What Do First-Year University Students in Ontario, Canada, Know about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples and Topics?

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Abstract

We disseminated the Awareness Questionnaire to the first-year cohorts at 10 Ontario universities in 2014. Co-designed with over 200 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit educators and community members across Ontario, the survey investigated how students are learning to think about colonialism and its relationship to Indigenous peoples and Canadian society. Statistical analysis of 2,899 student responses reveals that first-year university students who graduated from Ontario high schools are substantially unaware of Indigenous presence and vitality. The majority of students do not understand the fundamental laws structuring conditions of life for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people or the contributions Indigenous peoples make to all aspects of Canadian society. Although they know slightly more about what is happening with regard to Indigenous peoples today, students have little sense of the historical circumstances and forces that shape current events. Arguably, students are this ignorant because the Ontario K–12 curriculum, which remains deeply inadequate, is the primary source of information for most students. However, when students have opportunities to engage with Indigenous perspectives and topics, it can make a difference to what students know and think. These results indicate that curricular reform is key to eradicating mass ignorance but cannot occur in isolation. Teacher education programs must play a central role in enacting the promise of new curricular emphases.

Keywords: ignorance, awareness, Indigenous, Ontario, university, curriculum

Résumé

Nous avons diffusé le questionnaire sur la sensibilisation au corps étudiant de première année de 10 universités ontariennes en 2014. Élaboré en collaboration avec plus de 200 éducateurs et membres des communautés des Premières Nations, Métis et Inuits à travers l'Ontario, ce sondage a examiné ce que les étudiants pensent du colonialisme et de son rapport avec les peuples autochtones et la société canadienne. L'analyse statistique de 2 899 réponses d'étudiants révèle que les étudiants universitaires de première année ayant gradué des écoles secondaires ontariennes ignorent substantiellement la présence

des autochtones et leurs activités. La majorité des étudiants ne comprennent pas les lois fondamentales qui régissent les conditions de vie des membres des communautés des Premières nations, Métis et Inuits, ni la contribution qu'apportent les peuples autochtones à tous les aspects de la société canadienne. Bien qu'ils en sachent un peu plus sur ce qui se passe actuellement à l'égard des peuples autochtones, les étudiants n'ont que peu de connaissances sur les circonstances et contraintes passées qui façonnent les événements actuels. Les étudiants sont sans doute ignorants parce que le programme d'études ontarien de la maternelle à la 12e année, qui demeure très insuffisant, demeure pour la plupart leur principale source d'information. Cependant, offrir aux étudiants l'occasion de se familiariser avec les points de vue et la culture des autochtones peut avoir un impact sur ce qu'ils connaissent et pensent. Ces résultats indiquent que la réforme des programmes d'études est essentielle pour éradiquer l'ignorance généralisée, mais qu'elle ne peut à elle seule y arriver. Les programmes de formation des enseignants doivent jouer un rôle primordial afin de mettre en place de nouveaux programmes d'enseignement scolaire.

Mots-clés : ignorance, sensibilisation, autochtones, Ontario, université, programme d'études

Introduction

This article shares the results of the Ontario Student Awareness Questionnaire, part of a project that investigates how post-secondary students in provinces across Canada have learned to think about colonialism and its relationship to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and Canadian society. Disseminated online to 42,916 first-year students at 10 Ontario universities[1] in the fall of 2014, the questionnaire sought to engage students in learning better about Indigenous peoples and topics and to explore barriers to that learning. Following Linda Tuhiwai Smith's observation that "real power lies with those who design the tools," the questionnaire includes a multiple-choice knowledge test co-designed with over 200 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit educators and community members across Ontario, as well as questions on where students learned what they know, their social attitudes, and demographics (Smith, 1999, p. 38; Ermine, 2007). The knowledge test and associated questionnaire reflect what First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people associated with Ontario universities believe all residents of Ontario and Canada, especially university-level students, should know to be able to act responsibly as treaty partners and fellow citizens and neighbours.

In Canada, many Indigenous leaders and activists, as well as decolonial and anti-racist scholars, attest that the principal barrier to decolonization is ignorance. Ignorance of the structural injustices at play in land claims and land use negotiations, resource extraction, governance and jurisdiction, identity definition, health, education, child welfare, and justice systems all work to uphold and retrench inequities faced by Indigenous people/s (Coulthard, 2007; Dion, 2009; Environics Institute, 2016; Maddison, Clark, & de Costa, 2016; Regan, 2010; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Ignorance in this sense is not a mere absence of knowledge, to be alleviated through the acquisition of new facts. Rather, it is systemic and foundational to structural methods of not knowing that are deeply linked to power and hierarchy (Calderon, 2011; May, 2006; Medina, 2013; Steyn, 2012; Sullivan & Tuana, 2007). Such methods of not knowing are embedded in and cultivated through social institutions including the media, the justice system,

1 These are University of Windsor, University of Guelph, Wilfrid Laurier University, McMaster University, University of Toronto, Trent University, Queen's University, University of Ottawa, Laurentian University, and Lakehead University.

and especially education, through what is taught and what is omitted from curricula and textbooks (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991; Calderon, 2014; Kaomea, 2000; Rose, 2007; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013), through how content is taught (Battiste, 2013; Cannon, 2012; Donald, 2012), and through the mindsets of teachers and teacher educators (Dion, 2007; Higgins, Madden, & Korteweg, 2015; Waldorf, 2014). As many decolonial scholars demonstrate, education in Canada has long played a central role in cultivating modes of rationalization that work to legitimize racism and Indigenous assimilation (Battiste, 2013; Cannon & Sunseri, 2011; Coté-Meek, 2014; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; St. Denis, 2009; Vincent & Arcand, 1979). Consequently, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) emphasized in its 2015 final report, ministries of education, schools, colleges, and universities bear particular responsibility to foster in Canadian classrooms the critical historical consciousness and mutual respect upon which nation-to-nation relationships are built (TRC, 2015; see also Dion, 2007; Tupper & Capello, 2008; Tupper, 2013, 2014). The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has prompted educational institutions across Canada to enhance their efforts to identify and confront the systemic prejudice embedded in course content, funding priorities, administrative decision making, and the priorities of teachers, teacher educators, faculty and staff (Coté-Meek, 2017; Favel & Stoicheff, 2015; Macdonald, 2016; Trimbee & Kinew, 2015). Yet, as the quantitative results reported here suggest, many Ontario students lack even the most basic understanding of colonialism and Indigenous presence identified by Indigenous educators and community members as necessary for cultivating the ethical relationality central to decolonization (Ermine, 2007; Donald, 2012). This article makes three key contributions: (1) It is the first in-depth investigation of student learning of its kind, combining co-design, a large sample size, rigorous statistical analysis, and careful attention to the language and structure of curricula and texts. (2) The article shares the question topics considered important by over 200 Indigenous educators and community members, which is important for curriculum writers and policy-makers and relevant for teachers and developers of teacher education programs. (3) We suggest that ignorance runs deep and is multi-faceted, requiring concerted and coordinated effort on the part of ministries of education, school boards, faculties of education, and post-secondary institutions to challenge it. Teachers can only act in a certain range of influence when they have to contend with inadequate curriculum. Yet curricular reform is but one part of the equation. Teacher

education programs are also accountable to shifting their colonial conditions and challenging systemic ignorance in ways that foster decolonizing relations as called for by the TRC.

Methods

The Awareness Questionnaire was developed over a period of 10 months, in more than 60 meetings, and with more than 200 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit educators and community members affiliated with 10 Ontario universities. The questionnaire's development was an iterative process—to each meeting we brought the questionnaire and went through it, word for word, for importance, accuracy, and resonance with co-designers' experiences and understanding. Co-designing the questionnaire transformed its structure and content and foregrounded the importance of listening and decolonizing our own ways of thinking, a process that is ongoing (Schaefli & Godlewska, submitted). We disseminated the Awareness Questionnaire online to the first-year cohorts at 10 Ontario universities in the fall of 2014. Given the difficulty of surveying Grade 12 classrooms across Ontario, we focused on first-year university students as a proxy for what students have learned from their K–12 education. Of the 42,916 students invited to participate, 5,150 (12%) responded to the questionnaire, 2,899 of whom graduated from high school in Ontario and completed the questionnaire. The following analysis focuses on these 2,899 students as it is possible to examine the influence of the K–12 Ontario curriculum.

The Awareness Questionnaire contains 93 items across six sections designed to determine:

1. Where students learned what they know (26 items)
2. What they think of what they have learned (eight items)
3. Knowledge (36 items)
4. Social attitude (10 items)
5. Demographics (e.g., age, gender, the nature of their schooling) (11 items)
6. Reactions to taking the test (two items)

Knowledge is assessed through the co-designed knowledge test composed of 36 multiple-choice questions designed to appraise awareness of:

1. Indigenous presence (geography)
2. Past realities that have shaped today's circumstances (history)
3. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultural continuity (culture)
4. Laws or circumstances structuring First Nations, Métis, and Inuit lives (governance)
5. What is happening for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples in Canada today (current events)

For analysis, we coded each test question into one of these mutually exclusive categories: geography (seven items), history (seven items), culture (eight items), governance (seven items), and current events (seven items). We also classed topics according to whether or not and to what degree they are mentioned in the 2003–15 Ontario curriculum, which guided most of the education received by these students.

Statistical differences in participants' performance were examined through paired-sample t-tests or analysis of variance (ANOVA). The null hypothesis for these analyses was that demographic groupings would not influence awareness. For demographic variables with two groupings, we employed a paired t-test. For demographic variables with three or more groupings with equal variance, we used an analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Bonferonni correction ($\alpha = 0.05$). The Bonferonni correction reduces the chance of a type 1 error (i.e., rejecting the null hypothesis when it is true) (MacDonald & Gardner, 2000). For demographic variables with three or more groupings with unequal variance, an ANOVA ($\alpha = 0.05$) with a Games-Howell post hoc test was used. Where there were significant differences, Cohen's d or partial $\eta 2$ were calculated as a measure of effect size (Cohen, 1988). Statistical differences in participants' responses within check-all-that-apply items were examined using contingency tables (cross tables) and Pearson's chi-square tests of independence (chi-square test). A chi-square test using a z-test of column proportions with Bonferonni adjustments to significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$) was employed to identify significant differences. The null hypothesis for these analyses was that demographic groupings would not influence awareness. All data analyses were completed using the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences version 22 (SPSS v. 22).

As the questionnaire was a knowledge test rather than an opinion or satisfaction survey, and as it was focused on a controversial topic that many Canadians prefer to avoid, we expected a low response rate. We have since moved to in-class surveys and raised response rates to above 80%. While gaining access to university classrooms is a significant challenge, conducting the survey in classes enhances the educational

opportunity for students and instructors. If the response rate for this study creates a bias in the data, it is that these students are probably more interested and knowledgeable than most, as they took the time to complete the questionnaire on their own time (i.e., not in class).

Student Performance on the Knowledge Test

The distribution of the data suggests that students have had little exposure to the test question topics. The average score on the test was 24.28% (*SD* = 16.06%, range = 0 to 86%). Students' test scores were relatively normally distributed, with a floor effect, meaning that more students performed below the median than above it. If this were a typical university test, designed to reflect what students have been taught in any given course, such a distribution would require careful reconsideration of the test instrument. However, this test was co-designed with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit educators to reflect the knowledge they deem students *should* know. The test is consequently not restricted to topics mentioned in the K–12 curriculum. Students do, however, perform better on questions covered in the curriculum. We coded each test question according to whether it was in the 2003–15 Ontario curricular documents and associated textbooks, which guided the K–12 education received by these students. We focused on the Grades 1–6 social studies courses, Grades 7 and 8 history and geography courses, Grade 9 geography, and Grade 10 history and civics. The rationale for focusing on these courses is twofold: they are mandatory for all students and have the greatest likelihood of including content related to colonialism and Indigenous peoples. Based on our analysis of the curriculum and textbooks, we organized test questions into three categories: covered in core courses (four items), maybe covered (13 items), and not covered (19 items). Table 1 provides a summary of students' performance by test question theme and nature of coverage in curriculum and associated textbooks.

Table 1. Student performance by test question theme and nature of coverage in mandatory social studies and Canadian and World Studies courses (2003–15)

Theme	Question topic	Nature of coverage	Average student performance (%)
Culture	Athletes*	Yes	30.5
	Musicians*	Yes	21.1
	Widely spoken languages	Maybe	60.9
	All my relations	Maybe	39.5
	Inuksuk	No	9.9
	Authors	No	16.4
	Inuit cultural persistence	No	36.4
	Positive changes	No	26.5
Current events	Upholding treaties	Maybe	40.7
	Consequences of residential schools	No	30.2
	Residential school apology	No	39.1
	Systemic racism	No	11.7
	Post-secondary funding	No	36.8
	Idle No More	No	24.3
	Changes in status	No	33
Geography	Reserves versus traditional territories	Yes	39.4
	Off reserve	Maybe	26
	FN, M, I population**	Maybe	8
	Traditional territories	No	3.3
	Oil sands	No	11.8
	Languages spoken in Ontario	No	34
	Ring of Fire	No	8.8
Governance	1876 Indian Act	Yes	18.9
	Canada's Constitution	Maybe	26.5
	Royal Proclamation	Maybe	9.2
	Indian Act gender discrimination	Maybe	38
	Land claim agreements	No	24.5
	Aboriginal title	No	19.8
	Powley	No	8.1

Theme	Question topic	Nature of coverage	Average student performance (%)
History	Métis nation	Maybe	14
	Haudenosaunee Confederacy and Council of Three Fires	Maybe	12.7
	Vote	Maybe	17.4
	Limiting land claims	Maybe	3.5
	Inuit relocation	Maybe	27.9
	Who administered residential schools	Maybe	47.4
	Forbidden in residential schools	No	28.1

* The curriculum highlights one Indigenous athlete (Jordin Tootoo) and one Indigenous musician (Susan Aglukark) multiple times. The awareness test question asks students about nine Indigenous athletes and six musicians, two of which are Tootoo and Aglukark.
** First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.

We conducted a paired samples t-test to assess whether students performed better on test questions covered or maybe covered in mandatory courses compared to questions on topics not mentioned in these courses. Students performed significantly better on material that was definitely or maybe taught ($M = 25.54$, $SD = 17.79$) compared to topics not mentioned in the curriculum ($M = 22.34$, $SD = 16.68$); $t[2898] = 13.66$, $p < 0.001$. These results indicate that students retain what they are taught, signalling the real potential of teacher education and curricular reform for improving education about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and topics in Ontario.

Students performed best on questions pertaining to current events ($M = 34.3$, $SD = 24.87$). Students scored highest on a question asking who has an obligation to uphold treaties (40.7% correct), followed by questions on the prime minister's 2008 Residential School apology (39.1%), the availability of federal post-secondary funding for First Nations and Inuit students (36.8%), the effects of changes in legal definitions of Indian status (33%), and the Idle No More Movement (24.3%). Troublingly, nearly a fifth of first-year respondents (17.7%, $n = 512$) believe that all Indigenous students receive free post-secondary education, a finding that demonstrates the important role schools, universities, and colleges must play in fostering respect for First Nations' treaty rights and Inuit constitutional rights.

To respect the knowledge students do have, we structured some questions as check-all-that-apply, allowing more nuanced analysis. Two of the current events questions, the manifestations of systemic racism and the consequences of Residential Schools,

are questions that require check-all-that-apply answers. The frequency of each answer indicates that students are more aware of some aspects of systemic racism and the consequences of Residential Schools than of others. While nearly 70% of respondents identified biased coverage in mainstream media as a manifestation of systemic racism, only 55.3% identified unsolved crimes against women, 54.7% identified omission in the curriculum, and 50.3%identified overrepresentation in prisons. Moreover, only 11.7% of students selected all of these four correct answers, suggesting that nearly 90% do not understand the depth and breadth of systemic racism. Similarly, while two thirds of students are aware of the role of Residential Schools in attacking First Nations, Métis, and Inuit ways of being, many have little sense of the ongoing trauma wrought by the schools. The seven correct answers to this question fall into two categories: four answers focus on the traumatic and ongoing effect on individuals and families, and three answers focus on cultural loss. Of the 66.7% of participants who selected all three cultural loss options, only 42.3% were also aware of ongoing trauma. Of the 34.7% of participants who were aware of the traumatic and ongoing effect of the schools, 80.9% answered all parts of the question correctly. This pattern suggests that cultural loss is forefront in the awareness of the majority of students, but many are unaware that Indigenous people continue to live with the trauma inflicted by the schools. There is another risk with the focus on cultural loss. Narratives of degradation in the absence of narratives of strength and resurgence reinforce discourses of Indigenous damage and decline, a mentality that easily supports settler interests (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Million, 2013; Tuck, 2009; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). That these students are much more aware of loss than they are of resurgence demonstrates the need for better education about Residential Schools. Such education, promoted through both curriculum content and teachers' pedagogical strategies, would foreground the historical and contemporary stories, knowledge, and experiences of Indigenous people(s) and emphasize that colonialism is not the only story of Indigenous lives. It would also help students develop the critical consciousness to identify the underlying assumptions, motivations, and values that have come from the history of colonization, in order to challenge them (Battiste, 2013; Regan, 2010; TRC, 2015; Tupper, 2014).

Students did second-best on culture questions ($M = 31.01$, $SD = 20.65$). Students' responses to the culture questions suggest that while they have some general awareness of Indigenous ways of knowing and the importance of language and culture, many do

not see Indigenous people(s) as part of Canadian society. Students performed best on a question on widely spoken Indigenous languages (60.9%, the best-answered question on the test) and scored relatively well on questions on the meaning of the phrase "all my relations" (39.5%) and Inuit cultural persistence (36.4%). Students did less well on a question on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit athletes (30.5%), though still above the test average. Students did most poorly on questions on the Inuit inuksuk[2] (9.9%), Indigenous authors (16.4%) and musicians (21.1%), and positive changes led by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people (26.5%). Low scores on the authors and musicians questions, despite their presence on the curriculum, suggest that many students are not taught well about Indigenous contributions to the arts. Similarly, while over 60% of respondents selected "pride in identity," "cultural rejuvenation," and "language recovery" as correct answers to the question on positive changes led by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, they were less likely to select "post-secondary graduation" (49.7%), "self-government" (47%), or "business ownership" (40.8%). This suggests that while two thirds of respondents have some awareness of Indigenous cultural vitality, they do not see cultural vitality as linked to success in business, self-government, and post-secondary education. Together with students' poor performance on the arts questions, these results suggest a prevailing misconception that Indigenous people are not present in contemporary arts, post-secondary education, government, or business.

The pattern of responses to questions on governance suggests that when students learn about governance at all, that learning is focused on the interpretation of Indigenous rights by the Canadian state rather than on the territories, philosophies, and critical perspectives of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people(s). While students performed close to the test average on governance questions ($M = 24.62$, $SD = 20.02$), their performance on individual questions varied according to whether the question focused on the Canadian government or on the roots of Indigenous rights. Students did best on questions focused on the Canadian government's framing of Aboriginal r ights, scoring above the test average on questions on Aboriginal and treaty rights in the Canadian Constitution (26.5% correct) and trends in the Canadian government's approach to land claim agreements (24.5%). Students scored more poorly on questions that emphasize the pre-European-contact origins and enduring nature of Indigenous land and resource rights: Aboriginal title,

2 We follow the Inuit-preferred spelling rather than the English-language "inukshuk."

treaties, and scrip (19.8%); the 1763 Royal Proclamation (9.2%); and the 2003 *Powley* case (8.1%). Such an uncritical approach to governance allows denial of the existence and diversity of Indigenous sovereignties; works to reduce conflicts around land, resources, and cultural continuity to a matter of majority rule; and portrays government as innocent of assimilative interests (Grande, 2004; Lawrence & Dua, 2005; Coulthard, 2007). Together these work to preclude imagination of Indigenous resurgence and futurity.

The most important, deliberate, cultivated, and sustained act of legislated racism in Canadian colonial rule is the Indian Act. Yet students have little understanding of its aims or ongoing existence and effects. Only 18.9% of students understand the role of the Indian Act in legislating and subordinating Indigenous identities and sovereignties. Only 38% answered a question on the ongoing assimilative effects of the gender discrimination embedded in the Indian Act correctly. There is nearly a 20% difference in student performance on the two Indian Act questions. This is probably less a reflection of students' superior knowledge of its gendered effects than of the structure of the test question: co-designers advised us to focus on the effects of gender discrimination; consequently, it was necessary to explain its nature in the body of the question. This enhanced the educational value of the question but also made it a little easier, increasing students' scores. Overall, these governance questions require in-depth and critical education about the disciplining of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and rights through Canadian law. It is unlikely that students could, or should, learn this from the media or informal discussion.

While students have some awareness of the role of government in attacking Indigenous ways of being and knowing, they do much less well on questions that demand sensitivity to Indigenous autonomies and awareness of the numerous government strategies to sever Indigenous connections to land. Students performed below the test average on history questions ($M = 23.19$, $SD = 20.46$). By far the best-answered history question is a factual question on who administered the Residential Schools (47.4% correct, the second-best-answered question on the test). Students did less well on questions requiring deeper awareness of assimilative practices: the assimilative aims of the Residential Schools (28.1%) and government relocation of Inuit (27.9%). Students performed even worse on questions that emphasize Indigenous sovereignties, scoring 14% on a question about the Métis nation and 12.7% on a question on the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and Council of Three Fires. Students did most poorly on questions that highlight government strategies to limit Indigenous peoples' avenues of resistance to colonial attack. Only

17.4% knew when First Nations and Inuit could vote. Only 3.5% understood some of the early 20th-century government strategies to limit land claims. Students' poor performance on these history questions reflects the breadth of the gap between the history they have been taught and the history deemed important by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people in Ontario (Schaefli, Godlewska, & Rose, in press). This gap is deeply political, because it discourages young Canadians' critical understanding of Canada's colonial nature. It also works to dull students' responses to our collective inherited injustices, by allowing them denial of epistemic responsibility (Ermine, 2007; Medina, 2013; Whitt, 2016).

Student unawareness of Indigenous presence, either here and now, or in resource extraction disputes, for example, limits their capacity to engage respectfully with Indigenous people on issues of major importance to all people in Canada today. It is significant, then, that students performed least well on questions assessing awareness of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit presence ($M = 22.29$, $SD = 18.29$). Students did relatively well on a question on Indigenous languages spoken in Ontario (34%). However, they scored very poorly on a question on whose traditional territory their university campus is built (3.3% correct, the lowest score on the test) and a question on whether the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit population is increasing, decreasing, or staying the same (8%, the second-lowest score on the test). This suggests that while students have some awareness of the Indigenous nations in Ontario, they have little understanding of Indigenous presence where they are. It is likewise important, given the commitment of the Canadian government to resource extraction and the disproportionate effect of that extraction on Indigenous people(s) (Cameron & Levitan, 2014; Preston, 2013), that students do not do well on questions on resource projects of considerable regional and national importance. Only 8.8% of respondents were aware of some of the consequences of the Ring of Fire mining project in northern Ontario. Nearly 90% could not name the Indigenous nations grappling with the extraction of the Alberta oil sands. These results demonstrate that universities have a crucial role to play in awakening students to what is happening around them and encouraging sensitivity to relationships between signs in their daily landscape and events and structures at play in Canada, especially with regard to Indigenous peoples and territories. Students did slightly better, though not well, on questions focused on reserves: the percentage of First Nations people who live off reserve (26%) and the difference between reserves and traditional territory (39.4%). That students do better on reserve questions is a reflection of the Ontario curriculum. The curriculum focuses predominantly on First

Nations reserves, neglecting the presence of Métis and Inuit and of First Nations people in urban areas. It is also silent about Indigenous territories and omits critical Indigenous perspectives on land theft, removal, and resource extraction.

The prevalence of "Don't know" and incorrect responses can teach us even more about the nature of student ignorance. Average performance is raised or lowered by outliers in the group, but where more students answer correctly than answer "Don't know," we can say that there is greater awareness about that topic in the population. Conversely, when more students answer incorrectly than "Don't know," we can say that misconception prevails in the population. Five test questions stand out. Encouragingly, more students answered correctly than "Don't know" on questions about widely spoken Indigenous languages (60.9% correct vs. 33.6% "Don't know"), who administered the Residential Schools (47.4% correct vs. 39.8% "Don't know"), and treaties (40.7% correct vs. 38.3% "Don't know"). Troublingly, misconception is widespread on whether the population of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people is increasing, decreasing, or staying the same. Nearly three times more students responded "The population is decreasing" than "Don't know" (65.2% vs. 22.4%). This belief is politically important, as it feeds discourses of ongoing Indigenous decline, a mentality that works to naturalize settler presence (Dunbar-Ortiz & Gilio-Whitaker, 2016; Wolfe, 2006). Importantly, students who say they learned most of what they know about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit from their formal education are significantly more likely to consider that the population is decreasing ($p < 0.001$). This result accords with our analysis of the 2003–15 K–12 Ontario Social Studies and Canadian and World Studies stream. Despite the fact that the Indigenous population is not only growing but is the fastest growing population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011), the 2003–15 Ontario curricula and texts consistently frame Indigenous peoples and topics as of the distant past, succeeded and superseded by the non-Indigenous settler presence (Schaefli et al., in press). Misconception is also apparent in student responses to a question on the proportion of First Nations people living off reserve. Although at least 70% of First Nations people in Canadian provinces live off reserve (Statistics Canada, 2013), the majority of students think that most First Nations people live on reserve (41.6% incorrect vs. 32.4% "Don't know"). Together with students' poor performance on the population question and on the traditional territory question, these findings suggest a prevailing misconception that wherever Indigenous people(s) are, they are not *here*, a conviction shared by first-year university students in Newfoundland and

Labrador (Godlewska, Schaefli, Massey, Freake, & Rose, 2017; Godlewska, Schaefli, Massey, Freake , Adjei, et al., 2017). As in Ontario, curricula and texts in Newfoundland and Labrador are encouraging this mentality (Godlewska, Rose, Schaefli, Freake, & Massey, 2016).

Non-Indigenous students performed much less well on questions about current events, culture, governance, and geography than did Indigenous students, perhaps because Indigenous students have learned about these topics from sources beyond school. We investigated differences in student performance based on self-reported identity (Figure 1).

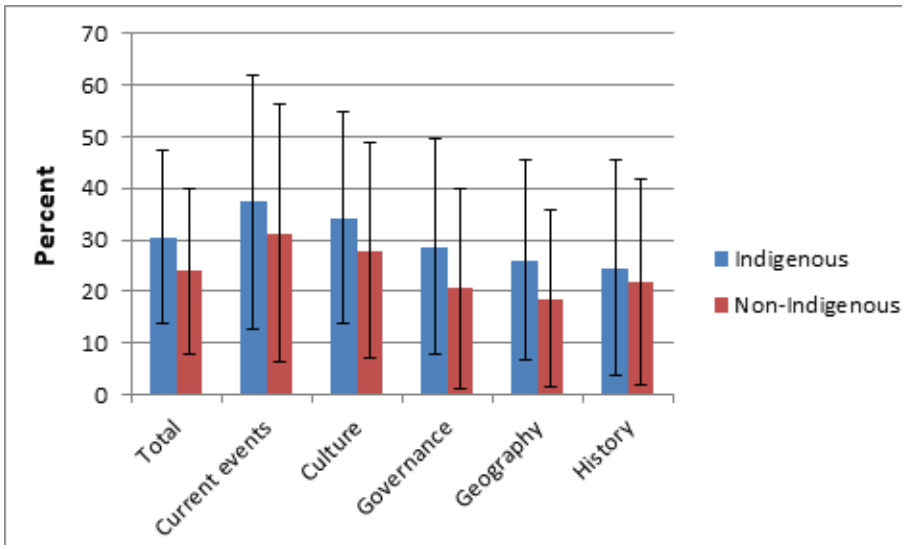
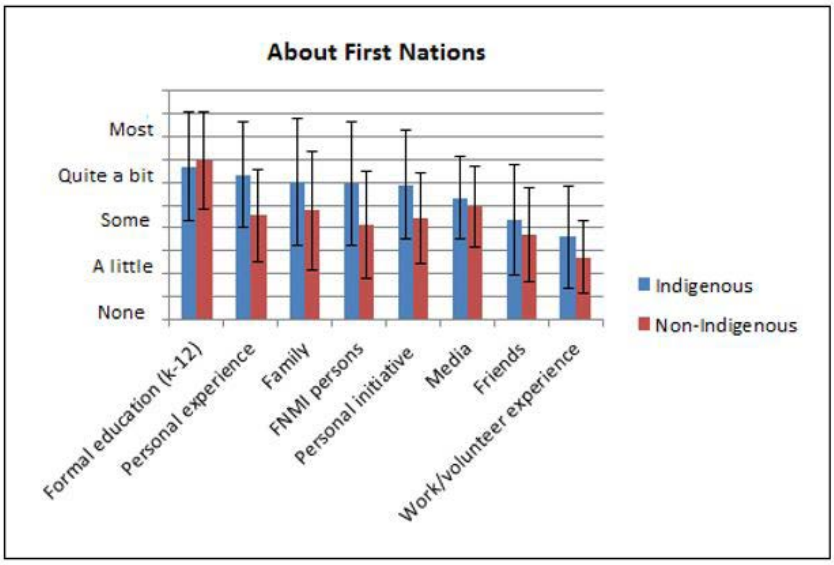


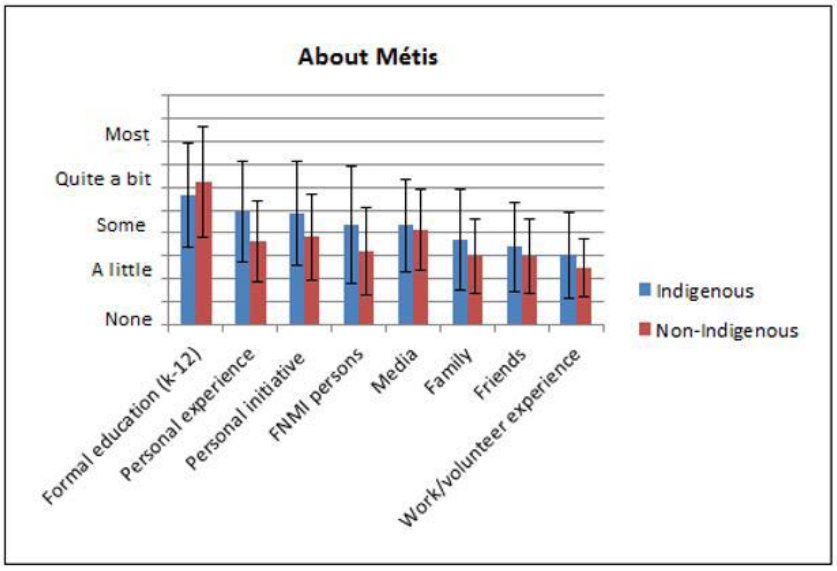
Figure 1. Student performance in each test question category by Indigenous identity

The difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students' performance was significant for four of the five question themes: current events, $t(2702) = 2.852$, $p = 0.004$, cohen's $d = 0.24$; culture, $t(2702) = 3.568$, $p < 0.001$, cohen's $d = 0.30$; governance, $t(2702) = 4.941$, $p < 0.001$, cohen's $d = 0.40$; and geography, $t(2702) = 5.071$, $p < 0.001$, cohen's $d = 0.40$. There was no significant difference between non-Indigenous and Indigenous students on historical questions, $t(2702) = 1.596$, $p = 0.111$. That non-Indigenous students score nearly 10% lower on geography, governance, and history questions than they do on culture and current events questions suggests that they are least aware of the history of Indigenous–settler relations in Canada and of contemporary Indigenous presence.

Where Students Learned What They Know

Where students learned what they know differed significantly between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Students also learned differently about First Nations than about Métis and about Inuit. We asked students how much they learned about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit from their personal experience, their own initiative, their formal education, media, friends, family, Indigenous persons, and work, volunteer, or internship experience (Figure 2).





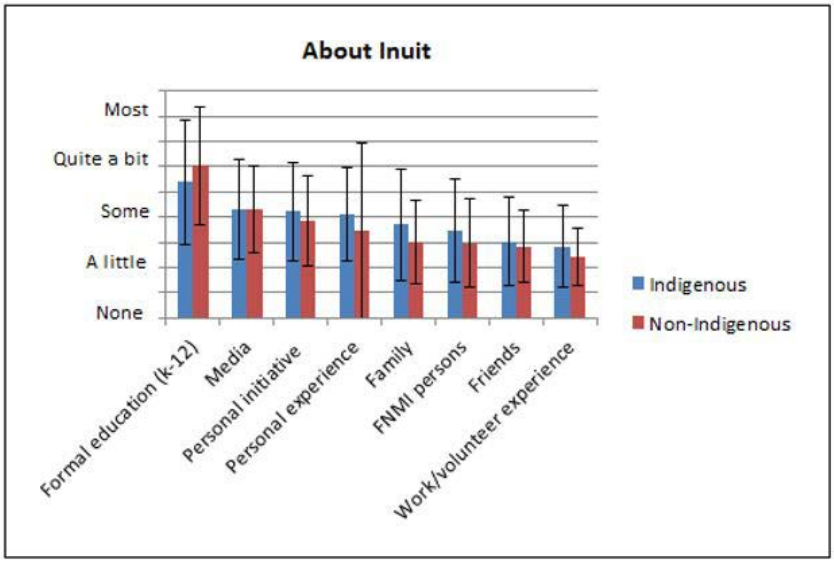


Figure 2. Indigenous and non-Indigenous students' sources of learning about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and topics

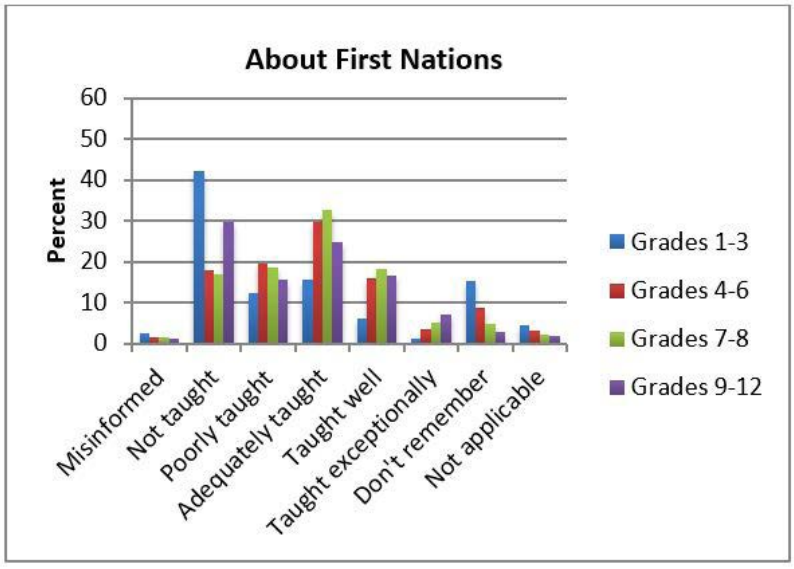
All students consider that they learned most about First Nations, much less about Métis, and least about Inuit. All students feel that they learned more from school than from any other source and least from work/volunteer experience. That Indigenous students report learning "quite a bit" in school may be a consequence of better teaching in schools with higher proportions of Indigenous students (Archibald & Hare, 2017). These students may also have taken Native Studies courses in high school. This strong suite of courses, developed through the considerable efforts of Indigenous educators across the province in the 1990s, was to be available to any interested student. Yet provincial enrolment requirements and the prevailing prejudice that Indigenous topics are only relevant to Indigenous students has meant that Native Studies courses are often not offered consistently year-to-year and in most Ontario schools are not offered at all (Chaput, 2012; Strachan & Kidder, 2016). Nevertheless, when these courses are available, students probably learn a great deal.

While formal education was an important source of knowledge for all students, Indigenous students are significantly more likely to learn from other sources as well, $F(24, 3223.74) = 14.51$, $p < .001$. Indigenous students are significantly more likely to have learned what they know from personal experience ($p < 0.001$); personal initiative ($p < 0.001$); family ($p < 0.001$); First Nations, Métis, or Inuit persons ($p < 0.001$); friends

($p = 0.003$); and work, volunteer, or internship experience ($p < 0.001$). However, non-Indigenous students are significantly more likely to have learned what they know from formal education ($p = 0.014$). Media is also an important source of knowledge. That non-Indigenous students perform significantly less well on the test having learned most from formal education and media suggests the need for better integration of the knowledge and experiences of First Nations and Métis people(s), and especially Inuit, in formal education.

Quality of Formal Education

Student reporting on the quality of their education suggests that they know when they have been taught well or poorly. We asked students how well they consider they were taught in four grade categories: Grades 1–3, Grades 4–6, Grades 7–8, and Grades 9–12. Students could respond "Misinformed," "Not taught," "Poorly taught," "Adequately taught," "Taught well," "Taught exceptionally," "Don't remember," and "Not applicable" (Figure 3).



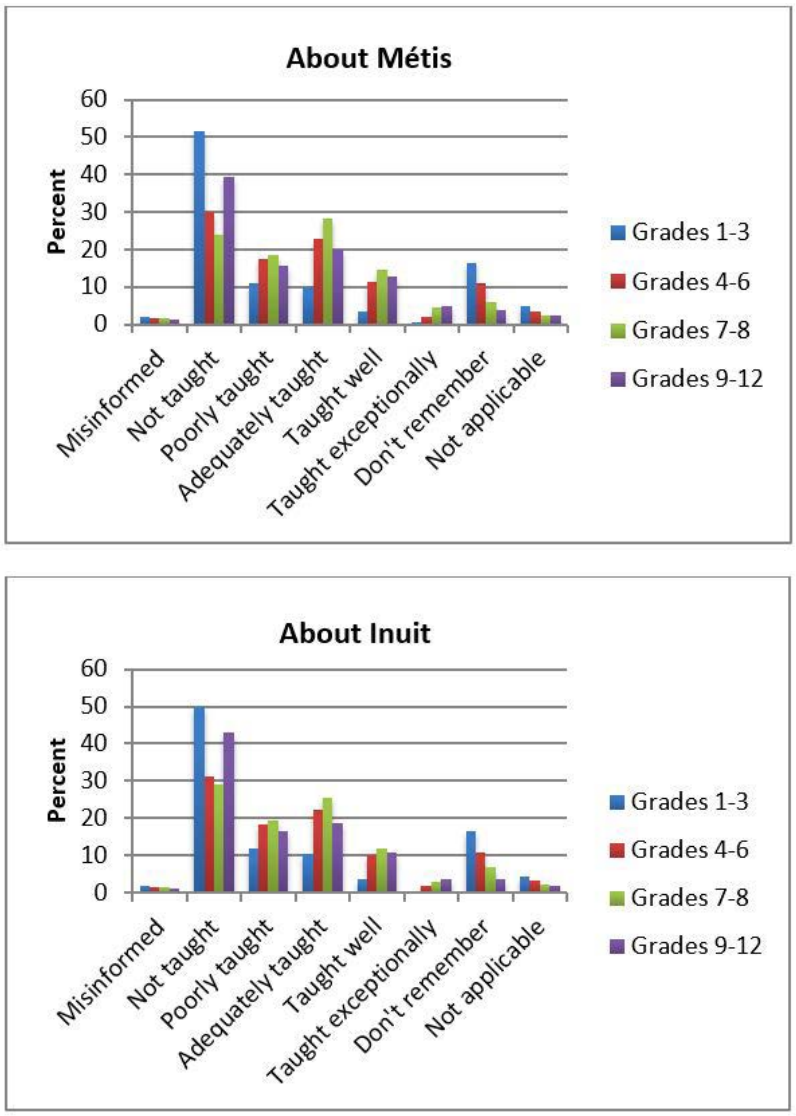


Figure 3. Student reporting on quality of teaching about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and topics in Grades 1–3, 4–6, 7–8, and 9–12

Students consider that they were taught best about First Nations and least well about Inuit, with Indigenous content clustered in Grades 4 through 8. Students also considered that they learned very little in early grades or in high school, patterns consistent with the curriculum (Schaefli et al., in press). Worryingly, in each grade category between 20% and 50% of students consider that they were not taught about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and topics. This too is a reflection of the curriculum, where over 80% of Indigenous content is framed as optional (Schaefli et al., in press). That so many students are reporting

not being taught suggests that teachers may not be engaging with material construed as optional. This finding reinforces the need for better teacher and administrative training on the importance of Indigenous topics for all people in Canada, especially as nearly all Indigenous content in the new 2013–15 curriculum is framed as optional (Nardozi & Mashford-Pringle, 2014; Pratt & Danyluk, 2017; Redwing-Saunders & Hill, 2007; Strachan & Kidder, 2016). Encouragingly, students who reported that they were taught well or exceptionally well about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in middle school and high school (Grades 7–12) scored significantly higher on curriculum questions ($p < 0.05$). Likewise, students who knew enough to consider that they had been misinformed scored significantly higher on Residential Schools questions, $t(2897) = 2.16$, $p = 0.03$.

Learning from Indigenous People(s) Matters

Some research has shown that increasing contact between people of different backgrounds and experience can foster empathy and reduce prejudice (Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, & Wright, 2011; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2008). Other research suggests that this effect depends on the quality of the contact (Askins & Pain, 2011; Denis, 2015). In this study, we found that greater interaction with Indigenous people and topics increased students' test performance, enhanced their willingness to engage with Indigenous perspectives, and made them more willing to imagine issues from Indigenous points of view. We asked students to describe the quality of their interaction with Indigenous persons (Figure 4).

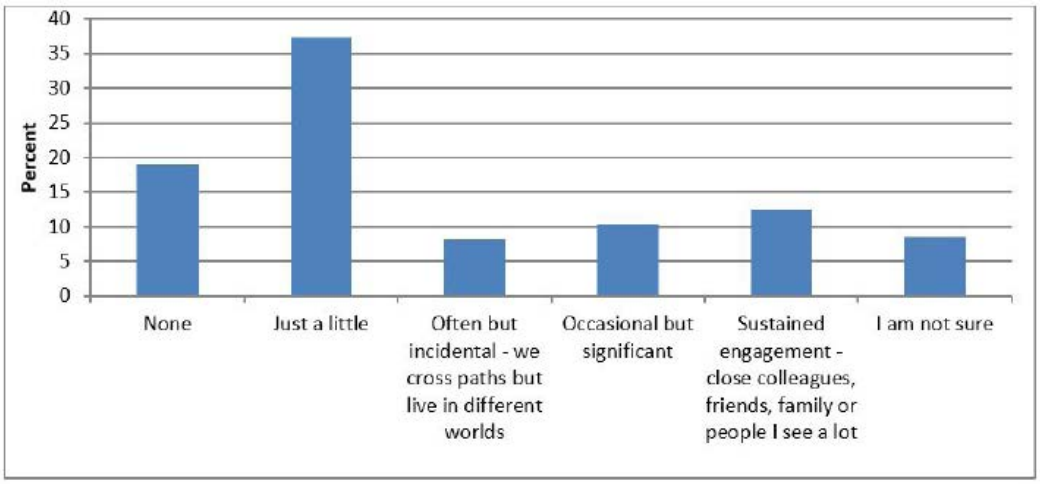


Figure 4. Student reporting on the nature of their contact with Indigenous persons

The quality of contact students had with Indigenous people had a significant effect on their test performance, ($F(6, 2868) = 58.79$, $p = 0.001$, partial $\eta 2 = .11$). Students who considered that they had "sustained" or "occasional but significant" interaction with Indigenous people performed better on the test than students who reported having little contact, no contact, or were not sure ($p < 0.001$).

Caring about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit well-being is also linked to better test performance. We asked students two questions: how much they care about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people and how much they care about social justice issues faced by Indigenous people(s) (e.g., disproportionate poverty, murder of women, inequity in housing, education, incarceration, and health) (Figure 5).

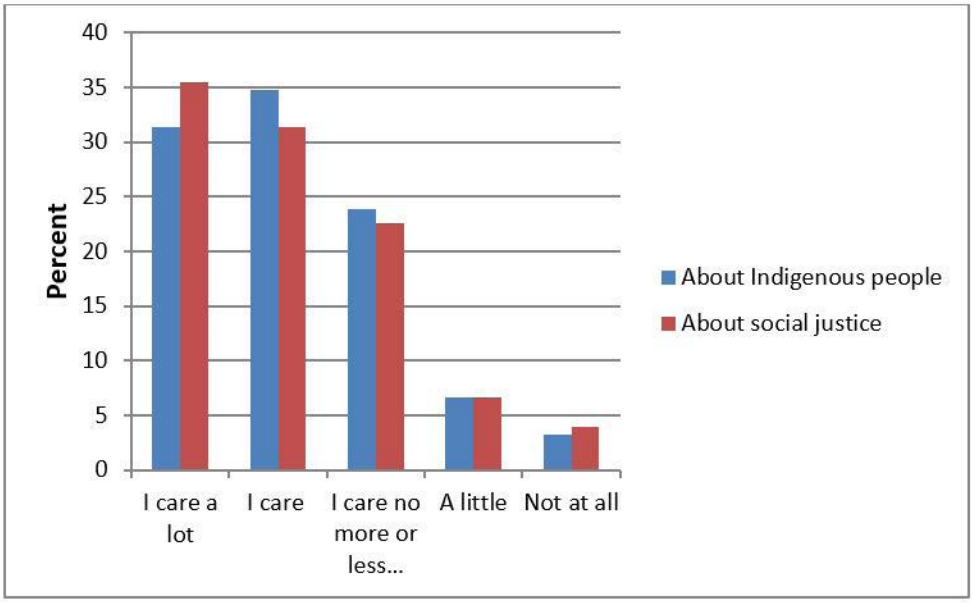


Figure 5. Student reporting on how much they care about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit well-being

Nearly 70% of respondents report caring about Indigenous people and about social justice. About a quarter of these students care no more or less about Indigenous well-being than about any other people or issues in Canada. Fewer than 5% do not care at all. These findings are probably not representative of the entire Ontario student population, as the students who took the time to complete the survey likely care more than most. A two-way ANOVA investigating the relationship between how much participants care about Indigenous

well-being and their test performance yielded significant results, $F(4, 2717) = 4.417$, $p = .001$. While higher levels of care about Indigenous people increased students' test scores, how concerned participants were with social justice issues did not affect test performance, $F(4, 2717) = .882$, $p = .4874$. However, the interaction effect was significant, $F(15, 2717) = 1.962$, $p = .015$, meaning that the effect of participants who cared more about Indigenous well-being was greater when participants also cared more about social justice.

Family interest also had a significant effect on students' test scores. We asked students to characterize the interest of their immediate family members in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and topics. Students could choose one of six set phrases (Figure 6).

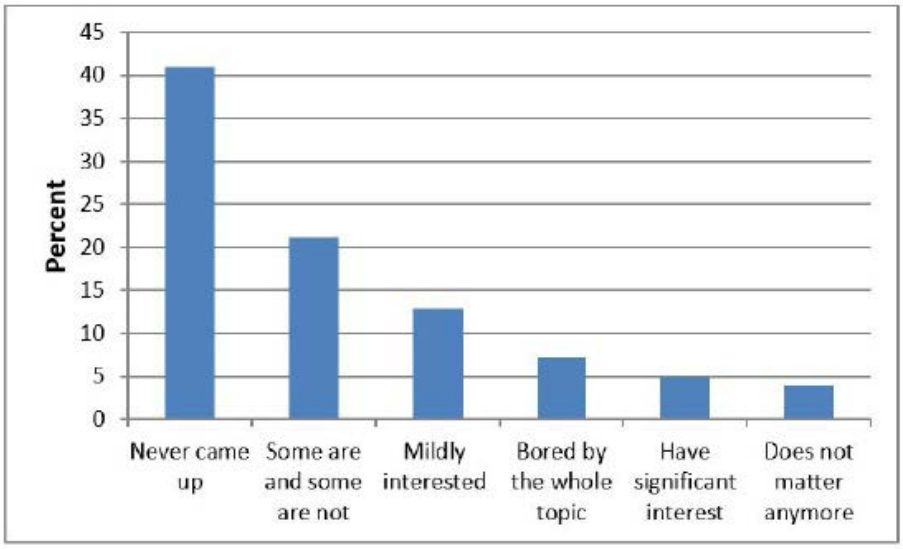


Figure 6. Student reporting on the interest of their immediate family members in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and topics

The majority of students encounter silence in the home on this topic. Nearly a quarter of students say their families are interested in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and topics (mildly interested and significantly interested combined). Worryingly, over 10% consider their families to be bored by the whole topic or think Indigenous topics do not matter anymore. A one-way ANOVA showed that how students answered this question had a significant effect on their test score, ($F(7, 2891) = 42.3$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta 2 = .093$). The

more interested a student's family, the higher the student scored on the test ($p < 0.05$). Even those students who consider their families to feel that it is all in the past and does not matter anymore perform better on the test than those who say that it never came up as a topic of conversation ($p = 0.004$). In other words, any engagement on the part of students' families with Indigenous topics is associated with increased knowledge in this group of students.

Students' Interest

Students' exposure to Indigenous perspectives and topics is also linked to their interest in learning more. We asked students what might be the cause of any limitation to their knowledge about Indigenous peoples and topics in Canada. Students could choose one or more of nine set phrases (Figure 7).

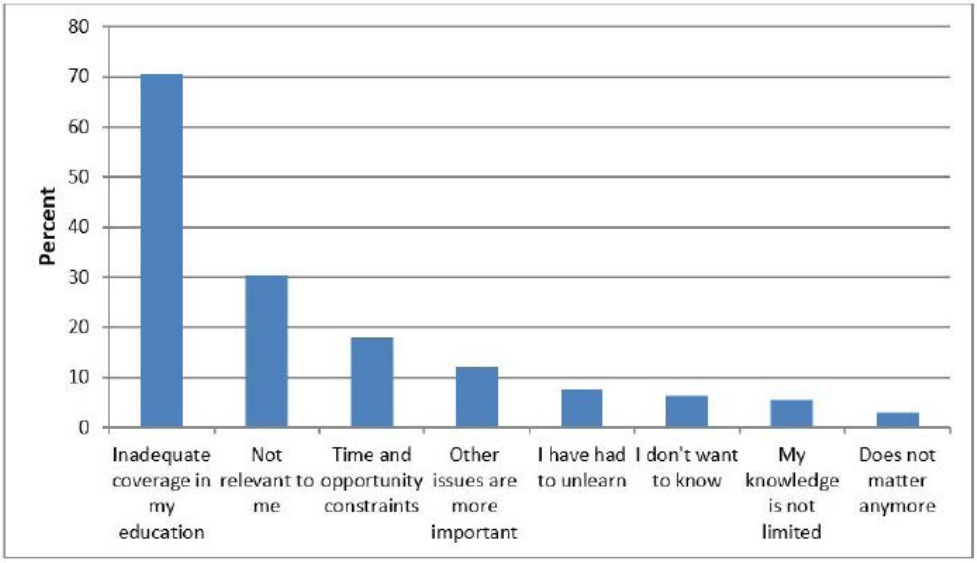


Figure 7. Student reporting on the limitations to their knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and topics

The vast majority of students consider that the principal barrier to their knowledge is inadequate coverage in school, reinforcing the need for better education. Nearly a third of respondents consider that Indigenous topics are not relevant to them. A smaller, but still substantial, proportion of students consider that they do not want to know. The nearly

10% of students who indicate that they have learned things they have had to unlearn are likely more aware than most, as are the students who say that their knowledge is not limited.

Importantly, students who indicate that they are not interested in engaging with Indigenous topics are significantly less likely to have interacted with First Nations, Métis, or Inuit people or had exposure to Indigenous topics. Chi-square tests showed that students who say "My family is not First Nations, Métis, or Inuit so it is not relevant to me" (X^2 (6, N = 2869) = 46.76, $p < 0.001$) or "I don't want to know about these issues" (X^2 (6, N = 2869) = 16.20, $p = 0.013$) are significantly less likely to have had sustained engagement with Indigenous people. Students who say they do not want to know are also less likely to have been taught about Indigenous peoples in high school (X^2 (7, N = 2899) = 40.44, $p < 0.001$). Both of these groups of students are significantly less likely to consider that they should have been taught more (X^2 (2, N = 2899) = 87.19, $p < 0.001$); (X^2 (2, N = 2794) = 239.84, $p < 0.001$). That the lack of exposure to Indigenous topics and perspectives negatively affects students' willingness to engage with them reinforces the importance of centering Indigenous territories, philosophies, and critical perspectives in public education.

While engagement with Indigenous people and topics affects student interest, so do family attitudes. We asked students how they would characterize the views of their immediate family members towards First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and topics. To respond, they could choose one or more of seven set phrases (Figure 8).

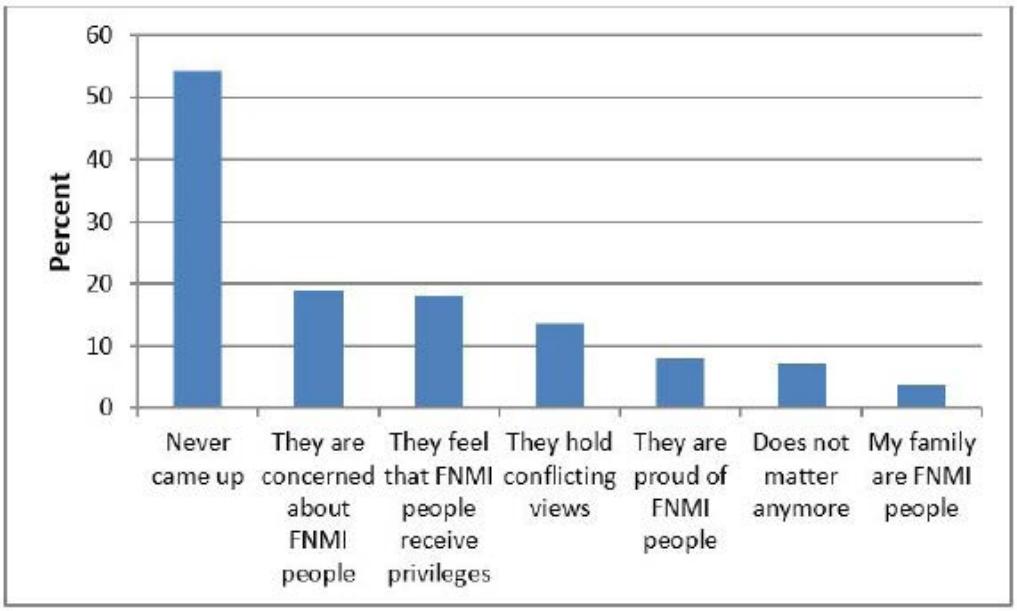


Figure 8. Student reporting on the attitudes of their immediate family members towards First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and topics

Again, overwhelmingly, students encounter silence in the home. While at least 25% hear expressions of pride and concern (i.e., they are concerned about FNMI people, they are proud of FNMI people), nearly 30% receive more negative messages (i.e., they feel that FNMI people receive privileges, does not matter anymore). Independent samples t-tests indicated that students who considered their family members to be proud of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples are significantly more interested in Indigenous peoples and topics, ($t(276.5) = 11.54$, $p < 0.001$). However, students who say that their family members feel that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people receive privileges are significantly less likely to be interested in social justice for Indigenous people(s), ($t(780.98) = 2.00$, $p = 0.046$). These students also report caring less about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, ($t(770.36) = 2.01$, $p = 0.045$). Troublingly, these students are more likely to say that they feel informed, ($t(2805) = 3.12$, $p = 0.002$). These findings reinforce the need for a public education system that counters familial prejudice.

Students' Political Views

Exposure to Indigenous perspectives and topics also affects students' attitudes towards social inequity. We asked students how they feel when First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people have fewer advantages and opportunities than they do. Students could choose one or more of 10 set phrases (Figure 9).

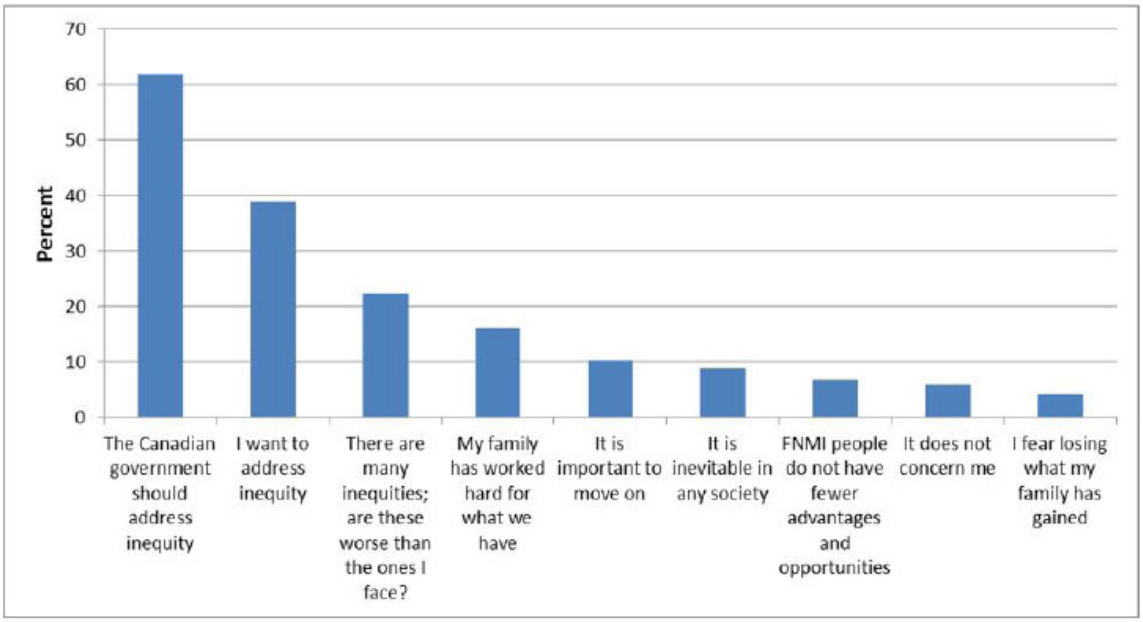


Figure 9. Student reporting on how they feel when First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people have fewer advantages and opportunities than they do

The responses fall into five categories: delegation of responsibility, taking personal responsibility, ambivalence, fear, and apathy. Over 60% of students delegate responsibility for inequity to the Canadian government. Fewer consider that they want to address inequity, though this is the second-most popular answer amongst these students. That over a fifth of students wonder if the inequities faced by Indigenous people are worse than the ones they face suggests that many of the students in this sample experience social marginalization of one sort or another, or perhaps it expresses ambivalence. Another fifth express fear that addressing inequity would entail loss of the advantages they have ("I fear losing" and "my family has worked hard"). Approximately 10% are apathetic about inequity ("It is inevitable," "must move on," and "does not concern me").

The prevalence of fear and apathy is particularly indicative of the barriers at play in challenging systemic racism (Schick & St. Denis, 2003; Tupper, 2013). Yet engagement with Indigenous people is statistically significant here too. Students who say that inequity does not concern them are significantly less likely to have had sustained engagement with Indigenous people, ($X^2(6, 2869) = 20.61$, $p = 0.002$). The same is true of students who consider inequity inevitable in any society, ($X^2(6, 2869) = 19.6$, $p = 0.003$). These results suggest the social and political importance of engagement with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and topics.

Where Students Were Educated

We found that social attitudes were also linked to where students completed their Grade 1–12 education. We asked students where they attended most of their primary and secondary education (Figure 10).

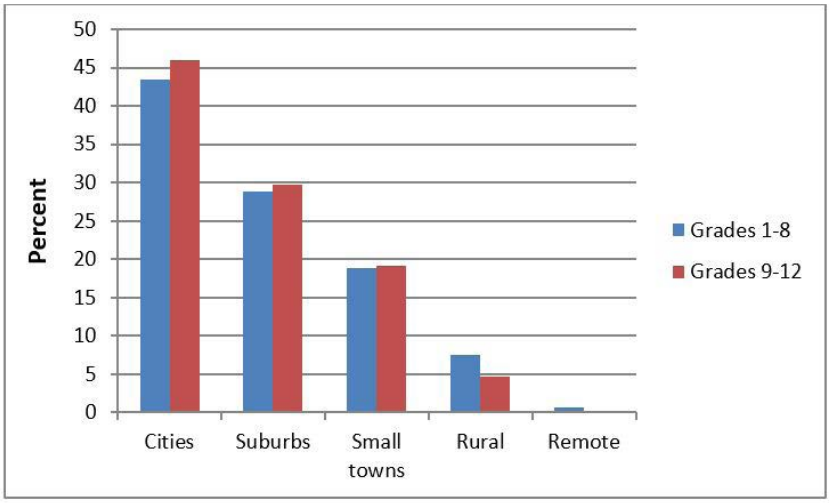


Figure 10. Where students completed the majority of their Grades 1–8 and 9–12 education

The vast majority of students attended school in urban and suburban areas. About a fifth completed their schooling in small towns. Fewer than 10% were educated in rural areas and 0.1% of respondents were educated in remote areas. Where students were educated had no significant effect on test performance, though it did on social attitudes. Chi-square

tests indicated that students who say their immediate family members feel First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples receive privileges are significantly more likely to have completed Grades 1–12 in rural areas ($X^2(7, 2899) = 42.36$, $p < 0.001$) or small towns ($X^2(7, 2899) = 33.36$, $p < 0.001$). Students who indicated that they did not want to know about Indigenous peoples and topics are significantly more likely to have completed high school in cities ($X^2(7, 2899 = 24.14$, $p < 0.001$). That urban students are more closed to knowing about Indigenous peoples and topics may be linked to longstanding practices of Indigenous erasure from urban lands (Lawrence, 2004; Peters, 2011).

Where students are attending university also affected test performance. Bearing in mind that at the time of survey most students were in their first semester, we conducted independent samples t-tests and chi-square tests to investigate whether test performance and social attitude varied by university. These yielded significant results. Students at northern Ontario universities scored significantly higher on the test than students at southern Ontario universities, $t(315) = 3.00$, $p = 0.003$. Students attending universities in small cities or towns (population < 500,000) scored significantly higher than students at universities in large cities, $t(2650) = 5.58$, $p < 0.001$. Additionally, students at small universities (student population < 20,000) scored better than students at large universities, $t(2897) = 6.1$, $p < 0.001$. Chi-square tests indicated that students attending large, urban universities are significantly more likely to report that Indigenous peoples and topics never came up as a topic of conversation at home, ($X^2(9,2899) = 41.86$, $p < 0.001$). These results suggest that large, urban universities may have the most work to do in enhancing awareness of Indigenous peoples and topics in their student body.

The analysis presented in this article reflects the knowledge and social attitudes of university students who graduated from high school before the implementation of the updated K–8 and Grade 9–12 Canadian and World Studies curricula. Released in 2013 and 2015, respectively, these curricula were designed with input from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit educators and in many ways are much improved—for example, traditional territories are now discussed. However, over 98% of Indigenous content, including material on the Indian Act and Residential Schools, is optional (Ontario Ministry of

Education, 2013, 2015).[3] Making content optional is one way of allowing teachers and schools to tailor curriculum to their student populations. Yet many Ontario teachers have themselves not been taught well about colonialism and Indigenous peoples (Dion, 2009; Higgins, Madden, & Korteweg, 2015; Pratt & Danyluk, 2017). Additionally, the majority of Ontario faculties of education do not prioritize or mandate Indigenous-focused curriculum or pedagogy across their programs (Nardozi & Mashford-Pringle, 2014; Gallagher-Mackay, Kidder, & Methot, 2013; Waldorf, 2014). As Dion (2012) found in her study of Métis content in Ontario teacher education programs, despite significant advances in teacher education, the prevailing attitude amongst non-Indigenous instructors and teacher candidates remains that Métis content is mostly irrelevant outside schools with high proportions of Métis students. The new curriculum's placement of Indigenous content in optional terms thus risks perpetuating the "unequally occupied rhetorical space" fostered by colonial history and Eurocentric cognitive imperialism and demonstrated by the generation of university students who participated in this Awareness Questionnaire (May, 2006, p. 110; Battiste, 2013; Code, 1995). This dynamic, together with the findings presented here, emphasize the necessity of improving teacher education to the point where Indigenous topics, critical perspectives, and worldviews are mandatory for all students' learning in Canada. While different regions of Ontario may face different challenges in educating their students, educational institutions from kindergarten to university have key roles to play in fostering the critical historical consciousness, mutual respect and ethical stance central to nation-to-nation relationships (Donald, 2012; Ermine, 2007).

Conclusion

Quantitative results of a knowledge test and associated questionnaire co-designed with over 200 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit educators across Ontario demonstrate that first-year university students in the province have been taught ineffectively about colonialism and its consequences for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and Canadian society.

3 At this time, the Ministry of Education has consulted with First Nations and Métis educators and organizations to revise the updated 2013–15 curricula in response to the TRC's Calls to Action. These revisions integrate much more content into mandatory directives and are currently being rolled out across the province for implementation by school board. The curriculum revisions are still in pre-publication but should be verified and confirmed by the fall of 2018.

A number of things are clear from this quantitative analysis. Most students are not sufficiently interested to take part in a questionnaire on Indigenous topics on their own time. While students are most aware of topics in the news, many know remarkably little about the history of Indigenous–settler relations in Canada or about contemporary Indigenous presence and vitality. Students have little sense of the systemic nature and ongoing consequences of colonial violence. Many do not see Indigenous people as part of Canadian society, and the vast majority do not understand the roots of Indigenous rights and take an uncritical approach to Canadian governance. Overwhelmingly, students seem to believe that wherever Indigenous people are, they are not *here*; not present and by implication not relevant to their daily lives. This perceived absence is deeply political, as it works to limit points of connection to the longstanding efforts of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people and governments to engage residents of Canada in respectful relations (Ermine, 2007; de Costa & Clark, 2016; Donald, 2012). While the Indigenous students who participated in this survey could and did turn to family and Indigenous persons for their knowledge, non-Indigenous students often rely on formal education and media. Non-Indigenous students' poor performance on the knowledge test highlights the breadth of the gap between what is taught in formal education—through curriculum content and pedagogical approaches—and the knowledge considered important by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people in Ontario. However, when students have opportunities to learn from Indigenous people(s), knowledge systems and topics, and when we expect students to engage, care, and be accountable to this relationship core to Canada, it can make a significant difference to what students know and think. We will be returning to Ontario universities in 2018 to survey the exiting student cohort. We will conduct at least some of these surveys in classes to increase response rates and engage students in dialogue and reflection. Qualitative results from this 2014 study (forthcoming) and results from surveys of exiting students will further enhance the analysis of student learning presented here.

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