ABORIGINAL EDUCATION AND ANTI-RACIST EDUCATION: BUILDING ALLIANCES ACROSS CULTURAL AND RACIAL IDENTITY

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A critical race analysis could provide both Aboriginal students and their university student advisors with knowledge to understand and potentially challenge the effects and processes of racialization that have historically, legally, and politically divided Aboriginal communities and families. Coalition and alliances can be made within and across the diversity within Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples' lives through a common understanding and commitment to anti-racist education. A critical anti-racist education could provide a foundation to forge alliances between diverse Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in a common search for social justice in education.

Key words: coalition, alliance, social justice, racialization

Une analyse critique de la race pourrait fournir aux étudiants autochtones et à leurs conseillers universitaires des connaissances qui leur permettraient de comprendre et peut-être de remettre en question les effets et les processus de racialisation qui, à travers l'histoire et sur les plans juridique et politique, ont divisé les communautés et les familles autochtones. Des coalitions et des alliances peuvent être formées au sein des peuples autochtones et non autochtones grâce à une compréhension et à une promotion communes de l'éducation antiraciste. Une éducation antiraciste faisant place à l'analyse critique pourrait fournir une base pour la formation d'alliances entre les communautés autochtones et non autochtones dans un souci commun de justice sociale dans le domaine de l'éducation.

Mots clés : coalition, alliance, justice sociale, racialisation

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Recently I was invited to talk with university student advisors about how to think and respond to conflict among Aboriginal university students. These advisors described the basis of the conflict as dealing with issues of "authenticity" and "belonging"; in other words, who is a "real" Indian and what does it mean to be a "real" Indian. As a child of a Métis/Cree father who spoke Cree and Mitchif[1] and a Treaty 6, Cree-speaking mother living in a white settler colonial nation, I too am personally familiar with such identity politics and have had a professional interest in understanding them (St. Denis, 2002, 2004). These identity politics are rooted in our colonial history and Aboriginal students are, in part, living out a long-established, politically charged script of who belongs and what it means to belong to an Aboriginal community (Brayboy, 2000; King, 2003; Wieder & Pratt, 1990).

There are several ways to interpret conflicts resulting from these identity politics. A critical race analysis can help educators understand these identity politics as both the effects of colonialism as well as effects of some of the contradictions that arise in the context of the movement towards cultural revitalization. Ironically, cultural revitalization can be seen to unwittingly encourage a form of cultural fundamentalism that leads to an informal but nonetheless daunting cultural hierarchy that can encourage notions of authenticity among Aboriginal people.

I believe that Aboriginal students engaged in conflict and identity politics would benefit from developing a critical race analysis to provide both Aboriginal students and their advisors with knowledge to understand and potentially challenge the effects and processes of racialization that have historically, legally, and politically divided Aboriginal communities and families. Furthermore, a familiarity with a critical race analysis may even encourage productive alliances across the diverse subjectivities of Aboriginal students, and between Aboriginal students and their student advisors and other educators wanting to provide support to Aboriginal students.

In this article, I briefly discuss the concepts of identity and identity politics. This part of the article provides definitions of race and racialization, including a discussion of how and why race matters. I next review the history of how Aboriginal people were racialized in the process of colonization because that history is important for an

understanding of some of the root causes of identity conflicts among current Aboriginal communities. I also explore how cultural and language revitalization efforts among Aboriginal people can have contradictory effects, including those that may inadvertently contribute to conflicts regarding who is and what it means to be a real Indian. This part of the article draws on research I conducted among Aboriginal teachers (St. Denis, Bouvier, & Battiste, 1998; St. Denis, 2002). I include, too, a discussion of some of the effects of racialization on Aboriginal teachers and their sense of identity and belonging to an Aboriginal community. Racism not only has an impact on Aboriginal teachers' sense of identity but also on their work as teachers. Therefore, I argue that Aboriginal teachers would benefit from a critical race analysis. Increasingly, educators are seeing the call for anti-racist education to become a part of what constitutes Aboriginal education. Finally, I suggest that researchers need to do more critical race analysis for everyone involved in education. A critical anti-racist education could provide a foundation to forge alliances between diverse Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in a common search for social justice in education.

RACE, RACIALIZATION, AND IDENTITY POLITICS

Rather than thinking about identity as innate and individually determined, it is much more helpful to understand one's identity as a construction, a product, and an effect of social and historical relations. As cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall (1990) suggests:

Cultural identity is *not* something that already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere and have histories. But, like everything that is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. (p. 225, italics added)

Hall's definition of cultural identity stresses the importance of history and social relations in the production of identities, and it is this notion of identity that is helpful for analyzing the effects of colonization and racism on Aboriginal people.

The concept of identity politics refers to the processes by which racially marginalized peoples resist colonization and oppression. The

following definition of identity political formations speaks of liberation and self-determination:

Identity political formations typically aim to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context. Members of that constituency assert or reclaim ways of understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant oppressive characterizations, with the goal of greater self-determination. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n. p.)

The identity politics in which Aboriginal people are immersed is not unique to Aboriginal students and people in Canada; colonized people around the world share such identity politics. A central feature of the colonization of Aboriginal people occurred through the implementation of racialized ideology and racialized social relations.

Omi and Winant (1986) explain that racial identities, and the social meanings attached to racial groups, are widespread and deeply embedded in social, educational, political, and economic institutions. They use the concept of *racial formation* or *racialization* to bring attention to the political and social processes by which racial identity is assigned and given meaning. Racial formation refers to "the process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turned shaped by racial meanings" (p. 62). Racialization is a concept that brings attention to how race has been used and is continually used to justify inequality and oppression of Aboriginal peoples.

Race matters because members of society have internalized racist ideas about what skin colour tells about the value and worth of a person or a group of people. For example, differences in skin colour and other obvious physical characteristics are "thought to explain perceived differences in intellectual, physical and artistic temperaments, and to justify distinct treatment of racially identified individuals and groups" (Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 63). Castagna and Dei (2000) also explain that the racialization of identities continues to matter "because of its utility for distributing unequal power and privilege. It has become an effective tool for the distribution of rewards and punishments" (p. 21).

Through implicit and explicit designations of Aboriginal people and their use of the land as inferior to that of the colonizer/settler, the racialization of Aboriginal people justified and continues to justify the

colonization of Aboriginal people and their lands. Ng (1993) explains that "To treat race, gender, and class as *relations* enables us to see how racism and sexism were deployed to subordinate particular groups of people in the colonization of Canada and its subsequent development as a modern nation-state "(p. 52, emphasis in original). She offers the example of how ideas of European superiority were "tied to private property, farming and Christianity" (p. 53). Ng argues that the ideology of European supremacy was deployed to justify the subordination of Aboriginal people. An ideology of white European supremacy had material consequences: that ideology of superiority justified the taking of Indigenous land, the confinement of Aboriginal people to reserves, and their subjugation to Christian education.

HISTORICAL PRACTICES OF RACIALIZING ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

The introduction of a capitalist economy, Christianity, and Western forms of patriarchy has long changed Aboriginal family and community structures. These institutional practices, beginning with the fur trade and continuing with the Indian Act, have shaped ideas and practices of determining who belongs and how one belongs to Aboriginal communities. The legacy of the fur trade and the Indian Act is multifaceted, but, for sure, both offered lessons about belonging and identity, and both were racializing practices. In other words, both used either race or patriarchal traditions to determine who belonged and who did not belong, or rather, how one would belong and where one belonged, if at all.

   For example, the fur trade, as an economic and political colonial practice, initiated the development of Métis people in Canada. In part, the development of racialized hierarchal relations between First Nations and European subjects is based in these early economic relations. In this historical context, white skin came to matter in specific ways, determining who belonged and who was ignored and/or excluded by both Aboriginal and settler communities. The racialized hierarchal human relations introduced through colonization have intimately and unequally affected Aboriginal families and communities, influencing ideas about who belongs and who does not (Adams, 1975).

By determining how membership to Indian bands would be decided, the Indian Act is another way in which ideas of belonging have had an impact on Aboriginal families and communities. Historically, the Indian Act discriminated against Indian women who married exogenously because they and their children lost the right to Indian status and the right to live on the reserve. Although Indian women and their children lost Indian status and Indian rights upon marriage to a non-status person, Indian men who married non-status persons, including white women, could, through the Indian Act, bestow Indian status upon these non-status women. Subsequently, although Indian women and Indian men could both have children of similar mixed cultural and racial heritage, the children of the Indian women were not recognized as status Indians because of the Indian Act membership laws, but the children of Indian men were. There have since been revisions to the Indian Act regarding membership; however, Aboriginal people continue to live with the legacy of this injustice. The children of Indian women who lost status often continue to struggle with outsider status.

The experience of residential school education has also had a huge impact on Aboriginal identity and belonging. The primarily negative effects of the mandatory requirement that First Nations children attend residential schools have been well documented (Sellars, 1993). Among the many devastating effects was the alienation of Aboriginal family members from one another, and the widespread, deliberate, and for the most part, successful erasure and slaying of Aboriginal languages. As opposed to describing Aboriginal people as having *lost* their Indigenous language, I am deliberately using the word *slaying* to describe the experience of Aboriginal people who were often severely punished and shamed for speaking their Indigenous language. Aboriginal people did not lose their Indigenous language; it was shamed, beaten, and tortured out of them (Moran, 1988). All these practices of racialization and racism have had devastating effects on Aboriginal people. The historical legacy of the Indian Act and residential schools continues to impact Aboriginal peoples' sense of community and belonging. Through these historical processes, so many were and, some would argue, continue to be relegated to the margins of the margins.

In response to these devastating conditions a movement towards self-determination arose. In the past 40 years or so, Aboriginal communities in Canada have been engaged in decolonizing through processes of cultural revitalization to resist the many effects and legacies of colonization and racialization. In Canada a new Indian policy outlined in *The White Paper* of 1969 (Indian and Affairs and Northern Development, 1969) recommended drastic changes in how the federal government should relate to Aboriginal people. Aboriginal groups regarded this new proposed policy as the continuation of the erosion of the special rights and status of Aboriginal/First Nations people in Canada. Aboriginal responses to *The White Paper* "became the single most powerful catalyst of the Indian nationalist movement, launching it into a determined force for nativism – a reaffirmation of a unique cul-tural heritage and identity" (Weaver, 1981, p. 171).

In *These Mountains Are Our Sacred Places*, Chief John Snow (1977) of the Wesley Band of Stoney Indians tells a story of how Aboriginal people began resisting the stranglehold that colonial institutions had maintained for so long. In the process of building a case for their land claims, the Wesley Band began to rediscover their cultural heritage through the history of their land. Through events like participating in their first on-reserve band council election in a move towards self-government, the Band Council realized the deep-rooted problems resulting from a long history of colonization. Snow explains that the Band Council realized, "We would have to take an embittered, despondent, confused people and point them towards rediscovering, recapturing and revitalizing our cultural philosophies and values" (p. 123).

In the early 1970s, the Morley reserve in Alberta began hosting a conference of Indian leaders, spiritual practitioners, and traditional elders in an ecumenical gathering to affirm Indigenous cultural traditions and values. This gathering turned into the Indian Ecumenical Movement that involved thousands of Indian people from all parts of North America coming together in a pilgrimage to remind each other of their cultural heritage and traditions (Snow, 1977). As Indian people came together at these gatherings, they soon realized that if they were going to revive "our cultural, spiritual, and religious heritage … [then] we would also need to retain our language and culture" (p. 144). In this

part of the story, Snow tells of the movement towards cultural and language revitalization in Aboriginal communities. This move towards revitalizing cultural traditions and language has been an immense healing process for many Aboriginal people. It was one way to resist the deeply entrenched assumptions about the inferiority of Indigenous people. A move towards cultural revitalization has also had unantici-pated effects.

CULTURAL REVITALIZATION AND FUNDAMENTALISM

After almost three decades of involvement in Aboriginal education, I have slowly and not easily come to understand why some of the efforts Aboriginal people have made towards cultural revitalization may not always be as liberating and healing as they were intended to be. Some contradictions and paradoxes of cultural revitalization became evident to me while conducting research on the experiences of Aboriginal teachers (St. Denis, 2002, 2004). Fundamentalism, especially ethnic and national fundamentalism, is one framework that helps to understand the contra-dictions and paradoxes that cultural revitalization has on identity politics and belonging in Aboriginal and First Nations communities.

Fundamentalism is more commonly associated with religious beliefs and practices. Joyce Green (2004), an Aboriginal political scientist, argues that fundamentalism is about process, not content. She explains that fundamentalism is about the "practice of reinforcing boundaries and prescribing behaviour" (p. 19), and that ethnic or cultural fundament-alism "constructs historically and nationally located identity as legiti-mate only when a precise set of cultural, ideological and most worry-ingly, genetic markers or 'blood quantum' are met" (p. 23). Nationalist fundamentalism "identifies insiders and outsiders and the processes, practices and belief by which the nation is perpetuated. Essential characteristics become idealized, policed and enforced in defense of the politics and social purity of the nation" (p. 23).

When Aboriginal teacher education programs were established across Canada beginning in the early 1970s, their mission included producing Aboriginal teachers who would play a central role in language and cultural revitalization. Those who had retained their language and were knowledgeable of cultural traditions and practices

were in high demand. In the late 1970s one of the few books available on traditional education practices was *Respect for Life: The Traditional Upbringing of American Indian Children* (Morey & Gilliam, 1974), a book that reports the proceedings of a conference in which American Indian elders had been invited to share their knowledge of traditional childrearing practices.

Henry Old Coyote, a Crow Indian from Montana who participated in the conference, talked about how focusing on cultural revitalization had certain effects on identity politics among American Indian and Aboriginal peoples. He was aware that one of the consequences was the production of categories of Indians: real, traditional, and assimilated. For example, realizing that Indians familiar with traditional knowledge were increasingly in demand, Henry Old Coyote explains:

Now we have Indian experts popping up all over the country. Everybody's trying to tell us that this is the correct way, the authentic way of presenting our customs and beliefs. But the real traditional Indian is staying in the background, trying to see what goes on. I consider myself a traditional Indian. (Morey & Gilliam, 1974, p. 4)

In today's political climate, accentuating authentic Aboriginal cultural identity has become highly regarded. Some of the requirements for cultural authenticity include speaking one's First Nations language, having knowledge of and participating in a myriad of spiritual practices, and knowing traditional stories and other cultural practices. These are important for First Nations people, but one's participation in cultural practices does not alleviate the social, political, and economic alienation experienced by too many Aboriginal peoples, both now and in the past. Although participating in cultural revitalization has helped many to withstand discrimination, it will not challenge or end the injustice.

Although many individuals, families, and communities have benefited from the cultural revitalization movement, Aboriginal people are still faced with so many of the social problems that Chief John Snow, in the 1970s, had hoped this return to culture and language would address. Part of my concern with cultural revitalization is how the varying capacities, and perhaps even lack of desire, for Aboriginal or First Nations people to participate in cultural revitalization can become another form of blaming the victim. For example, for an Aboriginal

person to participate in cultural and language revitalization, one must have access to resources such as language classes, if they are available at all. Aboriginal language instruction has not been made as readily available as French language instruction. Because of the Indian Act, adoption, and other life circumstances, some Aboriginal people are not easily integrated back into Aboriginal communities. When these external factors are not considered, it becomes much easier to blame the victim of colonization for not speaking their Aboriginal language. This is especially the case if one's observance of cultural practices becomes a way to assess one's cultural authenticity; then one's level of cultural authenticity can be seen as the problem rather than the devastating effects of systemic inequality and discrimination faced by Aboriginal people.

The ability to speak one's language has become an important sign of one's cultural authenticity, but it is a criterion that continues to pose a challenge for many Aboriginal people. Although there have been many calls for Aboriginal language maintenance and reclamation, Aboriginal languages are continually dying (Swan, 2001), and as previously mentioned, language programming is often not available to Aboriginal people. Family and community contexts have changed, making it even more difficult to learn one's language even when the personal desire is there. In Saskatchewan, many elementary and secondary Aboriginal teachers, charged with the responsibility of supporting the development of a positive and strong cultural identity in their Aboriginal students, must struggle with their own challenges of reclamation and revitalization. In an educational climate that calls for cultural and language restoration, those Aboriginal teachers who do not speak their First Nations languages explain the decisions made by their parents and grandparents who encouraged them to learn English, usually at the expense of retaining their Aboriginal languages. These decisions were typically influenced by a desire to protect their children from being rejected or humiliated because of their inability to speak English and to protect their children from the racism and rejection they themselves had experienced. This lack of fluency in Aboriginal languages was set in motion by the requirements of residential schools and other colonial practices.

In a climate of cultural revitalization, parents and grandparents, who under very difficult colonial and racist conditions did their best to make good decisions for their children, are now told they made the wrong decisions, and that they must now try to reverse language and cultural change. The shift to language revitalization can be very daunting for many Aboriginal parents. For example, a Yup'ik instructor at a community college in Alaska noted,

Back when parents were told to speak only English to their kids, they did that, but had very limited vocabulary in English. With limited vocabulary, children aren't going to learn that much. Now, however, parents are hearing that they should speak Yup'ik to their children. This change has caused some parents to mistrust the advice of educators, …"first I was told one thing, then another." (Henze & Vanett, 1993, p. 128)

In the past many Aboriginal parents and grandparents did their best to learn the norms and practices that would increase the success and acceptance of their children in a dominant society. In a strategy of cultural revitalization, these efforts would come back to haunt Aboriginal people who no longer speak their Aboriginal languages and who are no longer familiar with their historical cultural practices and customs. These Aboriginal ancestors and their descendants are produced as deviant once again, continually making the wrong decisions, and thereby held ac-countable for cultural and social change brought about by colonization. Madeline Solomon, a Koyukuk Alaskan elder, explains it this way:

We were told not to talk in Indian to our kids so we start talking in English to them. Then as they were growing up they don't know how to talk in Indian. Now they change their minds and start this Bilingual, but it's pretty hard to teach these kids. They just don't believe in learning the language again. (Madison & Yarber, 1981, back cover)

A Saskatchewan Aboriginal educator explains her history and lack of fluency in her Aboriginal language in the following way:

I think that the basis of survival is knowing your language, whatever it is, and for myself I never taught my kids because I had to relearn my own language, and once I grew up and got married I never lived in Saskatchewan, so there was nobody there to guide me or nobody there to talk to and speak Cree… even my

dad never wanted us to learn our language, to relearn our language. He used to say, "I don't want any Indian spoken in this house." (St. Denis, 2002, p. 117)

Another Aboriginal teacher from Saskatchewan explains that when he was about sixteen years old, he asked his parents why he and his siblings were never taught to speak Cree (St. Denis, 2002). Apparently his grandfather had asked that his grandchildren not be taught Cree. The grandfather believed that learning English would enable his grandchildren to move off the Reserve.

I asked my mom, "Why is it that we didn't get to learn the Cree language? Why didn't you speak to us when we were kids, and teach us how to speak Cree?" And she told me that my mushum, said, "Don't teach your kids Cree. I want your children to learn English". He kind of looked at education as the key to success. (St. Denis, 2002, p. 116)

Cultural revitalization for Aboriginal peoples is a double-edged sword. On one hand, by encouraging cultural nationalism, cultural revitalization can create a positive sense of identity and common cause (Green, 2004). On the other hand, cultural revitalization can also be problematic, "when it is a valourization of some and the erasure of others, when it's fictive and mythical elements resonates for some and alienates others" (p. 24). Cultural nationalism is also double edged; on one hand it encourages positive, collective pride in common identification, but it can also encourage xenophobia and the legitimating of exclusion (Green, 2004). Green explains as follows:

On one hand ethno nationalism draws communities of interest together under the umbrella of shared culture, history and language to be a shield against the dominating and fragmenting colonial culture. Ethno-nationalism also has a racist potential, constructing the 'we' community as fundamentally racially pure and distinct from others, who are political competitors. (p. 26)

The irony of cultural revitalization is that it has both a positive and negative potential – it can create a positive sense of identity and common cause, but it also applauds some and discounts others. This tension is poignantly evident in the example of Aboriginal teachers, some of whom are very knowledgeable of their cultural traditions and languages and many others who are not – and most often, not by their own choice. And yet the expectation is that Aboriginal teachers must be culturally grounded, and those who are not are said to be a source of frustration for

their communities. For example, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, 1986) reports, "Many Aboriginal community members and education leaders have expressed frustrations that Aboriginal teachers are not fully grounded in the teaching traditions of their nations" (Vol. 3, p. 492). In this case the history of brutal colonial domination must always be remembered, along with the long history of shaming and beating the language and culture out of Aboriginal children. We must not hold Aboriginal people individually responsible for these colonial practices.

If part of the goal of cultural revitalization is to address the problem of systemic social inequality, as Chief John Snow (1977) and the policy of Indian Control of Indian Education (National Indian Brotherhood/ Assembly of First Nations, 1972) suggest, then cultural revitalization is only part of the solution and ironically, as a solution, it also contributes to other problems for some Aboriginal people. As a solution, cultural revitalization places the burden of change on Aboriginal peoples, yet again. Although making efforts towards cultural revitalization is regarded as a positive approach to addressing the effects of colonization, it also helps minimize and discourage analysis of how historical and contemporary practices of racial inequality limit the aspirations of Aboriginal people.

To some degree, cultural revitalization encourages Aboriginal people to seek out and perform cultural authenticity as compensation for exploitation and oppression. Although cultural revitalization is liberating for many, it can also function to blame the victim, suggesting that the social problems faced by Aboriginal people occur because Aboriginal people have lost their culture, they have failed to get it back, and/or they are not doing their culture properly. For example, in the case of Abori-ginal students, failure was attributed to Aboriginal students who arrived at school with too much culture, especially culture that was incongruent with dominant school culture. More recently, Aboriginal student failure is attributed to students who do not have enough culture, or who have lost their culture.

We, First Nations people, must broaden our solutions to inequality. We cannot expect cultural authenticity to function as the sole solution or to use cultural authenticity as reasons to exclude and include students

and teachers in our efforts to address the social conditions of our communities. I think this kind of emphasis on cultural authenticity may contribute further to conflict among Aboriginal students. Not all Aboriginal teachers and educators are able to be, as the Royal Commission proposes, "fully grounded in the teaching traditions of their nations" (RCAP, 1996, Vol. 3, p. 492). Yes, there must be support and acknowledgement for those who are grounded in their languages and traditions, but we must also acknowledge that there are many ways to challenge inequality that do not encourage the development of a cultural hierarchy with notions of "real," "traditional," and "assimilated" Indians. Otherwise we may find ourselves in the same place as some Maori in New Zealand who are "no longer seen as deficient in relation to Pakehas [white New Zealanders], they are seen as deficient as Maoris" (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 131).

The production of a cultural hierarchy, organized around notions of traditional and assimilated Indians, denigrates some identities and honours others. We need to acknowledge the analysis offered in anti-racist education because it offers a way to explore how practices of racialization have positioned Aboriginal people differently and sometimes against each other at the expense of a common goal of challenging our marginalization. An anti-racist analysis can provide a common ground for building alliances for those concerned with the impact of racism and white domination on Aboriginal people. Proceeding without addressing the impact of racism in education on Aboriginal people is no longer acceptable.[2]

ACKNOWLEDGING THE NEED FOR ANTI-RACIST EDUCATION IN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

Aboriginal teachers' lives are a testament to the ongoing legacy of racialization in Canada. In a study conducted on their experiences, Aboriginal and Métis teachers offered comments like the following: "In Saskatchewan there's nothing lower than being an Indian or looking like an Indian, whether or not you're Métis, you're Indian; it doesn't matter" (St. Denis et al., 1998, p. 39). Aboriginal teachers, both Métis and First Nations, repeatedly spoke to the reality that skin colour does matter in terms of how they were received; racial ideology mediated the kind of

racism they experienced. For example, one Aboriginal teacher explained, "I never experienced any of the racism that some of my friends did who are Treaty Indians or who had dark complexions (St. Denis et al., p. 40).

Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal people, in general, experience racism and the effects of a belief in white superiority in different ways; they also respond in different ways to that racialization. For example, if passing as white is an option for some Aboriginal people, then passing can become an expedient option. But choosing to pass has its own cones-quences, one of which may include denying that racism is a problem as one way to achieve acceptance. As Dei, Karumanchery, and Karuman-chery-Luik (2004) explain, "while many of our fellow oppressed can be heard to deny the impact of racism on their lives, their subconscious and often conscious choices to 'pass' reflects a very different oppressive reality that is carefully managed and regulated" (p. 134). As this Aboriginal teacher explains, "I denied that [I was] an Aboriginal person because it wasn't acceptable, we were looked down upon as Métis people" (St. Denis et al., 1998, p. 40). Passing is an effort to avoid the effects of racism. As Dei, Karumanchery, and Karumanchery-Luik (2004) further explain, "while notions of 'passing' are often associated with a desire to be one of the privileged, they are also deeply entrenched in feelings of fear and otherness – realizations that you are a target" (p. 137). In this context, Aboriginal teachers and people when equipped with a critical anti-racist analysis would be better positioned to challenge such effects of racialization by developing a critical analysis of how whiteness has been produced as superior.

These dynamics of racialization affect intimate family relations. For example, one Aboriginal teacher talked about such effects:

Like there are three in our family that were very dark, the other seven are very white looking. And the three of us in our family got nothing but ridicule most days and the siblings that looked white didn't even want to hang out with us when it came to new friends coming because if they hung out with us then that would mean that they were Indian and then they wouldn't have those friends anymore. (St. Denis et al., p. 40)

Aboriginal teachers are well aware that "the more visibly Aboriginal you are the more you are bound to experience racism" (St. Denis et al., 1998, p. 40).

There are different challenges for those Aboriginal people who are visibility identifiably Aboriginal and those who are not. In the case below, a critical race analysis would be beneficial for both individuals because both experience the effects of racism though in different ways. This example also speaks to the need for a national anti-racist educational initiative because it is clearly not possible to challenge people's deeply entrenched negative views of Aboriginal people in Canada in such brief encounters. Aboriginal people are often expected to be able to challenge deeply entrenched racist ideology without the time and resources to do so adequately. As an Aboriginal student I taught several years ago explained:

I have a friend who has blue eyes and looks white, but she has a treaty card. She is in her last year of studies in the mainstream of university. Because of her appearance, she has been on the other side of racism, many times, almost on a daily basis at the 'smokers corner', she has expressed her frustration to me many times, because she finds herself defending First Nations issues all of the time. We often share both of our experiences together and they are quite different, for instance, she is always in a position where she has to hear what the 'complainees' have to say about 'Indian' people, whereas, I am the one being complained about. It is tiring and exhausting to try and educate people all the time, its like when someone has something negative to say, we find ourselves having to explain to people the events from contact to the present day, and even that does not persuade negative practices completely. Both my friend and I have come [to] the conclusion that the racism in today's society has not changed much; it is just hidden behind our backs. (First Nations student's reflections, 2006, quoted with permission)

Perhaps educators need to call for the widespread offering of a critical anti-racist education as a requirement at all universities across Canada. Perhaps then Aboriginal people would not have to try to accomplish that educational task in marginalized contexts like the "smokers corner."

Much effort has gone into developing and advocating culturally relevant education, including incorporating cultural traditions and practices into schools as well as developing culturally relevant curriculum content for all subject areas. No doubt this has had positive impacts in education, both in Canada as well as in the United States. But, what these interventions do not adequately address is the racism that our youth face on a daily basis. In *Collected Wisdom: American Indian*

Education, authors Linda Cleary and Thomas Peacock (1998) state, "Schools cannot effectively integrate American Indian culture and language into the curriculum or hire more American Indian teachers and administrators if racism in schools is not confronted" (p. 254).

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, 1996) reported that, despite so many sincere efforts to change the quality of Aboriginal education, little has changed over the past twenty-five years. The commission stated that "too many youth do not complete high school, they do not have skills for employment, and they do not have the language and cultural knowledge of their people" (Vol. 3, p. 434). RCAP also reported that Aboriginal youth in public schools "frequently encounter racist attitudes and behaviors that undermine their self-esteem" (Vol. 5, p. 485).

In 1992, Bev Sellars, who was then the Chief of the Soda Creek Indian Band in British Columbia, gave an address to the Canadian Teachers Federation, entitled "Racism in Education." She stated:

We are looking at new ways of trying to heal our people. We have tried all kinds of programs in the past. We opened treatment centers for alcohol and drug abuse. We had courses for self-esteem building but nothing seemed to work because we were dealing with the symptoms of the problem and not the root cause. (Sellars, 1992, p. 91)

One example of focusing on the symptoms of the problem rather than the root cause is the oft mentioned low self-esteem suffered by Aboriginal and Indian youth in public schools. Identifying low self-esteem as the problem contributes to blaming the victim by individualizing and psychologizing the effects of systemic and structural discrimination. As Deyhle (1998) argues,

Indian students are often portrayed as suffering from low self-esteem and low self-worth, but racism does limit the educational and economic opportunities of Indian youth and their communities 'this is a reality they live with daily, to ignore this is to place responsibility on the individual for identity problems of low self-worth, alienation, and helplessness.' (p. 4, italics added)

Rather than having low-esteem become the primary focus of our interventions, we need to offer both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal teachers and administrators opportunities to learn more about racism and how its effects, especially the ideology of and belief in the

superiority of whiteness, shapes both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of society. In other words, instead of assuming and hoping that a focus on the positive through the celebration of culture will be enough to disrupt ideologies of racial superiority and inferiority, we might all benefit from an anti-racist education.

By ignoring the production of racial identities, whiteness remains at once invisible and a marker of difference in a Canadian context (Schick & St. Denis, 2005). Discourses of race are ignored or seen as bad manners, allowing a certain "raceless" Canadian identity to function as the norm (Backhouse, 1999). But we cannot escape our history of racialization that was integral to Europe's colonization of Canada and Aboriginal peoples. Rather than deny and avoid – and the pressure is great to participate in denial and avoidance of exploring how race continues to matter – educators must become informed on how racism has and continues to impact Aboriginal people and work towards developing tools for anti-racist education. The call to address racism has been made but not adequately responded to (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Hawthorne, 1967; Sellars, 1992; RCAP, 1996; St. Denis & Hampton, 2002).

CONCLUSION

Educators started out a few decades ago in Aboriginal education believing that we could address the effects of racialization and colonization by affirming and validating the cultural traditions and heritage of Aboriginal peoples. There is increasing evidence that those efforts have limitations. As I have argued, cultural revitalization encourages misdiagnoses of the problem. It places far too much responsibility on the marginalized and oppressed to change yet again, and once, again, lets those in positions of dominance off the hook to be accountable for on-going discrimination. It is to the advantage of the status quo to have Aboriginal people preoccupied with matters of authenticity. If cultural authenticity is the problem then educators don't have to look at what is the immensely more difficult task of challenging the conscious and unconscious ways in which the ideology of white identity as superior is normalized and naturalized in our schools and nation, both in the past and in the present (Francis, 1997; Willinsky, 1998).

Instead of doing anti-racist education that explores why and how race matters, educators can end up doing cross-cultural awareness training that often has the effect of encouraging the belief that the cultural difference of the Aboriginal "Other" is the problem. Offering cultural awareness workshops can also provide another opportunity for non-Aboriginals to resent and resist Aboriginal people. For example, in a recent letter to the editor in the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix*, headlined "Don't foist native culture on everyone at workplace," the writer and perhaps the editors of the newspaper protest the practice of companies offering First Nations cultural awareness workshop to its employees (Kingston, 2007).

Offering cultural awareness education has become the mainstream thinking about proper solutions to educational and social inequality. Hermes (2005), an American Indian educator, in research that explored qualities of effective teachers of American Indians, found that "more powerful than [teachers'] knowledge of cultural difference is their knowledge of the big picture – the context of socioeconomic and cultural op-presssion of Native Americans (p. 21). The argument that addressing racism and doing anti-racist education is too negative and that we need to focus on the positive often results in tinkering with the status quo. As Kaomea (2003) suggests, when schools offer benign lessons in Hawaiian arts, crafts, and values, this approach tends to erase Hawaiian suffering, hardship, and oppression. She writes, "It is time to tell more uncomfortable stories" (p. 23).

Without a commitment to anti-racist education, Aboriginal teachers, like other racial minority teachers, find themselves isolated, marginalized, and restricted in their efforts to work as agents of change (Legare, Pete-Willett, Ward, Wason-Ellam, & Williamson, 1998; McNinch, 1994; Melnechenko & Horsman, 1998; St. Denis, et al., 1998; Quiocho, 2000). Research identifies the need for supportive systems, nurturing communities, and networks to celebrate successes and provide forums for professsional development with like-minded teachers (Melnechenko & Horsman, 1998; Quiocho, 2000; St. Denis, et al., 1998). As Stewart (2005) suggests, "Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers alike will have to make coalitions to do the work that is necessary to unpack the racism that we have all inherited" (p. 111). There is a need to

promote a commitment to multicultural, anti-racist, and pro-justice practices with non-minorities who are often in influential administrative positions (Quiocho, 2000).

Aboriginal people are no longer – as if they ever were – a homogenous Aboriginal people, but what does tie us together is a common experience with colonization and racialization. The processes of colonization have irreversibly changed and affected our lives; the make-up of our families and communities has been changed by the religious practices brought by colonization, by the practices and ideologies of racialization, by economic exclusion, and by many other forces. Proceeding as if these changes do not matter does not contribute to equity. We need to work and collaborate across a multitude of differences, both within and outside our own communities.

Colonization and racialization are also what tie Aboriginal people to non-Aboriginal. We have long since ceased to be islands onto ourselves. The many social, economic, and educational problems faced by Aboriginal people have been created and are profoundly situated in historical and contemporary social, economic, and political conditions. By acknow-ledging a common experience of colonization and racism educators can enact solidarity and join together to challenge racism and racialization. Coalition and alliances can be made within and across the diversity within Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples lives through a common understanding and commitment to anti-racist education.

Anti-racist education explores the practices, processes, and ideologies of racialization, which includes a study of not only how racism disadvantages some but also how racism advantages others, and how whiteness gets produced and constructed as superior (MacIntosh, 1998). As anti-oppressive educator Kevin Kumashiro (2000) explains:

Educators and students need to examine not only how some groups and identities are Othered, that is, marginalized, denigrated, violated in society, but also how some groups are favored, normalized, privileged, as well as how this dual process is legitimized and maintained by social structures and competing ideologies. (p. 35-36)

Educators must be examples of collaboration and cooperation, across our diversity, in spite of the many challenges we face.

The analysis I have offered in this article has the potential to be distorted and misinterpreted. But I welcome the day when critical debate among Aboriginal people in our analyses and strategies for change is not used as a justification by dominant institutions to ignore our claims for social justice and to maintain the status quo of inequality and marginalization. We must have, as Aboriginal people, researchers, and scholars, the freedom to debate and discuss the contradictions and paradoxes that arise in our various decolonization strategies. This includes debating the merits of our efforts not only to defend treaty rights and indigenous rights, but also to participate in and benefit from the resources of our land, to participate in the economy, politics, and education of the institu-tions that have come to dominate our lives.

We need to join with our white and non-Aboriginal allies and work together to uncover and understand how racism and the normalizing and naturalizing of white superiority continue unabated in our schools and communities. My experiences with teaching anti-racist education to primarily white preservice teachers (St. Denis & Schick, 2003) leads me to believe there is hope, and that despite some initial resistance, we do have the research and critical scholarship to support a critical anti-racist and anti-oppressive education.

NOTES

[1] Mitchif is a language combining French nouns and Cree verbs and spoken by Métis people.

[2] With some revision, the above section was published in St. Denis (2004).

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