

Literature Review

On

Racism and the Effects on Aboriginal Education

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I. Our context

I went through hell.... (They said) 'Those dirty Indians' were coming.... and I was so degraded and I just hated who I was (First Nations Education Steering Committee Society, 1997, p. 25)

*I have asked why should it take so long, this work of educating Indians. ...Sometimes I think it is because we have had not only to educate the Indian but also to educate the white man. The two have had to go hand in hand, and **the education of the white man has been the more difficult task.*** (Board of Indian Commissioners, 19th century American philanthropist, Annual Report, Washington, D.C., 1897, in DeJong, 1993, p.268, emphasis added)

It would be bad enough if this student's experience were an isolated incident. After all the progress over the past sixty years most Canadians would join us in condemning racist actions and many would be shocked that it is still happening. Unfortunately, the thousands of indigenous students we have worked with, our own experience and the research literature are all in 'nearly' unanimous agreement. Racism continues to be a significant obstacle to the education and employment of our youth. And perhaps as the speaker of the second quote suggests and realized over one hundred years ago, the unnamed problem maybe the education of the white man.

When we told a respected elder that we had been asked to write a review of the literature on the effect of racism on First Nations youth she told the following story:

When I was on the school board in [a non-Indian town] I gave a speech to the Chamber of Commerce. I complimented them on having a non-racist town. I told them that I didn't find any racism in their town. I told them I didn't find it because I wasn't looking for it.

She laughed, and then said to us, "That's why you have that thick brown skin". Thank goodness for thick skins (brown and white). But we have to admit that like everybody else our skins get a lot thinner when children are hurt. We think it takes courage to tackle the issue of racism. One of our grandfathers often used the word, "brave" as a synonym

for stupid. We readily imagine him saying, “You are really brave to be talking about racism”. It takes a particular kind of courage to write or read the word racism.

So, we ask you to thicken your skin and open your heart as we try to lead you through some of the literature on racism. Your task, should you accept it, is to mine this review in hopes of a lump of coal that may stoke the policy furnace or in some unlikely circumstance of heat and pressure be turned into a tool grade diamond. We agree with Norbert Hill (1991, p.48) that there “are questions that we need to consider. We must, however, simultaneously act”.

II. Scope of Literature Review

This review focuses on First Nations education in Canada. However, it includes literature on American Indian and Alaska Native education and in a few cases, literature on Indigenous education in Australia and New Zealand. The review is also intended to focus on academic literature published in the past decade, although in some cases, earlier literature is also referenced. On our behalf, Shelley Fahlman of Luther College used various combinations of keywords to conduct thirty-two searches of a dozen different databases including ERIC ProCite, PsyInfo, Wilson Web and the First Nations Periodical Index. She consulted with reference librarians, compiled reference lists and abstracts, and screened articles for relevance. We also searched informally for relevant research and government reports. We did not include the Report of The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples since our original intent had been to focus on just the past five years of research. We continue to find reports that we wish we could have included but as the Bible says, “Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh” (Ecclesiastes 12:11). The literature includes works by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars and researchers. Literature reviewed includes research on elementary, secondary and post-secondary Aboriginal education.

III. Racism: The problem of denial

On one hand there is very little research and educational literature on racism and Aboriginal people, yet on the other hand, the literature is filled with references to the effects of racism on Aboriginal people in educational institutions. This is a paradox, one that must be understood within larger social and political, national and academic

commitments and traditions. There is no doubt that Aboriginal people, students and teachers, must contend with racist practices and beliefs rooted in white supremacy and colonialism. There are many reasons and ways in which the problem of racism and white supremacy are relegated beyond acknowledgement, beyond naming and therefore, beyond problematizing and re-dress.

The following review of literature on racism and Aboriginal people, poses a number of questions, including: Does the literature identify racism as a problem encountered by Aboriginal people in education? What effects does racism, particularly, in the form of white supremacy have on Aboriginal people? How is racism defined and identified? If there is no such thing as human “races,” does racism exist? What social practices and educational traditions keep racism outside conscious and deliberate focus? What are effects of denying that race matters and that racism is a problem for Aboriginal people? Despite a tradition of denial and evasion, what does the educational literature advise as strategies of intervention?

There are far more texts and research literature that address the challenge and problem of teaching culturally different Aboriginal students than there are about how to teach for anti-racism in the context of Aboriginal education. Although the literature on Aboriginal education identifies and names racism as a problem that prevents and limits Aboriginal people from attaining an education, there has been little scholarly attention (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Deyhle, 1995; Huffman, 1991; Sixkiller Clarke, 1994; St. Denis, 2002; St. Denis, Bouvier & Battiste, 1998). For example, in a study of postsecondary students, Huffman (1991) writes, “Racism directed towards Indian college students has received relatively little attention.... [And] There is little research on the role racial prejudice plays as a barrier in the Indian educational experience (p. 1). In a study of Native American youth at risk, Sixkiller Clarke (1994) also states, “There has been little research conducted on racism, discrimination, and prejudice within and/or among American Indian groups and/or American Indians and non-Indians within the school setting; and yet racism, prejudice, and discrimination clearly exist and may, in fact, be contributors to lack of success of students in the school setting” (p. 67).

This lack of scholarly and research attention must be understood within long and established national and academic traditions and commitments. To begin with, the

literature identifies and names 'denial' as a problem, in other words, the denial of racism as a problem that Aboriginal students face is a problem in itself. For example, a recent report by the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (1999) identifies racism as a problem in B. C. schools and has committed itself to eliminating racism, "Although it is sometimes denied, the evidence is overwhelming that racism is in practice in B.C. and in particular in regard to Aboriginal peoples" (p. 22). Ryan (1998) writing about the Canadian context claims that despite mounting evidence to the contrary, many educators continue to deny that educational institutions are racist in nature.

It is not only institutions that deny and therefore avoid the problem of racism, but also individuals within those institutions who deny the problem of racism. In her research on Navajo students, Deyhle (1995) found, "equally damaging to Navajo students' school experiences are teachers who refuse to acknowledge the racial discrimination in the community. (1995, p. 10). Deyhle reports, further that "Navajo students' attempt to make racial discrimination visible within the school have been silenced by the Anglo students and school administrators" (1995, p. 10). In the book, *Collected wisdom: American Indian education* (1998), authors, Cleary & Peacock claim that the efforts made to address American Indian education have "failed for a variety of reasons. Most of these programs were either too little, too late, or not enough, or simply bad ideas. Generally speaking, programs attacked an issue and ignored a whole set of other issues. The piecemeal nature of programs has not been able to break through the nearly impervious nature of institutional and overt racism in this country" (p. 253). The denial of racism as a problem that limits the educational success of Aboriginal and American Indian students is not only denied at the institutional and individual level, but is also denied both in Canada and the United States.

Ironically, those who must bear the effects of racism and white supremacy may also deny and/or avoid the problem of racism. For example, Ryan (1995) found that Native students react to racist practices in different ways. "Many either do their best to avoid situations that have a potential to generate prejudicial behaviour, or do not acknowledge that such discrimination is taking place" (p. 220). As well, Aboriginal and American Indian denial of the problem of racism occurs both at the individual and institutional level. Ambler (1997) describes her effort to include a story of how an

American Indian student in the mid seventies resisted racism and in the process led to all Indian students walking out of their predominantly white school which then led to the development of a K-12 school on the reservation and eventually a tribal college. Ambler (1997) explains, “when I tried to tell her story in an article about tribal colleges several years ago, a popular Native magazine would not include it, her experience was too negative” (p. 1) Ambler (1997) suggests that just because racism is not a comfortable subject, “it should not be ignored, especially by an education publication such as the Tribal College Journal” (p. 1).

Despite the denial of racism as a problem and the lack of scholarly attention, Jeffrey (1999, p. 12) who reviews a number of research documents and policy statements regarding the education of Aboriginal people, found “repeated reference students and parents make to racism and discrimination in schools. ... [And therefore suggests] we must be honest about the issue of racism and work in partnership to eliminate it from individual, institutional and systemic practice” (BC Human Rights Commission Report (2001, p. 5). An honest approach to the problem of racism must include acknowledging Canada’s complicity with a denial of racism in its history and present.

1. Denial: A Canadian tradition

In a paper exploring the challenges of advocating and teaching for anti-racist analysis in teacher education, Schick & St. Denis (2001) write,

That racism in Canada often escapes scrutiny is one of the factors that make anti-racist analysis a challenge in a teacher education program. In addition to outright denial or designating discussion of racism as taboo, racism is often understood as something that took place primarily in the past or is associated with specific and unique examples. While it is relatively easy to support official events such as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the de facto examples of racism and those that warrant our outrage are often limited to apartheid in South Africa, the Holocaust in Germany and slavery in United States. These are common examples of racism that come readily to mind for students and form the basis of many educational programs in public schools across this

country. As significant as these historic examples are, their continual referencing as examples of what constitutes racism supports a belief that since Canada has none of these international markers, whether apartheid, slavery or holocaust, then racism is not a significant problem. Against this background, racism as an everyday practice in Canada is more difficult to bring to the level of discourse. The relegation of what is racist to historical and faraway practices produces Canada as a raceless nation, a national identification that is embedded in all major institutions. For example, Backhouse (1999) found that Canadian legal history is characterized by an “ideology of racelessness”. She argues that this ideology of racelessness is a “hallmark of Canadian tradition” which is in keeping with a “national mythology that Canada is not a racist country (Schick & St. Denis, 2001, p. 7/8).

Although, one may discuss the specific example of Canadian traditions of denial, Deyhle also identifies ways in which the problem of racism is denied in an American context, she explains, “By reducing racial conflict to ‘others’ problems or a thing of the past, the local power struggle is kept out of the classroom” (Deyhle, 1995, p. 10). In other words, racism is a problem that affects ‘others’ but not ‘us’ and/or racism is understood to be a problem of the past and/or of other places. The research literature tells us that racism is often a problem denied and therefore makes even more difficult to re-dress.

1.1 Some effects of the denial of racism

The effects of this culture of denial around the problem of racism in Canada and the United States in reference to the experiences and position of Aboriginal and American Indian people means that one must take many risks to bring the problem of racism to conscious discourse. Larocque (1991), a Canadian Métis scholar, notes that merely talking about or attempting to address racism in Canada can bring about strong rebuke that one is being prejudiced. She asks, “[s]ince when is a person prejudiced for exposing racism and injustices” (p. 76)? She notes that “when peoples around the world speak out against racism in a manner stronger than I or other Native persons have done, they have been accorded heroic stature; we, on the other hand, are often maligned and

censured” (Larocque, 1991, p. 75). Larocque tells us that it is not safe to acknowledge racism as a problem that affects the lives of Aboriginal people. Deyhle also found that racism is denied and silenced “on the premise that it does not exist or that to acknowledge racism is to ‘cause problems’” (1995, p. 14). Ryan (1998) suggests that educational institutions continue to deny they are racist because of different interpretations of what constitutes racism and racist practice. In part, this ‘confusion’ is an effect of designating ‘racism’ as a taboo topic because to raise racism as a problem one must take the risk of being identified as the problem. As discussed by Larocque (1991), this a form of backlashing that contributes to the denial and silencing of the problem of racism.

The denial of racism has additional affects, such as blaming the victim (Larocque, 1991; St. Denis, 2002), Sixkiller Clarke, explains “For too long, we have explained the failure of Indian students as a ‘within child’ deficit. ... We have failed to look beyond these problems, because if failure is not the fault of the child, then it lies elsewhere and that elsewhere may be the school” (Sixkiller Clarke, 1994, p. 121). The denial of racism, prejudice, and discrimination means that they cannot be identified as “contributors to lack of success of students in the school setting” (SixKiller Clarke, 1994, p. 67).

The denial of the racial discrimination that Aboriginal and Indian students face, means that history continues to repeat itself. A Navajo parent describes her frustration with the racism her child must endure by school personnel who she once faced as a child. Deyhle (1995) describes a meeting in which a Navajo and Anglo community address the racial hostility that was being played out in violence between the youth in these communities. After an unsatisfactory community meeting, a Navajo parent regrets not speaking out, she laments her unspoken challenge to the vice-principal, with whom she had gone to school twenty years before and wishes she would have said this to him: “You know what is like for the high school kids. You used to do the same things the kids are doing now against Indians. You remember when you put the pins in my seat? All the things that you used to do to Indians, it is still going on here. You did it, and now your kids are doing it” (Deyhle, 1995, p. 7).

In summary, the literature identifies and names the ‘denial’ of racism as a problem. It is not only institutions that deny and therefore avoid the problem of racism, but also individuals within those institutions who deny the problem of racism and this

denial occurs both in Canada and the United States. Ironically, those who must bear the effects of racism and white supremacy may also deny and/or avoid the problem of racism, for example, Aboriginal and American Indian denial of the problem of racism occurs both at the individual and institutional level. Larocque (1991) tells us that it is not safe to acknowledge racism as a problem that affects the lives of Aboriginal people. Despite this denial of racism and the silencing of racism as a problem, Jeffrey (1999, p. 12) who reviews a number of research documents and policy statements regarding the education of Aboriginal people, found “repeated reference students and parents make to racism and discrimination in schools.” The denial of racism, prejudice, and discrimination means that they cannot be identified as “contributors to lack of success of students in the school setting” (SixKiller Clarke, 1994, p. 67). Ryan (1998) suggests that educational institutions continue to deny they are racist because of different interpretations of what constitutes racism and racist practice.

IV. Racism as prejudice plus power

Perhaps, part of the problem of acknowledging of racism, as a problem has to do with its definition, as Chartrand, a Canadian Metis scholar suggests “Racism is a word that is used by many people in our time, probably with many different ideas in mind” (Chartrand, 1992, p. 7). He advocates a definition of racism that acknowledges unequal power relations. Chartrand provides the following analogy,

Racism is always present in a situation where there is an imbalance of power which permits the ‘racist’ behaviour to have effect. The racist comments of a white, Anglo-Saxon child in a schoolyard in Winnipeg, if directed at a young Cree, are liable to have effect because the Cree are vulnerable to the power of non-Aboriginal people in Winnipeg. That is, the Cree yield relatively little clout in the economic, social, and political life of the Winnipeg community. On the other hand, the racist taunts of a young Cree directed against non-Aboriginal schoolyard acquaintances in a Winnipeg suburb are hardly likely to have a similar impact on the White Anglo-Saxon recipient. Racism only matters if it has the power to hurt.

The individual coward is able to rely on the power of the group to assert personal dominance over another (1992, p. 7)

Larocque (1991) also provides a power relations definition of racism. She explains, ...Racism is a particular prejudice that legitimizes an unequal relationship. In other words, racism is political; it facilitates and justifies socioeconomic mobility for one group at the expense of another...while there may be mutual dislike, there is no such thing as a mutual discrimination in an unequal relationship. (Larocque, 1991, p. 75)

Both Chartrand (1992) and Larocque's (1991) definition of racism highlight unequal power relations as one marker of racism.

Ng (1993) stresses the taken-for-granted societal practices that condone racism, she explains,

I use the terms 'racism' and 'sexism' to point to systems of domination and subordination that have developed over time as taken-for-grant societal features. ...I draw attention to them [attitudes and practices] as systems of oppression and inequality based on the ideology of the superiority of one race and/or gender over others.... Systems of ideas and practices have been developed over time to justify and support the notion of superiority. These ideas become the premise on which societal norms and values and based, and the practices become the 'normal' ways of doing things" (p. 51-52)

An important distinction is made in the anti-racist literature between being prejudice and being racist. For example, Olsson (1996-97), a white Canadian anti-racist educator reiterates this analysis. She explains that although people of colour may express racial prejudice against white people, they do not exercise racism. She makes an important distinction between being insulted and being oppressed; this is an important distinction in discussing the definition of racism. It is the imbalance of power between Indigenous peoples and Canadian society that gives racial prejudice its teeth. The common dictionary definition of racism as discrimination against people because of race and the belief that one race is superior to another hides the central and most destructive element of racism.

1. Racism as discourse and discursive practice

In an article describing the racial and ethnic stereotyping that occurs in schools, Ryan (1998) argues that a “preoccupation with positive and negative images leads to a kind of essentialism” and that it “given the contested nature of processes of representation, it makes more sense, then, to abandon the language of accuracy and authenticity and focus instead on discourses and how they work through the images we encounter” (p. 5). Discourse, however, should not be equated with language. In fact it is a concept that attempts to combine language and practice, what people do and what they say (Hall, 1997). For example, discourses offer men and women, ‘interpretive packages,’ a series of central yet perpetually evolving organizing ideas or frames, which become part of how they make sense of what they encounter (Merelman, 1995) and what it means to be a man or a woman. Discourses are also the means through which power is exercised to promote particular interests. What discourses are made available or prevail at a given time and place will inevitably depend in crucial ways on prevailing power arrangements (Ryan, 1998). Lastly, Ryan suggests that discourse need not be seen as solely a technique of inequality, but also as a terrain of struggle (Ryan, 1998). Ryan suggests that understanding racism as discourse or discursive practice provides a means to name the “more subtle ways advantages and opportunities are unevenly distributed among students”.

2. Racism: Conscious and unconscious practice

The British Columbia Teachers Federation “recognizes that some racism is individual and some systemic and institutional and that some racism is conscious and intentional and some unconscious; further, that all these forms of racism must be opposed (1999, p. 22). Archibald and Urion (1995) found in their study of postsecondary First Nations graduates that barriers to completion included negative perceptions of the university. They explain that “one of the most difficult aspects of racism is that there may be racism that is almost unconscious, as if the deficiency of a group were ‘given in nature,’ but in which there is no conscious link between ideas and action, ideology and action. ... But more commonly, and much harder to deal with, it may be subtle and implicit in assumptions that different looks or background mean different goals. Such

differences may be addressed in racist ways unless better understandings develop” (Archibald & Urion, 1995, p. 151).

V. Race is a social construct

There is a question about the legitimacy and applicability of the race concept in Aboriginal education (Chartrand, 1992; British Columbia Human Rights Commission Report, 2001). Castagna and Dei (2000) also acknowledge that in the social sciences ‘race’ is “one of the most hotly contested concepts” (p. 19). Perhaps there is a confusion between the socially and politically constructed nature of the race concept and the daily and historical practices and processes by which racialization has been achieved. Nonetheless, many have argued that the race concept is important because of its social, political and economic consequences (Castagna and Dei, 2000; Omi & Winant, 1986, 1993; Ng, 1993). Castagna and Dei explain, “As a socially constructed category, race lacks any ‘scientific’ validity. Yet the concept continues to gain in social currency because of its utility for distributing unequal power and privilege. It has become an effective tool for the distribution of rewards and punishments” (2000, p. 21).

Ng (1993) explains, “race, class, and gender are not just categories, or ideas, or simple concepts but are indicate relationship that affect how humans relate, they refer to concrete everyday social relations” (p. 52). Gender does not merely refer to biological conditions of the human body, or disability merely to biological conditions of the body, rather they are also referring to socially constructed relations. Race and gender analysis brings attention to how those biological and sexual differences serve to justify differential social, economic and political participation in society. In other words, race, class and gender are social relations that have to do with how people are defined, and how those definitions affect participation in social life. Ng 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 “(Ng, 1993, p. 52), for example, how European superiority was “tied to private property, farming and Christianity” (Ng, 1993, p. 53). Ng argues that it is important to point out that the ideology of European supremacy and its deployment for the subordination of Aboriginal people. An ideology of white European supremacy had a

material base; it justified the taking of indigenous land, confinement on reserves “given” to Indians and exploiting indigenous labour and sexuality as well as subjugation to Christian education.

1. Whiteness and racialization

More recently, others have begun writing about ‘white’ as racial identity and the processes and practices through which ‘whiteness’ is achieved and what it affords and implies in challenging racism. McIntosh (1998) explains, “As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage” (p. 165). In an effort to name white privilege as one unequal effect of racist practices and institutions, McIntosh further elaborates, “I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks” (1998, p. 165).

Racialized identities are always operating to create difference: denial that one has a racial identity trivializes and invisible the effects of power (Roman, 1993). By claiming that ‘we’re all part of the human race; and that the ‘colour of a person’s skin’ is invisible, students whitewash the daily advantage of white privilege (MacIntosh, 1998, Sleeter, 1993; Henriques et al, 1984). By denying that race matters, whiteness, as the dominant racial identification, can be considered the invisible norm against which ‘others’ are judged as ‘not white/not quite’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 92)” in (St. Denis & Schick, forthcoming, p. 14/15).

This important scholarly work in naming and identifying white identity and its relationship to racism has been in an important development in anti-racist education.

1.1 Skin colour matters

Although there may be many who declare that skin colour should not matter, there is much in the literature that acknowledges it matters in terms of the treatment one receives. Aboriginal teachers attest to the reality of racialization at the end of twentieth

century, as one teacher explained, “In Saskatchewan, there is nothing lower than being an Indian or looking like an Indian, whether or not you are Metis, you are Indian, it doesn’t matter “(Aboriginal teacher in St. Denis, Bouvier & Battiste, 1998, p. 39). The visibility is evident to those who are identifiably Aboriginal, for example, an Aboriginal teacher states, “I personally feel that the more visibly Aboriginal you are the more you are bound to experience racism” (Aboriginal teacher in St. Denis, Bouvier & Battiste, 1998, p. 41). Chartrand also addresses the impact of racialization on Aboriginal people, he explains, “Racism hurts. There is no doubt about that. There are many individuals in Canada who walk around every day and carry their badge of identification in the colour of their bodies, like a miner’s lamp, which identifies them as an individual who is part of the group that every bigot is invited to assail” (Chartrand, 1992, p. 7).

In a graduate student panel, Andrew Lee, an Aboriginal man, discusses the impact of racial visibility and the desire to deny racism, as explains,

“The other issue in terms of racism is how visible we are as Aboriginal people. And this is where sometimes biology plays into it—skin colour—because skin colour is a big issue in racism, and we need to recognize it. I hear a lot of Aboriginal people say, ‘I don’t personally experience racism in terms of a personal contact,’ but when they hear ideas on that, they know there isn’t a fit. So we should not say that racism does not exist, because it does exist.... We need to be mindful of those different layers of oppression and how to deal with them (Lee in Gauchupin, 1995).

Once again, in this same graduate student panel, Wilson and Lee discuss their experiences with racism, Andrew Lee, reports, “racism is there. It’s implicit. I mean that I personally have not experienced any explicit racism. I think a lot of that has to do with how I look [white]. That is an issue, and I’m sure that all of you recognize that” (Lee in Gauchupin, 1995). The racial invisibility and the ability of some Aboriginal people to ‘pass’ as white often results in different experiences and relations to racist practices. For example, Sixkiller Clarke states,

Although incidences of racism, prejudice, and discrimination vary from one geographical region to another and one reservation to another, there

are a number of studies which seem to support the idea that the more 'white' a student appears (mixed-bloods), the more acceptability is defined in terms of more opportunities in school and employment. Therefore, the questions of racism, discrimination, and prejudice, whether practiced within the tribal groups or among mainstream society, appear to have a major impact on American Indian youth" (Sixkiller Clarke, 1994, p. 71)

VI. Racism: A problem Aboriginal people in education encounter

"The Navajo's experiences of racial and cultural warfare must be placed at the center of an explanatory model of their education and work experiences" (Deyhle, 1995 p. 5).

The research literature identifies racism as a problem, despite the culture of denial. Racism prevents Aboriginal and American Indian youth from achieving an education (Deyhle, 1995, 1998; First Nations Education Steering Committee Society, 1997; Nighthorse Campbell, 2000; Peacock & Albert, 2000; Ryan, 1995; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Vol III, 1996; Sixkiller Clarke, 1994; 2000; Tirabo, 2001; Wilson, 1991). Deyhle (1995) states, "Although Navajo youth enter high school with high aspirations about their future opportunities, their future aspirations are thwarted by the racism they experience in school" (p. 21/33). Deyhle (1998) asserts again, that "Racially framed political, social, and economic practices have limited educational and economic opportunities for Navajo youth and their communities" (p. 4). American Indian US senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell identifies 'racism' as an obstacle facing American Indian youth (2000). In a study of American Indian dropouts in U.S. public schools, Tirabo (2001), concludes, there is no single reason why Indian kids drop out of public schools at higher rates than other race/ethnic groups. There are many. At the broad level, there are poverty and racism. Furthermore, Deyhle, (1995) argues "Racism frames the stage and remains a barrier for all Navajo youth, regardless of their academic success or social competence" (p. 29).

Racism continues to limit and prevent Aboriginal and American Indian people from receiving and participating in post-secondary education (Ambler, 1997; Archibald, Bowman, Pepper & Urion, 1995; Bellew, 1997; Huffman, 1991; Ness, 2001; Ryan, 1995). In a study of American Indian completers and noncompleters in a tribal and

community college, Ness (2001) found that ‘racism’ was one of the five key issues confronting both completers and noncompleters. In a study exploring the factors that support or provide barriers to Aboriginal people who move to urban settings to pursue postsecondary education, Ryan (1995) found “difficulties include finding and keeping suitable accommodation, handling family concerns, managing finances, and dealing with racial discrimination” (p. 215). In a comprehensive study of postsecondary experiences of First Nations graduates, Archibald, Bowman, Pepper and Urion (1995) report, “A major barrier discussed at length by the focus group participants was racism in various contexts and forms” (p. 6).

Aboriginal teachers in publicly funded schools also report being the target of racism (Legare, Pete-Willett, Ward, Wason-Ellam, & Williamson, 1998; Melnechenko and Horsman 1998; St. Denis, Bouvier & Battiste, 1998). For example, Melnechenko and Horsman (1998) report “The teachers in this study shared a number of experiences that brought these challenges and frustrations to life. These experiences carried overtones, stereotyping, prejudices, and general misunderstanding of different cultures.... The increasing number of Aboriginal teachers in provincial schools has brought diverse reactions from parents and community. Teachers have encountered overt and covert racism, stereotyping and prejudice attitudes” (p. 4). And St. Denis, Bouvier & Battiste (1998) also report,

Thus far, in the initiatives undertaken in Saskatchewan, the historical foundations and the impact on racism in society and the resulting legacy of an oppressive colonial history have not been sufficiently acknowledged or examined. Racism is the silent endemic factor that continues to affect individuals and groups, that strains relationships and limits the possibility for individual and collective action to effect change which will benefit all students. Racism, so long as it goes unacknowledged, will continue to affect policy decisions, practice, and the quality of the relationships in schools, school systems and the educational system as a whole. Racism affects everyone, and since clearly, racism can no longer be regarded as simply the uninformed attitudes of a few individuals, the systemic support within which racism is produced must come under closer scrutiny (p. 75)

In summary, racism is a problem encountered by Aboriginal students in elementary and secondary schools, it is a problem faced by Aboriginal students in postsecondary programs and it is also a problem encountered by Aboriginal professionals such as teachers. Racism is not limited to a particular position in society but affects all Aboriginal and American people involved in educational institutions, as Deyhle (1995) reports, racism affects and limits Indian students regardless of their academic success and/or social competence.

1. Forms of racist practice Aboriginal people

The forms of racism that Aboriginal and American Indian encounter takes many forms including verbal and psychological abuse, as well as being subject and vulnerable to systemic and structural discriminatory practices.

1.1 Verbal abuse

Over and over again, the research literature that does investigate the problem of racism identifies verbal and psychological abuse as a devastating form of racism (Ambler, 1997; Chartrand, 1992; First Nations Education Steering Committee Society, 1997; Huffman, 1991, Little Soldier, 1997; Peacock and Albert, 2000; Peterson, 1989; Wilson, 1991). In research on the experiences of Aboriginal youth in British Columbia (First Nations Education Steering Committee Society, 1997) report that “

Participants spoke eloquently of other children making fun of them, of those kids’ parents either encouraging that or doing nothing to stop it; of schoolyard fights resulting from racist taunts; and of teachers blaming the victim of the taunt for the fights. They spoke of shop clerks following them around stores, assuming that because they were Aboriginal, they would steal. One of the women participants, who described herself as a ‘fair skinned native’ spoke of an instance when a ‘white tourist’ visiting her reserve made fun of a ‘drunk native’ in front of her, even calling upon her to join in, not realizing that she herself was Aboriginal” (p. 26).

Huffman also found that “More often racism directed toward Indian students is expressed in the form of verbal attacks” (1991, p. 3). He explains that

Racist remarks range from derogatory remarks about Indians in general to verbal attacks specifically directed at the individual. For instance, typical racial remarks include name-calling and racial slurs arising from prevalent stereotypes. Racist slurs about Indians in general seem to be more common than remarks directed as an attack on the character of the individual” (1991, p. 4).

Wilson (1991), Peterson (1989) and Huffman (1991) report that the source of this verbal violence is predominantly white students. For example, Huffman reports that, “non-Indians are the major source of negative racial comments” (1991, p. 4).

It is not only students who express verbal racial hostility to Aboriginal students, but also teachers, parents and general citizenry. Chartrand (1992) reports, “I have heard many other horror stories concerning the casual condemnation of an entire people by bigoted teachers, choosing to characterize a people by the behaviour of individuals who exhibit the characteristics common to all those who share the fate of the dispossessed” (p. 9).

Deyhle (1995) argues “Discrimination takes different forms between teachers and students in classes and in the hallways.... Although some teachers’ actions may be seen as ‘innocent’ or ‘ignorant,’ others clearly reveal a hostile edge” (p. 8/9).

Little Soldier (1997) explores strategies for working successfully with urban Native American Indian students and the challenges that face their families, she states, “families may not be prepared for the hostility that they often face when they try to take their place within the dominant society. Prejudice and racism do exist—particularly in urban areas close to reservations that have a sizable Native American population competing in the workplace” (p. 2). Little Soldier argues that racism and prejudice is particularly difficult for Indians living in poverty, and for those who move to the cities where they encounter more racist practices. She calls for acknowledgment of the problems and suggests that teachers take more responsibility,

“Native Americans, particularly those who function in the lower socioeconomic strata of society often face racism and prejudice when they move to the city. These are ugly words that make educators uncomfortable. Yet we recognize the realities they describe in our society. Native American students are certainly not immune to the effects of these

negative attitudes and behaviours, and racism and prejudiced can find their way into the school and classroom. Name-calling and other negative behaviors on the part of students must not be permitted. An alert school staff can stop such behaviours before they can cause irreparable harm to their victims. (Little Soldier, 1997, p. 4).

At this point it is important to remember Chartrand's distinction between having the power to discriminate, as he explains;

The racist comments of a white, Anglo-Saxon child in a schoolyard in Winnipeg, if directed at a young Cree, are liable to have effect because the Cree are vulnerable to the power of non-Aboriginal people in Winnipeg. That is, the Cree yield relatively little clout in the economic, social, and political life of the Winnipeg community. On the other hand, the racist taunts of a young Cree directed against non-Aboriginal schoolyard acquaintances in a Winnipeg suburb are hardly likely to have a similar impact on the White Anglo-Saxon recipient. Racism only matters if it has the power to hurt (1992, p. 7).

1.2. Psychological Abuse

The literature also identifies psychological abuse of racism as having a devastating impact on Aboriginal and American Indian people. As a First Nations leader explains, Aboriginal people are subjected to humiliation and disgrace, "your whole life has been based on one of forced inferiority" (Sellars, 1992). Sellars (1992) describes the effects of racism "It was shameful to be Native because we were part of a weak defective race unworthy of a distinguished place in society" (p. 85). Archibald, Bowman, Pepper and Urion (1995) report on the forms of racism practiced against Aboriginal students "Some incidents took the form of belittling persons or cultures; some were depersonalizing incidents of tokenism and assuming that First Nations programs and achievements were inferior to those of the majority culture. The legacy of past discrimination and racism had present impact as well" (p. 92). Stone Child College President Steve Galbavy, a non-Indian, says that when he coached an Indian team, the

students became accustomed to being served last in restaurants and being followed like criminals in stores (Ambler, 1997). In the research on Aboriginal youth,

Participants spoke of discriminatory treatment from teachers, peers, and shop clerks and from people they meet on the street—people who cross the street to avoid walking too near them. A lack of self-esteem and self worth was the most frequently cited result of this discrimination. One participant said that when a person is told over and over again that they are a ‘lazy Indian’ or a ‘stupid Indian,’ eventually they believe it (First Nations Education Steering Committee Society, 1997, p. 16)

1.3. Low expectations/self-fulfilling prophecy

Applying low expectations that results in a self-fulfilling prophecy is another form of racism against Aboriginal people. The research literature repeatedly identifies low expectations of Aboriginal students as a major problem (Ambler, 1997; Delpit, 1995; Hall, 1993; Strong, 1998; Tirabo, 2001; Wilson, 1991). Hall (1993) argues, “Racism and discrimination have a major impact on the expectations teachers have of their minority students (p. 181). Low expectations helps to justify lack of instruction and attention to Aboriginal and Indian students, as Tirabo (2001) in *Left Behind* found that teachers have a tendency to size up American Indian students as underachievers, ‘they don’t expect the kids to do anything, so they don’t teach them’. In a review of literature by Strong (1998) the problem of low expectations has been a long standing challenge faced by Aboriginal and Indian students, as Strong cites Demontigney (1968) who reported more thirty years ago that “teachers’ attitudes of low expectancy confirms teacher doubts about young Indians’ performance in the classroom or school setting” (1998, p. 3). Wilson found that “even before teachers knew the students, they prejudged them. They could not have imagined that these students would ever be successful. Students were classified as unable to cope with a heavy academic load.” (1991, p. 379) and as result are often placed in vocational or special needs classes (Wilson, 1991). Ambler (1999) found that low expectations of Native American students were held by both Indian and non-Indian teachers.

1.4. Socially marginalized and/or isolated

Aboriginal and Indian students both in public and postsecondary institutions report being social marginalized and isolated (Ballew, 1997; Clarke, 2002; Huffman, 1991; Wilson, 1991). But not only are Aboriginal students isolated and marginalized but so are Aboriginal teachers (Legare, Pete-Willett, Ward, Wason-Ellam & Williamson, 1998; St. Denis, Bouvier & Battiste, 1998; McNinch, 1994).

In recent study exploring social and emotional distress among American Indian and Alaska Native students, Clarke (2002) found that among a variety of factors leading to dropout, ‘school conditions and racism’ were factors that led to student alienation and dropping out. Aboriginal students are aware of their isolation and marginalization in school, for example, Wilson, states

Students had clear perceptions about the cause of their lack of success in high school. They perceived that they were isolated in the school—isolated from the system, from the white students, and from the teachers. They said that they knew that they caused much of this isolation themselves because they felt like outsiders. They were drawn to, and spent most of their time with, other Indian students who could understand how they felt” (1991, p. 378).

Deyhle (1995) also found that “racism surfaces not only in ill-intentioned treatment of Navajo students, but also when well-intentioned educators make demeaning assumptions about them” (p. 11). In conclusion, Wilson reports “Students said they were unprepared for learning in an unfamiliar culture. They were not prepared for the racial prejudice that they encounter regularly. They were not prepared to work in a setting where they had no support” (1991, p. 378).

Aboriginal and Indian students also report feeling and being marginalized and isolated in postsecondary educational settings (Archibald, Bowman, Pepper & Urion, 1995; Ballew, 1997; Huffman, 1991). Ballew (1997) reports on the research exploring the Experiences of Native American women in doctoral psychology programs and found they reported encountering stereotypes and assumptions about being Indian and experienced alienation from others. Huffman also reports that Indian reported a “feeling of not belonging at college” (1991, p. 6).

Not only do Aboriginal students report feeling marginalized and excluded, but so do Aboriginal teachers. For example a report on Aboriginal teachers' experiences in public schools, states, "Many Aboriginal teachers experienced racism and feelings of social exclusion in their schools. It was noted that the racism and exclusion was often not deliberate, but the results of non-Aboriginal teachers' and administrators' ignorance or lack of sensitivity to cultural issues. Some Aboriginal teachers felt a pressure to conform to middle-class mainstream cultural practices" (Legare, Pete-Willett, Ward, Wason-Ellam, & Williamson, 1998, p. 61). An Aboriginal teacher reports, "I felt isolated. I felt very much Indian, not part of the white staff. They would read the paper on Native issues, and criticize the Indians. This was the first time that I realized that I had a racist staff that wasn't aware they were racist. I spend more time by myself" (Legare, Pete-Willett, Ward, Wason-Ellam, & Williamson, 1998, p. 19).

1.5. Denied professional support and/or attention

In reviewing the Hawthorne Report (1967), St. Denis (2002) discusses and identifies the way in which the racism directed against Aboriginal people was dismissed and minimized in that report. For example, in the report "Indian people express concern about the hostility of white teachers, parents and students, the unfair disciplinary practices, the lack of English as a second language instruction, the biased curriculum, the impact of poverty on their ability to attend and benefit from schooling. Indian parents and their children report, "feeling stupid all the time and not belonging" (Hawthorne, 1967, p. 140). They report being the subject of "unjust discipline" (Hawthorne, 1967, p. 140) and "ridicule" (Hawthorne, 1967, p. 136). They also report, "...being afraid of the teacher and always failing as factors which have lead to a general dislike of school" (Hawthorne, 1967, p. 136). The authors of the Hawthorne Report explain away Indian people's experiences by claiming that schools are 'unintentional' in producing fear and discomfort in Indian children. This unintentional practice is reflected in those cases where "teachers held children responsible for situations they did not control, and did [not] assist to integrate them into the classrooms, and did not hold non-Indian children accountable when they ridiculed and socially isolated Indian classmates" (Hawthorne, 1967, p. 136).

To the present day, Aboriginal and Indian students cannot rely and depend on the support of their teachers (Deyhle, 1992; Kitchen & Velasquez, 2002; Little Soldier, 1997; Sixkiller Clarke, 1994; Wilson, 1991). In a recent study on Native American and Hispanic high school dropouts, Kitchen & Velasquez (2002) identify cultural discontinuity and racism as contributing factors to dropout. The students and the parents interviewed by Kitchen & Velasquez (2002) report that “teachers were uncaring, biased against students’ cultures, and insensitive to students’ difficulties at home.” Deyhle (1992) also reports “almost half of the Navajo and Ute school leavers felt their teachers did not care about them” (p. 30). Deyhle, in (1995) writes, “acknowledging racism (i.e. citing it as one of the central reasons they leave school), over half of the 168 students I interviewed who left school said simply, ‘I was not wanted in school’” (p. 12).

Wilson identifies examples of unfair treatment of Aboriginal students by teachers “both in and out of class, in a fashion which displayed that the teachers would have preferred for them not to be there” (1991, p. 375). Examples include rigidly and unfairly implementing attendance policies, when Aboriginal students asked for teacher assistance, teachers “would simply write the answer on the chalkboard or give the answer very briskly and then move on without any explanation” (Wilson, 1991, p. 376). Teachers seldom made contact with Indian students and often “faced away from Indian students though out entire class periods” (Wilson, 1991, p. 376). Sixkiller Clarke, also reports, “A number of researchers have attributed the historically poor achievement of Indian students to white teachers who are unable or unwilling to pay attention to the cultural background and values of American Indian students. Some researchers have found that white teachers often demonstrate contempt for Indian students” (1994, p. 119).

Finally, Aboriginal youth reported that teachers and counselors “at best, did not support them or take them or take the time to help them, or at worst, actively mistreated them. Some participants said the teachers or counselors in question did not seem to care about any of their students. In most cases, however, they believed the real problems was that the teacher was racist” (First Nations Education Steering Committee Society, 1997, p. 17). Wilson (1991) also identifies school guidance counselors as inadequate.

1.6. Rules and procedures to facilitate failure

School rules and procedures accomplish and facilitate ‘dropping out.’ Not only are rules rigidly and unfairly applied to Aboriginal students, but Aboriginal and Indian students are often subject to harsher penalties than racially dominant students. In a study that explored how local school districts measured up in terms of racial justice, only one received a barely passing grade (Gordon, Piana and Keleher, 2000). This study found glaring inequalities and discrimination in the public schools towards racial minority students, including Native American students who were suspended or expelled in disproportionate numbers, had less access to advanced classes or programs for gifted students (Gordon, Piana and Keleher, 2000). They also found that the racial makeup of the teaching corps rarely matched that of the student body (Gordon, Piana and Keleher, 2000).

In another study, Brady (1996) makes the argument that Aboriginal student drop out cannot be fully explained by ‘cultural discontinuity,’ and cites other literature that suggests that one’s social economic status also shapes and limits the quality of education of low-income adolescents. Low-income students report “school administrators [who] are uneven in their enforcement of school rules, often giving harsher penalties for rule infractions to lower income students than are the norm for their higher income peers” (Brady, 1996, p. 5). Brady concludes that both disadvantaged Native and non-Native youth “report that they are treated differently from their more advantaged peers by school officialdom, and that institutional rules and regulations are applied more rigorously to them. The differential treatment also extends to the manner in which teachers interact with different groups of students within the classroom setting” (1996, p. 6). Wilson (1991) also found that attendance policies were rigidly and unfairly implemented. In addition to the above forms of discrimination, Aboriginal people report being denied basic human rights like access to housing and having their concerns taken seriously. For example, Aboriginal students reported encountering racism when looking for suitable accommodations, for example, they may be told on the phone that accommodations are available, but when they show up in person they are told it has been claimed (Ryan, 1995). Sellars (1992) tells us that the complaints of Aboriginal parents have historically

been ignored, “There were complaints about the abuse of children but our complaints fell on deaf ears” (Sellars, 1992, p. 83).

In summary, among the many forms of racism experienced by Aboriginal people in education, the literature includes the following: verbal abuse, psychological abuse, low expectations, social marginalization and isolation, denial of professional support and attention, unfair and discriminatory application of rules and procedures, denial of Aboriginal experience and denial of basic human rights. This list does not include the stereotypical and racist curriculum that has long been acknowledged as a problem in Canadian schools (Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 1976).

2. Some effects of racism on Aboriginal people

Aboriginal people lost a lot, loss of enjoyment of life, loss of reputation, loss of relationships with family, neighbors and friends and loss of potential normal experiences (Sellars, 1992).

2.1. Limits opportunities

“Racially framed political, social, and economic practices have limited educational and economic opportunities for Navajo youth and their communities” (Deyhle, 1998, p. 4).

Just as there are many forms of racism directed towards Aboriginal students, so are there many effects of racism on Aboriginal and Indian people. The effects include limiting educational and economic opportunities, but also reeking havoc on the psychological and mental health of Aboriginal students through various blaming the victim strategies. Racism does have the effect of limiting opportunities whether educational or economic for Aboriginal and Indian people. For example, Wallace Strong writes as he completes his doctorate, “My own experiences of low expectations by counselors and teachers left a dramatic impression on my own expectations to succeed. ...Now I’m completing a doctorate degree beyond anyone’s expectations, except myself – I clearly see the ‘race card’ that was dealt to the majority of Native American students” (1998, p. 2). Racism manifests in Aboriginal people having ‘unrealistically low evaluation of one’s own ability’ and ‘low skill levels’ “(Archibald, Bowman, Pepper and Urion, 1995).

2.2. Blames the victim

One blaming the victim strategy occurs through the individualizing and psychology of the effects of systemic and structural discrimination. For example, Aboriginal students are often portrayed as suffering from low self-esteem and low self-worth, but as Deyhle (1998) argues, racism does limit the educational and economic opportunities of Indian youth and their communities and “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). This analysis is also reiterated in the research on Aboriginal youth in British Columbia that identified racism as “by the far the most significant barrier to employment raised by participants. In fact, many of the other barriers identified by participants, such as low self esteem and alcohol abuse, were said to be, at least in part, attributable to racism” (First Nations Education Steering Committee Society, 1997, p. 24).

Once again, Aboriginal youth attribute and politicize the conditions of low self-esteem to the racism they continually encounter,

There was a sense among the older participants (out of school and post secondary) that racist treatment throughout their lives had done a great deal to shape their opinions of themselves. They attributed their problems with low self-esteem, ‘laziness’ and lack of motivation to having been told—either literally or by the way they were treated—that they were inferior” (First Nations Education Steering Committee Society, 1997, p. 25).

When racism is not acknowledged as contributing to low self-esteem, then the effect is to assume a failure on the part of Aboriginal students to develop a healthy sense of self. In fact racism does contribute to the internalization of low self-worth.

2.3. Leads to internalization of low self-worth

Racism encourages self-rejection and a colonization of the mind (Ambler, 1997).

Aboriginal and Indian students internalize the racism directed against them and the effects are low self-esteem ((Archibald, Bowman, Pepper and Urion, 1995; Ballew, 1997; Chartrand, 1992; Sellars, 1992; Sixkiller Clarke, 1994; Strong, 1998). As Sellars

(1992) explains, “When you’ve been programmed to believe you are worth nothing, you unconsciously act out the role and its difficult to change that view of yourself” (p. 85).

Aboriginal and Indian students enrolled in postsecondary education make a correlation between the racism they encounter and their performance in education. In doctoral research on the experiences of Native American women enrolled in psychology programs, Ballew (1997) reported that these women experienced “internalization of negative feelings related to stereotypes and assumptions about Indians.” Other postsecondary students report examples of tokenism and the assumption of their instructors that they were cultural experts and also assumed to be second class (Archibald, Bowman, Pepper and Urion (1995 p. 152).

Aboriginal and Indian youth in public school also internalized the racism which manifested in low self-esteem, which is then regarded as the problem, rather than the root cause, such as racism as the source of low self-esteem. Sixkiller Clarke (1994) identifies factors that lead to failure like dropping out, she states “Research generally indicates that American Indian students have lower self-esteem than students from other racial/ethnic groups and they have more difficulty in establishing tribal self-identity and pride in their Indianness” (p. 118). “It was evident that students with low self-esteem suffered from an identity crisis. They wished they had not been born an Indian, they believed their lives would have been better had they not been born an Indian, and they more often than not feel discriminated by their teachers” (p. 118). And once again, in addition to poverty and racism as factors contributing to high drop out among American Indian students, Tirabo (2001) in *Left Behind* also states that ‘causes pinpointed most by researchers range from child’s loss of identity and low self-esteem to peer pressure and cultural incompatibility with curriculums. Sixkiller Clarke (1994) reports that of the graduates who participated in her/his study, found that family expectations and a strong belief in themselves kept them in school, but also found that many students live in abusive homes, as well reporting abusive teachers and other adults in their lives, “children who are abused most often believe they are unworthy. To have teachers and school employees abuse you is a further validation of unworthiness” (p. 121). Chartrand (1992) explains “people without power or control over their lives turn violence inward to themselves, to family, and community. The effects of dispossession are not pretty” (p. 9).

2.4. Produces Aboriginal people as hostile

“My brother, he is still at that school. And he is fighting back. You just have to keep doing it. Otherwise they just treat you like a dumb Indian. I will always fight. And someday my children will also go to school and fight and get jobs and be Indian” (Deyhle, 1995, p. 16).

In a paper on American Indian students and the schools, Peacock and Albert (2000) report the comments of an American Indian student who describes the effect of racism in schools on Indian students, “I think the racial part of school was pretty hard for me, kind of, we were always fighting. There were only like five Indians in the whole school and the rest were white. They’d say racial remarks and you we’d get mad” (p. 14). Aboriginal and Indian students respond to racism in different ways. Ryan found that Aboriginal children “do not all respond to prejudicial behaviour in the same way. Some submit quietly to taunts and abuse, while others fight back. Indeed, fighting in the school yard is a common occurrence for those who stand their ground, but conflicts of this nature can lead to serious consequences” (1995, p. 219). More often than not, the serious consequences include suspension from school and/or quitting school. Deyhle reported in 1992 “over one-third of the youth that left NHS did so because of disagreements and fights with teachers and the administration and with the terse official dropout code which state, ‘an active dislike of the schooling experience’” (p. 11). An Aboriginal youth explains his reasons for ‘quitting’ school, “I quit because there has been racism in my school with the teachers and the principal.... they never really helped me. They were.... on the other person’s side.... so I thought, that’s how it’s going to beso the hell with it. Never went back” (out of school student in First Nations Education Steering Committee Society, 1997, p. 8). Ambler (1997) also claims that the colonial legacy in the education of Aboriginal and American Indians has resulted in students’ ambivalence or even hostility toward education and teachers.

2.5. Leads to early school exit

Early school exit and dropping out are effects of the racism Aboriginal and Indian students encounter. Aboriginal and Indian students respond in multiple ways, and one of the most common is to remove oneself from the situation. In the above sections,

Aboriginal and Indian students more often leave school, for example, Ambler (1997) found that students responded through 'passive resistance' that surfaces as high drop out and poor achievement. Colonial legacy in the education of Aboriginal and American Indians has resulted in students' ambivalence or even hostility toward education and teachers (Ambler, 1997). According to Caine and Caine (1997), students who are confronted with racist threats on a regular basis often lose a positive sense of cultural identity and begin a process of *downshifting* [original italics] which eventually leads to dropping out " (Sixkiller Clarke, 2002, p. 67). Huffman also found that "For Indian students the frequent consequences of campus racism is an early exit from the academic institution" (1991, p. 6). Clark (2002) also found that racism lead to student alienation and dropping out among Alaska Native students.

VII. How is the avoidance of a race analysis achieved?

1. Not a systematic focus of inquiry

As was stated earlier, the forms of racism directed against Aboriginal and Indian students or teachers has not received scholarly or systematic attention (Bennett, 2002; Huffman, 1991; Ledlow, 1992; Sixkiller, 1994; St. Denis, Bouvier & Battiste, 1998; St. Denis, 2002). Huffman (1991) states, "Racism directed towards Indian college students has received relatively little attention" (p. 1). Sixkiller Clarke (1994) in a study of Native American youth at risk, states, "There has been little research conducted on racism, discrimination, and prejudice within and/or among American Indian groups and/or American Indians and non-Indians within the school setting; and yet racism, prejudice, and discrimination clearly exist and may, in fact, be contributors to lack of success of students in the school setting" (p. 67).

2. Racism is actively denied and silenced

The denial and silencing of racism against Aboriginal and Indian people is itself a racist practice. There is much acknowledgement that the denial of racism is widespread (Bennett, 2002; British Columbia Teachers Federation, 1999; Deyhle, 1995; Larocque, 1991; Legare, Pete-Willett, Ward, Wason-Ellam, & Williamson, 1998; Ryan, 1998; Schick & St. Denis, 2001; St. Denis, 2002). For example, reporting on the experiences of

Aboriginal teachers in Saskatchewan schools (Legare, Pete-Willett, Ward, Wason-Ellam, & Williamson, 1998) cite a teacher who explains, “I was talking to a principal about racism. He said, “well, there is no racism in our school”” (p. 27). Sometime the denial of racism is justified on the basis that openly addressing racism will only make matters worse, as in the case that Deyhle (1995) reports, that although efforts were made to address the racism experienced by Navajo students, through a journalism class that had called a ‘press conference’ “the students, concerned that discussions of racial prejudice would both demoralized Navajo students and embarrass Anglo students, decided not to print the story” (1995, p. 11). Little Soldier is also aware that acknowledging the problem of racism invokes discomfort, “These are ugly words that make educators uncomfortable. Yet we recognize the realities they describe in our society (Little Solider, 1997, p. 4).

3. Cultural discourses instead of race analysis

There seems to be a need to deny that racism exists. There are many denial mechanisms such as stereotyping, blaming the victim and backlashing.

...These policies [assimilation, paternalism, confiscation of lands] have had a devastating impact on Native peoples but the fallout has been explained away as stemming from ‘cultural differences’. In turn ‘cultural differences’ are reduced to stereotypes such as ‘Indians can’t or won’t adjust’ to city life. (Larocque, 1991, p. 74)

A discourse of cultural difference has been quite effective in minimizing and discounting the effects of racialization and racial discrimination in Aboriginal education (St. Denis, 2002). While there is a plethora of research identifying numerous factors, such as low achievement motivation, poor academic preparation, inadequate financial support and lack of parental and community support, “there is little research on the role racial prejudice plays as a barrier in the Indian educational experience. Quite often, the racial prejudice encountered by Indian students is simply included under the rather generic label of ‘cultural conflict’” (Huffman, 1991, p. 1). Foley (1996) and Ledlow (1992) both argue that there is an unquestioned assumption that cultural difference plays an important role in the education of Aboriginal and Indian students. Ledlow suggests that the thesis of cultural discontinuity as a cause of school drop out precludes “overwhelming evidence

that economic and social issues which are not culturally specific to being Indian (although they may be specific to being a minority) are very significant in causing students to drop out of school (1992, p. 29). Brady (1996) also makes the argument that Aboriginal student drop out cannot be fully explained by ‘cultural discontinuity,’ but also argues and cites other literature that suggests that one’s social economic status also shapes and limits the quality of education of low-income adolescents. Wilson also suggests “cultural ecology cannot be accepted as the only explanation for their lack of success” (1991, p. 368).

Deyhle (1998) has come to see the limitations of bicultural theory, “The assumptions that Indian youth can merge these worlds and become bicultural/bilingual people also ignores the reality that the world of the Anglos is only marginally available to them as a choice because of poverty, racism, discrimination, and lowered teacher expectations, regardless of their potential for success” (p. 5). Finally, St.Denis, Bouvier & Battiste (1998) write,

We need to become more critical of our approaches. We need to scrutinize and understand the limits of cultural difference approaches which may inadvertently further stereotype peoples, and recognize that a cultural diversity approach might lead to a superficial reading of difference, making power relations invisible and keeping dominant cultural norms in place (St. Denis, Bouvier & Battiste, 1998, p. 76)

4. Indians are not a race, ethnic or multicultural argument

There is debate about applying the race and ethnic concepts to Aboriginal and Indian peoples (Chartrand, 1992). The BC Human Rights Commission Report (2001) reiterates a familiar argument that “First Nations peoples are not ‘mere’ ethnic groups—we are, after all, the First Nations and we do have Aboriginal rights not enjoyed by immigrant ethnic groups” (George Calliou in BC Human Rights Report 2001, p. 7). The concern is

Policy and practice that is based on multiculturalism may further marginalize Aboriginal peoples, as it obscures the special status of Aboriginal Peoples as original inhabitants of the land. The thesis is that applying the concept of

multiculturalism creates a situation in which Aboriginal peoples' needs and aspirations are deemed to be the same as those of everyone else, thus avoiding the need to confront the history of colonialism" (BC Human Rights Commission Report, 2001, p. 7).

This BC report quotes quite extensively from others who make similar arguments. It is a vicious irony that racial superiority was once used as an argument for dispossessing Indigenous peoples and now equality is argued to the same effect. It seems in part, the claim that Aboriginal people are not a race, comes from those who must argue against others in Canadian society who wish to dismiss 'special race based rights' for Aboriginal people and for those who argue for equality without acknowledging the long history of inequality that Aboriginal people have endured, for example, "Equality for all may be a morally attractive (and certainly a politically expedient) objective, but when it is used to deny or downplay a history of enforced inequality it becomes a cynical attempt to promote social amnesia" (Bateman, 1997, p. 72/3 in BC Human Rights Commission Report, 2001, p. 8).

Other such as Burns (2000) in BC Human Rights Commission Report (2001) reject addressing the problems that Aboriginal people face in education through a discourse and practice of multiculturalism. The Canadian Race Relations Foundation (1996) also recognizes that "Aboriginal peoples in Canada are the original inhabitants of this land, and accordingly, that their experiences of racism are not necessarily the same as those of racial and ethnic minorities" (BC Human Rights Commission Report, 2001, p. 9). The result was that CRRF created a Task Force on Aboriginal issues (1999). In a special issue of the Tribal College Journal, Ambler (1997) states they are examining the problem racism poses to American Indian students and looking at "how racism against Indian people differs from racism against other ethnic and racial groups." Huffman (1991) tries to explain the lack of attention given to the racism directed towards American Indians, he suggests since racism directed towards other minorities is often expressed in violent ways and often makes campus headlines, "the struggles of Indians against the currents of racial prejudice have passed virtually unnoticed" (p. 1).

5. A return to some of the effects of ignoring and/or denying racism

As stated earlier, the literature identifies and names the ‘denial’ of racism as a problem. Larocque (1991) tells us that it is not safe to acknowledge racism as a problem that affects the lives of Aboriginal people. The denial of racism, prejudice, and discrimination means that they cannot be identified as contributors to lack of success of students in the school setting (SixKiller Clarke, 1994). By reducing racial conflict to ‘others’ problems or a thing of the past, the local power struggle is kept out of the classroom” (Deyhle, 1995, p. 10/33). Denial of racism contributes to blaming the victim (Larocque, 1991, Sixkiller Clarke, 1994, St. Denis, 2002); it means that racial problems go unacknowledged and silenced (Deyhle, 1995).

VIII. Policy Implications and Strategies for Change

1. Acknowledge that racism against Aboriginal people is a problem

There is much that the literature tells us about how to approach the problem of racism against Aboriginal and Indian students. Ambler (1997) suggests that hope lies in education that “tackles racism head on.” And First Nations leader, Bev Sellars, explains, “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).

Sellars (1992) suggests that we must name ‘racism’ as the root cause of what plagues Aboriginal people. BCTF (1999) states “A necessary first step to eliminating racism is acknowledging that it does exist, and that concrete action must taken to oppose it in schools and communities” (p. 22). It appears that it will be a radical step in the right direction, if racism is acknowledged as a problem that limits the educational and economic opportunities of Aboriginal people, in spite of the resistance.

2. Educational institutions must be accountable and responsive

Many claim that it is the responsibility of the schools to challenge and work towards the eradication of racism in our society. It is reported in BC Human Rights Commission Report (2001, p. 29) that participants in the CRRF Task Force on Aboriginal

Issues (1999) urge that education in schools must better address issues of racism affecting Aboriginal people. In a comprehensive study of postsecondary experiences of First Nations graduates, Archibald, Bowman, Pepper and Urion (1995) make a number of recommendations including the need to work systematically to eradicate racism at all levels. Chartrand (1992) also states that, “The fight against racism is a fight for a better society. ... The education system must help destroy the environments in which racism thrives” (Chartrand, 1992). Cleary & Peacock explain “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” (1998, p. 254). St. Denis, Bouvier & Battiste (1998) reporting on experiences of Aboriginal teachers also recommend that Saskatchewan Education “pay particular attention to how racism shapes and influences responses to Aboriginal education and educators” (p. 81)

3. Incorporate anti-racist education in all educational institutions

The fight against racism requires the involvement of everyone, “To fight racism in education requires the efforts of scholars, the community, and the tribal colleges” (Ambler, 1997). A BC Human Rights Commission Report (2001) on Barriers to Equal Education for Aboriginal Learners among wide-ranging recommendations intended to promote education equity and social justice in the public school system, recommends “Cross-cultural and anti-discriminatory education for all staff and students” (p. 3). In the end this Report recommends that the following issues be addressed, the “role of education in examining how structures perpetuate racism and discrimination; role of education in examining how knowledge is constructed and validated; role of education in addressing how attitudes are learned and how they might be changed; cross-cultural training that will enable all teachers to help all students address the ignorance and hatred of racism; and Holistic approach to learning” (BC Human Rights Commission Report, 2001, p. 46). A report on experiences of Aboriginal teachers in Saskatchewan schools recommends “Schools must have anti-racist strategies in place” (Legare, Pete-Willett, Ward, Wason-Ellam, & Williamson, 1998, p. 61). In a paper exploring education and

racism in Australia and the challenges facing the Reconciliation Movement, Dunn (2001) calls for the development of anti-racist and non-racist practices in rural schooling.

3.1. Education that is critical of privileging and othering

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 (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 35-36)

BCTF (1999) also states “to develop effective programs to oppose racism, it is necessary to understand the different forms it takes. Then appropriate policies, programs, training and other strategies can be used to address each manifestation of racism” (p. 22). This must include an examination of the taken-for-granted privileges afforded those who are racially dominant in our society. Critical anti-racist education provides the possibility of exploring the production of racially dominant identities, as perhaps this American philanthropist may have been suggesting, as identified at the beginning of this paper, that the education of the white man is important and may be the more difficult task.

*I have asked why should it take so long, this work of educating Indians. ...Sometimes I think it is because we have had not only to educate the Indian but also to educate the white man. The two have had to go hand in hand, and **the education of the white man has been the more difficult task.*** (Board of Indian Commissioners, 19th century American philanthropist, Annual Report, Washington, D.C., 1897, in DeJong, 1993, p.268, emphasis added)

An anti-racist educational program must also include a critique of the production of white identity and whiteness, otherwise the possibility of reinforcing racial dominance becomes more likely (Schick, 2000).

3.2. Anti-racist education for teachers and other school personnel

There is a call that teachers and other school personnel acquire anti-racist education as an integral part of their professional training. Both Aboriginal teachers and racially dominant teachers must understand and better address processes and practices of

racialization and discrimination in our society and our educational institutions. Hall recommends, “Teachers need to be better educated on the effects of racism and discrimination (1993, p. 181), as does Sixkiller Clarke who suggests, “teachers should be accountable” (1994, p. 120).

Teachers and other personnel have a responsibility to know more about racism, the various ways in which it manifests and the effects it has on learning. Belcourt-Diffloff and Stewart (2000, p. 1166) state, “We believe that it is the clinician’s job to be aware of the effects of historical racism. Ignorance of this aspect of Native American reality inadvertently serves to promote historical racism in the therapeutic relationship. It is vital for clinicians intending to work with Native Americans to become culturally competent so as to minimize the effect of historical racism.” In a study on factors that contribute to Aboriginal students success in school in grades six to nine, Melnechenko and Horsman (1998), report “Many Aboriginal students in middle years classrooms are faced with ethnocentrism and discrimination. It is critical that middle years teachers help students understand and process these issues” (p. 5). Wetsit (1999) explores effective counseling with American Indian students, including developing among school counselors cross-cultural competencies and strategies for dealing with environmental factors of racism and prejudice. BCTF (1999, p. 23) also recommends that unlearning racism and skills for students to respond to racist incidents be included in the personal planning and the career and personal planning programs at all levels. Although, BCTF (1999) calls for the development of teacher workshops on inter-cultural communication and to assist teachers to deal with all forms of racism, but it is also important that educational professionals receive pre-service anti-racist education.

Being the subject of racist practices does not make one necessarily knowledgeable about how to challenge and intervene in racist practices. In a study of Aboriginal teachers, St. Denis (2002) states, “Aboriginal teachers are implicated in far more than providing culturally relevant education; they are engaged in the politically volatile educational practice of anti-racist education, whether they see themselves involved in such practice or not”. Goulet (1998) describes a culturally relevant First Nations teacher education program that responds to students’ need for connection to traditional cultural knowledge in order to overcome personal and cultural dislocation and racism. ... Tools to

deconstruct racist ideology and practices are provided to students; in addition, classes model pedagogical methods of dealing with racism and critical thinking. We need to see Aboriginal education incorporate anti-racist education into our calls for culturally relevant education; otherwise, Aboriginal educators and students continue to be vulnerable to everyday racism in their lives.

3.3. Anti-racist education for Aboriginal and racially dominant students

We must better prepare Aboriginal students to understand the processes of racialization that has shaped their past and continues to shape their present. Although, Wilson states “It is doubtful whether or not any amount of schooling on racism or biculturalism in elementary school could have prepared the students well enough to withstand the negativism they faced as they enter high school” (1991, p. 381). In a study by Johns (1994) that explored what kept Native students going, among several factors, was the ability to cope with racism and discrimination. It is better to prepare and equip Aboriginal students with a race analysis than to leave them vulnerable to its practices. BCTF also suggests that “anti-racism as a part of the mandated curriculum will help ensure that all students have the opportunity to develop the skills to deal with racism and help counter the claim that racism does not exist in schools” (BCTF, 1999, p. 23).

A paper by Ashford (1997) describes a proposal for evaluating “a school violence prevention program aimed at reducing racism and social isolation of Native students in two predominantly White schools in British Columbia.” Huffman claims that until racism are eradicated from campus, “Indian students must conquer or be conquered by one more menacing foe” (1991, p. 7). In a comprehensive study of postsecondary experiences of First Nations graduates, Archibald, Bowman, Pepper and Urion (1995) make a number of recommendations including as substantive areas to follow include working systematically to eradicate racism at all levels, including “It is important that students learn what racism is, both from others and from themselves, and learn how to relate constructively within the program, not to be caught up and hurt by this issue” (p. 150). Archibald, Bowman, Pepper and Urion (1995) also suggest “coping with racism involves the development of a number of skills. First, it is important to adjust expectations regarding racism. Racism, intended or not, can be expected to occur. If it is expected, though not pleasant, if need

not be shocking so that one is only able to cope by giving up or fighting back. It is important to resolve to not take it personally. This sounds like a tall order. ... Neither fight nor give in. Become prepared to provide information where ignorance exists” (p. 152). Huffman concludes, “racial prejudice, despite its crippling nature, has been overcome by some Indian students in this study” (1991, p. 7).

IX. Summary and Conclusions

Racism continues to be a significant obstacle to the education and employment of our youth. Although the literature on Aboriginal education identifies and names racism as a problem that prevents and limits Aboriginal people from attaining an education, there has been little scholarly attention (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Deyhle, 1995; Huffman, 1991; Sixkiller Clarke, 1994; St. Denis, 2002; St. Denis, Bouvier & Battiste, 1998). The literature identifies and names ‘denial’ of racism as a problem that Aboriginal students face. The denial of racism as a problem that limits the educational success of Aboriginal and American Indian students is not only denied at the institutional and individual level, but is also denied both in Canada and the United States. Ironically, those who must bear the effects of racism and white supremacy may also deny and/or avoid the problem of racism.

An honest approach to the problem of racism must include acknowledging Canada’s complicity with a denial of racism in its history and present. That racism in Canada often escapes scrutiny is one of the factors that make anti-racist analysis a challenge in a teacher education program. The effects of this culture of denial around the problem of racism in Canada and the United States in reference to the experiences and position of Aboriginal and American Indian people means that one must take many risks to bring the problem of racism to conscious discourse. The denial of the racial discrimination that Aboriginal and Indian students face, means that history continues to repeat itself. Both Chartrand (1992) and Larocque’s (1991) definition of racism highlight unequal power relations as one marker of racism. Ng (1993) stresses the taken-for-granted societal practices that condone racism.

The British Columbia Teachers Federation “recognizes that some racism is individual and some systemic and institutional and that some racism is conscious and intentional and some unconscious; further, that all these forms of racism must be opposed (1999, p. 22). Racism is a problem encountered by Aboriginal students in elementary and secondary schools, it is a problem faced by Aboriginal students in postsecondary programs and it is also a problem encountered by Aboriginal professionals such as

teachers. Racism is not limited to a particular position in society but affects all Aboriginal and American people involved in educational institutions, as Deyhle (1995) reports, racism affects and limits Indian students regardless of their academic success and/or social competence.

Over and over again, the research literature that does investigate the problem of racism identifies verbal and psychological abuse as a devastating form of racism (Ambler, 1997; Chartrand, 1992; First Nations Education Steering Committee Society, 1997; Huffman, 1991, Little Soldier, 1997; Peacock and Albert, 2000; Peterson, 1989; Wilson, 1991). The literature identifies psychological abuse of racism as having a devastating impact on Aboriginal and American Indian people. The research literature repeatedly identifies low expectations of Aboriginal students as a major problem (Ambler, 1997; Delpit, 1995; Hall, 1993; Strong, 1998; Tirabo, 2001; Wilson, 1991). Applying low expectations that results in a self-fulfilling prophecy is another form of racism against Aboriginal people. Aboriginal and Indian students both in public and postsecondary institutions report being social marginalized and isolated (Ballew, 1997; Clarke, 2002; Huffman, 1991; Wilson, 1991). But not only are Aboriginal students isolated and marginalized but so are Aboriginal teachers (Legare, Pete-Willett, Ward, Wason-Ella, & Williamson, 1998; St. Denis, Bouvier & Battiste, 1998; McNinch, 1994).

In reviewing the Hawthorne Report (1967), St. Denis (2002) discusses and identifies the way in which the racism directed against Aboriginal people was dismissed and minimized in that report. The authors of the Hawthorne Report explain away Indian people's experiences by claiming that schools are 'unintentional' in producing fear and discomfort in Indian children. Sixkiller Clarke, also reports, "A number of researchers have attributed the historically poor achievement of Indian students to white teachers who are unable or unwilling to pay attention to the cultural background and values of American Indian students. Some researchers have found that white teachers often demonstrate contempt for Indian students" (1994, p. 119?).

Not only are rules rigidly and unfairly applied to Aboriginal students, but Aboriginal and Indian students are often subject to harsher penalties than racially dominant students. In summary, among the many forms of racism experienced by Aboriginal people in education, the literature includes the following: verbal abuse, psychological abuse, low expectations, social marginalization and isolation, denial of professional support and attention, unfair and discriminatory application of rules and procedures, denial of Aboriginal experience and denial of basic human rights.

Just as there are many forms of racism directed towards Aboriginal students, so are there many effects of racism on Aboriginal and Indian people. Racism does have the effect of limiting opportunities whether educational or economic for Aboriginal and Indian people. Racism manifests in Aboriginal people having “unrealistically low evaluation of one’s own ability” and ‘low skill levels’ (Archibald, Bowman, Pepper and Urion (1995) p.). Aboriginal and Indian students internalize the racism directed against them and the effects are low self-esteem ((Archibald, Bowman, Pepper and Urion, 1995; Ballew, 1997; Chartrand, 1992; Sellars, 1992; Sixkiller Clarke, 1994; Strong, 1998).

In a paper on American Indian students and the schools, Peacock and Albert (2000) report the comments of an American Indian student who describes the effect of racism in schools on Indian students, such as hostile when they fight back in response to the racism they encounter in the classroom and playground. Early school exit and dropping out are effects of the racism Aboriginal and Indian students encounter. Clark (2002) also found that racism lead to student alienation and dropping out among Alaska Native students.

The denial and silencing of racism against Aboriginal and Indian people is itself a racist practice. For example, reporting on the experiences of Aboriginal teachers in Saskatchewan schools (Legare, Pete-Willett, Ward, Wason-Ellam, & Williamson, 1998) cite a teacher who explains, “I was talking to a principal about racism. Sometime the denial of racism is justified on the basis that openly addressing racism will only make matters worse, as in the case that Deyhle (1995) reports, that although efforts were made to address the racism experienced by Navajo students, through a journalism class that had called a ‘press conference’ “the students, concerned that discussions of racial prejudice would both demoralized Navajo students and embarrass Anglo students, decided not to print the story” (1995, p. 11/33). The denial of racism, prejudice, and discrimination means that they cannot be identified as contributors to lack of success of students in the school setting (SixKiller Clarke, 1994). Denial of racism contributes to blaming the victim (Larocque, 1991, Sixkiller Clarke, 1994, St. Denis, 2002); it means that racial problems go unacknowledged and silenced (Deyhle, 1995).

There is much that the literature tells us about how to approach the problem of racism against Aboriginal and Indian students. Ambler (1997) suggests that hope lies in education that “tackles racism head on.” It is reported in BC Human Rights Commission Report (2001, p. 29) that participants in the CRRF Task Force on Aboriginal Issues (1999) urge that education in schools must better address issues of racism affecting Aboriginal people. Chartrand (1992) also states that, “The fight against racism is a fight for a better society. ... The education system must help destroy the environments in

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