shortages and Interrupted Education.** The ability to access quality schooling before the post-secondary level is a notable barrier facing Indigenous learners. Several rural school divisions and northern Indigenous communities in Manitoba have resorted to filling teaching vacancies with EAs and non-certified applicants (Macintosh, 2023; Monkman, 2017; Searle, 2023). People in the latter group have little more than acceptable background checks and an interest in working with children (Searle, 2023). The teacher shortage in Manitoba is a significant disservice to students, particularly in Indigenous communities, which often bear the brunt of teacher shortages (Macintosh, 2023; Monkman, 2017). For example, the Shamattawa First Nation School closed in 2017 due to a lack of teachers, resulting in the displacement of roughly 200 students (Monkman, 2017). Like their non-Indigenous counterparts, Indigenous students deserve uninterrupted education and to be taught by qualified teachers.

Teacher shortages and interrupted education in Indigenous communities can be attributed to settler colonial tactics exposed through a TRCT lens. The historical displacement of Indigenous people to remote parts of the province and

the exorbitant costs of transportation and high cost of living in Indigenous communities often result in teachers working in these communities for short periods of time (Brayboy, 2005; Burleigh, 2016; Writer, 2008). The departure of teachers has exploitative implications for Indigenous communities, as is evident in the 2017 Shamattawa school closure (Monkman, 2017). Teacher shortages hamper the ability of Indigenous students to access quality education. An increase in employable Indigenous teachers, to which the University of Manitoba's Diversity Admissions Policy contributes, has the potential to mitigate these shortages and interruptions. The University of Winnipeg's BFW program can also alleviate teacher shortages, especially if Indigenous teacher graduates teach in Northern Manitoba. Indigenous and remote communities in Manitoba routinely deal with teacher shortages and are forced to rely heavily on EAs to assume teaching positions (Macintosh, 2023; Monkman, 2017). The above policies and programs should be replicated at other post-secondary institutions, as they have been successful in facilitating greater diversity in the new teacher ranks and have the potential to reduce the gap between the proportions of Indigenous students and teachers.

**8.2. Financial Constraints.** Financial constraints significantly impact access to higher education for many First Nations individuals, especially those from remote and economically disadvantaged communities. Historical displacement to these remote locales means that Indigenous students today continue to feel the ill effects of settler colonialism (Writer, 2008). For example, Indigenous youth often have to travel to larger communities to access high school and educational programming that smaller communities cannot afford to offer, such as programming for students with disabilities (Mardon & Ahmed, 2023). Through a TRCT lens, settler colonial tactics such as geographical displacement are endemic and continue to marginalize Indigenous people and limit their participation in the teaching body.

The belief that all Indigenous people receive free post-secondary tuition is a myth that needs debunking. The demand for university education often exceeds the funding that many Indigenous communities receive from the federal government. For example, the Little Pine First Nation in Saskatchewan typically funds 1523 applicants per year but often has to turn away roughly 30 applicants because of funding restraints (Monkman, 2016). The funding that does exist typically fails to cover all the costs associated with university. Some reserves, for instance, only pay for textbooks and supplies, while others may only cover tuition for one or two years of study rather than a full degree course (Monkman, 2016). Students from remote communities often encounter additional expenses related to relocation and adaptation (Mardon & Ahmed, 2023), which further exacerbate financial burdens.

Financial limitations can be a significant hurdle for Indigenous students to overcome. According to a 2021 Indspire study, an increased percentage of Indigenous students report relying on student loans, need-based bursaries, scholarships, and other forms of financial support instead of relying on employment income

or Registered Education Savings Plans. A 2016 survey of First Nations students at Algoma University revealed that funding posed a major obstacle, with nearly half of the respondents facing significant challenges in securing affordable housing and childcare (Cameron et al., 2024). The combination of high costs and limited financial resources contributes to lower enrollment and completion rates among First Nations students, underscoring the need for targeted support and funding to address these inequities.

The University of Winnipeg's Access Education programs aim to address the financial barriers that many Indigenous individuals face when pursuing higher education. WEC plays an important role by offering academic advising, access to specialized library resources, and free tutoring services, all of which support academic success. Additionally, WEC provides financial assistance options, including student loans and bursaries, to help mitigate the financial constraints that impede post-secondary access (University of Winnipeg, n.d.-c). Similarly, CATEP aids students through free math and science preparatory classes, access to financial advisors, and the opportunity to work while studying as an EA, thereby earning a university degree and certification while gaining practical experience (University of Winnipeg, n.d.-d). Lastly, BFW supports students with financial assistance, including paid tuition, monthly bus passes, honoraria, and food hampers (Winnipeg School Division, 2024). These supports can mitigate the challenges that can undermine the well-being and success of Indigenous learners.

The support offered by the University of Winnipeg programs alleviates the financial burdens associated with higher education. For example, by providing free tutoring, the WEC assists students who do not have the financial means to access costly private tutors (Mardon & Ahmed, 2023). By taking advantage of food hampers and bus passes from BFW, students can devote more time to their studies and less time working to afford the high costs of post-secondary studies and living expenses. The teacher education program for Indigenous students at the University of Winnipeg is vital in supporting Indigenous youth on their pathways to teacher certification, which can help increase the number of employable Indigenous teachers.

**8.3. The Education Systems Eurocentric Focus.** The Eurocentric focus of the education system in Manitoba can lead to a sense of cultural disconnect for First Nations individuals, potentially discouraging them from pursuing careers in teaching. A curriculum that fails to represent Indigenous languages, cultures, and customs contributes to this disconnection (Mardon & Ahmed, 2023). Battiste (2017) argues that the dominance of Eurocentric values in curricula marginalizes Indigenous ways of knowing, leading to a sense of alienation among Indigenous students. This lack of connection affects Indigenous teacher candidates engagement with the education system and diminishes their desire to pursue careers in that field (Battiste, 2017). This ultimately contributes to a broader underrepresentation of Indigenous educators in the teaching profession.

The University of Winnipeg's Access Education programs can address the dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies in the education system. WEC offers

a curriculum that emphasizes the historical relationships between Canada and First Nations, including Elder programs that incorporate Indigenous knowledge and traditions. Elders can share stories that bring marginalized voices to the forefront and disrupt the dominant narratives that permeate the education system, such as rhetoric that defends the motives of residential schooling (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). CATEP and BFW similarly integrate Indigenous perspectives into course content to counter Eurocentric values. BFW, for example, offers Indigenous language learning opportunities, cultural activities, and land-based learning (Winnipeg School Division, n.d.), which is an important cross-cultural initiative that introduces non-Indigenous students to practices that differ from their own and helps Indigenous youth discover and value their traditional ways of life (Datta, 2019). This is vital to ensure that subsequent generations of Indigenous people reap the benefits of such traditions (Sekaly & Bazzi, 2021). The aforementioned initiatives, which emerged from the need to bridge the gap between Eurocentric educational practices and Indigenous knowledge systems, are instrumental in fostering a more inclusive environment to support Indigenous teachers.

**8.4. Retention Challenges.** Retention challenges for Indigenous teachers are multifaceted and influenced by factors such as cultural isolation, insufficient professional development, and systemic discrimination. Cultural isolation in the education system is a significant challenge for Indigenous teachers, for the dominant framework of most school systems is Eurocentric (Tessaro et al., 2021). This framework favours Western pedagogies and curricula and frequently overlooks or misrepresents Indigenous perspectives and ontologies, which may contribute to a sense of alienation among Indigenous teachers. This can leave Indigenous educators feeling disconnected from their cultural roots and the broader educational community (Tessaro et al., 2021) and can negatively impact job satisfaction and retention rates.

Professional development plays an important role in retaining Indigenous teachers and diminishing feelings of alienation. Indigenous teacher retention efforts in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and the United States offer many supports for teachers in their first years in the classroom. For example, the Sapsikit'wałá (Teacher) Education Program at the University of Oregon provides support services for graduates during their first year of teaching that include peer mentorship, progress evaluations, professional development opportunities, cohort meetings, and access to a virtual curriculum and research center (University of Oregon, 2012). Comparable strategies have also been implemented in Indigenous teacher education programs in Australia and New Zealand (Tessaro et al., 2021). These strategies address the unique challenges faced by new Indigenous teachers by providing a framework for their professional development and success. However, these efforts have not often been mirrored in Canada, where support commonly ceases after teacher graduation (Tessaro et al., 2021). Indigenous teachers new to the profession are not immune to the challenges that beginner teachers typically face, such as managing a classroom and meeting the needs of all learners (Casperson & Raaen, 2014). Ongoing professional development is

essential to keeping Indigenous teachers in the education sector, particularly as they transition from students to educators, ensuring that they remain employed in the field and can thrive in their positions.

Systemic discrimination is another barrier for Indigenous teachers and their retention in the school system. According to Wallin and Scribe (2022), Indigenous individuals in colonial school environments often find themselves needing to prove their competence as educators despite qualifications that are (at least) equivalent to those of their non-Indigenous counterparts. Because of their racial identities, Indigenous teachers may not feel knowledgeable or credible in a colonial system that favours Whiteness (Wallin & Scribe, 2022). Systemic discrimination creates an environment in which Indigenous teachers may feel that they must continually validate their knowledge and capabilities while facing persistent skepticism from colleagues and school boards. This systemic bias undermines the confidence of Indigenous educators and contributes to higher rates of burnout and turnover (Wallin & Scribe, 2022). This exacerbates the challenge of retaining Indigenous teachers in colonial, Eurocentric school systems.

Systemic discrimination in the school system also hampers the ability of Indigenous teachers to ascend to the ranks of administrators. In Ontario, approximately 90% of administrators identify as White, a stark contrast with the nearly 30% of the provinces population that identifies as BIPOC (Abawi, 2021). Data reviewed by Ontarios Ministry of Education suggests that BIPOC educators are overrepresented in teacher positions due to systemic barriers and biases that limit their advancement into administrative roles, which contributes to the gap between BIPOC teachers and administrators. Indigenous people, for example, comprise less than 7% of the administrators in Winnipegs River East Transcona and St. James-Assiniboia school divisions (Macintosh, 2024). BIPOC teachers simply do not ascend to the ranks of administrators at the rate of their non-BIPOC colleagues. If administrators remain predominantly White, then equity, diversity and inclusion milestones may become targets to achieve rather than transformative frameworks (Abawi, 2021). Action is crucial to address the divide; otherwise, the gap between BIPOC and non-BIPOC administrators will remain disproportionate.

## 9. CONCLUSION

Indigenous representation among teaching staff is vital; however, Indigenous people face many barriers to access the profession and retain their positions once they get there. Settler colonial practices have marginalized Indigenous learners in the education system through means such as eradication, integration, and noble intentions (Henderson, 2023). The lived experiences of Indigenous teachers are thus critical underrepresented pedagogical tools that can diversify the curriculum and contest the dominant Eurocentric principles embedded in that system (McDevitt, 2021; Skelton, 2022). Indigenous teachers can implement Indigenous-infused epistemologies and worldviews instead of curricula based on Eurocentric perspectives (Landertinger et al., 2021). Indigenous worldviews typically view

the whole person as interconnected to their relationships with the land and other people and usually consider the emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual embodiments of a person and how they connect to family and community (Cull et al., 2018). An increase in Indigenous teachers is needed to ensure Indigenous worldviews and epistemologies are properly integrated into the curriculum and to contest the remnants of Eurocentrism.

This article has shown that education officials affiliated with the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Education are strong advocates of diversity and ensuring that the future teaching staff is comprised equitably of BIPOC teachers. Indigenous educators are not sufficiently represented in the provinces teaching body and in teacher training programs. The University of Manitoba's Diversity Admissions Policy that attempts to increase the number of employable Indigenous teachers is affirming for those pre-service teachers who identify as Indigenous (Stephenson, 2019). The policy has been successful in recruiting a larger number of Indigenous teachers since its implementation in 2017 (Froese, 2020). Nevertheless, systemic barriers such as teaching shortages, interrupted education, financial constraints, a Eurocentric curriculum, and retention issues are obstacles that maintain the gap between the proportions of Indigenous teachers and students. Minimizing that gap is imperative to achieving the aims of reconciliation and returning power back to Indigenous people by reclaiming educational spaces.

The University of Winnipeg is making important strides in its Indigenous teacher education offerings to mitigate the obstacles outlined above. Programs like the WEC, CATEP, and BFW work toward lessening the hurdles that prevent Indigenous students from attaining teaching positions. By infusing Indigenous epistemologies and ways of knowing into curricula, covering tuition costs, assisting with living expenses, and providing relatable work experiences before certification, the programming at the University of Winnipeg exemplifies the supports that can mitigate the challenges Indigenous students face on their pathways to becoming teachers. Despite the noble intentions of these programs, the gap between the proportions of Indigenous teachers and students continues to widen, which indicates that the programming in place is still not enough to mitigate this discrepancy in representation (Macintosh, 2024). Financial constraints and a lack of federal funding mean that First Nations communities cannot support all the applicants who are interested in obtaining post-secondary education. A lack of support for Indigenous teachers once they certify is another issue that needs to be addressed, as these educators face many obstacles once they enter the teaching profession, including cultural isolation, insufficient professional development, and systemic discrimination. Mitigating these challenges is critical to reducing the gap between the proportions of Indigenous teachers and students in Manitoba.

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