This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in the Journal of Vocational Education and Training on 13 October 2020, available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2020.1833077.

Leveling up: Toward decolonizing apprenticeship learning

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Abstract

With a focus on the Western-Canadian province of Manitoba, this article aims to develop a conceptual and empirical exploration of how apprenticeship learning can be transformed to meet the needs of Indigenous apprentices. Conceptually, the article layers an articulation of ‘decolonizing education’ onto Billett’s (2016) formulation of apprenticeship learning as a form of learning that should explicitly support apprentices’ prior knowledge, and which should recognize the socio-political context within which this learning occurs. Empirically, the article draws on qualitative in-depth interviews with Indigenous carpentry apprentices about their experiences with on-the-job training in order to better understand how Indigenous adult learners negotiate well-documented systemic barriers to education and employment. By contrasting participants’ experiences in industry worksites to their experiences with Indigenous-centric curriculum offered by the Manitoba-based social enterprise BUILD, the article develops a discussion of how market-driven apprenticeship programs limit the potential achievements of Indigenous learners and how a decolonizing approach to apprenticeship learning that prioritizes Indigenous epistemologies may result in higher levels of learner success.

Keywords: Apprenticeships; Apprenticeship learning; Decolonizing education; Indigenous apprentices

Introduction

Globally, decolonizing perspectives on education are gaining traction in educational research within a diversity of educational settings (Battiste 2013; Smith, Tuck, and Yang 2019), including in post-secondary education (Cote-Meek 2014). However, until now there has been scant attention paid to how apprenticeship learning may be transformed in such a way as to improve access and retention of Indigenous apprentices. With a focus on Indigenous carpentry apprentices in the Western-Canadian province of Manitoba, this article examines the challenges and opportunities faced by Indigenous learners navigating a state-supported apprenticeship model of education. Drawing from the narratives of apprentices themselves, the article identifies how an apprenticeship model that does not consider the colonial history and lived realities of Indigenous peoples can further marginalize Indigenous learners, while an apprenticeship learning approach that is sensitive to these may improve learner success.

In 2007, the Canadian government established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) in an effort to develop recommendations for building respectful relationships that support societal healing from the damaging intergenerational impacts of colonization. With a particular focus on the damage inflicted by Canada’s legacy of residential schools, a government-sponsored mandatory Christian educational system intended to assimilate Indigenous children into ‘Canadian’ culture, in 2015 the TRC made numerous proposals for

decolonizing Indigenous education (TRC 2015). These include for example increasing federal funding for Indigenous education and developing culturally appropriate curricula for Indigenous learners. Concurrently, the extant scholarly literature on decolonizing education and adult learning has established that educational methods such as community-based learning, smaller classroom sizes, and an attention to Indigenous spirituality are all contributing factors in the success of Indigenous learning outcomes (MacKinnon 2013; Silver 2013). The question thus arises: what would a decolonizing approach to education mean in the context of vocational education and training (VET) and apprenticeship learning?

As of Canada's 2016 census (the most recent data available), Manitoba had a recorded Indigenous population of 223,310, or 18% of the province's total population, the highest percentage of all Canadian provinces, excluding the Northern Territories (Statistics Canada 2016). While VET has been identified as a means of addressing well-documented employment gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals in Canada (Mackinnon 2015) and elsewhere (Cameron, Stuart, and Bell 2017), there remains a dearth of research that examines Indigenous learners' actual experiences of navigating VET both in Canada and globally. In Manitoba, apprentices in the carpentry trade are required to complete 7200 hours or 4 years working in the trade, 4 levels of technical training, and pass an interprovincial exam in order to obtain certification (Apprenticeship Manitoba 2020). Employing a work-first approach to apprenticeship education, Apprenticeship Manitoba requires that employers provide adequate practical work experience to cover the scope of the trade described in the training curriculum. Our data reveal how this approach in its current form may inadvertently discriminate against Indigenous learners, who must learn to navigate a system that does not consider the systemic employment barriers resulting from existing and historic social injustices. In order to achieve higher completion rates for Indigenous apprentices, the apprenticeship program in Manitoba must adapt and evolve to meet the needs of Indigenous workers. In the interests of thinking through the possibility of developing a decolonizing approach to apprenticeship learning, in this article we also examine Indigenous apprentices' experiences of participating in BUILD, a Manitoba-based social enterprise that offers trades training for individuals who face barriers to employment, including Indigenous learners from low-income inner-city neighbourhoods of Manitoba's capital city of Winnipeg.

The article begins with a critical overview of Indigenous apprenticeship education in Manitoba. This is followed by a conceptual section which underscores the need to develop a decolonizing approach to apprenticeship learning that prioritizes the needs of Indigenous learners. We then provide a brief discussion of methods, followed by a section that integrates our data with insights from the conceptual framework of decolonizing VET. The article then concludes with practical recommendations.

Manitoba and the case for effective Indigenous apprenticeship learning

Poverty continues to afflict Indigenous families disproportionately in Manitoba (MacDonald and Wilson 2016). For example, high unemployment and poverty rates among the Indigenous residents of the inner-city neighbourhoods of Winnipeg, Manitoba's capital and largest city, illustrate the continued effects of colonization (Silver 2013). The marginalization of Indigenous peoples is entrenched by a historical legacy of colonial education systems, of which residential schools were central. These compulsory religious schools, which were in operation between the 1870s and the 1990s, were used as political tool to support Canada's colonial project and to assimilate Indigenous peoples into Euro-Canadian culture and society (Brayboy 2005;

MacDonald and Hudson 2012). The effects of this colonial educational history, which the TRC has designated 'cultural genocide' (TRC 2015), continue to resonate in Indigenous communities to this day, and is manifested as low educational attainment, over-representation in the criminal justice system, poverty, and widespread unemployment (MacKinnon 2015).

These serious social problems provide the justification to produce a more holistic approach to education for social change, and VET, including apprenticeship education, may potentially play a role in this transformation (Mirchandani and Brugha 2017; Taylor 2012). Apprenticeship training has been shown to be a cost-effective post-secondary option for Manitobans whereby apprentices earn wages while being trained on-the-job. Under the current provincial system, the province pays tuition fees for technical (in-school) training, and eligible apprentices can collect federal employment insurance while in training. This is an attractive career opportunity for many, as interprovincial Red Seal certified journeypersons have increased labour mobility, more employment opportunities, and higher wages than uncertified workers (Frank and Jovic 2015). While the international VET literature demonstrates that VET is not immune from the effects of systemic racism (Chadderton and Wischmann 2014; Onsando and Billett 2017; Strathdee and Cooper 2017; Tran and Vu 2016), in their annual report of 2015-2016, Manitoba's Apprenticeship and Certification Board, the provincial body responsible for promoting apprenticeship education and supporting employer participation in apprenticeship training, reaffirmed its commitment to the ongoing recruitment of, and successful completion of Indigenous apprentices (Apprenticeship and Certification Board 2016). An approach to VET that considers the unique needs of Indigenous learners would provide an important opportunity for raising the educational and employment potential of Canada's growing Indigenous population.

It is important to note that Apprenticeship Manitoba, the provincial organization that provides access to apprenticeship training in Manitoba, has developed community-based technical training offered through accredited educational institutions targeted toward Indigenous learners. While this initiative has made training more accessible, it has not completely overcome the barriers to apprenticeship completion and certification encountered by Indigenous apprentices either in school or on-the job. This is at least partly due to the fact that VET is for the most part dominated by programming designed along neoliberal lines in which training aimed at fashioning 'entrepreneurial' subjects benefits employers but does little to empower workers to challenge inequities and improve their overall socio-economic situation (Brookfield and Holst 2011; Pasura 2015). Government education policies, such as state-supported apprenticeship programs, typically look to the market as the primary determinant for adult education and training (Cunningham 2000; Elfert and Rubenson, 2013) with an emphasis on building human capital to meet the needs of industry (Holst 2009; Tur Porres, Wildemeersch, and Simons 2014). It is our position that this approach, rather than ameliorating the circumstances of learners from marginalized communities, instead exacerbates exclusions based on race, gender and socio-economic status (Mirchandani and Brugha 2017).

As part of their annual strategic plan for 2012-2013 Manitoba's Apprenticeship and Certification Board established the Target Groups Advisory Committee (TGAC), whose responsibility was to "inform, advise and support the Board's efforts to increase the participation and completion" of targeted groups (including Indigenous peoples) in the province's apprenticeship training and certification system (TGAC 2014, 3). Barriers such as low income, inadequate transportation, and issues with co-workers faced by Indigenous apprentices led the TGAC to conclude that apprenticeship programming needs to better support Indigenous apprentices, 43.2% of whom reported difficulty progressing through their program versus 33.9%

of non-Indigenous apprentices (Frank and Jovic 2015). The TGAC further found that a lack of journeyperson trainers in remote regions of Manitoba restricts Indigenous participation. In urban areas where there are sufficient journeypersons to maintain regulation ratios, the TGAC identified how employee recruitment is still left to employers who have little incentive to train and develop Indigenous employees who may have multiple barriers to employment. The TGAC (2014) has consequently identified a need to broaden and strengthen relationships, especially with employers, in order to increase the number of Indigenous apprentices throughout the province. Aside from some limited community-delivered training, however, few changes in the standard apprenticeship training model have occurred in spite of the identified barriers for Indigenous learners.

Stakeholders who presented to the TGAC cited the legacy of residential schools, poverty, and low educational attainment as barriers to Indigenous apprentice success (Apprenticeship and Certification Board 2016, 10). Indeed, Canada's residential school legacy is a stark reminder of the role that education has played in contributing to colonial violence, and how formal education has been employed as a tactic "to undermine Aboriginal people's self-determination, ways of life and ways of knowing" (Cote-Meek 2014, 163). While the TGAC report notes the harmful legacy of residential schools as an ongoing barrier to Indigenous participation more generally, the report does not adequately speak to how neoliberal work-first training policies may undermine, rather than ameliorate, current barriers to employment and education faced by Indigenous peoples. In this article, the authors aim to address this gap.

Decolonizing apprenticeship learning

Decolonizing education is not just about undoing or changing something that has been done in the past; it is active resistance to contemporary, ongoing, colonization in the contexts of formal and informal learning (Battiste 2013; Atleo 2013; Iseke-Barnes 2008). For Indigenous learners this means addressing current struggles that are rooted in forms of systemic oppression (Atleo 2013; Silver 2013). What would this mean for decolonizing apprenticeships? While this topic has not been examined in depth within the VET literature (Cameron et al. 2017), there is some companionable scholarship that could assist in thinking about decolonizing education in relation to apprenticeships. Beginning with some thoughts on the specific dynamics of learning in this context is informative. An analysis of apprenticeship ethnographies such as those undertaken by Coy (1989) and more recently by Lave (2019) would suggest that apprenticeship is not just a simple educational arrangement whereby craft skills are acquired through direct knowledge transmission from master to apprentice. Rather, in her most recent work, learning theorist Jean Lave (2019) makes a compelling case that apprenticeship learning is a complex practice that is embedded in socio-historical, political and institutional relations. Apprenticeship in Canada, and indeed in other comparable settler-colonial societies, cannot therefore be decoupled from the legacy of colonial relations within which it is embedded.

Thinking through how this view of apprenticeship could inform a decolonized approach to apprenticeship learning, Billett's (2016) distinction between apprenticeship as a mode of education and apprenticeship as a form of learning may be useful as a conceptual bridge. Billett builds the argument that apprenticeship should be approached as a mode of learning, and not simply as a model of education. The latter, according to Billett (2016, 617), positions learners variously as "low-academic achievers" or "labour market entrants", and that this positioning is enacted through "institutional arrangements, societal sentiments and decision making… shaped by powerful interests". This approach, he argues, presents a barrier to supporting apprentices'

learning in so far as it ignores learners' prior individual and collective experiences of formal education and informal learning, not to mention the socio-political context in which these have occurred. This is consistent with research from Canada that examines how Indigenous high school students from urban areas are often labeled 'at-risk', and thereby placed in non-academic programs in an effort to curb what are perceived as disruptive behaviour problems, but which ignore systemic issues, such as poverty and racism (Wishart, Taylor, and Shultz 2006; Wotherspoon and Schissel 2001). In the words of Cote-Meek (2014, 140), indigenous learners enter formal education sites "racially marked as at risk, a marker that not only inscribes a victim identity but also constructs them as inferior and unintelligent". By contrast, approaching apprenticeship from the perspective of *learning* rather than of *education*, prioritizes what Billett refers to as 'personal epistemologies' – ways of knowing that are central to engaging learners in learning. As a more learner-centred pedagogy, apprenticeship learning as described by Billett prioritizes apprentices' embodied knowledge, sense of self, agency and intentionality. This description of apprenticeship learning is reminiscent of what black feminist cultural theorist bell hooks (1994) refers to as 'engaged pedagogy', a holistic teaching methodology that, in the context of apprenticeship, could potentially decentralise market-based characterizations of apprentices as merely practitioners-in-waiting. Thinking of apprenticeship as a socially and historically embedded practice that should prioritize holistic and learner-centred pedagogies offers a pedagogical foundation from which we may conceptualize the centrality of Indigenous epistemologies in apprenticeship learning (Battiste and Henderson 2009; Carr and Thésée 2012).

In Canada, there is a wide disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous education and employment attainment. In light of this fissured landscape of opportunity, the TRC (2015) has lobbied the federal government to develop a joint strategy with Indigenous communities to eliminate these equity gaps. In the past 5 years, the TRC report has sparked an increased interest in exploring what 'indigenizing' curricula may mean in various educational contexts, including most notably in post-secondary education (Brulé and Koleszar-Green 2019; Louie, Poitras-Pratt, Hanson, and Ottmann 2017; Ragoonaden and Mueller 2017; Root, Augustine, Snow, and Doucette 2019). While some recent scholarship has examined the role of vocational education in the school-to-work transitions of Indigenous learners (Taylor 2012), the field has been comparatively slow to incorporate insights from decolonizing education. MacKinnon (2013), whose research focuses on Indigenous adult learners in Canada, makes an important observation as to the need to address the how the legacies of colonialism affect learners' everyday lives. She discusses how educational supports for Indigenous learners, who "typically have low socio-economic status, minimal access to resources and supports and responsibilities beyond those of the mainstream student" (MacKinnon 2013, 49), must consider these needs and realities. If apprenticeship education is to be an affective model for addressing the continued effects of colonization in settler-colonial states such as Canada, then we must develop an apprenticeship pedagogy that understands and acknowledges how Indigenous learners carry the burdens of colonial violence.

Methods

This article presents the findings of a qualitative research study which took place in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 2018. In an effort to understand how Indigenous learners interpret their own experiences of apprenticeship education, interviews were designed in such a way as to prioritize participant voice, and thus to approach participants as "situated knowers" (Collins 2009), as opposed to mere research subjects. This involved developing a research design that encouraged

participants to openly and critically reflect on their own learning (Kreber 2012). A depth interviewing approach was therefore chosen for this project (Jones 1985). Jones (1985, 46) describes this approach thus:

> in order to understand other persons' construction of reality, we would do well to ask them… and to ask them in such a way that they can tell us in their terms… and in a depth which addresses the rich context that is the substance of the meanings.

In choosing depth over breadth, Beaudry, the project lead, decided to interview a small sample of 5 Indigenous carpentry apprentices. During the interviews participants were invited to share their first-hand experiences of navigating Manitoba's apprenticeship program, with a view to better understanding the challenges Indigenous learners face as well as to cultivating recommendations for improvement.

Beaudry is currently employed by the Province of Manitoba as an Apprenticeship Training Coordinator. Previously, they worked as a journeyperson carpenter at a Winnipeg-based social enterprise named BUILD, a non-profit training program designed for people who face barriers to employment, including Indigenous community members. Research recruitment was conducted in collaboration with BUILD, and in the end all 5 of the apprentices interviewed were former participants Beaudry had met and worked with in his previous position. This familiarity provided a base level of trust between interviewer and interviewee, which enabled the telling of rich stories. Manitoba's apprenticeship program operates province-wide, and different challenges exist for rural, northern, and urban apprentices. In order to better illustrate these varying challenges, Beaudry interviewed three apprentices who had come to Winnipeg from different rural communities, one from Winnipeg, and another who was training in Manitoba but who originally came from the northern territory of Nunavut. For their part, focusing mostly on Indigenous and otherwise racialized migrant workers from the Global South working in the Global North (Perry 2012, 2020), Perry has an interest in examining how precarious work and precarious citizenship status intersect with processes of racialization, indigeneity and learning.

In what follows we present the project findings and an analysis of these in terms of developing a decolonizing approach to apprenticeship learning.

From work-first to BUILD: Presentation of findings

Manitoba's Indigenous apprentices face a number of barriers unique to their social location. These include a shortage of employment opportunities in remote communities, a lack of supervising journeypersons, inadequate funding, and well-documented systemic racism. The five participants Beaudry interviewed, Gordon, Ty, Ann, Wayne, and Bruce (all names have been changed in the interests of confidentiality), all began their on-the-job training with BUILD. Following their training at BUILD, they went on to become carpenter apprentices with various companies in Manitoba.

This section proceeds in four subsections. The first two subsections examine participants' experiences with the work-first apprenticeship education approach employed by Apprenticeship Manitoba. The third subsection integrates an analysis of decolonizing apprenticeship learning to participants' experiences of working with the social enterprise BUILD. The final subsection

provides some suggestions on how to ameliorate industry-based apprenticeship programs by providing additional anti-racist training and increasing the responsibilities of journeyperson trainers.

A work-first approach disregards systemic barriers to Indigenous employment

As it exists today, Manitoba's apprenticeship education model incorporates a work-first approach that focuses on getting people working prior to receiving training. Access to the program is in the hands of employers as they are responsible for recruitment and on-the-job instruction. The result is an apprenticeship education model that effectively submits to market-driven priorities, thereby marginalizing learners who may not easily conform to this paradigm (Mirchandani & Brugha 2017). Aspiring Indigenous apprentices can struggle to find employment and apprenticeship opportunities in industry, as employers are more likely to hire and retain workers perceived to be less encumbered by personal and social challenges (Perry et al. 2019). Attending to this gap is crucial. Over the course of one year in apprenticeship training in Manitoba, a carpenter apprentice only attends either 8 or 10 weeks of classroom instruction, and the rest of the year is spent in paid on-the-job training. This emphasis on work-first prioritizes the needs of employers and disregards how Indigenous learners' experiences of education and employment may be shaped by the legacy of colonialism (MacKinnon 2015).

Wayne, for example described how his struggle with addiction made it difficult to maintain employment and an apprenticeship after Manitoba's Child and Family Services apprehended his children. In his words:

> *So since then I haven't looked for any kind of full-time work 'cause I don't have the trust in myself to not get wasted one day and not make it in, and I thought, well, it's what I'm going to do. So, I've been looking for help with that, and it's very difficult to find legitimate, capable, appropriate help with that kind of addiction issue.*

Similarly, Gordon described how he managed to overcome his addiction, and how this affected his career trajectory:

> *It was all about my addiction. It controlled me: it told me when to eat, when to sleep, when to go to school, when to go to work – it told me all those things, and now I'm free from all that. I busted that cycle, and here I am today ready to go. I would do much better today than I did back then. Actually, I know I would.*

On-the-job training may be essential to developing vocational skills (Coy 1989). However, in order to meet the employment requirement of Manitoba's Apprenticeship Program, Wayne and Bruce had to each find their own ways to overcome well-documented employment barriers related to inter-generational trauma, such as addictions (Brave Heart 2003). Wayne's and Bruce's experiences of navigating a market-based approach to apprenticeship education illustrate how in the Canadian context, such an approach is embedded in colonial relations (Lave 2019). By not seriously addressing the barriers to employment faced by members of Indigenous communities, a work-first approach to Manitoba's apprenticeship education primarily benefits the interests of industry and positions individual Indigenous learners as underachievers and incompetent. Rather, Indigenous apprentices would benefit from a learner-centred approach to

apprenticeship learning that would prioritize embodied knowledge, Indigenous ways of knowing, and learner self-determination (Battiste and Henderson, 2009; Billet 2016).

Manitoba's TGAC acknowledged in 2014 that addictions and mental health issues pose barriers to Indigenous apprentices, and made this recommendation in their report: "the provision of other support services such as community or cultural organizations, psychological, mental health or other addiction services can help Aboriginal apprentices succeed in their apprenticeship programs" (TGAC 2014, p. 10). However, there has been no sustained plan by Apprenticeship Manitoba or its current ministry, Education and Training, to implement or integrate any of these proposed resources.

Colonial pedagogies infiltrate an employer-driven approach to apprenticeship education

Indigenous apprentices' experiences of on-the-job harassment are another common-place experience of Manitoba's apprenticeship program, highlighting the colonial pedagogies embedded therein. Participants largely reported a normalized culture of on-the-job abuse. Gordon for example, described his first experience as an apprentice in the construction industry thus:

> *Well, to be honest, [it was] very verbally abusive I would say. Everywhere I went there was abuse – lots of verbal language going on, like very direct, like 'you fuck, you do this'.*

For Indigenous apprentices this abusive environment was intensified by systemic racism. Wayne illustrates this with the following scenario:

> *… sometimes it's like there's a situation sometimes where like somebody will view you as a native person and associate the negative stigmas with that upon you, right? And native people, like I noticed we're sensitive to that. It's like, just like 'oh it's payday, are you coming in tomorrow?' It's like, 'are you going to go out drinking and come in hungover?' But if somebody is native and they're really sensitive to this kind of thing they'll associate it with 'what are you calling me, a drunk native?'*

While these stories are consistent with current research on harassment in precarious employment more generally (Beaudry 2019), the apprenticeship work-site is not just a place of work, but is also a site of formal education. As such, these experiences are illustrative of how of Indigenous learners are othered in the formal classroom, are racially marked, and are made to feel inferior and less intelligent in relation to their co-learners (Cote-Meek 2014). To contrast, drawing from hooks (1994), education should be thought of as the 'practice of freedom'; a way of teaching that emphasizes learner well-being and self-actualization. If respect and care for "the souls of our students" are essential to providing "the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" as hooks (1994, 13) suggests, then pedagogically, the culture of verbal abuse that Gordon describes can erect serious impediments for apprentices' intellectual and spiritual growth. Far from fostering the type of holistic and engaged teaching environment that hooks advocates, participants described Manitoba's apprenticeship work-sites as unwelcoming spaces that diminish Indigenous learners' self-expression.

Unfortunately, participants of this study suffered socio-cultural injury as a result of their participation in Manitoba's apprenticeship program. However, by providing skills and opportunities that can lead to a more prosperous life, apprenticeship learning has great potential

to intervene in the cycle of colonial violence. Our view is that for this potential to be realized apprenticeship learning in settler-colonial contexts must move away from a Eurocentric epistemic standpoint (Grosfoguel 2011) and instead incorporate a relational, intercultural and decolonizing pedagogy (Martin and Pirbhai-Illich 2016). Rather than trying to fit Indigenous apprenticeship learners into a pedagogical model in which they feel othered, a decolonizing approach could provide the space for diverse identities and ways of knowing to interact in dialogue (Martin and Pirbhai-Illich 2016). In what remains, we will examine participants' experiences with BUILD, a Manitoba-based social enterprise that offers an alternative pedagogical model to apprenticeship learning.

Supporting personal epistemologies in Indigenous VET: The case of Manitoba's BUILD

While perhaps only one small step toward decolonizing VET, Manitoba's BUILD program provides an interesting blueprint for how apprenticeship learning can meet the specific needs of Indigenous adult learners in settler-colonial contexts. Most importantly, BUILD offers a vision of VET whereby apprenticeship learning does not take place in social and political vacuum, but on the contrary aims to address those learners' struggles that are rooted in systemic oppression (Atleo 2013; Silver 2013). BUILD's format incorporates an asset-based approach which involves renovating homes in the low-income neighbourhood of Winnipeg's North End and hiring and training local Indigenous people to do the work.

Indigenous apprentices, when given the opportunity and appropriate resources, can thrive in VET despite the well-documented structural barriers. Progressive training programs like BUILD offer trainees an opportunity to learn basic construction skills they can later apply in industry. Also, learning environments modified to meet the needs of Indigenous learners are crucial to learner success. One of BUILD's major limitations, however, is the short length of the training (six months). Trainees are not able to experience the scope of the trade in only 6 months, and neither are they able to take advantage of BUILD's additional supports for the full duration of an apprenticeship. In order to continue in Manitoba's apprenticeship program, participants must seek out apprenticeship opportunities in industry, which, as discussed above, do not offer the same kind of supports or inclusive approach available at BUILD.

Considering the realities of participants' lives, BUILD tries to address the barriers encountered by their trainees, for example by recognizing that government-imposed barriers like criminalization do not predict an individual's capacity to grow and learn. As such, BUILD's recruitment process targets workers who face systemic social and educational barriers, including people with criminal records, as Wayne describes his interview with BUILD staff:

> *I think* [the interviewer] *asked me some strange questions, like "Do you have a criminal record?" And I'm like "Yes" and* [the interviewer] *said like "No, that's a good thing"*.

No prerequisite formal educational level is required in order to access BUILD's six-month training program, greatly increasing the accessibility of apprenticeship learning for Indigenous learners. Neither Gordon nor Bruce completed high school, but both were accepted into an adult education and carpentry program offered through the Center for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD), a Winnipeg-based non-profit organization that provides education and training programs for Indigenous residents of the city. Participation in the CAHRD program enabled them to later secure a training position with BUILD, which Gordon described as "like a second-chance program". Gordon's characterization brings to life MacKinnon's (2013, 49) idea

that community-based adult education programs must meet the needs of learners who have not followed a traditional education and training trajectory, who may have limited access to socio-economic resources, and who may have "responsibilities beyond those of the mainstream student".

While BUILD trainees are introduced to construction and safety concepts, such as how to use a measuring tape and other hand tools, and the safe operation of power tools and machines, BUILD also incorporates learning opportunities and resources that address the broader issue of Indigenous social exclusion. While BUILD's "programming does not formally integrate cultural reclamation and healing" (MacKinnon, 2015, p. 121), their approach does include driver training, cultural activities such as traditional purification rights (sweats and smudges), parenting classes, and other training meant to address personal and social barriers facing Indigenous learners.

Learners at BUILD are therefore supported in ways that are not available through traditional educational paths, and in ways that are not typically required for non-Indigenous apprentices. Workers at BUILD are paid a wage while they train, and the training they receive is not solely related to carpentry, but also aims to address potential gaps in prior learning, such as basic numeracy skills. Wayne, for example, who had a grade 8-level education when he began training with BUILD, followed a non-traditional educational trajectory into apprenticeship training. Wayne was admitted into the apprenticeship program as an 'access program trainee'. This meant that while he was a registered apprentice, he did not have access to apprenticeship technical training until he completed essential skills upgrading. In an agreement with Workplace Education Manitoba, a not-for-profit adult education organization, BUILD had two educators work with participants like Wayne on the development of literacy and essential skills. Wayne described his experience with this skills upgrading opportunity thus:

> *They helped us with the math, they had a math class a couple days a week, and got us prepared to take an essential skills exam, and then those of us who passed that exam I guess were accepted for the apprenticeship program.*

Bruce also attended upgrading classes at BUILD, and found the he was able to apply the math concepts he learned his subsequent formal education:

> *He taught me how to do this math, and this math was the kind of math to prepare me for the math that I would encounter in Red River College. I'm pretty sure I was able to use that math when I went to school at Red River.*

The BUILD program thus advances a holistic approach to apprenticeship learning that incorporates supports beyond the instrumental transmission of craft skills, including basic literacy and numeracy instruction, social supports and traditional ceremonies such as sweats and smudges. This broader approach to apprenticeship learning is in harmony with Lave's (2019) interpretation of apprenticeship as a complex practice embedded in socio-political and institutional relations, in this case those associated with cultural genocide and colonial violence (TRC 2015).

Learning together in an all-Indigenous learning environment was also flagged as an important aspect of the BUILD VET experience. Of the five interview participants, Ann was the sole apprentice who had completed high school prior to accessing any post-secondary program.

After high school, she attended college level courses in Winnipeg's Red River College in a hospitality program but experienced difficulty while in school:

> *I can't speak for everybody but I grew up in a small town in Nunavut, and the education system isn't that great. So I graduated high school and all that, but coming to Winnipeg and going to Red River [College], and they're throwing these words at you, and I'm like 'I don't know what you're talking about, like I've never heard that word in my life.'*

When she began an accounting course in the hospitality program, Ann found it too difficult, and dropped the course. Ann was later offered an opportunity to attend a modified Level 1 carpentry training course, a pilot program orchestrated in tandem with Red River College, Apprenticeship Manitoba, and BUILD.

This course followed the same curriculum as any Level 1 program, but was targeted toward Indigenous learners, was extended over a longer period and included Indigenous cultural programming. It is important to note that some learners who participated in this program felt resentful about being singled out as needing extra support as a result of their marginalized social status. For example, Wayne who attended the same program stated:

> *There was kind of a sense that we needed the help, it was like it kind of chipped away at our dignity a little bit because we needed this extra help, a longer course. It was like, you know, why are we getting this special treatment?*

However, other participants appreciated the fact that they did not feel othered, and that this feeling of fitting in was a crucial aspect contributing to their success as apprentices. Ann for example was enthusiastic about the idea of attending a course with her follow Indigenous learners. She stated:

> *When BUILD mentioned that they were going to do this pilot program I was excited because I knew I was going to school with my co-workers who I know, and who are visibly Indigenous. It was so different 'cause I could talk about anything, and it wouldn't offend anybody when I was going to school with brown people.*

Having Indigenous apprentices learn together away from the gaze of non-Indigenous learners provides a particularly unique opportunity for apprenticeship learning to become a place of antiracist struggle in which VET can be experienced as 'the practice of freedom' as opposed to a site where domination is reinforced (hooks 1994). BUILD demonstrates how an Indigenous-focus approach to apprenticeship training can therefore inform broader policies aimed to address systemic inequities in both education and employment in such a way that can recognize the 'personal epistemologies' of learners themselves, and not just those of industry and capital (Billett 2016). In light of this finding, we propose that settler-colonial governments such as Manitoba's incorporate a social justice-oriented approach to apprenticeship learning for all apprentices, and which prioritizes Indigenous self-determination over the labour market needs of industry.

On the potential role of anti-racist jouneyperson education in industry worksites

An extra-governmental approach to apprenticeship learning such as BUILD can provide an important means for developing apprenticeship curriculum that incorporates Indigenous epistemologies. However, in the meantime, for those Indigenous apprentices who currently go on to work on industry worksites, we propose that developing the role of the certified journeyperson in Indigenous apprenticeship learning could be a crucial area for advancing a decolonizing approach. Though the exigencies of training and teaching apprentices fall primarily on the certified journeyperson, the only requirement of any journeyperson to teach and train apprentices in Manitoba is that they have their trade certification. In keeping with the TRC's recommendations to businesses, we suggest that certified journeypersons receive additional skills-based training in "intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism" (TRC 2015, 10). In addition to having expertise and experiential knowledge of a particular trade, journeyperson training must evolve to incorporate elements that prepare journeypersons to "examine their own subjectivities" (Martin and Pirbhai-Illich 2016, 369) in relation to the colonial violence to which Indigenous learners have been subject through Eurocentric educational systems and curriculum. In an effort to decolonize on-the-job learning, our view is that journeypersons should develop the capacity to reflect on how the legacy of colonialism my affect their positionality in relation to their learners. In addition to anti-racist training, we also suggest increasing the autonomy of journeypersons in the area of apprenticeship selection. Currently in Manitoba, employers are responsible for assigning a journeyperson to train an apprentice. An employer can therefore assign a journeyperson directly to an apprentice without the journeyperson's knowledge or consent. In our view, transferring the control over apprentice selection to a journeyperson educator committed to anti-racist praxis could increase learner success in apprenticeship programs and shift the power dynamic away from an employer-centric model of apprenticeship education toward a more holistic and learner-centered approach. This could in effect bring us one step closer to advancing the type of apprenticeship learning approach, advanced by Billett (2016), that fully considers the identity, self-determination and agency of apprenticeship learners.

Conclusion

Decolonizing perspectives on educational theory and practice are increasingly influential in the realm of educational research. While interest in finding ways to 'indigenize' curriculum in primary, secondary and post-secondary education in settler-colonial contexts is gaining traction, there have been limited conceptualizations of how this may apply to vocational education and training. Given how apprenticeship training has been targeted as an effective educational path toward labour market success for Indigenous learners, this is a conceptual and practice gap that requires attention. In Canada in 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada developed numerous recommendations for developing culturally appropriate curricula for Indigenous learners (TRC 2015). Applying these recommendations to the context of VET is therefore a timely intervention into the educational politics of contemporary settler-colonial states. Manitoba, which is home to the highest Indigenous population of any Canadian province, is an important case study from which to base this analysis. Similar to other settler-colonial jurisdictions, poverty and systemic barriers to decent employment continue to afflict Manitoba's Indigenous population, illustrating the importance for developing culturally appropriate curricula for Indigenous adult learners.

Indigenous apprentices often encounter barriers to certification that non-Indigenous apprentices do not face. In an analysis of Indigenous apprentices' first-hand experiences of

apprenticeship training in Manitoba, this article has explored some of the barriers to training confronting Indigenous apprentices in settler-colonial contexts, and has identified some measures that could be incorporated in an effort to develop a decolonizing approach to apprenticeship learning. Building on extant literature from the field, particularly Stephen Billett's (2016) critical distinction between 'apprenticeship education' and 'apprenticeship learning', our findings suggest that a market-driven approach to apprenticeship training that emphasizes the need to build human capital in order to meet the needs of industry is failing Indigenous apprenticeship learners. Participant experiences reveal how, instead of carving a clear path to a more prosperous life, industry-led work-first apprenticeship training programs such as that supported by the Manitoba government exacerbate systemic social exclusions faced by Indigenous people. Prioritizing the needs of industry over those of Indigenous apprentices can therefore erect barriers to learner success, and thereby undermine the goal of Indigenous self-determination. In contrast, participants' experiences with an apprenticeship training program administered non-governmentally by the Manitoba-based social enterprise BUILD provides some interesting ideas in how a decolonizing approach to VET may take shape. BUILD's holistic approach, which incorporates additional supports, culturally appropriate programming and Indigenous-centric curricula, can offer a blueprint for settler-colonial governments to develop socially-just and equitable apprenticeship training for their Indigenous populations.

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