A policy, a 'priority,' an unfinished project: The *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework*

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Abstract: In 2007, the Ontario Ministry of Education released the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework. *The policy set forth a vision to significantly improve the levels of achievement for Indigenous students attending Ontario's public schools, and to increase awareness and knowledge of Indigenous cultures and perspectives for all students by the year 2016. Drawing upon critical pedagogy, theories of decolonizing education, and policy enactment, we engaged with the Framework and a set of related documents to a critical discourse analysis. Four discourses were revealed: achievement; increasing capacities; incorporating "cultures, histories, and perspectives"; and absence. In tracing the presence of these discourses across the documents we found that, while well-intentioned, the policy has yielded problematic outcomes. In turn, this undermines the ability of Ontario's education system to not only reach the aforementioned goals but also to take an active role in reconciliation and efforts towards the decolonization of education.*

Keywords: Indigenous Education, Policy, Ontario, Decolonization, Critical Pedagogy, FNMI Education

Introduction

In 2007 the Ontario Ministry of Education (hereafter the Ministry) released *The Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (henceforward the *Framework*). The development of the *Framework* was a response to the Ontario Government's efforts to build a new relationship with Indigenous[1] peoples as reflected in *Ontario's New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs* (2005). Aligning with this "new approach," the *Framework* positions Indigenous education as one of the Ministry's "key priorities" (2007b, p. 5) for public education within the Ministry's broader aims to support high levels of student achievement, reduce achievement gaps, and maintain high levels of public confidence.[2] The document is intended to provide the "strategic policy context" (2007b, p. 5) for Indigenous education in Ontario in which the Ministry, school boards, and schools would work towards improving First Nation, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) student achievement, but as Apple (2008) has noted, "[education] policies often have strikingly unforeseen consequences. Reforms that are instituted with good intentions may have hidden effects that are more than a little problematic" (p. 243). Our work reveals that the *Framework* is one such reform where good intentions (i.e., giving attention to Aboriginal education) have yielded problematic outcomes, and/or a lack of outcomes. We believe this is particularly significant as the *Framework* reaches a decade of presence in the policy environment of Ontario education.

As white Ontario-certified settler[3] women teachers, we concerned with the ways education policy supports and inhibits efforts to decolonize education. As we moved through our post-secondary studies, we both began to understand the ways our formal education failed to teach us about Canada's colonial past and present. Our pedagogical foundation as critical educators requires us to address this gap. Understanding policy as a living set of documents and practices (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997), we contemplate the ways the *Framework* and its associated support documents have (or have not) evolved since 2007. We consider the ways the *Framework* failed, and continues to fail, to interact with and develop in ways that

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[1] The terms Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit are used throughout this paper. Indigenous is increasingly the preferred term in scholarly work while Aboriginal has specific meaning under Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* and "includes the Indian, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada." When discussing the works of specific authors, associations, or government ministries or agencies, we adopt the terminology used by them, while FNMI is used when referring to Ontario education policies.

[2] The Ministry of Education (2007b) states these three as main goals for the public education of all students in Ontario in relation to Indigenous education.

[3] In identifying ourselves as settlers we acknowledge Canada as a nation built on settler colonialism, a circumstance where the colonists never left, where colonial structures and institutions continue to create systemic disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. For further reading on the subject we would direct readers to Regan's (2010) *Unsettling the Settler Within*: *Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*.

facilitate efforts to decolonize education (Battiste, 2013) in Ontario. Decolonization is not currently recognized as a priority by the Ministry; however, we believe it is essential in efforts concerning reconciliation. Building upon the work of others (Anuik & Bellehumeur-Kearns, 2012; Cherubini, 2014; Cherubini & Hodson, 2008) engaging with the *Framework,* we demonstrate that the *Framework* can no longer be understood as "a priority" as originally claimed by the Ministry. Our analysis indicates that the *Framework* remains an unfinished project which undermines the ability of Ontario's elementary and secondary school (K-12) education system to take an active role and generate attempts towards the decolonization of education.

We begin this paper with an outline of our methods. Next, we provide a discussion of the theoretical perspectives framing our analysis. We then review the literature concerning Ontario's Indigenous Education Strategy with a focus on the *Framework*. Following this, we discuss the result of our analysis. We conclude the paper with a look forward, and make suggestions for further research and policy development.

Method

The analysis presented here utilizes an analytical framework which draws upon the concepts of policy enactment and critical discourse analysis. The analysis is based in an understanding that policy is an ongoing process rather that a static and singular text (Taylor, Rizvi, & Lingard, 1997). Policy enactment describes policy as "creat[ing] circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed, or particular goals or outcomes are set" (Ball, 1994, p. 19). Thus, policies do not dictate behaviour, nor can they be implemented (Braun, Ball, Maguire, & Hoskins, 2011). Instead, policies are enacted, through the interpretation and actions of those who interact with them. Enactment is a creative process during which those involved interpret, translate, and enact the policy within their social context (Braun, Ball, Maguire, & Hoskins, 2011). As part of the target audience of the *Framework*, educators act as both policy subjects (Braun, Ball, Maguire, & Hoskins, 2011) who produce and consume policy, and policy actors who effect the policy process through their actions (Braun, Ball, & Maguire, 2011).

This article discusses the results of a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of both the *Framework* and a set of related Ministry-authored documents including a support document for student self-identification (2007a), the online teacher resource kit (2009a), two progress reports (2009b, 2013), and an implementation plan (2014). Using Fairclough (2013) as our guide, we deployed CDA as a systematic analysis of the text, examining the "dialectical relations between discourse and other objects, elements or moments, as well as the analysis of the 'internal relations' of discourse" (p. 4). Fairclough suggests three dimensions of analysis: textual analysis, discursive practices, and social practices. In doing so, Fairclough's analytic framework necessitates researchers consider both the content and form of the document(s) analyzed and their relation to society. Following Foucault (1972; 1980), discourse in this study is defined as particular representation(s) of the world which operate to promote the circulation of specific ideas while hindering others.

Our analysis was comprised of four steps: a) the texts were described in order to observe areas of concordance, b) elements within the text were then identified with attention paid to the social context, c) the organization of language was explored with attention paid to areas of agreement and contradiction, and d) terminology was then developed to describe the discourses present. We began our study by examining the *Framework* independent of the other documents. In doing so, we identified the presence of four significant discourses: achievement; increasing capacities; incorporating FNMI "cultures, histories, and perspectives"; and absence. Understanding that the *Framework* describes the requirements necessary to position Indigenous education as a priority in Ontario, we then traced these discourses through the Ministry's publications that followed in order to understand the ways that the policy was being acted upon in Ontario's education system. These discourses and their place within the aspirational document—the *Framework*—were scrutinized against three themes which emerged through our theoretical perspectives. Guided largely by the principles of critical pedagogy, we have identified the hidden curriculum, decolonizing education, and cognitive imperialism as crucial components of a policy which seeks to create substantive changes for Indigenous education in Ontario. Finally, the actions taken to achieve these goals were considered through an analysis of the Ministry's publications relevant to the *Framework*.

Theoretical Perspectives

Education is "deeply connected to the social context in which it exists" (Apple, 2011, p. 25) and is rooted in relationships of domination and subordination. These relationships manifest as the structures and content of formal education which contribute to the production and reproduction of values and beliefs supported by the privileged to undermine possibilities for the marginalized. Given the dual role of education—the "*social function* of legitimating […] differences" and the "*technical function*" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 164, emphasis in original) of producing qualifications—schooling cannot act as a site of "neutral activity" (Apple, 1999, p. 5). As a school of thought and a process of critique (Giroux, 1983), critical pedagogy gives important attention to the ways that education maintains and reproduces structures based on oppressive relationships, as well as the possibilities for exposing and transforming these sites of oppression so that inequities can be challenged.

The hidden and informal curricula of schools (Giroux, 1983) are used to uphold the worldview and values of those in power through the privileging of particular curricular areas, the absence of Indigenous perspectives and colonial histories in curriculum, the use of specific and often Euro-Western-oriented learning resources, and the physical form of the learning spaces. Indeed, Orlowski's (2008) work highlights the way that well-intentioned teachers who embraced curriculum derived from discourses of liberal multiculturalism were able to ignore calls to make formal education structures and curriculum more relevant to Indigenous students. Through actions such as those described by Orlowski, teachers reproduce elements of the hidden curriculum in Ontario schools, which marginalizes Indigenous students and blames them for their lack of "achievement." In Canada, this hidden curriculum is evident in the ways that Indigenous knowledges have, and continue to be, excluded from the K-12 education system, with clear links to the use of the residential school system as a tool of assimilation (Milloy, 1999). Indigenous peoples experience what Battiste (1986; 2000; 2013) called *cognitive imperialism*: this is where Indigenous knowledges are excluded from mainstream education due to the privileging of Eurocentric foundations of education. In order to combat cognitive imperialism supported through the hidden curriculum, Battiste (2013) suggested that "meaningful education in Canada must begin with confronting the hidden standards of racism, colonialism, and cultural and linguistic imperialism in the modern curriculum" (p. 29). Indigenous educator and political leader Sol Sanderson, speaking at a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) event in 2010, likewise stressed the importance of making connections between colonial policies and practices and the contemporary need for change in Canadian society (TRC, 2015). It is only through such confrontation that these connections can be upset in order to support the building of new relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in order to support reconciliatory action.

Though difficult to define exactly, decolonization can be broadly understood as actions taken to confront, interrogate, and dismantle the structures, both physical and mental, of colonialism (Battiste, 2013; Fanon, 1963; Said, 1978; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999/2012). Decolonizing theories emphasize the importance of action, in addition to the deconstruction of colonial discourses and structures (Battiste, 2013; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999/2012). Tuck and Yang (2012) caution that decolonization cannot be taken up in ways that position it as a metaphorical goal, which provides a space to alleviate settler guilt. Decolonization, like critical pedagogy, is not enacted by "unmasking" (Apple, 2003, p.108), or "simply acquiring knowledge and reflecting" (Regan, 2010, p. 22). Instead, the connection between knowledge, critical reflection, and action is central to decolonization. As Regan (2010) suggests, "settlers cannot just theorize about decolonizing" rather "we must experience it" both as individuals and "morally and ethically responsible socio-political actors in Canadian society" (pp. 23-24). As settlers, we take the arguments of Tuck and Yang as well as Regan very seriously. This research, then, represents a first step in moving beyond theorizing to investigate what, if any, substantive changes have been supported through the *Framework*.

Cognitive imperialism, supported by the power of the hidden curriculum, can be challenged by embracing the action-oriented goals of decolonization, and through meaningful education which positions students as active participants in their education (Freire, 1974/2013). This kind of pedagogical approach to learning values critical thinking that is based in discussion (Freire 1970/1993), and requires "the learner [to]

…critically engag[e] through dialogue and debate the historical, social, and economic conditions that both limit and enable their own understanding of knowledge as power" (Giroux, 1996/1997, p. 84). In turn, this allows students to become empowered to question, critique, and challenge power relations in the classroom and in society (Shor, 1992). Battiste (2013) stresses that schools can either work to "sustain colonization in neo-colonial ways" (p. 175) as sites of social and cultural reproduction, or they can work for change and decolonization. It is essential to give critical consideration to the ways in which education, and its associated policies and practices, open up or close transformative learning opportunities in order for the formal sites of education in Ontario to take up the important work of acknowledging Canada's colonial past, the colonial legacies thereof, and to support decolonization and reconciliation.

Literature Review

After reviewing both the scholarly literature about, and reports from organizations tied to the *Framework*, we found that tension was evident between the principles stated in the document (Cherubini & Hodson, 2008). The principles include a greater awareness of FNMI cultures and languages for all students in Ontario, and the increased achievement of FNMI students, but also a focus on standardized assessment as a means of measuring success. An emphasis on attainment is also supported by expectations of the Auditor General of Ontario (2012, 2014, 2016) in reports on Aboriginal education, which repeatedly reference the Education Quality and Accountability Office's (EQAO) standardized test results and the importance of determining benchmark data against which to measure "progress."

Another site of contradiction in the *Framework* includes the policy's advocacy of culturally sensitive pedagogy for FNMI students while simultaneously limiting the ability of educators to do so in their programming through the continued focus on standardized testing (Cherubini & Hodson, 2008). Cherubini, Hodson, Manley-Casimir, and Muir (2010) argued that continued emphasis on measurement through standardized testing maintains bias towards Eurocentric priorities of education, thereby continuing to marginalize FNMI students in Ontario schools. It has also been argued that the notion of an educational "gap" is, itself, culturally insensitive and marginalizing by privileging standards of achievement that align with a capitalist-oriented perspective (Cherubini et al., 2010) over Indigenous concepts of success (Toulouse, 2016). In focusing on statistics and standardized achievement measures in order to close the "gap," the Ministry risks "widening the void" which may in turn lead to the increased social, cultural, and political marginalization of FNMI students (Cherubini et al., 2010, p. 347).

The 2012 report from the Auditor General of Ontario on Aboriginal education raises concerns about the lack of an implementation plan from the Ministry to outline how the goals of the *Framework* were to be achieved. In the Auditor General's 2014 update, the Ministry's *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework Implementation Plan* (hereafter the *Implementation Plan*) is criticized for not being detailed enough, suggesting that it repeats the general direction of the *Framework*. Butler (2015) also criticizes the Ministry's follow up actions, specifically the *Implementation Plan* (2014), arguing there is too great a focus on the collection of self-identification data instead of attempts to alter the structures and content of education in Ontario's schools.

Kearns (2013) notes that policy efforts like the *Framework* represent an important step forward in the ways that education acknowledges and interacts with Canada's colonial past and present. This potential, however, is limited by actions taken out to enact the policy. As a study by Anuik and Bellehumeur-Kearns (2012) found, while some boards were making substantial efforts to translate the policy into practice, others were not, resulting in a significant variation of the ways the *Framework* was being taken up across the province. People for Education[4] (2013) call this the "knowledge gap" (p. 3) in which most teachers, and therefore students, do not have a good understanding of Aboriginal peoples' histories, the impacts of colonialism, and the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and settlers. In their collection of survey data from the 2015-2016 academic year, People for Education (2016) found that 31% of elementary schools and

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[4] People for Education is an independent charitable organization, which supports public education in Ontario by conducting research and making policy recommendations. More information can be found on their website: http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/about-us/what-we-do/

53% of secondary schools offered professional development on Indigenous cultural issues. While this has increased over previous years (People for Education, 2016), it is clear that not all teachers are presented with opportunities to receive the training and support needed to include meaningful Indigenous content in their classrooms. Recent research by Burm (2016) also indicated that there is some dissonance between the values and goals as proclaimed by the Ministry and the ways Indigenous education policies are enacted by both educational leads and school board administration. That the *Framework* has not reached every school in Ontario is made clear through a review of the literature. However, as work by Kearns (2013) and Cherubini (2014) have shown, the *Framework* has seen some positive action occur in some schools and school boards in Ontario who have enthusiastically embraced the work required by *Framework*, and in doing so have created culturally appropriate and responsive programming for Indigenous youth in Ontario's schools. The literature reviewed here indicates there remains much work to be done in the area of Indigenous education in Ontario. The literature also highlights the complex nature of Indigenous education, the improvement of which requires enhanced teacher training and significant change at the institutional level in order to better support Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the area of Indigenous education.

Results and Discussion

The *Framework*: Discourses Arise

Four distinct discourses became apparent through our analysis of the *Framework*: achievement; increasing capacities; incorporating FNMI "cultures, histories, and perspectives"; and absence. Achievement, perhaps the most pervasive discourse, is presented in the *Framework's* introduction when it is noted that the Ministry seeks to meet two challenges by the year 2016 "to improve achievements among First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students and to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the areas of literacy and numeracy, retention of students in school, graduation rates, and advancement to postsecondary studies" (Ministry, 2007b, p. 5). Throughout the *Framework,* achievement is primarily discussed in terms of standardized testing outcomes and credit accumulation meeting the provincial standard. It became clear through our analysis that achievement, in Ontario schools, continues to be understood through Eurocentric measures.

Both the vision and policy statement of the *Framework* highlight the need for FNMI students to "have the knowledge, skills, and confidence" required to complete their studies while gaining "both the traditional and contemporary knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to be socially contributive, politically active, and economically prosperous citizens" (Ministry, 2007b, p. 7). The second discourse recognized, "cultures, histories, and perspectives" and the integration thereof into curriculum and classroom practice, is positioned by the Ministry as essential to this success throughout the *Framework*. Such integration is designated as a performance measure within the *Framework*, and is closely connected to the Ministry aims of improving FNMI student self-esteem, reducing gaps in achievement, and improving relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and communities in Ontario (2007b, p. 21-22).

The policy indicates that the integration of cultures, histories, and perspectives, as well as an improvement in the achievement levels of FNMI students, will be realized through the increased capacities of education professionals. Increased capacities, the third discourse acknowledged, allows for the provision of educational experiences able to respond to the "learning and cultural needs" of Indigenous students through the presence of a "curriculum that facilitates learning about contemporary and traditional First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, histories, and perspectives" (Ministry, 2007b, p. 7). Moreover, the *Framework* discusses the importance of "all students in Ontario" having "knowledge and appreciation of contemporary and traditional First Nation, Métis, and Inuit traditions, cultures, and perspectives" (Ministry, 2007b, p.7). This requires education professionals to receive additional training specific to Indigenous education so they can adequately respond to the learning needs of FNMI students, present appropriate learning material to support FNMI students, and ensure all students are made knowledgeable of FNMI histories, cultures, and perspectives.

Lastly, a discourse of absence became clear. We were struck by the ambiguous language throughout the *Framework*. The *Framework* outlines steps that the Ministry "will," and school boards and schools "will

strive to," carry out in order to decrease the achievement gap. It offers no specific guidance to teachers who are, ultimately, charged with the tasks and goals of the first three discourses. Furthermore, there is an absence of meaningful acknowledgement by the Ministry of the actions and impacts of colonialism, colonial education, and the persistent systemic marginalization of Indigenous students, their families, and communities. Such an absence positions Indigenous knowledges and perspectives as unnecessary to learn and reproduces a social norm of apathy and ignorance towards Canada's colonial past and present.

Tracing the Discourses

The prominence of the achievement discourse remains in both the progress reports and the *Implementation Plan*. While both progress reports discuss the *Framework* implementation in terms of capturing Aboriginal student achievement data (i.e., through self-identification and standardized test results), the 2013 report provides baseline Aboriginal student achievement data for the first time. With a focus on the accumulation of this data, the goal of teaching Aboriginal content to all students, which could be a site to challenge the hidden curriculum that supports Eurocentric education, clearly falls away as a priority for the Ministry. As a result, the technical function of education (i.e., providing qualification) rises up as the main goal. In turn, cognitive imperialism is not challenged because of the privileging of this hidden curriculum that focuses on academic "achievement." Cognitive imperialism is then perpetuated and Indigenous students continue to have the value of their languages and cultures ignored, and Indigenous students continue to be measured against the academic success of non-Indigenous students, which is positioned as the norm.

Though the number of times a word is present in a document is not always representative of the discourses present, in this case it highlights a focus on academic student achievement over well-being. In the 21 pages of the *Implementation Plan,* the term "gap" is mentioned 17 times and "achievement" 41 times, compared to "well-being" in 15 instances, and self-esteem in 3. It is only in the *Implementation Plan*, published almost a decade after the release of the *Framework*, that the Ministry finally communicates a strategy related to "additional indicators of student achievement" (2014, p. 16) identified in collaboration with Aboriginal partners and stakeholders. Given the efforts of education, particularly through the residential school system, to commit "cultural genocide" (TRC, 2015, p. 1), we find it deeply troubling that well-being and self-esteem are only now beginning to become recognizable components of the Ministry's work.

The discourse of increasing capacity is present across several of the *Framework's* supporting documents. The Ministry's guide for self-identification is, in and of itself, an effort to increase the capacity of school boards and schools to meet the needs of Aboriginal students under the assumption that "the availability of data on Aboriginal student achievement in Ontario's provincially funded school system is a critical foundation for the development, implementation, and evaluation of programs to support the needs of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students" (Ministry, 2007a, p. 3). The Ministry's (2014) strategy to encourage "boards to take into account the needs of the self-identified Aboriginal student population when engaged in the board improvement planning process" (p. 16) is a problematic suggestion, because it delegitimizes the needs of Aboriginal students and families who do not want to self-identify because of distrust of the education system as a result of colonial policies (Ministry, 2009a).

The 2013 progress report explicitly reports on capacity building efforts of Aboriginal community organizations to "help support Aboriginal identity building, including the appreciation of Aboriginal histories, cultures and perspectives by all students and staff" (Ministry, 2013, p. 32), in addition to the capacity-building goals of the *Framework*. The Ministry's (2014) *Implementation Plan* discusses capacity-building in terms of collaboration and capacity building with Aboriginal partners, "leadership capacity … to help improve Aboriginal student achievement and well-being and close gaps in student achievement" (p. 13), the evaluation of educators' professional development to assess satisfaction and capacity to meet the needs of Aboriginal students, and to "provide professional development opportunities to … enhance their capacity to support Aboriginal learners more effectively" (p. 14). While we recognize that building capacity to meet the needs of Aboriginal students is important to their academic achievement and well-being, this discourse does not contribute to decolonizing education, because the goals and strategies for capacity-building only recycle, or add to, what has been done before. As a result, capacity-building becomes hostage to the metaphorical goal of decolonization in place of substantive change (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

As we traced the discourse of incorporating Aboriginal cultures, histories, and perspectives across the *Framework*-related documents, we saw little evidence of the Ministry creating substantive change which would support the decolonizing of Ontario schools. Both progress reports highlight increased enrolment in Native Studies and Native Language courses since the release of the *Framework* and that curriculum documents are revised to be "more inclusive of Aboriginal perspectives and more responsive to Aboriginal learners" (Ministry, 2013, p. 38). However, the inclusion of Aboriginal content through curriculum does not necessarily achieve the disruption of cognitive imperialism as "teachers inevitably pick and choose what actually gets taught" (People for Education, 2013, p. 4), resulting in a gap between the inclusive, revised curriculum and what teachers do in practice. The only example of resource development at the Ministry level to integrate Aboriginal content into classrooms is an online compilation of resources meant to "*help elementary and secondary teachers bring Aboriginal perspectives into their classrooms*" (Ministry, 2009a, p. 4, italics in original). The online resource is an attempt to integrate Aboriginal content, and ultimately to build capacity among teachers. However, the webpage hosting the resource was last revised in 2011 and the 37 activities do not cover the breadth of subjects or courses offered in elementary or secondary schools. Furthermore, the inclusion of this material does not address "the existing cultural interpretive monopoly of Eurocentric knowledges, assumptions, and methodologies," because the aim of including such content focuses on "affecting attitudes, motivation, and retention of Aboriginal students" (Battiste, 2013, p. 103). As a result, the Ministry fails to challenge cognitive imperialism once again.

While the Ministry aims to increase Aboriginal content in classrooms across the province, standardized testing does not assess this knowledge. Student achievement continues to be based on learning which aligns with Euro-Western knowledges and priorities. In effect, the EQAO testing process and tests reflect a Eurocentric knowledge-base that maintains cultural bias so as to exclude "Aboriginal learning paradigms, linguistic traditions, and holistic epistemologies" (Cherubini, Hodson, Manley-Casimir, & Muir, 2010, p. 338). The *Implementation Plan* discusses strategies to continue supporting curriculum development and professional development around the integration of Aboriginal cultures, histories, and perspectives, but there are no new plans or strategies identified to accomplish this goal. The possibility for decolonized education is missed in this case, because there is no attempt to change the ways in which Aboriginal content is valued within the context of the *Framework*. Eurocentric ideals of achievement are the basis for the inclusion of this content.

The absences which became obvious through the *Framework* remain clear in the related documents analysed. The *Implementation Plan* (Ministry, 2014), for example, only discusses teachers in relation to the provision of professional development opportunities and capacity building. Capacity building through professional development is integral to the success of any effort to improve FNMI education in Ontario; however, there remains no concrete requirement for teachers to engage these opportunities and integrate their knowledge into practice. In not making such a requirement, the Ministry perpetuates an education system which both supports cognitive imperialism and actively works against decolonization. Moreover, there is a broader absence of activity related to the *Framework* by the Ministry as the commitments to "provid[e] progress reports every three years" (Ministry, 2007a, p. 10) have gone unfulfilled. The first progress report was released in 2009 while the next was not released until 2013, and the 2016 report, at the time of this article's publication, has yet to be made available. This lack of activity in both the progress reports and the online resource as mentioned above indicates that, perhaps, FNMI education is not the "priority" the Ministry describes it as.

Conclusion

The *Framework* represents an ambitious and necessary effort towards creating change in the way Indigenous education is understood and carried out in the province of Ontario. When considered against the themes of our analytic toolkit, the language in the *Framework* demonstrates both strengths and weaknesses. The policy aims to provide opportunities to integrate Indigenous cultures, histories, and perspectives into Ontario's education system. If successful, this integration has the potential to both upset the hidden curriculum and to work against cognitive imperialism. While the policy can be understood as a positive step, it does little in the way of decolonizing Ontario's schools and classrooms through substantive change. At no point does the

Framework offer an opportunity for educators and/or students to critique the ways the current education system continues to operate in ways that uphold cognitive imperialism. Thus, the framework does little to decolonize education in Ontario. The *Framework* merely attempts to react and "fix" a problem within the current system while doing little to upset the status quo. Indeed, through the absence of specific directives aimed at the classroom practice of teachers, the policy fails to require more of teachers and positions Indigenous education as an option, rather than a requirement.

Our findings support a need for further research aimed at understanding the ways policy, and specifically the *Framework*, is understood and enacted by teachers on the front lines of education. Furthermore, this research has highlighted a lack of stamina around creating, adapting, and enacting a vibrant and active policy concerning Indigenous education in Ontario. As missed deadlines pile up, and the Ministry-created resource pool becomes stagnant, it becomes clear that what was once "a priority" is not one any longer. We advocate for research around this lack of action and its causes in order to support a new phase of Indigenous education policy development in Ontario. We believe this will support the thoughtful critique and rebuilding of Ontario's education system in a manner which supports decolonization.

Acknowledgement

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