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Jamie Sarkonak: 'Trans-affirming toolkit' tells teachers to put ideology above biology

Federally-funded document claims the 'gender binary is a colonial and white supremacist structure' that should be dismantled in school

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Jamie Sarkonak

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The Progress Pride Flag flies at Syncrude's Wood Bison Viewpoint on Saturday, June 18, 2022. PHOTO BY VINCENT MCDERMOTT/FORT MCMURRAY TODAY/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Schools are a provincial matter, but that doesn't mean the federal government won't stick its fingers in where it can to drive a social agenda in the classroom. The latest instance? A new, federally-funded, "[Trans-Affirming Toolkit](#)" for teachers loaded with poor scholarship and ideological preaching.

The toolkit's stated purpose is to teach teachers about transgender-identifying students, but its nearly-100 pages are dripping with social justice theory, leftist identity politics and various false claims about biology, history and sex.

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The inaccuracies are glaring. The toolkit tells teachers, for example, that biological sex is determined by seven elements (it asserts that no single element can determine sex on its own): external genitalia, internal sex organs, gonads, secondary sex characteristics, hormone production, hormone response and chromosomes.

It's a comically false framing of biological sex. Chromosomes determine sex. There are other features that are associated with sex, like body parts, but the primary determinant comes down to DNA. Irregularities exist within a tiny sliver population, but these are clearly medical conditions, not proof of a sex spectrum. In the same way, a person born with one leg doesn't disprove the fact that humans are a two-legged species.

From there, the toolkit goes on to explain that the presumption that people are either men (if their sex is male) or women (if their sex is female), is racist. "Gender binary is a colonial and white supremacist structure rather than a natural and indisputable truth," it stated, before linking to a couple of online blog posts and newspaper articles as evidence.

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This is, of course, ridiculous. There's nothing uniquely "white" about biological sex and gender roles. Still, according to this toolkit, the Europeans are to blame for the oppressive belief in men and women.

"Because of colonialism, gender in Ontario and Canada, and specifically in the education system, still tends to be understood in binary terms or as being on either end of this 'spectrum,' or somewhere in between it," it lamented.

"European settlers forced their rigid views on gender upon the civilizations they invaded, reforming Indigenous gender roles through colonial restrictions as a tool to align patriarchal family and kinship structures that mirrored the privileged European family systems during the time of invasion."

The paragraph is wrong about everyone involved. Europeans generally had more defined gender roles than hunter-gatherer groups, sure, but "rigid" is a bit of a stretch by historical standards. Women were teachers, pioneers, scholars, midwives, managers and so on. And if the traditional European family structure indeed produced strong outcomes for people, that's because it performs well, not because it's anointed with privilege.

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On top of that, Indigenous people were already familiar with the differences between men and women. Hunting was traditionally a man's role among the Slavey; tent-crafting was typically the job of women in Cree culture; the Apache celebrated their girls' initiations into womanhood with ceremony (the boys' equivalent was participating in his first raid). While studies on these observed divisions were only produced starting in the colonial era, these traditions were evidently passed down from a previous time. Europeans couldn't have invented the Ojibwe menstrual lodge, for example.

That said, the message this toolkit wants to send is that gender norms are inherently European, and therefore they're inherently oppressive.

"Cisgenderism, cissexism and cisnormativity are the root of the violence perpetuated against trans and gender diverse people," it explains. Teachers are encouraged throughout the document to "audit" their own views on gender and deconstruct them in the classroom.

This, of course, is ridiculous. "Cis-" merely refers to females who identify as women and males who identify as men — that is, 99.7 per cent of the population, according to Statistics Canada. It's not "violence" to assume that most people aren't trans; it's merely reality. The toolkit insists that such assumptions are cruel and unjust, however, and asks teachers to review their "cis-privilege" and reflect on times where they made "cisnormative assumptions."

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To undo these abuses, the toolkit advises schools to cater to the oppressed. It suggests a radical restructuring of the classroom: Progress Pride flags should be displayed in the classroom, gender ideology should be embedded in the curriculum, teachers should talk about trans people during lessons, students should be taught about the dogmatic privilege hierarchies that now drive leftist thought. High school students should learn about racism, colonialism and white supremacy during biology class, and so on.

“Every single student needs to learn about gender diversity in all areas of the curriculum, inclusive of science and mathematics, and not just in language arts and history,” reads the instruction. “Knowledge about gender diversity in the study of biology is important, for example. Learning about trans and gender diverse communities for their brilliance beyond gender-based activism, survival in the face of violence and transition stories that center linear representations of transition is vital.”

The toolkit recommends that teachers read [books](#) about [transgender children](#) to their classes, and have students complete gender-introspective [worksheets](#). One recommended activity [asks](#) kids to denote the degree to which they feel emotional and sexual attraction to each of: men, women and “other genders.”

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“Students must be affirmed in their identities, and so no assumptions should be made about them (for example, educators should not assume that all students are cisgender as the default),” is explains.

“Dedicated separate spaces must also be provided for students who are Othered so that they might find support if and when they experience harm.”

The toolkit’s shaky scholarly base cites the same familiar names known for nonsensical progressive leftist work. Critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw gets a mention (the toolkit encourages teachers to apply Crenshaw’s theory of “intersectionality” to identify layers of oppression). Susan Stryker, prominent trans studies professor, is referenced as well. It’s the equivalent of using Karl Marx to explain basic economics to business owners.

I no longer feel surprised when I come across pseudo-scholarly work that tells me the gender binary is fake, that European colonialism is the cause for all of society’s problems and that young children should be vigorously instructed in the ascendant theories of social justice. This happened last year, too when a federally funded [“anti-hate” toolkit](#) for teachers explained that Canada’s former flag, the Red Ensign, was a symbol of white supremacy, and that various widely-used internet memes were racist.

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This time, the “Trans-Affirming Toolkit” was a work of Wayne Martino, a Western University professor of “equity and social justice education,” PhD candidate Jenny Klassen and an Ottawa-Carleton school board employee. Martino received modest federal funding since 2007 totalling \$415,000, with more than half going towards the project that

gave rise to the trans-affirming treatise now being circulated to teachers [by their trade unions](#).

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