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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Educating the Colonized Colonizer: Rethinking Francophone Schooling in Canada

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| ABSTRACT

This article offers a critical reassessment of francophone education in Canada through postcolonial and settler colonial theory. Francophone communities have long framed themselves as colonized minorities resisting linguistic and cultural assimilation. However, this identity often obscures their simultaneous participation in settler colonial structures, particularly regarding Indigenous lands and histories. Adopting a comparative, critical narrative methodology, the article analyzes curriculum frameworks from multiple Canadian provinces, historical documents such as the Parent Commission (1963–1966), and key texts on decolonization and Indigenous–settler relations. Literary and philosophical perspectives complement this analysis by exploring the affective and ethical dimensions of truth-telling in education. Findings reveal that while francophone education emphasizes cultural survival, it often marginalizes Indigenous perspectives or includes them in superficial ways. Curricula across Canada show persistent tensions between gestures of inclusion and deeper structural silences. Institutional and employment precarity among francophone teachers further complicates the adoption of critical pedagogies, especially when they challenge dominant national narratives. The article proposes a pedagogical ethics of truth built around three dimensions: epistemic accountability, affective engagement, and transformative praxis. It calls for curricula co-created with Indigenous partners, validation of emotional responses to injustice, and learning practices grounded in dialogue and land-based inquiry. Ultimately, the article challenges the limits of multicultural inclusion and the myth of francophone innocence. Truth-telling in education, it argues, must move beyond symbolic gestures to become a foundational commitment—one that embraces discomfort and reimagines historical responsibility as an ongoing and relational process.

| KEYWORDS

Francophone education, decolonization, Parent Commission, settler colonialism, Indigenous reconciliation, postcolonial theory

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction: Between Liberation and Omission

In the canon of educational reform in Canada, the Parent Commission Report (1963–1966) has long been celebrated as a foundational moment in the modernisation and secularisation of Quebec's educational system. Heralded as the intellectual engine of the so-called Quiet Revolution, the Report proposed nothing less than a pedagogical reawakening: it sought to democratise access to education, curtail ecclesiastical influence, and realign curricula with the needs of a postwar, industrialised society (Gouvernement du Québec, 1966). It was, in its ambition and language, a revolutionary document. And yet, as with many revolutions, its silences speak as forcefully as its declarations. Nowhere in its thousands of pages does one find a substantive engagement with the histories, languages, or epistemologies of Indigenous peoples—nor, it must be said, with the cultural complexities of the broader Canadian francophone diaspora.

This article proposes to revisit the Parent Report not as a triumphalist origin story, but as a site of epistemic ambivalence. Drawing on postcolonial and decolonial theories (Fanon, 1963; Memmi, 1965; Coulthard, 2014; Veracini, 2010; Smith, 1999), it interrogates the notion that francophones in Canada, and particularly those in Quebec, have been merely the colonised subjects of British imperialism. While such a framing holds historical truth — indeed, the Durham Report of 1839 envisioned their

assimilation — it also risks occluding the ways in which francophone populations, especially in Western Canada, have participated in settler colonial structures (Lowman & Barker, 2015; Regan, 2010).

Francophone education in Canada exists in a space of paradox: born of resistance, yet not innocent of complicity; marked by cultural resilience, yet embedded in colonial geographies. The cultural narratives of survivance and linguistic preservation that animate French-language schooling often position the francophone as a victim of assimilationist policies. While this position is historically justified, it can, if unexamined, reproduce another kind of erasure, namely, the erasure of Indigenous presence and of the francophone's own settler privilege. As Glen Coulthard (2014) has argued, the politics of recognition within liberal multicultural states often reproduces colonial dynamics rather than disrupting them.

How, then, should we speak of truth in francophone education? And more pointedly, what truths have been too difficult, too inconvenient, or too uncomfortable to name? This article explores these questions by positioning francophone education within the discourse of "truth-telling" that has gained international urgency in the context of post-conflict and postcolonial reconciliation movements (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; Boadu, 2020). In doing so, it answers a call issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: that educational institutions must become sites not only of knowledge transmission but of historical accountability.

The stakes are high. In Canada, debates around historical truth have animated controversies over curriculum reform, Indigenous content, language rights, and the politics of memory. In Quebec, the introduction of the Ethics and Religious Culture program, and its eventual replacement by a curriculum purportedly focused on "culture and citizenship", has reignited long-standing tensions around secularism, pluralism, and identity. Across the country, French-language schools outside Quebec struggle with dwindling resources, assimilation pressures, and the challenge of serving increasingly diverse student bodies whose identities exceed the binary of French-English dualism (ACUFC, 2023; Canadian Parents for French, 2019).

It is in this context that this article proposes a critical historiography of francophone education through the prism of settler colonial theory and decolonial thought. By analysing the discursive silences of the Parent Report, comparing curricular frameworks from multiple provinces, and drawing on Indigenous critiques of Canadian historical narratives, it seeks to reframe francophone schooling not as an isolated victim narrative but as part of a wider colonial assemblage.

Stylistically and methodologically, this article assumes a deliberately interdisciplinary posture. It borrows from educational philosophy, critical curriculum studies, political theory, literary hermeneutics, and memory studies. In doing so, it recognises that the truth of education, particularly in postcolonial and post-truth contexts, cannot be approached through data alone. It requires narrative, metaphor, ethical risk. As Gert Biesta (2013) reminds us, the task of education is not merely to shape competent subjects but to call them into being in relation to the world and to others. To educate is to engage in a poétique du lien, a poetics of relation (Glissant, 1990).

Poetry, in fact, has much to teach us about truth-telling. From the resistances of Michèle Lalonde's "Speak White" to the melancholic illuminations of France Daigle and J.R. Léveillé, francophone literature across Canada has long offered counter-histories to the national imaginary. These literary voices will appear in the margins of this article, not as decoration but as epistemic interventions. Their presence insists that any inquiry into francophone education must also be a reflection on the aesthetics of cultural survival.

In that spirit, this article invites a double displacement: first, of the francophone from a position of unquestioned victimhood to one of reflexive complexity; and second, of the historical narrative of education in Canada from progressivist linearity to dialogical entanglement. Such a repositioning does not aim to delegitimise francophone struggles, but rather to situate them within a broader and more honest account of Canada's colonial past and pedagogical future.

Truth-telling, then, is not a destination but a method. It is the method of unsettling what we think we know; of listening for the absences in our archives; of accepting that education has never been neutral terrain. In turning to the history of francophone schooling with these questions in mind, we do not merely seek correction: we seek transformation.

2. Theoretical Framework: Colonial Entanglements and the Ethics of Educational Truth-Telling

To approach truth-telling in francophone education through a decolonial lens requires a careful unpacking of how knowledge, identity, and historical narratives have been constructed in colonial and postcolonial contexts. This section draws from key thinkers in postcolonial, settler colonial, and educational theory to articulate the conceptual framework for our analysis.

The foundational tension at the heart of this article, the dual status of francophone communities as both colonised and complicit, is informed by the work of Albert Memmi (1957/1965), who introduced the now-classic dyad of the coloniser and the colonised. Memmi's formulation helps us identify the internal contradictions of communities who may experience domination in one historical or cultural register, while enacting or benefiting from domination in another. This dynamic, what Leanne

Betasamosake Simpson (2017) might call the "nesting colonialisms" of the Canadian context, is crucial to understanding the position of francophone settlers, particularly in regions where land expropriation and linguistic preservation have coincided.

Further deepening this reading is Glen Coulthard's (2014) critique of the "politics of recognition," wherein he argues that institutional framewçorks of reconciliation in settler states often entrench colonial hierarchies rather than dismantle them. For Coulthard, recognition is not inherently liberatory unless it is grounded in Indigenous sovereignty and a refusal of settler colonial logic. In the context of francophone education, this critique prompts us to ask: can the inclusion of Indigenous content in a French curriculum be a form of recognition that masks deeper colonial continuities?

The theory of settler colonialism, as developed by scholars such as Patrick Wolfe (2006) and Lorenzo Veracini (2010), provides further clarity. Wolfe's axiom that settler colonialism is "a structure, not an event" underscores the enduring logics of elimination, replacement, and occupation that define colonial education systems. Veracini's (2010) distinction between colonialism and settler colonialism is also instructive: the former seeks to extract, the latter to stay. French-language schools in western Canada, established as instruments of cultural survival, can also be read as instruments of territorial consolidation and nation-building.

From an educational standpoint, the work of Paulo Freire (1970) and Gert Biesta (2013) offers an ethical counterpoint. Freire's insistence on critical pedagogy as a means of conscientisation, of developing the ability to perceive social, political, and economic oppression and to take action against it, resonates strongly with the aims of decolonial education. Biesta (2013), meanwhile, reminds us that education is not merely about qualification or socialisation, but about "subjectification", calling learners into being as ethical and relational subjects.

In bringing these perspectives together, we assert that truth-telling in francophone education must be situated within a matrix of ethical and historical accountability. It is not enough to include Indigenous authors on reading lists or to land-acknowledge without reflection. Rather, it requires an epistemic humility and a rethinking of what education is for: not the preservation of a threatened identity, but the co-creation of a just and plural future.

As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) has famously argued, decolonising research and education is not simply a methodological shift, but a political and philosophical reorientation. In the Canadian francophone context, this means resisting the urge to frame cultural survival as an end in itself. Instead, we must recognise the interdependence of survivance with responsibility, and of identity with land, memory, and justice.

The analysis that follows adopts a comparative, critical narrative methodology, drawing on curricular texts, historical reports, and theoretical frameworks to uncover silences, tensions, and ethical possibilities within francophone education across Canada.

3. Excavating Silence: The Parent Report and the Erasure of Indigenous Presence

The Parent Commission Report (1963–1966) is widely regarded as a watershed in the transformation of education in Quebec, marking the transition from ecclesiastical control to a secular, state-led system. Its scope was monumental: five volumes, dozens of subcommissions, and recommendations touching every level of the educational ladder, from preschool to university. The Report sought not only to reorganise the structure of Quebec's educational institutions but to redefine their purpose, aligning them with democratic values, social mobility, and the logic of economic modernisation (Gouvernement du Québec, 1966; Bouvier, 2001).

Yet for all its visionary breadth, the Report is marked by a conspicuous absence. There is no mention of Indigenous peoples as historical or contemporary subjects of education, nor is there any engagement with the cultural and linguistic diversity of francophone communities outside Quebec. While this silence may be partly explained by the provincial jurisdiction over education in Canada, which limits the scope of the Commission's mandate to Quebec, it nonetheless reflects a deeper discursive narrowing. In seeking to modernise education, the Commission appears to have anchored its reforms around an imagined normative citizen: francophone, urban, Catholic-turned-secular, and ultimately Quebecois. This erasure is not merely incidental; it is structural. As Veracini (2010) and Wolfe (2006) have argued, settler colonialism depends not only on the elimination of Indigenous bodies but also on the replacement of Indigenous histories by settler narratives. In this light, the Parent Report can be read not only as a secularisation of education, but as a settler move to innocence (Tuck and Yang, 2012), a discursive repositioning of Quebec's francophone majority as a modern subject unburdened by colonial complicity and disconnected from the broader francophone condition in Canada.

This settler innocence is reinforced by the Report's rhetorical reliance on universalist discourse, calling for equal opportunity, individual development, and rational governance. But as postcolonial and decolonial scholars have long emphasised, universalism often operates as a veil for normativity (Said, 1978; Mbembe, 2021; Smith, 1999). The Report's vision of a liberated Quebecois subjecthood thus rests on a suppressed binary: the modern citizen and the absent Indigenous Other. The Indigenous

presence, its pedagogies, its relationships to land, its historical and ontological claims, is not so much contested as it is rendered irrelevant.

This epistemic erasure is compounded by a lack of institutional recognition. Despite the contemporaneous context of growing Indigenous political organisation in the 1960s, the Parent Report fails to acknowledge any need for intercultural education, Indigenous representation, or even territorial specificity. There is no mention of treaty relationships, land acknowledgments, or jurisdictional plurality. Admittedly, Quebec's historical trajectory diverges from other provinces in that few treaties were signed between the Crown and Indigenous peoples, most notably the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement would only come later in 1975. Yet even in the absence of a treaty framework, the omission of Indigenous nations remains striking, particularly in a province whose northern regions are predominantly Indigenous, and where Cree and Inuit communities had long resisted both ecclesiastical and state-imposed schooling. This silence is more than ironic, it is ideologically revealing. It points to a modernising vision of education that subsumes territorial plurality under a singular narrative of secular, francophone progress, erasing alternative sovereignties in the process.

The consequences of this foundational silence are multiple. First, it has helped to shape a curriculum and teacher education model that continues to centre Euro-Canadian knowledge systems, even when these systems are framed in the language of critical pedagogy. Second, it has contributed to a pervasive reluctance within francophone education to address its own historical entanglement with settler colonial infrastructures, not only in Quebec but across the broader Canadian francophone space (Martel, 1997; Thériault, 2002). Finally, it has perpetuated the belief that reconciliation is primarily an anglophone-Canadian concern, thereby marginalising the necessary self-examination of francophone actors within colonial histories.

A comparative reading of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Final Report (2015) makes this absence all the more striking. Where the TRC foregrounds survivor testimony, historical injustice, and the imperative of ethical reckoning, the Parent Report remains entrenched in institutional reform and economic rationalism. Its silence on residential schools is particularly troubling, given that several of the earliest institutions were run by francophone Catholic orders. However, this silence may not stem from ignorance, but from a residual cultural deference toward religious institutions. Although the Report explicitly advocates for the secularisation of Quebec's education system, it stops short of directly challenging the moral authority of the Church in areas where it caused demonstrable harm, particularly in Indigenous schooling. As Regan (2010) and Robinson and Martin (2016) have shown, historical denial is often more subtle than outright refutation: it lies in what is not said, in what is not taught, in what is structurally excluded from educational memory. In this sense, the Report exemplifies a form of "respectful omission", an ideological discomfort that preserves institutional legitimacy at the expense of historical truth.

Moreover, this silence cannot be isolated to the Quebec context. In provinces such as Manitoba, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, where French-language education has historically operated within a minority framework, francophone institutions were nevertheless beneficiaries of colonial land policies and educational assimilation schemes. French-language schools in these regions were often established on Treaty 1, Treaty 4, and Treaty 6 lands, and yet their founding narratives rarely include recognition of this territorial reality (Lowman and Barker, 2015). Instead, historical memory centres on the struggle for French-language rights against anglophone authorities, obscuring the simultaneity of being both oppressed and complicit.

In some cases, francophone institutions even reproduced the very logics of exclusion they had themselves experienced. For instance, curriculum materials in French-language schools well into the 1990s depicted Indigenous peoples in stereotypical or romanticised ways, if they were included at all (Battiste, 2000). Teacher training programs offered little to no engagement with Indigenous pedagogies or worldviews. The prevailing discourse focused almost exclusively on the preservation of French language and culture, often through a lens of cultural exceptionalism or civilisational defence (Paré, 1992).

To excavate the silence of the Parent Report, then, is not simply to fill in missing content. It is to interrogate the very epistemological foundations of what counts as knowledge, whose histories are considered foundational, and whose absences are rendered normative. As Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin (2016) have argued, decolonising education requires not just additive inclusion but a fundamental unsettling of pedagogical assumptions. In this sense, truth-telling in francophone education must begin with an archaeology of omission, attending not only to what is said, but to who is permitted to speak, and which histories are allowed to shape the curriculum.

This work of unsettling is both theoretical and practical. It invites curriculum developers to examine the frameworks of historical knowledge production; it challenges educators to reflect on their own positionality within settler institutions; and it demands that institutions adopt a stance of humility and responsiveness to Indigenous critiques. In doing so, it echoes Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's (2012) call to resist the easy comfort of settler moves to innocence and to embrace instead the discomfort of truth, complexity, and responsibility.

In the next section, we turn to an analysis of contemporary francophone curricula across Canadian provinces, examining how the legacy of this silence continues to shape the pedagogical landscape today, and how some educators and institutions are beginning to respond.

4. Curricular Silences and Shifting Narratives: Francophone Curricula Across Canada

If the Parent Report served as a foundational blueprint for Quebec's educational transformation while simultaneously erasing Indigenous presence, its influence, or its ideological echoes, can be detected in francophone curricula across Canada. From Manitoba to New Brunswick, from Alberta to Ontario, francophone education has often positioned itself as a project of cultural survival and resistance. Yet this defensive posture has sometimes obfuscated the equally necessary reckoning with the role of francophone institutions in perpetuating settler colonial narratives and exclusions.

Across the provinces, contemporary history curricula in French-language schools reflect a striking ambivalence. On the one hand, they celebrate the resilience of French-speaking minorities and highlight key moments in the struggle for language rights. On the other, they continue to marginalise Indigenous perspectives or to integrate them in tokenistic, fragmented ways, often through isolated units or optional modules rather than as foundational lenses. This dissonance reveals deeper epistemological tensions within francophone educational frameworks.

In Manitoba, the Grade 11 Histoire du Canada curriculum, offered in French-language schools, now includes references to Indigenous treaties, the Indian Act, and residential schools. However, these topics are frequently presented in ways that detach them from the lived realities of francophone students, many of whom are themselves settlers on Treaty 1 territory (Government of Manitoba, 2023). The curriculum often fails to integrate Indigenous worldviews, pedagogies, or languages as legitimate knowledge systems. The result is a compartmentalisation of Indigenous content, reinforcing its status as supplementary rather than integral.

In Alberta, the French-language Social Studies program for Grades 10 to 12 includes references to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit histories, particularly in relation to Canadian identity and constitutional development. Yet as Hébert and Gani (2021) observe, these references are rarely accompanied by critical engagement with colonialism as an ongoing structure. Rather, they are often framed through narratives of reconciliation that emphasise healing without accountability or structural change. The curriculum thereby risks reproducing what Tuck and Yang (2012) term "settler moves to innocence": gestures of inclusion that preserve the comfort of settler narratives.

New Brunswick presents a slightly more complex case. As the only officially bilingual province, it has long celebrated its Acadian heritage and has made notable efforts to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into its curricula. The Grade 9 Social Studies program now includes materials developed in collaboration with Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqey communities (Gouvernement du Nouveau-Brunswick, 2022). Nevertheless, critiques persist regarding the depth and consistency of this integration. As Levesque and Croteau (2020) note, curricula often fail to interrogate the historic alliances, and tensions, between Acadian and Indigenous communities, opting instead for a harmonious narrative that downplays colonial entanglements.

Ontario's French-language curriculum likewise includes modules on Indigenous history, particularly in its Grade 10 Canadian History course. However, the structural challenges of teacher training and resource allocation often limit the effectiveness of these modules. Teachers frequently report lacking the confidence or background knowledge to teach Indigenous histories with nuance and respect (Lévesque, 2019). Moreover, textbook materials continue to prioritise Euro-Canadian timelines and frameworks, relegating Indigenous narratives to the margins. This challenge is further compounded by the institutional heritage of many francophone schools in Ontario, a significant number of which remain under Catholic administration. While these schools have embraced multicultural and reconciliation discourses in theory, their religious affiliation can create a delicate dynamic when addressing the Church's historical role in residential schooling. As such, the legacy of Catholic education continues to shape the contours of pedagogical comfort, institutional memory, and the perceived boundaries of historical responsibility.

What emerges from these provincial comparisons is not merely a question of inclusion or omission but one of epistemic hierarchy. Indigenous histories are often taught as adjuncts to a central narrative of Canadian, and implicitly, settler progress. Francophone curricula, in particular, struggle to reconcile two identities: the linguistic minority fighting for recognition and the settler community complicit in broader colonial structures. This dual positioning creates a discursive paradox: how can one be both oppressed and oppressive? How can francophone education affirm its own survival while reckoning with its role in the marginalisation of others?

This paradox is compounded by the institutional frameworks governing curriculum development. In many provinces, francophone curricula are developed by branches of the Ministry of Education that operate independently of Indigenous consultation or oversight. This institutional siloing reinforces the notion that Indigenous knowledge is external to the francophone educational mission. Yet as Proulx (1997) has argued, the future of francophone education requires a shift from a defensive posture of cultural survival toward a project of cultural citizenship rooted in pluralism and shared responsibility. Thériault (2002) further underscores that modern francophone identities cannot be disentangled from the broader political and territorial reconfigurations

of postcolonial Canada. Together, their work invites educators and policymakers to reimagine francophone schooling not as a walled bastion of language, but as a relational space open to decolonial dialogue and institutional co-responsibility.

There are, however, emerging practices that gesture toward such a transformation. In British Columbia, for example, the Conseil scolaire francophone has partnered with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers to co-develop classroom resources that reflect local territorial realities. Pilot programs have included land-based learning activities conducted in both French and Indigenous languages. While these initiatives remain limited in scale, they offer a model for what decolonial francophone education might look like in practice.

Similarly, in Saskatchewan, educators in francophone schools have begun incorporating Treaty Education into all subject areas, rather than confining it to social studies. This approach recognises that treaties are not simply historical documents but living agreements that structure the everyday contexts in which education takes place. As the Office of the Treaty Commissioner (2019) argues, understanding treaties is foundational to responsible citizenship, particularly for those who benefit from their unacknowledged privileges.

These efforts underscore a crucial point: decolonising francophone curricula is not about erasing French-Canadian history or identity. Rather, it is about re-situating that identity within a broader ethical and historical framework. It involves acknowledging that the struggle for linguistic survival has often coincided with complicity in settler colonialism. It means recognising that the language of resistance can sometimes mask structures of exclusion. And it requires a pedagogy that is not only bilingual, but bicultural, plurivocal, and historically accountable.

In sum, while provincial francophone curricula have made gestures toward inclusion, these remain insufficient in the face of the deeper challenge posed by truth-telling. The integration of Indigenous perspectives must move beyond curricular add-ons toward a fundamental reimagining of what it means to teach history in French in a settler colonial context. This reimagining must be grounded in collaboration, humility, and a willingness to embrace discomfort as the price of ethical education.

Moreover, francophone communities outside Quebec face an additional layer of complexity: the pressures of assimilation, identity loss, and linguistic insecurity. As Boudreau (2022) argues, language in these contexts is not only a means of communication but a deeply contested symbol of belonging, power, and legitimacy. Beaudoin-Bégin (2015) further highlights how sociolinguistic norms, often internalized through schooling, can marginalize non-standard varieties and reproduce feelings of inferiority among minority francophone speakers. These dynamics complicate the work of curricular reform, making it all the more urgent to adopt approaches that are both decolonial and emancipatory.

The following section will explore the implications of this reimagining for teacher training, classroom practice, and institutional responsibility. It will ask: what would a truly decolonised francophone history education look like, not just in content, but in form, method, and relational ethos?

5. Towards a Pedagogical Ethics of Truth: Teaching Beyond the Settler Imaginary

If truth-telling is to become more than a curricular accessory, it must be grounded in a pedagogical ethics that transcends mere inclusion. The challenge lies not only in revising content but in rethinking the very relationships that structure how historical knowledge is produced, transmitted, and experienced in the classroom. This section proposes a triadic approach to pedagogical ethics in history education: epistemic accountability, affective engagement, and transformative praxis. Each dimension seeks to unsettle the settler imaginary, that unconscious framework within which history is often taught as a series of national accomplishments rather than as an ongoing struggle for justice and recognition.

5.1 Epistemic Accountability: Whose Knowledge Counts?

At the heart of any decolonial approach to education lies the question of epistemology. Whose knowledge is legitimized within the curriculum? Who is named as an agent of history, and who remains voiceless? For too long, francophone curricula across Canada have relied on a model of additive multiculturalism, inserting diverse narratives without challenging the epistemic foundations of historical knowledge itself. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) has shown, this form of liberal inclusionism fails to confront the colonial logics embedded in disciplinary knowledge.

Epistemic accountability begins by recognising that Indigenous knowledge systems are not supplementary; they are alternative frameworks for understanding history, time, land, and responsibility. As Battiste (2013) argues, these systems offer holistic approaches that integrate spiritual, ecological, and relational dimensions often absent from Eurocentric curricula. Incorporating such worldviews into francophone history education entails more than translation—it demands a decentring of the settler subject as the normative point of reference.

Practically, this may involve the co-construction of curriculum with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, ensuring that historical narratives are contextualised within specific territories and traditions. It also requires a critical self-reflection on the part of

educators and institutions. As Grafton, Melançon, Parker, and Fasunhan (2024) point out, francophone communities in Canada must reckon with their own settler complicity if they are to move from symbolic gestures toward substantive justice.

At the same time, Gérard Bouchard (2012) has argued that in societies marked by deep cultural and linguistic pluralism, the framework of interculturalism offers a pragmatic and philosophically grounded alternative to both assimilation and fragmentation. Unlike multiculturalism, which tends to reify group boundaries, interculturalism fosters active dialogue, mutual recognition, and shared civic belonging. In educational terms, this implies creating curricular spaces where Indigenous, francophone, and other minority narratives do not merely coexist, but actively interact, shaping each other in the process. Such a model does not replace decolonial approaches but can complement them by building sustainable relational ethics in plural settings.

5.2 Affective Engagement: Discomfort as Pedagogical Resource

History education is never purely cognitive; it is an affective experience shaped by emotions such as pride, shame, anger, and grief. Yet many educational settings treat emotion as peripheral or even disruptive to learning. This is particularly true when addressing historical injustices that implicate the learner's own community or identity.

However, as Michèle Audette (2019) and Paulette Regan (2010) contend, discomfort is not an obstacle to truth-telling, it is the very terrain upon which ethical pedagogy unfolds. For francophone teachers, especially those in minority settings who already feel besieged by linguistic insecurity, this may seem like an added burden. The institutional context often compounds this challenge: a significant proportion of francophone educators work under temporary contracts, with no guarantee of tenure or long-term stability. In some provinces, it is not uncommon for teachers to wait a decade or more before obtaining permanent status. In such a climate, broaching politically sensitive or emotionally charged subjects may be perceived as professionally risky, especially in communities where divergent views on reconciliation, language policy, or national identity are already polarized.

Nonetheless, embracing discomfort can be liberating when reframed as a collective journey rather than an individual failure. This calls for an affective pedagogy that validates emotional responses while channeling them toward critical insight. Teachers can draw on artistic and literary texts, including Indigenous poetry, theatre, and storytelling, to open emotional entry points into complex historical narratives. In the Franco-Canadian context, works by Natasha Kanapé Fontaine or Katherena Vermette offer powerful examples of how literature can serve as a bridge between knowledge and feeling, between historical truth and ethical action.

5.3 Transformative Praxis: From Learning About to Learning With

The final dimension of a pedagogical ethics of truth involves rethinking the relationship between teacher, student, and knowledge. Paulo Freire's (1970) concept of praxis, reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it, remains central here. Rather than treating history as a static body of facts to be transmitted, educators are invited to cultivate learning environments where history becomes a dialogical, participatory process.

Such praxis challenges hierarchical models of authority. Teachers must relinquish the fantasy of mastery and embrace a role of co-learner and facilitator. This can be operationalised through project-based learning that engages students with their local communities, archives, and oral histories. In a Manitoba context, for example, students could investigate the layered histories of their own towns, mapping settler narratives alongside Indigenous presence and displacement.

More radically, transformative praxis may involve unsettling the very temporalities that undergird historical thinking. As Coulthard (2014) argues, settler colonialism operates through a futurist logic of endless reconciliation without restitution. Decolonial pedagogy, by contrast, foregrounds memory, land, and intergenerational responsibility as sites of resistance.

5.4 Institutional Responsibilities: Beyond Individual Will

While pedagogical ethics begins in the classroom, it cannot be sustained without institutional support. Ministries of Education, teacher training programs, and school boards all have a role to play in enabling truth-telling as a systemic priority. This includes revising teacher certification standards to include competencies in Indigenous knowledge, anti-racist education, and critical historical inquiry. It also involves funding professional development programs co-led by Indigenous educators, rather than outsourcing decolonisation to occasional workshops or one-off resources.

Moreover, institutions must recognise the material conditions that constrain pedagogical innovation. Overworked and under-resourced teachers, especially in rural or remote francophone schools, cannot be expected to decolonise education in isolation. Structural change requires investment, collaboration, and a sustained political will.

Conclusion: A New Grammar of Historical Responsibility

Truth-telling in history education is not simply a matter of telling more stories or adding more voices. It is about rethinking the grammar of historical responsibility. Who is responsible to whom? What pasts are we responsible for? What futures do we make possible through our pedagogical choices?

For francophone communities in Canada, the stakes are particularly acute. Their own histories of marginalisation can either serve as bridges toward solidarity or as shields against accountability. A pedagogical ethics of truth invites us to reject this binary and to imagine education as a space of mutual recognition and collective transformation.

We began by tracing the conceptual stakes of truth-telling, from post-truth anxieties to the call for ethical responsibility. The analysis of the Parent Report revealed not only the exclusion of Indigenous presence but also the entrenchment of a settler-centric vision of educational reform. Despite its progressive aspirations, the report mirrors a broader pattern of historical erasure, where Indigenous voices are rendered silent, even in moments of systemic upheaval. The myth of francophone victimhood, though grounded in genuine experiences of linguistic oppression, risks eclipsing the more foundational violence of settler colonialism.

The curricular analysis confirmed these patterns, showing how provincial francophone programs tend to reproduce national myths under the guise of cultural resilience. Whether in Manitoba, New Brunswick, or British Columbia, the narrative arc remains largely settler: migration, perseverance, and institutional survival. Indigenous perspectives, when present, are often tokenised or sequestered in isolated modules. The curriculum thus becomes a space of discursive management rather than of epistemic reckoning.

To respond to this impasse, we have proposed a pedagogical ethics of truth rooted in epistemic accountability, affective engagement, and transformative praxis. These are not abstract ideals but concrete strategies: co-constructing knowledge with Indigenous partners, validating emotional responses to difficult histories, and transforming classrooms into sites of dialogical and land-based inquiry. At its heart, this ethics demands that educators abandon the illusion of objectivity and instead embrace vulnerability, relationality, and co-responsibility.

But ethical pedagogy cannot exist in isolation. Institutions must move beyond symbolic commitments and allocate the material resources required to support sustained truth-telling. This includes funding, time, and training, not as exceptional investments but as core responsibilities. Crucially, this also means addressing the precarious employment conditions that many francophone teachers face across Canada. A pedagogy of historical justice cannot flourish when educators themselves are uncertain of their professional future. In several provinces, it is not uncommon for teachers to remain on temporary contracts for a decade or more, moving from one assignment to another without the protection or continuity that permanent status provides.

Such precarity not only undermines teacher well-being, it constrains pedagogical risk-taking. In contexts where truth-telling may provoke controversy (be it around Indigenous rights, settler complicity, or linguistic hierarchies) teachers must feel institutionally supported, not professionally exposed. Ministries and school boards must therefore recognise that historical justice is not an elective topic. It is the ground upon which education must now stand. Ensuring stable employment for those who carry out this work is not a luxury; it is an ethical imperative.

Importantly, truth-telling must resist the lure of closure. To teach ethically in a settler colonial society is to work within a paradox: we must both account for the past and refuse its finality. This demands what Anishinaabe scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) calls "constellatory thinking", an ability to dwell in contradiction, to trace patterns across difference without erasing specificity. French-language education in Canada, particularly in minority settings, is well-positioned to model this pluralism, having long inhabited the interstices of linguistic, cultural, and political negotiation. The question is whether it will rise to the occasion.

In this spirit, truth-telling becomes a refusal: a refusal to simplify, to sentimentalise, or to universalise. It insists instead on complexity, on multiplicity, on the hard labour of listening. And it is here, in the act of listening, that pedagogy becomes political.

Listening to the land, to the ancestors, to the silences that rupture our textbooks. Listening not to respond, but to remember.

This is not a conclusion. It is an opening, an invitation to remake the grammar of historical responsibility in a way that honours the weight of what has been, while creating the conditions for what could be.

Ultimately, teaching history ethically in a settler colonial context means learning to speak in a plural voice. It means resisting the seductions of narrative closure and embracing the openness, vulnerability, and relationality that truth-telling demands. Only then can history education become, not a monument to the past, but a living practice of justice.

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