

Learning from Roger Simon: The work of Pedagogy in the Social Studies Curriculum

Aparna Mishra Tarc
Faculty of Education
York University
 amishratarc@edu.yorku.ca

Abstract

This paper conducts an affirmative reading of key constructs of pedagogy, ethics, culture and justice put forth in the texts of Roger Simon. Rereading these texts with, against and across the trajectory of one thinker's thought, the article generates new possibilities for pedagogy in global and contemporary times. The paper demonstrates that reading affirmatively is a generative form of critical thinking that considers, deliberates and renews thought as an active ongoing and dialogical process of meaning making. This way of reading, as closely inhabiting the lines of the other's thought, seeks to do justice to the lifework of this remarkable thinker and contributes a view of reading the other's words as a vital to thinking, learning, teaching and acting in the world.

It is neither easy nor agreeable to dredge this abyss of viciousness, and yet I think it must be done, because *what* could be perpetrated yesterday could be attempted again tomorrow, could overwhelm us and our children. One is tempted to turn away with a grimace and close one's mind: this is a temptation one must resist.

—Primo Levi

I first read Roger Simon's groundbreaking book *Teaching Against the Grain* (1992) twenty years ago. Recently finished teacher's college, the book entered into my consciousness when I was a young and idealist teacher ready to take on the world. However, before embarking on classroom teaching, a professor in the faculty of education at Queen's University urged me to 'slow down' and continue reading in the field of critical pedagogy by entering into graduate studies. Following this advice, I was introduced to Simon's (1992) beautiful book in a cultural sociology class. Taught by Dr. Glenn Eastabrook (1977), a contemporary and intellectual comrade of Simon, I was plunged into the ideas of a range of scholars grappling with the implications of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1977/1981). Among the more unforgettable readings we engaged during this time was Simon's (1992) book on pedagogy: *Teaching Against the Grain* tentatively offered to teachers and students engaging with each other and the world.

First books are a precious gift. The more stunning and ground-breaking of first books archive a faint blueprint of a great thinker's intellectual development and trajectory. First encounters with such books are also precious. As it did for my cohort and I, this first book set the scene for the ideas and intellectual development of emerging thinkers. I would go on to follow and read all of Simon's works for

twenty years before meeting him in person at a cultural studies conference. He is perhaps, the only scholar I have encountered whose ideas, way of being in the world, and professional practice seemed remarkably aligned. As we talked, his ideas came to life in person. And the rest, as they like to say, in regards to our too brief yet profound intellectual collaboration, is history.

Simon was my beloved mentor, yet this paper will not give a personal reflection of his teaching: I never sat in his class, and Simon was not my teacher in any formalized or conventional sense. Instead, this paper explores the implications of particular aspects of his theory of pedagogy for teachers of the humanities and social sciences. Although we collaborated in person, my most searing pedagogical memories of Roger Simon are a direct result of my sustained attention to reading and interpreting his work. His thoughts inform my own theories of pedagogy, and I am sure, a new generation of scholars will continue to be deeply influenced by his many books, papers, and published lecture notes. These engagements will in turn carry on and renew Simon's ideas on pedagogy into the future because, as Derrida (1993) insists, writing survives us as long as we continue to be read by others. In this spirit, in what follows I seek to engage one of the strongest threads in Simon's thought through the primary way I engaged with his theory—through reading.

Part of my paper then pedagogically demonstrates how reading along the trajectory of a thinker's development supports us to learn in ways unseen. In my work I deliberately depart from a scholarly reading practice that rehearses or parses out the arguments of a thinker as way to demonstrate mastery of ideas. Although Simon was trained in a rigorous philosophical and sociological tradition, and moreover, strongly believed that thinking required disciplined training, I employ a version of close reading that attends to the intrapersonal qualities of reading that often facilitate for the reader a pedagogical experience. In doing this, I theorize a reading that causes us to think in a way that is akin to the teaching relationship, where a pressing exchange of ideas between our self and the other can foster communion, conflict, or a meeting of minds (Coleman, 2011). Rather than employ what I have come to view as a somewhat masterful and non-generative strategy of reading and/or critiquing the logics of a work that tends to fixate on small details, close down meaning, and/or moves cleverly to produce triumphant new versions of old academic arguments, I insist that we read affirmatively to gain a sense of the forms of life produced by a thinker's use of particular kinds of discursive strategies. Derrida (1993) refers to this kind of affirmative reading as saying 'Yes' to the Other. He writes:

When you address the Other, even if it is to oppose the Other, you make a sort of promise - that is, to address the Other as Other, not to reduce the otherness of the Other, and to take into account the singularity of the Other. That's an irreducible affirmation. (p. 1)

Affirmative reading follows the pedagogical operations of the text in relation to the kinds of contents that aesthetic forms labor to articulate. In this kind of literacy that invites us to engage a world outside our own we attend to the formal constraints

and aesthetic registers giving significance to the objective, persuasive, factual and fictive descriptions of social life (Tarc, 2013).

Reading as an intimate renewal of the other's words supports the reader and the student to say something of our relation to the other's thought through our communication of what we imagine the other thinks. Held to solitude and the other's pressing address, the soft, inside space of the other's thought enters our own. In the uninterrupted exchange of words, we lay ourselves open to "allow the knowledge of an/other to touch the mind" (Robertson, 2001, p. 42). In this meeting of minds in bodies without personal attachment or prior affiliation, the reader projectively imagines an association with and from the other's words that can overwhelm, animate, excite, challenge, or provoke a great desire to make meaning, interpret, translate, and return a thinker's often challenging ideas for oneself and the other (Coleman, 2011). In my own reading history of engaging the great thinkers of our time, I liken reading to having met someone so striking that I cannot help but learn from them through my engagement of what I imagine is their ideas. "Reading," Deborah Britzman (2006) writes:

feels as if it begins with taking in, introjecting the text/body and projecting meanings into it. In the logic of emotions, introjection is our turn to the act of copying the object, only to project it back into the world, now accompanied by our own difference. (311)

In this conception of reading as inhabiting to return or regurgitate a sense of our self in interpretation of the other's psychical and social formulations of thought, reading is a deeply intellectual and emotional situation (Britzman, 2006). This paper then is written with the pedagogical imperative of reading to take in, return, and pass on the gift of Simon's thought to those working with students in the classroom so they too might bring to theory new editions of enduring problems. Finding and giving significance to Simon's ideas can support the work of a new generation of social studies teachers and scholars of the social living in today's world.

Reading Simon After a Century of Traumatic History

The quotation opening this paper expresses Primo Levi's (1988) grave concerns for pedagogy and the role it could play in bearing witness to unthinkable practices of violence waged through deliberate acts of mass genocide, colonization, and, education. Addressing traumatic human history both today and in the last century was a concern that Simon (1992, 2005, 2006, 2011, 2013, 2014) shared with survivors of mass violence, degradation and genocide all his life. His thought and writing emerged in the terrible aftermath of the Holocaust, World War II, and the disassembling of massively violent colonial projects throughout the world, particularly in Canada. In this regard Simon took seriously, and as matter of scholarly obligation to others and to history, Levi's (1989) call to bear witness to atrocity. This ethic of response through remembrance is reflected in Simon's every act of thinking, speaking, teaching, and writing. Looking towards an ethical horizon of co-existence offered by Emmanuel Levinas, in his works we engage a questioning

orientation towards thinking that took its basis in response to Others. Facing others, Simon insisted, behooves us to take responsibility for our implication in the other's suffering. But more than this, Simon took to heart Levinas's (1989) injunction to attend to my own attending of others implicating scholarship and pedagogy as a responsive and vigilant practice of responsive attendance of others.

Simon's sustained investigation of the implications of mass violence and genocide on social thought was far reaching. He identified particular histories of oppression as linked to dehumanizing ontological and epistemological tenets that required deep scrutiny and debate rather than dismissal, rivalry, comparison and silence. Before his death in 2012, in works like *Towards a Hopeful Worrying Together* Simon (2013) continued to extend his enduring thoughts on teaching against the grain, to a public pedagogy of witness in the form of teaching and learning from a history of mass violence in Canada towards Aboriginal people. Emerging from the Canadian Government's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on residential schooling (citation), he argued for an explicit educational responsibility that he deemed critical to public education. Making this call, he demanded that we extend public responsibility beyond the instrumental confines of public schooling because public and political culture in Canada has yet to assume a critical response to this terrible history. In his late work in particular, Simon calls for a new pedagogical practice of public history through remembrance that supports a reflexive, ethical and learned response to survivors' testimony of residential schooling. Without the development of historical inquiry as pedagogically significant, teachers in schools will continue to frame history as set of facts to be learned and digested rather than facilitating a responsive, politically-informed, active curriculum for a change in the national imaginary of this country. For Simon the educational implications of legal forms of justice for Aboriginal people required a corresponding development of an ethical, responsible, and dialogical capacity to respond and repair on the part of the Canadian public. However, rhetorical and often-stagnant forms of guilt, shame, and sorrow continue to impede the dynamic production of a public sphere of thinking and dialogue necessary for the reparation and renewal of health and education within Aboriginal communities, as well as their particular claims to land and self-sovereignty. Keeping these commitments in mind, I situate my readings of Simon's intellectual thought in the context of his ongoing scholarly efforts to developing in Canadians a public, critical, and educational response, in terms of the civic, communal, and individual responsibility all Canadians have to the reparation of atrocities committed to Aboriginal communities and peoples in Canada

Key conceptualizations of critical pedagogy as theorized by Simon can be used in teacher education to develop critical-historical consciousness on the part of teachers. Simon argued that it is imperative to develop in teachers a responsive and reflexive capacity to learn from survivors' testimony to help pre-service teachers engage histories of oppression countering official records and undergirding the Canadian system of public education. Among Simon's constructions of pedagogy that I most identify as critical for teacher education are: teaching against the grain, along with bearing witness to traumatic history and 'curating' counter histories and narratives that support the possibility of generative dialogue and responses

amongst, between, and beyond communities affected by mass violence. These constructs support the work of the social studies teacher in the provocation of a curriculum that responds to the imperatives of critical thought, creative possibility and, above all, *hope*, which Simon advanced over and over again as central to the cultural and pedagogical work of teachers committed to social justice and well being for all students. In undertaking this mission, teachers might also become a "cultural worker" to, as Henry Giroux (2005) put it, understand her and the Others lived conditions and to transform those conditions through the work of ethical, dialogical, social, and critical inquiry. The task of the teacher in this view is to engage students "so as to provoke their inquiry and challenge their existing views of the way things are and should be" (Simon, 1992, 47). For Simon (1992) this meant "offering questions, analyses, visions, and practical options that people can pursue in their attempts to participate in the determination of various aspects of their lives" (47). Educational responses to the bare and counter facts of history is a subjective and supplemental practice that "attempts to take people beyond the world they already know but in a way that does not insist on a fixed set of altered meanings" (47).

Central to my understanding of Simon's vision of social renewal through public history and education for the common good is the readerly development of teacher capacities for ethical, critical, and pedagogic response. For Simon it is not enough, and indeed we risk further violating the other when delivering instrumentally designed curriculum that compartmentalizes unthinkable aspects of the other's lived realities. Without some prior preparation and sustained knowledge and care given to the forms of life we present in the classroom we risk silencing, misrepresenting, and violating the unique experience of others. Studying the social world goes beyond surface comprehension of historical facts, and requires humility and tentativeness on the part of the teacher to pedagogically develop in students a capacity for curiosity around, questioning of and implication in one's place in historical situations beyond one's reach (Simon et al., 2000). This development is partly fostered by internal work into one's limits to knowing, combined with a sustained and penetrating analytical attention to representations of knowledge claiming to account for history. In the sections to follow I discuss three components of analytic capacity that Simon theorized as critical to the teachers delivery of a social studies curriculum and pedagogy that serves the call for an educational response and justice in relation to a traumatic national past.

Critical pedagogy: *Teaching Against the Grain*

Simon's theory of pedagogy follows the work of Paulo Freire (1981/1997) who viewed education as the means by which people form, assume, and come to understand their subjectivities and social location. As a key mechanism of state control, Freire argued that education and particularly the banking method, assigns students to a brutal socioeconomic structure designed to serve the materially elite and power-holders of a nation. Education as a form of deposit and exchange aligns the socio-cultural position of children along particular political, economic, racial and cultural structures of power/knowledge. More devastating though than streaming and sorting, was the formation of student's subjectivities such that they begin to

accept their class position as their educational destiny and potential. As with Freire, Simon (1992) suggested that once one becomes critically aware of the social effects of relations and flows of power circulating in state produced and sanctioned discourses of identity one could begin to work against those frames conditioning ones modes of thinking and acting in the world to transform both oneself and one's possibilities in and for the world. As Freire (1981/1997) reminds us:

The radical, committed to human liberation, does not become the prisoner of a 'circle of certainty' within which reality is also imprisoned. On the contrary, the more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side. (21)

For Freire the work of pedagogy is to support students to become radically aware of the dehumanizing aspects of their lived conditions to transform themselves and others through education. Literacy is the term that Freire gives to the development of the capacity to be critical of one's place in relation to others to interrupt and transform social processes. Simon uses the metaphor of "teaching against the grain" to image the development of this radical, critical capacity that ran counter to official and normalizing, educational records, discourses and expectations. This capacity for critical thought finds itself in tension and conflict with various forms of knowledge rather than be enlightened by it. Insight came from asking questions and holding tensions around the limits of knowledge in abeyance of a hasty judgment that was oriented towards immediate justice. To develop this capacity required on the part of teachers, a critical engagement with the normative social structures and frames of reference that form teacher identity and subjectivity. However, the critical capacity was not simply to tear down the system or to claim transformation for the self, as for Simon these ends could be equally or more violent, dangerous, tautological, and unproductive. Instead, critical pedagogy works within the cracks of a totalizing system to generate a creative means by which to deconstruct and then supplement that system with other visions and versions of schooling. Simon (1992) writes that teaching against the grain "articulates a framework that might aid in constructing educational practices that express and engender hope" (4). He (1992) goes on to state that the "intent is to help to construct a pedagogy of possibility, one that works for the reconstruction of social imagination in the service of human freedom" (4). Simon (1992) identified schools as one of many cultural sites of pedagogical possibility, for social understanding, engagement, and action. Working with teachers Simon supported educators to see curriculum as part of a pedagogically mediated cultural production rather than its final product.

Theorizing curriculum as a cultural production mediated by pedagogy Simon sought to highlight the distinct quality of knowledge produced from a social context

as an effect of power relations further subject to a set of social conventions, rules, performances, discourses and relations. This is not to say that there are no facts, objective or universal truths circulating in the production of knowledge. Instead Simon called for one to make claim to facts, objectives and truths with the acknowledgement that one's claims are personally, socially and culturally constructed and mediated. Simon insisted that as constructors and carriers of socially mediated knowledge, teachers might begin to critically examine the cultural modes and interpersonal dynamics of social and political production, including the pedagogies that contributed to one's understanding of the truth in a world of others.

In *Teaching Against the Grain* Simon provides models of inquiry by which teachers can begin to develop a critical capacity. He insists that teachers examine with their students, modes of cultural production that both reinforce and interrupt nationalist versions of history and belonging to which many of us become passionately attached, ironically through our education. Citing the Canadian context of nationhood, he (1992) calls to teachers to begin critically examining the Canadian government's violent mandate to "assimilate" Aboriginal children into mainstream of Canadian society through a policy of forcibly removing Aboriginal children from their parents and communities under the auspices of 'education' and adoption. This policy continues to negatively impact on the social fabric of Aboriginal communities and on Aboriginal peoples' relationship to schooling, their children, and social services. The policy denying Aboriginal people the right to self-determination also haunts and diminishes Canadian democratic and multicultural society and continues to obstruct the possibility of forging a functional multicultural public in Canada today.

As early as the mid eighties, long before the last residential school in Canada was closed and, decades before the Canadian government's official apology and recognition of wrong doing gave way to its commission of truth, Simon began to insist that teachers engage conflicting and counter versions of history that formed the basis for miseducation on the part of both teachers and the general Canadian public. This meant that teachers produce objects and events of curriculum that constructed pedagogical space for teachers and students to investigate, deliberate and dialogue on the misdoings of their government and the wrongful action of the civil state. To produce counter versions of national history, Simon suggested that teachers begin to critically engage, with their students, cultural accounts and objects that question the veracity of official statements. In his first book, he (1992) begins to parse out a "method" of curating history that uses unknown, foreclosed or disappeared curricular objects to unearth other versions of national history and belonging. For example, he juxtaposes photographs of police brutality and violence against Aboriginal people protesting a land claim against a news article documenting the then Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney's statement that "Canada was not built by expropriating retroactively other people's property" (145). Simon suggests that when placed uneasily against each together, these two objects of curriculum representing radically different versions of the same story--a photo and a news article--can critically support students to consider, deliberate and inquire into contesting versions of a historical account. Teaching against the grain of the official statement, Simon (1992) suggests:

provokes a pedagogical call for an elaboration of how conquest and coercion were manufactured into the often told 'official' story of 'Indian' consent and government beneficence. This story has hidden untold suffering produced through government failures to confront and resolve questions of native claims to sovereignty. It is also a story of an inability or unwillingness of many Canadian to adequately assess the response and moral commitments due people of the First Nations. Perhaps from the vantage point of 'now time,' the reconsideration of how such stories were written might inform what now must be done to assert a project of possibility for all communities of people living about the forty-ninth parallel. (146)

Part of the 'now time' of teaching against the grain involves Canadian teachers to sustain critical engagement of a history of oppression that continues to shape Canadian schooling in the contemporary moment. However for Simon this kind of pedagogical examination of competing versions of history is only a beginning. Also important was the construction of new versions or what he called counter memories to interrupt the common national curriculum in schools and within the public sphere.

Counter Memory: Repairing Social Ruin, Renewing History

Writing in a time of the critical, linguistic, pedagogical, affective and now visual turn, Simon maintained that symbolic and discursive knowledge is a product of mediated human relations, or what he came to term pedagogy. The symbolic for Simon was pedagogically and socially mediated as an effect, as well as a function of text. This conception of language as representative of thought required of the reader or viewer theoretical resources that followed both their intra and interpersonal dynamics of meaning-making in the context of the cultural and social construction of particular forms of knowledge as a pedagogical relation, a linguistic formation, and inherited practice. Rather than produced from a self contained and omnipotent mind, knowledge is handed down and given to us from others. For this reason, Simon fixed his gaze on human mediations of the social, what he would term cultural production, as key to the circulation of great and destructive ideas of the social, social structure, and the possibility of altering existing inequitable relations. Altering the social imaginary, he claimed was, the promise of pedagogy as the creator of the social and the relational means by which a person gained social sanction and membership. Perhaps the social itself was for Simon, a grand, and sometimes devastating, incredible cultural and pedagogical production.

Simon embraced with some hope the generative qualities of cultural productions. As shown in the example of his juxtaposition of the prime minister's denial of a policy of land appropriation against photographs of police brutality against Aboriginal land claim protesters, Simon felt that counter memory had to be *curated* with care and a thought to pedagogical response. Rather than replicate the fact-finding and giving missions of the historian and the educator, Simon (2011) argued that counter memory's force came from its pedagogical imperative to both take care and carry forward the difficult and erased knowledge of history.

In his late work, Simon turned away from school for its pedagogical potential to public sites of education, and particularly the museum. Curating history became a significant form of public pedagogy that might alter the social imaginary of citizens and students. In museum studies the act of curating involves a deliberate selection of texts, images, poetry, testimony, sound and other cultural objects of interest to present to the general public. Rather than let objects of history stand alone as spectacle of human experience or used for didactic teaching, the pedagogical notion of curation draws attention to the responsibilities of both the exhibitor and the viewer -- the teacher and the student. Curation is the scholars deliberate effort to elicit thinking and to support viewers to make links between the past and the present when learning from an object or exhibit of testimony.

Carefully selected and arranged counter memories and historical artifacts, for Simon, created a dialogical social space, or *mise-en-scene*, where intersections between the social and the past uneasily meet. Rather than rely on historical knowledge as a stable fixed narrative of verifiable facts, for Simon, the bare facts of traumatic history is supplemented by diverse and uncertain accounts and forms of knowledge that provoke, challenge, and extend our learning. Simon (2005) asserts: "Such a process does not mean mindlessly accepting all counter-memories but means learning to hear what is within them and seriously considering the claim they make on our understanding of the present" (17). In the consideration of multiple and interdisciplinary sources of historical, social and cultural knowledge, pedagogical approaches to equity and justice can become a political and ethical minefield. Simon felt we might tread through this charged ground with careful preparation and an openness to the unexpected that might arise in the pedagogical encounter with difficult knowledge. Rather than relying on omnipotent sources of knowledge, teachers in this way can involve students in debates that constitute the shaky ground of memory and its reconstruction of humanity in the aftermath of social devastation.

Pedagogy of Witness

Central to Simon's conceptualization of counter memory, then, are practices of remembrance. Working with colleagues in the important book *Between Hope and Despair* (2000), Simon began theorizing pedagogy of witness as a deeply subjective pedagogical practice. This practice involves the testimony of survivors, as often the last remaining sources of knowledge that runs counter to the official record. Counter history that takes its basis in survivor testimony opened, for Simon, a whole set of new concerns and questions for pedagogy that could not be easily resolved through a critical capacity or by judgment. As Simon's (2005) thought moved from teaching against the grain towards a pedagogy of witness he began to highlight the affected and unconscious quality of counter memory, both from the perspective of those offering other versions of history and those receiving the "terrible gift".

The question of witnessing as the basis for the pedagogical production of counter memory becomes particularly salient for educators working with residential school survivor testimony emerging out of the Canadian government's TRC. In light of his previous findings of the difficulty of pedagogically engaging the

unthinkable experience of others, Simon (2011) was worried about the 'use' of testimony in public school classrooms and other forums of public display and dialogue. He was also concerned about the pedagogical mediation of such material in the public sphere by media outlets and newspaper articles in that these technologies began to shape the kinds of encounters the public might have with more sensitive forms of knowledge and suffering.

For Simon, witnessing animates unexpected obstacles and conflicts in learning that require pedagogical mediation. He found, in his own work with students and by participating in the TRC, that thinking devolves into unreliable affect when learning becomes hard and unbearable for those bearing primary and secondary witness to terrible histories. Leaning on Pitt and Britzman's (1992) concept of difficult knowledge, Simon (2011) does not describe testimony and other cultural productions as difficult in of themselves. Instead, difficult knowledge resides in the indeterminate yet potentially problematic relation between the affective force provoked by encounters with testimony and the sense one makes from this encounter. The danger of such affective encounters,-- the very force that gives pedagogy its potential -- is that the learner's emotional experience of witnessing overwhelms and shuts down the possibility of learning. To prepare for disturbances in learning, Simon (2011) insisted that teachers curate curricular objects of witness in the classroom in a:

generative *mise-en-scene*, a dynamic space that embodies a pedagogy of emplacement with the potential not only to mobilize the dialectical movement between affect and thought, but also to effect some degree of influence in regard to the direction and substance of this movement. (p. 201)

For Simon, it is important that teachers engaging counter memory prepare for and think about their pedagogical intervention before, during and after student's engagements with objects witness. He suggested that teachers attend to the ethical framework in which the pedagogical intervention is devised, the emplacement of a cultural object to exhibit in the classroom, and the student's possible reception of the film, text, image or sound in their difficult encounter with history. Though there are no guarantees, the deliberate constructing of the scene accounting for counter memory, is to work against consuming or sensationalizing survivor testimony, which can provide a response that often reproduces the very violence the testimony seeks to lessen.

A pedagogy of witness that stages unthinkable versions of history and sociality is fraught with difficulty and yet necessary to move learning beyond rhetorical forms of understanding, transformation, and resolution. Above all his concerns, Simon (in Simon et al., 2000) advocated for a responsive witnessing that formed the basis of critical engagement with the others' life as a form of vigilance that might lead to "new forms of living on after the event, new forms that initiate thought that has no rest, that can neither be completed nor end "(p. 19).

In his article "Hopeful worrying" discussing the public educational use of Aboriginal survivor testimony, Simon (2013) puts forth the important but fraught pedagogical concept of bearing witness as a public learning from history.

Acknowledging the importance of forums such as truths commission in bringing unthinkable histories to public record, Simon worries that as public school teachers we have not yet developed modes of listening, thinking, reading, and learning that support a responsive and responsible engagement with the other's testimony. If teaching against the grain is a critical inquiry into official versions of history, witnessing can foster a relationship to those versions that can further move us to material and social acts of redress, reparation, and renewal of social ruin. Witnessing, as with pedagogy, is relational and makes useless our learned modes of understanding others through frames of mastery, certainty, stereotype, and comprehension. This kind of pedagogy compels a response involving a call to listen, rather than a demand to understand.

Simon's framework for bearing witness is both ethical and pedagogical. He calls for a response that works through rhetoric or feeling guilty and bad to a fostering of public dialogue and debate that moves beyond the state facilitated performance or ritual of apology. Without political will, along with an ethical and responsive orientation and critical engagement, he feared that state-run public schools could fall into uncritical consumption of testimony that is revised for the instrumental or gestural purpose of meeting curriculum objectives rather than the more ethically responsible and justice-oriented imperative of learning from history. For Simon (in Simon et al., 2000) witnessing

necessitates a practice of remembrance in which one is required to draw near but remain distant, a memorial stance in which one is required to study, teach, and keep/preserve the memories of another, not in ossified form, but through a 'handing down' whose substance lies in vitality, inventiveness and renewal. (p. 18)

Rather than view the other's testimony or representation of experience as comprehensible, when we engage with testimony we are given a difficult inheritance obligating us to receive and then consider the implication of such a gift as a disrupting the framework of the singular, or self and communal interest. Given the constraints of schooling and the lack of teacher education of oppressive histories that found the Canadian schools system, it is not enough to simply mandate that all teachers learn about and deliver a violent history of residential schooling to students in the classroom, as is recently mandated in the Alberta public school system (citation). Although the Alberta government's initiative is welcome and about time, Simon might have expressed concern over teachers' lack of prior engagement with this history, and lack of trained capacity to attend to their delivery of the testimony. Social studies teachers are in great need of prior training and sustained attention to thinking about the use of testimony, accounts and artifacts in the classroom. Historical thinking supports a creation of a historical and social scene [*mise-en-scene*] that bears witness to a dark time in Canadian history, in a way that does not invoke stereotype, violence, and further suffering to the Aboriginal community. In this regard, Simon's (2014) pedagogy of witnessing through an ethic of response is relevant to teacher education and engagement with survivor testimony. By engaging with survivor testimony through the practice of

remembrance and pedagogy of witness, teachers gain theoretically-informed and responsive capacities that might begin supporting students to listen to and learn from a terrible Aboriginal account of Canadian history.

Conclusion: Holding on to hope: Lasting impressions of the thought of Roger Simon.

Learning from Simon's dynamic conception of knowledge as a relational, symbolic, pedagogical, and cultural production, teachers and students can begin to engage the social studies curriculum as offering a space for critical thinking about history, politics, societal structure and ruin along with one's place within a complex constellation of social life. Simon (1992) suggested that to bring students into the world, we as teachers, first had to understand the myriad dynamics of social construction and destruction that obscured our view on the intricate workings of social life. Simon's scholarly and public commitment to reckon with and address a history of violence and wrongdoing towards Aboriginal peoples and communities in Canada reflects his commitment to public pedagogy of matters of national collective concern. Because we increasingly live in amnesiac times, perhaps now more than ever, the relevance of Simon's work bears significant fruit in contemporary theories and understandings of pedagogy and to the work of schoolteachers across Canada. Pedagogy in this view is not simply about delivery of content or a teaching and learning transaction. Pedagogy structures a form of witness that, as Levi (1988) insists, supports our efforts to face the inhuman, unthinkable qualities of human thought and action. Theorized as an attendant and caring practice, this pedagogy provides a relational, intellectual and dialogical forum for thought and action, for action through thought and thoughtful action when confronting some of the most difficult human ideas and acts of our time. Simon was not a public intellectual in the great, and highly politicized tradition of speaking 'truth to power'. His work instead gently, attentively, painstakingly, and carefully yet insistently, compels a 'thinking through' the meanings of justice with others. In every sense of the word Simon is a public scholar; Simon is a scholar who attended to his response to others, a scholar who thought, read and dialogued with and for others for the common betterment of society and for the development of an intellectual sphere vested with the difficult obligation of taking public responsibility for and to all.

Simon implies that every teacher in the classroom might work towards furthering the limits of their own thought and aspire to take on and take care of their role as public scholar. A public scholar is a deeply thoughtful and knowledgeable individual that develops thinking in and with their students, through sustained reading, dialogue and judgment. She fosters an intellectual, imaginative, and emotional capacity to consider, communicate, attach to, feel concern, and take responsibility for lives outside their own. Public scholars develop in student's worldliness but also one's sense of implication in historical conditions "not of one's own deed or making". In his book *A Touch of the Past* (2006) Simon calls this implication a "terrible gift," (p. 187) a difficult inheritance, one that cannot refuse nor return, one that obligates one to acknowledge the lives of others that walked on

the land upon which one forges her own first shaky steps. Simon (2006) theorized that the pedagogical task of accepting the terrible gift of the other's testimony was a problematic confronting social inquiry, rather than an avenue to assuage collective guilt, or give a resolution to suffering. As indicated by Levi (1988), working with the unthinkable of history, one is brought to one's implication. The grounds for learning come from engagement with the lives of others, while also providing the very grounds for the enactment of a responsive pedagogy for the generations to come.

The lasting impression of the thought of Roger Simon continues to influence the work of scholars, teachers, and students engaged in the work of pedagogy. His thought is so critical to a vision of human co-existence in the wake of a new century of mass violence and genocide. The pressing existential question of 'how do we live' in the midst of worldwide suffering from mass human violence, and how do we live together' in attendance of such suffering, is for Simon, a pedagogical imperative of the helping profession, the common good, and the public sphere oriented always to the Other. Reading his work can support teachers to learn to teach critically, responsively, and with a thought to others and to the historical, social and cultural circumstances in which we are caught, which include terrible moments in human life that estrange and bring us closer to others. Learning from Simon we might work towards a pedagogy of attending to our attendance of others as an ethically responsive means to teach against the grain, generate counter memory, bear witness to the unthinkable history and to hold on, as Roger Simon holds on without consolation, to *hope*, and the possibility of justice through education.

References

- Britzman, D. (2006). On being a slow reader. Psychoanalytic problems in Ishiguro's *Never let me go*. *Changing English*, 13(3), 307-318. doi: 10.1080/13586840600971810
- Coleman, D. (2011). *In bed with the word. Reading, spirituality and cultural politics*. Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press.
- Derrida, J. (1993). *Spectres of Marx. The state of the debt, the work of mourning and the New International*. (trans. P. Kamuf) New York: Routledge.
- Derrida, J. & Padgaonkar, N. (1997) "An Interview with Jacques Derrida." in: *Web Archive*. (Last update:) March 17, 1997.
- Eastabrook, G. (1977). School change and the implications for student's rights. *Interchange*, 8(1-2), 128-142. doi: 10.1007/BF01188023
- Freire, P. (1981/1997). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Giroux, H. (2005). *Border crossings and the politics of education*. Routledge: New York.
- Levi, P. (1989) *The Drowned and the Saved*. New York: Vintage
- Levinas, E. (1998). *Entre-nous: On thinking of the other*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Pitt, A. & Britzman, D. (1992). Speculation on qualities of difficult knowledge in teaching and learning. An experiment in psychoanalytic research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16(6): 755-766. doi: 10.1080/09518390310001632135
- Robertson, J.P. (2001). 'Art made tongue-tied by authority': A literary psychoanalysis of obstacles in teacher learning. *JCT: Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 17 (1), 27-44
- Simon, R. (1992). *Teaching against the grain. Texts for a pedagogy of possibility*. New York: Bergin & Garvey.
- Simon, R. (2005). *A touch of the past. Remembrance, learning and ethics*. New York: Palgrave & MacMillan.
- Simon, R. (2006). The terrible gift. Museums and the possibility of hope without consolation. *Museum management and curatorship*, 21(3): 187-204. . doi: 10.1080/09647770600202103
- Simon, R. (2011). The turn to pedagogy. A needed conversation on the practice of curating difficult knowledge. In E. Lehrer & C. Milton (Eds.), *Curating difficult knowledge. Violent pasts in public places* (193-209). New York: Palgrave & MacMillan.
- Simon, R. (2013). *Towards a hopeful practice of worrying. The problematics of listening and the educative responsibilities of Canada's truth and reconciliation commission*. In J. Henderson & P. Wakeham, *Reconciling Canada: Critical perspectives on the cultures of redress* (pp. 129-142). Toronto: University of Toronto Press
- Simon, R. (2014). *A pedagogy of witnessing. Curatorial Practice and the pursuit of social justice*. New York: SUNY Press.

- Simon, R., Rosenberg, S. & Eppert, C. (2000). *Between hope and despair. Pedagogy and the remembrance of historical trauma*. New York: Rowan and Littlefield.
- Tarc, P. (2013). *International education in global times. Engaging the pedagogic*. New York: Peter Lang.