

Unsettling our Narrative Encounters within and outside of Canadian Social Studies

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Abstract

In 2007, Indian Residential School System (IRS) survivors won a class action settlement worth an estimated 2 billion dollars from the Canadian Government. The settlement also included the establishment a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Despite the public acknowledgement, we posit that there is still a lack of opportunity and the necessary historical knowledge to address the intergenerational impacts of the IRS system in Ontario's social studies classrooms. In this essay we therefore ask: How might we learn to reread and rewrite the individual and collective narratives that constitute Canadian history? In response to such curriculum inquiries, we lean upon the work of Roger Simon to reread and rewrite historical narratives as shadow texts. For us, life writing as shadow texts, as *currere*, enables us to revisit the past as a practice of unsettling the present, toward reimagining more hopeful future relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities across the territories we now call Canada. As Simon's life-long scholarly commitments make clear in this essay, the onus lies with those present to teach against the grain so that we might encounter each other's unsettling historical traumas with compassion, knowledge, and justice.

Our project requires that we subvert a view which constitutes existing forms of social life and social consciousness as obvious, natural, and taken for granted. We need to comprehend how the limits we all live within are historical limits. (Simon & Dippo, 1986, p. 198)

I am estranged from a past to which I always arrive too late (thus as I come close, I find myself moving away). Yet this boundary is not simply the limit of my social imagination condemning me to indifference, voyeurism, or an epistemological violence that renders the experience of others in terms I recognize or imagine as

my own. This boundary rather initiates the terms for the reconstructions of my historical memory. (Simon, 2000, p. 21)

Yet at times, unsettling questions need to be asked. (Simon, 2013, p. 133)

Nicholas and Robin: What is Truth and Reconciliation for Canadians? Why and how should it matter for teachers and students across Canada? What are our pedagogical obligations toward collectively witnessing, acknowledging, and remembering the historical experiences, impacts, and consequences of establishing the Indian Residential Schooling (IRS) system to ensure the future security of a settler nation-state? Studying such ethical, historical, and social questions provokes us to subvert, as Simon and Diplo (1986) suggest, the historical limits of what constitutes our contemporary and future normative understandings of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples' treaty relations.

In *Settler Colonialism*, Lorenzo Veracini (2010) situates some important discursive, material, political, and psychical distinctions among the descendants of European settlers, immigrant exogenous Others, and Indigenous peoples. Although, "immigrant exogenous Others often benefit from the dispossession of indigenous people, even as their incorporation into the settler body politics remains pending, ...it is, the settler that establishes himself as the normative" (p. 18). The settler often hides behind historical narratives whose storylines describe "the metropolitan colonizer," "labour and hardship," and "the peacemaker" (p. 14). Though we grew up in different places, our public school history courses taught us, as diasporic settler Canadians, that our descendants did not have the right to make economic, political, or military decisions reserved for kings, queens, lords, dictators, and elected governments who by manifest destiny pioneered colonial nation-states like Canada. Outside of formal schooling, we learned from our parents and grandparents about the hardships and sacrifices they had to make to leave their homelands and immigrate to Canada. Their arrival perpetuated the chain of settler colonialism, and they profited from the appropriation of newly allotted, Indigenous dispossessed land.

For the most part, in school we learned that colonial settlement here in Canada, compared to the United States, was a relatively non-violent military activity. Indeed, a Judeo-Christian commonwealth curriculum, and its mythical portrayals of a settler colonial democratic peacekeeping regime influenced the ways in which we socially imagined and narrated Canadian history (Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013). During our lived experiences with the Ontario social studies curriculum, we were taught that French and British settlers sought to establish colonial settlements that mimicked their respective metropolitan (judicial, military, political, religious, schooling) institutions. What was absent from this historical account of our common countenance (Tomkins, 1986/2008), was that several different cosmopolitan settlers, such as English, Chinese, French, German, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Ukrainian, and so on, alongside First Nations communities, helped to found what is now constitutionally known as Canada (Battiste, 2013; Stanley, 2006). Such imagined inclusions and exclusions often manifest themselves as a certain kind

of historical narrative of disavowal within our social studies curriculum here in Ontario. This is what Paulette Regan (2010) calls elsewhere a curriculum of settler denial.

After demanding acknowledgement of longstanding historical settler denial and a violent colonial past, several Indian residential school survivors won a class action settlement agreement worth an estimated 2 billion dollars from the Canadian Government in 2007. The Canadian government officially responded a year later with a public state apology for the violent intergenerational impacts of residential schooling. Soon after, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission travelled across Canada, listening to the stories of survivors, and facilitating various public commemorative events for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.¹ Often forgotten within this recent sequence of events, however, is that First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities and their leaders had been petitioning the Canadian government and its people to acknowledge their constitutional treaty obligations for several decades prior to the 2008 apology. Such obligations included land settlements, educational funding, and judicial and political recognition of First Nations sovereignty as part of Canada's Constitutional Act – what Henderson Youngblood (2013) has termed constitutional reconciliation. Despite this momentum, opportunities to study the complexities of truth and reconciliation in terms of our historical and ongoing treaty obligations are for the most part absent from our school curriculum in Ontario and from the public memory of a settler nation-state.

Given the disparity between public apology and personal knowledge, how might we work as curriculum theorists, social studies educators, teachers, and students toward rereading and rewriting our individual and collective memories within and beyond the boundaries of the existing narratives that constitute what Canadian history? To respond to this pedagogical and personal question, we lean upon the work of Roger Simon and life writing as a form of curriculum theorizing, as *currere*,² to deconstruct and reconstruct our estrangements from the historical narratives that were, and in many ways still are, absent from our lived experiences with Canadian social studies and history curricula.

Our initial conversation for this essay began as part of Robin's final life-writing project for a graduate course entitled: *Curriculum, culture, and language*. There, we focused on the different ways in which life writing "requires researchers to craft pieces of autobiographical writing in which they research and teach themselves" (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, and Leggo, 2009, p. 9). We examined different methodological strategies for engaging life writing research such as autobiography (as *currere*, literary métissage), auto/ethnography (as bricolage), A/r/tography, and oral history. Each assignment worked toward creating openings for graduate students to further develop their understandings of life writing as a research methodology that in turn informs educational research and the aesthetics of their academic writing as life writers, while also studying, theorizing, thinking through, and improvising playfully with the intellectual compositions put forth by past and present Canadian curriculum scholars.

Situating our Narrative Encounters

Nicholas and Robin: During the winter term of 2012, we travelled with six Bachelor of Education students to conduct oral history interviews with Bertha Commanda, a residential school survivor, who live on the Kitigan Zibi reserve near Maniwaki Québec. The oral history interview was part of a larger Social Science and Humanities Research Council Insight Development (SSHRC) Grant titled *Making digital histories: Virtual historians, digital literacies, and education*.³ The larger project was designed to explore the existing digital practices and respective literacies teacher candidates draw upon to both access and produce historical knowledge. During their coursework, teacher candidates were introduced to the concepts of historical thinking (Lévesque, 2008; Seixas, 2006; Seixas & Morton, 2013), followed by a workshop that introduced students to the Virtual Historian website (<http://www.virtualhistorian.ca>). This is a website through which history teachers can share lessons and historical content that not only facilitates the process of ‘doing history’ but also the pedagogical demands of 21st century digital classrooms.

As a supplement to their course, we offered teacher candidates opportunities to volunteer for the oral history component of the project. Prior to interviewing elders, teacher candidates attended several different workshops that examined the theoretical and methodological processes for doing oral history research as part of their future curriculum designs for teaching the Ontario social studies and history curriculum (see Perks & Thomson, 1998; Ritchie, 2003). For the final component of the SSHRC research project, eight senior history teacher candidates conducted oral history interviews with two Kitigan Zibi Algonquin elders. Through this, the teacher candidates had the chance to partake in the pedagogical processes of “rereading” and “rewriting” their existing historical narratives on the psychosocial, cultural, and material impacts of settler colonialism with First Nations elders.

In this project, we sought to create an epistemological space for us to identify and discuss the different tensions we experienced when confronted with alternative narratives that depart from the grand narratives of Canadian settler history. Engaging these narrative tensions is crucial for complicating our ongoing identifications with, and constructions of history. What is at stake in such epistemological commitments “is our imaginative and emotional abilities to learn from ‘multiple perspectives’ so as to potentially expand the range of responses to pressing issues of social concern by extending our circle of attention and care” (den Heyer & Abbott, 2011, p. 612). Such extensions involve becoming historical subjects capable of rereading historical narratives through the rewriting of alternatives.

Juxtaposing different alternative, or counternarrative historical texts such as historiographies, oral histories, and autobiographies alongside rewriting our individual and collective life histories promotes “a capacity to tolerate – and narrate – the disillusionment of encountering the otherness that history both references and provokes on the inside” (Farley, 2009, p. 538). In contrast to a “readerly” approach that anchors one to meaning explicitly found within a text, a “writerly” approach calls upon readers to create meanings with reference to the historical con/texts that inform their imagined past, present and future lives (den Heyer & Abbott, 2011).

In the ensuing sections, we take up Simon and Eppert’s (1997) concept of writing shadow texts, which recognize the juxtaposition of presences (governmental, judicial,

curricular), and absences (cultural, place, psychic), in order to unsettle our “readerly” and “writerly” narrative encounters with the life histories of others. Part of this critical and ethical praxis of relational reflexive rewriting of history requires one to reread “as much for a text’s ‘absences’ or ‘silences’ as for what it more directly ‘says’” (Simon, 1982, p. 6). Such readings and rewritings are part of a “commemorative” praxis of ethics, of learning to bear witness to historical traumas, where one “becomes aware of, self-present to, and responsive toward something/someone beyond oneself” (Simon and Eppert, 1997, p. 183). We, as historical subjects, are learning to work through the juxtaposition of alternative “readerly” and “writerly” shadow texts that in turn attempt to bear witness to the historical traumas of residential school survivors.

Here we draw upon William F. Pinar’s (2006) concept of “juxtaposition” to clarify a conceptual framework for the kinds of rereadings and rewritings of historical narratives we put forth in this essay. In *The synoptic text today*, Pinar calls for teachers and curriculum scholars to both paraphrase and juxtapose historical texts that have never been in narrative relations with each other before this moment in time. Such juxtapositions should include students’ questions, comments, and pedagogical engagements. He further explains that, “in addition to connecting the ‘text’ to students’ and her or his own subjective intellectual experience, the teacher enables students to connect ‘text’ to ‘social text,’ to society,” a concept he understands is situated in time, and thus historically (p. 9). As part of his experimentations with life writing and for his final course assignment, Robin juxtaposed the life histories of residential school survivors with the works of scholars like Roger Simon, which have never before been in narrative relation with one another, or with narratives that implicate us as historical subjects. Such kinds of historical rereadings and rewritings we suggest, are part of the pedagogical processes for recursively questioning the ways in which our research, theorizing, and conceptions of the Ontario social studies curriculum do or do not represent our individual and collective subjective relations with the past, present, and future.

Life Writing as Shadow Texts

Communities of memory designate structured sets of relationships through which people engage representations of past events and put forth shared, complementary, or competing versions of what should be remembered and how. (Simon & Eppert, 1997, p. 186)

If the Commission can create a space that allows people to feel that their stories are accepted without fear of repercussions, perhaps it can help to neutralize some of the negativity that has poisoned our relationships with each other. Hopefully, in some ways, our relationships with Canada can be improved. (Angeconeb, 2012, p. 30)

Nicholas: Part of decolonizing the explicit, implicit, and null school curriculum involves learning how to remember the narratives that inform our understandings of Canadian history. It requires coming into contact with alternative historical narratives that we can juxtapose as complementary and competing versions of what and how our differing individual and collective histories are remembered. In *Pedagogy and witnessing testimony of historical trauma*, Simon and Eppert (1997) explain that writing shadow texts provides a potential personal and communal space for us to witness, teach, and learn from historical trauma. Yet, we have to remember that documenting historical trauma is difficult work. After all, “testimonies of historical trauma always enact a betrayal” due to the discursive limits of our interpretive translations that fail to fully render “the realities of human cruelty and suffering” (p. 183). Consequently, this “translational betrayal of the testimonial act means that narrative and images of historical trauma are commonly shot through with absences that, in their silence, solicit” and provoke us to ask interminable questions (ibid.). At this juncture in Canadian history, and living in a society which champions a neoliberal politic and ethos, it seems fair to ask how anyone could take away another parent’s child. We might ask the following questions: Why didn’t more First Nations parents take more action to protect their children? Why did a supposedly “peacekeeping” settler nation-state let such violent events happen?

Simon and Eppert (1997) invite us to write shadow texts as a potential response to answering such interminable historical questions. For them, shadow texts are “secondary narratives a reader or listener ‘writes’ (but does not necessarily write down) in response to the unresolved questions a primary narrative elicits” (p. 184), and where “attempts to write shadow texts are an ‘asking after’ something that has not been satisfied” (ibid.). Our attempts at constructing explanations which address these questions are not typically attached to something in historical texts but instead to something missing from such textual representations. Moreover, “shadow texts are neither juvenile nor narcissistic; they are cultivated precisely because they fuel an unrest—a movement without definitive end—which is the only possible way to sustain the pursuit of justice” (ibid.). However, shadow texts may also become, as Simon and Eppert warn, “simplistic (or worse yet, racist or sexist) rationalizations that short-circuit one’s capacity to witness testimony” (ibid.). More troubling, testimonies like those of residential school survivors become an object of a lesson taught in schools, where the complexity and feelings evoked within their narratives are reduced and mobilized to illustrate the concept of “historical significance” as a means of addressing a specific category of knowledge and skills within the Ontario achievement chart (see Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 33). Despite significant benefits, developing shadow texts through life writing poses several pedagogical risks.

In *The paradoxical practice of Zakhor: Memories of “what has never been my fault or my deed,”* Simon (2000) outlines some of these risks. First, elders’ stories are in danger of becoming old news to which students claim to fully understand and respond. Second, the stories can become appropriated objects to be consumed, remembered and then forgotten. Similar to the 2008 government apology, a student can “accept the predefined importance of such stories and one’s responsibility to reiterate that significance when asked, but only

when asked” (p. 18). Finally, as Simon makes clear, the stories can become transference objects reduced and shaped by one’s obsessions, concerns, and own self-understanding. My sense is in this article we perform such risks. How do we learn then to reread, rewrite, view, or listen to others’ pain when it is not recognizable as our own? This is an interminable curricular question. It is even perhaps unanswerable.

While mindful of the aforementioned risks, such learning involves opening ourselves up to the vulnerable processes of being wounded by the wounds of others while reading, listening, and reviewing “the shadows of history” and acting “against the grain of an objectifying and oppressive historical grammar” (Eppert, 2000, p. 216). During our courses together, I invite students to write their life narratives alongside and against the historical narratives of others—to risk being wounded. To do so, we watch films, read novels, and listen to the testimonies of Algonquin elders and each other. This pedagogical process demands reading and rewriting different historical accounts of what constitutes the places and people that make up the mythologies of Canada. As a praxis of decolonization, life writing as shadow texts, enables us in many ways, to honour survivors’ “names and to hold a place for their absent presence” as Canadians (Simon, 2000, p. 4). My hope is that through such practices of life writing, such as *currere*, we can envision narratives of the past, present, and for the future, that work to remember the names and lives of those who were lost and survived the violent colonial government curriculum of the Indian Residential Schooling (IRS) system.

Engendering Absences: A Curriculum of Apathy, Ignorance and Negligence

An education that creates silence is not an education. (Simon, 1987, p. 375)

Robin: Who is a Canadian? What does it mean to be a responsible citizen here in Canada or abroad? What do the geopolitical and historical landscapes of Canadian cultures look, sound, taste, smell, and feel like? Are we just a collection of disconnected micro-cultures borrowed from faraway places? What makes us Canadian apart from being born here? Are Canadian social studies curricula and classrooms accountable for connecting different Canadians to the territories and histories that now make up what we, as intergenerational settlers, call Canada? These are for me the kinds of Canadian social studies questions we need to pose as teachers and students.

My lived experiences with such curricular inquiries at school were intertwined with the Ontario social studies curriculum where students were invited to “understand basic concepts,” “develop the skills, strategies and habits of mind required for effective inquiry and communication,” and then apply such “basic concepts of social studies, history, and geography to a variety of learning tasks” (see Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 3). Unfortunately, these goals engender little other than the ability for students to “continue to learn effectively in secondary school” (p. 3). Thinking back to my lived experiences within this social studies curriculum, I wonder at what point are we empowered to pose the following proverbial educational question: What knowledge is of most worth? We were not

developing the skills in classrooms to become active members of society capable of critically identifying historical and contemporary injustices like the Indian Residential Schooling (IRS) system.

While some connections are made between self, local, national and global concerns, I experienced what Freire (1970/1990) terms a banking model of education. By simply fostering knowledge, skills and attitudes that afford certain students access to future university studies, teachers push students into higher studies where they continue to be comforted by settler narratives of the status quo, and only “know” history from one vantage point. Not surprisingly, students remain apathetic, ignorant and absent toward a greater social responsibility to discover the narrative complexity of what it means to be Canadian because they have not been taught that other narratives exist, much less how to investigate them. Questions like the ones I pose above often go unanswered, largely because they are never asked. My experience with the social studies curriculum certainly did not provoke any kind of critical thinking, witnessing and/or forms of historical remembering that Simon and Eppert (1997) call for.

Simon (1987) reminds us in *Empowerment as a pedagogy of possibility*, that “education is fundamentally about our hopes for the future given an understanding of current realities, that particular forms of educational practice offer both a particular version and vision of a future civic prospect and morality” (p. 370). Simon additionally calls for educators to create spaces for their students to romanticize with a particular “not yet” of how we might live our lives together. But we cannot do this with misguided narrative conceptions of the present. A limited historical understanding of the present clouds our potential visions toward the future while simultaneously perpetuating hegemonic constructions of the past. If our teaching of social studies continues to deny our collective remembering of the narrative ruins of a Canadian colonial past, our present and future conceptions of an uncommon common curricular countenance will continue to push narratives of survivors to the margins of Canadian social studies curriculum (Chambers, 2012).

At issue here is what we might call a curriculum of present absence (Aoki, 2000/2005). In my lived experiences within Ontario’s public schools, the social studies curriculum fostered unawareness and general apathy. The alternative voices, experiences and perspectives of many marginalized Canadians were pushed to the periphery of our national “knowing.” These voices, like those of the victims and survivors of the IRS system, are in many ways still waiting at the periphery to be heard and remembered (Donald, 2009; Weenie, 2008). Eurocentric conceptions of curricula allow teachers to “protect” their pupils from potentially discomfiting and destabilizing notions that accompany the witnessing of difficult knowledge and traumatic Canadian histories (den Heyer & Abbott, 2011; Eppert, 2002).

The revised Ontario Social Studies curriculum seems to address the previous document’s shortcomings at least in part. It advocates for presenting students with opportunities to “learn about what it means to be a responsible, active citizen in the community of the classroom and the diverse communities to which they belong within and outside the school” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 9). Specifically, this curriculum

asks Canadian teachers and students to: 1) Work for the common good in local, national, and global communities; 2) Foster a sense of personal identity as a member of various communities; 3) Understand power and systems within societies; and, 4) Develop character traits, values, and habits of mind (see Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 10). While this more engaged discourse sounds quite promising, there are still very powerful political forces and hegemonic agendas at play that must challenge the explicit, implicit, and null narrative dimensions of this policy document (Ng-A-Fook, 2013). In the sections that follow, I attempt to bring meaning to my recent connections to a Canadian history and narrative previously absent from my “knowing.” My goal is to critique current realities, deconstruct a curriculum of absence, and create in its place an imagination of alternative possible futures. To accomplish this, I see my task as a curriculum theorist not only to share testimony of what I have witnessed as an act of “learning from the past,” but also, to speak back *to* such testimony. Speaking *to* testimony requires us to “attend to the limits displayed” as we attend to experiences that are absolutely foreign to us, calling into question the predispositions we bring with us – an attending to our attending (Simon & Eppert, 1997).

Teaching Against the Grain: Toward a Vulnerable Education

The cultural politics from which I begin is one centrally committed to the task of creating specific social forms (such as schooling) that encourage and make possible the realization of a variety of differentiated human capacities; rather than denying, diluting or distorting those capacities. (Simon, 1987, p. 372)

Since the late 1800s, over 150,000 Aboriginal children were forcibly taken away from their families and shipped off to one of 130-plus schools scattered across seven provinces and two territories. There, they were robbed of their language, their beliefs, their self-respect, their cultural, and, in some cases, their very existence in a vain attempt to make them more Canadian. (Taylor, 2012, p. 142)

Nicholas: How do we begin to decolonize our relations with our selves, others, and the past? What are the local, national, and international implications of such cultural, historical, material and political relations in terms of Truth and Reconciliation? What is “truth?” What is “reconciliation?” These are provocative curricular questions. Perhaps for some, they are dangerous ones. They are in-deed complex ones (see Henderson & Wakeham, 2013).⁴ Nonetheless, these are the kinds of pedagogical questions Roger Simon (2013) asked “as a form of worrying-in-public” (p. 129). In many ways, his research continues to invite us to critically question our relations with each other by revisiting, listening, and remembering

our individual and collective narrative conceptions of the past and our potential future relations to national programs of cultural redress and/or reconciliation.

Therefore, decolonizing our relations with the past also involves, as Simon (1992) suggests, a commitment toward *teaching against the grain*. Within such teachings, Marie Battiste (2013) calls our attention to the existing historical narratives that inform the public memory of settler colonialism and its ongoing denial of a colonizing past.

Consider for more than a century, Indigenous students have been part of a forced assimilation plan—their heritage and knowledge rejected and suppressed, and ignored by the education system. Imagine the consequence of a powerful ideology that positions one group as superior and gives away First Nations peoples' lands and resources and invites churches and other administrative agents to inhabit their homeland, while negating their very existence and finally removing them from the Canadian landscape to lands no one wants. (p. 23)

Here, a commemorative ethics of “remembrance attempts to meet the challenge of what it might mean to live, not in the past but *in relation with* the past, acknowledging the claim the past has on the present” (Simon, 2000, p. 4). Acknowledging such kinds of ethical engagements with the past must be part of the politics of redress implicated in Truth and Reconciliation.

In our course together, Robin and I attended to such relations with our pasts by rereading and rewriting our memories and our narrative representations of them through life writing. We leaned on the different methodological dimensions of *currere*—regression, progression, analysis, and synthesis—to create a space “that risks our becoming wounded in the attendance to the wounds of another” (Simon, 2000, p. 5). The historical traumas of the victims and survivors of the IRS system call for such pedagogical risks as part of our responsibilities toward Truth and Reconciliation. But how do we create the necessary pedagogical spaces of vulnerability to encounter unsettling historical narratives as a project of possibility? Like Robin, I continue to struggle to learn the difficult knowledge associated with historical trauma. Such learning, as Britzman (1998) suggests, is belated, often coming to us when it is too late. Moreover, how do elementary, secondary, and/or university educators introduce difficult knowledge in productive ways that do not console our egos?

In *Radical hope: Or, the problem of uncertainty in History Education*, Lisa Farley (2009) puts forth the psychoanalytic concepts of “illusion,” “disillusionment,” and “re-illusions” to complicate the “readerly” and “writerly” processes of unsettling our relationships with the traumatic pasts of others.⁵ Farley draws upon these concepts to explore the uncertainty and tensions that exist in the psychic dynamics of teaching and learning from difficult knowledge. And within the contexts of history education such knowledge is, she writes,

... difficult not only because of its inclusion of traumatic content in and otherwise-sanitized curriculum, but also because it poses a challenge to

teachers and students, who, in efforts to understand such knowledge, may be confronted with affective traces of an *internal* history made from primal helplessness, disillusionment and crises of authority and (not) knowing. At stake here is a view of historical knowledge that is touched by the very anxieties it hopes to settle in answering “matter-of-factly” a child’s burning question. (p. 539)

To reread and rewrite alternative historical narratives, or open ourselves up to an ethical engagement with others, means having to tolerate the loss of epistemological certainty in our very pedagogical efforts “to know” or “to interpret” others’ individual and collective traumatic pasts that are excluded from the school history curriculum.

In response to such discursive reproductions of an explicit, implicit, and null curriculum as well as our encounters with epistemologies of uncertainty, I suggest that we might learn the critical politics of remembering and forgetting certain historical narratives through life writing.⁶ “One concrete version of what this might entail would be a process,” as Simon (2013) proposes, “of reflecting on the experiences of listening to the stories told to the TRC and retelling these stories, not to co-opt them in the service of the self, but interweaving them with one’s own life stories” (p. 136). Such “a critical politics of remembrance,” as Ranck (2000) stresses, “necessarily implies a decolonization of imagination that scrutinizes the discourses of neo-colonialism for its contamination of the politics of the present” (p. 209). In turn, “the insight won in the struggle to learn from history,” as Simon (2013) maintains, “can offer a new foundation for rethinking the significance of a history of violation and violence beyond the idealizations of empathy, identification, and facile notions of solidarity that simply promote settler state citizenship” (p. 136). This is especially true when a 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.

Such mediated stories, as Dwayne Donald (2009, 2012) has illustrated in his thought-provoking research on forts, curriculum, and Indigenous *métissage*, work to represent the beliefs Canadian citizens hold regarding the narrative genesis of our nation-state. The stories we (don’t) tell each other through the public school curriculum about the birth of our country have a significant impact on the institutional, political, and cultural character of the country, as well as the narrative preoccupations of its future citizens. In this groundbreaking work, Donald (2009) makes clear that Canadian institutions perpetuate the colonial establishment of the fort. Where “universities and schools are predicated on colonial frontier logics and have both served to enforce epistemological and social conformity to Euro-western standards” (p. 4). Educational institutions as such, then symbolize academic forts that work to perpetuate certain inherent institutional discursive regimes that in turn obstruct our potential engagement of Indigenous perspectives and contribute to the violent pedagogical and epistemic curricular reproductions of exclusion and displacement of what does and does not constitute historical knowledge within the contexts of what we call “Canadian” history.

If we think about the school, or the policy document as a public site implicated in the formation of our collective historical imagination, we can see how it institutionally operates in a similar fashion to that of the colonial fort. Curriculum policy documents, and the ways in which we might translate them form the political walls of the provincial (or state) curricula. History textbooks and teacher perceptions of history effectively erect certain discursive walls, establishing the territorial and disciplinary demarcations of a neoliberal, neoconservative, indeed neocolonial Eurocentric (white supremacist) narrative fort (Stanley, 2006).

The curriculum itself then becomes a discursive instructional and instrumental fortification where the teachings of history might seem, at first glance, self-evident. However, as we all know, history is not an inert political or psychic text that students receive or create in a classroom. Rather history, or the current educational movement called historical thinking, *is* always about interpretative, discursive, and ethical relations with our narrative constructions of the past, its implication for present, and future visions of what constitutes Canadian history. Theorizing and doing such kinds of historical thinking or historical inquiry then need to foster ethical relational spaces for teachers and students to access the diverse alternative primary and secondary sources that inform our interpretations of the historical significance of creating settler state sponsored institutions like the IRS system.

Although the last residential schools closed in the mid-1990s, narratives about the institutions or by their survivors did not exist within my school-aged memories or as an undergraduate student. Not until graduate school in a course with Celia Haig-Brown (2009) on decolonizing research methodologies, did I begin to question whose traditional lands I now occupied while learning to become a “good” diasporic Canadian. My prior educational experiences inside and outside the explicit, implicit, and null Catholic school curriculum did not create specific social forms that encouraged my capacity to imagine the diverse historical narratives of the differing Aboriginal communities who continue to live on what some call Turtle Island.

Unsettling Narrative Understandings of the Past: Experiencing Inexperience

On such terms, remembrance becomes a practice that supports a learning from “the past” that is a fresh cognizance or discovery that unsettles the very terms on which our understandings of ourselves and our world are based. In its most powerful form, such remembrance initiates forms of learning that shift and disrupt the present, opening one to new ways of perceiving, thinking and acting. (Simon, 2000, p.13)

Robin: In our teaching and learning together, Dr. Ng-A-Fook continually challenged my preconceptions and pushed me to accommodate new capacities for imagining the lives of others. This was possible because he complicated my understanding of curriculum, in how I was encouraged to attend to the testimonies of others – whether through artistic

representations or the living accounts he invited into the classroom. He provoked me to expand upon my newly developed capacities by inviting me to identify, interrogate, situate, and present curriculum artifacts. Unlike any of my prior schooling, this experience at graduate school challenged the very epistemological foundations for comprehending my sense of self. My personal apathy led to my reductive notions of history; institutional and social structures became exposed through what I now understand was a process of re-remembering.

Coming to the realization that certain political ideologies had deeply structured how I received, remembered, and responded to knowledge and other representations completely dismantled my historical grounding as a Canadian teacher and student. I was rendered both vulnerable and fragile. Nonetheless, it afforded me pedagogical opportunities to encounter the “experience of my inexperience” – that is, to hear, and learn differently (Simon, 2000, p.19). I encountered my complicity in remembering and forgetting certain historical narratives. No longer naïve, I could not hide behind a veil of indifference. Instead, I now understand my responsibilities as a Canadian to re-remember the various historical narratives that constitute my Canadian identity. To do so, “one must bear (support and endure),” as Simon and Eppert (1997) make clear, “the psychic burden of a traumatic history, and acknowledge that memories of violence and injustice press down on one’s sense of humanity and moral equilibrium” (p. 178). It is within such vulnerability, fragility and unsettling curriculum that a pedagogical space becomes available for learning difficult knowledge. Provoked by the unsettling experience of my inexperience, I desired alternative understandings of the past, opportunities to read, interpret, and re/write my ways of perceiving, thinking and acting as a Canadian. After discussing this with Nicholas, he invited me to join him on a trip to Kitigan Zibi, an Algonquin reserve in Quebec.

When we arrived, the Kitigan Zibi School was lively with activity. Students from grades one to twelve filled the halls. Eagles, trees, a flock of Canadian geese and the lone wolf made up some of the Canadian topography painted on the walls. While wondering and witnessing, I could feel the soft gaze of students attempting to process my presence as the proverbial “Other.” My eyes drifted to theirs. They were met with an intrigued, yet bashful smile that turned into a series of timid little waves, welcoming me to the school. Others were slightly bolder, greeting me with the type of hug I would only be comfortable instigating with a dear friend. In the library, the principal readied her presentation of the Algonquin Anishinàbeg culture, language and curriculum. I listened intently to her describe the cultural, historical, and linguistic relevance of their locally developed education system and its seven grandfather teachings of honesty, truth, love, respect, humility, bravery and wisdom. I was also experiencing it all around me.

Then Bertha Commanda, an Algonquin elder and residential school survivor stood up in front of us. She expressed her gratitude for our presence and desire to learn about Algonquin history and culture. And, Bertha proceeded to share the following story:

A couple of years ago, I was in with the Assembly of First Nations. We went for a meeting [on] parliament hill and so the national Chief says, “this is Mrs. Commanda...this is her territory. Let’s thank her for being

on her territory." A lot of parliamentarians were confused there. After the meeting was over, I was getting ready to get up and a couple of women came to see me. White women! And you know what they said? "I'm so glad you people are here." I said thank you. They then said, "You know what? If it wasn't for you people, my ancestors would have never survived." I told them we must have welcomed them because "Quebec" for me sounds like my language. If you come to my house in a boat or in a car all alone, I would say "kaba." When there are many of you, I would say "kabak." "Kabak kinebay" means in our language "get off and come on in." That should be in our history! So that day, I told the Chiefs across Canada, "it's about time we changed our history, I want a better history." We got a lot of our own young people. They should be able to write and learn our history.

This alternative account emerged from the silent confines of the colonial narratives that previously prejudiced my understandings of Canadian history. In this moment, history and its respective narratives came alive differently for me, and not because I had witnessed survivor testimony, but more disturbingly because I became further aware of my complicity in the perpetration of what Malewski and Jaramillo (2011) call an epistemology of "ignorance." Such unsettling narrative encounters were not just about unearthing facts that rendered history more accurate. Instead, I was awakened toward attending to Canadian history differently (Simon, 2000). Kanu and Glor (2006) explain, "by uncovering biographies, there can be an empowerment and a movement away from cultural authority and cultural reproduction" (p. 106). Engaging oral history projects with Algonquin elders as one example, forces us to interrogate our worldviews. In turn, it connects us to the multiplicity of historical accounts, many of which remain characterized by inequality, discrimination, stereotypes, paternalism, isolation, distrust and misunderstanding (Donald, 2004). Such acts of historical deconstruction and reconstruction within and outside the contexts of Canadian social studies may potentially lead to more hopeful relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. And, within such encounters of remembrance, we may become unsettled in our rethinking, reassessing and re-understanding of Canadian history.

Encountering Truth and Reconciliation: An Unfinished Story

This unfinished story is the story pedagogy must learn to tolerate.
(Britzman, 2000, p. 50)

My understanding of what *reconciliation* means has evolved since that time. To me, it's all about relationships and communication.
(Angeconeb, 2012, p. 27)

The worthy pedagogical idea inherent in such a form of public history is that the authority and moral weight of the commission will lead Canadians not only to become more aware of past policies and events excluded from the dominant narratives of Canadian history, but also to undertake an active, ethical engagement with this past, one that might forge new covenantal relations of solidarity with Indigenous communities in a collective struggle for a more hopeful future for all. (Simon, 2013, p. 130)

Nicholas: We seem to think we know Aboriginal people by name. And “we” as settlers continue to profit from renaming their ontological, epistemological, material, and political realities with the mythologies we call Canadian history (Donald, 2012). Such colonizing and nationalizing hubris should be an epistemological, curricular, and pedagogical worrying problem for Canadian citizens. For those of us who support and profit from a settler “neoliberal” colonial nation-state we remain intoxicated by the convenient myths of what King (2012) calls elsewhere the *Inconvenient Indian*. In our Ontario social studies curriculum, we often toast to celebrations of economic, moral, and technological progress of our citizenship. Our national congratulatory cheers are so loud that we cannot see or hear the voices of the missing and murdered Aboriginal women, men, and children who have experienced the systemic intergenerational traumas of cultural genocide. Who are experiencing it! Discursively and politically, the narratives occupying our newsstands, our classrooms, our individual and collective historical consciousness, are perhaps slowly changing. Ontario teachers and students can now find the term “residential schools” within the social studies curriculum policy document. But how do we take up the complexities of their historical representations as future strategic essential questions?

Over the course of our oral history work together, Bertha Commanda refused to let her lived experiences, her life narratives, or Algonquin histories be symbolized by the colonial discursive and material regimes of privatization, criminalization, and victimization. Despite her traumatic experiences at St. Joseph’s, the girls Indian Residential School in Spanish Ontario, she shared testimonies of her traumas with resilience and a generous pedagogical spirit. On several occasions, Bertha shared her teachings with pre-service history teachers and graduate students. She taught us how to reread, relearn, rewrite, and teach what we call “Canadian” history differently. Hers and other elders’ stories, like Garnet Angecone in *Speaking My Truth: Reflections on Reconciliation and Residential School*, have provoked me to question the ways in which I am (or not) addressing the commemorative ethics required for *Truth and Reconciliation*. And yet addressing such ethics as a critical pedagogy for questioning and remembering history will not be found within the disciplinary thinking skills of the Ontario social studies curriculum. And, like Robin, I am still learning how to attend to such kinds of commemorative ethics, of unsettling my encounters with others in the past, present, and future within my research and teaching as a pedagogy of worrying-in-public, as a shadow text, where my relationships with *Truth and Reconciliation* remain an unfinished story. Remembering

Bertha's parting words, I am learning to reread, rewrite, and relearn her Algonquin Kitigan Zibi history: "*Kabak kinebay!*"

Toward the Pedagogical Art of the Possibility of futurities

There is no future without uncanny memorial connections, responsibilities to memories other than one's own, to memories you have no responsibility for but claim you to a memorial kinship. (Simon, 2000, p. 19)

Writers and intellectuals can name, we can describe, we can depict, we can witness—with—out sacrificing craft, nuance, or beauty. Above all, and at our best, we may sometimes help question the questions. (Rich, 2001, p. 167)

Nicholas and Robin: Throughout his work as a writer and public intellectual, Roger Simon challenged educators to question the questions that inform our understandings of history. His work continues to provoke us to think, listen, speak, and write differently. While the discourse in Ontario's new social studies curriculum seems to enable educators to learn the shadow texts of Canadian history, the onus is still on curriculum theorists, teachers, and students of history to craft pedagogical spaces to encounter the unsettling historical traumas of others with compassion, knowledge, and justice (Eppert, 2002). These encounters, as Eppert reminds us, must also challenge our anxieties and egocentric investments that seek to forget as we remember the violent inheritance of a colonial history. Moreover, as she and Roger Simon stressed, we must continue to commit ourselves toward deconstructing and reconstructing current Western narratives in their "heroic" conventions for understanding the past. Such conventional historical plots fail to provide the necessary historical reading lenses to construct the shadow texts and affective excesses of residential school survivors' testimonies. For us, life writing as shadow texts, as *currere*, enables us to revisit the past as "a practice of unsettling the present," toward reimagining more hopeful future relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities across the territories we now call Canada (Simon, 2000, p. 20). Roger Simon and the works of former students like Aparna Mishra Tarc (2011), Claudia Eppert (2000, 2002), and Lisa Farley (2008, 2009, 2010) have provided an intellectual and pedagogical starting point for us to further develop alternative lenses to encounter unsettling histories inside and outside of Canadian social studies.

To this unfinished ending, we might heed Simon's (1987) words, that "what we do in classrooms can matter; we can begin to enable students to enter the openness of the future as the place of human hope and worth" (p. 381). Such pedagogical openness might begin by taking account, listening, reading, and viewing the stories of elders like Bertha Commanda, Garnet Angeconeb, and the many nameless others who did and did not survive as part of our commemorative ethical commitment, as treaty people, to truth and reconciliation.

Endnotes

¹ To see a timeline on the establishment of the Indian Residential Schooling system and ensuing Truth and Reconciliation Commission consult the following website: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/a-timeline-of-residential-schools-the-truth-and-reconciliation-commission-1.724434>.

² *Currere* is the Latin infinitive etymological root for the term “curriculum” and can be translated as: “to run the course.” For Pinar (2012), the method of *currere* consists of the four following intertwining parts: regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical. In the regressive phase, one conducts free association with memories in order to collect autobiographical data. The purpose is to try and re-enter the past in order to enlarge and transform one’s memories. The second phase, or the progressive, is where one looks towards what is not yet present. In the analytical stage, one examines how both the past and future inhabit the present. At the analytical stage, how might educational researchers bracket such experiences in order to loosen emotional attachments and their respective limit-situations in relation to pedagogical concepts such as, but not limited to: decolonizing one’s self? The synthetical is the last stage, where one brings together past, present, and future limitations and possibilities in order to re-enter the present moment, hopefully without instrumental certainty or promise, with a sense of self-understanding, or insight, in relation to such pedagogical concepts. William Pinar’s (2012) concept of *currere* has been an integral part of Nicholas Ng-A-Fook’s (2009, 2012, in-press) teaching and research at the University of Ottawa.

³ To learn more about the different components of the larger research project consult the following articles Corrigan, Ng-A-Fook, Lévesque, Smith (2013), Lévesque, Ng-A-Fook, Corrigan (2014), and Smith, Ng-A-Fook, Corrigan (in-press).

⁴ Within the scope of this essay we cannot provide an in-depth analysis of both the possibilities and limitations of examining the transnational culture of redress taking place across Western neoliberal and/or neoconservative nation-states such as, but not limited to South Africa, Australia, and Canada. However, in *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress*, Henderson and Wakeham, put forth an excellent edited collection of essays that examine the historical, political, and theoretical, and dimensions of what they call “the culture of redress” (p. 15). What we can take from their arguments put for in this thought-provoking collection, is that several different several different neoliberal Western countries like Canada have sought to control the various political, economic, and discursive mechanisms for acknowledging historical traumas and in turn establishing the parameters around the kinds of redress that are given as part of any future settlements with descendants of interned Japanese-Canadians, Chinese head tax, or residential school survivors as three examples.

⁵ Within the scope of this essay we are not able to tease out the complexities of these psychoanalytical concepts in relation to juxtaposition of the texts related to the IRS system and/or Truth and Reconciliation. For a more thorough discussion and potential future juxtaposition of these concepts we strongly encourage readers to read Lisa Farley's (2009) *Radical hope: Or, the problem of uncertainty in History Education*.

⁶ Thirty-five years ago, Elliot Eisner (1979) situated the following three different types of curriculum within the contexts of public schooling: 1) Explicit, 2) Implicit, and 3) Null curriculum. The explicit curriculum refers to government policy documents like the Ontario Social Studies curriculum. The implicit refers the values and expectations that are not put forth in the formal curriculum. The null refers to what is excluded from the school curriculum. Often what is included and/or excluded could have significant impacts for different exogenous and/or Indigenous populations in a school. "The concept of evolution omitted from a biology curriculum," as Flinders, Noddings, and Thornton (1986) suggest, "would be an example of this type of exclusion". The null curriculum can also be considered in terms of the exclusion of particular facts. "For example an American history unit focusing on the New Deal without reference to the failure of the New Deal to solve the unemployment problem," as these authors argue, "would consign this bit of information to the null curriculum" (p. 35). In Ontario a similar example would be the exclusion of various historical events, like the establishment of the Indian Residential Schooling system, from the history curriculum. Moreover, a lack of Indigenous historical perspectives within existing history textbooks on such events would be another example of the null curriculum. For a more thorough discussion of the different dimensions of the null curriculum see Flinders, Noddings, and Thornton's (1986) essay *The Null Curriculum: Its Theoretical Basis and Practical Implications*.

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