

Deconstructing a Curriculum of Dominance: Teacher Education, Colonial Frontier Logics, and Residential Schooling

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The elimination of language has always been a primary stage in a process of cultural genocide. This was the primary function of the residential school. (Fred, 1988)

An animal bellows in the backdrop. A voice yells, "*Hurry up!*" A car tramples the chicken wire that makes up the rabbit-proof fence . . . and colonial violence makes its entrance into this filmic scene. A mother yells. Holding hands mothers and daughters run.

Constable Riggs steps out of the car and shouts, "*Come for the three girls, Maude!*"

"*No!*" she screams. "*This is my kids! Mine!*"

"*It's the law Maude,*" he says.

The two mothers continue to scream, "*No!*"

"*You got no say in it,*" the constable continues.

He grabs the girls and throws them one by one into the back of the car.

The mothers continue to yell... "*No! Mine!*"

"*Move one inch,*" Riggs tells the girls, "*and I'll lock your mother up!*" "Neville's their legal guardian."

Crying, a mother pleads, "*Give me back my Daisy!*"

Riggs responds, "*I've got the papers, Maude!*"

He tells the girls, "don't move!"

Their grandmother tries one more time to save them.

Constable Riggs responds, "Nothing you can do old girl, nothing you can do old girl."

The scene ends with Molly, Daisy, and Gracie staring out the rearview window at their grandmother hitting herself repeatedly to the head with a rock, mothers collapsed with grief on the red soil, wailing, disappearing in the distance alongside the rabbit proof fence, the longest colonial fence in



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the world, keeping rabbits on one side, and the farmland on the other. The narrative plot of people occupying foreign lands, enclosing the commons within reservations and reserves, building schools, taking children from their families, implementing a curriculum of assimilation, forcibly institutionalizing a child's residency at vocational schools, brutally violating Indigenous cultures, languages, bodies, minds, spirits, hearts and indenturing their servitude to the colony, is not merely relegated to movies and their filmic narratives, nor contained historically and presently within the national borders of countries like Australia. For us, we four authors, the presence of colonial frontier logics put forth in films like *The Rabbit Proof Fence*, and its respective traumatic narratives, was deeply rooted and taught as a curriculum of absence at the different schools we attended (and to a large extent teach at) across Canada. And, for many of us, such curricular absence continued within the curriculum presented to us during our teacher education.

Therefore, in this article we write collaboratively toward deconstructing how we might redress such present absences in the curriculum through our current occupations, research, and intellectual studies as a Canadian curriculum theory project. As Ng-A-Fook (2007, 2009) suggests elsewhere such deconstructive work involves tracing genealogies, and uncovering the contextual political and historical layers from which certain narratives emerge, are promised, and made possible through the stories and respective national mythologies we tell one another in schools and its respective curricula. The province of Ontario, albeit not globally alone, continues to invest in narrative capital which attempts to reproduce standardized subjects, with a common curriculum, and thus disseminate its empire through ideological apparatuses—juridical, educational, medical, religious, etc.—which makes the subject of deconstruction, and the deconstruction of a curriculum of dominance all the more pressing today.

Such curriculum of neo/colonial dominance—history textbooks, curriculum policies, popular films, and so on—continues to work here in Ontario to create myths about the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal creation stories we tell (or don't tell) each other. Moreover, such creation stories as Donald (in-press) makes clear, work to represent the beliefs Canadian citizens hold regarding the narrative genesis of our nation-state. In turn, the stories we (don't) tell each other through the public school curriculum about the birth of our country, as Donald writes, have a significant impact on the institutional, political, and cultural character of the country, as well as the narrative preoccupations of its future citizens. Donald (2009) theorizes that Canadian institutions perpetuate the colonial establishment of the fort. "Universities and schools," Donald suggests, "are predicated on colonial frontier logics and have both served to enforce epistemological and social conformity to Euro-western standards" (p. 4). Therefore educational institutions re/imagined as academic forts helps us to better understand how they create and perpetuate certain inherent institutional barricades that in turn obstruct the engagement of Aboriginal learners (or international students) and contribute to the violent pedagogical and epistemic curricular reproductions of exclusion and displacement. According to Donald, the symbol of the fort perpetuates a colonial frontier logic that forces some individuals to remain outside the walls of Canadian institutions. Often when 'outsiders' attempt to enter such institutions (forts), they are asked or even forced to give up their way of life and in turn reconstruct their subjectivity as a curriculum of radical hope (Lear, 2008). Therefore educational forts, like residential schools, represented (at least for the colonial governments) the pinnacle of 'civilization' and 'progress' set up to bring a benevolent curriculum of civilization to the 'uncivilized outsiders.'

In response to such colonial frontier logics, we weave our writings within the interstitial temporal margins of our lived experiences to co-produce narratives assemblages and attempt to understand how colonial frontier logics work to displace Indigenous histories and epistemologies to the peripheries of what constitutes a curriculum of dominance within the Ontario public schooling system (Weenie, 2008). Much like Ng-A-Fook, Sheridan and Noble (2011), "our narrative assemblages seek

to render curriculum theorizing [...] as an aesthetic form of production” (p. 5). In turn, each author is provided a space in which they can articulate lived experiences with such curricular absences in a way that accommodates not only their preferred method of deconstructing a curriculum of dominance but also their epistemic commitments. Through the assemblage of these narratives, inspired to some extent by the methodology of *métissage* (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers and Leggo, 2009), we create a space for a dialectic through which we each deconstruct the colonial frontier logics that have shaped our understandings of lived experiences with a curriculum of dominance. Our collective writing creates narrative assemblages in the following ways:

1. Through a textual analysis, Bryan Smith looks at the ways in which authorized textbooks make possible the conditions through which silences are made viable and as a consequence, legitimize the continued hegemony of colonial logics.
2. Using film analysis, Sara Berry examines how films such as *The Rabbit Proof Fence* and *Where the Spirit Lives* can generate a praxial space that works to deconstruct and transcend colonial frontier logics; interrogating dominant historical narratives, and revisiting those that have been silenced.
3. Reflecting on educational interactions provides a space for Kevin Spence to re/engage his classroom practice and confront his own colonial frontier logics.
4. Nicholas Ng-A-Fook asks us to reconsider the limit-situations that define our understandings of history. Reflecting on his teaching praxis with teacher education students, he discusses some of the ways in which we can engage our limit-situations and reflect on ontological and epistemological understandings of our relationships with colonial histories.

As scholars working from different professional vantage points (as a professor, graduate students, and practicing public and Catholic school teachers) our writing creates a curricular space that both re-inscribes and disrupts historical narratives, while taking them apart, *reassembling* them, *disassembling* them and then starting the process again (Ng-A-Fook, Robayo-Sheridan, & Noble, 2011). Our disassembling and reassembling of history textbooks, films, and autobiographies is caught betwixt-and-between the margins of what we might call the narrative chronotopes of *Third Spaces* (Bhabha, 1994; Ng-A-Fook, 2009; Wang, 2009). One of the ways to engage displaced knowledge is narrative *métissage* (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, and Leggo, 2009). For us, narrative *métissage* as a life writing methodology provides a curricular method through which we might develop empathy with others who have experienced education as trauma. Our radical hope is that such work, at least for us as educators, can begin to redress the detrimental and traumatic effects of a curriculum of colonial dominance, yet without any predetermined promise.

Absence and Sanitization: Residential Schooling, Textbooks, and Historical Narratives

My interest in textbooks arises out of the experiences I had as a student. For me, the text *was* knowledge which perhaps isn't all that surprising given that, “textbooks in Canada have played a crucially important role in education because of their ubiquitous role in classrooms” (Clark, 2006, p. 1067). Apple (2004) even goes as far as to argue that in the United States (and I would argue Canada), “the curriculum *is* the textbook” (p. 188, original emphasis). The hegemony of this particular form of textual document creates conditions in which the textbook becomes the arbiter of truth. Experiences in classroom settings both as a student and a teacher have lent credence to the belief that the text comes to constitute acceptable forms of knowledge and engagement with historical ideas. Even at the post-



secondary level, where ideas are subjected to greater levels of scrutiny, I found myself still fervently reading textbooks because exams were generally devised around the ideas held therein. In this sense, the textbook regulated and shaped both the curriculum as program/course outline and curriculum as an experiential endeavour with education. It is for these reasons that I commit myself epistemologically to a project of unravelling the complexities and curricular dominance enacted through textbooks.

The notable absence of Aboriginal residential schooling from my lived experiences serves to highlight an intellectual and curricular gap in the sharing of our individual and collective histories. Such curricular gaps can be traced to curricular materials that are used as the basis for teaching history to many of the teacher candidates. In Ontario, the grade ten history course, a compulsory course designed to teach students about the history of Canada since the First World War, effectively serves to silence the difficulty of the residential schooling experiences through two separate mechanisms: curtailing the articulation of these experiences or, when present, sanitizing the history in what is ostensibly an attempt to make the experiences more palatable or congruent with the colonial logics put forth in the texts. As a consequence, the trauma of residential schooling and the tensions that have inhered in Aboriginal/Euro-Canadian relations is displaced in favour of colonial narratives that privilege a history of 'progress' over a history of contention and violence.

In terms of the official curriculum documents used to outline the course of study for Ontario secondary students, the absence of residential schooling is absolute. Nowhere in the *Canadian and World Studies* curriculum document (Ministry of Education, 2005) does the requirement to teach residential schooling experiences exist⁵. This totalized absence translates into similar (but not complete) absences in the textbooks used to teach the Ontario curriculum. This is perhaps no surprise given the Ministry of Education's (2006) mandate that requires textbooks to, "support at least 85 per cent of the expectations for a Kindergarten learning area, an elementary subject in a specific grade, or a secondary course" (p. 7). This presents a problem – the lack of curricular requirements around residential schooling translates into a dearth of content in the textbooks themselves.

The textbooks present content on residential schooling in two ways. First, they tend to minimize the importance of residential schooling in Canadian history by precluding any comprehensive discussion (a consequence of the aforementioned curricular exclusion). Looking through many of the texts available to educators and students, we find that numerous texts dedicate only a few pages to discussions of residential schooling. In fact, most texts dedicate less than five pages to any sort of discussion (including quick mentions and glossaries). Most of these textbooks are longer than four hundred pages. Yet, the texts frequently dedicate less than one percent of the potential space to a discussion of the expansive set of encounters with Euro-Canadians that shaped the emotional and educational experiences of the First Peoples. If we compare this to the only Native Studies textbook approved for use in Ontario, *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada* (Reed, Beeds, Elijah, Lickers & McLeod, 2011), which dedicates an entire chapter to the topic, it becomes clear that Ontario history texts operate to minimize the pedagogical importance of residential schools in relation to the grand narrative of Canadian history thereby displacing the violence in favour of more palatable discussions.

Quantifying historical inclusions however only accounts for the presence or absence of narratives. This brings us to my second point: namely, the existing narratives that are present are largely sanitized for the high school student reader. This in turn creates conditions in which students are unable to contend and address the curricular violence in any great depth. In those instances in which residential schooling is discussed, I found that the texts discuss the experiences in ways that mitigate the representation of violence. In so doing, students are unable to recognize the violence, colonial logics or lasting consequences of the residential schooling tragedy in enough detail to address the difficulty that inheres in such a history.

For example, many of the texts acknowledge the violence that existed in the schools but do not provide enough detail to elicit a response that may encourage the student to confront the colonial frontier logics of the narrative:

Frequently, students who broke the rules were severely punished (Fielding, Evans, Haskings-Winner, Mewhinney, Robertson, Sly & Terry, 2001, p. 99).

Students were severely punished if they were caught speaking their own languages (Quinlan, Baldwin, Mahoney, & Reed, 2008, p. 68).

Traditional religious practices were forbidden, and if the children spoke their own language, they were severely punished (Newman, Aitken, Eaton, Holland, Montgomery & Riddoch, 2000, p. 186).

Many Aboriginal students suffered emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. Some experienced physical and sexual abuse (Bogle, D'Orazio, & Quinlan, 2006, p. 297).

While we are certainly not asking authors to publish grotesque or overly disturbing representations of residential schooling experiences, we do suggest that the representations available are oversimplified and ambiguous. Consequently, this understates the violence enacted against both Aboriginal cultures and bodies in residential schools.

Unlike *Rabbit Proof Fence*, these texts sanitize the historical experiences of residential school survivors, effectively inhibiting, I contend, their capacity to elicit an emotional response. If we compare this to the Native Studies text, we get an even better sense of how sanitized the articulations are:

Punishment was the main means of control used in the residential schools, and, unfortunately, it was often very harsh and cruel punishment, such as the withholding of meals, confinement, strapping, and public humiliation (Reed et al., 2011, p. 350).

This excerpt, in conjunction with a detailed narrative from a survivor on the same page, provides the reader with a greater sense of the forms of violence, which, in turn, makes possible a better engagement with the violence and colonial nature around common articulations of residential schooling. For example, the text offers the following from Fred Kelly, an elder with the Ojibway of Onigaming:

My very first memory of my entry into the school is a painful flashback. For whatever reason, I am thrown into a kneeling position. My head is bashed against a wooden cupboard by the boys' supervisor. Instant shock, the nauseating smell of ether, more spanking, then numbness; sudden fear returns at the sight of the man. (Reed et al., 2011, p. 350)

While each of us recognize that the existence of a Native Studies course may assist in bringing into consciousness the histories of Aboriginal groups, we also agree with Tupper and Cappello (2008) who argue that, "offering Native studies as a stand-alone course for students might appear to be well intentioned, [but] the reality is that this separation further marginalizes the lives and experiences of Aboriginal peoples" (p. 561). As a course that is neither mandatory nor popular with high school students, we are left with a circumstance in which the few sanitized articulations of residential

schooling come to be the official and accepted understandings. As a means of confronting these problems, we suggest that there are a few ways to address the colonial logics and violence that shaped the educational experiences of Aboriginal students and the implications this has for teachers.

Viewing Film as a Medium for Addressing Traumatic Histories

I situate my writing, and my story from within a traumatic third space—somewhere between the grand narrative of the European colonizer and that of the colonized Aboriginal. Both stories are my own. However, over time, one story has collided with, discounted and superseded the other, leaving behind another displaced narrative calling itself to be re-visited and re-written. Consequently, as a teacher and former graduate student, I aim to reflect upon, re-write and redress lost memories through a medium that both students and teachers can relate to very well; namely, media.

Film can address traumatic histories. It has the power to generate a praxial space where personal and collective identities, as well as suppressed knowledges are challenged, re-worked, and reformed in relation to curriculum. Moreover, film serves as a window through which we may “read” into various curricular texts for the purpose of navigating the messages and meanings inherent in the language of curriculum. In what follows, I provide a brief deconstruction of two films and their pedagogical implications for disrupting the colonial frontier logics embedded within a curriculum of dominance.

The Rabbit Proof Fence, set in Western Australia in the early 1930’s, follows the true story of three young “half-caste” Aboriginal girls; Molly, Gracie and Daisy. The film begins when A.O Neville, is granted the official title of Chief Protector of Aborigines. In fear of the unwanted creation of a “third race,” Mr. Neville seeks not to protect Aboriginal people, but the racial purity of white Australians. Thus, he authorizes the seizure of all half-cast children, those with both Aboriginal and White parentage, from their families, and houses them in re-educative settlements where they are to receive the training and discipline required for indentured servitude. Molly, her sister Daisy, and cousin Gracie are taken to a settlement one thousand miles away from their rural home in Jigalong. Here, Molly plans to escape. The three girls embark on the one thousand mile trek home, through the Australian outback, following a state-long rabbit proof fence designed to keep the rabbits on one side, and the farmland on the other. The girls successfully return to Jigalong. However, at the end of the film we learn that several years later Molly’s daughter is seized, and the cycle of abuse continues into the 1970’s.

The trauma of displacement is evident in the violent scene that depicts Molly, Daisy and Gracie being literally pried from their mothers’ arms, and thrown into the vehicle that transports the girls from Jigalong to a re-educative site thousands of miles from home. Trauma also manifests itself in the anthropomorphic representations of the girls’ mothers as they propel their bodies onto the ground, and into the dirt, revealing the emotional pain and suffering inflicted upon them. Trauma, as Gilmore (2001) maintains, is “beyond language in some crucial way, that language fails in the face of trauma, and that trauma mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency. And yet language, ironically, “is pressed forward as that which can heal the survivor of trauma” (p. 6). In the film, Molly, Daisy and Gracie’s ties to home, culture and language are jeopardized when the girls are forced to speak English; a language that they do not use to describe themselves, and their encounters with the other. Thus, the language of the colonizer presents itself as a source of vulnerability when it is meant to replace the girls’ native language. Notions of hybridity and the third space may be used to illustrate how the girls in the *Rabbit Proof Fence* might overcome forces of colonial oppression by straddling two cultures that are seemingly at odds. However, as Donald (2009) warns, a postcolonial reading of the film, attentive to the significance of the third space would suggest that Molly, Gracie and Daisy’s hybridity is placeless (p. 17). Consequently, weakening the importance of place works to undermine the trauma associated with becoming displaced.

The Rabbit Proof Fence puts forth a myriad of colonial attitudes that are established in the language that pervade a society's history, its educational structures, and the lives of those "poor souls" that one hopes to save by means of exclusion. Furthermore, one might suggest that a curriculum that employs streaming and testing is similar to Neville's assimilating curriculum where the objective is to weed out those individuals who do not fit society's mould. At the end of the film Mr. Neville states that, "we face an uphill with these people." Similarly, educators often face an uphill battle with students that are seemingly "unreachable." Therefore, if the language of curriculum could be re-imagined in colonial terms, one might become closer to recognizing, deconstructing and transcending what Donald (2009) aptly calls the colonial frontier logics that, in turn, perpetuate narrative enclosure and displacement in Ontario classrooms. With such curricular displacements in mind, I now turn to the film *Where the Spirit Lives* for the purpose of situating the notions of trauma and curricular displacement within a post-colonial discourse here in Canada.

As part of a national policy mandating the forced assimilation of First Nations children into British-Canadian society, the children in the film, are to be transported to a boarding school on the Canadian prairies. Lacking the agency to choose her fate, Ashtokome (the protagonist) succumbs to the tempting allure of the Indian agent standing before her. His mysterious charm and kind demeanour ultimately lure Ashtokome and the other children onto the plane. Upon arrival to the residential school, Ashtokome and her brother Pita are cautioned against "talking gobbledygook" and forced to speak English. Befriending her teacher, Ashtokome reveals that she is capable of navigating the English language despite her unwillingness to do so. Aoki (2000) maintains that language is largely associated with ways of knowing (p. 326). Thus, Ashtokome's departure from her Native language, signals at that point in the film a potential loss of her worldview situated within a particular Indigenous metaphysical and ideological space. Stuart Hall (1997) might suggest that the Aboriginal meaning of an apple changes when it is named APPLE since, "representation through language is [...] central to the process by which meaning is produced" (p. 1). In the book of Genesis, the apple is the forbidden fruit that symbolizes knowledge and the fall of mankind. The film suggests that by naming the apple, Ashtokome gains access to the knowledge of her colonizers. However, the appropriation of knowledge that makes navigating the worldview of her oppressors possible also potentially endangers her cultural knowledge. Thus, by naming the apple, Ashtokome accepts the potential subjective reconstruction of her worldview.

In addition to the subjection to foreign language practices, Ashtokome and Pita (her brother) are given the British names Amelia and Abraham. In the Judeo-Christian tradition the re-naming of an individual at baptism signals the beginning of a new (Christian) self and also the attempt to erase one's relational identity to both family and place. Consequently, the re-naming of Ashtokome bears a close resemblance to the Christian baptismal ritual. Upon her arrival to the school, the scene depicts Ashtokome being re-named, bathed and clothed. We might suggest that this scene presents a certain washing away of the past, and Ashtokome's induction into civilized, White society as a pseudo-Christian.

Reading films as historical texts serve a dual purpose; it is a vehicle enabling us to critique the ways in which we continue to both reproduce and resist the colonial attitudes that displace traumatic experiences within our current history education curriculum, and a vehicle whereby we may critically engage in praxis designed to re-imagine the study of history as the study of one's life story both internationally and here in Canada.

Films, such as *The Rabbit Proof Fence* and *Where the Spirit Lives*, serve as vehicles where we might combine theory and history for the purpose of considering the curricular implications of the colonial legacy. However, a critical analysis of the ways in which the language of the historical

colonizer inhabits curriculum requires an interrogation of the past; a journey many of us are hesitant to embark on. History is guilty of storying the ‘other’ in the same way Ashtokome and Molly’s oppressors attempt to reconstruct their subjectivities through the formal processes of schooling. Similarly, generations of Canada’s First Nations and Australia’s Indigenous peoples’ lived realities are storied and scarred by history’s abuse of exclusions. In Canada, the stories of First Nations Peoples are both affirmed and denied. Apologies have been made and monetary settlements administered. However, the authority of the colonist narrative still supersedes First Nations stories as the hallmark of our Canadian national identity. If we are confined to the pages of our own stories, how are we to fully acknowledge our responsibility in working to foster dialectical spaces where hierarchies might be deconstructed?

In both films, Molly and Ashtokome embark on the journey back to places that were once lost. Similarly, an interrogation of history would require us to return to the repressed cognitive sites that house the traumas of the past. It is here that we might begin to repair and re-write lost stories. If the de-colonization of history depends upon the de-colonization of the mind, we might use Farley’s (2010) metaphor of the “reluctant pilgrim” to think about history curriculum in terms of returning to memory (p. 10). Moreover, a re-configuration of history curriculum as a series of life stories woven into the fabric of the past, present and future might offer a possibility for an abandonment of the single story.

Re/engagements with a Curriculum of Colonial Frontier Logics

Looking over my class list in early September 2006, I came across a surname that I had not previously encountered. I asked the student what the origins of her last name were. She proceeded to explain to me that although she was rather fair, she was Cree. Laughingly she told me that she called herself ‘the whitest little Indian ever’. This initial interaction was perhaps an initiation into things to come, a moment of what Rey Chow (1994) describes as “evidence-cum-witness”, a place where Indigenous people are imagined in terms outside those of resistance against an image, a place that surpasses colonization and exists outside of the image both prior to and post European contact, and provides a space for First Peoples to exist beyond imposed images of the ‘Native’, ‘Aboriginal’, or ‘Indian’, all terms not heard prior to European contact.

Perhaps this student was constructing her own space as an adult Aboriginal learner within the classroom. As the semester progressed, she consistently demonstrated understanding at or near the highest level of academic achievement in the class. However, I felt that she was not fully engaged and feared that she was losing interest in the course material. I spoke to her and explained that I had rarely taught a student with more potential. In turn, I felt that she was prepared for studies at the academic level. Smiling, she replied that her teachers had been telling her about her ‘potential’ since elementary school. Although she enjoyed school, she sometimes lost interest, and according to her this was both a gift and a curse. She often caught up quickly or just showed up for the test and performed well.

In the spring of 2009 I nominated my student for a Youth in Science Initiative. Although she believed the opportunity would nurture her interests and boost her confidence in science, she disappeared from our school after returning from her March break internship. After her educational dis/engagement, I attempted to contact her and persuade her to return to her studies. I was not successful. Her grandmother told me that she had moved back west. This past autumn, I taught her cousin who informed me that my previous student had since re/engaged with education, graduated from high school and gone on to university studies. The relationship between First Peoples and educational systems, according to Donald (2009), has been historically built upon “colonial frontier logics that have served to enforce epistemological and social conformity” (p. 4) to the dominant colonizing culture of Canada. The educational dis/engagement of many Aboriginal learners testifies to lasting impacts of

assimilation within the dominant hegemony of what we now call the Canadian public and private schooling systems.

Despite the consequences of colonial interactions many Aboriginal People are attempting to reconcile their relationship with Canada's educational systems. Nonetheless, additional supports from teachers as well as educational and Aboriginal organizations are required if adult Aboriginal learners are to successfully re/engage with educational systems. Adult educators are well positioned to address offences of the past, educate colleagues, and ease the re/engagement of adult Aboriginal learners with educational systems. Therefore, adult educators as well as institutions of adult education must be made aware of the needs, sensitivities, and histories of adult Aboriginal learners and must be prepared to address the symbolic and pedagogical violence of exclusion and displacement perpetuated by colonial frontier logics. The educational experiences of adult Aboriginal learners often present challenges for continued participation in educational settings (Wootton and Stonebanks, 2010). Needs for improvements to adult education have not gone unrecognized by First Peoples. In Haig-Brown (1995), Chief Kelly of Lacomen describes the need for expanded adult Aboriginal education as:

The Government removal of two or three of the smart girls out of the school and to train them to be nurses so that they would be able to treat the Indians who are sick...if we had one or more competent nurses, in my opinion, a great many lives could be saved which are now lost through lack of proper attention. (p. 73)

Here Chief Kelly realizes the benefit of adult Aboriginal education to the wellbeing of the Lacomen. Through re/engagement with educational systems, many adult Aboriginal learners demonstrate high levels of educational resilience. In *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Residential School*, Haig-Brown (1988) describes how the Kamloops Residential School has been reclaimed by those who were oppressed and abused within its walls. The building now houses a Native Indian teacher education program, a cultural centre, a day care, and a Native adult basic education program.

Despite significant academic accomplishments, feelings of inadequacy persist. This may result in adult Aboriginal learners doubting their abilities and accomplishments. In interviews with adult Aboriginal learners, Grant (2004) discovered that feelings of academic inferiority were so ingrained in one student that "she did not believe that 'trash' really deserved these accolades and felt her accomplishments were a hoax" (p. 121). Yet for another, they felt that "in spite of her excellent academic record, she was not at all sure she had really 'made it'" (p. 143). Historical prejudices regarding the abilities of adult Aboriginal learners have been long embedded in the educational hegemony of Canada. *The Davin Report* (1879) concluded that "As far as the adult Indian is concerned, little can be done with him. If anything is to be done with the Indian, we must catch him very young" (p. 12). *The Davin Report* stands as one of the main documents used to support the development of the Indian Residential Schools.

With culturally sensitive supports and self-reflective methods (Sargent and Schlossberg, 1988), it may be possible to alleviate some of the stress associated with re/engagement, as well as mitigate feelings of inadequacy or inferiority that adult Aboriginal learners may feel as they transition back into educational settings. As a result of schooling policies, Barnes, Josefowitz, and Cole (2006) state that "most, if not all, residential school students experienced conditions that placed them at risk for potentially harmful psychological impacts, that is, separation from parents, immigration to a new culture, second-language learning, and denigration of their first language and culture" (p. 20). Youth under institutionalized care often do not have parents or other compassionates to provide guidance, advocacy or the cultural teachings required during developmental periods when they are vulnerable to

the physical and psychological risk factors associated with childhood and adolescence. The absence of support networks may hinder continued education. This absence of support may be similar to the description provided by Desroches (2005) of “a child whose early development was negatively impacted by parental neglect [that] may demonstrate resilience once they are able to access additional support from teachers and peers when they enter school” (p. 5). Although the term ‘parental neglect’ may not be appropriate here, as parental absence was forced on many Indigenous families, the result of parental or supportive adult absence on the educational experiences of adult Aboriginal learners may be much the same. The legacy of abuse that occurred in the residential schooling system continues to affect Aboriginal peoples and their interactions with educational institutions.

Anuik, Battiste and George (2010) describe success for Aboriginal people as the “self-mastery and learning about one’s special gifts and competencies” (p. 67). Under this model learning is not seen as competitive, but rather as a “role model or goal to emulate” (p. 67). In Faries (2004) work with Aboriginal curriculum, an informant described their disengagement with education as a result of a lack of respect for “the culture and history of my people” and continued that he “wanted to learn about my people because I need to understand who I am. But that did not happen; I am now a high school dropout” (p. 1).

At the MiChigeeng First Nation adult and continuing education program, the adult learners developed their own rules of conduct based upon the Seven Grandfather teachings of the Ojibway (Jones, 2003). Eileen Antone (2003) advocates the framing of Aboriginal literacy programs in culturally sensitive ways based on traditional teachings and respect for the teachings of Elders. Whereas Battiste, Henderson & Youngblood (2009) examined rights to Indigenous Knowledge and the production and protection of “histories, language, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures” (p.8) as well as the right to maintain distinct cultural and social institutions. Nonetheless, there remains some debate concerning the effectiveness of methods employed to engage adult Aboriginal learners. However consensus around the importance of Elder teachings and the employment of commonalities such as teachings that engage the emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical aspects of the learner, do tend to emerge. Although I am trying to avoid any Pan-Canadian Indian stereotypes, certain similarities in teachings are present [i.e. circle teachings, environmental concerns and the determination of ones place in the world] and can be explored in classroom settings.

Through my experiences with adult Aboriginal learners, I have been guided to two teachings concerning interactions that may lead to desired engagement outcomes. These were not discovered, but rather students and friends in the Aboriginal community led me to them. The first of these teachings describes a need for support and reassurance without placing pressure on the learner. This was illustrated to me by an Aboriginal student who I questioned concerning his plans after high school. He did not tell me to back off directly, rather he told me that when someone asked him about his plans after high school he told them he was going to be a shit truck driver. I got the point and discontinued my questioning of his future plans. As chance would have it, a short time later another teacher asked the student what his plans were after he finished school; he looked over at me and with a grin and repeated, “I’m going to be a shit truck driver.” My lesson has been learned. I can and should provide support, but must not apply pressure to long-term goals. For this student, the goal of completing high school was pressure enough and should be regarded as success on its own right.

The second need demonstrated to me concerns a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging to a community who need and support each other has been explained as a vital component of re/engagement. A friend from the Aboriginal community has described his interactions with people through participation in school, cultural activities, and community events as visiting his families around the city. This student does not have many close relatives in the region and found that he felt stronger

and important in an acknowledged way when he made intimate connections with people. Therefore, it is from my interactions with people, community, and culture that I continue as a high school teacher and educational researcher to research into the concept of educational re/engagement for the aboriginal students I in turn teach and am taught by.

Remembering Residential School Narratives within our Curriculum Designs

As a first generation immigrant, I continue to listen and learn from the stories of those who traditionally inhabited the land here in Canada since time immemorial. Such stories remind me that not all inhabitants have profited, like me, from the colonial system of education. “Coming to know the past,” Smith (1999) writes,

...has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges. The pedagogical implication of this access to alternative knowledges is that they can form the basis for alternative ways of doing things. Transforming our colonized views of our own history (as written by the West), however, requires us to revisit, site by site, our history under Western eyes. (p. 34)

As curriculum theorists, we make inquiries into and critiques of past and present colonial and curricular landscapes in order to understand and improve the processes of teaching and learning. One of the main goals of the *International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies* is to “work against the cultural and economic imperialism associated with the phenomenon known as globalization,” or in my case to work against international neocolonization (Pinar, 2003, p. 1). And yet, in many ways the discursive conceptual lens of taking up history as a post-colonial strategic turn continues to invoke various theoretical limit-situations associated with appropriating Indigenous historical knowledges (Freire 1970). For example, tracing discursive regimes to the dialectic and material limit-situations flattened between the hyphen (-) of “post” and “colonial” fails to acknowledge the political and historical complexities of how Canadian history is narrated in relation to local understandings of place, Indigenous sovereignty, wisdom traditions, and respective communal utilities.

Indigenous communities who live within the geographical international boundaries of North America differ from other minority communities in that the Canadian governments recognize First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities as sovereign nations. In order to enjoy the economic fruits of Canada’s resources, these communities were relocated, taken away and sent to residential schools, and now situated beyond the walls of our institutional forts across Canada. For many teacher candidates such communities and their respective historical narratives remain out of sight and thus for many of us still out of mind. Despite such ongoing present absence within the curricula we teach here in Ontario schools, in 2008 Prime Minister Stephen Harper stood up in the House of Commons and offered the following apology on behalf of all Canadians to former First Nation, Inuit, and Métis, residential students:

Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today to offer an apology to former students of Indian residential schools. The treatment of children in Indian residential schools is a sad chapter in our history. In the 1870's, the federal government, partly in order to meet its obligation to educate aboriginal children, began to play a role in the development and administration of these schools. Two primary objectives of the residential schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption aboriginal

cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, "to kill the Indian in the child." Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country... First Nations, Inuit and Métis languages and cultural practices were prohibited in these schools. Tragically, some of these children died while attending residential schools and others never returned home. (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2008)

In a sense, for many, the apology provided an opportunity to put closure to a sad chapter of our collective history here in Canada. And yet such curriculum of en/closures also function to help us forget the history of residential schooling by psychically pushing its narratives to the past, and in turn to the margins of historical forgetfulness within our minds. In fact, such curricular acts of forgetting, their colonial frontier logics, work to prevent certain historical narratives from even entering our minds (Moore, 2003).

During the eighteenth century, professional cadres of geologists, naturalists, astronomers, ethnographers, philosophers, historians, geographers, painters, and poets staffed the research and development arm of European empires, many of whom held day jobs as sailors, soldiers, missionaries, and bureaucrats (Willinsky, 1998). Most of these imperialist research positions, if not all, belonged and belong to non-Indigenous scholars. The colonizers' historical and institutional exclusion of indigenous epistemologies reproduced knowledge, which continues to support and legitimize colonialism's culture (Thomas, 1994). For indigenous peoples, "colonialism became imperialism's outpost, the fort and the port of imperial outreach" (Smith, 1999, p. 23). Historians within the academy used the term "imperialism" to refer to a series of developments—discovery, conquest, exploitation, distribution, and appropriation—leading to European economic and political expansion (Smith, 1999). Meanwhile, Indigenous ways of critiquing imperialism and the culture of colonialism and reproducing indigenous ways of knowing were and, for the most part still, are ignored within the walls of academia, including many faculties of education (Kuokkanen, 2003; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004).

As a first generation immigrant father living in Canada for more than 37 years, the possibility of government agents showing up at our door to remove our three sons remains an unimaginable act. To see them go hungry, abused, deprived of proper care and nurturance, or to die would be unbearable. It is unbearable! How might we then, as curriculum scholars, administrators, teachers, and students begin to make inquiries towards understanding the ways in which Indigenous communities across the globe have experienced a curriculum of dominance and its respective colonial frontier logics? What might we learn from such unbearable curriculum inquiries about others and ourselves? How might we begin to recognize as Chambers (in-press) makes clear... that here in Canada our shared common countenance is that we are all treaty people? How might we begin to deconstruct the present narrative absences of residential schooling within our curriculum designs? What are our ethical responsibilities toward acknowledging such alter/native histories? How might we start to ask such questions with our students? Such asking was not part of the curriculum presented to me at school. And, although the last residential school closed in Canada in 1996, the first time I heard about the colonial violence that took place inside, was four years later during graduate school. Therefore much of my research and teaching has sought to understand and disrupt the limit-situations of my colonized worldviews.

To challenge such colonial narratives, as a university professor I try to weave Indigenous histories and wisdom traditions within my curriculum designs. In 2010, students enrolled in our *Schooling and Society* course participated in a collaborative social action curriculum project with the Kitigan Zibi. Prior to visiting this Algonquin community, I invited students to utilize the course readings as a theoretical framework for understanding and challenging the various historical narratives

represented in films like *Where the Spirit Lives*. Taking indigenous thought seriously through reading articles (Battiste, 1998; Brody, 2000; Haig-Brown, 2008; King, 2003; Kirkness, 1998; Taylor, 1995), textbooks (McGregor, 2004), and pedagogical activities within Indigenous communities often challenges many students to question the limit-situations of their prior narrative visions of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit living within (or at the borders of) the territorial boundaries of what we call now Canada. As the project came to an end, a student wrote the following in their final reflections:

As teachers we are being trusted to guide students on a journey through the history of a land that we do not know well; things must be changed and people must take a stand, but we (as European descendants) can't do it alone. "Teachers teach what they know" (Fletcher, 2000)... the meat of the curriculum has been boiled, and we are left starving without Aboriginal history. Without a doubt, there is a distinct lack of Aboriginal content included in the Ontario public curriculum... As teachers, together we need to figure out how to "decolonize Canadian education" (Battiste, 1998) and really start to take steps in the right direction. While beginning my journey to decolonize my future classroom, I was lucky enough to learn about the education system of the Kitigan Zibi people. They have been able to start to take steps in the right direction and write their own textbooks, as they realized that "it was time for the Algonquins to share their story with [us]" (McGregor, 2004). We need to follow in their footsteps to ensure that "Canadian curriculum theorists can [begin to] write from this place, of this place, and for this place" (Chambers, 2006). The lack of Native content in the Ontario curriculum is evident and we must work together to change this.

As Bryan Smith's section in this article stresses, if we understand curriculum as a set of governmental guidelines, Aboriginal histories and knowledges will at least for the near future remain a present absence within the Ontario public's historical consciousness.

Since the 2008 government apology, several resources such as *Where are the Children?* have been created for use in the classroom.⁶ This website was created by *The Legacy of Hope Foundation*. The primary objective of this foundation is

...to promote awareness among the Canadian public about residential schools and try to help them to understand the ripple effect those schools have had on Aboriginal life. But equally important, we want to bring about reconciliation between generations of Aboriginal people, and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. (The Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2009)

This concern with the promotion of Aboriginal experiences corresponds with the official (state) government apology to Aboriginal groups in 2008 for their role in developing the residential schools (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, n.d.). Despite the public apology, it remains a mystery to many teacher candidates (Mishra Tarc, 2011). Indeed, as Mishra Tarc (2011) notes about a group of teacher candidates, "since the apology's enactment not a single student demonstrates a substantive awareness of its existence or of the long history of government denial of wrongdoing framing this gesture of reparation" (p. 358). In this rather bleak assertion about the lack of awareness of both the atrocities and the apology lies the value of the website, and films like *Where the Spirit Lives*, or *The Rabbit Proof Fence*, in terms of what they potential bring into our historical consciousness. And despite the difficulty that resides for teacher candidates and/or teachers to bring this particular historical narrative of residential schooling into classrooms across Ontario, my curricular designs remain committed toward developing what Donald calls (2009) an ethical sensibility. Such ethical sensibilities, at least for

me, involve learning from the past in order to re-imagine our future Aboriginal-Canadian relationships while also taking up alter/native historical narratives as a potential curricular site for decolonizing our worldviews.

Assembling Inconclusive Narrative Conclusions

The colonial dominance that defines the naturalized history of Canada, in many ways, continues unabated. The reproduction of exclusions in curricular materials and the troublesome practices of (re-) presentation in filmic media highlights the ways in which dominance reproduces and manifests itself in seemingly banal and benign ways. The persistence of colonial frontier logics that subjugate and render farcical the narratives of Aboriginal history only exacerbate the justifications for continued symbolic violence. Yet, such a state is not one that need be viewed through fatalistic eyes. Re/engagements with Aboriginal knowledges provide avenues through which the colonial logics can be contested, reconfigured and made sufficiently reflective of a history that is not only infinitely more complex but marred by a violence that has been excised from the consciousness of those who inhabit the ‘Euro-Canadian fort.’

The importance of alter/native stories is central to effective anti-racist and emancipatory work and indeed, historical inquiry itself. The narration of these experiences through stories however necessitates equal access to the means of conveyance, which are generally regulated through access to power. As Newhouse (2005) notes, “the Aboriginal set of stories is one that is only starting to be told. The telling of it from our perspectives is difficult because we don’t have power to make others listen” (p. 50). Despite the intellectual and curricular resistances that one might encounter when coming to hear of these histories, the tragedies and ‘forgetting’ that defines the relationship between Aboriginal histories and teacher candidate conceptions of history necessitates engagement so as to come to terms with the historic and ongoing epistemic and symbolic violence that inheres in the grand narrative of Canadian history. The articulation of such stories however needs to be done from a position of empowerment and not from one that rearticulates history as a retelling of a relationship in which Aboriginal groups are repeatedly made to be victims.

Although the introduction of alter/native narratives which complicate grand narratives are essential, they are not necessarily an ultimate solution for disrupting the institutional governmental regimes that inscribe a curriculum of dominance. We don’t intend to suggest that we occupy a spot that affords us the power to make such a claim. However, we do offer up our experiences working together to create this assemblage as a way of thinking about the complexity of historical knowledges—of History. Our thought processes, personal experiences, social/moral/political commitments and relationships with history all collided and melded together to demonstrate how aesthetically complex individual thoughts and knowledges are in relation to the curriculum put forth in public and Catholic schools here in Ontario. Through this, we have come to appreciate the different ways that such dominance articulates itself through the teachings of history. By applying this to the lived colony of the classroom, educators and students can potentially work collaboratively to reread and transform a curriculum of dominance into a relational curriculum of intellectual and cultural reciprocity.

Notes

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⁵ On two separate occasions, the curriculum does encourage teachers to think about education and the “pressures to assimilate” (p. 48, 59) in relation to Aboriginal experiences in Canada. However, this is not discussed in relation to an expectation dealing specifically with residential schooling.

⁶ See also the *Historical Thinking Project* for its lesson plan on residential schooling (<http://historicalthinking.ca/lesson/379>). Or, *Project of the Heart*, a collaborative, inter-generational, inter-institutional artistic endeavour that commemorates the lives of the thousands of Indigenous children who died as a result of the residential school experience (<http://poh.jungle.ca/>).

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