Imagining and Enacting Métis-Informed Anti-Racist Education: A Local Prairie K–12 Flower Beadwork Framework

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Abstract

This article is based on findings from an anti-racist Métis/Michif partnership between the Gabriel Dumont Institute's Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) and the University of Saskatchewan's College of Education. The study took a local approach through a series of anti-racist knowledge exchanges amongst 16 urban and surrounding-area Prairie Métis teachers and teacher educators. Drawing from Métis teachers' experiences, Métis studies, and critical race theory, the article disrupts Eurocentric conceptions of anti-racist education by centring Métis experiential knowledge. Through

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qualitative and Métis methods, data was collected from five workshops that revealed an initial Métis-informed anti-racist education (MIARE) K–12 flower beadwork framework. The framework demonstrates how specific experiences of K–12 racialization are transformed into anti-racism through Métis teachers' intergenerational cultural knowledge protected by core Métis cultural values.
Keywords: Métis anti-racism, Canadian schools, Métis studies, critical race theory

Résumé

Cet article s'appuie sur les conclusions d'une étude métisse/michif portant sur l'antiracisme, menée en partenariat entre le programme SUNTEP (Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program) de l'Institut Gabriel-Dumont et le Collège des sciences de l'éducation de l'Université de la Saskatchewan. L'étude adopte une approche locale et s'appuie sur une série d'échanges de connaissances sur l'antiracisme avec 16 personnes métisses des Prairies, enseignantes ou formatrices, établies en milieux urbains ou environnants. En se basant sur les expériences vécues des enseignantes et enseignants métis, les études critiques sur les Métis et la théorie critique de la race, l'article remet en question les conceptions eurocentriques de l'éducation antiraciste en mettant l'accent sur les savoirs expérientiels des Métis. Grâce à des méthodes qualitatives et métisses, des données ont été recueillies lors de cinq ateliers — de perlage à motifs floraux — qui ont permis d'établir un cadre initial d'éducation antiraciste fondé sur les connaissances métisses (MIARE) pour les élèves de la maternelle à la 12e année. Ce cadre montre comment des expériences spécifiques de racialisation, de la maternelle à la 12e année, sont transformées en antiracisme à travers les connaissances culturelles intergénérationnelles des enseignantes et enseignants métis, soutenues par les valeurs fondamentales des Métis.
Mots-clés : Métis et antiracisme, écoles du Canada, études critiques sur les Métis, théorie critique de la race

Introduction

This article is based on findings from a qualitative local K–12 Métis informed anti-racist education (MIARE) study. As a group of five Métis women, the research team recognized the pervasive lack of Métis knowledge and experiences within Canadian anti-racist education. Although the Métis nation is one of three Indigenous founding peoples of Canada, Métis exclusion and under/misrepresentation remains systemic within academia (Forsythe, 2024). To counter Métis exclusion within anti-racist K–12 and teacher education, this study took a local approach through knowledge exchanges amongst 16 urban and surrounding-area Prairie Métis teachers and teacher educators. The article seeks to disrupt Eurocentric conceptions of anti-racist education through a flower beadwork, Métis-informed, anti-racist education (MIARE) K–12 framework that can enrich Canadian education systems. The MIARE framework imagined and presented highlights how Métis cultural values and common racialized experiences shape how the Métis teachers who participated in the study strategically respond to intersectional racism.

As teachers and teacher educators, the participants of this study stressed throughout the project that the intention of MIARE is not to reject the education system, but to support all educators with enacting racial justice and reconciliation. Indeed, in spite of systemic K–12 Métis exclusion, the project participants are proud teachers who love learning with children and youth.

Yvonne Poitras Pratt (2021), a Métis scholar, explained the absence of Métis education across disciplines "deliberately erases, subsumes, or demonises the Métis and instead presents as acts of symbolic violence inflicted through the guise of education" (p. 384). Other Métis scholars have documented how Métis-specific theorizing has been ignored within academia through a myopic focus on 1885 narratives and pan-Indigenous analyses (e.g., Gaudry, 2018; Hogue, 2020). Canadian researchers have provided valuable examinations of Indigenous students' experiences with racism in higher and K–12 education, as well as teacher candidates' and, to a lesser extent, practising teachers' experiences (e.g., Bailey, 2015; Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani, 2019; Marom, 2019; St. Denis, 2010; Stelmach et al., 2017; Zinga & Gordon, 2016). Canadian teacher education researchers, however, have rarely examined distinct Métis racialized experiences or framed research within Métis anti-racist theorizing. Grounded in historical organized struggles and political movements, Métis anti-racist epistemologies benefit everyone and assisted the par-

ticipants of this study—researchers and volunteers—with decolonizing understandings of anti-racist K–12 education and standard approaches to Métis education. The act of decolonization, to the participants, meant deracializing mindsets that have been inundated with false colonial logics of racial purity, cultural essentialism, and White intellectual and moral superiority, as discussed below.

Métis Racialization: A Brief Historical Context

As Michel Hogue (2020) argued, Métis exclusion from academia is situated within a particular ideological and historical context. Originating in pre-Confederation Canada, Métis communities were matriarchal and defied artificial—but heavily regulated—racial boundaries, upon which Western colonial power was dependent. Brenda Macdougall (2016) explained:

> Métisness arose out of a unique socio-cultural context centered on specific economic activities associated with the fur trade, which then led them to develop a political expression of distinctiveness. Métis people saw themselves—and were regarded by others—as different from their paternal and maternal relatives because they enacted their sense of self through a cultural worldview centered on kinship connections spread throughout the historic homeland. (p. 4)

The Métis nation originated in the 1800s northwest Prairies, during a time of normalized overt White supremacy advanced by scientific racism. Scientific racism was upheld by 19th-century institutionalized pseudoscience that constructed false notions of innate White superiority. Leading to social Darwinist race policies, scientific racism was, and continues to be, dependent on misogyny, class and religious persecution, ecological destruction, illogical beliefs in "racial purity" and biological cultural traits or essentialism, and the demonization of miscegenation (Smedley, 1999). Scientific racism was foundational to colonial ideology and the rationalization of White Western European global colonial invasion and genocide.

Discredited by scientists after World War II, all modern expressions of racism—from White supremacist movements to unconscious racism—are directly informed by the era of race pseudoscience. An outcome of scientific racism, the purpose of racialization—

a process where authorities assign populations inferior or superior racial statuses based on ancestry, dialect, and physical appearance—is to preserve White dominance (Burton et al., 2010). Within Western European colonizing nations, localized and fluctuating racialization processes reflect "an ideological process, an historically specific one" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 64). Central to race science were warnings of the inevitable degradation of humanity through miscegenation or racial mixture, an ideology entrenched in Canadian institutions and public opinion during the emergence of Métis communities (Andersen, 2008, 2014; Gillies, 2022). For example, racialized colonial logics authorized anti-Métis laws and policies including the scrip system, road allowances, the Reign of Terror, and exclusion from provincial schools (Adese, 2011; Chartrand, 2021; Barkwell, n.d; Teillet, 2008), thus safeguarding White settler intergenerational wealth. The deficiency of Métis experiences and knowledge within contemporary anti-racist education can therefore be understood as an outcome of the continuation of mixed-race contamination discourse needed to stabilize clear racialized colonial economic and political divisions.

Discussed within Métis studies, Métis people complicate racist patriarchal settler-colonial logics and have consequently been demonized through derogatory racialized discourse and slurs such as half-breeds, hybrids, and *one-and-a-half men* (half-White, half-Indian, half-devil) (Hughes, 2016; Monchalin et al., 2019; Stevenson, 2024b). Today, many Indigenous people are of mixed-race ancestry or have one parent who is not Indigenous, but only Métis continue to be racialized systemically as mixed (Andersen, 2014; Gaudry, 2018; Logan, 2015). Perpetuated through government designations that "distort and may have little to do with the peoples' understandings or perceptions of themselves" (Sawchuck, 2001, p.73), Métis racialization is fundamental to ongoing colonialism and illiberalism within Canada. While scholars have argued obtaining Métis citizenship is central to countering fraudulent identity claims (Gabel et al., 2024), Métis citizenship cannot prevent or mitigate racialization, racial violence, or White dominance.

Resistance to racial violence—referred to in the present as anti-racism—was integral to Métis culture, as Métis peoples' existence depended upon rejecting the vilification of "mixed-race" families. To resist Métis racialization, Canadian anti-racist educators can learn from the anti-colonial and anti-racist theories and strategizing of Métis people. For example, the location of this study has a rich history of Métis activism (Troupe, 2021) and Prairie Métis leaders collaborated nationally and internationally through multiple means to resist systemic racism and patriarchal colonial oppression (Bird-Wilson &

Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research, 2011; Cooley, 2019; Racette, 2018). Prairie Métis scholar activists such as Louis Riel, James Brady, Malcolm Norris, Maria Campbell, Howard Adams, Emma Larocque, and Verna St. Denis have theorized anti-essentialist anti-racism, interweaving Indigenous and Western epistemologies. Métis people also experience racism in contradictory ways. Generations of Métis families have been, and are, physically oppressed, while many others continue to deny their identity to escape persecution, benefiting from violent colonialism and the illegal confiscation of First Nations land. Yet, it is the experiential racialized diversity of Métis people that has shaped unique epistemological anti-racist understandings.

Methodology

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the research was guided by Métis studies and critical race theory (CRT). Métis studies consists of interdisciplinary analyses of Métis identities, experiences, and rights in relation to intersectional colonial power and, like CRT, is anti-essentialist. Critical race theory was also selected to guide the research because it explicitly seeks to achieve racial justice through robust analyses of racism (Parker, 1998) and "is determined by an ontological position best outlined by its commonly held tenets" (Hylton, 2012, p. 24). Several CRT tenets align with primary themes identified within Métis studies : valuing experiential knowledge, cross-racial coalitions, historical contextualization of current injustices, interdisciplinary analyses, critiques of liberalism, rejection of White supremacy, and the use of counterstories. A CRT tenet not always reflected within Métis studies is the ontological acceptance that racism is endemic. While Métis studies provides complex examinations of racism, the field generally does not consider Whiteness within Métis communities. Thus, this article attempts to learn from Métis studies in ways that align with CRT as a means to imagine and enact MIARE.

Similarities between Métis studies and CRT, however, also include a commitment to improving democratic institutions and defending Indigenous sovereignty, both of which require multiple divergent processes of decolonization. Louis Riel, for example, embodied what CRT scholars call—drawing from W. E. B. Du Bois—double consciousness, or the ability to see Métis people as fully human and how Métis are racialized as inferior. As an early-1900s US Black scholar, Du Bois' (1903/2009) conceptua-

lized double consciousness as a complex ontology consisting of recognizing oneself as fully human and how one is racialized as inferior simultaneously. To Du Bois, reconciling one's racialized double consciousness meant neither rejecting the United States entirely nor claiming only African identities. Similarly, more than 30 years prior to Du Bois, Riel theorized and fought for Indigenous sovereignty and Canadian confederation through a double-consciousness lens. In other words, Riel believed Métis people to be Canadians and a distinct Indigenous People with rights to nationhood (Hamon, 2021). This ontological standpoint of early Métis intellectuals such as Louis Riel undergirds Métis studies literature (Teillet, 2019) and the research team's objectives.

Methods

To begin, the principal investigator (PI), Dr. Carmen Gillies, consulted with and invited Dr. Verna St. Denis (professor emeritus), Sheila Pocha (SUNTEP program head), and Jennifer Altenberg (school principal) to collaborate with the project. Each member was approached because of prior working relationships and their in-depth knowledge and community contributions to Métis/Michif and anti-racist education. Each member had also been taught anti-racist graduate courses and mentored by Dr. St. Denis. After accepting the invitation, the research team identified possible participants, finalized the study's design, communicated with the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan about the research, and acquired ethical approval from the University of Saskatchewan. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Nine women and two men who have teaching experience with local schools, are respected and active anti-racist teachers, and are accepted members of Métis communities volunteered. A Métis graduate student, Nicole Mercereau, was hired as the project's research assistant and was essential to the project's success. Invitation and consent forms were sent to each participant prior to the workshops and reviewed in person before each workshop began to acquire verbal consent. Five half-day workshops took place from fall of 2023 and into spring of 2024. The workshops were relational and valued visiting as a learning method, and thus meals and childcare were included within non-judgmental, anti-racist knowledge exchanges where questions and debate were encouraged. To ensure accountability to Métis people, the research sought to benefit Métis communities, and the findings were shared with participants for feedback and to ensure the themes discussed at the workshops were represented accurately.

Data obtained from the workshops included the research teams' reflective notes and 15 hours of transcribed workshop recordings. The Métis method of visiting—sharing stories that embraced empathy and laughter—was utilized to analyze the data in reflexive ways that valued subjective knowledge (Flaminio et al., 2020; Stevenson, 2024a). After discussing the transcriptions with the research team, the PI used the repetitive methods of open, axial, and selective coding with NVivo software and identified 332 codes (Boeije, 2010), which were collapsed into 30 categories and organized into five themes. Four themes reflected the participants' experiences with racism and a fifth theme represented how participants resist racism. Each theme included 65 to 85 examples. Finally, four Métis cultural values discussed repeatedly within the workshops and analysis meetings were identified to provide guiding ethos needed to uphold MIARE. The themes and cultural values were shared with the research team through a series of data analysis gatherings and, to conclude, with the participants at a project meeting to review the manuscript.

Métis Flower Beadwork Framework

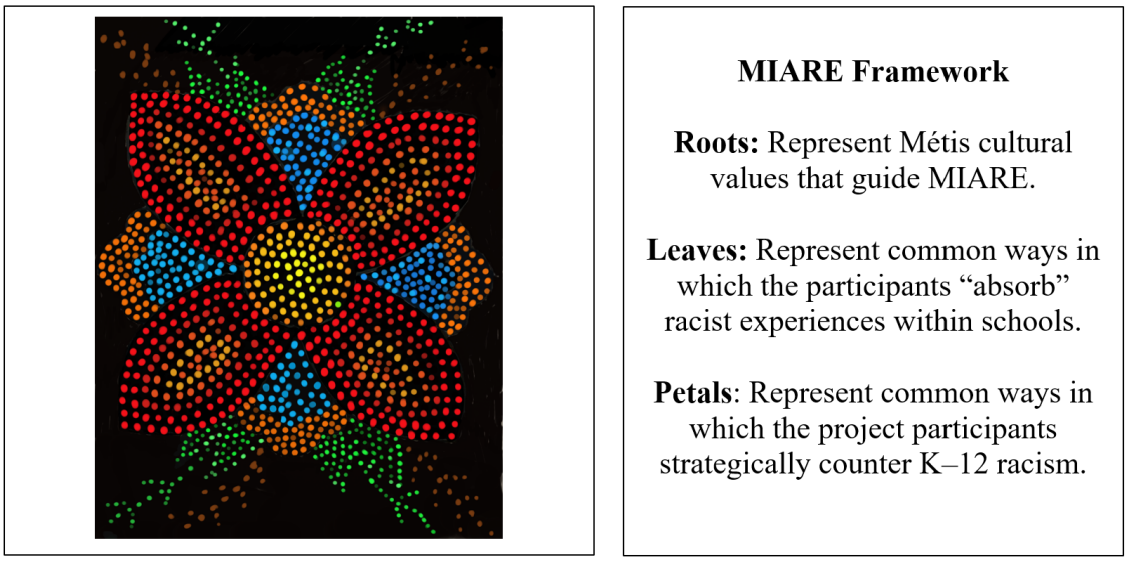
The graduate student research assistant (RA), Nicole, inspired the research team to use a Métis flower beadwork image as an artistic metaphorical representation of the study's findings. As Jeffrey Ansloos et al. (2022) explained: "Beading is deeply rooted in the land and historical relationships between peoples on territories—this includes relationships between Indigenous nations and between Indigenous and European nations where trading occurred for beads" (p. 2). Introduced to Canada as some of the earliest trading items, glass beads provided an artistic component to everyday Métis items. The symbolism of flower beadwork continues to facilitate Métis cultural exchanges and resistance to colonialism through sharing knowledge, strengthening kinship, and artistic expressions (Mackie & Nordstrom, 2024; Scofield et al., 2011).

Flower beadwork is congruent with MIARE because it requires patience, attention to detail, strategic planning, and humility. For example, a purposeful mistake is made when beading to avoid hubris and this mirrors the need for anti-racist self-reflection. Moreover, because Métis women created flower beadwork historically, and because Métis women often lead anti-racist education, it is fitting to use flower beadwork as a metaphorical framework. Men and genderfluid Métis bead today, but "women's artistic production has been a fundamental element in the emergence of the Métis people as a distinct

people" (Stevenson, 2024a, p. 258). Lisa Shepherd (2024) explained, "beadwork [is] healing. It makes us visible" (p. 14). The petals of Métis flower beadwork are vibrant, which can strengthen anti-racist education by drawing people in to learn. The authors were also drawn to flower beadwork because, as Christie Belcourt (2008) explained, flowers "offer a counter-balance to the overwhelming negative forces of destruction, despair, violence, and death to which we are exposed on a daily basis" (p. 148).

Figure 1

MIARE Framework



Note. Inspired by Christie Belcourt's art, the flower beadwork framework depicted above was created by Nicole and represents the findings of this study, discussed in the preceding sections.

MIARE Roots

Métis anti-racist epistemologies—the roots of the flower framework—represent Métis cultural values that can strengthen K–12 anti-racist education. For the purpose of this project, it became apparent through reviewing the transcriptions multiple times that relationality, reciprocity, reverence, and regeneration resonated with the participants'

experiences and cultural knowledge, and are thus represented as roots within the MIARE flower framework. In the image above, the roots are brown and blend into the background because Métis cultural values are not always visible but are essential to the decolonization of anti-racism through MIARE.

Evident within the participants' discussions, relationality is a Métis cultural value that supports racial justice. Métis Elder Maria Campbell (2007) explained:

> At one time, from our place it meant the whole of creation…Wahkotowin meant honoring and respecting those relationships…. We need to think about how…we've been conditioned not to openly criticize our governments, our leadership, the processes of land claims, and rights-based causes and therefore we don't engage in critical analysis of ourselves because we are told that to do this will be seen as putting our people, our communities, down. Can't, Can't, Can't—turn the other cheek, suppress anger, suppress pain until we can't feel anything anymore and our brains stop working—this is the legacy of colonialism. (p. 5)

In this way, relationality is undermined when one turns the other cheek to racism and lateral violence. Without an understanding of interdependency and a desire to think critically and question in respectful, relational, and assertive ways, White patriarchal colonial oppression will endure. Similarly, a second Métis cultural value, reciprocity, guided the participants' knowledge exchanges and represents a second root within the framework. Reciprocity is central to racial justice but unachievable when, as Howard Adams explained, "Whites consider native people as objects and not as persons. This is reflected in phrases such as 'our Indians,' implying possession of objects, such as toys or pets" (Adams, 1975, p. 41). Métis responsibilities to, and expectations of, reciprocity strengthen MIARE through, for example, ensuring those who lead anti-racist education are not exploited, silenced, and taken for granted.

Reverence, a deep respect for those who have challenged colonial oppression historically and in the present, was also identified as a central Métis anti-racist cultural value. Demonstrating anti-racist humility without reverence for the experiences and activism of Métis women, trans, and Two-Spirit people, for instance, can obstruct racial justice (DuPré & Fowler, 2023; Forsythe, 2024). Anti-essentialism, such as rejecting Métis cultural authenticity tests, can also be considered central to the cultural value of reverence. Stan-

dard English literacy, for example, as Métis scholar Emma Larocque (2010) explained, is a "two-edged sword dependent on whether humans use it for oppressive or emancipatory purposes" (p. 21). As such, the project was guided by a deep respect for Métis and all racial justice intellectuals and activists, regardless of their access to specific knowledge systems. Through reverence, the participants suggested MIARE can lead to regeneration, a fourth value rooted within the research. To regenerate means to regrow, to be restored to a stronger state after and while withstanding destructive conditions. Howard Adams argued, "Severely oppressed people who do not understand their oppression prefer domination… [we] must be able to perceive liberation as a real possibility and see that society is transformable" (Adams, 1975, p. 161). Examining, countering, and transcending racial violence—through a collective Métis consciousness—is a regenerative process.

MIARE Leaves

While the roots of the flower beadwork framework represent the cultural values discussed above that nourish, strengthen, and guide MIARE, the leaves represent how the Métis teacher participants "absorb," or experience and transform, their everyday experiences of racism. In the case of this project, racism was identified as experienced in a variety of K–12 settings and included deficit cultural essentialism, colourism, monoracism, and exploitative exclusion. Each of these is discussed below through excerpts of impactful knowledge shared by the participants.

The First Leaf: Deficit Cultural Essentialism

Anti-essentialism refutes essentialist claims that members of racialized groups must think, speak, behave, and look a certain way. As Métis scholar Lucy Delgado (née Fowler, 2024) explained, "The essentialization of Métis identity to only jigging, beading, Louis Riel, and the fur trade, can alienate Métis youth" (p. 24). Essentialism also gives way to fraudulent Métis identities because cultural essentialism is easy to mimic and perform (Giroux, 2018; Leroux, 2019). When informed by deficit-based assumptions that Indigenous people are intellectually inferior, cultural essentialism reinforces false beliefs that White dominance is natural (Gillies, 2023; St. Denis, 2007). A remnant of

race science, deficit cultural essentialism is based on false racist premises that Indigenous people are inherently intellectually inferior (deficit) and can only learn through traditional knowledge systems (cultural essentialism).

For example, participants explained: "A colleague said I only got my permanent position because I am Métis, they need representation" and "I would tell people I took the SUNTEP program [and colleagues said], 'oh, not a good program, you didn't receive a good education.'" Affirmative action programs such as SUNTEP were legislated to address racist barriers to employment and education, but deficit cultural essentialism reinforces false racist beliefs that Métis students can only succeed with institutional "help" that White families do not need. Deficit cultural essentialism further materializes in schools when high quality instruction and opportunities are reserved only for White students. Disguised as care, one participant noted:

> I came from a school where White saviourism was "if [Indigenous kids] need to leave class, you can do that" or "if you need to sleep, or eat, do that." The supports need to be there, but there also needs to be the expectation that kids can succeed and learn.

When attempting to challenge deficit racism at a staff meeting, one participant explained that her colleagues asked, "Aren't you Métis, shouldn't you support kids [with low expectations]?" As the participant recognized, "having no expectations is not supportive." In this way, deficit cultural essentialist views insinuate "real" Métis teachers care about Indigenous kids, which, from a racist standpoint, means having low academic expectations that excuse teachers' responsibilities to provide exceptional instruction.

Teachers often believe Indigenous students in general are "too damaged to learn and behave," which also excuses teachers' duties to refine their instruction (Gebhard, 2019; Gillies, 2023). The participants stressed a racist double standard, where caring for White children means providing high quality instruction and caring for Indigenous children means substandard instruction. For example, one participant explained:

> It's my job to get them to where they need to be. My Indigenous kindergarteners went into Grade 1 [with] letter and sound mastery. The school I'm at [now], [some] White kids only [know] 12 letters and sounds [but teachers don't assume they're incapable].

The participants further explained that teachers' unconscious beliefs in deficit cultural essentialism "trickles down from [affecting] students, to parents, to family; [teachers] assume [Indigenous] parents can't help their child in school." Another outcome of deficit cultural essentialism is the racialized streaming of Indigenous students into modified and behavioural programs, which has been well-documented and mirrors Black student racialization patterns (Connor et al., 2019; Parekh & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2017; Yee & Butler, 2020). Described by one participant:

> I've noticed when the learning assistance teacher comes in, White kids are [assumed to be] busy but the dark [Indigenous] kids are [assumed] to have autism. They get flagged quicker. It is constant, [White kids] can be busy but Indigenous kids [have a disorder].

Another participant shared, "I've heard that too—they're not ready to learn." This pervasive racist double standard regarding school readiness is not applied to White middle-class students.

Stressed previously, deficit cultural essentialism is grounded in false claims that Indigenous people can only learn from traditional cultural knowledge systems. This racist assumption is grounded in scientific racism and rejects calls to decolonize education systems. Decolonization calls for the prioritizing of Indigenous knowledge, which differs substantially from overt racist claims that Métis people are a distinct race who can only learn from Métis knowledge systems. When teachers stress, "Métis kids need to learn about culture and language" to succeed, this assertion is regularly grounded in racist assumptions that Métis epistemologies only exist within non-threatening physical "artifacts" rather than anti-racist organizing, which has been dependent on "reading, and writing" in the colonizers' languages.

It was noted that when teachers express deficit cultural essentialist assumptions—such as Indigenous "people have different definitions of success," "grades don't matter," and "parents are not parenting"—that such language normalizes racist educational practices. One participant described, "Our representative of assessment…explained [how] teachers need to provide feedback [to Indigenous students] orally instead of in writing." Informed by normalized deficit cultural essentialism, the message communicated was that teachers can bypass teaching Indigenous students how to read and write and instead provide oral feedback as a culturally responsive practice. While oral assessments strengthen

decolonization, withholding access to English literacy is a colonial practice. Participants argued educators must therefore question "the very romanticized Métis curriculum" that can at times support deficit cultural essentialism. When students are told institutional success is not compatible with Métis culture, such lessons maintain White patriarchal dominance.

The Second Leaf: Colourism

Deficit cultural essentialism, discussed above, has advantaged Métis people who practise non-threatening cultural traditions and avoid challenging racism. In a similar way, Métis with light skin do not experience the abject racism targeted toward Métis with dark skin. Métis people with light skin can often choose to hide their Métis identity to avoid persecution, a double-edged sword that can cause mental strife as explained by Cathy Richardson (2006). Yet, the intergenerational privileges afforded to Métis who hid/hide as White cannot be overstated. Discussing an example of the "new Métis" (Gaudry, 2018), or Métis who only identify to benefit from Métis citizenship, one participant shared:

> A family that has never identified as Métis want schooling for their daughter. They benefited generation after generation from White privilege. They had the big houses, now they want to take education funding when they didn't have to go through the pain.

Not all Métis families, for obvious reasons, were able to, nor chose to, hide their cultural and racialized identities, but those who did have benefited tremendously from systemic racism.

Colourism has underscored such processes through "the discriminatory treatment of individuals falling within the same 'racial' group on the basis of skin colour" (Herring, 2004, p. 3). For example, Métis family members who have dark skin experience racism much more overtly, with greater consequences, than those with lighter skin. Considering the diverse racialized experiences of Métis people, understanding and challenging colourism is integral to MIARE. Similar to mixed-race people in general, it is critical students understand "why so many leaders [we remember] have been light-skinned, and the unique barriers that darker-skinned leaders have faced" (Hunter, 2016, p. 59).

Evidence of colourism was also discussed by 12 of the women participants who are mothers to children who attend local K–12 schools. Challenging the falsehood of light skin superiority must start at an early age, as exemplified by the stories below:

> [My daughter] has all the pride instilled by influential Métis folk, but when I say, "your skin is so nice and brown my girl," she says, "No Mama, my skin is not brown, it's White," and she started that when she was four.

Another participant shared a story about a conversation with her daughter, in which she asked:

> Do you know why [another child] wasn't being very nice? And [my daughter] said, "Because he is brown?" I said, "What color is kokum's skin? Brown. Is kokum bad because she has brown skin? No." But trying to explain this to a four-year-old…

The pervasiveness of colourism, where Métis children are socialized to believe that "White skin," an artificial construct, equates to superiority, was also expressed in this story:

> My [four-year-old] grandson said, "I only play with vanilla kids," and I said, "What?" [He replied] "I only want to play with vanilla-coloured kids because they're nicer, I'm not playing with brown kids." I said, "Your dad was brown, your mom is brown, and I have brown skin."

In the examples above, the participants had taught their children to be proud of their cultural identity and to love being Indigenous, but this did not stop their children's unconscious racist beliefs. Parents therefore require teachers, including early childhood educators, to teach age-appropriate, racially just education. Race-neutral Métis cultural education—prevalent with schools local to the project—cannot challenge racism, but race-conscious Métis education can.

Idealization of White skin was witnessed by the participants across three school divisions. One participant highlighted that "lighter [Métis] kids sit closer together, and the darker students sit closer together," because lighter skin Métis youth tended to favour each other. Connecting colourism to deficit cultural essentialism, or racialized assumptions about students' academic capacities, another participant shared:

> I spent my career at [a community school] saying the [Indigenous] kids can learn. Kids can learn, they can do calculus and go to university…. But that ties into colourism, because the darker they are, the more [teachers] expect them to not learn.

Another participant explained, "we [Métis] automatically are [assumed to be] not as legitimate as teachers. We are less legitimate with dark skin." Through colourism, double standards that favour White Métis are reinforced through teachers' condescending tones, physical contact, and racial profiling of Métis students with darker skin. It was stressed, "school divisions use colourism to divide [us], to privilege White Indigenous teachers and reward them…they're accepted as long as they're silent." As a result, "Métis people who move up into [senior] roles are [often] White-passing. That sends a message to students, too."

The Third Leaf: Monoracism

Métis people with light skin privilege from colourism, but monoracism oppresses all Métis people. Monoracism operates through "oppression on the basis of being more than one race" (Harris, 2016, p. 803) and is a direct result of scientific racism and false beliefs in racial purity. Within Métis communities, monoracism can also fuel lateral intersectional violence. The participants also discussed varying experiences with, and observations of, monoracism stemming from deficit cultural essentialism and colourism. For example, "I hear within our own people, 'you're not a part of the community.' I feel on the outside, I'm not good enough…how do I get into this community?" Another participant shared, "I see it all the time…cultural essentialism from Indigenous leaders and it's hard to speak about it because [critiques are] not welcomed." As similar stories were shared, it was recognized that complicated systemic beliefs in racial/cultural purity/essentialism, as well as colourism, undergird anti-Métis monoracism. For example,

> I was told I was a Métis elitist at [my child's] Métis school. If you think of an elitist, it's someone who has high expectations, who wants to not have generational trauma or things you must heal from. Are Métis people supposed to accept violence? We're not allowed to aspire to being in a different tax bracket. I felt like it put me in a box. I hated that feeling.

Monoracist violence is fueled by deficit cultural essentialism, insisting Métis identity can be reduced to and measured by traditional cultural markers only, while ignoring how many Métis are advantaged by White privilege or colourism.

Howard Adams (1975) argued, "Within a colonized society, there is fierce competition for status, because there is so little to start with" (p. 169). The 12 participants who are practising K–12 educators are proud Métis citizens, yet several expressed feeling "a need to prove" and "authenticate" themselves as "real" Indigenous people within their school division. Other participants expressed similar sentiments, such as "I have to tiptoe through culture because if I don't do this, I'm not Métis enough," and "I can't seem to shake off proving myself to Métis *or* White people. I'm proud, but [worry about] what they think." It was also stressed that White Métis educators often participate in monoracism without "even know[ing] they're doing it, they're emulating colonialism…copying it." For instance, when Métis teachers who look White deny their access to Whiteness but tell others, "You're Métis if you wear a sash and you can jig and you're an expert in everything cultural," such practices reinforce monoracism. As one participant stressed, "if I keep doing it this way [equating Métis people with cultural racial purity], I am perpetuating the system that maintains Whiteness." To counter monoracism and the constant questioning of Métis identity, one participant "stopped saying where my [Métis] family is from" and listing all their historical Métis relatives, as this practice is not expected of those constructed as "racially pure."

Through monoracism, Métis teachers and students with light skin are also often only recognized as White, which denies their experiences and identity. Métis people with dark skin are oppressed by racism in much more oppressive ways, yet all Métis experience racism through historical erasure and racialization of families, for example. As one participant shared:

> We are assumed to be White. I've been called out and been told, you're not [Métis], and I am. Where do [White Métis] kids see themselves in our schools, that's important. But everywhere you go, [school] resources predominantly [represent Métis with dark skin].

In the same way, Métis students who are also First Nations, Black, or Asian, for instance, are often accused of racial inauthenticity. Indeed, "schools designated as Métis or Cree, perpetuates some of the things we are trying to work against" and "there are First Nation–status students who have Métis ancestry. But they don't talk about it." Similarly, a participant asked, "Do you think I could find a book about a Métis girl who is Black? Not all of us look the same." Similarly, very few, if any, classroom resources represent Métis who are not cisgender and heterosexual.

Monoracism is experienced as a double standard within schools, where, as one participant explained, "On one hand, we're [Métis and accused of being] not authentic [Indigenous people], and [on] the other hand there's always this preconceived notion that we're biased because we're [Indigenous and] not seeing things through a neutral lens." Not experienced by people racialized as racially "pure," monoracism sabotages capacities of those racialized as mixed to challenge White patriarchal colonial dominance. Two participants aptly shared, "talking about passing—how creepy. It's infuriating, a part of me wants to say we are navigating the world in a better way…but in a way we are not" because "being conflicted [about how one is racialized] takes away from speaking [against racism]. If you don't look the part, who will listen?"

The Fourth Leaf: Exploitative Exclusion

Due to school-based deficit cultural essentialism, colourism, and monoracism, numerous stories were shared regarding how Métis teachers' ideas are taken (or stolen) by, or given credit to, White educators through normalized racist practices. For example, one participant shared a memory from nearly a decade ago: **"**The principal took a lot of credit for my ideas. It takes its toll on us. I was exhausted. We would meet with Indigenous parents, and she would talk like she was Indigenous…put on this Indigenous act." Another participant shared a recent memory:

> I [was] on a committee preparing a document…there were two Métis and a non-Indigenous person, and the non-Indigenous [White] person took over all the communication with the [White senior leader] committee and we wouldn't get sent emails. I did so much research for that document. My work was not recognized.

The participants spoke about recurring experiences of being exploited when they were asked to develop anti-racist projects but were not valued by senior leaders. For example:

> A colleague and I finally got space to speak with our senior admin about anti-racism—we had a [short] timeslot, it was virtual, and we had a deep, critical, centred, well-thought-out [presentation]…and a White male spent the first [half] talking about why it was important instead of allowing us to dig in. When we get space, it's limited, it's sabotage.

Pervasive Indigenous dehumanization—which is evident through double standards that privilege White teachers—enables the exploitation of Métis teachers' knowledge and time.

Exploitative exclusion can be understood through Cheryl Harris's (1993) theory of Whiteness as property. For example, when Métis teachers are racialized as inferior through double standards, or reputation and status rights awarded to White teachers, Métis teachers become "White property" to be used and discarded as needed (Gillies, 2022). This process is compounded by intersectional systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991; Scott, 2021), as highlighted within a participant's memory of a school staff meeting: "The exact same thing a strong, Indigenous woman does in her leadership role is [perceived as] radical, wrong, they're burning that school to the ground. And the White guy across the city [is perceived as] running a tight ship." Such racist patriarchal double standards replicate historical tropes of Métis people—particularly women and those who challenge racism—as irrational, too sensitive, and mentally unstable. As one participant shared, "I was pointing out a colleague was trying to work around my anti-racist answers…and a [White colleague] chimed in, 'You're reading too much into that situation.'" This event illustrates how Métis people continue to be pathologized through insinuations of inabilities to "see clearly" when challenging racism.

Métis anti-racist teachers are also exploited when administrators and others instill fear by attempting to pathologize Métis as chronic complainers, replicating historical processes. This racist discourse is utilized to prevent Métis educators from accessing professional opportunities and promotions. One woman teacher shared, "A lot of us feel when we push back, we are seen as trouble causers or difficult, when what we're doing is advocating and bringing voice." Another shared, "school divisions only want parts of us." As a result, Métis anti-racist teachers often ask:

> Why do we have to keep putting our name in the hat multiple times to be rejected when we know we have the experience, the knowledge, the intellect…. It's so emotionally exhausting, how much do you give of yourself to be rejected multiple times and [then] finally get to a position of power and you're still sludging through the concrete.

Tremendous intergenerational social wealth, institutional power, and land ownership was, and continues to be, reserved for White families and was/is withheld from Métis, particularly those who did/do not identify as White (Auger, 2021). It therefore in some

ways makes sense when Métis teachers conform to racism; this tactic continues to be a necessity of survival within White patriarchal colonial Canada, where Métis have been dehumanized for generations.

The Petals

Returning to the flower beadwork framework, the article began by discussing four roots, or Métis cultural values, that guided the anti-racist workshop conversations. The leaves were then discussed as representing four ways in which the participants experience school-based racism. The following and final part of the MIARE flower beadwork framework includes eight petals, which represent the intertwined collective strategies utilized by the participants to challenge and transcend K–12 racial oppression. These colourful petals protect anti-racism and are essential because they attract "pollinators," or those who share and generate anti-racism in other contexts and locations. Eight MIARE petals identified in the data are highlighted below and expressed through counterstories that were written by synthesizing multiple participants' stories into individual first-person narratives. Each petal provides anti-racist guidance for all educators.

Petal One: Facilitate Anti-Racist Conversations

I'm getting braver and more courageous to have those conversations and say, "No, we need to do something." Ten years ago, I would not have, but now I have people to talk with, I'm bringing anti-racist conversations to our school equity committee. I think about questions we need to ask to unpack why our colleagues feel uncomfortable and how to navigate conversations so people will listen. It is hard because you want people to face facts and sometimes anti-racist conversations backfire. When do I get to push people beyond what they're comfortable with? But we have to start somewhere; our colleagues and students are seeking permission to learn and for us to guide them. Maybe they won't like what we say, but I'm okay with that. I am at the point where I'm going to be myself and advocate for my community and that's the bridge I will die on.

Petal Two: Hold School Divisions Accountable to their Commitments

I ran into a situation at a school where I needed the support of division policy, and my coordinator couldn't advise me. I was working with a principal who didn't know how to implement equity policies. If more of us learned about policies and were supported, we could strengthen anti-racism. I did, however, feel empowered by one White male superintendent, and it made all the difference. But at the same time, I had a challenging conversation with a different White male superintendent. In these times, I need to remember I am protected by a powerful union. I can meet with school authorities and bring a union representative who must support me. It might not always work, but we should not be afraid to try. We need to be strategic, however, because school authorities can make our work harder and we must document when that happens.

Petal Three: Facilitate Anti-Racist Communities

We have to be there for young people in a good way. When we create inclusive spaces for kids, that's huge. Métis students feel more comfortable when I let them know who I am, even in overtly racially hostile schools. Many teachers have weak understandings of racism, and it seems like most teachers are afraid to move beyond surface-level knowledge. But we can be creative, learn from Métis poetry and art, learn from others, share our vulnerabilities, and think critically to find solutions. Surrounding ourselves with people who want to engage in anti-racist conversations becomes sustaining. This is what I aspire to for my students and colleagues, to create space to share and learn. We have so much farther to go but it's exciting to know we have power. We can be those school change agents, starting with community.

Petal Four: Practise Anti-Essentialism

We need to envision our end goals from an anti-essentialist lens. It's easy to say "that's racist," but students need the knowledge to understand. Let's create anti-essentialist resources to ensure our instruction rejects deficit cultural essentialism, colourism, and monoracism. I think about every Indigenous student I put in workplace math versus foundations math and how that determined their future. Rejecting essentialism has been a long time coming…but isn't that how we became Métis? We resisted racial binaries. I

did a Grade 1 art project once and this little boy showed his artwork to his mom and said, "Mom, this is a Métis soldier." We talked about Métis soldiers, their contributions to Canada, and how they experienced racial discrimination without resorting to cultural essentialism. We need to ensure the Métis people we teach about represent Métis diversity; we need to believe everyone can learn.

Petal Five*:* Expect Reciprocity

I am a Métis woman and find racist incidents replay in my head: What I should have said, done, do? It takes away enjoyment from my family time and harms my mental health. Sitting in meetings with school authorities who don't know what they don't know; thinking, where do I start, where do I enter this conversation, what do they need? Trying to debrief with people who do not care. I have worked hard not to feel guilt. That was a hard realization. Finding strength and the proper words without getting angry because anger is the worst emotion. At the end of the day, you only have so much to give. I still have to be a mom. There's that balance of yes, I want to do these things because they're amazing and I'm passionate. But if I don't feel safe, what's happening to me? It's a colonial practice when we are asked to guide and aren't compensated and are exhausted. You have to know when to say no.

Petal Six: Reject Intersectional and Lateral Racism

Many Métis women bring an incredible anti-racist voice to their role and apologize for it. That's not okay—we shouldn't feel silenced; we should be included. When we advocate and educate, we are faced with challenges. But we need to keep doing what we're doing; push back and don't apologize. We experience racism all the time. I have been fortunate because I am supported by Métis women anti-racist educators who have equipped me with readings and ways to support myself and exist as an anti-racist teacher. We have all picked racism up and are teaching racism to our kids in some way or another. We have to stop ourselves, especially when it becomes lateral violence: "I'm better than her, I'm going to get that job, do you know what she said about you?" We do it to each other. We need to rise above. I want us to credit each other.

Petal Seven: Normalize Métis White Ancestry

Claiming our White identity and/or ancestry does not make us less Métis. I started to say my mom is a White woman and my dad is Michif. When I did that, even some Métis people couldn't believe I was acknowledging my biracial identity. I started saying White dominance and it made people uncomfortable…but let's keep going. I have acknowledged the "whys" of the Whiteness, and it has taken a lot of time, research, and knowing; as well as storying with my grandmother. Not only are we saying you have to learn anti-racism, but some people are still learning their family's story as to how they have gotten to this place and to not be ashamed to be perceived as White. We have to keep in mind, when talking with Métis students, White Indigeneity is complex, and many students, due to racism, do not yet see themselves as Métis.

Petal Eight: Use Access to Whiteness to Challenge Racism

We can use our White privilege or ancestry as an element of surprise to engage in anti-racist conversations. White and lighter Métis also hear more racist comments. People will say racist things, or put down another Métis, because they think, "You are palatable" or "You're White, so this won't bother you." Our responsibility is to say something to correct racist conversations and practices. We are less likely to receive pushback from administrators or parents when we are Métis. I have conversations with Grade 1 students about my White privilege and my family's experiences, even five- and six-year-olds understand why we need anti-racism. I also use my White privilege with high school students to illustrate systemic racism. I help students and colleagues understand how racism advantages and disadvantages people.

Concluding Thoughts

In addition to claiming space for Métis students, families, and teachers within Canadian anti-racist education, the MIARE flower beadwork framework conceptualized through this study holds potential to be built upon in ways that extend Canadian teacher education and anti-racist theories in vital directions. The framework imagined reflects hundreds of stories shared by Métis educator participants who generously shared their time and knowledge. Through this process, everyone involved expressed deeper appreciation and

pride for the anti-racist contributions of Métis people who have been systemically excluded from Canadian education systems. The authors recognize the project's limitations and that the stories shared centred the experiences of only a small group of Métis teachers within a Prairie, urban K–12 context. The findings, however, also hold potential to reinvigorate a desire for the serious study of Métis anti-racist intellectualism and activism. It is hoped that the MIARE flower beadwork framework shared might serve as a starting point for needed conversations and stronger effective coalitions.

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