Courageous Conversations
Engaging Citizens in Conversations that Matter

CONCENTUS
CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION FOUNDATION INC.
The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission is committed to public education that promotes equality, equity, and the importance of diversity. Through the Concentus Citizenship Education Foundation, the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission is supporting students, teachers, and stakeholders committed to citizenship education.

Purpose of the Concentus Citizenship Education Foundation:
- Educate and empower individuals to understand their rights
- Encourage responsible, respectful, and participatory citizenship
- Promote a commitment to justice in a pluralistic society

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Foreword

The phrase courageous conversations is used in today’s lexicon, but do we stop to ponder how courageous conversations could be used to leverage positive change?

The Holocaust launched a human rights revolution in the 20th century as the global community denounced the inhumanity that had occurred. The Holocaust is the clearest example of the destruction and devastation that can result if a civil society abdicates the responsibility to promote, protect, and respect the rights of its citizens. Through this tragedy, citizens the world over discovered what they cared about. The 1948 United Nations Declaration outlined universally guaranteed fundamental human rights. With rights come responsibilities. Nations are made up of citizens and it is those citizens who must now animate a 21st century responsibility revolution.

In order to evoke a successful responsibility revolution, citizens must discover and declare their moral imperatives. This realization occurs when individuals and systems are informed and invited to take responsibility to respond to issues that matter. Citizens around the world face many issues that demand immediate attention and response.

The Concentus Citizenship Education Foundation asked the Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit to engage scholars to research and write a 1,500-word précis on: the Holocaust, mental health and addictions, racial discrimination, disability, Indigenous cultures and awareness, and gender. This was no easy task. While these issues are complex, and volumes could be written on each of the six topics, these précis provide an overview and a common starting place for discussion. You may wonder why these issues were chosen and other important issues were not. Consider this the first in a series of courageous conversation documents.

As Canadians, and as global citizens, there are many brave conversations to initiate. These six topics were designated in the hope of making them more visible and accessible for discussion and action. An understanding of, and commitment to, these issues are foundational to citizens developing a full understanding of what it means to be a responsible, respectful, and participatory citizen committed to justice in a pluralistic Canadian democracy. It is my hope that this document will encourage and enable citizens to engage in conversations that matter.
Imagine if citizens worldwide were brave enough to learn about issues that matter, and if they were courageous enough to start conversations on these topics. Why not take the challenge to discuss these issues with people you know? Next, be courageous and talk to people you do not know. Finally, engage those who are typically outside your personal and professional circles. What would you learn? What would you do better? How might these conversations revolutionize your beliefs and values and your relationships with citizens here at home? Further afield, how would your reflections impact those who live around the globe? How can you honour your responsibilities by taking positive action on these issues?

This resource was created to help you facilitate discussions in your home, classroom, business, or organization in order to change our world. We need to engage citizens to become advocates for equality in a free and democratic society. For many citizens, raising their voices on these topics requires great courage, and in some instances, your fellow citizens are still struggling to have their voices heard. Unresolved issues threaten our commitment to a just society. Each of us must become informed and then respond to the call to be a part of this responsibility revolution. As individuals, and as members of small groups, now is our chance to do better.

Thanks to the efforts of these six contributors – and the Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit – this document exists as a support for individuals and agencies that are willing to be part of the responsibility revolution. The invitation to have courageous conversations about pertinent topics that matter has been issued. As you explore these and other complex social issues, you are challenged to make a personal commitment to help communities discover what they care deeply about and to find creative solutions to make our world a better place now, and in the future. I believe meaningful conversations will change our world. Let the courageous conversations begin.

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The Holocaust

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The Holocaust and Human Rights

How do you teach events that deny knowledge, experiences that go beyond imagination? How do you tell children, big and small, that society could lose its mind and start murdering its own soul and its own future? How do you unveil horrors without offering at the same time some measure of hope? Hope in what? In whom? In progress, in science and literature and God?

The Holocaust is humanity’s darkest moment, a ‘negative absolute’ (Desbois, 2008). It is the definitive case study of what can happen when respect for the universality of human rights collapses and shows us “the susceptibility of ordinary people to acts of unspeakable cruelty” (Welker, 1996, p. 102). Learning about the Holocaust gives us the opportunity to explore what lessons we can learn from this dark past (Barton & Levstik, 2004) and to understand the international framework of human rights which it provoked.

What Do We Mean by the Holocaust?

The term ‘Holocaust’ came to be used after the Second World War (1939-1945) as the scope of crimes against Jews and other minorities became clear (Michman, 2014). The word Holocaust comes from the Greek terms holos and kaustos meaning whole and burnt, and carries a connotation of a Jewish religious sacrifice. Some consider this inappropriate and instead use the Hebrew term Shoah, which means total destruction or overwhelming catastrophe (Rothberg, 1994; Russell, 2006). The question of which war-time victims it includes is also contested. Approximately 6,000,000 Jews were murdered by the Nazi state and its collaborators (Bloxham, 2009), while 5,000-10,000 homosexuals, 2000 Jehovah’s Witnesses, 250,000 Roma and Sinti, and 250,000 persons with disabilities were also murdered (Short & Reed, 2004). These killings happened in parallel with those of thousands of political dissidents in Germany, Slavs from the occupied East, and millions of Soviet prisoners of war. Some interpret these murders as a single phenomenon (Rosenbaum, 1996; Stradling, 2001), while others see the Jewish persecution as distinct because the Nazis sought their total elimination (Bauer, 1978; Katz, 1996;
Lewy, 1999). While all these groups can be included, the Nazi persecution of the Jews is distinctive in its scope and should be located at the centre of any unit of Holocaust education.

**Holocaust: The Degeneration of Citizenship**

Learning about the Holocaust must situate individual stories into the context of what happened (Hammond, 2001). The Jewish people have a long history of diasporic life and persecution in Europe. By the 19th century, many Jews became ‘emancipated’ and were increasingly accepted, or tolerated, as citizens. However, these liberal convictions declined in Germany in the late 19th and early 20th centuries while negative caricaturing of Jews increased (Evans, 2003; Noakes & Prindham, 1983).

Germany’s loss of the First World War (1914-1918) made these problems worse. Jews and communists were frequently blamed for this and other national crises. Public upset at the war was exacerbated by a tumultuous decade ending with the Wall Street Crash and a global Great Depression (Evans, 2003). The Nazis rose to power in the midst of this turmoil and Adolf Hitler became Chancellor in 1933. Hitler’s own correspondence shows that he considered the Jews a threat to Germany and envisioned their de-legitimation and expulsion as early as 1919 (Noakes & Prindham, 1983). Yet Nazi power did not arise primarily on account of anti-Semitism. Instead, the Nazi’s electoral popularity grew from 2.6% in 1928 to 37% in 1932 on account of economic anxiety; by 1932, this anxiety had bred a disenchantment vulnerable to Hitler’s more demagogic leadership (Evans, 2003; Koonz, 2003).

In power, the Nazis sought to methodically remove the civil rights of German Jews and then of other Jews as the Reich subsequently expanded (Michman, 2014). Many attempted to leave or sought to send their children abroad. However, the Depression and anti-immigration sentiment meant most nations, including Canada, were closed to prospective refugees. (Abella & Troper, 1986; Ogilvie & Miller, 2010). In September 1939, the Nazis invaded Poland triggering the Second World War. Poland had the highest population of Jews in Europe resulting in a substantial increase in Jewish killings and mass deportations to ghettos (Browning, 1992).

In June 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet Union specifically deploying *Einsatzgruppen*, killing squads, to mass murder Jews in Eastern Europe marking the beginning of the Holocaust as a consciously genocidal program (Browning, 1998; Hilberg, 1985; Wachsmann, 2015). The “Wannsee Conference” was then held in January 1942 to coordinate this “Final Solution.” Deportations to purpose-built extermination camps followed and gas chambers were used to murder on an industrial-scale until 1945 (Cesarani, 2016).
A New Framework for Human Rights

While the allies had known about and publicly condemned the extermination of Jews as early as 1942 (Hansard HC Deb, December 17, 1942), mass murder continued until the end of the war. The scope and horror of these crimes became better publicly understood through the 1945-46 Nuremberg trials of senior Nazi leaders provoking global outrage that such crimes, on such a scale, were possible (Overy, 2011). The world’s response came through two documents from the newly-established United Nations (UN, 1948a, 1948b): the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (The Convention) and the *Declaration of Human Rights* (The Declaration).

The Convention was designed to broaden the international legal framework available to address genocide. Deeply influenced by the Jewish-Polish scholar Raphael Lemkin (Zimmerer & Schaller, 2009), it criminalised “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such” (UN, 1948a, Art. II). The Convention was foundational for the later creation of the International Criminal Court and the recent Right to Protect doctrine which emerged following the 1994 Rwandan genocide (Holmes 1998; Kikoler, 2009; UN, 1999).

The Declaration, a non-binding statement drafted by an international committee, sought to establish an international consensus on what rights were universal (Glendon, 1998). It begins by declaring the innate freedom and equality of all persons and the endowment of each of those persons with reason and conscience (UN, 1948b). It then outlines an impressively wide range of inalienable personal, social, and political rights. Today, it is at the very heart of international human rights, both invoked in its own right and as inspiration for a vast range of further declarations and conventions (Kennedy 2006; Lauren, 1998; Roth, 2015; von Bernstorff, 2008).

Teaching the Holocaust

Teaching about the Holocaust (See Appendix) can challenge the expertise and skills of any teacher (Welker, 1996) and there is a real risk of sincere but misdirected teaching (Kitson, 2001). This is particularly concerning given that “oversimplification, systematic generalisation and a mixture of ideology and pseudo-science were tools of Nazi rhetoric” (Lecomte, 2003, p. 49). McGuinn (2000) outlined two approaches through which schools can address the Holocaust: explicitly through the curriculum and by “attempting to eradicate the seeds from which that evil flowering grew” (p. 125) through democratic pedagogy.

Students studying the Holocaust should learn about the topic in an age-appropriate way. Care should be taken with explicit images and acting out the roles of victims or perpetrators should be avoided (Schweber, 2004; Wieser, 2001). Materials used should be historically accurate and representative, and should avoid stereotyping, generalisations and simplification (Gray, 2015). Students must be able to recognise the significance of key events that led to the Holocaust (Hammond, 2001), but
also study a range of individual stories – including those of rescue and resistance (Kitson, 2001). This balance of a broad understanding and knowledge of specific stories is vital to help students avoid Holocaust distortions, denial, and trivialisation (Gray, 2015). Students should also learn to recognise the ways that authority and advertising shape their own views, in order to develop critical independence (McGuinn, 2000).

The Holocaust and the Future

In Canada, we too have historical experience of government policies which have undermined the rights of minorities and students will necessarily critique their own society when encountering the Holocaust (Lecomte, 2003). The term ‘holocaust’ is now often used analogously in Canada to explain the trauma and abuse experienced by First Nations and Métis people (Andrew, 2005; Fontaine & Farber, 2013; Morissette, 1994). While these experiences are different than those of the Jews, it is often because of global reaction to the Holocaust that we can now label and challenge these other abuses (Fontaine & Farber, 2013).

History is not stationary; it is the dynamic product of the community who has produced it. Our shared conviction that the Holocaust was deplorable can only continue insofar as we remember and respond to it (Kellner, 1997). Holocaust education will inevitably be an imperfect offering and the democratic challenges of the 21st century may be starkly different to those of the 20th century. But should we find ourselves in circumstances which echo moments along the path that led to the Holocaust, “[n]o longer can we plead ignorance – ‘I didn’t know what was happening’ – as a justification for inaction” (Roth, 2015, p. 17).

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Rothberg, M. (1994). “We were talking Jewish”: Art Spiegelman’s “Maus” as “Holocaust” production. Contemporary Literature, 35(4), 661-687.


### Appendix Comparative Guidance for Teaching the Holocaust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>United States Holocaust Museum</th>
<th>Holocaust Educational Trust</th>
<th>International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approach</strong></td>
<td>Take a positive, student-centred, cross-curricular approach</td>
<td>Create a positive learning environment, with an active pedagogy and a cross-curricular, student-centred approach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definitions and language</strong></td>
<td>Define what you mean by the Holocaust; strive for precision of language</td>
<td>Don’t forget non-Jewish victims, but do not include them in a catch-all definition; be precise</td>
<td>Define the term Holocaust; be precise in your use of language and urge your students to do the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significance and comparisons</strong></td>
<td>Avoid comparisons of pain</td>
<td>Consider your objectives and contemporary significance; avoiding a historical comparisons</td>
<td>Distinguish between the history of the Holocaust and the lessons that might be learned from that history; distinguish between the Holocaust and other events; avoid comparisons of pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stereotypes</strong></td>
<td>Avoid stereotypical descriptions</td>
<td>Avoid stereotypes</td>
<td>Avoid simple answers; challenge claims of inevitability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complexity and inevitability</strong></td>
<td>Avoid simple answers to complex history; just because it happened, doesn’t mean it was inevitable</td>
<td>Avoid simple, reductive answers; root answers in the historical events</td>
<td>Use primary sources; acknowledge evidence taken from perpetrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sources of information</strong></td>
<td>Make careful distinctions about sources of information</td>
<td>Use primary source material and eye-witness testimony; acknowledge sources from perpetrators; go beyond stories of victimhood; include resistance and rescue activities</td>
<td>explore a variety of victim’s experiences, including resistance; be aware of source limitations, including those on the Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appropriate Content</strong></td>
<td>Be sensitive to appropriate written and audio-visual content</td>
<td>Choose resources which respect students, victims and survivors, especially imagery</td>
<td>Do not use horrific imagery to engage your students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Statistics</strong></td>
<td>Translate statistics into people</td>
<td>Statistics are impersonal; focus on individuals</td>
<td>Individualise statistics; use personal stories and witness testimony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context and interpretation</strong></td>
<td>Contextualise the history you are teaching; do not try to romanticize history to engage students’ interest; strive for balance in perspectives</td>
<td>Do not romanticise history; explore differing interpretations; avoid defining Jewish people solely by the Holocaust by teaching about their pre-war lives; re-humanise ALL involved – the Nazis were human beings not monsters; teach about perpetrators as well as victims, including the diversity of Nazi collaborators</td>
<td>Contextualise the history; giving broad and balanced coverage; analyse different interpretations; do not define Jewish people solely in terms of the Holocaust; do not attempt to explain away the perpetrators as “inhuman monsters”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lesson activities</strong></td>
<td>Select appropriate learning activities</td>
<td>Make activities meaningful: challenge assumptions; avoid role-play activities</td>
<td>Avoid using simulations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mental Health and Addictions

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Introduction

This précis offers an overview of some of the more germane literature that speaks to pressing problems in the area of mental health and addictions while also offering hopeful solutions that could and should be enacted. The author acknowledges an inherent bias that has coloured the manner in which this task was undertaken. Notably, the distinction between physical and mental health sets the stage for stigmatization based on an artificial separation of body and mind. Whereas the former is considered more natural and bears fewer negative associations, the latter is wrought with fear, misunderstandings, avoidance, stereotyping, and ostracizing attitudes that persist despite research to the contrary. Additionally, separating addictions from its roots within the mental health spectrum is somewhat arbitrary and presents a fractured rather than holistic approach to treatment focused interventions.

What is Mental Health?

Mental health has been defined as:

a state of wellbeing in which you can realize your own potential, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productivity, and make a contribution to your community. Good mental health protects us from the stresses of our lives and can even help reduce the risk of developing mental health issues (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2013b, p. 4).

While it is distinguished from mental health problems and illnesses, there is recognition that “mental health issues are the result of a complex mix of social, economic, psychological, biological, and genetic factors” (p. 5). These problems can range in severity, duration and resistance to treatment while also presenting with co-morbid physical illnesses. Overlapping symptomatology is the norm with most classifications acknowledging that specific mental disorders are placed on a spectrum that recognizes levels of severity that will impact the onset, development,
course, and corresponding treatment options (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5, 2013). Hence informed differential diagnostic processes are essential to ensure corresponding conclusions are accurate and consistent with rigorous professional standards.

A Ten Year Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan for Saskatchewan (2014)

In the report titled, “Working Together for Change: A 10 Year Mental Health and Addiction Action Plan for Saskatchewan,” Stockdale-Winder (2014) outlined a roadmap that includes quality assurance and accountability at every turn and fork in the path to change: “person-centered, accessible, equitable, culturally-responsive, client-informed choices, coordinated, accountable and of high quality with sufficient capacity to meet the needs of our province” (p. 4). Over 16 recommendations specify clearly what needs to happen to take these authentic yet research informed ideas and translate them into blueprints for moving forward in a proactive and fully engaged manner.


This report presented a “comprehensive blueprint for change” (p. 11). The six key recommended strategies were:

1. Promote mental health across the lifespan in homes, schools, and workplaces, and prevent mental illness and suicide wherever possible.

2. Foster recovery and well-being for people of all ages living with mental health problems and illnesses, and uphold their rights.

3. Provide access to the right combination of services, treatments and supports, when and where people need them.

4. Reduce disparities in risk factors and access to mental health services, and strengthen the response to the needs of diverse communities and Northerners.

5. Work with First Nations, Inuit, and Metis to address their mental health needs, acknowledging their distinct circumstances, rights and cultures.

6. Mobilize leadership, improve knowledge, and foster collaborations at all levels.
The Mental Health Strategy for Canada: A Youth Perspective (2013)

This supplementary report “highlights the experiences and vision of young people working toward system changes” (p. i) and strives to provide a document that is accessible to a wider audience. Given the fact that “more than two-thirds of young adults living with a mental health problem or illness say their symptoms first appeared when they were children” (p. 2), engagement of youth is critical at the planning and policy-making stage. The six strategic directions were rewritten and refocused to align with a critical youth lens. Their ‘Call to Action’ included the need for data collection systems that will assist with setting and monitoring targets as well as tracking the access and effectiveness of services.

Informing the Future: Mental Health Indicators for Canada (2015)

The goal of this report was to “improve mental health data collection, research, and knowledge exchange across Canada” (p. 3). The report included indicators that covered a range of topics with the intent of “providing information on access and treatment, caregiving, diversity, economic prosperity, housing and homelessness, population wellbeing, recovery, stigma, discrimination, and suicide” (p. 4). The scope of this report is broad, inclusive and sensitive to the unique needs of specific populations and benchmark comparisons are made that can serve as starting points for further study.

Reported indicators were drawn from different sources “including national surveys and administrative databases” (p. 5) employing the following five selection criteria: meaningfulness, validity, feasibility, replicability, and actionability. Members of their information gathering team included leaders in First Nations, Inuit and Métis mental health, experts in school-based mental health promotion, and members of international initiatives for mental health leadership. Together they formulated a collection of indicators that provided a snapshot of mental health related problems in Canada. Their 63 indicators were presented in one of three colours to represent its relative status:

- **Green**: good performance; indicator moving in a desirable direction
- **Yellow**: no change, some concern, or uncertain results
- **Red**: significant concerns/indicator moving in an undesirable direction (p. 5)

The following website takes you to the Indicators Dashboard where you’re able to click on one of 12 focus areas to explore the related indicators:

www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/focus-areas/mental-health-indicators-canada
Staggering statistics tend to have a mind-numbing effect where their overwhelming impact may lead to confusion or inaction. However, statistical evidence that speaks to the efficacy of interventions can fuel hope as well as inspiration. It is critical to invest in mental health now in order to prevent the past from repeating itself (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2013a).

**First Nations, Inuit and Métis Perspectives and Mental Health**

Tensions that exist between western and indigenous traditions and ways of knowing must also be acknowledged and taken into consideration during all stages of intervention, treatment and follow-up. The following quotation highlights this reality:

Indigenous people with limited experience in highly complex government organizations often need assistance in developing the organizational literacy to be able to see and deal with tensions between what they may view as right and good and the organizational culture in which they find themselves. (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2011a, p. 22)

Furthermore, these tensions are exasperated when views of mental health and mental illness are conceptualized from variant perspectives, e.g., western vs. aboriginal. The former may privilege individual rights and concerns while the latter values collective responsibilities that aims to engage both family and community members.

Radical acceptance is promoted as a means of valuing individuality and diversity in an unconditional and non-judgmental manner. If illness is viewed as a “disconnection and imbalance” then “healing and recovery is founded on supporting reconnection with self, other, family, community and the natural world” (Canadian Mental Health Commission, 2011a, p. 29).

Healing from trauma-induced illnesses may take many untraditional forms. When the goal is to restore a balance between the heart, spirit, body and mind, a therapist’s office may not be the best or only place for healing and recovery to take place. Alternatives need to be considered and could include land-based healing options where reconnecting with nature may have a parallel internalizing effect on participants that is similar and just as profound. In other words, healing starts from within, and may need periods of silence, reflection and solitude before the inner dialogue can be expressed outwardly. This form of traditional healing is an accepted indigenous practice but may be foreign to many non-indigenous individuals who practice within more traditional forms of western mental health intervention paradigms.

Accessibility is extended beyond physical barriers or adequately trained personnel who are able to deliver culturally informed programming and services to include holistic approaches that consider physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of accessibility (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2011b). Additionally, a strength-based approach to intervention is encouraged while at the same time being trauma-informed. Acknowledging the effects of intergenerational trauma and its connection to colonial practices is a priority when working with Indigenous peoples.
Summary

Moving away from a dichotomized view focused on an individual’s health to a more holistic perspective is consistent with indigenous worldviews and may lead to breakthroughs in research as well as the provision and payment of needed services in a more equitable manner. A corresponding framework for analysis of these interrelated forces is depicted in the appendix. Mental health and addictions continues to dominate conversations that recognize the need for change while respecting traditions, cultures, and historical ways of viewing these westernized concepts. Canadian society has experienced the effects of inaction and inertia. However, the future is filled with cautious optimism given the growing consensus around culturally informed and research driven paths for change.

Re-imagining Mental Health and Addictions: Policies, Perspectives, and People

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http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/system/files/private/document/FNIM_Holding_Hope_In_Our_Hearts_ENG.pdf


Appendix

A holistic view of interrelated forces that enable and constrain relational practice and ethical engagement from First Nations, Inuit and Métis Perspectives

Racial Discrimination

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Race

The Ontario Human Rights Commission declared, “Race is a social construct. This means that society forms ideas of race based on geographic, historical, political, economic, social and cultural factors, as well as physical traits, even though none of these can be used to justify racial superiority or racial prejudice” (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2016, Racial discrimination brochure). Race is animated by social thought and power relations (Ladson-Billings 1998; Memmi, 2000; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2016; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

Racist beliefs tend to conflate phenotypical attributes with moral character or intelligence, however, biological races have never actually existed (Sussman, 2014). Yet, race and racism are central factors in the social order and racial discrimination based on the social construct of race remains deeply rooted in contemporary society (Battiste, 2013; Schick & St. Denis, 2005b; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). People are racialized through a process known as socialization (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012) which refers to our systematic training into the norms of our culture.

Racism in Canada

Racism is oppression experienced typically by non-White groups in Canada. It is the violent intersection of power, prejudice, and discrimination. Together they weave a discourse, culture, and system as the fabric of marginalization and oppression. “Racism encompasses economic, political, social, and institutional actions and beliefs that systematize and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources, and power between Whites and people of Color” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 99). This experience of racism occurs at both individual and group levels. Further, they described racism as: “White racial and cultural prejudice and discrimination, supported by institutional power and authority, used to the advantage of Whites and the disadvantage of people of Color” (p. 99). Racism is rooted in the asymmetrical distribution of power and privilege which
Racial Discrimination


Racial Discrimination

Racial discrimination is the illegal manifestation of racism and includes “any action intentional or not, that has the effect of singling out persons based on their race, and imposing burdens on them and not on others, or withholding or limiting access to benefits available to other members of society” (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2016, Racial discrimination brochure). Racial discrimination permits and denies access to privilege (McIntosh, 1998; Schick & St. Denis, 2005a; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Privilege can mean having unconscious and unintentional access to certain benefits without race being attributed to one’s character or intelligence. When race, gender, class, and power intersect, it exposes racialized groups to greater or lesser forms of oppression and privilege (McIntosh, 1998; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

In practice racism represents more than individual acts of discrimination or personal animosity towards groups of racialized people. Coates (2012) emphasized “racism is not merely a simplistic hatred. It is, more often, broad sympathy toward some and broader skepticism toward other” (para. 14). Being persistently followed around while shopping, being denied rental applications by landlords, or being seen as inherently violent without justification are artifacts of racism.

Failure to Address Racism

Racism varies in degrees of magnitude and racial discrimination and represents a dynamic of oppression on a spectrum ranging from mundane and seemingly innocuous acts, behaviours, and attitudes to heinous atrocities. The challenge of anti-racist work reflects a general unwillingness to engage with discourse that disrupts well established narratives. If people are not wearing white hoods or using explicitly racist language, racism can become “colorblind” to the more subtle and invisible manifestations of racial discrimination. Perversely, the denial of racism becomes a new form of racism.

Racial discrimination was initially justified through divinity and endorsed by the Catholic Church. Subsequently race was rationalized by science as evidenced by the infamous eugenics experiments of the 19th century (Stote, 2015). Today, individualism attributes the inequities of racialized groups to individual decisions thus absolving both history and contemporary society from its moral and legal obligations to redress the legacy of racism and colonization. Canada’s dark history was often suppressed or obfuscated from many of its citizens creating challenges for public education and civic discourse geared towards addressing human rights.
Racial Discrimination

Racism Experienced by Indigenous Peoples

Like other colonial nations, racism in Canada is deeply rooted in colonization (Assembly of First Nations (AFN), 2013; Daschuk, 2013; Mosby, 2013; Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP), 1996; The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), 2015). The myth of race in Canada seeps into every facet of life though it can be difficult to discern and understand because of its relative ubiquity. Understanding racism in Canada means tracing its impact through the history of Indigenous peoples, immigrants, black, and other non-white peoples. To comprehend racism we must address the dynamic of “whiteness” which carries “institutional status and identity imbued with legal, political, economic, and social rights and privileges that are denied to others” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 99).

Canada is a nation built on the genocide and forced dislocation of Indigenous peoples (Daschuk, 2013; TRC, 2015). For Indigenous peoples, Canada’s racism problem (Macdonald, 2016) continues to represent its largest human rights challenge to date (TRC, 2015). Colonization cultivated the conditions for recurring crisis and standoffs such as Oka, Attawapiskat, Thunder Bay, Elsipogtog, High River, Burnt Church, and Shoal Lake 40. Intergenerational trauma was permitted, with the support of the Crown, by various “civilizing” policies (Battiste & Henderson, 2000) and practices now cited as acts of cultural genocide (TRC, 2015). For example the residential school system forcibly removed children from their families and communities to be placed in religious boarding schools where physical, sexual, emotional, and spiritual abuse were rampant. The 60’s scoop saw children seized by the state and, without permission or knowledge of their parents, placed into care with white families. Forced sterilization (Stote, 2015), medical experiments on unsuspecting Indigenous children (Daschuk, 2013; Mosby, 2013), government sanctioned starvation (Daschuk, 2013), theft of land and resources (AFN, 2013), the infamous Pass System, and abrogation of treaties (Carr-Stewart, 2001) stem from a racist and oppressive system that persecuted Indigenous people for generations.

Racial discrimination is systemic and impacts the well-being of Indigenous peoples across a variety of domains. The criminal justice system, Child and Family welfare system, and First Nations school systems are pervasively underfunded (APTN National News, 2016; Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013; TRC, 2015) and systematically marginalized by the government charged with protecting, recognizing, and implementing Indigenous and Human Rights. Indigenous incarceration rates in Saskatchewan are among the highest in Canada with some prisons housing nearly 80% Indigenous people (Arrowmigh, 2016) although First Nations represent only 4% of the overall Canadian population (AFN, 2013). Indigenous peoples are also sentenced in Saskatchewan with twice the average jail time as non-Aboriginal people for the same crime (Scott, 2014). There is a disproportionate number of missing and murdered Indigenous peoples (Human Rights Watch, 2013; National Women’s Association Canada, 2015), over-representation in the criminal justice system (RCAP, 1996; Scott, 2014; TRC, 2015), and Indigenous students are more likely to go to prison than graduate from high school (AFN, 2013). Despite the vast array of literature on racism, the impact of racial discrimination ripples across history and contemporary society. The dehumanizing reality of individual and systemic racial discrimination culminates in the tragedies all too common and familiar to Indigenous peoples.
Racial Discrimination & Canadian Immigration

Weaving policies, practices, and narratives of racism in Canada creates a grim picture that challenges the image of a tolerant and welcoming multicultural nation. Fear and derision of the “other” is well woven into the Canadian psyche. Canada violated the rights of many people due to their race or ethnicity through the immigration system: Japanese internment Camps during World War II; the building of the Trans Canada Pacific Railroad using Chinese slave labour; the recent outburst of Islamophobia exhibited during the Syrian refugee crisis; and finally the Komagata Maru where passengers from Punjab, India were turned away in Vancouver Harbor (Trudeau, 2016). Systemic racism in Canadian immigration policies and practices have led to the varied exclusion, denial, and further marginalization of numerous non-white groups and individuals (Jakubowski, 1997).

Remaining Challenges

Today, strong human rights codes and legal instruments designed to prevent racial discrimination exist. But despite racial discrimination being illegal, racism remains an ongoing challenge when nurturing civic culture, social cohesion and economic prosperity. These challenges include the pervasiveness of “colorblind racism”, systemic discrimination in education/justice/child family welfare, ongoing legal battles, and the personal reality of individuals who face daily indignity due to their perceived race. Civic education and a reconciliation with the reality of colonization is required in order to come to terms with a painful and suppressed history but also understanding that race, racism, and racial discrimination are founded upon the belief of the inherent superiority of whites. This is not meant to elicit guilt, anger, frustration, or sadness but rather to sow the seeds of curiosity that animates a dialogue inviting everyone to a more inclusive, tolerant, and beautiful nation that maximizes the productive and creative potential of diversity.
References


Racial Discrimination


Disability

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Introduction

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Government of Canada, 1982) and the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code (Government of Saskatchewan, 1979) uphold the rights of individuals and groups with disabilities. Persons with disabilities have the right to accessibility and accommodations to ameliorate the disadvantages caused by their disabilities. They have the right to barrier-free environments that allow all people to participate in society to the level of their full potential. Disabilities include both visible and invisible conditions that affect the individual’s ability to participate fully in daily living due to physical, mental, health, and mental health conditions. Stereotypes related to disabilities need to be dismantled and will be most effectively changed through interaction and understanding. Respecting and valuing differences in all people, including people with disabilities, will go a long way to reducing the stigma and exclusion that many people with disabilities experience.

Impact of Disabilities

Discrimination occurs when persons with disabilities are treated or viewed negatively due to their disabilities. The disabilities are often treated as a burden and something to be pitied. According to the 2012 Canadian Survey on Disabilities, 13.7% of Canadians and 15% of Saskatchewan residents 15 years of age and older report having a disability. As well, 73.8% of individuals without disabilities of working age are employed while only 47% of persons with disabilities of working age are employed. People with disabilities are less likely to graduate from high school and, given the emphasis placed on education in today’s society, this leads to under-employment and lower wages for those who are employed (Statistics Canada, 2012). These numbers may be underestimated considering the stigma experienced by individuals with disabilities. This stigma often leads people to hide their disabilities and avoid obtaining supports or more effective approaches lest they be treated as being less than.
Disability

Medical Model

Disabilities have been primarily approached from a medical model. Disabilities are usually identified or diagnosed by a medical or other professional who focuses on the deficits the individual has and how to fix or reduce the deficits. The medical model often fails to recognize the individual's strengths or ability to do tasks in a different way. Focusing on the individual as the problem requires each individual with a disability to make changes instead of more substantive changes in societal attitudes that will reduce or remove the current barriers. Within this model, persons without disabilities tend to view the existence of a disability as negative and often respond with sympathy and not a recognition that changes can be made to reflect the strengths and potential of the person (Brisenden, 1986; Johnston, 1994; Llewellyn & Hogan, 2000). The person with a disability must fit into a society run by persons who do not have disabilities (Brisenden, 1986). This focus on deficits and treatment also leads to the person being defined by their disability and being viewed as defective in some way rather than society valuing the diversity and rights of all people (Johnston, 1994).

Although the participation of professionals in diagnosis and recommendations for persons with disabilities will be needed in many cases, the medical model with its focus on the person as the problem and professionals as the sole experts has been largely rejected by persons with disabilities and advocacy groups. In fact, Goodley (1997) argues that the medical model discourages and devalues self-advocacy.

Social Model

Due to dissatisfaction with the medical model, the social model of disability emerged with the participation of persons with disabilities. This model argues that the concept of disability is socially constructed (Hutchison, 1995; Llewellyn & Hogan, 2000; Stevenson, 2010). Persons with disabilities have physical, cognitive, and/or other impairments that impact their ability to do some things, particularly if they are required to do them in certain ways. Society excludes persons with disabilities socially and economically by not providing environments and conditions that take into account their impairments. This leads to them being excluded from mainstream activities (Stevenson, 2010). The prevalence of the social model has led to major changes in accessibility, attitudes, and language since this approach puts less emphasis on deficits than the medical model does. Instead of referring to a disabled person, we now refer to a person with a disability to reflect that the person is not defined solely by their disability. Providing wheelchair ramps, visual fire alarm systems, and other environmental changes allow persons with disabilities accessibility to physical locations and knowledge without needing to depend on others. The emphasis is on what people with disabilities can do when society makes changes that support the participation of all people. Self-advocacy has followed naturally from the view of changing society to meet the needs of persons with disabilities (Goodley, 1997).
Rights-Based Model

Other approaches to viewing disabilities and research on disabilities such as the rights-based model are emerging; these emphasize rights, activism, and the lived experiences of individuals with disabilities (Gooding, 2013; Stevenson, 2010). For example, the Emancipatory Disability Research paradigm emphasizes that research on disabilities should be done by persons who themselves have disabilities and/or with the active participation of persons with disabilities in the research to ensure their experiences are fully acknowledged (Stevenson, 2010).

Inclusion

In 1982 with the adoption of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canada became the first country to guarantee rights to persons with disabilities that are entrenched in the country's constitution (Hutchinson, 2007). Inclusion became an important concept in policies concerning persons with disabilities. Educational facilities moved towards an inclusive model in which students with disabilities were initially integrated into some classes with the students without disabilities to participate in the regular classroom for the full day when possible. Special education teachers started spending more time co-teaching in the regular classroom rather than exclusively in a separate location for pull-out support (Hutchinson, 2007).

Changing the perceptions that teachers and other people in society have towards persons with disabilities is key to making this approach work. The support that teachers give to inclusion is often connected to the degree to which they focus on the differences and deficits of persons with disabilities in comparison to the importance of social justice in the school context (Lalvani, 2013).

Teachers, parents, and policy makers are often worried that the other children in the classroom will be adversely affected by having a student with a disability fully participating in the classroom. A study comparing students from classrooms with or without a child with disabilities fully included in the classroom were compared in their academic progress over a year. There were no significant differences between the groups (Sermier Dessemontet & Bless, 2013).

The current approach is to differentiate instruction through adaptations (changing how the material is presented) and modifications (changing what is presented) to meet the needs of all students in the classroom (Hutchinson, 2007). Postsecondary institutions are now required by law to make reasonable accommodations to provide equitable access to services for students with disabilities. This change has greatly affected the numbers of students with disabilities accessing and experiencing success in postsecondary studies (Mullins & Preyde, 2013).

Saskatchewan Context

Saskatchewan has seen an evolution of attitudes and practices concerning persons with disabilities. For example, in the past individuals with mental health disabilities
and intellectual disabilities were often institutionalized and even sterilized. Some of these individuals lived and died in the institution. Valley View Centre in Moose Jaw opened as the Saskatchewan Training School in 1955 and is projected to close in 2018. When it first opened, it was designed as a temporary place of residence for individuals with intellectual disabilities to be trained so they could participate more fully in society. The capacity for 1,200 residents was reached shortly after it opened and it developed a 500 person waitlist within 2 years.

In many ways the design was flawed as the assumption that functionality in society can be attained separate from society proved to be false in most cases. As well, society did not appear willing or able to accept the residents after they were trained. Employment opportunities did not materialize and many residents continued to reside at Valley View on a long term basis.

By the end of the 1970s the movement towards community-based programming had begun in earnest and most of the residents of Valley View Centre were moved out of the institution and into group homes or other community-based placements (Wickham, 2012). The Saskatchewan Council for Crippled Children and Adults changed its name to the Saskatchewan Abilities Council in 1984 echoing the societal shift away from the medical model to the social model of disability (Saskatchewan Abilities Council, 2016).

The Saskatchewan Disability Strategy involved community stakeholders in identifying the important direction for transformation in the province. Person-centered services where the organization adapts to the person with a disability, a shift to understanding the impact of the individual with the disability with their participation in the process, accessibility and inclusion benefiting all people, and promoting and protecting human rights were major directions identified by this initiative (The Saskatchewan Disability Strategy, 2015).
References


Disability


Indigenous Cultures and Awareness

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Introduction

The five linguistic groups of Saskatchewan First Nations (FNs) are Cree, Dakota, Dene, Nakota (Assiniboine) and Saulteaux. The plains FNs lived in individual migratory bands each independent with its own chief (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada [INAC], 2013). During summer gatherings they held spiritual ceremonies, dances, feasts and communal hunts. Military societies policed life in camp and while traveling, and also organized defences.

The culture based on buffalo developed over thousands of years. Homes called tipis were portable and built from materials readily available. FNs transported goods and household possessions by dog and travois. Their clothing was made from tanned animal skin such as buffalo, antelope, elk or deer. Around 1700 the horse was introduced and became an essential part of FNs culture; FNs became skilled riders. FNs beliefs, values, and traditions were from the Creator. Elders passed on oral stories and legends, and children learned creation stories. People depended on nature-given stocks for survival, and they treated the earth respectfully. This was "reflected in songs, dances, festivals and ceremonies" (INAC, 2013, p. 21). Paget (2004) observed the “Plains people are a 'model' race” and FN women were the "most attentive mothers" (p. xxi).

The Treaties

British colonies depended upon peaceful relations with FNs to achieve control of America (INAC, 2013, p. 28). In 1763, the Royal Proclamation aimed to achieve that. It stated that only Crown representatives could purchase FN lands. That was the first recognition of FNs title to lands. Pursuant to that, the numbered treaties were signed from 1871 to 1921 and in Saskatchewan this included Treaties 2, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 10 (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2016). The treaties contain guarantees for reserve lands; education; agricultural tools; health; and hunting, fishing, and gathering rights. One FN treaty obligation was to maintain peace and good order between each other and settlers.
The Saskatchewan Government maintained that since Saskatchewan did not exist at that time, it was not a party to the treaties (OTC, 2007). The federal government has legislative authority over Indians and their lands under s. 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867. Aboriginal rights, which are separate from Treaty Rights, are the practices, customs, and traditions unique to FNs that FNs participated in prior to contact with Europeans. The “courts have also expanded the scope of . . . existing Aboriginal and treaty rights” (OTC, 2007, pp. 157 – 158).

The Pass System and Reserve Life

Lerat (2005) stated after the treaties, FNs had little choice but to settle on reserves and have the Indian Agent rule their lives. They were destitute and by the following winter they were “starving” and in particular, “women suffered” (p. 42). Since 1876, Indians are the “most bureaucratically regulated minority group in all of Canada” (Satzewich & Mahood, 1994, p. 40). By the 1900s, Indian Affairs had a firm control of reserve governance. Satzewich and Mahood (1994) acknowledged the government intended to “introduce a system of elections [but] in practice, . . . [they simply] appointed leaders . . . capable of [control] . . . to act as extensions of state authority” (p. 40). Those appointed were “deposed for ‘incompetence’ when they sought to question” (p. 40).

By the 1960s, FNs were well groomed. Indian Affairs had a firm grip on band councils who acted as “rubber-stamps for . . . Indian Affairs” (Dosman, 1972, pp. 22–23). Reserve stratification resulted in “leading families” competing in a “hot-bed of politics” where winning earned “respect and privilege” and losing meant “impoverishment and permanent exclusion” (p. 60).

By the 1980s, Indian Affairs had become bloated by bureaucracy. It was a three-tiered system with overlap in responsibilities and programs. Services were delivered as a matter of policy not based on constitutional and treaty obligations (Brezinski, 1993). Flawed priorities, policies, and decision-making resulted from “overlap in jurisdiction” (p. 381).

Residential Schools

A total of 132 residential schools were established across Canada with more than 150,000 Aboriginal children who attended between 1857 and 1996 (INAC, 2013, p. 50). By 1967, child care issues were identified in nine residential schools in Saskatchewan (Caldwell, 1967). Staffing problems included long hours combined with low wages and minimum qualifications for employment. There was overcrowding, and fire hazards were found in three residences.

The child’s formative years were absent of parental influence. Children lived at the school for ten months with only two months at home. They constantly had to adapt and readapt without support. Caldwell (1967) stated children could not “handle this struggle on their own (p. 61). Innes (2013) interviewed an Elder who stated “we never learned about family; [families were] already separated . . . brainwashed
Indigenous Cultures and Awareness

... [and] that took away ... our given right to know about our own relatives and family” (p. 108 – 109). She finally understood “it's not just one ... it’s everybody ... I understand that now” (p. 109). Paget (1907), almost 60 years earlier, “directly challenged negative representations and distortions of Aboriginal people” used to justify the creation of residential schools (p. xxiii). However, by the 1960s the FN family as an institution was effectively destroyed.

The 60s Scoop

The 60s scoop had its roots in residential schools. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) 2015 reported “from the 1940s ... residential schools ... served as orphanages and child-welfare facilities” (p. 104). By 1967, in Saskatchewan, 60% of admissions were for child welfare problems and 40% educational needs (Caldwell, 1967, p. 64). Indian Affairs policy was to arbitrarily remove children in need from their home which “relieved the parent of responsibility” (p. 61).

The TRC 2015 emphasized the child-welfare system is the residential school system of our day. Child apprehension continues because of the residential school experience and prejudice toward Aboriginal parents; that is “Aboriginal poverty [is viewed as] neglect” (p. 105).

Long Term Effects of Colonialism

False Assumptions

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) (1996) found historical false assumptions have continued to influence Canadians. Although not grounded in treaty principles, the Indian Act treats FNs as “inherently inferior and incapable of governing themselves; and that treaties are mere “bureaucratic memorandum of understanding” (p. 229). If Canadians accept that context, then “ward-ship is appropriate ... [and government] actions [are] ... for [FNs] benefit” (p. 229). FN consent was irrelevant; programs and progress were “defined by non-Aboriginal values alone ... [with success] ... measured by being civilized and assimilated” (p. 229). Today the standard for FN mainstream acceptance is portrayed as acquiring middle-class values and lifestyles funded by “resource development and resource exploitations” (pp. 229 –230). In a sense, recognizing Aboriginal and Treaty rights threatens those two critical economic interests. New false assumptions have replaced the old. Today, FNs are an “interest group” akin to labour not “entitled to be treated as nations” (p. 232). Change is set against oppressive policy processes entrenched by a “200-year history of [FN] losses” (p. 234).
Abuses of Power

FNs political representation is seen as illegitimate, rather than legitimately emerging out of a treaty relationship. FN geographical population dispersal and complex bureaucracies limit political influence and allow government to “deflect blame and postpone action” (RCAP, 1996, p. 230). Such abuse would not be tolerated in a western democratic nation (p. 230). The Indian Act is a “battering ram . . . [that] invade[s] . . . unimpeded . . . unconscionable; [and] . . . bureaucrat discretion is punitive . . . without . . . public scrutiny” (p. 231). Although the combined effects are “harder . . . to unravel and change [however], . . . FNs fear change” (p. 231).

The impact of the residential schools continues to be experienced by the disrupted families and Aboriginal children who continue to be placed in care. Today’s educational system must bear responsibility for arguable gaps in current educational success. Aboriginal health status remains far below national standards because FN children’s health “was undermined by inadequate diets, poor sanitation, overcrowded conditions, and a failure to address the tuberculosis crisis” (TRC, 2015, p. 101). And finally, “punitive discipline . . . physical and sexual abuse . . . have links . . . to over-incarceration and over-victimization” (p. 101).

Conclusion

Our hope lies in future generations. The TRC (2015) reported “Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth . . . are taking up the challenge of reconciliation” (p. 116). They stated “Canadians . . . spoke . . . about the importance of reaching out to . . . create hope” (p. 117). They advocated to accept “truth . . . of lived experiences as told . . . by Survivors” (p. 117). The Commission defined “reconciliation’ as an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships” (p. 121). The TRC (2015) recommended the following three of 10 guiding principles. The first declares that the “framework for reconciliation [is] the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” (p. 125). Next, “Treaty, constitutional, and human rights that must be recognized and respected”; and finally, close the gaps in social, health, and economic outcomes (p. 125). Those are the starting points.
References


Gender

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Introduction

Those who suggest gender issues are no longer a concern need only walk through a children’s clothing, sports or toy store to recognize that is simply not the case. Regardless of sex, babies are born into a world that socializes males and female differently, and disparately structures their future experiences and opportunities. The result is reflected in inequalities in rights, responsibilities, and respect, the essential competencies of Citizenship Education advocated by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission (2016). In fact, gender inequality and/or discrimination often goes unnoticed, unacknowledged, or unrefuted because it is highly normative within our society. Individuals tend not to want to consider that their gender, moreso than their individual ability, may have shaped their experiences, advancement, or lack thereof. This was made evident in the dumbfounded reaction of audiences to Justin Trudeau’s appointment of an equal representation of women and men to the cabinet in November, 2015. His rationale that the appointment was made “because it’s 2015” (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [CBC], 2015), jarred people with the reality that sex and gender remain significant factors in access to power and representation within Canada’s political milieu. If Canadian democracy is premised on participatory democracy, then all citizens, regardless of gender, need equal access to, and benefit from, all that Canadian society has to offer. It is therefore incumbent upon Saskatchewan schools to provide children with curricula sensitive to how gender structures the experiences of individuals within Canada and beyond.

Terminology

Sex and gender terminology are not easily defined and are highly contested. Sex is based on the biological characteristics of reproduction attributed to males and females, with an acknowledgement that intersexed individuals may hold combinations of these features (American Psychological Association [APA], 2011). The term gender refers to the social constructions of attitudes, behaviors, and attributes associated with biological sex (APA, 2011; Taylor et al., 2015; United Nations, 2014).
Gender identity refers to an individual’s sense of self and experience with gender, which may or may not conform with one’s biological sex. The way one expresses gender identity and communicates that within a social context is known as gender expression (Taylor et al., 2015). Sexual orientation refers to the sex of the person to whom one is sexually attracted (United Nations, 2012). A growing number of categories of sexual orientation exist (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, questioning, two-spirited, etc.), because sexual orientation is very difficult to definitively categorize; it is better understood as being on a fluid continuum of experience (APA, 2011; Taylor, 2015).

Gender Equality and Gender Equity

Gender, as a construct changes over time, is “affected by political, economic, cultural, social, religious, ideological and environmental factors, and can be changed by culture, society and community” (United Nations, 2014, pp. 35-36). Although the social constructions of gender may change, gender equality presumes that all individuals should be free to develop their individual abilities and pursue their ambitions without being impacted by stereotypes and normative gender role expectations (United Nations, 2010; 2014). Gender equity refers to fair treatment based on need which may be equal treatment, but may also be differentiated treatment that is presumed equivalent (United Nations, 2010, 2014). This is exemplified in the creation of “safe spaces” for those experiencing gender discrimination including, for example, women’s shelters and gay-straight alliance groups (Wallin, 2015).

Gender as a Human Rights Issue

Because constructions of gender shift across time and space, a thorough understanding of gender as a human rights issue should examine how gender is experienced in local, national and international contexts. Gender studies tend to focus on how gender is constructed and experienced in private, public, and political life; sexual and reproductive health and rights; the right to an adequate standard of living; violence against women; migration; conflict and crisis; and access to justice (United Nations, 2014). In all cases, discussion of how education and the family are positioned within each topic is imperative. The United Nations (2014) noted the following regarding gender analysis:

gender analysis helps us understand how women and men experience human rights violations differently as well as the influence of differences such as age, class, religion, culture and location. It highlights and explores hierarchical and unequal relations and roles between and among males and females, the unequal value given to women’s work, and women’s unequal access to power and decision-making as well as property and resources…the impact of different laws, policies and programmes on groups of men and women. (pp. 35-36)

For example, the Canadian government introduced federal legislation Bill C-16 on May 17, 2016, which would enshrine “gender identity” and “gender expression” as
human rights protections within the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code (CBC, 2016). These changes would ensure that hate speech law include the two terms and make it illegal to discriminate against members of the LGBTQ community who have faced a history of criminalization, violence, psychiatric labeling, and family rights violations. Gender analysis, therefore, does not exclusively focus on an analysis of women’s issues, but rather, focuses on how particular groups of men and women, and not necessarily all men or all women in all circumstances, experience human rights.

Intersectionality and Discrimination

Gender discrimination is often experienced in conjunction with other forms of discrimination based on identity characteristics such as race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability, coloniality, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, class, health, etc. The result is that the experience of discrimination is exacerbated, putting those who experience it into a “double bind” (United Nations, 2009). Focusing on intersectionality helps those interested in gender issues avoid making generalizations based on binary thinking (i.e. males or females). It leads to more complex understandings of how gendered power dynamics play out in different contexts (i.e. gay males or heterosexual males). As Mohanty (2003) stated, a focus on intersectionality provides for the consideration of “the micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle, as well as the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes” (p. 223).

For example, Canadian literature supports the view that the intersection of race and gender positions visible minority women as the most disadvantaged group in Canada (Ambwani & Duke, 2007; St. Denis, 2007). This point is underscored by the recent national inquiry on the generational disregard of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) in Canada (Government of Canada, 2016). According to this body of research, visible minority women, and Indigenous women in particular, are positioned as deficient and primitive in Canadian society and their plights are attributed to personal failings rather than to the socially constructed scripts, policies and practices that keep them marginalized and that reinforce continued discrimination (Crawford, 2004). As St. Denis (2007) found, “most, if not all Aboriginal people, both men and women, who are living in western societies, are inundated from birth until death with western patriarchy and western forms of misogyny” (p. 44). The effects of intergenerational trauma from residential schools and the Sixties Scoop has had a genocidal effect on First Nations and Métis families, and has caused tremendous upheaval to the social fabric of Indigenous peoples who are living the intersectional realities of race and gender (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

Caution: Essentializing and Dichotomizing

As Wallin (2015) noted, those who study gender issues must be wary of two dangers: (1) the tendency to essentialize the experiences of women and men (e.g., the
creation of a “sisterhood” or a “brotherhood” that presumes erroneously that the experiences of all women or all men regardless of context and social location are similar) and, (2) the tendency to dichotomize the experiences and understandings of men and women (e.g. setting up a “men versus women” analysis that positions men’s issues and ways of being in the world as completely separate and different from that of women’s issues). This not only rejects the possibility of similarities in gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, et cetera, but it also creates an unhelpful antagonistic relationship premised on sex-based characteristics and male superiority. Neither position accurately reflects the complexities found in the experiences of women and men; instead, there exists a need to think about gender in multi-dimensional, intersectional and interdisciplinary ways.

Conclusion

A focus on gender as part of citizenship education in Saskatchewan is important because gender issues and discrimination are hindering the freedom and ability of certain individuals and groups to achieve their full capabilities as human citizens of this world. Although there is a tendency in gender studies to focus on objectifiable statistics and the human experiences of the Other in far-off locations, there is also a great need for students, teachers, school leaders, and curricula designers to reflect upon how their own sense of self and their experiences have been shaped by socially constructed notions of gender. There is the need for all of us to “contemplate how it is that each of us is shaped by, and shapes, the systems in which we are engaged…. In this way our agency is affirmed at the same time that our privileges and oppressions are unearthed and deconstructed” (Wallin, 2015, p. 35). By doing so, students in Saskatchewan will come to understand how gender has shaped human experiences and understandings over time, and as a consequence, students will be better positioned to advocate for, and act upon, a more gender equitable future.
References


Courageous Conversations: Next Steps

Thank you for taking the time to review this publication. The information that follows is provided to support you in the development of your commitments to action or next steps. The work of the Concentus Citizenship Education Foundation is an excellent resource to support you as you initiate courageous conversations about topics that matter.

The Concentus Citizenship Education Foundation was established by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission in 2012. This organization is committed to the 3 Rs (rights, responsibilities, and respect) of Canadian citizenship and the five Essential Citizenship Competencies (ECCs) that bind together Saskatchewan’s approach to citizenship education. The Essential Citizenship Competencies are outlined in the chart below:

### Essential Citizenship Competencies

- **Enlightened**: Historical events have an impact on today’s decisions, and today’s understandings impact our perception and interpretation of historical and current events.
- **Empowered**: Governance and public decision-making reflect rights and responsibilities and promote societal well-being amidst different conceptions of the public good.
- **Empathetic**: Diversity is a strength and should be understood, respected, and affirmed.
- **Ethical**: Canadian citizenship is lived, relational, and experiential, and requires understanding of Aboriginal, treaty, and human rights.
- **Engaged**: Each individual has a place in, and a responsibility to contribute to, an ethical civil society; likewise, government has a reciprocal responsibility to each member of society.

The Concentus Citizenship Education Foundation has collaborated with educators, students, community and government leaders, and many other stakeholders to prepare citizenship education resources that facilitate explicit and intentional learning opportunities for students to develop the skills, knowledge, and dispositions of the five ECCs. In order to nurture participatory citizens able and willing to have courageous conversations about issues that matter, the Concentus Citizenship Education Foundation has prepared multiple resources to assist teachers, students, parents/caregivers, educational partners and community members in the pursuit of this goal. For more information on Concentus’ vision for inclusive Canadian citizenship visit www.concentus.ca