“WE’LL GET POLITICS OUT OF THE CLASSROOM”: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHY EXPLORING DISCOURSES OF NEUTRALITY IN AND AROUND THE HIGH SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM IN ALBERTA

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ABSTRACT

Through this study, I draw on Critical Discourse Analysis and autoethnography to examine the implications of educational discourses which position Alberta's grade 10-12 Social Studies curriculum as apolitical. This work is timely and vital in Alberta at this moment, as widespread government focus on "removing politics from education" attempts to position curriculum as neutral. This research disrupts this discourse by showing how it conceals the workings of power and maintains inequities in schools. I draw on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the Social Studies curriculum and engage in an autoethnographic account of my planning process in response to emerging discourses revealed by my CDA. Together, these methodologies illustrate how political and cultural ideologies affect the curriculum and thus teacher praxis, reinforcing inequitable social power structures. This study establishes a framework for considering how critical theories and pedagogies may contribute to the development of more inclusive curricula and classrooms.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Introduction

Politicians in Alberta are encouraging the positioning of Social Studies content, curricula, and practices as apolitical. On November 28th 2019, Education Minister Adrianna LaGrange tweeted criticism of an exam in an Albertan Social Studies class that conveyed environmental perspectives of the impact of the oil sands, saying "Alberta has a great story to tell about our responsible energy sector, and educators should not be attacking it. [We will] get politics out of the classroom" (Tucker, 2019). Whereas the notion that education ought to be apolitical is not new, this tweet highlights how central and renewed this discourse is in Alberta presently. These discourses continue to be front and center during the current tumultuous public debates following the United Conservative Party (UCP) government's recent release of a draft version of the kindergarten to grade six curriculum (Alberta Education, 2020). During public exchanges, political figures often classified curriculum (and education as an institution) as politically neutral. Partisan politicians, across the spectrum, have been accusing each other of using education as a tool to indoctrinate students into a particular political ideology. For example, UCP Education Minister Adrianna LaGrange said at a press conference that "We've gone away from the ideological [curriculum] that was in the previous [New Democrat Party] government," stating that "they [the UCP party] did not 'politicize education'" (Black, 2020). This is a continuing discourse as the Premier of

Alberta, Jason Kenney recently tweeted that "we promised to stop the NDP's ideological, left-wing, politicized rewrite of the school curriculum. We kept our word. [We have] stopped it. We are now presenting Albertans with a thoughtful and balanced curriculum to set young people up for success" (Kenney, 2021). Again, the discourse of neutrality is positioned as ideal against the threat of ideological influence of opposing views.

Discursively, comments like the ones above undermine any recognition that all curriculum is political. These comments reinforce a society where governments and policy makers seek to position themselves (and their curricular changes) as neutral. As critical educational scholars posit, positioning curriculum as neutral reinforces inequities (Egbo, 2019, Richards, 2020), and requires disruption and critical questioning. This positioning is problematic because apolitical understandings of knowledge privilege certain voices in the narration of historical and contemporary events over others—all while implying that such privilege is without bias (Richards 2020). As a result, an apolitical worldview is "positioned as the most legitimate way to view the world, and as such, is difficult to resist" (Strega, 2015, p. 121). Thus, the dominant discourse that values curriculum neutrality in Alberta marginalizes those who are excluded from these privileged groups and normalizes their exclusion. This concept of curriculum neutrality is what I propose to interrogate, at both institutional and personal levels.

In this research, I investigate the implications of positioning Albertan curricula as apolitical. I start by explaining my own position within education in Alberta, which leads me to my research. In chapter one, I outline my research question and rationale, and provide a brief overview of the curriculum documents I analyze. In chapter two, I discuss the theoretical context that informs my work. Here I review relevant literature and scholarship associated with curriculum in Alberta, critical theories and pedagogies, as well as curriculum theories. Following this, in chapter three I outline the methodologies of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and autoethnography that inform my study. Chapter four contains my CDA of the high school Social Studies program in Alberta, followed by a reflexive autoethnographic account of my own pedagogical planning in chapter five. Finally, chapter six concludes by reflecting on the research itself, and the implications I see for my own work as a teacher and as researcher on future projects.

Personal & Professional Context

As an educator in Alberta for the last fifteen years, I am beginning to recognize the ways in which I am complicit in the maintenance and circulation of discourses that position education as apolitical. For example, I position myself as objective while not acknowledging the privilege I benefit from or reinforce. As a white, middle-class, cis-gendered, able-bodied settler, I am firmly entrenched within the status-quo. Thus, the idea of teacher neutrality is something I absorbed in my personal and professional

pedagogy. However, as I gain awareness of my own privilege and position, I realize that I benefit often from my decision to socialize myself into the status quo of the school. I situate myself using “accepted and [proven] means to impart knowledge and skills prescribed by the curriculum” (Egbo, 2019, p. 160). Not only am I not required to question my own apolitical stance, but I found myself proud of my ability to remain neutral.

Yet, I now realize that by positioning myself as objective and neutral, I am positioning the curriculum, information, and knowledge in my classroom as neutral as well. While such an approach benefits me, it does not benefit all my students, nor does it contribute to a more just society. As I gain awareness of how power operates around and through me, I gain appreciation for the positions of critical educational scholars who argue that it is actually “the tension between what we choose to teach and what we actually leave out that is political" (Egbo, 2019, p. 160). I realize that if I am teaching certain knowledge as true while leaving other knowledge unseen or unspoken, I am reinforcing dominant thinking and discourses.

Research Overview

Drawing on methods of Critical Discourse Analysis (van Dijk, 1995, Gee & Handford 2012, Flowerdew & Richardson, 2017) and autoethnography (Atkinson & Reed-Danahay, 1999, Adams, Ellis, & Jones 2017, Winkler, 2018), I will examine the

ways power operates through Alberta's grade 10, 11, and 12 Social Studies curriculum. In identifying how the curriculum contributes to power dynamics that are marginalizing and inequitable, I explore how critical theories and pedagogies might provide an approach for teachers to reframe teaching Social Studies and arrive at more equitable ends. My research examines ways to shift our perspective on history education away from teaching it as objective facts to be memorized. Instead, it explores ways that our efforts can be refocused on creating educational spaces where students and teachers can critically examine how historical knowledge is constructed (Clark 2011, Milligan, Gibson, & Peck, 2018). This brings educational questions related to power, knowledge creation, and equity to the center of my study.

Research Questions

My research addresses the following questions: How do discourses of political neutrality operate on, and through, the Alberta grade 10, 11, and 12 Social Studies Curriculum? What does an autoethnographic approach reveal about the presence of these discourses in my own pedagogical practice as a Social Studies educator? And what does this analysis reveal about the politics reinforced or challenged in my own teaching? Finally, how might critical theories and pedagogies be used to disrupt apolitical discourses of neutrality as a means of addressing inequities?

Critical work must first be undertaken by teachers (myself included) by examining and articulating how power and inequity manifest in the curriculum and in our own pedagogical practices. As a result, I will use the following supporting questions to aid in my research: How does the curriculum normalize certain ideologies? What discourses does the curriculum develop about groups that do not fit within a certain hegemonic framework? How is the status-quo explicitly or implicitly elevated as a result of my own pedagogy? Who is erased? What agency is granted to students and on what subjects? What response is necessary as a result of this work?

Rationale: Why does this type of research matter?

Disrupting the centering of dominant thinking matters because it is a step towards more equitable education both in terms of what we deem appropriate knowledge and how we share that knowledge. To disrupt these existing discourses, we need to understand how current systems are being shaped. My work focuses on the problems created by an apolitical construction of knowledge and the centering of dominant discourses as neutral in relationship to the grade 10, 11, and 12 Social Studies curriculum in Alberta.

When knowledge is constructed and viewed as neutral it conceals the ways that said knowledge has been constructed in a particular socio-political and historical context. This portrayal of knowledge as neutral appears in educational discourse and practices in a variety of ways, such as curriculum, textbooks, historical narratives, or lectures (Giroux,

2019, Rezende, & Ostermann, 2020). This results in "epistemological approaches to knowledge [that are] rooted in "objective" reasoning [and] result in the construction of true-or-false dichotomies, through the treatment of "truth" as certain and knowledgeable" (Moosa-Mitha, 2015, p. 70). When we structure Social Studies education as apolitical, we are reinforcing a view of the past and the present that centers dominant discourses as universally true. This is a problem because it suggests an objective position that casts all other positions as contrary or alternative to the norm. The result is that Social Studies becomes a re-telling of history that does not question whose knowledge, story, and perspective is being centered as the 'neutral' base to measure every other form of knowledge, story, and perspective against (Ross, 2017). Consequently, what remains is an unquestioned dominant narrative that all other experiences are measured against.

It is necessary to acknowledge that the positioning of knowledge as neutral is—in itself—a political act. Potts & Brown (2015) suggest that "knowledge is neither neutral nor benign, as it is created within and through power relations between people" (p. 19). Failure to grasp the political nature of knowledge results in a failure to see gaps between our own perceptions of our positionality (in classrooms or in society as a whole) and how our privilege impacts others. In other words, choosing neutrality is a choice to ignore the way power manifests itself in and through us as educators.

In response to this problem, I am exploring how the application of critical theories and pedagogies to Alberta curriculum and surrounding discourses exposes these hegemonic influences. This provides teachers with insights into how they can challenge these structures in their own classrooms. My research will turn the focus on the structures and authority that shape what is defined as knowledge, and how that knowledge is framed within the curriculum and passed along as objective facts within classrooms and public discourse. Addressing my research questions will assist in uncovering how power works in classrooms, which is necessary to examine how to teach Social Studies in a more equitable manner. The application of critical theories and pedagogies enables the examination of how power manifests itself within the curriculum and my own practice, and how such power acts as a political force that reinforces the status quo. As a result, we can more consciously examine and disrupt the hegemonic forces that shape our understanding of knowledge.

Curriculum Document Overview

The high school Social Studies curriculum in Alberta was written in 2005, with implementation in 2007. The document contains a "Program Rationale and Philosophy" which encompasses grades 10, 11, and 12. Each grade is then separately listed and will be referred to as such (grade 10, grade 11, and grade 12). Within each grade the curriculum

is organized similarly: four related issues, which all contain two categories: values and attitudes, and knowledge and understanding outcomes.

This new curriculum coincided with my first year of teaching. As such, I initially encountered and studied the curriculum (often referred to as the Program of Studies) in university education classes, talking with my classmates about its major themes: the importance of multiple perspectives, critical thinking, and student inquiry (Program Rationale, Alberta Education, 2005). The progression of ideas from globalization (grade 10) to nationalism (grade 11) to liberalism (grade 12) reveals a narrowing of focus from the student's view of the world to their country, to their personal ideology, which we thought may resonate with students. In our teacher education classes it never occurred to us that the world, nation, and ideology that students were examining came from a white settler, capitalist lens, and we missed the fact that this lens may not represent all students. Our assumption of apolitical neutrality was implicit and accepted, and thus the centering of worldviews and history was left unchallenged as we assumed that all students would see themselves in the curriculum.

Critical analysis of these curriculum documents reveals a central issue: that neutrality is both assumed and normalized. For example, in grade 10 (Alberta Education, 2005) contemporary economics associated with capitalism is presented as factual, and then other systems are compared with that norm (Outcomes 3.4 and 3.7). The importance of diversity is emphasized, but the outcomes focus on centering a capitalist ideology. It

also identifies “controversial issues [as] topics that are publicly sensitive and upon which there is no consensus of values and belief” (Program Rationale, 2005, p. 6). This implies that there are issues on which there is widespread agreement on values and beliefs – a dominant and widely accepted narrative presented as objectively correct. Overall, students are to develop the ability to “assess the validity of information based on context, bias, sources, objectivity, evidence or reliability” (Program Rationale, 2005, p. 17). However, the binary between objectivity and bias is particularly problematic because it obscures the presence of bias in the curriculum's dominant narrative. As a result, the document presents itself as neutral and thus positions objectivity as desirable and implicitly dismisses other perspectives as biased or controversial.

My research questions this assumed apolitical positioning in the curriculum. By employing CDA my work will uncover specific ways the presumed neutrality of the curriculum contributes to the othering of marginalized groups, while my autoethnography examines how my own planning and teaching can implicitly reinforce a dominant ideology.

Research Goals

Critical research on Alberta’s curriculum is especially significant in this current context. As these conversations about keeping curriculum and education neutral continue to center dominant ideologies, it becomes increasingly important for educators,

policymakers, and the general public to recognize that curriculum is inherently political. Moreover, there is an emerging discussion about how the draft curriculum takes this further and re-positions colonial history as neutral—the lens through which historical knowledge should be consumed, thus increasing the erasure of those who are outside the status-quo, and further emphasizing knowledge as objective (Peck, 2021). This marks an extension of an apolitical view of curriculum to an apolitical view of history, which combines to reinforce marginalization, both historically and presently.

My research contributes to a better understanding of how this view of education as apolitical already exists in the current grade 10, 11, and 12 curricula. It will also demonstrate that in order to bring about equitable changes to the province's curriculum, we must consider ways power has masqueraded as neutral in both the current curriculum and our schools. As such, critical theories and pedagogies become a valuable tool to expose the "attempt to be objective in a subjective type of way" (Strega, 2015, p. 124) that underscores curriculum in the province. My objective is to use this approach to unmask power, challenge inequities enforced through dominant thinking and practices, and contribute to discussions of what equitable curriculum could be.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Context & Review of Relevant Literature

In this chapter, I review recent literature that examines critical perspectives and analysis of Alberta curricula, as well as critical theories, pedagogies, and curriculum theory that I employ in my CDA and autoethnography. Altogether these two sections inform my research.

Review of Relevant Literature

To date, I have collected literature that disrupts apolitical discourses and representations. I provide an overview of what discourses have been challenged within the context of Alberta's high school Social Studies curriculum, what gaps exist in this research field in terms of the absence of intersectional analysis, and how my research adds to the field, specifically in regard to the importance of identifying and disrupting singular narratives.

Firstly, I examine what knowledge is granted authority, and how that authority is implicitly and explicitly developed to create singular narratives. I see this addressed to an extent in an article by den Heyer (2019) in which he identifies that the discussion surrounding curriculum in Alberta revolves around "what is worth knowing and what is worth recognizing" (p.8). This discussion of what knowledge is 'worth knowing' is of specific interest to my work, as realize I am complicit in contributing to these discourses—which is what my work looks to interrogate. Den Heyer outlines the

discourse surrounding the proposed shifts to curriculum in 2016 by the newly elected NDP government, and how these discourses fail to consider the "what and why" (p. 6) of curriculum. Or, put another way, he points out that it is not just what is taught but the reasons why it is selected to be taught, that must be considered. He goes on to critique the competency focus of standardized testing in Alberta education policies, pointing out how this approach sacrifices the diverse stories and experiences students need exposure to (p. 7). This focus on the 'why' of curriculum aligns with my own work, specifically as den Heyer identifies the political forces shaping the 'what' in curriculum in the same way I will be identifying discourses that reinforce political visions. He also identifies a disconnect between the political goals of "bureaucrats" (p. 6) and best practice for students, which I also see in my work as politicians attempt to neutralize a curriculum which marginalizes many students who fall outside the dominant hegemony. However, den Heyer's article is written with a forward focus on what curriculum changes are coming. While there is an implicit analysis of the current curriculum in the call for change, there is no explicit analysis of how the current curriculum is politicized. This is the gap where my research fits, as I examine not only the why of curriculum but also the implications of how these politicized discourses shape our classrooms.

One of the goals of my research is to disrupt the normalization of apolitical discourses in education, specifically in Alberta. Some existing research exists that

focuses on this goal but is more specific in what political discourses are being examined. For example, Tannock (2021) identifies the political discourses in Alberta involving climate change and education, noting the same interactions I identify in my introduction, around the discussion of the energy sector and education in Alberta. Yet nothing more is said on the Alberta curriculum beyond acknowledging that politicians are attempting to position their curricular approach as neutral. However, two articles did delve into political discourses with more depth. Firstly, Edmondson (2021) indirectly critiques the curriculum with their interrogation of the grade twelve textbook. Specifically, she identifies how the textbook employs an orientalist discourse to position Islam as the other through the reinforcing of "harmful pre-existing stereotypes" (p. 51). Furthermore, Edmondson uses an intersectional framework to identify the way colonial and patriarchal ideologies create intersecting areas of oppression. This demonstrates how important intersectional analysis is in unraveling singular narratives that elevate certain discourses or ideologies. Secondly, Kendrick (2021) examines the Alberta Education slogan "Engaged thinkers and Ethical citizens with an Entrepreneurial spirit" (p. 84). Kendrick critiques this "bold, openly economically driven…political agenda" (p. 84) as a promotion of neoliberal consumerism. This reinforces standardization and predictability as driving forces in educational policy which in turn shape educational pedagogies in Alberta. Here Kendrick is linking the supposed apolitical education policy with a political agenda, which is like my research. However, they do not identify how these

economically driven narratives could potentially compound in a variety of intersectional manners (such as through gender, race, or ability). While both discourses examine how educational materials (a textbook and a slogan) reflect hegemonic power structures, neither directly considers how the curriculum itself reinforces these discourses. Furthermore, while Edmondson does identify a degree of intersectionality, Kendrick does not, and neither piece of research considers the intersectionality of economics on other identities. My work would take the intersectional analysis further, looking for what is present, but also what is absent in the curriculum, specifically regarding intersectional analysis.

While the above research focuses on documents other than curriculum, other work uses focus groups to examine how power dynamics in Alberta impact people who are marginalized by those in positions of power. One such example from Michaud & Stelmach (2019) looks at the experiences of lesbian and gay parents in relationship to the schools. While this study focuses outward on the experiences of others, and my study looks to interrogate curriculum and my own practice, both use critical theory in their approach. For example, Michaud & Stelmach (2019) employ a queer framework to disrupt heteronormative structures that persist in society. My work takes a similar approach, but on a broader scale, as I use a variety of critical theories in order to disrupt intersecting forms of power that marginalize others. Furthermore, this research examines

the relationships between schools and lesbian and gay parents as a reflection of the values and attitudes held by those with authority, whereas my work examines how the curriculum itself promotes certain political visions despite its claims of neutrality. Another example that considers power dynamics between marginalized peoples and schools comes from Scott & Gani (2018). They research the disconnect between the curriculum's claim of including Indigenous perspectives and the implementation of Indigenous perspectives (or lack thereof) in the Alberta high school Social Studies classroom. They employ sociocultural analysis and draw on focus groups for their research. Their findings demonstrate how schools in Alberta are not apolitical, and this is of particular interest to me, specifically in my autoethnographic analysis. I see myself specifically in their conclusions about teacher disengagement due to a lack of understanding (p. 173). While the conclusions about teacher disengagement link to my research as I consider what influences my reluctance to include certain topics in the classroom, I also examine how I reproduce discourses present in the existing curriculum.

Another topic of interest to my work is related to how reconciliation is developed through the Social Studies curriculum. Firstly, I turn to the work of Freeman, Fraser, and Higgens' (2021), where they analyze the proposed science curriculum in the Alberta K-6 draft through feminist and anticolonial frameworks. They outline how historically European and colonial discourses shape scientific discourse before turning to an analysis

of the current K-6 draft science curriculum (p. 9). In doing so they examine three areas of analysis: misrepresentation of Indigenous ways of knowing, erasure of Indigenous ways of knowing, and an assertion of western hegemony (p. 11). Overall, Freeman, Fraser, & Higgens (2021) state that these problems contribute to "tokenistic, misleading, and underdeveloped" (p. 24) portrayal of Indigenous culture and knowledge, and thus hinder the stated goals of reconciliation. Their findings, and the application of the intersection of feminist and anticolonial analysis, is like my own research which uses intersectional analysis. Additionally, their analysis reveals similar problematic colonial portrayals in the proposed curriculum to what I see in the existing curriculum. My work takes a similar approach but expands that intersectional lens beyond feminist and anticolonial frameworks. Furthermore, I examine the political nature of the curriculum as it exists at the high school level. By placing my focus on the existing curriculum instead of the proposed curriculum I am analyzing existing discourses that are likely to be reproduced if left undisrupted. Secondly, the research of Miles (2021) is also relevant in this area of reconciliation. Of specific interest to my own work is Miles' focus on how political and social factors influence government policy in addressing historical wrongs (p. 1). While this work focuses on the Social Studies curriculum in BC (and not Alberta where my work is situated) it clearly emphasizes the political framing of curriculum as it considers "how politics, policy, and social movements influenced and shaped curriculum development" (p. 53). Miles' (2021) emphasis on the political nature of curriculum,

specifically in the focus on addressing historical injustice, sets the stage well for my own analysis of the Alberta curriculum. This is especially relevant given the positioning of curriculum and education as apolitical within our current context.

Lastly, the topics of historical and ethical thinking (Milligan, Gibson & Peck, 2018) and curriculum design over history (von Heyking, 2019) both identify discourses that relate to my own research. The work by Milligan, Gibson & Peck (2018) clearly articulates the importance of ethical historical thinking, while also acknowledging that it is a skill left underdeveloped or assumed in students. They write: “evaluating the rightness or wrongness of past decisions, responses, and actions is no simple matter” (p. 453) and “we unavoidably evaluate the past from the position of our present ethical frameworks” (p. 545). While the focus of their work revolves around the ethical frameworks and judgments, it does speak to the idea of student agency that I have identified as a problematic discourse in the existing Social Studies curriculum in Alberta. While they focus on understanding what ethical and historical thinking is, my work will examine the implications of when students lack this framework but are granted the agency to evaluate and judge historical events. Additionally, the research by von Heyking (2019) outlines the Alberta educational curriculum, providing an outline of scope and sequence of all core subjects from k-12, as well as roles of teachers, policies, and curriculum development. Overall, the work presents an overview of education in the

province. This link to my own work–the positioning of education as a neutral entity–is what I look to disrupt with my own research.

Taken together, this body of research reveals a pattern of political acts that underpins not only what is in the curriculum, but how that is enacted through teacher pedagogy. My work continues this discussion by drawing on intersectional approaches to critical theory to analyze other ways that power, ideology, and politics operate through the curriculum.

Theoretical Context

In this section, I situate my work by surveying the fields of critical and curriculum theory, and discussing some key ideas and concepts from these fields that are essential to my study. While much work has been done in these fields in a variety of contexts, my research combines these ideas to further examine a specific curriculum and the ways in which is constructs itself (and thus the knowledge inherent in it) as neutral. My analysis identifies emerging discourses in making a case against the movement toward apolitical education. In short, I demonstrate the importance of applying critical theory to the Social Studies Program of Studies as a means of disrupting hegemonic power that claims to be neutral.

My research is rooted in critical theory and also informed by critical pedagogy and curriculum theory. My encounters with critical scholarship (that examine power,

hegemony, and its manifestations in education) influences my desire to investigate the contexts in which I operate as an educator. These fields also provide the theoretical and analytical tools that help me analyze how power operates through the Alberta Social Studies curriculum and my own pedagogical practices.

Critical Theory

Critical theory is a theoretical framework that aims to expose the mechanisms of power at work in social, institutional, and discursive contexts in order to enact counterhegemonic change (Mussell, 2017; Gouthro, 2019). Critical theory emerged from the German Institute for Social Research, or the Frankfurt School, which had three leading theorists influenced by Marxist literature: Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Macruse (Raymond, Morrow & Brown, 1994). They worked within a Marxist framework and proposed an "alternative conception of social science...one that could grasp the nature of society" (p. 14), while also utilizing the work of Kant and Hegel (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & Joseph, 2005). Scholars informed by critical theory posit that all texts carry political power, and thus critical theory takes up political analysis and calls for change. Freire (2004/1970) suggests that "human beings are not built in silence but in word, in work, in action-reflection" (p. 88) which emphasizes the importance of action in challenging hegemony. In other words, critical

theory evokes an action (the effort) which brings about change (the work-process relationship).

Presently, critical theory contains multiple frameworks which examine and expose power structures that marginalize and oppress people by examining ideological and hegemonic structures that reinforce sexism, racism, heterosexism, and ablism. In response to these oppressive social forces critical theory includes multiple “approaches and concerns…[it] is unified in its effort to expose social inequities and injustices among the institutions of society” (Hlebowitsh, 1992, p. 69). In other words, there are many ways power manifests itself to privilege some at the expense of others. While early critical theory was rooted in Marxist theory based upon “the conflicting relationship between social classes within an economy” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 23; see also Hall, 2018) contemporary critical theory has since expanded as a recognition of other factors beyond class that require this action-reflection (Renault. 2018).

Critical theory looks to examine power structures, and in doing so, considers all texts as political entities in hegemonic power structures. Hegemony is a concept that is used to theorize the workings of power in contemporary societies in the field of critical theory. Hegemony, in its simplest form, refers to the implicit acceptance of power dynamics that maintain accepted norms. People can willingly, or unknowingly, embrace hegemony. Accepting dominant power dynamics willingly may appear to be advantageous. However, people may also support hegemony subconsciously by accepting

the social order as natural; leaving them incapable of imagining the world any other way. In other words, people accept (or do not resist) beliefs and structures of those in power because of manufactured consent (Gramsci, 1971). These internalized and accepted structures form the status-quo, what is expected or standardized, and are thus presented as norms in society and exist “at all sorts of levels. It is a form of power that is socially constructed amongst people, and socially maintained” (Johnston, 2017, p. 782). Furthermore, Williams (1977) suggests hegemony “does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, defended” (p. 112) as it is made up of multiple ideological frameworks and thus can be challenging to disrupt.

As a result, it is important to consider the relationship between ideology and hegemony. Hegemony ensures that ideology seems natural and thus accepted, which contributes to the aforementioned renewing and defending. As a result, ideology that is accepted as neutral reproduces existing systems, structures, and actions which reinforces itself as natural by creating internalized beliefs and values (Brookfield, 2005; Çoban, 2018). As such, unless we are aware of those factors which privilege some—and thus marginalize others—we accept the dominant discourses surrounding knowledge and power as normal and acceptable.

Hegemony exists in education. This often manifests in education through policies, values, and structures that are unconsciously elevated because we do not understand how “codes, symbols, and signs subtly construct our worldview” (Kincheloe, 2012, p. 207)

and thus form the foundation of how education is approached. For example, "classrooms and lecture halls, with students arrayed in rows, are the result of defining education as an industrialized process of production" (Johnston, 2017, p. 782). Furthermore, bells and teachers hold authority over student's time, rewarding those who conform which demonstrates that "power is at work, promoting particular views of educational excellence" (Kincheloe, 2012, p. 20). Awareness of these existing power structures not only "widens our understanding of how ideology contributes to the maintenance of social control" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 44) but provides space for increased agency through counter-hegemony (Johnston, 2017; Çoban, 2018). This agency can be encouraged through critical frameworks, which allow students to recognize and explore power and can learn to "recognize, and challenge, the unjust exercise of power" (p. 783). Overall, an awareness of how complex ideologies contribute to hegemony within schools is a key component of disrupting the apolitical nature of education.

I use critical theory as a lens to examine the high school Social Studies curriculum in Alberta. This provides an opportunity to examine how curriculum and ideology privileges the knowledge of some at the expense of others. It not only questions who is represented and who is not, but it also positions those inclusions and exclusions as political choices that reinforce hegemony—in effect de-neutralizing curriculum and calling into question the centering of certain discourses. While all critical theories (as outlined below) are distinct critical lenses, when applied to systems which reinforce

hegemony, they all seek to counter dominant discourses that have placed marginalized people on the edges of curriculum, texts, and history. In my analysis of Alberta curriculum documents, I consider the reality that this power manifests itself in multiple ways through the curriculum using the framework of intersectionality.

Intersectionality

First coined by Crenshaw (1991) about the specific marginalization of Black women, "intersectionality offers a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identities and the ongoing necessity of group politics" (p. 12). Intersectionality exemplifies the need to account for diverse identities when considering power structures and their impacts on societal structures, including education (Howarda, Patterson, Kinlocha, Burkharda & Randalla 2016; Childers-McKee & Hytten 2015; Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays & Tomlinson 2013).

An intersectional approach can be used to critique power in a variety of social contexts, including schools. For example, an intersection of feminist analysis and critical race theory leads to Critical Race Feminism, where intersections of race and gender are considered together and not as separate entities. Critical Race Feminist theory can be "used by educators to look at the myriad ways in which schools reproduce marginalization and inequality" (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015) based on racialization

and gender. This also draws new attention to the ways in which schools can be consciously or unconsciously reinforcing intersecting forms of privilege.

Moreover, the theory of intersectionality has been expanded "to engage a range of issues, social identities, power dynamics, legal and political systems, and discursive structures" (Carbado et. al, 2013, p.304) and "it moves more broadly as a prism linking and engaging scholarly subfields" (p. 307) which is useful in my research where critical theories that focus on various power structures and inequities can be used together to more critically examine the power inherent in the curriculum. For example Sykes (2011) writes that "intersectional thinking about hetero-normativity, with its links to whiteness, racialization, and colonialism, is being taken up across the field of literacy and critical literacy studies" (p. 426). The linkage of critical theories to one another reveals that "there is potentially always another set of concerns to which the theory can be directed, other places to which the theory might be moved, and other structures of power it can be deployed to examine" (Carbado et. al, 2013, p. 304). Intersectionality extends critical theory from a singular to a multifaceted approach, while also providing opportunities to examine emerging criticalities that are largely un-represented in curricular discussions in Alberta such as queer theory and critical disability theory. Overall, my work is informed by intersectional criticisms that consider hegemonic power, Marxist, feminist, critical race, critical Indigenous, critical disability, and queer theories.

Marxist Theory

Marxist theory provides a framework which examines how power is held and maintained through economic structures and values. For example, power is held by those that control production of goods, which allows them to also exert power and influence over the political and social consciousness of the collective (Bressler, 2003). Marx (1970) uses a base/superstructure metaphor, where the base (i.e. means of production such as tools and resources, as well as capital, commodities and property ownership) shapes and influences ideology, and thus the rest of society (i.e. politics, religion, education, culture, philosophy, law), which is referred to as the superstructure (Tyson, 2006). These two pieces work in tandem: the base "determines the ‘superstructure’ – the political, cultural and civic domains of social life” (Wayne, 2003 p118). In turn the superstructure (and it’s ideology) upholds the power of the base as the dominant structure. This metaphor positions success as an upwards social and economic movement by which the individual is solely responsible for any successes or failures, where opportunities are equally available and thus achievable. Such a belief system fails to consider the implications of external factors or power structures (Tyson, 2006). For example, Kendi’s (2018) discussion about the “hierarchy of value” (p. 44) not only identifies the ranking or status of individuals/groups in society, but also emphasizes the capitalistic idea of ascendancy. Marxist criticism resists these capitalistic ideas by examining the “gaps, fissures, and ruptures that provoke and articulate the class conflict and economic struggle that the

dominant ideology of the text, its hegemonic levels of meaning, would otherwise silence" (Phillips & Wojcik-Andrews, 1990, p. 128). In other words, by drawing attention to the problems created by class conflict, and questioning the supposed neutrality of the economic status quo, Marxist criticism draws attention to the discourses that are removed, silenced, or marginalized.

From a Marxist theoretical perspective, education systems contribute to capitalist values by emphasizing schools as a means of attaining 'good' employment (Sarup, 2017). They also work to reinforce the socialization of students into citizens that "do not question the social order" (Richardson & Smits, 2004, p. 3) which contributes to the normalization of capitalist values. The norms created by this taken-for-granted power structure have become so internalized partially because they are re-packaged and re-presented to us by the texts we are exposed to (Phillips & Wojcik-Andrews, 1990; Beetz, Herzog, & Maesse, 2021).

This is true of the curriculum in Alberta as well, where capitalist values are presented as apolitical norms. As critical theory is also a call towards taking action (Brookfield, 2005), the application of Marxist theory to the curriculum allows us to identify the "work-process relationships on which society is built" (Horkheimer, 1995/1937b, p. 210) and thus provides an opportunity to the challenge the status-quo.

Critical Indigenous Theory

Critical Indigenous Theory has emerged as a means to center the knowledge and voices of Indigenous persons and scholars in response to "academic gatekeeping" (Miheasuah & Wilson, 2002, p. 145) of colonial histories and institutions, even in criticism of white settler frameworks. As a framework, Critical Indigenous studies offers "accounts of the contemporary world of Indigenous peoples that center our ways of knowing and theorizing" (Moreton-Robinson, 2009, p. 11) which works to challenge existing narratives that position the Eurocentric experience of settlers as the norm. Critical Indigenous Theory differs from postcolonial criticism, which emerged to understand the facets of colonial and anticolonial worldviews (Tyson, 2006). However, postcolonial theory continued to center non-Indigenous voices even in its critique of colonialism. For example, the use of the word Eurocentric centers dominant worldviews in its criticism. In contrast, Critical Indigenous Theory decenters internalized and externalized colonial power structures (Tuck & Yang, 2012) through centering Indigenous critics, scholars, and authors. Additionally, it decenters historical Eurocentrism and instead examines white settler colonialism (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, & Corntassel, 2014). These frameworks reveal the wholly encompassing nature of racial power structures that compound for Indigenous persons in Alberta, where Eurocentric frameworks permeate all levels of society: institutions, language, literature, and schooling. Additionally, even if space for 'other' perspectives exist those voices are seen

as alternatives to the norm. This is often disguised by personal attachments or power structures that exist around us through a "lingering nostalgia for the idea of 'authoritative texts' with assumption of values and authenticity that clearly link the study of literature with the values of Western culture and life" (Wiltse, Johnston, & Yang, 2014, p. 269). Not only does it reinforce a false binary of Eurocentrism as civilized, it implicitly positions Indigenous persons and culture as the other.

Furthermore, Critical Indigenous Theory emphasizes that we must "involve students' critical reflection on how racism, stereotypes, prejudices, and moral judgements manifest in research, education, and practice in community" (Fellner, 2018, p. 287). This requires students to have access to diverse, authentic Indigenous voices and ways of knowing (Battise, 2013). By drawing on insights from critical Indigenous theory I extend my analysis to examine how the current Program of Studies positions Indigenous voices and ways of knowing as an alternative to the dominant ideology.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) examines the relationship between race, racism, and systems of power in society (Delago & Stefancic, 2017). CRT initially developed as a framework in critical legal studies, but diverged into its own theory which specifically questions dominant hegemony, taking a "broader perspective that includes economics, history, setting, group and self-interest, and emotions and the unconscious" (p. 3). CRT

differs from civil rights movements as it examines how capitalist, liberal democracies produce and reproduce inequality even when they present formal equality to persons of colour (Zamudio, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, 2010). As a result, CRT questions the status quo by examining "the ideologies, narratives, institutions, and structures of society through a critical conceptual lens" (Parker, Laurence, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999, p. 11). This questioning reveals the systemic and institutionalized racism inherent in the dominant structures within society.

I apply Critical Race Theory to this curriculum to reveal the systemic racism that has been normalized within education institutions. Educators adopt CRT to examine and bring to light the racial inequality and inequity experienced by persons of colour in the education system (Parker, Laurence, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999; Closson, 2010). For example, CRT analysis suggests that multicultural inclusion, when done from the lens of whiteness, ultimately serves as a force of marginalization or othering (Anguiano & Castañeda, 2014). In this regard, CRT is a framework that brings forward stories and counternarratives to provide a way of "equipping people of colour to resist structural racism" (p.111). My research takes up the implications of this in terms of who is being represented in the texts and narratives of the class, but also who is misrepresented or silenced (Bressler, 2003). For example, Brown & Kelly (2001) write about black student focus groups who identified "that historically black figures are presented as passive, victimized, and ancillary to any paradigms of development" (p. 511) and who point to the

first and second world wars as historical examples. I use CRT to consider how the curriculum reproduces racial inequality.

Feminism

Feminist theory examines how societal power structures and institutions reinforce or resist patriarchal power and challenge the oppression of women. By bringing to light the false patriarchal binary where texts privilege the male voice and gaze over the female, feminist criticism questions the power of the authoritative male voice and gaze which is often implicit and unquestioned in texts (Smith, 2019). Feminist criticism also draws attention to how "texts provide a historical lens for our assumptions about gender" (Paul, 1999, p. 118) which allows us to examine past and present portrayals of norms imposed upon women and internalized by society. Additionally, feminist critics also point out the necessity of highlighting female voices about historical and contemporary events (Hesse-Biber, 2012), which means critiquing texts "for superficial inclusion of women as incidental to traditional political history forged by men" (Walter & Young, 1997, p. 2). I use a feminist framework to analyze how the curriculum positions women—both historically and presently—as secondary to the patriarchal narratives which privilege male voices as authoritative. Furthermore, my feminist analysis examines how intersections of identity (such as race, sexuality, class) are presented or excluded from these narratives.

Critical Disability Theory

Critical disability theory looks to question and resist dominant narratives about disability that perpetuate systems of ableism (Goodley, Lawthom, Liddiard, & Runswick-Cole, 2019, Hall 2019). The absence of the experiences of disabled persons in CRT and gender studies led to the development of Critical disability theory (Anderson, 2006) which draws attention to the fact that "disabled persons are everywhere and nowhere at the same time" (Stuart, 2000, p. 169). Critical disability theory asserts that "disability is a social-political construct" (Erevelles, 2006, p. 428, see also Reaume, 2014) and that all marginalized groups contain disabled persons who are positioned as the other in comparison to able-bodied individuals (Anderson, 2006, Goodley, 2013). Disability studies question the centering of able-bodied individuals as the norm. Erevelles' (2006) suggests that "the discursive category of the normal is necessarily dependent on the notion of abnormal" (p. 424, see also Goodley. 2013). Additionally, critical disability theory identifies that "a key site of oppression of disabled peoples pertains to these moments when they are judged to fail, to match up to the ideal individual" (Goodley, 2013, p. 639). Put another way, the oppression of disabled persons arises from a perception of deficit—where they are defined by what they are lacking in response to someone able-bodied. These deficit perspectives reinforce a normal/abnormal binary

which marginalizes disabled persons and highlights the importance of disability studies in challenging the dominant positioning of able-bodiedness.

Critical disability theory implicates education in perpetrating the dominance of able-bodiedness and challenges how disability is conceptualized in schools (Slee, Corcoran, & Best 2019). By drawing attention to how educational institutions position disability, disability studies provides insight into how "power harnesses culture to shape the way people see themselves and each other" (Anderson 2006, see also Hall 2019). In short this happens largely by absence, where students are provided with a "mirror of abled-self" (Goodley, 2013, p. 640) and abled-bodied students know "disabled peoples in deficit ways" (p. 640). The absence of disability or disability studies in curriculum or curriculum theory suggests that able-bodiedness is the common lived experience, which is a force of marginalization (Goodley, Lawthom, Liddiard, & Runswick-Cole, 2019, Anderson 2006, McRuer, 2006). However, critical disability theory also suggests ways to address these inequities. Anderson (2006) posits that "insights for pedagogy emerge when we consider disability as a valuable source of lived experience, rather than disabled bodies as something to be accommodated" (p. 369). By repositioning how disabled persons are positioned, educational institutions have the opportunity to develop a pedagogy that challenges the narrative of disabled persons as the absent other.

This is true of my application within the context of the Alberta Program of Studies. As a result, any inclusion of persons of disability is additive to the curriculum. This deficit positioning is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, it positions the experiences of disability as the other. Secondly, it defines disabled persons by a singular story of disability and limits an intersectional understanding of identity. While the experiences of disabled persons are absent in the Program of Studies, critical disability theory provides a lens with which to consider the implications of this absence, as well as a means to examine ways that deficit discourses are wielded to reinforce racial inequities.

Queer Theory

Queer theory seeks to challenge the dominance of hetero and cis-normativity in society (Loutzenheiser, 2022, Baines, Pereira, Edwards, & Hatch, 2019). Queer theorists "draw our attention to the 'norms' of gender and sexuality that are taken for granted" (Sandretto, 2018, p. 197) by bringing to light how hegemony reproduces heterosexual norms. In response queer theory provides an opportunity to identify and disrupt these structures and beliefs which oppress LGBT2S+ persons. There norms are culturally produced and reinforced (Sumara & Davis, 1999) and often results in the erasure of queer experiences, then positions these absences as normal and politically neutral. As such, queer theory "disrupts and challenges regimes of normalcy" (Miller, 2019, p. 82). Additionally, queer theory recognizes the importance of intersectionality as all

marginalized groups are represented by the queer population (Anderson, 2006). The field continues to evolve as the terms used by individuals to express their identity continue to shift and evolve as well (Matsuno & Budge, 2017).

Queer theory also sheds light on how heteronormativity shapes education. It shapes pedagogy when choices with a classroom only include heterosexual experience (Sandretto, 2018), and it shapes curriculum when same-sex marriage is categorized as a controversial issue (Sykes, 2011, p. 424). Sandretto (2018) points out that "everyone is constricted by heteronormativity and strict gender conventions, not just those who live outside the norms" (p. 198) which exemplifies the need to for inclusion of queer perspectives in education. Furthermore, queer theory disrupts the notion of neutrality in education. Sumara & Davis (1999) write that "queer theory does not ask that pedagogy become sexualized, but that it evacuate and interpret the ways it already is sexualized .... that it begin to interpret the way it is explicitly heterosexual" (p. 192). In summary, queer theory challenges the ways in which education reinforces and reproduces hegemonic structures as politically neutral.

In the same way the Alberta Program of Studies erases the experiences of disabled persons, it also leaves out any references to queer persons. As a result, inclusions of queer stories and representation are left to teacher discretion, and as I unpack, often categorized as controversial and thus political issues. This works to further

reproduce the problematic narratives that some knowledge is apolitical and some is not. As such, I will use queer theory to unpack these absences and what they reveal about dominant discourses in the curriculum and my own pedagogy.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy employs critical theoretical frameworks to examine educational contexts and curricula (both hidden and official), rejecting the premise that schools and education are politically neutral entities. The intent of critical pedagogy is to "eliminate inequalities on the basis of social class...[and] has sparked a wide array of anti-sexist, anti-racist, and antihomophobic classroom-based curricula and policy initiatives" (Mclaren, 1997, p. 1). Furthermore, critical pedagogy points out that the "internal organizing devices that go into [curricular material] assemblage must be uncovered to lay bare the ideology they embody" (Giroux, 1980, p. 354). This elucidation demonstrates that the daily choices that shape ideological beliefs also manifest in curriculum and education. From a critical pedagogy perspective, power is inherently present in the creation of text (Sykes, 2011). Thus, critical pedagogies focus on teaching methods which deconstruct and examine the ideologies inherent in the text shared through schooling processes (Forest, 2014). This is relevant to my work as the CDA not only examines the language in the curriculum, but the ideologies I am complicit in reproducing.

Historically, critical pedagogy is often associated with the works of Paulo Freire (1968). It is an education framework that links action and theory; a place where "the individual and society are constructed, a social action which can either empower or domesticate students" (Freire, 2014b, p. 21). He suggests that praxis is not the "privilege of some few persons but the right of everyone" (Freire, 2004/1970, p. 88), pointing out that:

> as a consequence of thinking in favor of whom, in favor of what, in favor of what dream I am teaching, I will have to think against whom, against what, against what dream I am teaching. From my point of view it is impossible to be a teacher without asking these questions. If we consider education in its philosophical, epistemological, and historical dimensions, we cannot escape from these questions (p. 21).

Critical pedagogies are a key part of challenging hegemony in educational contexts as well. The application of critical pedagogies unveils the political nature of all actions (Kincheloe, 2008; Ellsworth, 1989) which in turn brings to light power structures, and provides a means to "better understand the processes of teaching and learning that we engage in and the social, political, and cultural context within which we work" (Gouthro, 2019, p. 65). This approach can then serve as a springboard for teachers to examine how power and hegemony operate and how power is used to center and other perspectives, knowledge, and identities in curriculum. However, it is important to note that just

because the claim of criticality is applied, that action is still “partial in the sense that they are unfinished, imperfect, limited....and project the interests of ‘one side’ over others” (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 305). As such, teachers who wish to apply critical pedagogies must also be reflective of the political nature and positioning of their own actions within the classroom. Kincheloe (2008) suggests that those committed to critical pedagogies must acknowledge these complexities uncovered not just in words but in actions. Put another way, it is not enough to know that a curriculum or textbook is centering one form of knowledge at the expense of another, or that a dress code rule in schools unfairly targets one demographic based on gender or religion, but to take action to addressing that inequity. And, as Ellsworth (1989) suggests, such action requires a struggle against the status quo and/or a struggle to unlearn assumptions. It is not just changing the textbook but rather challenging and changing the assumptions we hold about knowledge and authority that have given the textbook power for so long.

Curriculum Theory

Pinar (2011) defines curriculum theory as “the scholarly effort to understand the curriculum” (p.1) and suggests that the purpose of curriculum is to provide education to the public which is “characterized by spirited and informed communications” (p. 1). Both early understandings of curriculum, as well as present day discussions, are rooted in the selection and transmission of knowledge. Early curriculum theory was based on a

scientific method (Bobbitt, 2013) that identifies social deficiencies and uses those to direct training (p. 17), thus positioning knowledge as clearly identifiable and practical skills. These methods were paired with a traditionalist approach that accepts the structure of the curriculum as it is and sees curriculum theory as the practice of guiding and assisting institutional decision-makers who deal with curriculum (Pinar, 2013).

As small groups who wield power continue to be prominent in the formation of curriculum, (Flinders & Thornton, 2013; Kliebard, 1995) the interests of these powerful groups continue to influence how curriculum, knowledge, and power are intertwined. Critical approaches to curriculum theory examine how power is wielded by these groups to determine what discourses and knowledge are granted authority in the curriculum and how they reinforce the hegemony.

One such critical approach to curriculum is a reconceptionalist theory which refutes the idea of political neutrality. Reconceptionalist theory suggests that while curriculum can appear apolitical, it is “contributing to the maintenance of the contemporary social-political order” (Pinar, 2013, p. 153). This happens “implicitly, but effectively” (Apple, 2019, p. 78) through daily normalized interactions, yet these interactions are marginalizing forces for those that are not in the dominant group. The result is schools and classrooms that are inherently political, yet only feel political when a perspective challenges their hegemonic worldview. In other words, resisting

marginalizing forces is a political act but so is complicity. My research will be guided by a reconceptionalist framework; it will examine how power flows through the curriculum as a political force.

Four concepts from curriculum theory are important to my research: official, enacted, hidden, and null curriculum. Firstly, the official curriculum is what is designed by those and authority, published in official documents and textbooks, and officially assessed (Connelly, Fang He, & Phillion, 2008). The Social Studies program of studies is the official curriculum: the knowledge that educators are to teach and assess. In contrast, while the official curriculum is visible and tangible, the enacted and hidden curriculum form much of what is present in the classroom. The enacted curriculum is, simply put, what is actually taught (Connelly, Fang He, & Phillion, 2008). Within this enacted curriculum lies the hidden curriculum, which is defined as the "underlying norms, values, and attitudes that are often transmitted tacitly through the social relations of the school and classroom" (Giroux, 1980, p. 354). This works to reinforce the privilege of some at the expense of others, as the experiences and beliefs of these immersed in the status quo are presented as normal and differences are seen as abnormal. In other words, both the enacted and hidden curriculum manifests in the taken-for-granted assumptions about the rightness of certain ideological beliefs which are often left unquestioned and unchallenged. For example, teachers who reinforce bell schedules, dress codes, and late policies by rewarding or punishing compliances with them reinforce the central authority

held in schools as an institution. As such, daily actions inform the power dynamics and political nature of schooling. Examination of the hidden curriculum is more challenging. However, as Connelly et al. (2008) demonstrate through their studies on how teachers are socialized in a variety of geographic locations worldwide, it is possible to uncover "many of the hidden assumptions behind the [official] curriculum in each country" (p. 352).

The null curriculum refers to what is excluded or minimized from the curriculum (Eisner, 1979/1994). These topics could be superficially examined or get "no emphasis at all" (Connelly et al., 2008, p. 410). Kendi (2019) argues that "whatever a society accepts as knowledge or truth inevitably ends up strengthening the power of some and limiting the power of others" (p. 134). Such a statement is true of the official curriculum in Alberta; it fails to take up themes of sexuality, sexual identity, gender identity, or disability in any context. However, such exclusions are often portrayed as neutral or objective when they reinforce the Eurocentric, colonial status-quo which frames the official curriculum in Alberta. Understanding that curriculum is not neutral but politicized allows us to better understand the role of the null, hidden, enacted, and official curriculum in reinforcing hegemonic structures.

Applying Critical Theoretical Frames in my Study

In my study, I examine how critical theory, curriculum theory, and critical pedagogy work together to help me understand the ways power is being discursively

framed and maintained in the Alberta curriculum documents. Halbert & Salter (2019) suggest that "the notion of a universal cultural (or cultureless) base suggests that the center of the curriculum is impenetrable and so deeply entrenched with dominant Western ideologies it takes, and is taken, under the guise of neutrality" (p. 12). The result is that Western ideologies become the norm by which all other ideologies or points of view are measured against.

Here I draw upon Adiche's (2009) concept of singular stories as an important theoretical framework. Specifically, I examine how certain discourses normalize singular stories and as a result, marginalize, simplify, or erase those that do not fit within the status quo of a white, cis-gendered, capitalist and patriarchal identity. The result is that this simplified narrative is centered and those that fall outside become the other. As such, this supposedly neutral curriculum "create[s] a single story… [by showing] a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, [until] that is what they become" (Adichie, 2009, 9:07). Singular stories not only shape who or what is seen, but they also shape who is not seen and whose story is left untold (Wootton & Stonebanks, 2010).

In addition, adopting a critical perspective requires that my study must work to resist hegemonic structures that contribute to educational inequities. If critical theory is a "critical, progressive orientation in education with aims at least at the amelioration of social conditions" (Maddock, 1999, p. 43) then perhaps its application in my study will

help me examine curriculum and my teaching in order to "unravel the ideological principles embedded in the structure of classroom knowledge" (Giroux, 1980, p. 354).

I leverage the power of this theoretical approach to examine how power circulates on, and through, my educational context. I use critical approaches to emphasize how curriculum is a politicized entity as a result of the "interplay between political parties, the influence of powerful individuals and groups, the availability of financial resources, the force of popular pressure, and the influence of class, religion, and race" (Franklin 2008, 152). That is to say that when critical theory is applied to educational contexts, it has the potential to reveal hegemonic structures that are often unseen.

Critical pedagogical works have a wide range of application. This is evidenced by the use of critical theory to analyze curriculum in a vast array of programs: music, LGBTQ2+ texts, drug education, inclusive education, even critical literacy itself (Weninger, 2020; Tupper, 2008; Liasidou, 2008; Schieble, 2012; Thompson, 2002). Such a wide range of specialties reveals that politicized structures are at work in a variety of educational contexts. Furthermore, the specific critical frameworks employed to analyze curricula are equally as varied through an emphasis on race, gender issues, queerness, and/or Indigenous knowledge. The broad scope reinforces the pervasive nature of marginalization that dominant power structures impose. It is necessary to consider the hegemonic systems that shape curriculum, as well as the inclusions and exclusions that are made, as another manifestation of power. Critical theory focuses on identifying which

knowledge and abilities are deemed "most worthy for students to learn" (Wraga, 2008, p. 155) while also taking into account how these inclusions (and subsequent exclusions) reflect the power structures that shape educational and social discourses. My work examines how these power structures are at work in Alberta's Social Studies Program of Studies and how critical theory empower educators to challenge hegemony.

Informed with theories of critical and curriculum theories and critical pedagogy, I see that the discussion of how power manifests itself in Social Studies is centered around whether curriculum should or should not be ideological. As a result, the hegemonic power within the curriculum remains unchallenged. Furthermore, the program of studies does not consider how critical theories can work together to reveal hegemonic structures within the curriculum and help teachers and students to challenge the erasure, marginalization, or misrepresentation of individuals and groups that fall outside the status quo (Brown & Kelly, 2001; Johnson, 1999; Wootton & Stonebanks, 2010).

In the next chapter I discuss how I employ the methodologies of Critical Discourse Analysis and autoethnography to analyze the curriculum, and my own teaching, in greater depth. In my study these methods help me examine how the application of critical theory can shatter "the naive notion that simply offering students multicultural literatures will effortlessly transform racist hearts and minds and automatically develop tolerant attitudes" (Johnson, 1999, p. 16). I examine how critical theory empowers students to see the complex and multiple stories at work in Social

Studies discourses. By considering "whose version of histories, cultures, and values count" (Bainbridge, Carbonaro, & Green, 2005, p. 313) through a critical lens, I will also be examining how power is reproduced through curriculum and texts in the classroom.

Chapter Three: Methodological Context

For this study, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and autoethnography help me examine the grade ten to twelve Social Studies curriculum in Alberta for discourses that reinforce political neutrality and hegemony. Through CDA I look at how hegemonic discourses are present, consider in what ways the document reinforces power, and reflect upon how we can work to disrupt these discourses. Then I employ autoethnography to my own experiences as a teacher, with the intent to consider how my own positioning as an authority figure (complicit in the status-quo) impacts my pedagogical choices and actions. Adopting a reflexive autoethnographic approach, I not only examine how the knowledge I teach positions a white settler view of history as objectively true, but I also reflect on how I consciously and unconsciously reinforce hegemony through my words, actions, and positionality. This chapter will first explore the metaphor of the gaze in relation to my research, linking this metaphor to my methodologies: CDA of the curriculum and autoethnography. Then I discuss CDA as a methodology, the branch of CDA employed in my work, followed by an examination of CDA in education and in my own study. After this, I discuss autoethnography in the same manner: outlining it as a methodology, and what is looks like in education and in my own study. I finish this chapter outlining my ethics and research design.

The metaphor of the gaze as a methodological framework

I am drawn to the metaphor of the researcher's power being linked to their gaze. In this metaphor the researcher's power comes from their ability to look outward at a group they are researching, and draw conclusions based on their observations. This power is often hidden behind a veil of neutrality that obscures the researcher from any scrutiny. Interestingly, the word veil suggests that the gaze only works one way. Neutrality allows the researcher to gaze outwards, but protects or shelters them from the gaze or critique of others in return. The result is the positioning of the researcher as central in the work, defining the methods and questions, determining the participants, writing up the findings (Kovach, 2015), yet have "historically … been portrayed as objective and disembodied and thus privileged over those they study" (Strega & Brown, 2015, p. 7). Furthermore, while veils allow sight outwards, that sight is altered in some way. Similarly, when we view ourselves as neutral we are normalizing or centering our own knowledge and perceptions as the lens with which we view others. The result is a researcher who looks out from a position of power, at the risk of not seeing their own position as influencing the research (Strega & Brown, 2015).

As a result of this, I am choosing to counter this power-laden gaze by researching "researching up" and "researching inwards" (Potts & Brown, 2015) because "reversing the gaze on whom and what gets studied can be an important first step" (p. 19) in countering false apolitical discourses. This reversal of gaze directs the research towards

sources of power: the researcher and the hegemonic structures that require dismantling (in this case the curriculum and my own practice) instead of those who experience oppression.

This deliberate shifting of the gaze in and up is an attempt to unmask power that rests in people and institutions that often presume neutrality. I use this metaphor of researching up and in to describe my application of Critical Discourse Analysis (researching up by examining the curriculum itself) and autoethnography (researching in by examining my own processes and pedagogies).

Firstly, research upwards shifts the focus to the institutions that shape oppression in our society, or in the case of education—the policy makers and curriculum that shape schooling. Fraser & Jarldorn (2015) suggest that “so often we research ‘down’...we rarely seek or are given the opportunity to research ‘up’” (p. 170) against those structures which dictate what is knowledge or worth learning. Researching upwards provides an opportunity to challenge the status quo without speaking for or over marginalized communities. This can take the form of critiquing constructions of knowledge that are granted objectivity and validity through “anti-oppressive approaches [which] offer a counter-approach" (Kovach, 2015, p. 47), or it can involve challenging accepted hegemonic practices and internalized ideologies.

Secondly, turning the gaze inward on our own selves requires a high degree of reflexivity. In this way, the outsider’s research does not draw conclusions about that

which they are removed from, but rather the "knowledge of the subaltern is used to reflect on dominant practices in which the [I am] complicit" (Moosa-Mitha, 2015, p. 89). In other words, examining my own context and actions becomes an important practice; the work itself falls under scrutiny as I invite the gaze to be returned to practice as an educator. Instead of remaining veiled, I will use autoethnography to reflect on my own complicity in the discourses identified.

Critical Discourse Analysis: Researching Up

CDA evolved from a combination of functional linguistics, critical theory, and historical analysis and utilizes pre-existing concepts such as power, ideology, and discourse (Rogers et al., 2005). While CDA can be linguistic in nature, analyzing sentences and utterances (Blommaert, 2005) it can also be social in nature, as it is used to analyze power and how it manifests. Norman Fairclough (1995), a germinal scholar in the field of CDA methodology, writes that it explores:

> often opaque relationships of casualty and determination between (a) discursive practices, events, and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power (p. 132).

The emphasis on the links between power and language extends CDA to consider that "discourses, then, are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing" (Gee, 1996, p. viii) and thus are "always and everywhere *social* and products of social histories" (p. viii). Locke (2004) characterizes discourse as being "concerned with language in use...and with the way in which patterns of meaning...are socially constructed" (p. 9). It is these socially constructed patterns (or emerging discourses) within the Social Studies curriculum I wish to examine through CDA (Gee & Handford 2012, Flowerdew & Richardson, 2017).

As a methodology, this approach to CDA is useful in bringing forward the ways power manifests within conversations, debates, and authoritative communications about a particular topic. Or, put another way, CDA seeks to identify ways in which power works to reinforce hegemony. It does this by drawing attention to how power manifests to create narratives or structures that often remain unquestioned. Strega (2015) explains, "discourses organize social relations as power relations while simultaneously masking these workings of power" (p. 136). CDA is a means to unmask this power, which allows us to then examine how it "is enacted, reproduced or legitimated by the text" (van Dijk, 1995, p. 84). This is a necessary step in being able to understand who that power privileges and who it oppresses.

CDA provides a structured framework to analyze how the Social Studies curriculum reflects hegemonic power and thus shapes the discourses surrounding power

in the classroom. Fowler (1997) writes that Fairclough's CDA allows for "analysis of (spoken or written) language text, analysis of discourse practice (process of text production, distribution and consumption) and analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice" (p. 421). In my research context, I analyze discourses in the curriculum document to determine how they work to reinforce inequities under the guise of critical thinking. Specifically I identify discourses of supposed student agency, damage, deficit, and absence. In chapter four I examine how these discourses are at work in the curriculum, and in chapter five I examine how they are at work in my own pedagogy.

Examples of CDA in Education

The application of CDA to educational contexts provides an opportunity to examine how power is held through institutional structures, such as curriculum. Interrogating curriculum documents, and surrounding discourses, provide an opportunity to examine how power shapes "the structures of text and talk in such a way that...the knowledge, attitudes, norms, values and ideologies of recipients are - more or less indirectly - affected in the interest of the dominant group" (van Dijk, 1995, p. 85). CDA found its way into education research through an interdisciplinary interest in language, power, and ideology.

CDA looks to disrupt the assumed neutrality of words that wield power. The attempt to unmask implicit power in the following two studies is similar to my own research, as is their emphasis on how words and ideas are presented as neutral despite the political space they occupy. For example, an article by Kenneth Tupper (2008) considers how “drugs and drug use are positioned through discourse in the text of a drug education learning resource” (p. 223). He examines how a lexicon that “is not [ideologically] neutral” (p. 223) is used specifically around the use of the word of drug. Additionally, I see a similarity in how Tupper (2008) extends the CDA to consider how “the representation of knowledge (i.e. ‘the facts’) about drugs as uncontested is questionable, even misleading” (p. 229) which also parallels my own work to contest the singular narratives about history that preserve the status quo and marginalize those it excludes.

Another way CDA has been taken up that is similar to my own context is the research conducted by Csilla Weinger (2020). She uses CDA to examine a critical literacy lesson conducted in an English classroom in Singapore. Despite the critical nature of the lesson, the CDA uncovers power dynamics—it is not simply what is being taught but how and why and where it is being taught that matters. Weinger (2020) points out that “much less attention has been paid over the years to how critical literacy itself must operate with existing power structures” (p. 108) which parallels my own examination of power structures that manifest in the classroom.

CDA in my Study

While the above examples examine lessons, and I am examining curriculum, both examples are looking to understand how an ideology influences a classroom by unmasking power at work. However, this differs from my own research in that it recorded lessons and then applied CDA to those discussions, whereas I am examining written curriculum and applying CDA. My own research is situated in the social branch of CDA and examines how language contributes to social action, focusing on "what members of a social group are accomplishing through their discourse" (Gee & Green, 1998, p. 122) to point to the political nature of the Social Studies discourse in Alberta. This is necessary as the political power is hidden or normalized by hegemonic structures, as "much modern power in democratic societies is persuasive and manipulative rather than coercive" (van Dijk, 1995, p. 85). My research focuses on how the document as a whole reinforces power, even when attempting to resist it. I use CDA to examine how "language is used and abused in the exercise of power and suppression of human rights" (Widdowson, 1998, p. 136). My qualitative analysis aims to identify discursive problems and obstacles, their manifestations in practice, possible solutions, and ideas for moving forward (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999).

Through the application of a variety of critical theories mentioned in the theoretical context section, I look to the Social Studies curriculum and surrounding educational discourses that present the status quo as politically neutral. The assumed

neutrality of the curriculum not only creates binaries that privilege certain voices and histories, but does so by ignoring or framing other voices and history as the other. Critical theory is a useful tool in this practice as it is "generally concerned with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, race, class, gender, religion, education, and social orientation construct, reproduce, or transform social systems" (Rogers et al., 2005, p. 368). I use CDA to look at how language within the curriculum enacts, legitimizes, and reproduces power (van Dijk, 1995).

Autoethnography: Researching In

I recognize the necessity of understanding how hegemony operates in my teaching, and how critical frameworks can help me disrupt inequitable practices I have long taken-for-granted. For this, I turn to autoethnography. There are differing variations of autoethnography, yet commonly this methodology involves an author's willingness to "scrutinize, publicize, and reflexivity reword their own self-understandings as a way to shape understandings of and in the wider world" (Butz & Besio, 2009, p. 1660). As "a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context" (Atkinson & Reed-Danahay, 1999, p. 9) it requires the researcher to turn their gaze not only on themselves, but their position as well (Adams, Ellis, & Jones 2017, Winkler, 2018). This shifting of the gaze "is often complicated by our connections to dominance" (Potts & Brown, 2015, p. 24) and thus requires continuous work. Such reflexivity allows the work itself to fall

under scrutiny: asking the question of "whose voice(s) the research (re)presents" (p. 128); or by "(re)positioning the research as an object of inquiry...in terms of personal awareness and experience" (Crawford, 1996, p. 167). Overall, autoethnography as a methodology requires a high degree of self-reflexivity.

Autoethnography in Education

Two examples of autoethnography that highlight the importance of this methodology to my own research are found in Denzin's (2003) article discussing autoethnography as a political entity and Berry & Patti's (2015) reflection on their autoethnographic processes. Denzin (2003) links autoethnography to hope, as well as dissent and criticism, declaring it a "strategic means to… political ends" (p. 259). His link between autoethnography and political forces parallels my own interest in examining political forces at work in my own practice and reflection. Furthermore, he goes on to cite Giroux (2000b) saying: "critique and criticism begin in those places "where people actually live their lives...where meaning is produced...and contested"" (Denzin, 2003, p. 266). This further emphasizes the importance of reflexivity in the process of examining power and directly contrasts the positioning of teachers as apolitical that I address in chapter five.

Additionally, Berry & Patti (2015) examine the link between autoethnography and self-reflection (p. 266) while also stating that it is important to be "specific in

expressing the motivations and goals that guide our projects" (p. 267). Furthermore, they focus on how to position themselves as "objects of inquiry" (p. 264) which emphasizes the importance of reflexivity in this process, the shifting of the gaze inwards. This reminds me to be clear about my intent, and to interrogate my own experiences and reflections critically as well. They also identify the power of storytelling in their own process, reflecting on how their use of story resonated with those they were working with: "during our review process ... the stories in our essay seemed to resonate with all reviewers. The reviewers spoke to how our narratives helped them to reflect on their own relationships" (p. 266). Overall, their reflections on their own research process and the potential for storytelling as a methodology links to my own work.

Autoethnography in my Study

Autoethnography has the potential to work alongside CDA to enhance my findings. While CDA brings forward inequities and power imbalances in educational discourses, autoethnography can be used to examine how this power manifests and creates obstacles when knowingly challenged. It also provides an avenue for reflection and change as these reflections can be critically analyzed, which should include "the position from which [the research] is carried out" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 66). Gee and Green (1998) suggest that such a perspective allows for analysis of an insider's perspective and for "examining how discourse shapes both what is

available to be learned and what is, in fact, learned" (p. 126). I apply this to my own praxis: considering what I have available to me as the teacher through curriculum and critical theory, and then examining my own shaping of these discourses as I prepare to teach. Moreover, if critical discourse deals with the "lived experiences of our times" (McKenna, 2004, p. 27) then including a methodological reflection of those lived experiences has the potential to provide another avenue by which to consider the research question and potential responses.

My choice to consider my own positioning in relationship to my classroom practice through autoethnography is motivated by an observation from Rogers et. al (2016) that a prevalence of "distanced, outside perspective…where the author was not intricately involved" (p. 1209) was common in a review of CDA. This low reflexivity was contrasted by a small number of highly reflexive cases where "studies weaved an analysis of positioning throughout the study" (p. 1210). Additionally, the review highlights the importance of developing critical praxis. I believe it is also important to consider my position within the research context.

To summarize my methodological approach, I use critical theory to analyze the grade 10, 11, and 12 Social Studies curricula, identifying the discourses that emerge for reoccurring patterns. Then I review my own practice as a teacher, considering what implications the CDA has for my own pedagogical practice. I also look to my own practice to see how I reinforce or disrupt the discourses revealed by the CDA in my own

planning and teaching process. Finally, I will look forward towards what these two areas of research suggest is necessary for equitable pedagogy.

Ethical Issues & Reflexivity

Through these two methodologies I examine how someone enmeshed within dominant structures (a white, middle-class, cis female settler) can contribute to challenging hegemony. My research centers on "making transparent the relationships of powers that oppress and diminish" (McKenna, 2004, p. 21), and how I must be reflexive; recognizing that I as the researcher am "not separate from but [exist] in relationship with what [I am] trying to understand" (Strega & Brown, 2015, p. 8) in my own practice if I want to contribute to socially just classrooms. Instead of focusing on who is disadvantaged by the current system (an outsider looking inwards) I instead focus on "reversing the gaze on whom and what gets studied" (Potts & Brown, 2015, p. 19). This reversal of gaze centers the research around the power structures at play: the researcher and the hegemonic structures that require dismantling instead of those who experience oppression. For example, my own positionality places me firmly within the status-quo. With the exception of feminist analysis, I am largely an outsider when it comes to anti-oppressive research. Even within feminist research, the intersectionality of many women also places me on the outside of much work that should be done for and by BIPOC women, or women who are a part of the LGBTQ2+ community. The reality is that there

is much I do not know about the authentic experiences of my students, and I must be constantly cognizant of my own positionality when I engage in research so that I do not reproduce hegemonic forces.

It is important to note that I will focus my research on my planning and pedagogy. This work will not involve student engagement, reflection, or observation. But rather I will be analyzing the curriculum and reflecting on my own planning processes.

Research Design

I started this work by using critical theories to analyze the high school Social Studies curriculum. Once I did that, I categorized my findings into four discourses and looked at how curriculum theory and critical pedagogies informed those findings. While this was occurring, I was also teaching in my own practice and taking notes before and after about my thoughts and choices as I planned how to address these identified discourses in my classroom. These reflections became the evidence for my autoethnography that I used to interrogate my own practice. As I reflected, I drew upon my current and past pedagogy, in order to fully examine my own complicity in reinforcing these discourses. The reflective process was illuminating in crafting my recommendations as it revealed the internalized ways hegemony reproduces itself within me. When examining the existing literature, I see the benefit of being reflexive and intersectional in my own pedagogy.

Chapter Four: Critical Discourse Analysis

By identifying and analyzing the discourses circulating in Alberta curriculum, this chapter shows how the curriculum is political despite being positioned as neutral. Here I address the research question: How do discourses of political neutrality operate on, and through, the Alberta grade 10, 11, and 12 Social Studies Program of Studies (Alberta Ed, 2005)? To do this, I turn to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (van Dijk, 1995, Gee & Handford 2012, Flowerdew & Richardson, 2017) in order to turn the research gaze towards the documents that hold power in education. This upward gaze shifts the focus of the researcher towards the structures that set and reinforce the direction and vision of education through curriculum. As such, I identify and disrupt the dominant discourse, outlined in chapter one, that the Alberta high school Social Studies curriculum must remain neutral and apolitical. To do this, I start by identifying how the curriculum is political and reinforces singular stories that foster singular political ideologies. Each section examines how a different discourse wields power within the curriculum. I end with a reflection on how these discourses can seep into my own practices (which I examine more in chapter five).

I identify and analyze discourses of supposed student agency, damage, deficit, and absence. I show how the prevalence of these discourses reveal not only the ways in which the current curriculum is inherently political, but also that claims of neutrality are

misleading and faulty. Further, I show how attempts to propagate discourses of neutrality are political attempts to replace one ideological position with another, while veiling that reality from the public.

This analysis shows how these discourses contribute to power dynamics that privilege some groups while marginalizing others through the creation of singular stories (Adichie, 2009) where individuals and groups become defined by a singular trait. In this context, I show how the Alberta curriculum presents a single story that normalizes whiteness, European, straight, cisgendered, male, able-bodied individuals and their experiences as the norm by which all others are measured. This chapter demonstrates how the curriculum tacitly reinforces unquestioned rationalities and assumptions that position neutrality as the ideal. The implication of this being that the political positioning of the curriculum is hidden from view. The result is an official curriculum which reinforces singular stories that form the basis on either a null or hidden curriculum (Connelly, Fang He, & Phillion, 2008).

Recognizing how discourses create single stories

This chapter's analysis reveals four distinct discursive dynamics at work in the Alberta Social Studies curriculum documents. Each of these demonstrates how, despite widespread claims of neutrality by politicians, policymakers, and even educators, the curriculum is political. These discourses include agency (where critical analysis is

designed to give students autonomy but ironically reinforces certain agendas), damage (the emphasis on conflict and trauma as defining attributes in the representation of Indigenous persons), deficit (defining groups by the differences that exist and seeing those differences as needing fixing or support), and absence (the major gaps in terms of who or what is included in the curriculum). All these discourses contribute to the marginalization of those whose beliefs, values, or identities place them as a part of a minority. However, these discourses continue to be positioned as politically neutral. I employ CDA to uncover how these discourses contribute to the maintenance of hegemonic power and the subsequent consequences on equitable education.

The CDA presented in this chapter can help educators recognize and understand how these discourses create a "single story" (Adichie, 2009) that position political visions as neutral. As I present in chapter two, the concept of a single story is to singularly and definitively define a group based on a simplistic perspective. As Adichie (2009) states: "power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person" (10:03), which is exactly what curriculum has the power to do by legitimizing certain knowledge as neutral and thus objectively true. Responding to these issues, I show not only how the Social Studies curriculum creates singular narratives, but also the subsequent need to disrupt the simplified narratives to reveal complex and authentic identities. Left unchallenged and uninterrupted, the four

discourses I identify in this chapter reinforce societal norms which marginalize some and privilege others, all while positioning this disparity as normal. These discourses do this by maintaining that certain ideological ideas are neutral and free of political influence. The result is an unquestioning acceptance of certain values as objectively true and a marginalization of those who fall outside said ideological positions. By drawing attention to how discourses of damage, deficit, agency and absence enforce a single story I attempt to disrupt the singular narratives that privilege some over others under the guise of neutrality and objectivity.

Supposed Student Agency

Unproblematized discourses in various sections of the Alberta curriculum documents suggest that students ought to have agency in their educational pursuits. For example, the Program Rationale (2005) states that students will "engage in active inquiry and critical and creative thinking" (p. 2). The Program Rationale then explores the pedagogical approaches for critical thinking further by explaining that:

> students will develop skills of critical thinking that include: distinguishing fact from opinion; considering the reliability and accuracy of information; determining diverse points of view, perspective and bias; and considering the ethics of decisions and actions (p. 8).

This emphasis on critical thinking positions students to be active participants who have agency in their learning. However, what is problematic with the inclusion of this discourse is how the program of studies tries to operationalize this goal. I explore two ways in which the curriculum attempts to grant students agency, but is reinforcing dominant heteronormative, able-bodied, capitalist, patriarchal, white settler narratives. I first examine how the curriculum attempts to have students think critically about diversity by including alternative perspectives, and then I examine which subjects are framed as knowledge to be understood versus ideas to be analyzed and judged. Altogether, these examples suggest that the agency of students is limited by the hidden curriculum. Furthermore, the act of including critical thinking often and ironically reinforces one worldview as the central authority. In contrast, alternative worldviews are left to student investigation.

The official curriculum grants students individualized agency to analyze issues that are presented simplistically and individually. As such this exercise of agency reinforces dominant ideology by presenting topics of diversity (or as I explore later this chapter, topics of gender or race) as single stories, not intersectional identities. The result is the belief that students are being thoughtful and analytical, but the reality is their analysis is limited: they do not problematize or question systemic societal issues. The issue is that while students think they are being critical, they are simply reinforcing

existing hegemony. I will now use the topic diversity in the curriculum to exemplify how this occurs.

The program of studies emphasizes that diversity is a key part of society, stating: “some key manifestations of this diversity include: First Nations, Inuit and Métis cultures, official bilingualism, immigration, multiculturalism” (Alberta Education, 2005, Program Rationale, p. 2). However, racism is only explicitly mentioned once in grade 12 (Alberta Education, 2005), where is it listed alongside other problems in society such as poverty and debt, censorship, pandemics, and terrorism: “students will evaluate the extent to which the values of liberalism are viable in the context of contemporary issues (environment concerns, resource use and development, debt and poverty, racism, pandemics, terrorism, censorship)” (Outcome 3.9, p. 23). Even here, racism is the issue that impacts liberalism, not an issue to be examined or understood on its own. In other words, racism is a secondary topic to understand in order to understand the complexity of liberalism (a Eurocentric construct) instead of being examined as a complex topic and issue in and of itself. Crenshaw (1991) asserts that intersecting identities compound to amplify privilege or oppression. This challenges the singular story the curriculum develops about racism as a standalone event. In other words, intersectionality asserts that racism compounds other issues; that race impacts how individuals and groups experience other issues, such as poverty and debt, censorship, pandemics, and terrorism. By listing

racism as a standalone issue, the hidden implication of the curriculum is that it is also experienced as a singular event, not a systemic one. The danger here is that when students examine racism as a singular event tied to a moment, or an individual (and not a systemic issue), they begin to envision solutions that are focused on events or individuals, not structures in society. As a result, students feel as if they are tackling the issue in critical ways, yet they are reinforcing structural inequities.

Despite including critical thinking, multiculturalism, and pluralism in the curriculum, hegemonic power still flows through the document and thus gets translated into the classroom. The way teachers and students interact with curriculum will vary, as their own thoughts, experiences, and identities will serve as a filter through which texts are consumed (Wallin, 2012; Brown & Kelly, 2001). As a result, texts that "some students are critical of…[are] accepted by others as unproblematic" (Brown & Kelly, 2001, p. 502). In other words, students bring different experiences to their interpretation of a text, and when they are only exposed to singular stories about diversity, they filter new knowledge through these existing frameworks. As a result, failure to address power dynamics results in a failure to evoke meaningful change in student thinking, as students sort knowledge claims through existing power relationships (Brown & Kelly, 2001). Furthermore, these attempts at inclusion, like the emphasis on multiple perspectives, fail to bring about nuanced or new understandings if these new

texts and perspectives are simply filtered through an existing knowledge base. For example, in grade 11 (Alberta Education, 2005) outcome 1.2 states students will “appreciate the existence of alternate views on the meaning of nation” (p.20). The use of the adjective alternate positions one meaning of nation as primary and the rest as secondary, resulting in students positioning their own worldview as primary. So, while the inclusions present as reforms that emphasis diversity, they should also be examined critically, as both curriculum and proposed reforms are susceptible to hegemonic influence (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015).

The result is that students are granted agency to reach conclusions on their own, yet these conclusions are influenced and shaped by hegemonic frameworks. For example, when the aforementioned teaching about diversity is done from the perspective of whiteness, student agency can ironically reinforce white settler narratives about color blindness (Egbo, 2019, Anguiano & Castañeda, 2014). A specific place this can occur is in grade 10 (Alberta Education, 2005) when students are expected to "evaluate various attempts to address consequences of imperialist policies and practices on Indigenous peoples in Canada and other locations” (Outcome 2.12, p. 22). However, the framing of these issues is through imperialist/Eurocentric frameworks, making them more likely to filter these events through their own color-blind belief, which effectively dismisses the need for systemic change or acknowledgement of a societal issue. So, while the

curriculum positions itself as promoting student agency and critical thought, students are still filtering their ideas through their existing worldviews.

Additionally, my analysis of the curriculum reveals that discourses of student agency often work to reinforce capitalist ideologies. The hidden curriculum props up capitalism as the dominant ideology through the way in which students are asked to engage with ideas linked to capitalism in contrast to other ideological frameworks. For example, Grade 10 (Alberta Education, 2005) outcome 3.3 states that students will "explore understandings of contemporary economic globalization" (p. 23), which suggests that students need to be familiar with–not challenging or questioning–contemporary economics, and grade 12 outcome 2.6 states they will "analyze the impacts of classical liberal thought on 19th century society (laissez-faire capitalism...)" (p. 21). Grade 10 outcome 3.4 goes on to state that they will "examine the foundations of contemporary globalization" (p. 23), which suggests a deeper level of interrogation, however, the parenthetical matter which outlines specific content is all directly tied to capitalist thinkers or events: for example, "(F. A. Hayek, Bretton Woods Conference, Milton Friedman)" (p. 23). As a result, contemporary economics are equated with capitalist structures. This can be interpreted from a Marxist perspective which suggests that the hidden curriculum positions education as a social institution which acts as a superstructure that reinforces the base, in this case capitalist ideals, through the implicit

acceptance of capitalism. Absent is any discussion of how economic power contributes to socio-economic status and/or contributes to the marginalization of those who either resist capitalism or are left behind as a result of capitalist structures (Gordon, 2019). This is further seen specifically through the descriptors in outcomes that relate to capitalism: "examine the foundations of" (Alberta Education, Grade 10, 2005, outcome 3.3) and "analyze factors contributing to" (outcome 3.5). While the verbs examine and analyze suggest interrogation, the outcomes are suggesting said interrogation be applied to events that lead and contribute to capitalism.

In contrast, there is no analysis of capitalism as a structure or ideology. Juxtaposed with this are two grade 10 (Alberta Education, 2005) outcomes: 3.7 where students "explore multiple perspectives regarding the relationship among people, the land and globalization (spirituality, stewardship, sustainability, resource development)" (p. 23) and 3.8 which has students "evaluate actions and policies associated with globalization that impact the environment (land and resource use, resource development agreements, environmental legislation)" (p. 23). Here students are invited to judge perspectives and policies that do not align with capitalist values. The result of this is a hidden curriculum which frames capitalist economic structures as something to be understood –not analyzed – while positioning alternative economic structures as singularly defined structures or ideologies to be examined. The limiting of agency to certain topics presents an illusion of

student choice and critical thought, while neutering the process so that only systems outside the dominant capitalist framework are interrogated. This creates a singular story where capitalist structures are positioned as neutral and potentially unquestionable, while encouraging questioning and interrogation of alternative structures. The result is a curriculum where students interrogate and evaluate only certain ideas, leaving concepts and events that support the dominant ideological structures of capitalism unquestioned.

Damage Discourses

Damage-centered discourses emphasize a singular story of brokenness or marginalization (Tuck, 2009). In the program of studies, these discourses create a hidden curriculum that positions Indigenous persons as the other. Eve Tuck (2009) writes about damaged-centered research, identifying the tension between "recognizing the need to document the effects of oppression" and Indigenous communities or individuals "viewing [themselves] as broken" (p. 409). She goes on to argue that "the danger in damage-centered research is that it is a pathologizing approach in which oppression singularly defines a community" (p. 413). While her work centers around academic research, it resonates within educational structures as well, specifically regarding what is being taught in the official curriculum about Indigenous persons. This emphasis on damage discourses becomes another way that education systems reinforce Indigenous persons as the other, which becomes an accepted singular story that reinforces Eurocentric and white

settler frameworks as neutral. The result is a curriculum which implicitly centers the political visions of colonial institutions and history. This centering normalizes white settler worldviews, a politicized vision being portrayed as politically neutral. I examine this positioning through critical Indigenous theory in two ways. Firstly, how damage narratives create broad generalized identities for Indigenous persons, secondly how damage narratives define Indigenous persons by past trauma.

The application of Critical Indigenous Theory reveals that the Alberta Social Studies curriculum employs a damage framework which singularly defines Indigenous persons. This singular story is incomplete in many ways. For example, by centering the program of studies around discourses of damage, portrayals of Indigenous peoples become monolithic as well—there is no room for “self-crafted images” (Tuck, 2009, p. 417) or “complex personhood” (p. 412) at local levels unique to various parts of the province. Rather, all Indigenous persons are grouped together on a national scale. The damage discourses both set them apart as a group defined by trauma, while erasing their unique cultures and identities at the same time. For example, grade 10 (Alberta Education, 2005) has the most explicit teaching in connection to Indigenous experiences. Outcome 2.1 asks students to “recognize and appreciate historical and contemporary consequences of European contact, historical globalization and imperialism on Aboriginal societies” (p. 21) and outcome 2.5 states students will also “recognize and

appreciate various perspectives regarding the prevalence and impacts of Eurocentrism" (p. 21). The verb 'recognize' suggests students are to gain awareness but not examine or analyze these consequences, which are left undefined. Furthermore, the verb 'appreciate' suggests that students should fully understand these issues. However, these issues are left as generalized impacts of Eurocentrism, which lacks actual understanding of localized and unique impacts on Indigenous persons. Then outcome 2.6 creates two generalized groups, asking students to "examine impacts of cultural contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (exchange of goods and technologies, depopulation, influences on government and social institutions)" (p. 21). These two broadly defined groups are understood by their relationship to the other, with the references to depopulation, exchange of technology, and influences on government all implicitly placing non-Indigenous persons in positions of power. Altogether the result is a damage discourse singularly defining Indigenous history, while also nullifying local cultural traditions and ways of knowing.

Moreover, Indigenous culture and history exists in the curriculum as a separate or alternative perspective, separate from non-Indigenous culture and history and always from a position of damage. For example: outcome 2.11 states students will "analyze contemporary global issues that have origins in policies and practices of post-colonial governments in Canada and other locations (consequences of residential schools, social

impact on Indigenous peoples, loss of Indigenous languages, civil strife (p. 22). The focus of student analysis is on the consequence of residential schools (i.e., the trauma caused to survivors), not the injustice of residential schools themselves. As a result, this teaching of Indigenous history is not only centered around the actions of the dominant Eurocentric society, but the emphasis is on what is lost, or taken, or damaged. While this knowledge is important for students to grasp and understand, simply leaving Indigenous peoples to be defined by these events and perspectives create a problematic singular story of damage the suggests a monolithic culture. The result is that students learn to view Indigenous persons as universally damaged. This singular narrative removes discussion of how class, gender, disability, land use, political and economic structures intersect within the lives of Indigenous persons both collectively and individually.

The need to address the injustices of Residential schools within Indigenous communities throughout Canada is a key component of the program of studies – and rightfully so. The report released by the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples in 1996 clearly states that developing relationships "on a new footing to mutual recognition and respect, sharing and responsibility" (Archives Canada, 2016), and this emphasis is present within the curriculum itself. Just as residential schools looked to eradicate culture and language, to contain Indigenous persons into a specific framework, now educational structures do the same thing: teaching about damage, loss, and addiction as opposed to

sharing and promoting Indigenous ways of knowing and language. Consequently, this damage discourse, at best reinforces stereotypes, and at worst, functions as a form of assimilation into and absolution of dominant white settler culture. As a result, the curriculum, the classroom, and the students are complicit in furthering these singular stories as the damage-narrative often leads to students to envision a "civilizing journey" (Battiste, 2013, p. 31) in which Indigenous peoples become un-damaged by assimilation into the 'progressive' white settler culture. Ironically, the result of this singular story created by a damage discourse is an implicit and politicized suggestion that Indigenous persons require fixing by moving closer towards the dominant group.

Deficit Discourses

Deficit discourses circulate when some groups are positioned as being outside the heteronormative, able-bodied, capitalist, patriarchal, white settler groups as a result of differences, and then defined by their perceived deficiencies in comparison to said groups. Furthermore, individuals defined by these deficits are often portrayed as in need of support or corrective measures to be more like those in the dominant group. Scott & Armstrong (2019) suggest that a "discourse of deficit can erode people [and their] sense of community, reinforce hierarchy, and encourage a sense of self-enfeeblement" (p. 116). These discourses emerge as part of the hidden curriculum in the program of studies as students are expected to examine how those outside the dominant group present alternate

views, which Battiste (2013) calls an “additive approach” (p. 106). This serves to reinforce them as the other by highlighting differences as less than through the positioning of “multiple perspectives, including Aboriginal and Francophone, that contribute to Canada’s evolving realities” (Alberta Ed., Program Rationale, p. 1). This section first identifies the presence of a dominant ‘us’ and an additional ‘alternative thought’, which sets groups and ways of knowing up to be defined by their relationship to one another. Then I identify the ways these manifests in the curriculum itself through the portrayal of some groups and knowledge as normative and some as alternative. Finally, I consider the consequences of these binaries in creating a discourse which defines groups as ‘them’ by the different to those who are considered ‘us’. My analysis suggests that this discourse presents itself as diverse but reinforces hegemonic beliefs as the standard by which other ideas, and people, should be considered.

Firstly, a key irony exists in the document: the emphasis on recognizing multiple perspectives also serves to emphasize the presence of a dominant (and accepted) discourse. For example, “the program of studies emphasizes how diversity and differences are assets that enrich *our* lives” (Alberta Education, Program Rationale, 2005, p. 5, emphasis mine), and while the use of “our” is intended to be holistic it does reveal a common pattern of centering Eurocentric norms and adding in Indigenous, Francophone, and immigrant experiences as “alternative thought” (p. 22). Furthermore, the document

centers much of the content specific outcomes around European, liberal ideas as a method to "understand the principals underlying a democratic society" (p 3) while "[validating and accepting] differences that contribute to the pluralistic nature of Canada" (p. 3). Yet this pluralistic nature privileges Western ideology. In grade 11 (Alberta Education, 2005) outcome 4.6 lists a series of people and events that form "historical perspectives of Canada as a nation" (p. 24). However, the list to be covered gives specific names to leaders in positions of power and creates generalized groups for those that challenge power. The list to cover includes Louis LaFontaine and Robert Baldwin, Sir Clifford Sifton, Henri Bourassa, Pierre Trudeau (p. 24) (of note – it does include Louis Reil, yet from a position of damage). It also includes First Nations treaties, the Indian Act, Metis and Inuit self-governance, French-Canadian Nationalism, and the National Indian Brotherhood p. 24). The lack of specifics and names groups those outside the dominant group together as the other in the portrayal of history. Altogether, the emphasis and labeling of multiple perspectives results in grouping all those who do not fall into one of the prescribed categories together and defines them by their difference to those who are a part of the dominant group.

Secondly, while the program of studies positions itself as neutral by asserting "Social Studies helps students develop their sense of self and community, encouraging them to affirm their place as citizens in an inclusive, democratic society" (Program

Rationale, p. 1), it fails to acknowledge that it is built upon a Eurocentric framework in terms of "whose knowledge is offered…and how those are achieved in an ethically appropriate process" (Battiste, 2013, p. 28). As such, the curriculum supports "an education, like the institutions and society it derives from, [that is] neither culturally neutral nor fair" (p. 159). It also "standardizes not only knowledge, but ways of knowing" (p. 116) and in doing so, fails to recognize the difference in the worldview between Eurocentric and Indigenous knowledge systems. As a result, the curriculum not only validates certain knowledge but "the question of who legitimizes 'the facts' of a given social order...is removed from the context of classroom pedagogy and discussion" (Giroux, 1980, p. 337). In other words, there is no discussion of who decides what we study or how we study it.

Furthermore, while presenting itself as neutral, the curriculum still positions the largely white, Eurocentric experiences (both historical and contemporary) as knowledge. This reinforces the centering of white perspectives as a natural central discourse. For example, in grade ten the curriculum states that students will "explore the relationship of historical globalization and imperialism" (Alberta Education, 2005, grade 10, outcome 2.8; p. 21) and "examine legacies of historical globalization and imperialism" (outcome 2.13; p. 22) while "exploring the foundations of historical globalization: (rise of capitalism, industrialization, imperialism, Eurocentrism)" (outcome 2.7; p. 22). This is

reinforced in grade 11 (Alberta Education, 2005) when students "analyze nationalism and ultranationalism during times of conflict (causes of the first and Second World Wars)" (outcome 2.7, p. 22) through the study of the conference of Berlin and European imperialism. As such, histories related to European countries, while not always positive, are always in positions of power, whereas African countries are presented as places that are powerless, historically through imperialism or currently through poverty. These countries are either portrayed through the lens of working towards achieving what Western and European countries have already done or as corrupt and in need of fixing. They are also singularly defined by this deficit as opposed to examining the ways other intersecting factors such as gender or class compound differently for individuals and groups. Such examples contribute to the political act of centering the values of the dominant group as the norm, positioning those that differ as either the other, or in need of development.

The consequence of all this is expectations are placed on outsiders to make up those deficits, to move towards the dominant group to gain acceptance OR to be content with being the alternative to the norm. As Guskey and Huberman (1995b) write: deficit discourses reinforce "the idea that something is lacking and needs to be corrected' (p. 269). Another example of this is how most examples of "linguistic, cultural and ethnic groups in Canada" (Alberta Education, 2005, Program Rationale, p. 4) are presented as

outsiders who are defined in relationship to the status-quo. An application of this is when immigration is taught with the intent to help students "understand the challenges and opportunities that immigration presents to newcomers and to Canada" (Program Rationale, p.2), where the experiences of immigrants are shaped by their ability (or inability) to find a place in Canadian society. For example, immigrants may require "accommodation" (grade 10, outcome 1.7, p. 20) for their religious or cultural differences as they adjust to a new country. Furthermore, identities that may fall outside the dominant view are positioned as needing reconciling: "evaluate the importance of reconciling contending nationalist loyalties (Canadian nationalism, First Nations and Métis nationalism, ethnic nationalism in Canada, civic nationalism in Canada, Québécois nationalism, Inuit perspectives on nationalism)" (grade 11, outcome 1.10, p. 21). Critical race theory (CRT) suggests this positioning is the result of attempting to teach from a lens of whiteness, where diverse groups are positioned in a place of deficit in comparison to the dominant group.

Another example is the positioning of Indigenous groups as requiring a "revitalization" (grade 10, outcome 1.7, p. 20) of culture and language as a result of colonialism, while also needing "integration" (p. 20) into the same culture that colonized them. And while reconciliation is mentioned, (outcomes 1.9, p. 21) it serves to reinforce damage as students learn about lost cultural practices such as Potlatch or lost languages.

As a result, the emphasis is on what Indigenous groups have lost, positioning them in need of support to regain identity.

In another example, democracy and ideology is emphasized in grade 12 through examination of emerging liberalism in Europe, covered by outcomes 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, and 2.8. These outcomes are marked by the verbs analyze, examine and evaluate, which are higher level thinking skills. Juxtaposed with this is the Haudenosaunee peoples in Canada in outcome 2.4 where students are asked to explore. So, while Indigenous outcomes are referenced and tested, most higher-level thinking revolves around Eurocentric knowledge and history (outcomes 2.5 – 2.10). Outcome 2.11 seems to address this by asking students to analyze the imposition of liberalism (p. 21), the higher-level analysis is actually focused on the imposition of liberal ideology of those in power. Overall, the result is an official curriculum where Indigenous experiences are being taught, but as implicit side notes to the main narrative. This “token integration of culture” (Battiste, 2013, p. 147) exemplifies how the inclusion of Indigenous experiences in the Alberta curriculum exists as an attempt to address historical marginalization, however these inclusions are positioned as side notes to the main narrative. This reinforces the singular story of Indigenous persons and ways of knowing as being of less value than the Eurocentric worldviews. Not only does this normalize Eurocentric worldviews and position Indigenous ways of knowing as the other, it presents Indigenous knowledge

through Eurocentric educational frameworks. Therefore, Indigenous knowledge is positioned as less-than and the onus is placed on Indigenous persons to either justify the different approaches or move towards the status quo to gain credibility.

Altogether the result of this deficit discourse is a hidden curriculum which positions people groups as secondary to the dominant group and frames their experiences in relationship to how they interact with, and differ from, the dominant group as well.

Absence Discourses

Although the sections above accent how discourses operate in the curriculum documents, and their implications, it is also worthwhile to analyze the implications of discourses that are absent from the documents. What is excluded is just as much a political statement about what is valued—the absence signifying a lack of value. These absences can also be described as null curriculum (Eisner, 1979/1994), where the exclusion of certain topics or groups in the curriculum work to privilege certain stories over others. For example, while the program of studies does recognize that "race, socio-economic conditions and gender are among various forms of identification that people live with and experience in a variety of ways" (Alberta Education, 2005, Program Rationale, p. 5), it does not include, mention, or take up themes of sexual identity, sexuality, and disability. As a result, there are multiple identities that are ignored, glossed over, or simplified to the point of erasure in the program of studies. In this section I work

through two types of absence. First, I highlight the complete nullification of representation of queer, trans, non-binary, gender non-conforming persons, as well as disabled persons in the curriculum. Second, I turn to simplistic inclusions that nullify the experiences of many people under the guise of inclusion, specifically regarding gender and race. These groups are marginalized by the hegemonic structures in society and their absence furthers the privileging of dominant groups as more important or worth knowing about (Tatar, Ş., & Adigüzel, O. C. (2019).

The absence of queer representation means that the voices, stories, and experiences of people with these identities are silenced. Furthermore, the curriculum also fails to consider the experiences and perspectives of trans, non-binary, or gender non-conforming individuals. As a result, students are left unaware of the complexity of these identities in relation to what they are learning and studying (in both historical and contemporary contexts). Miller (2019) suggests that "queer theory troubles—it disrupts and challenges regimes of normativity" (p.82), which points to the importance of queer representation in education. However, the inverse is also true—a lack of inclusion reinforces heteronormativity. Not only would the inclusion of queer representation bring stories of queer individuals and events that are important throughout history into the classroom, but it provides opportunities to examine history with an intersectional lens. This would enable the opportunity to examine "all those aspects of individual and social

life on which gender and sexual norms exert an informing, often coercive influence" (Wander, 2018, p.64). Failure to do this means that absences not only fail to represent, but also reinforce dominant and heteronormative singular narratives. Such erasure "is problematic ... because it marginalizes certain people by limiting their visibility and value" (Dodge & Crutcher, 2015, p. 95), creating a singular story of heteronormativity.

Some teachers do push back here and include discussions of activism in grade 12. For example, teachers may choose to study the Stonewall uprising under outcome 4. 10: "explore opportunities to demonstrate active and responsible citizenship through individual and collective action" (Alberta Education, Grade 12, 2005, p. 24). Or in grade 11, teachers may choose to teach about the persecutions of homosexual under outcome 2.8: "analyze ultranationalism as a cause of genocide (the Holocaust, 1932–1933 famine in Ukraine, contemporary examples)" (p. 22). However, these inclusions are up to teacher discretion, and often susceptible to parental or board censor. The result is that the absence of these stories is normalized and thus reinforces a heteronormative and exclusionary narrative.

There is also an absence of representation of disabled persons in the curriculum, which creates a similar erasure. Pennel, Wollak, & Koppenhaver (2017) argue that texts can function as mirrors to help the audience "envision connections to the world…[and] increase their sense of belonging and self-affirmation" (p. 412). They go on to argue that

when texts lack representation "of the range of ability and disability, we risk perpetuating…[a] single story" (p. 413). Critical disability theory identifies the significance of representation in raising awareness of unique identities and voices. This representation could come by looking at contributions of persons who are disabled throughout history. However often these stories are problematic in and of themselves as disabled persons are often used, historically and contemporary, to evoke feel-good emotions in the able-bodied community (Pulrang, 2020). Disabled representation could be part of the curriculum as an intersectional understanding of any historical or contemporary event being taught. Yet, by nullifying this representation across history and in the curriculum, students are left with singular stories of ablism in both historical and contemporary contexts.

I turn now to examples of how some identities are recognized, but only in specific ways that ignore and thus erase a diversity of experiences, both past and present. The result is a null curriculum where existing examples of race and gender suggest an inclusive and diverse accounting of a variety of experiences, yet these examples are superficial at best. My CDA suggests such superficiality contributes to the erasure of the diverse stories, perspectives, and experiences in both historical and contemporary contexts.

For example, while the official curriculum mentions multiculturalism, the program of studies only explores the experiences of Indigenous persons and immigrants. While the experiences of Indigenous people and immigrants should be included (and there are many problems with these inclusions mentioned above) the absence of other racialized identities and perspectives erases the authentic experiences of many people in Canada. Mensah (2002) suggests that "we have the tendency to not only ignore our racist past, but also to dismiss any contemporary racial incidence as nothing but aberration in an essentially peaceful, tolerant, charitable, and egalitarian nation" (p. 1). The result is that those who do not identify in those two categories are not represented and the intersection of race with other aspects of identity is ignored. Despite these claims of diversity, the program of studies contains a hidden curriculum which presents a narrow view of racial identities which fails to address and recognize institutionalized racist policies which shaped the past and continues to impact contemporary events. The result is a singular story which promotes the idea of a multicultural society, while hiding the systemic inequalities that exist in the status quo.

Additionally, the inclusion of gender in the curriculum is problematic. Not only is gender mentioned sparingly, but the curriculum lacks historical and contemporary inclusions of women. There are only four references to gender or issue's pertaining to women in the official curriculum. In contrast, feminist critics point out the necessity of

highlighting female voices about historical and contemporary events, which the curriculum nullifies. Hesse-Biber (2012) argues that "a central mission of feminist researchers is to conduct research on behalf of women and other oppressed groups with the goal of uncovering subjugated knowledge—oppressed groups' voices and ways of thinking that have been devalued by dominant, patriarchal, forms of knowledge—and promoting social change and social justice" (p.138). Feminist critique suggests that the curriculum examines history from the male gaze, which normalizes the views of men while objectifying women as resources to be controlled (Ponterotto, 2016). The program of studies is implicated here, as it presents historic events through the male experiences of colonialism, war, politics, etc. As a result, the events and perspectives that are deemed 'historic' or important are patriarchal in nature do not consider female voices or perspectives.

After the first reference on page 5 (quoted above), we see gender or gender issues three more times. In grade 10 (Alberta Education 2005), students are asked to "analyze impacts of globalization on women (gender issues, labor issues, opportunities for entrepreneurship)" (outcome 4.6, p. 24). This outcome positions entrepreneurship as something to be achieved and reinforces the capitalist norms as ideals to be striving for. There are no references at all in grade 11. Then, in grade 12 students will "analyze the evolution of modern liberalism as a response to classical liberalism (labor standards and

unions, universal suffrage, welfare state, protection of human rights, feminism)" (outcome 2.8, p. 21). Issues relating to gender are implicitly taught through universal suffrage and explicitly through the feminist movement. Instead of learning about women who advocate for change or carried different roles throughout history, women are contained to simplistic and singular roles. While both outcomes in the program of studies call for student analysis of events that relate to women, they restrict feminist perspectives to these singular issues, as opposed to examining a variety of contexts and issues from a feminist lens.

Feminist criticism reveals a hidden curriculum that singularly defines female identities and roles in both contemporary and historical society. Grumet & Stone (2010) identify the dualism of the male/female binary as a simplifying framework which defines individuals. The curriculum does this as well, by simplifying the intersectional experiences of women down to issues related to political or geographic issues, while the hidden curriculum uses absence to position gender.

One way this occurs is by locating feminist concerns as historical events. For example, the focus on suffrage as linked to the feminist movement positions feminism as something in the past, and by equating it with franchise, implies that equality has been achieved - erasing the importance of the feminist movement in the present. Contemporary discussion in grade 10 (Alberta Education, 2005) vaguely define gender issues in relation

fights for equality in developing countries. This locates gender as a geographic or racial issue. Historical gender issues are contained to suffrage, specifically of white women. Female identities that are present are thus contained and portrayed monolithically within this male/female binary as opposed to with diverse experiences and perspectives, and many more are erased completely.

Altogether these absences and erasures contribute to a view of the world—past and present—which centers around white, heteronormative, able-bodied, capitalist, and patriarchal norms. Those that do not fall into these categories are ignored completely (such as queer or disabled representation or recognition) or contained within simplistic categories that limit the scope and depth of representation (such as racial identities being limited to immigrants or feminist perspectives linked to suffrage). This fails to acknowledge the intersectionality of individuals and reinforces singular stories. Failure to include and acknowledge these subjects erases the authentic experiences of a variety of identities, while normalizing their erasure.

Political Curriculum to Political Pedagogy

My CDA reinforces reconceptionalist curriculum theory (that curriculum can contribute to the maintenance of political norms) by how discourses of student agency, damage, deficit, and absence create singular and politicized stories. The Social Studies program of studies reinforces hidden and null curriculum that centers cis, straight, able-

bodied, white, settler, capitalist and patriarchal discourses and reinforces curriculum as apolitical. Student agency gives the illusion of choice and analysis, yet students often lack the tools or the information to challenge or change the singular stories that are being presented. Damage discourses contain Indigenous people (individually and collectively) in a position of brokenness, while deficit discourse position those outside the status quo as defined by remedial efforts to fix or address perceived differences from the dominant group. The absence of queer, trans, non-binary, gender non-conforming folx, as well as disabled people, alongside the simplistic discussion of race and gender, and the neutralized teaching about economic power, all contribute to a reinforcing a particular set of politics and values.

I acknowledge that I am complicit in reinforcing these discourses. Even as I identify these discourses and the problematic ways in which they exist in the curriculum, I can see how I reproduce them as I engage with the curriculum, and plan how to teach certain topics and information. This will be the focus of my next chapter, where I adopt autoethnographic methods to examine how my own planning is also implicated in reproducing discourses of agency, damage, deficit and absence in my classroom.

Chapter Five: Autoethnography

Whereas chapter four employed Critical Discourse Analysis to explore dominant narratives of political neutrality in the Alberta grade 10, 11, and 12 Social Studies Curriculum, this chapter addresses the question: What does an autoethnographic approach reveal about the presence of these discourses in my own pedagogical practice as a Social Studies educator? And what does this analysis reveal about the politics reinforced or challenged in my own teaching? Specifically, this chapter draws on autoethnography to provide a framework to analyze how assumptions about political neutrality are internalized in my own practice, just as it is internalized in the Social Studies curriculum. My previous chapter identified how discourses of student agency, damage, deficit, and absences in the Alberta high school Social Studies curriculum reinforce singular stories that contribute to the dominant ideologies that education is politically neutral. By turning the research gaze upwards and examining the power in the curriculum itself, I sought to understand how these discourses form the hidden curriculum in Alberta. In this chapter, I turn that gaze inward and reflect on my own practices and pedagogy, looking critically at how these politicized visions hidden in the curriculum are replicated in my own teaching. This analysis reveals that teaching, just like curriculum, is not neutral and that educators and their pedagogical choices, are in fact political. Even though teaching is a political act, this analysis helps me recognize how I can both resist and reinforce these power dynamics that oppress or marginalize based

upon adherence to hegemonic power relations. In other words, while I do attempt to resist reproducing hegemony, I am also a force that reproduces these singular and exclusionary narratives. In this chapter I seek to identify how I use my voice and authority to reproduce hegemony, how I attempt to resist it, and what forces are at work in and through me.

Following a similar thematic structure to Chapter Four, in this chapter, I examine how the following discourses influence my pedagogy: student agency (where my granting of agency to students reinforces hegemony), damage (where my positioning of white settler narratives presents Indigenous experiences as marginalized and broken), deficit (where my approach to those othered by the curriculum positions them as less than or needing fixing), and absence (an examination of what I leave out and why). I will be reflexive in examining how I attempt to resist these politicized narratives but also examining where I consciously or unconsciously choose to not challenge them. I consider why I make choices, how they are connected to politics, and seek to understand what this reveals about how hegemonic power works through me to reinforce political ideologies, all under the guise of teacher neutrality.

Teacher Neutrality and Authority

As I mentioned in the first chapter, teacher neutrality is a position of privilege that is granted to those who can socialize within a dominant group. This positioning of

teachers as neutral is another method by which education as an institution reinforces political visions while maintaining an apolitical stance. In short, public discourse is as follows: political curriculums should be removed, political classrooms are dangerous, and political teachers are to be censored or removed. I clearly remember reading an opinion piece by a former conservative party leader in Alberta, where Danielle Smith (2019) writes that "Rather than focus on the detractors outside Alberta's borders, we need to focus on the detractors within our own publicly funded school system". Following this, she goes on to label grade 10 Social Studies test questions as anti-capitalist, pro-Marxist, and ends with a declaration about teachers moving forward: "Let's start by getting rid of the ones who are administering tests like this." This article shook me as an educator. I remember feeling angry at the lack of understanding of the curriculum, but nonetheless dove into the comment section. I was shocked at the number of comments calling for teachers to stop pushing political agendas and for government intervention.

The problem here is the implicit counterpoint that non-political teachers and pedagogies exist. When teachers are viewed as neutral, there is increased authority to what they say. This increased authority grants supposed legitimacy to the curriculum. This creates a cyclic pattern where apolitical curriculum is taught by apolitical teachers, who are directed by the apolitical curriculum. The result is that the political forces inherent in the curriculum, that are reproduced by teachers (knowingly or unknowingly),

are never questioned. I was unknowingly complicit in this power structure for a long time as it granted me authority within my classroom. In fact, Smith's claim that Social Studies teachers lacked objectivity, that my teaching was political, was what I initially took most offense to. This was because in 2019 my authority was linked to my perceived neutrality. However, this exchange online caused me to question if an apolitical stance within the context of education was another means of reinforcing certain political ideologies. After all, despite claiming that "indoctrination in Alberta's classrooms must stop" what Smith (2019) was proposing about Social Studies certainly felt political in nature. I began to wonder if I was using objectivity as a veil that granted certain ideological stances more legitimacy.

As I become more aware of the political nature of the official curriculum (as outlined in chapter four), I also begin to see how the enacted curriculum is also political—regardless of how objectively neutral a teacher positions themselves. Interestingly, as I became increasingly aware of the political nature of my actions, I also became increasingly aware of how power and surveillance exert influence over my actions. Overall, I can see two ways in which surveillance fits into this: an internal fear about challenging hegemony (often based on my own surveillance) and an external reality shaped by standardized testing (specifically in the context of provincial diploma exams that are evaluated at an administration and board level) as another form of

surveillance. This authority shows up in my own practice and planning: not only in what I teach, but in how I teach it. I will use my reflections on my own planning and practice to examine how I am culpable in reproducing the political visions that I identified in the curriculum through CDA.

Student Agency

Student agency—the ability to direct one's own path and make decisions—is propped up as an educational goal in the curriculum. As discussed in chapter four, these discourses of agency are often problematic, reproducing hegemony by creating illusions of agency. I see this same problem when I grant students agency in dealing with controversial topics. This reveals two problematic pedagogical issues. Firstly, this supposed student agency ironically works in opposition to my goal of having students challenge the dominant ideologies, and secondly, positioning agency as something to be granted reinforces hierarchies that exist within educational discourses. Overall, we are suppressing autonomy and then packaging it back as granting agency to students (but only when it reinforces apolitical visions of education).

When students are left on their own to examine ideas that may challenge dominant narratives, they are likely to engage in more cyclic reasoning that reinforces their initial beliefs. As I explored in chapter four, students are likely to filter new information through existing worldviews (Wallin, 2012; Brown & Kelly, 2001).

Ironically, this works to create a situation where student agency is being granted to challenge hegemony, yet actually reinforces or reproduces it. One example from my class is an independent research project where I ask students to consider how current events reflect principles of liberalism (Alberta Education, Grade 12, Outcome 3.5, 2005, p. 23). My plan is designed to reinforce student agency through the choice of an area of research, yet when granted agency to research topics of interest, students often researched topics and perspectives that already aligned with their own. For example, when asked to research illiberal actions some students select the #Blacklivesmatter movement, but through their research began to evaluate the ethics of civil dissent, essentially beginning to critique those resisting the current institutions that reinforce racial inequality. At times, these projects and discussions serve to reinforce existing worldviews instead of challenging problematic beliefs about race. The independent nature of the project allows students to engage in a variety of current events or tackle what might be deemed by the curriculum as a controversial issue, however upon reflection I can see that such a set up does nothing to disrupt perspectives that are comfortably emmeshed in the dominant group. So, while the project may be designed to resist hegemonic ideologies, it can reinforce them.

The choice to increase access to student agency will decrease traditional methods by which teachers (myself included) measure authority. This reinforces my own

willingness to allow students to tackle supposedly controversial issues independently. I am more agitated, nervous, and uncertain about jumping into discussions that I presume 'feel' political to students, like feminism. This was especially true as a young teacher committed to being seen as neutral as a means of maintaining authority. Now, despite having more years of experience, I still find that when my lessons push against patriarchal norms that I feel more vulnerable to criticism, more likely to experience raised eyebrows, quiet sighs, and questions from others about the 'appropriateness' of such a discourse. Smith (2017) identifies this tension when females push back against the capitalist framework where "young women who do not conform to society's concept of the married, financially stable, and mature mother are positioned as the deviant 'other' and considered to be unfit to parent" (p. 383). In the same way, I feel an internalized pressure to not be an unfit teacher who pushes back against gendered expectations.

An example of this in my planning was a lesson on intersectional feminism and the famous five (Alberta Education, Grade 12, 2005, p. 21). I taught my grade 12 students intersectional and feminist theory (which is an addition to the curriculum), showed videos, made real life connections, and then left them to respond to questions individually. Upon reflection I realized that this was a conscious choice on my part to disengage from students who wanted to push back against the ideas and thus challenge my authority. In doing this, I also removed the opportunity for students to actively engage with the topic or hear from one another about their authentic experiences. Despite my

intention to disrupt dominant discourses through an intersectional approach I taught the material in a way that was very power-laden where I controlled the narrative in a way that reinforced my own authority and limited the agency of my students to respond.

Furthermore, I see my willingness to 'grant' student agency as an extension of the agency 'granted' to myself as a teacher. In this way, my willingness to use supposed student agency to either protect my own authority or create the illusion of student choice parallels the supposed agency that I have access to as a teacher. Firstly, even the language I find myself using as a I reflect suggests hierarchy, where agency is granted by some higher type of authority. Even if agency is something that can only be suppressed, I see an internalized belief that positions that power as something to be held. This has me questioning how this is held over me, and how I reproduce this power over students. For example, while I supposedly have agency in terms of how I teach, when I plan a unit on Indigenous ways of knowing, I must carefully tie anything I wish to assess to the curriculum. The program of studies ultimately exerts more power over the pedagogical choices in my classroom despite being told I have agency to make decisions as I must "teach the courses and programs of study that are prescribed, approved or authorized" (Alberta Education, 2012, 196.1(b), p. 132) by the Education Act. I do the same with my students, suggesting that they have agency and choice in certain areas, but ultimately holding them to certain tasks, assessments, and outcomes.

Damage

My own desire to have students understand the trauma or struggles of Indigenous persons has led to a teaching pedagogy where I am complicit in reproducing damage narratives. Not only that, but my own positionality as a settler means that my own knowledge and understanding is that of an outsider and shaped by the official curriculum. It has framed what I learnt, and the resources provided have shaped how I engaged and taught.

Compounding the problems of the official curriculum addressed in chapter four is my own pedagogy, which is steeped in white settler norms. For example, when I examine my long-range planning for teaching Indigenous history in grade 10, my unit plan consists of the following: notes on impacts of cultural contact (Alberta Education, 2005, Grade 10, outcomes 2.6, p. 21), chapter questions on residential school experiences that destroyed language (outcome 2.11, p. 22) a research project on land treaties that emphasizes the loss of land (outcomes 2.11-2.13, p. 23) and a position paper on the correct responses to historical injustices which emphasizes the ways in which the government can fix the problem (related issue 2). Finally, at one point I ended this unit by having my largely white class participate in a debate about what government actions were necessary considering the legacies of residential schools. This is an especially problematic choice. First, I taught Indigenous history through a damage framework (as

indicated above) but then I used that damage framework as the foundation for students to judge and evaluate next steps, without creating space for voices of those who do have a right to speak on this topic. These practices reflect Tuck's (2009) assertions about damage frameworks as I placed non-indigenous students and their voices in a central, authoritative position on a subject that was not theirs to speak to. I can see now how all of these choices reinforce settler norms both in what I teach, and how I taught it.

Put another way, not only do I position myself as an authority in this area (which is problematic based on my own limited perspectives and understandings or Indigenous knowledge) but my pedagogy focuses on the telling of Indigenous history through factual accounts, textbooks, and readings which are all white settler educational constructs (Madjidi & Restoule, 2008). Moreover, I reproduce the faults in the curriculum. I largely ignore Indigenous knowledge and history in grade 11, just as the program of studies does. Furthermore, I also fail to bring intersectional awareness to the portrayal of Indigenous history or contemporary experiences echoing the singular stories the curriculum produces. As a result, my planning and approach further compounds these issues in the curriculum as I reproduce the singular narratives in both how and what I teach. While critical Indigenous theory (Moreton-Robinson, 2009 Snelgrove, Dhamoon, & Corntassel, 2014, Fellner, 2018, p. 287) suggests highlighting Indigenous voices and ways of knowing into teaching, my classroom is very much colonialized by framing the authority

of myself and the textbook as neutral, which is another way in which I reinforce a damage framework.

Interestingly, this is one area I have been actively seeking to disrupt in my own practice. I was excited about challenging this narrative in my classroom last spring. Instead of textbook questions designed to "analyze perspectives on the imposition of the principles of liberalism (Aboriginal experiences, contemporary events)" (Alberta Education, grade 12, outcome 2.11, p. 21) I first taught my students what a damage narrative was, examined hegemony, and had them examine the existing curriculum with that framework. Then another COVID wave placed our class back online, and I seriously considered dropping the entire thing and returned to chapter questions. Why? Because they were at home, and I did not know what their parents would think. The surveillance I imagined was amplified in the online setting. I continued however, and had students examine texts by Indigenous authors about storytelling as a source of knowledge transmission via our online classes. I do not require students to keep their cameras on while online and found this also increased my uncertainty in disrupting my usual practice. I found myself unable to gauge how students were responding to the lessons and discussion as there were no cues: no nods of understanding, no straightening of posture when a new thought hit, and no facial reactions to judge whether a point challenged or resonated with them. Teaching online, without knowing who was watching or how they

were responding, decreased my ability to see and thus heightened my awareness of what could be instead. I filled the space with my own ideas about what objections or concerns could exist, and upon reflection see my own self-surveillance at work. The result was a desire to return to the comfort of what I had done in the past, which was a return to practices that are granted the title of neutrality even when compounding the damage narrative exemplified in the textbook.

Deficit

Critical discourse analysis reveals that the curriculum prioritizes certain content as normative which creates a binary that casts alternative perspectives as the other, deficient, and in need of intervention. As I discussed in chapter four, the verbs linked to outcomes position of the dominant ideology as something objective and neutral to be understood while positioning alternative views as lacking or needing fixing. This deficit discourse also shows up in my own planning and pedagogy, which I see in two ways: where groups are viewed through an extension of the damage framework in need of fixing, and through the prioritization of content as higher-level analysis versus simplified facts. Overall, this deficit discourse in my planning reinforces the marginalization of groups in my practice. I see this specifically in how my actions reinforce power dynamics implicit in the official curriculum, and in how I present certain knowledge as necessary but unimportant. Like

other examples in this chapter, this demonstrates how my pedagogy is influenced by, and also reinforces, certain politics.

Firstly, I can see that the deficit discourse in my classroom is also an extension of the damage discourse discussed previously. The shaping of damage narratives not only positions Indigenous persons as defined by trauma, but as needing support to become a part of dominant society. For example, discussion about the consequences or residential schools (Alberta Education, grade 10, outcome 2.11, p. 21) still positions Indigenous persons as outsiders needing support to move towards the success of the dominant group. Specifically, when I critically review the PowerPoints I use to teach about historical globalization I see examples of language that positions students within the dominant white settler constructs. For example, one slides links imperialism and eurocentrism, and then the next links imperialism to Canada's capitalist economy, English and French language, and diversity. As such, the dominant economic and linguistic norms in the lesson are tied to groups that have exerted or held power over others. Any references to other groups outside these dominant groups become othered. The official curriculum frames this deficit as alternative thoughts. For example, when speaking of groups that differ from those immersed in the status-quo I use words such as "them". This reveals my own internalized position within the dominant group and how it creates an enacted curriculum of deficit. It is further complicated by my limited perspective as an outsider

from groups that experience marginalization. Overall, my words can reinforce existing hierarchies which privilege one group as normative and another as different.

This is not unique to the discussion of colonialism in Canada. I can also see the planning of a class activity in grade 11 that recreates the conference of Berlin replicating the power of European countries over African nations. While the intention is to provide insight into power dynamics and injustice, the reality is that it recreates and casts students in a position of power, repositioning colonial nations as inferior and lacking a voice. Upon reflection I can see that the intention to create empathy for the impacts of colonialism has created this deficit discourse in my own language and presentation of information. Similarly, outcome 2.12 in grade 10 (Alberta Education, 2005) states that students will "evaluate various attempts to address consequences of imperialist policies and practices on Indigenous peoples in Canada and other locations" (p. 23). The implication is that the consequences are negative and marked by loss which reinforces this deficit narrative through an emphasis on what is missing, as opposed to what Indigenous ways of knowing have to offer. The result is that the I am singularly defining Indigenous persons by this narrative and leaving students to envision reconciliation as a process of becoming more like the dominant group.

Secondly, deficit discourses contribute to the othering of groups in society. This can be seen in the emphasis I place on certain topics and the secondary focus placed on

other topics. For example, in grade 12 (Alberta Education, 2005), the diploma exam always asks one question about the Haudenosaunee confederacy as an early example of democracy to cover outcome 2.1 (appreciate Aboriginal contributions to the development of ideologies (p. 21). So, all my PowerPoints have this one slide of information before we transition to our focus for the course which is the development of liberalism in Europe, and my commentary to the class is usually: you will be tested on this, so know it, and we will move on to more in-depth topics. As a result, I position this information and perspective about Haudenosaunee political structures as the other, something that is secondary in value to the main narrative of liberalism in the curriculum. Here the power held within the official curriculum as to what is deemed important influences what I teach and is reinforced by the implicit surveillance that comes from students performing well on the standardized tests.

Absence

Tackling the null curriculum – identifying what I leave out and why – is particularly revealing about my own fear of censure and subsequent self-surveillance. In this way, I can see hegemonic power flowing through the curriculum. I can see this showing up in my own planning in two ways: when I choose not to cover something because it is not required, or when I am tempted to offload a topic to students (reinforcing that supposed agency) through a textbook or research project. To delve deeper into this, I

will examine the framing of controversial topics in my own practice as overtly political, how that contributes to my pedagogical approaches to these topics, and the problematic reproduction of hegemony that occurs as a result.

Firstly, the curriculum defines controversial issues as topics about which "reasonable people may sincerely disagree" (Alberta Education, Program Rationale, 2005, p. 6). As I stated in chapter one, this positioning of some issues as contentious implies that other information is not, and therefore is neutral. The result is that controversial topics become overtly political and obscure the hidden political nature of the 'non-controversial' topics. Furthering this binary is that controversial topics are not linked specifically to any assessable outcomes but addressed in the program rationale as necessary to "prepare students to participate responsibly in a democratic and pluralistic society" (p. 6). For example, a lesson on the #metoo movement has no curricular backing and I am more prone to self-surveillance when tackling it. In these moments of planning, I find myself considering what I would say to a parent or student who accuses me of pushing a feminist agenda and weighing the complexity of that discussion against the curricular backing I might have. Sometimes I talk through how or why I would justify that discussion and sometimes I choose a different direction. Interestingly, I have never had someone complain, yet each semester when I consider raising a modern feminist topic, I work through the same internal surveillance.

When tackling topics that are considered overtly political (such as the #metoo movement), I can see an interesting intersection of privilege and position. In planning lessons that situate feminist issues as central, I am hyper aware of my own position as a feminist and my planning reflects this as my lessons on feminism create a lot of distance from my own voice or involvement. For example, I remember introducing the topic of feminism in a grade twelve classroom, and watching students react: interest, frowns, disengagement. Instead of delving into those reactions, I simply steered the conversation towards something of distance, focusing on the historical or geographical positioning of women in the official curriculum. In fact, it is easier for me to teach feminism in English classes then in Social Studies because in English I keep that neutral distance from the topic—it is framed as literary criticism—whereas in Social Studies, it is my lived and personal experience. Juxtaposed with my hesitation, I know male teachers who simply wrote #metoo on the board and then proceed to speak with authority on the topic. I have often asked myself why I lack the courage or knowledge to mimic such an approach. What I am starting to see is that this is an example of privilege, where my own intersecting identity pushes against the idea of neutrality.

My choice to stick to the official curriculum–suffrage, early feminists, and gender issues in developing countries—in comparison to other colleagues reveals how hegemony reproduces itself though me. When I combine my self-surveillance outlined above with

my observations of colleagues jumping into spaces that are not theirs to speak, I can see another form of power at work: where male teachers are granted neutrality on issues related to gender and female teachers are not. This reinforces not on this gender binary of males as rational and females as emotional, but it also reinforces the false binary that curriculum and classrooms can be apolitical, even if some teachers choose to be political.

I find myself wondering why these areas of absence are also the areas in which I feel the most fear about censure. Evens, Avery, & Pederson (1999) suggest that "we must recognize the deep-seated nature of the cultural forces at work in schools and society" (p. 222) and that show up in a variety of ways, including self-censure. I am coming to realize it is because these areas of self-censure (and thus absence) are the ones in which most directly challenge the neutrality of the curriculum and my role as a teacher. If something (like suffrage for example) is in the curriculum, then I cannot be accused of being biased. However, when I planned and taught a lesson on intersectionality, feminist theory, and the famous five, I was very conscious that by stepping outside the bounds of what the official curriculum taught, I was opening myself up to increased criticism. No criticism came my way, yet my own self-surveillance was very high. This reveals how conscious I am about the implications of pushing back.

I also tend to leave out discussions about what is absent from the official curriculum. Several factors may keep me from naming these absences within the

classroom: the lack of resources, my own lack of knowledge, lack of time (these reflect ideological structures that reinforce certain norms about teacher time and knowledge as well). All of this keeps me aligned with the curriculum, especially in grade 12 preparing for provincial exams. Another way I allow this absence discourse into the classroom is by putting that responsibility onto the students. Often, I allow contemporary events or controversial issues to fall under the guise of research which does not require me to say or instruct but rather ‘covers’ the outcome only in the student’s mind. This absence of challenge allows them to filter what they read through whatever discourses/perspectives they wish. For example, instead of engaging directly with students on the topic of feminism, I would present the choice to research historical or present-day feminist issues. This allows students to stay in an area of comfort (which does not challenge previously held perspectives or beliefs). However, it does not implicate me in the process, which is a way I remove myself from the discussion.

Conclusion

This analysis shows that I am not exempt from reproducing discourses that reinforce political visions. In fact, autoethnography reveals that the enacted curriculum in my classroom is just as political as the curriculum my CDA sought to analyze. Similarly, just as the curriculum is positioned as neutral by the government, so are teachers expected to be neutral. Ironically, my own experience suggests that this neutrality is

another means for the enacted curriculum to further the political visions of status quo. My concluding chapter reflects on the implications of this for myself and for future work as well.

Chapter Six: In reflection

My CDA in chapter four reveals how discourses of political neutrality operate on, and through, the Alberta grade 10, 11, and 12 Social Studies Curriculum. The analysis suggests that there is a lack of intersectional awareness that contributes to the positioning of the curriculum as apolitical. This neutral positioning results in singular stories about people and history being accepted as objective truth. In chapter five I employ autoethnography to consider how politicized curriculum impacts my personal pedagogy. I consider how power and surveillance shape my own voice and authority by identifying ways in which I am complicit in reinforcing political discourses, both in what I teach and how I teach it. Now, to conclude, I turn to the final research question and ask: how might critical theories and pedagogies be used to disrupt apolitical discourses of neutrality as a means of addressing inequities? Here I turn my focus to how repositioning education as political and giving students and teachers tools to name and examine those power structures creates space for new voices, representation, and opportunities.

This chapter brings my research questions together to suggest that power is wielded through curriculum, language, and teacher pedagogy and practice. I first identify how my research has served to answer the three parts of my research question. Then I consider the implications of these findings for educational discourses in Alberta, curriculum development, teacher pedagogy, and teacher education. Following this I make

recommendations on how to challenge these discourses and consider how these recommendations may impact educational discourses in Alberta. After this I acknowledge my own limitations and the limitations that exist within this work. Then I attempt to shift my gaze forward to what I see as the next steps for me, as both an educator and a researcher, while also envisioning how this research might be used to spur other inquiry, other critical analysis, and other questioning of 'neutral' institutions and documents.

Findings of chapter 4: a lack of intersectional awareness

My work with CDA in chapter four reveals that the Social Studies curriculum positions neutrality as achievable and thus reinforces existing power structures which marginalize those who are not a part of white, cis-gendered, settler, patriarchal identities. As a result, it becomes clear that discourses of political neutrality are reinforced by the maintenance of singular stories which reduce or erase identities.

Throughout the program of studies there remains a lack of intersectional awareness. While the official curriculum attempts to develop student agency and awareness of diversity, it falls short. It lacks an intersectionality to the representations that do exist. To summarize my findings, students may study feminism, but do not explore intersectional feminism, or how economic status compounds for an individual based upon their gender, or students learn what multiculturalism is, but do not explore the

various and unique ways racial, linguistic, or cultural identities impact a person individually or collectively. Additionally, outcomes related to Indigenous history in Canada are not only reinforcing grand narratives that fall short of relaying unique and localized Indigenous ways of knowing, but they also do not leave room to share diverse stories and experiences of diverse peoples within local Indigenous cultures. And while students learn about economic structures, there is no analysis of how those economic structures compound for people whose identities remove them from the dominant group in some way—nor is their acknowledgement that economic structures shape (or are shaped by) dominant discourses. The further absence of queer and disabled persons compounds this lack of intersectional awareness and representation, where singular stories and erasures combine for a problematic and absentee portrayal of inclusion.

Overall, my research suggests that by embracing discourses of political neutrality the current Social Studies program of studies serves to reinforce existing power structures that exacerbate inequities in society, all under the guise of neutral objectivity, yet these can be disrupted using critical theory and pedagogy. I would suggest, based on this work, that an intersectional approach to identity will be necessary to disrupt these discourses.

Findings of chapter 5: the power of surveillance

My work with autoethnography in chapter five highlighted the ways power continues to operate through me, often because of my own surveillance. This chapter reveals that

these discourses are active in my teaching and thus I am actively engaging in a political act.

I was surprised when I began to realize how deeply rooted the discourses I identify within the curriculum were embedded in my own practice, and I was equally surprised at the effort it took for me to step towards challenging them myself. I first became aware of this when I found myself struggling to write this section—I had incorrectly assumed that the reflective process would be easier to conduct as it was personal. However, I found the inverse to be true. The process of reviewing and analyzing my own work required me to sort through the difference between intentions and practice, to consider how the curriculum I enacted aligned (or lacked alignment) with my own values or pedagogical stances. In this way, I saw the ways in which power and self-surveillance work despite our intentions to challenge them at times.

To expand, my autoethnographic research suggests that self-surveillance exerts more power than I had initially thought, which reveals to me that there are more ways in which hegemony exerts its influence over teacher practice (or at least my own practice) than I would have initially thought. I realized that I exert self-surveillance in anticipated responses to concerns from administrators, parents, and students, despite never once having had those concerns legitimized by any action from any of the above. Furthermore, I found that self-surveillance also prevents me (or has me pause before) speaking into

spaces that I do have a legitimate voice in, such as issues relating to gender. Here I see the power that the 'neutral teacher' has over me still, as I strive to create distance from the topic to protect my own objectivity, as I observe in chapter five. As a result, my research suggests that despite my own awareness of hegemony, institutional power, critical theory, and critical pedagogies, power continues to work in me and through me. This idea reflects Ellsworth's (1989) observation that: "when participants in our class attempted to put into practice prescriptions offered in the literature concerning empowerment, student voice, and dialogue, we produced results that were not only unhelpful, but actually exacerbated the very conditions we were trying to work against" (p. 298). Overall, my autoethnographic analysis reveals that passive awareness of the discourses that reinforce existing inequalities is not enough, but rather, action is required on a pedagogical level to evoke meaningful change.

In response to my findings: shifting pedagogy

After examining the way in which both the curriculum and my own teaching reinforce power structures, I turn now to consider what can be done to create a more equitable approach that disrupts these discourses within the classroom. I believe an intersectional framework combined with an emerging storytelling pedagogy provide emerging counterpoints to the discourses identified. While I recognize these will not fully address the issues created by these discourses, they are steps that resist the problematic

narratives of singular stories and neutrality in the curriculum. This does not mean that power will cease to exist within educational documents and within teachers, but an awareness of its existence provides the opportunity to counter its detrimental impacts. With this in mind, I draw on my existing research to answer the third part of my research question: how might critical theories and pedagogies be used to disrupt apolitical discourses of neutrality as a means of addressing inequities?

As I consider how to bridge these two areas of my research: the need to disrupt singular stories and the need to undertake active pedagogical change, I am drawn to the role of storytelling. Brown & Kelly (2001) suggest that classrooms can use stories to "provide spaces for students to adapt knowledge to their own relevant experiences, excising sensibilities in the experiences of others" (p. 516). Put another way, storytelling becomes a way for students to gain insight into the experiences of those that differ from them. The metaphor of stories as mirrors (providing reflection), windows (providing new worlds), and doors (providing everyday scenarios) provides another way in which stories can be used to challenge singular narratives (Pennell, Barbara Wollak, David A. Koppenhaver, 2017, citing Botelho & Rudman, 2009). It is important to note that students need access to all three of these, not just a singular in-point. Too often, students who fit within the dominant hegemony are exposed to mirrors while students from minority groups are only exposed to windows. I suggest that storytelling is an active

pedagogical framework to challenge apolitical singular stories by providing a “new vantage point” (Cardinal & Clarson, 2004, p. 3). This is a way educators can take to address the problematic discourses in the curriculum and teacher practice.

One way I see storytelling changing my pedagogy is in using stories to remove my own voice from spaces where it does not belong. While I recognize the problem with male teachers speaking with authority on feminist issues, I can also recognize that there are spaces where my voice is equally problematic. Storytelling is a means to bring authentic experiences and voices in that center Indigenous, racially diverse, or LGBTQ2S+ perspectives. Modelling this for students provides them with opportunities to look through more ‘windows’ in an authentic manner and while ensuring students who find themselves outside the dominant group can see themselves in texts. For example, racism stops being a singular point covered by a paragraph in a textbook and instead is a complex story and experience that has implications and intersections with other parts of a person's life.

A curriculum infused with storytelling looks to normalize stories as a form of knowledge transmission. This challenges the neutrality of schools as it no longer privileges objective facts but creates space for a variety of experiences. When curriculum recognizes the “significance of the creative in knowledge production and sharing” (Christensen, 2012, p. 232) it is working towards what Battiste (2013) calls a “trans-

systemic" classroom (p. 103) —a pedagogical approach where Indigenous knowledge is an authentic part of the pedagogy, not an alternative or addition. Historical accounts are no longer told only through facts and dates that are memorized as objective, but through the experiences and accounts of those who experienced those events from a variety of perspectives. The curriculum stops being a list of dates or facts to memorize and could become an entry point into examining how historical accounts can reflect a worldview, where students can analyze a story to understand how it creates or reflects a perspective on historical events. In short, storytelling becomes an active countermeasure.

Furthermore, infusing my own practice with storytelling is an active way to decenter my voice and position as the neutral authority for students. Instead of sharing history or perspectives of others through my own words or lens (which happens both explicitly and implicitly) it means making space for other voices and experiences to speak in authentic ways in my class. Not only this, but by bringing authentic voices of others into the classroom teachers are participating in "an exercise in recognition" (hooks, 1994, 41). For example, a storytelling pedagogy is one that uses excerpts from Wagamese's *Indian Horse*, paired with an interview of him explaining his choices for how and why he wrote that chapter about residential schools instead of a textbook timeline and list of traumas created by residential schools. In this case, using stories not only decenters my voice, but it also decenters white settler knowledge forms as well.

Implications

Overall, the implications of my research suggest that when neutrality is held up as an ideal, it serves to position certain ideas, identities, and pedagogies as normal, and thus everything else becomes the other or alternative. Examples of this in my research include positioning capitalism as a central and unquestioning ideal, positioning male identities as necessary in understanding history, and positioning factual accounts as necessary for knowledge acquisition. This is compounded by the belief that neutrality is attainable and necessary, thus legitimizing these identities. As a result, my research suggests that even when teachers are aware of such positioning, they are susceptible to reproducing these power dynamics and discourses. Reaching forward, I now ask what are the implications of this work for education in Alberta, for curriculum development, for teacher education, and for teacher practice?

Implications in Alberta discourse about education

As I mention in chapter one, discussions about maintaining the neutrality of education have dominated the public discourse. The impact here is that we have politicians claiming apolitical education as the ideal—something only their political party can offer. Education, in particular curriculum, has become a political tool to appeal to a partisan base. The emphasis on removing left-wing or right-wing ideology from the classroom distracts from the more critical issue: that education is always political. When

we allow partisan politics to label curriculum as neutral or political, we are failing to examine the deeper implicit ways in which curriculum reflects and shapes dominant ideological stances. For example, the current curriculum's attempt at inclusion (as mentioned in chapter four) may be well intended but it serves to other Indigenous and Francophone identities by categorizing them as alternative (and ignoring other specific perspectives and identities), and so continues to be an unchallenged framework. Additionally, by framing education as neutral it implicitly positions teachers who seek to challenge these frameworks as political—often creating a public discourse of criticism, often led by political leaders themselves. This normalizes certain norms while being actively punitive to those that challenge them (like Smith's characterization of teacher's as being anti-resource and indoctrinating students in chapter five).

In response, I believe that educational discourses in Alberta need to stop claiming neutrality and begin to actively acknowledge the political nature of education. By repositioning education as political the discussion can shift towards acknowledgement of what is present and absent. Or put another way, educational discourses need to stop defending political visions as neutral and start the work of identifying the intersecting power dynamics that flow through all aspects of education: policies, leaders, boards, teachers, communities, and curriculum. When we fail to see the intersectionality of these educational systems and stakeholders, we position them as apolitical and assume that

their ability or right to speak to the curriculum is both acceptable and objective. As I pointed out in regard to gender and Indigenous knowledge, this is a false assumption that should be challenged. To start, there can be a consideration of how intersectionality exists (or a critique when it does not exist) in the spaces where educational decisions are made. For example, initially the new k-6 curriculum advisory group was entirely male (Ross, 2020). Public disapproval led to this group being expanded, but the lack of female representation initially does mirror the lack of focus on gender issues in the existing curriculum.

Implications in the field of curriculum development

When it comes to curriculum development in Alberta, the current k-6 draft controversy serves as a warning to further normalizing politicized documents. However, the larger issue in relation to curriculum development is the idea that knowledge and pedagogy can be apolitical in nature. Just as educational institutions and curriculum can wield power that is used in public discourses, so can the ways in which knowledge and pedagogy are used wield power in how curriculum reinforces or challenges hegemony. An example of this is the privileging of colonial versions of history and settler-based knowledge. The result of elevating these frameworks means that even when the existing curriculum attempts to be inclusive of Indigenous ways of knowing, those ways of knowing are presented in way that are disingenuous or hollow to the very teachings.

Granting legitimacy to one type of knowledge devalues the other as subjective or unreliable in contrast, and this juxtaposition reinforces the political underpinnings of what is positioned as neutral.

Based upon my research I would recommend that curriculum be designed with an understanding of, and focus on, intersectionality. For example, instead of racism being a singular and separate point to know amongst a list of ideas, how race intersects with economics, politics, access to health care during crisis, (and more) becomes the focus on the curriculum. Doing this would create a break from the existing frameworks and discourse that privilege certain singular stories at the expense of the authentic experiences of others. Furthermore, we should also look at expanding how curriculum validates certain knowledge as objective and other knowledge systems as alternative. One example of this is to not only use storytelling as a means of teaching Indigenous history, but to legitimize storytelling as a means of knowledge transmission itself.

Implications for teacher education

The ways in which new teachers are encouraged to see and approach education is significant to this discussion too. When I think back to my own learning, I was never asked to challenge the authority of the texts that shaped what I learnt or taught. The implications of my research suggest we often reproduce power dynamics by socializing or assimilating new teachers into the ways things have always been. This happens at

times with the best intentions: sharing existing resources, suggesting approaches for areas of study, mentoring in pedagogical approaches. While this is true of student teachers it is also true of how we mentor and socialize young teachers as well. The inappropriate debate on how to respond to residential school I conducted was something I was encouraged to do by other teachers in my school, as was the conference of Berlin that placed students into the role of colonizers. In fact, I have given that resource to my own student teachers and encouraged them to try it too. My research and reflections suggest that this is a way that I am reproducing these damaging discourses. Perhaps what is needed is space for incoming teachers to share new approaches and ideas that they have learnt. Too often inexperience, especially in managing classrooms, creates a hierarchy that extends to knowledge and pedagogy. Ironically, these are areas that incoming teachers have the most recent and up-to-date knowledge and instruction in.

Part of what would be helpful in countering this would be to create space for new teachers (at both the practicum level and the introductory level) to be able to function in their roles without relying on existing resources. As stated above, those problematic activities I have done in class were passed onto me when I was struggling for time or engaging activities. I, in turn, pass those ideas along to others for the same reason. Too often, the desire to do something different requires new resource creation which, combined with the increased pressure of learning to teach full-time, becomes too much.

The result is that the same pedagogy and resources continue to be implemented as teachers struggle to survive the first few years.

Additionally, the pressure exerted to use similar pedagogical methods or resources often works as a form of power that socializes teachers into the existing norms of the school. To combat this, new teachers need support and time to bring fresh perspectives that challenge existing power dynamics. When I reflect on my own experiences and see how power has worked through me and in me, what I see is the need to support and encourage teachers who are just starting to learn about education, or are in their first years, to challenge the existing structures are around them.

Implications for teacher practice

The implications of positioning education, curriculum, and my pedagogy as neutral has me questioning my own acts of surveillance. As I mentioned, I can see how my actions reinforce power structures and problematic discourses. Sometimes this happens by actively engaging in a damage framework, using deficit-language in my teaching, allowing absences to stand, or distancing myself from topics that feel more political than others. However, the most profound implication for teacher practice comes from how challenging the act of autoethnography was—that reflective practice is uncomfortable. However, the act of being reflective becomes an essential part of

transforming criticism (like my CDA) to actual pedagogy. This work was necessary to be able to name the ways in which I reproduce hegemony in my own practice.

I recommend that we, as educators, be willing to push beyond discomfort to give students the tools and skills that help them break apart and understand the power structures created by the official, enacted, and null curriculum. Here is where an awareness of critical theory and critical pedagogies empowers teachers to identify discourses that reinforce existing power structures, and then develop resources and teach in such a way that names these structures in order to then dismantle them. When we can see these discourses at work, we are more capable of addressing them. This presents an opportunity for hands-on teacher collaboration and development where teachers have time to search out resources that bring diverse voices or new pedagogical approaches into their classroom. Teacher PD that allows for this degree of hands-on collaboration which results in tangible lessons and resources becomes an active step towards countering problematic discourses.

Recommendations

Overall, my research suggests that attempts at inclusion must be interrogated to reveal who is represented, who is misrepresented, and who is absent, all while keeping in mind that inclusion in and of itself does not do enough to challenge dominant discourses. To do this, shifting the focus of both the official and enacted curriculum from their

current discourses is necessary. As such, I see a need to use critical pedagogies to shift focus away from problematic discourses, which I outline below.

Supposed student agency becomes developing student voice

Instead of developing a false sense of agency that reinforces our own authority, students could learn how to challenge the authority of texts. When teachers engage in discussion about representation (or lack thereof) we provide an opportunity for students to recognize the difference between a text which misrepresents people and groups and a text that "acknowledges and values the voices of those formally silenced of unheard" (Johnson, 1999, p. 13). This creates space for students to question the authority of the text's portrayals and choices. When they are exposed to a critical theory, they can ask questions about who is represented or silenced, and they can challenge the perspectives that are presented to them. When the authority of the texts is no longer positioned as objective and thus needs to be taken as such, students can explore complex ideas and issues. When we stop positioning the class content or knowledge to be learnt as neutral, we can start teaching students how to unpack political messaging.

Damage discourses shifts to desire framework

Critical Indigenous scholars (Moreton-Robinson, 2009 Snelgrove, Dhamoon, & Corntassel, 2014) suggest that we should not allow the singular narrative in the classroom to be only damage. Again, Tuck's (2009) writing on damage-research provides direction

for educational structures as she proposes that "even when communities are broken and conquered, they are so much more than that – so much more than this incomplete story" (2009, p. 416). So how does one reshape these incomplete stories? Battiste suggests that "Indigenous knowledge must begin with Indigenous peoples' providing the standards and protections that accompany the centering of Indigenous knowledge" (2013, p. 72). This requires a shift in how we perceive and represent both the dominant and historically othered groups in society. Instead of groups of people defined by the "all-too-easy, one-dimensional narratives of damage" (Tuck, 2009, p. 417) space must be made for "self-crafted images" (p. 417) and "complex personhood" (p. 412). In doing so, singular narratives of damage are unraveled and room for new voices are created, where stories "about longing, about a present that is enriched by both the past and the future" (p. 417) provide students with a more nuanced opportunity to see loss as "desire for what was" and as a result, "hope" (p. 417). The injustices of the past are not removed or erased, but the way in which they are relevant to Indigenous experiences becomes defined by Indigenous persons themselves.

Increasing representation and voice

The singular stories created by deficit discourses can be challenged by increasing the representation of those defined by deficits. Too often the information students access about groups that are different than the dominant group are filtered through the

perspective (directly or indirectly) of those in power. The result is that those in deficit are defined by differences and students are left to envision how that difference could be erased. For example, one way to acknowledge both authentic voices and Indigenous ways of knowing would be to infuse the classroom with Indigenous authorship. If education has allowed a colonial worldview to "locate [Indigenous persons] in their time and space" (Battiste, 2013, p.37) then teachers committed to decolonization will look for voices and experiences that write back against that location. To challenge the stereotypes and sweeping narratives that keep Indigenous persons and experiences theoretical in student's minds, students must begin to see that "each community will have its own stories and understandings of how they have come to live in the world" (p. 75). Storytelling can provide students with a perspective for knowledge acquisition that breaks free from traditional educational structures, placing emphasis and value and meaning not only on what is being shared, but how it is being shared (Cardinal & Clarkson, 2004). For example, the Oka crisis is taught in grade ten, and students are given a timeline and asked to examine perspectives on the events. However, what about adding the story "A Blurry Image on the 6 O'Clock News" ? This text by Drew Hayden Taylor captures "a potent symbol of what we are still not quite able to do right – to live together" (p.6), allowing students to not just know events but consider the complicated people those events impact.

Teachers who understand that the "form of dissemination matters' (Christensen, 2012, p. 233) can utilize diverse authors and their stories to teach knowledge in a way that creates empathy through the experience of listening to the story. This is because the "story itself gives you tools. It gives you humor. It gives you pathos. It gives you drama. It gives you wild fantasy. It gives you morality. It gives you a value structure" (Schorcht, & Wagamese, 2008, p. 77). Stories create spaces where students are not studying learning about central and alternative knowledge. Instead, students are exposed to voices that have unique values that are not 'alternative'. What is required is a willingness to re-imagine what the classroom should look like, seek out the stories of others, and allow those voices to speak into spaces to contribute to the dismantling of the frameworks that make our classrooms. By bringing in stories of people traditionally marginalized or unheard of, students are immersed in the perspectives of those previously defined as the other. Placing a story from the perspective of that person shifts the focus from how they can become more like the reader to how the reader can understand and move closer to them.

Limitations

As I make these recommendations, I recognize the limitations within the CDA, and my autoethnography. I also acknowledge my position, professionally and personally, influences my findings and conclusions, including what I fail to see and thus leave out. Just as the curriculum can produce singular stories, so can my research if I do not take

care to recognize and name my own limitations. For example, I live in an upper-middle class community and teach in a secondary community that is middle-class, white, and conservative in nature. My daily interactions are with people who mirror my positionality in many ways.

As I do this work from within my own sphere, I recognize that it would be enhanced by collaboration with others who have differing backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. As such, I acknowledge that what I see as ways forward is limited by the scope of my positionality and perspective. Recognizing this, I have tried to frame my research within the context I work and live in, seeking to use reflexivity to shed light on how I reproduce power. I use Egbo's (2019) anti-racist framework to inform this work as she suggests that when we gain an awareness of inequity, we are more likely to become "agents of change" (p. 260). Considering this, the intent of this research is to consider how critical theories and pedagogies provide opportunity to challenge singular stories by identifying and resisting the power that creates them, while also identifying how these discourses manifest in our own practice. All of this is done with the intent of examining and dismantling existing discourses of political neutrality.

Areas and questions for future study

As I conclude, I can see two areas that are of interest for continuing research. The first considers broadening the scope of analysis, while maintaining the research focus on

researching up (the curriculum) and in (teacher pedagogy). The second is by extending the research focus to how implementing the recommendations for teacher practice may impact students.

Firstly, I would be interested in how this type of work would look when conducted by a range of individuals with differing experiences and identities and how my own positionality and findings would be challenged or reinforced. Some questions I would consider might be: What does an intersection of perspectives and reflection on my research questions look like? Would collaboration shift the very scope of the research itself? And are there recommendations that we would all reach consensus on? What different recommendations would people have from the ones I see now? In short, what could I learn from others who ask the same (or similar, or purposefully different) questions from a different position?

Secondly, after researching upwards and inwards, my next step could be to research outward as well. After examining the curriculum that shapes what we teach, and examining how I teach myself, I am curious how students would respond to these actions I see as recommended next steps. Some questions I would ask would be: How do students respond to these discourses? Can they apply critical theory and pedagogies to historical and current events? What impact does storytelling have in a Social Studies classroom?

Does the application of these theories and shifting these discourses create a greater understanding of inequity and develop citizenship?

In order to elicit meaningful change, it is clear that much more work is necessary. Too often the questions we ask (and research we do) about how students perform, or are impacted by schools, are taken up as student-centered problems; I would suggest that this work is a potential stepping stone for interrogation of the structures that marginalize students instead of studying marginalized students. Potts & Brown (2015) suggest that "we live in a world with shared dominant myths that we encounter every day and we need to make these visible in order to address them" (p. 37). Making these discourses visible provides opportunities to reconsider not only what we teach, but how we teach it.

Conclusion

When we allow the official curriculum to remain 'neutral' we normalize singular stories as objectively true at the expense of diverse and equitable representation. Furthermore, we allow teacher pedagogy to further normalize certain hegemonic beliefs and practices while othering alternative approaches. In addition, anyone who goes along with the singular stories is engaging in a political act, but it is not viewed as political. In contrast, those who challenge these discourses are more prone to scrutiny or reprimand. Overall, by identifying and naming these discourses in curriculum, and how they filter

into our own practices as educators, we can actively work to counter them in our classrooms.

As decisions about the future of Alberta's new curriculum continue to be debated in public spaces, these discussions are compounded by partisan politics and social media debates. The result is that Alberta feels like a difficult place to teach at times. The comments I open with from 2019 are still very much at work today. On April 9th 2022, Premier Kenney gave a speech at his leadership convention. Included in this was the statement: "we are getting rid of critical race theory, wokeness, activist teachers, and inappropriate sexual content" (as reported by Duane Bratt on Twitter, April 2022, https://twitter.com/DuaneBratt/status/1512846096220925953). Here we see that teacher neutrality is held up as an ideal, but really is a concealing force that fortifies existing political and power structures. Furthermore, when asked if the new curriculum is anti-racist (or if she could define critical race theory) Education Minister LaGrange evaded answering either question directly (April 9th, 2022). As we move towards a new curriculum in Alberta, this disdain for anything political continues, renewing the false narrative that neutrality is ideal. Until we disrupt this discourse, this false narrative will continue to be dominant.

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