

CONSIDERATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF INDIGENOUS EDUCATION POLICY IN ONTARIO: AN ANALYSIS OF RHETORIC

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Abstract

The Ontario Ministry of Education's (OME) *Implementation Plan: Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2014) restates its commitment to the principles of the 2007 Policy Framework. This analysis examines the value orientations and assumptions couched in the rhetoric of the 2014 *Implementation Plan*. The paper first situates Indigenous education in a contemporary context, and subsequently discusses the implications of the respective discourses as they are framed in the *Implementation Plan* document. The intent is to provide Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, communities, Indigenous education councils, administrators, teachers and other stakeholders with critical considerations of the OME Indigenous education policy initiatives.

Resumé

Le plan de 2014 (*Implementation Plan: Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework*) du ministère de l'éducation de l'Ontario répète qu'on est attaché aux principes de la déclaration de politique de 2007. Dans cette analyse on examine les orientations éthiques et les présupposés qui sous-tendent la rhétorique du plan de 2014. On commence par placer l'éducation autochtone dans un contexte contemporain, pour ensuite parler de ce qu'impliquent les éléments sous-jacents se trouvant dans ce document de 2014. Le but est de fournir aux autochtones comme aux allochtones (étudiants, communautés, conseils d'éducation autochtones, administrateurs, enseignants et autres individus et groupe concernés) des notes critiques sur les initiatives d'éducation autochtone du ministère de l'éducation de l'Ontario.

Key words: policy; Indigenous education; policy discourse

Introduction

The Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) has made a concerted effort to invest attention and resources in Indigenous education. The 2007 *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (the Framework) set the course for the ministry, school boards, school administrators, and teachers to better account for and subsequently address the unique needs and learning styles of Indigenous students in publicly-funded kindergarten to grade 12 schools across Ontario. The Framework references the uniqueness of Indigenous students' socio-cultural traditions, and commissions educators to incorporate these values into mainstream schools and classrooms. The respective implementation strategies outlined in the Framework reflect the core objectives of the policy (see Vetter & Blimkie, 2011). In 2014, the Ontario Ministry of Education released the *Implementation Plan: Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework*, (the Plan) to restate the OME's commitment to the principles of the 2007 Framework and to outline various strategies and actions for the ministry and provincial school boards in the context of the ten performance measures cited in the Framework. The Plan includes specific tactics for policy implementation between 2014 and 2016.

The 2014 *Implementation Plan* serves as a complementary document to the 2007 policy Framework. Both documents endorse the infusion of Indigenous worldviews in public education to better engage Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in diverse knowledge-paradigms (De France, 2013). These ministry documents recognize that the inclusion of Indigenous traditions and worldviews into school cultures and teachers' practice enhances the educational experiences of Indigenous students (Kanu, 2011). The *Implementation Plan* is best understood in the broader view of the 2007 policy Framework that identifies, in greater detail, the importance of incorporating the distinct learning needs and interests of Indigenous students (see, for example, Neeganagwedgin, 2013; Toulouse, 2010) in school practices and in teachers' pedagogy.

Purpose of the Analysis

This analysis examines the value orientations and assumptions couched in the rhetoric of the 2014 *Implementation Plan*. Using a similar approach from previous analyses of other policy documents (see Cherubini, 2010, 2012, 2016), the analysis will first situate Indigenous education in a contemporary context, and subsequently discuss the rhetorical implications of the respective discourses on Indigenous

students and communities as they are framed in the *Implementation Plan* document. The intent is twofold. First, to provide Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, communities, Indigenous education councils, administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders with critical considerations of the OME Indigenous education policy initiatives as they are presented and delivered across Ontario. Second, to invite these stakeholders to consider how Indigenous students and communities are positioned in the language of difference, and in potentially compromising predicaments.

Methodology

The model of social reproduction theory (SRT) is useful to examine the rhetoric of the *Implementation Plan* document. SRT is a sociologically based approach that accounts for the social advantages of privileged groups across generations (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). According to Bourdieu (1984), SRT contributes to an enhanced appreciation of how social status and privilege can in fact be transferable among dominant groups over sustained time periods. SRT is useful to understand how privileged and powerful groups are favoured in various socio-cultural contexts.

In these ways, SRT also considers how power is exercised in these contexts and the way certain groups benefit while others are disadvantaged in certain social settings, including schools (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). Cultural capital, as a component of SRT, includes the officially sanctioned knowledge that is perceived more favourably in certain cultural contexts, including education. Similarly, social capital encompasses the relationships that are privileged across social settings – including schools (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Hence, some groups are favoured in certain conditions where power itself can permeate cultural and social capital. Power, thus, favours historically dominant people who align with the dominant knowledge (see Paulsen, 2001). Likewise, the human capital model represents an economic-based theory that considers the acquisition of sanctioned knowledge as being directly related to financial gain (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989). This model suggests that privileged groups have the correct information to make prudent decisions, even on behalf of others. Human capital theory also considers the acquisition of officially sanctioned knowledge as serving the broader economy.

Indigenous Education: A Review and Context

There are nearly 65,000 Indigenous students enrolled in K to 12 public schools in Ontario. In Canada, public education is a provincial responsibility whereas First Nation schools are predominantly

administered by a reserve government or delegated authority. Indigenous students have historically not achieved at comparable levels as their non-Indigenous peers; further, the educational experiences of many Indigenous students in public education systems have not always been positive (Cherubini, 2014; Kim, 2015; St. Denis, 2011). As stated in a previous publication (Cherubini, 2010), traditional Eurocentric practices of contemporary schools have not necessarily been inclusive of Indigenous students' learning styles.

Numerous scholars, including Battiste (2013) and Preston and Claypool (2013) advocate for the inclusion of Indigenous pedagogy in schools and classrooms. These and other researchers identify the importance of creating learning environments that offer Indigenous students a sense of belonging and trust that is strengthened by nurturing relationships with teachers (Toulouse, 2008). Student-teacher relationships in culturally-responsive classrooms enhance Indigenous student engagement and achievement (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Learning environments that infuse Indigenous knowledge and practice tend to resonate with Indigenous students (Aikenhead & Elliot, 2010; Kim, 2015).

The literature also states that establishing such trustworthy and genuine connections with Indigenous students and their communities is challenging for mainstream educators, particularly because Indigenous families may have difficulty relating to public schools (Milne, 2016). Certainly, the troubling and not-so-distant history of Indigenous peoples' experiences in residential schools has contributed in many instances to a high degree of suspicion on the part of Indigenous peoples given the oppressive assimilation practices of these institutions (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). For some Indigenous families, the public education system may be considered yet another post-colonial practice to suppress the unique learning needs and worldviews of Indigenous children by normalizing the dominant understandings of knowledge, and how student achievement is measured (Donald, 2012; St. Denis, 2011). These and other practices that sought to assimilate Indigenous students have contributed to their sense of marginalization in publicly funded schools (Feir, 2016). Indigenous students often encounter a normalized narrative of public education that in some instances functions off a set of Eurocentric assumptions and practices, particularly as they relate to the dominant epistemologies that are practiced in mainstream schools. It has been noted that the standardized curricula of schools does not always resonate with Indigenous students' epistemic traditions and unique learning styles (Godlewska, Moore, & Bednasek, 2010). In this regard, contemporary public schools have not adequately served the needs of Indigenous students. Indigenous students risk feeling disconnected from their education and may experience significant tension between

classroom pedagogies and practices that can stifle their learning (Cherubini, 2014).

This sense of marginalization has, to some extent, contributed to the achievement gap (identified in both the 2007 Framework and 2014 *Implementation Plan* documents under discussion) between Indigenous and other students in Ontario (see, as well, Gunn, Pomahac, Stricker, & Tailfeathers, 2011). These students have consistently underachieved in formal education and have suffered from the adverse effects of power imbalances that privileges Eurocentric practices and paradigms in public education practices (Redefining Success, 2007).

Discussion

As discussed previously (Cherubini, 2016), the first page of the Ontario Ministry of Education's 2014 *Implementation Plan* document includes a rather sweeping statement that is positioned directly on top of the overarching government vision of Indigenous education in Ontario. The statement alludes to the OME's intent to "continue to advance the goals" (p. 3) of the 2007 policy Framework. The word "continues" underscores the government's long-term commitment to the initiatives rolled out in the Framework seven years earlier, and the language of "advance[ing]" implies that the original OME goals merit a further investment of public resources. The language of accountability is clear in the first page of the document.

The statements bind the necessary advancement of policy goals to the OME's allegiance to Indigenous partners who participate in "meaningful collaboration" (p. 3). The rhetorical construction of this first statement in the document positions the OME's commitment to Indigenous education as not only responsive and sustainable, but accounts for the Indigenous partners who assume a "meaningful" role in the development and implementation of the respective objectives.

The Introduction of the *Implementation Plan* informs the public that the investments (implying financial and human resources) of the last seven years since the inception of the 2007 policy Framework have been met with "many successes," and that partnerships with Indigenous communities and organizations "have become stronger" by way of these "collaborative initiatives" (2014, p. 4). The discursive framework contributes to the impression of a governing body that has been judicious in its efforts to ameliorate the plight of Indigenous students in public schools, while remaining accountable to the public that such investments in Indigenous education are prudent and thoughtful.

The discourse in the Plan's introductory chapter builds on the notion of the OME's responsiveness to Indigenous communities and stakeholders and cites the same core objectives of the 2007

Framework, namely to improve Indigenous student achievement and to close “the achievement gap between Aboriginal students and all students” (2014, p.4). While the rhetorical construction of this introductory sentence would seem to position Aboriginal students as the collective “other” in comparison to “all students” in Ontario, the footnote explains that,

in this document, ‘all students’ is used to refer to all students in provincially funded English-language and French-language schools in Ontario, including students who have self-identified and the rest of the student population, which includes those who are Aboriginal and have not self-identified. (p. 4)

Yet, the provincial baseline data on Aboriginal student achievement that is “based on the achievement of self-identified Aboriginal students” is consistently described as “gaps...between the numbers of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students and the numbers of English- and French-language students” (pp. 4 & 5).

This description that differentiates Indigenous students from English and French-language students would seem, for Indigenous students, to be a rather dubious position in which to be situated, particularly from a post-colonial perspective whereby an entire demographic of historically marginalized students is distinguished in the language of difference. The statements that refer to the respective ranges in test scores are identical to the ones made in a previous OME publication – the 2013 *A Solid Foundation* (Foundation) document (see p. 28) – that provided a second progress report on the implementation of the 2007 policy Framework.

Despite the significant gaps between Indigenous and English- and French-language students in Ontario, ranging from 19 to 45 percentage points, the introductory statements in this section of the *Implementation Plan* suggest that the OME has “achieved many successes” (p. 4) considering the outcomes of the 2007 policy Framework, and that the OME “ha[s] accomplished a great deal” in the seven years since the Framework was introduced. Indeed, one may surmise that some of the success rests in the fact that 86% of Inuit students passed the 2011-2012 Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, in comparison to 82% of “all English students” (Solid Foundation, 2013, p. 27). Somewhat curiously, however, there are no explanations to clarify that the Inuit students who scored four percentage points above the scores of “all English students” represent a total sample of 21, compared to over 137,000 English students across the province (as cited in the 2013 Foundations document). It might be expected that the enormous range in the sample size of students would merit some explanation.

The section on scores and gaps concludes with a paragraph that (for the third time in as many pages) restates the OME's and public-school boards' collaboration with Indigenous partners. The rhetoric, beginning in the front matter of the document, creates an unmistakable impression of a governing body that is accountable for its policy implementation. Like the Foundations (2013) document, there are recurrent references to meaningful and key collaborations with Indigenous partners and organizations. The references to key collaborations with Indigenous communities and education stakeholders create the perception that the ministry is honouring its obligation to the same Indigenous students and families that have been historically marginalized and oppressed by post-colonial education practices. As part of this obligation, the language of the *Implementation Plan* (2014) makes clear that key Indigenous groups have had a significant voice in shaping the various and multiple opportunities first articulated in the 2007 policy Framework to advance Indigenous student achievement.

The last section in the front matter of the *Implementation Plan* document, entitled 'Our Way Forward,' underscores the OME's commitment "to build on" the Indigenous education strategy (2014, p.6). Here, too, the rhetorical construction of this statement implies that the original initiatives of the 2007 Framework merit further investment of human and financial resources. The inherent implication is strengthened through a series of expressions of how the OME "will continue to implement" and in fact "increase focus" in various policy actions and strategies (p.6), thereby embedding their sustainable and long-term commitment to these same policy initiatives. As well, it is stated that "the ministry continues to recognize the importance of [not just collaboration but] meaningful collaboration" with Indigenous partners (p. 6) that are described as "essential to continuing to support Aboriginal students" (p. 7). The language situates and underscores the government's recognition of the importance of accounting for the Aboriginal communities. The consistent references to the ministry's extension and reach to Aboriginal partners positions them as a collegial governing body willing to invest in these important community relationships. However, as will be discussed later, these same references also indirectly allude to the fact that, at least to some extent, the ultimate success of the policy initiatives is based on the involvement of the respective Aboriginal partners.

Further into the 'Our Way Forward' section, school boards, schools, and Indigenous communities are described as "all benefit[ing] from mutual information sharing" across their respective organizations to "help strengthen meaningful and reciprocal relationship building, engagement, and collaborative work to ensure the success of Aboriginal learners" (p. 7). According to this discourse

Aboriginal organizations share the details of their observations and perceptions with institutions of formal learning. The connotations of collegiality describe the “meaningful and reciprocal” relationships between educational bodies and Indigenous organizations and communities. The alleged strong and sustainable relationships will “ensure the success of Aboriginal learners” (p. 7). In effect, the discursive framework posits the OME as having met public expectations by putting in place the opportunities, supports, and conditions for school boards and Indigenous organizations to tailor policy interventions to advance Indigenous learners. The discourse suggests that the same opportunities, supports, and conditions created by the OME will “ensure” Indigenous student success. The OME situates itself as competent and accountable to its obligations to the marginalized demographic of Indigenous learners. The discourse of the *Implementation Plan* showcases the OME’s accomplishments and subsequently positions school boards and Indigenous organizations as the stakeholders that will “ensure” Indigenous student success on the “way forward.” The rhetoric suggests that the ministry is both judicious and enabling in terms of its commitment to “ensure” the success of Indigenous learners (p. 7).

The bulk of the 2014 *Implementation Plan* document divides and separately lists the strategies and actions for the ministry and provincial school boards for 2013-14, in consideration of the original ten performance measures from the 2007 Framework (see Appendix for a complete list of Performance Measures). The discourse reflects understandings of “progress” that are based predominantly upon the cultural capital of standardized test scores (see p. 8). The OME remains accountable to reporting on the same standardized data of externally imposed large-scale tests to measure progress and student achievement. The first four performance measures listed in the *Implementation Plan* document includes rhetoric of sustainability that is framed in the discourse of the ministry’s long-term commitment to the policy initiatives. Five of the 11 ministry declarations begin with the word *continue*, contributing thereby to a distinct tenor that justifies further investment in a context of productive and successful policy implementation. Interestingly, variations of the word ‘continue’ are published 28 times in this 19-page document. The ministry will ‘continue’ their focused attention on key policy measures and “engage” (p. 9) with Indigenous partners to improve the achievement of self-identified Indigenous students.

The OME, using the data of large-scale standardized tests, will “continue to support” (p. 9) school board personnel to target specific resources and “support” the development of these resources in collaboration with Indigenous partners. There are also consistent references to support school board leaders and school administrators with their

efforts to increase the number of Indigenous self-identified students in their boards and schools. Such supports are offered in the context of collaboration with Indigenous communities in order “to track Aboriginal student achievement” and “set targets” for them (p. 9). The OME is situated as supportive and enabling of less successful students. Hence, the OME will “identify strategies” and “identify promising practices” (p. 9) to enable Aboriginal students to meet provincial benchmarks on standardized assessments. In these capacities, the discourse implies an invitational and accommodating governing body is willing to “engage with boards to support the effective use and analysis of student achievement data for Aboriginal students” (p. 10). One cannot help but notice the connotations of social capital as they relate to standardized test scores. The word “support” (cited 38 times in the document) stresses the OME’s commitment to “continue provincial engagement and support board and school engagement” with Aboriginal communities “to explore data sharing with the objectives of building understanding of Aboriginal student self-identification” (p. 10).

The impetus for Indigenous students and families to identify as Indigenous, it would seem, rests on the fact that the more students that identify, the greater the support from the ministry and publicly funded school boards. The question might be asked, however, that through self-identification are Indigenous students and their families giving licence to the ministry to “track” their progress as one, collective demographic of students in comparison to English- and French-language students in Ontario? In this context, Indigenous student achievement will continue to be “tracked” and compared to other *different* students in the province per externally administered large-scale standardized test scores.

Moreover, the rhetorical constructions throughout the document infer that the number of Indigenous students and families that identify are considerably low and thus warrant these targeted interventions and supports from the ministry and public-school boards. The inference may be problematic since it risks creating a public perception that Indigenous students and families are relatively indifferent to these “continued” supports and fiscal investments designed to improve and ensure Indigenous student achievement. After all, the ministry and school boards are committing to “continue [to] explore,” “engage,” “mobilize,” “help,” “work with,” and “support” targeted interventions for self-identified students.

Regarding performance measures five and six, “continue” is positioned as the first word in six of the eight ministry statements in the *Implementation Plan*, solidifying the impression of a government body with a long-range focus. The ministry is extending their reach to collaborate and work with the other provincial ministries and the federal government to support Indigenous education. The OME will

draw from other government agencies to bolster even more support for Indigenous students and families. The ministry and school boards will offer extensive supports to “increase opportunities” and “fund initiatives” related to Indigenous students’ engagement in public schools. Once again, the rhetoric of “collaboration” and “discussion” with Indigenous families and communities is employed, and in some instances, framed in the language of “capacity-building” (p. 11). The consistent rhetorical constructions throughout the document point to a responsible education ministry that “continues to” provide the necessary opportunities and make the necessary concessions to closing the achievement gap. In turn, school boards will “enhance” interventions to meet Indigenous students’ needs, “increase” opportunities for Indigenous student engagement, “continue to” support “successful” transitions, and “provide” professional development for teachers to “increase” and “enhance” their knowledge of Indigenous socio-cultural traditions (p. 14). These terms imply that such interventions, opportunities, and successful transitions have been well established as cultural capital in school boards as an outcome of the OME’s previous endeavors, as have the awareness levels of mainstream teachers in terms of their recognition and respect of Indigenous students’ learning preferences and community realities.

The focus on performance measure seven in the Implementation Plan on ministry and board commitments to heighten Indigenous cultures and traditions, share best practices that foster Indigenous students’ learning needs, and offer further professional development for educators. However, the bulk of the statements about this performance measure appeals to the concentration of resources that the ministry continues to invest in these initiatives. In the ministry’s response to performance measures eight, nine, and ten, the focus returns squarely upon engaging and collaborating with Indigenous partners and communities (in four of the five statements). The respective statements in this section related to school boards implicate the continual involvement of the Indigenous community and Indigenous students’ parents to further the objectives of the policy Framework. Indigenous students, parents, and communities are heavily implicated in the discourse of this document. There are abundant references that point to Indigenous community members and organizations having been invited to partner and collaborate with the governing authorities to further the objectives stated at the very outset of the policy in 2007, including closing the achievement gap between Indigenous and all other students.

The inferences throughout the 2014 document that relatively low numbers of Indigenous students and families have chosen to self-identify, complicates further what may be an already convoluted context. More precisely, the rhetorical frames of reference throughout

the document may create a perception that the ministry, provincial school boards, and schools themselves remain not only committed to the policy Framework objectives seven years into its implementation but are renewing and strengthening their support to improve Indigenous student learning and close the achievement gap. By underscoring the significance of Indigenous parental and community involvement, the ministry safeguards to some extent the progress (or potentially lack thereof) of Indigenous student achievement as reflected on test scores in comparison to all other students. The language of collaboration, partnership, and engagement, and the frequency in which it is employed, positions a rather dubious degree of responsibility and accountability on the Indigenous stakeholders as well, for Indigenous students' progress and achievement.

The last section of the document addresses the respective strategies for 2014 to 2016. Four of the eight statements in the Plan refer to the significance of continuing to "engage" with Indigenous partners (variations of the word, "engage," are cited 25 times in the document). A different statement endorses the funding of "additional strategies to increase the voluntary, confidential self-identification" of Indigenous students (p. 16). The attention towards investing in further supports for Indigenous learners construes broadly the ministry and school boards' steadfast support for successful policy implementation.

Implications of Student Well-Being

A social reproduction theory SRT analysis of the *Implementation Plan* document reveals the discursive positioning of the OME as accountable to the public and as a supportive agency that includes Indigenous student and community interests as components of the ministry's their cultural and social capital. However, there are references to Indigenous student "well-being" that emerge in this document that deserve further attention.

It is curious that in the statement of primary objectives in the Introduction section of the *Implementation Plan*, the term "well-being" accompanies the first objective of the OME's Indigenous education strategy of improving Indigenous student achievement: "To improve ... well-being" among Indigenous students (p. 4). Relatedly, the 2007 policy Framework called for significant improvements in Indigenous students' self-esteem (p. 14) and cited these improvements these as "performance measures" in both the 2007 Framework and the 2013 Foundations documents (2013, p. 33). While the 2014 Plan document identifies the "well-being" of Indigenous students (p. 4), it does not include any quantitative or qualitative outcomes to describe the progress made in the areas of student self-esteem and well-being, as it does the achievement levels of Indigenous students on test scores.

One might suspect that if affective considerations of Indigenous student self-esteem and well-being were significant enough to be included in the 2007, 2013, and 2014 documents, then it would seem reasonable to expect a summary of progress related to these initiatives. Instead, the discourse and hence, cultural capital, of the *Implementation Plan* document remains heavily reflective of quantifiable, data-related scores to measure progress. The Plan document cites the ministry's willingness to "continue to collaborate" with stakeholders to support Indigenous student "mental health" (p. 11). Yet, there are neither qualitative nor quantitative data to support the progress of the various 2007, 2013, and 2014 initiatives in these areas.

Perhaps more peculiar, the 'Strategies and Actions' for 2014 to 2016 cited in the *Implementation Plan* document refer to the OME's intent to "identify and define indicators for measuring the well-being and self-esteem of Aboriginal learners" (p. 16). If student self-esteem was an original focus of attention in 2007, 2013, and in 2014, and a component of one of the OME's primary objectives, one may wonder why these indicators for measuring the affective aspects of Aboriginal student welfare have not been already developed, implemented, measured and evaluated in the same way as the data related to students' scores on large-scale provincial tests. Additionally, it can be construed as rather late at this stage (seven years into a nine-year policy implementation plan) to be stating an intent to "identify" and "define" (p. 16) indicators. The discursive positioning of these intentions risks the suggestion that Aboriginal student mental health and well-being is an after-thought of sorts that was displaced by the apparently more pressing and valued indicators of externally imposed standardized test scores to measure student progress.

In its final pages, the Plan document states that in 2016 the OME will address "progress made in developing indicators for assessing the self-esteem and well-being of Aboriginal students" (p. 18). This suggests that nine years into the implementation of the 2007 policy Framework the OME will be making progress in *developing* these measures. It may be suggested, therefore, that the ministry priority for advancing Aboriginal student progress seems to be rooted squarely in the socio-cultural capital of quantifiable standardized test scores.

Conclusion

The rhetoric throughout the *Implementation Plan* document aligns Indigenous communities and stakeholders as key contributors to the implementation of the policy. The underlying impression is of a supportive and enabling education ministry committed to improving Indigenous student achievement and well-being, and to closing the achievement gap between Indigenous and English- and French-lan-

guage students in Ontario's public schools. Yet, the same rhetorical frames of reference that contribute to these impressions may also harbour critical tensions, since presumably more Indigenous students and families may need to identify as Indigenous so that the provincial government and school authorities can implement targeted initiatives for Indigenous students while simultaneously tracking their progress. It might be argued, then, that Indigenous students, families, and communities are situated in compromising positions. The 2014 document implies that the ministry and school boards have and will continue to reach out to Indigenous stakeholders.

But what happens, from both the perspective of public perception and from a human capital model, if Indigenous students, families, and community members consider the frames of references throughout this document as situating them in a position of difference that serves to only reinforce the same colonial paradigms of deficit and difference that have historically positioned this marginalized demographic of learners? Their actions, or perhaps inaction, in response to the ministry's request to identify, could be attributed to a lack of appreciation and perhaps even indifference to the government, school board, and especially the public's investments. Can Indigenous learners and communities risk to be positioned even further in deficit and negative discourses if they choose not to have their children "tracked" and compared to other students in Ontario? Can they assume that the tax-paying public draws upon historical detail to give an accurate picture of pre- and post-colonial realities as they relate to the marginalization of Indigenous peoples in educational institutions? The underlying tension inherent in the rhetorical construction throughout the document situates Indigenous students and communities in a potentially problematic position that has historical implications on their contemporary realities. Stated differently, there may be a cost to be aligned with the ministry as a partner to the policy initiatives and that cost may be perceived as a demarcation of their collective and "different" selves in the all-encompassing milieu of public comparison. To refute self-identification and tracking may contribute to the perception that they are ambivalent to the goodwill of an invitational and accommodating governing body, and by association, to the public support to assist under-achieving Indigenous students.

Appendix

Performance Measures 1 to 10:

1. Significant increase in the percentage of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students meeting provincial standards on province-wide assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics

2. Significant increase in the number of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit teaching and non-teaching staff in school boards across Ontario
3. Significant increase in the graduation rate of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students
4. Significant improvement in First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student achievement
5. Significant improvement in First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students' self-esteem
6. Increased collaboration between First Nation education authorities and school boards to ensure that First Nation students in First Nation communities receive the preparation they need to succeed when they make the transition to provincially funded schools
7. Increased satisfaction among educators in provincially funded schools with respect to targeted professional development and resources designed to help them serve First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students more effectively
8. Increased participation of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit parents in the education of their children
9. Increased opportunities for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and issue resolution among Aboriginal communities, First Nation governments and education authorities, schools, school boards, and the Ministry of Education
10. Integration of educational opportunities to significantly improve the knowledge of all students and educators in Ontario about the rich cultures and histories of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples

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