DECOLONIAL EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NOVA SCOTIA INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY

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I. INTRODUCTION

- Recognitions & Thanks: This Land, Our Ancestors, & Elders [past and present].
- ❖ Asakyiri clan membership − vulture our animal spirit.
- The 'Deveau/DBDLI' Fellowship in Africentric Research [school, family & African Nova Scotia community partnerships; DBDLI & CIARS collaborations].
- * 'Inclusive Schooling' & 'Africentric Schooling' not a binary choice, an 'either/or' but rather 'and/with'.
- Mapping The Terrain.

II. WHERE COMING FROM? THE POLITICAL AND INTELLECTUAL SUBJECT LOCATION.

- * The rhetoric & national imaginings/imaginaries of inclusion, social cohesion, good [capitalist] citizenship, institutional avoidance and White benevolence.
- The performativity of inclusive education & equity work; [e.g., celebratory approaches; BLM 'solidarity statements'; liberalization of social justice work under EDI; the refusal to name issues; & not directly focusing on the structures for liberation].
- * The silence on particular identities and how these identities connect to schooling and education [e.g., BLM, Indigenous identities].

- * 'Pedagogies of Subversion' teaching ourselves [and particularly, young learners (mostly Whites) to understand their Euro-ancestry privilege & for us all to divest ourselves from colonial investments].
- Understanding the new & current face of racisms.

[e.g., connections of anti-Black racism/anti-Blackness; settler colonialism & anti-Indigenous racism; anti-Muslim racism; anti-Semitism; xenophobia & 'anti-different racisms'; police carding & racial profiling of particular bodies/populations; 'hypervigilance of perceived Black physical formidability' [Wilson, Hugenberg, & Rule, 2017]; systemic workplace discrimination & racisms].

- * COVID-19 impact on health, economy & education [e.g., how we rethink the climate, culture, environment, demographic imperatives, and socio-organizational life of schooling & education & re-prioritization].
- * There can be no 'gatekeepers' in race, inclusion & equity work [e.g., recognizing the history of prior work/efforts, our different learning stages & journey, limits of our own knowing, and bringing humility to our work majority Black, Indigenous & racialized bodies will not always nor necessarily get it 'right'!].
- * "Any community is as good as we collectively work to make it" [Dei 1996].

III. FOUR [4] DISCURSIVE STANCES

- * 'Decolonization' as political and intellectual act that begins by asking new questions.
- The anti-colonial is intimately connected to decolonization, and by extension, decolonization cannot happen solely through Western [science] scholarship & dominant practices.

- There is a particular place of Indigenous epistemologies [e.g., relationality, community building, responsibility, accountability] to challenge, replace and re-imagine alternatives to colonial thinking & conventional schooling and education.
- The power of sanctity of activity [e.g., teaching, learning & administration of education] and the creation of 'sacred learning spaces/landscapes' [see Garcia & Shirley, 2012; p.77; Dei, 2012 *Suahunu*, Trialectic space'; Dillard, 2012].

IV. ASKING QUESTIONS.

- * How can we provide anti-colonial, inclusive education to assist young Nova Scotia African and Mi'kmaw learners develop a strong sense of identity, self and collective agency, resistance, and empowerment?
- * How do we re-envision schooling and education espousing at the centre values such as social justice, equity, accountability, resistance and anti-colonial responsibility?
- * How do we actualize an 'Inclusive Educational Policy' on the ground?

- * What is ACTIONABLE? [e.g., how institutions use Black and Indigenous bodies & our ideas as representation/ammunition to construct a project of redemption without reparations e.g. visuals, official statements, throwing names/image/quote becomes a validation stamp]?
- ❖ Uncovering how spatial imaginary is racially marked on schooling sites? [e.g., police presence, gentrification, Black and White visual representations on physical walls − notice boards, buildings], and how various posters/visual materials can re-inscribe Whiteness and the optical illusion that White legitimate knowledge?

V. KEY CONCEPTUALIZATIONS.

a) **Inclusion**

- Breaking from the past and current order and beginning anew.
- An action-oriented approach ensuring the centrality of all learners, affirming myriad & competing identities, and lived experiences; & presenting education as holistic learning [i.e., a whole, embodied learner able to act for meaningful change].

- An approach that deals with the interstices of difference [e.g., how race intersects with class, gender, sexuality, 2SLGBTQ+, disability, language & religion, etc.].
- Inclusion as 'radical inclusion' [i.e., challenging the depoliticization of difference; "standardization recipes" Lewin, 2008; and understanding "sameness as provocation that terrorizes" hooks, 1992; pp. 22-23].

- * Addressing power, transparency, accountability issues of schooling [colonial hierarchies, merit badges, entitlements & White privilege].
- Addressing the 'spatialization of reparations' [e.g., unmasking geography of exclusion, historical obligations to our African Nova Scotia & Mi'kmaw learners that surpass the 'written text' as performance].
- Presenting Africentric schooling & the Band-operated Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey Independent schooling as models of 'anti-colonial/decolonial inclusion'.

b) Curriculum

- * Beyond texts, instructional materials, pedagogies and the formal & unwritten rules and regulations.
- Embraces the culture, climate, environment & socioorganizational lives of schools ['deep curriculum'- Dei, et als., 1997.].
- A 'path to follow', course of action to take, a 'particular ordering of society' & a method of 're-writing/'restorying;' [Apple/Giroux].
- Curriculum as a power-saturated [e.g., not innocent nor apolitical; and must be a decolonizing act].

c) **Indigenization**

- An approach to teaching & understanding 'Land' as more than a physical space [i.e., a site of knowing, inclusive of metaphors of seas, waters, Earth and sky, & reclaiming our social, psychic, cultural & spiritual memories as "living forces" we learn from [Simpson, 2007].
- Land is power & is a quest for Life [Tuck, Styres, Wolfe etc.].
- * A process of socio-political, historical consciousness.

- * A cultural, political, spiritual and educational agenda, stressing ontologies of relations & relationality [not a possession], identity, culture, politics and a rootedness in place & history.
- * Knowing past, present & future as relational, pedagogical & as continually lived with possibilities of new futures unfolding daily.
- An approach & process of 'returning to source' [Cabral, 2000],
 'Sankofa', going back to fetch the forgotten value for educational & development purposes.
- * 'Colonialism & slavery are not our only referent points! [see also Alfred & Corntassel, 2006].

d) **Decolonization**

- Discursive relationality of Indigeneity, colonialisms & decolonization.
- A subversive approach, not a superficial add-on, requiring actions to dismantle and rebuild [see also Taiaiake, Mihesuah and Wilson, 2004; Hewitt, 2016].

Decolonization is building relationships in schooling, local communities, Lands & beyond [see also Tuck and Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 2006].

- Developing a critical consciousness of oneself as an educator/learner, place, history, identity, culture & memory.
- ❖ It is <u>NOT</u> about mainstreaming practice [i.e., a decolonial project cannot seek legitimation and validation from the dominant].
- Decolonization is 'Living Well' [*Beun Vivir*, Gudynas, 2011] in school schooling as a source of life, meaning and power.

- Calls for rematriation of Land, addressing the violence of removing Black & Indigenous bodies from Land & relinquishing settler futurities through 'Land Back Movements'.
- Resisting ways settler colonialism domesticates Indigenous/'Aboriginal' peoples as 'racialized minorities' rather than 'colonized nations' through processes of racial capitalism [see also Cannon, 2020].
- * Beyond discourse, theory, process to practice.

Decolonizing education "is not just de-Westernizing, but rather a total re-assertion of [Africa, African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw and other racialized communities] at the centre of knowledge discovery, interrogation, validation and dissemination" [see Asante, 2013, p. 12].

e) Decolonization, Anti-Colonialism & Anti-Blackness

- * The specificity of anti-Black racism & anti-Blackness as rooted in slavery, colonialism and Black humanhood.
- Settler colonialism domesticates Black struggles within an anti-racist, rather than anti-colonial framework.
- A need to subvert the containment of anti-Blackness within a 'domesticated anti-racist' perspective, rather than the framework of the settler state itself.
- Demands a critique of 'domesticated & recolonized antiracism' that fails to challenge the settler state & ways Black laboring bodies were used to build the settler nation [see King 2013, 2020; Maynard, 2017].

- An imperative of a 'Black-White paradigm' [not a 'Black-White binary'] as a lens for reading society [e.g., how a closer proximity to Whiteness is rewarded globally & conversely, proximity to Blackness is punished Dei, 2017; Dei and Vasquez, 2017; see also Smith, 2010; da Silva, 2007].
- * The 'Black-White paradigm' is not a negation of the colonial impact on Indigenous/'Aboriginal' peoples, nor a hierarchy of oppressions; yet it also complicates the 'Indigenous/Settler binary'.

VI. WORKING WITH DOCUMENTS

- A) 'INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY'.
- B) 'INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: THE CALL TO VALUE BLACK STUDENTS' LIVES, SO THEY CAN FULFILL THEIR PROMISE AND POTENTIAL'.
- a) Strategies of Effecting System Change
- * The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) consultations with African Nova Scotian staff, community stakeholders, and parents and families.

[Importance of youth in any extensive consultation process].

b) Focus

- * African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw students.
- ❖ P-12 students & Employees of the Nova Scotia Public Education System.

[Interstices of subject identities & extending our focus to private education systems as well].

c) Important Directive

- *Teaching Support Team.
- *Learning Support Teachers.

[The challenge is to bring African Nova Scotian & Mi'kmaw Elders into both directives, e.g., learning from & working with Land, Environment & Earthly teachings].

d) Important Select Roles & Responsibilities

- * "Build meaningful relationships with students, parents/guardians, families, and other members of the school community to collectively support students' well-being and achievement".
- * "As part of the student success planning process, every school will use evidence, including disaggregated data, to monitor and evaluate how students are doing and will respond with appropriate, timely supports" [including impacts on school discipline].
- * "Recognize that spirituality is integral to the wellness, resiliency, and experience of many Black learners. Use this knowledge to affirm students' identities and build linkages to the institutions and organizations that nurture their sense of purpose and well-being".

- * "Recognize and address White privilege in particular.
- * "Provide African Nova Scotian/Black students with access to African Nova Scotian school counsellors [and particularly] school counsellors that operate from, and are informed by, an anti-racist scope of practice".
- * "Developing a mandatory anti-racism and discrimination leadership module to support aspiring and current school administrators and leaders."
- * Hiring more staff, such as student support workers and African Nova Scotian facilitators".

- * Highlighting and underscoring the significance of Africentric education and practice."
- * Moving to implement an inclusive education policy".

[Paying attention to Environment/Climate education; accountability measures - setting goals & enforcing timelines].

VII. GENERAL REFLECTIONS ON INCLUSIVE POLICY DOCUMENTS

- * Extensive consultation, communication & 'buy in' with internal & external bodies/partners, especially underserved communities.
- * A systemic/institutional approach with an explicit anti-colonial commitment.
- Acknowledging legacies of racism & oppressions beyond expressed institutional commitments [e.g., how racism & colonial violence manifest themselves within our institutions].
- * Comprehensive anti-racist, anti-colonial training for educators & school administrators [e.g. Faculties of Education].
- * Identifying priority areas for immediate attention/redress.
- Sustained institutional funding commitment to follow through policy goals & recommendations.

VIII. REVISITING THE CONCEPTUAL DOMAINS FOR INCLUSIVE DECOLONIAL CURRICULUM

- Dei, G. S. James-Wilson, and J. Zine. 2002. *Inclusive Schooling: A Teacher's Companion to Removing the Margins*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Dei, G. and A. Kempf. 2021. "Afrocentric Education: Traditions, Politics and Possibilities". In. <u>International Encyclopedia of Education</u>, 4th Edition [Section on '*Primary and Secondary Education*', edited by Roland Coloma and Jeongeun Rhee].

THE EIGHT (8) CONCEPTUAL DOMAINS FOR INCLUSIVE DECOLONIAL CURRICULUM

1. Representation:

- Visual representation [i.e., visual culture, landscape and spatiology of schools];
- *Knowledge representation [i.e., the active & critical learning of multiple cultures, histories, experiences as sites of power & resistance]; and,
- ❖ Physical representation [i.e., proactive recruitment, retention & advancement of a diverse school population administrative staff, teachers & students].

2. Language:

- Promoting and enhancing local/Indigenous or first languages of learners;
- Language as a mode of transmission of culture, history, identity & ancestral knowledges; and,
- * Promoting language as resistance & liberation [i.e., assisting learners to use local cultural/Indigenous/minority languages to question & resist language that minimizes, denigrates and penalizes].

3. Family/Community and School Interface:

- * Linking 'school', 'home' & 'off-school' cultures;
- * Creating spaces for co-creation of knowledge & power-sharing with family/community involvement in schools [i.e., pedagogy, instruction & curricular development];
- Disrupting conventional colonizing practice of merely inserting parents/local communities into already existing hierarchical structures of schooling; and,
- ❖ Parents & community Elders as knowledge producers, educators & change agents [a co-relational status].

4. Co-operative Education:

- * Instructional and pedagogic practices that ensure schools as 'community hubs', 'schooling as community' & a 'community of learners'; and,
- * Collective learning and learner responsibilities that redefine 'success' broadly as co-operative; to include academic & social success; sees 'success' as beyond the individual accomplishment & achievement; and, 'success' as inclusive of 'community contributions'.

5. Equity and Values Education:

- * Curricular & instructional approaches that foreground social difference and power [race, gender, class, sexuality/2SLGBTQ+, (dis)ability, religion, age, language, as well as colonizing relations];
- * Promoting values that enhance spiritual, emotional, psychological and [moral] character development of the learner; and,
- * Presenting teaching & learning as 'emotionally-felt experiences', emphasizing the affective and psychomotor domains of the learner, not just cognitive competencies [i.e., appreciation of love, peace, justice, relations & responsibility].

6. Indigenous/Local Cultural Knowledges:

- * Local cultural resource knowledge base as multi-centric knowing;
- ❖ Inter-generational teachings as Indigenous educational philosophies [sharing, reciprocity, relations, healing and community building]; and,
- *Empirical & revealed knowledges based on everyday careful observations of surrounding environments, homes and communities, as well as validating knowledges acquired through intuition, revelations, dreams & visions].

7. Spirituality and Learning:

- Upholding spiritual presence in schools and schooling [e.g. learners as 'spiritual beings', spiritually-informed thought & practice];
- Understanding learners' relations to a Creator, Land/Mother Earth, conceptions of self, personhood & connections of inner/outer environments;
- Learning relationships established through understanding all elements of the Universe as interconnected [e.g., society, culture and Nature nexus & interface of body, mind, soul & spirit];
- Spirituality as 'relationships centering' & 'relationships building' [Meyer, 2008; Dillard, 2008, 2011].

- Using spirituality as a motivator for academic performance & educational success;
- * Spirituality as a source of social justice & racial equity activism; and,
- *Evoking spirituality to heal emotional & mental 'wounding'.

8. Learning for Environment & Climate Justice.

- Critical understandings Land, Environment & global climate crises;
- * A focus on the forces & politics of climate crisis aggravation and mitigation;
- Linking colonialisms, capitalism & environmental destruction; and,
- * Examining solutions & struggles of environmental sustainability from multiple global contexts.

IX. TOWARDS A 'PHILOSOPHY OF TEACHING PRACTICE'

- Representation [Physical & Knowledge] staffing & promotion of African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw and other racialized communities' cultural knowledges in school curriculum [as defined broadly].
- * Teaching Power mapping & triangulating power in schooling [e.g., colonial hierarchies, merit badges, ideas, beliefs, stereotypes and prejudices that produce particular historical & intellectual narratives].
- Mandating race & ABR courses in the K12 school curriculum and beyond.

- Critically teaching [e.g., review of history books and history lessons, placing emphasis on analysis of historical content & critical thinking; use of critical historical texts that debunk of Greek/Roman Whiteness assertions (Walter Dean Myers' 'Monster' instead of 'To Kill a Mockingbird); having resources (literatures, historical novels, drama, etc.) - that allow students to see themselves in their own representations].
- * Teaching omissions & hidden histories that speak to social injustices, violence & local resistances [e.g., teaching colonization & enslavement to uncover White/colonizer privilege & racialized resistances; teaching about anti-Blackness through celebrations & histories of resistance; & teaching heinous Black community erasures Africville].

- * Teaching African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw and other racialized peoples' histories across all grades K12; beyond Social Studies curriculum to all subjects, including STEM; and, integrating 'African/Indigenous/Asian History Month' year-round in the curriculum [see https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/25/us/black-history-in-schools-trnd/index.html]
- Examining the disciplining of African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw and other racialized learners [e.g., re-examining current disciplinary measures suspension/expulsion rates & experiences of Black students to develop alternatives to suspension programs i.e., approaches consistent with genuine collaborations between family, local communities, students, educators & school administrators].

* Special Education streaming and 'adultification' of the African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw and the racialized child even as young as senior Kindergarten (see Maynard, 2007; Jamal, 2020) [specifically, identifying barriers & developing strategies to remove systemic processes that impede student success, and lead to an over-representation of African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw & other racialized learners in Special Education programs].

* Building community and caregiver relations with educators tapping into African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw and other racialized learners' cultural knowledge existing within communities [e.g., Elders to support the well-being & academic achievement of students; promoting the use of storytelling - having a local poet to do 'spoken word' with students to express themselves].

[Goal - to ensure African Nova Scotian/Black & Mi'kmaw Elders, parents, students see themselves reflected & feel their voices heard within curricular programming, thereby cultivating a greater sense of belonging in schooling communities].

- Promotion of Indigenous languages in schools.
- Athways and Transitions: supporting African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw and other racialized learners & families as they transition while they are high school [academic pathways, post-sec opportunities, guidance, etc.; see also Mohammed, 2020].
- Supporting African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw and other racialized Youth Leadership Development & Students' Activism [e.g., rewarding social justice activism to change Environments/worlds; culture of protest movements, building 'communities'].

Developing self/collective-healing processes in schools [e.g., shedding our distortion patterns & embarking upon personal and collective (un)learning and healing journeys; having a space for African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw and other racialized youth to gather, support and advocate for themselves.

X. IMPLEMENTING DECOLONIAL CURRICULUM: SOME PRACTICAL INSTITUTIONAL GUIDELINES

[Focus on five (5) areas: Institutional Implementation Policy; Specific Equity Initiatives; Pedagogy and Methodologies; Evaluation and Assessments; and Research and Infrastructural Support].

1. Institutional Policy Implementation:

Developing Institutional/Regional Centres of Education [RCE] implementation strategies for the diversification of decolonial curriculum with focused attention on African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw and other racialized learners.

- Setting clear guidelines, timelines, academic expectations, measures of accountability & meeting African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw and diverse public demands [i.e., an institutional framework to support strategies for inclusive teachings, identification of staff/school mandate & meeting demands of underserved communities].
- Development of an equity standard of some kind to access the effectiveness & success of policy implementation across all courses [Arts, Social Studies and STEM], as well as RCEs enhancement of social & academic performance of African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw and other racialized learners..

- Paying attention to governance issues, including design & implementation strategies on the scope and organizational structure of schools, departments, etc.
- ❖ Important Goal Accountability measures to address the "non-performative speech acts" of our institutions [Sara Ahmed, 2006] the practice of policy only in name or 'on the books'.

2. Specific Equity Initiatives

- Regional Centres of Education [RCE] to revisit their objectives, mandate, policies and practices to consider internal exclusionary barriers for African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw and other racialized learners and what needs to be done to remove systemic barriers.
- Pursuing annual/periodic curriculum review of educational programmes [including introducing new ones] to be carried out by RCEs for their impact on African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw and other racialized learners.

- Incentivising the development academic programming initiatives that promote decolonizing and anti-colonial teaching & learning methodologies.
- Creating funds to support such initiatives.
- A systemic 'thinking through' of how groups/bodies & organizations such as DBDLI [through Deveau] can help develop such programming.

- Community outreach to address the question of educational relevance to African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw and other racialized learners' & communities that our educational institutions purport to serve.
- Let be described by Educators' connection to/grounding in local communities as a form knowledge generation, teaching, dissemination & academic responsibility.
- * Identifying community issues needing redress in joint consultations.

3. Pedagogy and Methodologies

- Diversifying the curriculum through development of new modalities of teaching & learning [e.g., infusion of multiple teaching methodologies, pedagogies, and academic courses].
- The application of African & Indigenous initiatives already in place to support critical understandings of Africa, Blackness, Indigeneities and global histories, etc. [e.g., the complex Black presence in Canada Indigenous Black presence on Mi'kmaw Lands; Maroons & British Empire Loyalists; descendants of Underground Railroad; Black Pioneers; post 1961 Black immigration].

- * Teaching methodologies that work with non-traditional sources such as the voices of African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw, and other Indigenous/'Aboriginal' Elders [see Dei & McDermott, 2020].
- A consideration of more dialogical curriculum co-creation in schools and classroom teaching involving African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw and other racialized students and local communities.

4. Evaluation and Assessments

- Dealing with the still rigid Eurocentric evaluation methods [e.g., to consider orality as equal medium to written text giving students opportunity to submit assignments orally].
- Not limiting "text" to only academic projects, but also, include community-based events as sites of learning [e.g., students given opportunities to attend community events or participate in organizing an event, have access to other "teachers' and then write or present reflections on these].

Encouraging students to present non-traditional papers [arts based, multimedia] as other opportunities to be creative and think 'outside the box', - a recognition and honour of multiple ways of knowing and being.

5. Research and Infrastructural Support

- Seek more meaningful research partnership opportunities with multiple sectors/communities & offering related supports for more trans-cultural and progressive instructional and teaching partnerships [e.g., partner with local African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw and other racialized scholars and Elders].
- African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw Elders 'Scholar in Residence' in our schools, colleges & universities.

XI. CONCLUSION

- To reframe 'schooling as community' as working with African & Indigenous ideas/conceptions of relationality, sharing, reciprocity, collective responsibility, and accountability.
- To see the school as a "place of refuge" [Moten and Harney, 2013] for critical learning; a place for us to be in, but not of the path of the subversive educator/learner ['academic warrior' Dei, 2012], working to tear down colonial structures.

- * 'Refusing coloniality', and to ask what schools do we want and are willing to fight for? [with a knowledge that another possible is possible!].
- An important search for a "Trialectic Space" [see Dei, 2012].
- * Education [teaching, learning & administration of education] as a sanctity of activity.

Thank You

Asante Sana