

Teaching a “Social Studies without Guarantees”: Disrupting Essentialism, Ameliorating Exclusions and Planting Seeds

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Abstract

Social studies, burdened with the responsibility of elucidating the complexity of the cultural and social world of the student, inherits from its disciplines (history, geography, civics) a legacy of racialization and exclusion. For the past few years, I have worked through and from within this legacy to highlight some ways that the pedagogical imperatives held by the students can be used to reshape popular and taken-for-granted notions of who the “we” is in social studies inquiry. Specifically, I focus on Stanley’s (2014) exclusionary premise, emphasizing how the discipline and curriculum privileges specific notions of the national and provincial world of the students. Through this, I offer some insights into the ambivalences, resistances and acknowledgments of the students when confronted with unsettling social and historic understanding.

The traditional model of depending on one semester in one course to interrupt a lifetime of White supremacist reinforcement is woefully insufficient in the attempt to prepare White educators to teach in urban settings.

—Bree Picower, “The Unexamined Whiteness of Teaching: How White Teachers Maintain and Enact Dominant Racial Ideologies”

Becoming skilled at decoding the text, while irrefutably essential for any reader to become fluent, is sorely insufficient when not married with other demands necessary for negotiating today’s text-saturated world.

—Lisa Patel Stevens and Thomas W. Bean, *Critical Literacy: Context, Research, and Practice in the K-12 Classroom*

For the last few years, I have been engaged in teaching a “social studies without guarantees” to elementary teacher candidates. In many ways, teaching as a whole lacks any semblance of guarantee; once students leave the critical space of the classroom, they are left to their own volition. Those critical proclivities that I attempt to make part of my students’ conceptions of the world are reflected in the two introductory quotes. In short, my approach to the social studies classroom addresses racialized supremacy and the decoding of the social world, itself a textual consequence of historic, geographic and political interaction between people. Who “we” are as people living in a socially determined world and how this manifests itself in relations of supremacy becomes the pivot from which I teach social studies.

In this paper, I engage this persistent dialectic between the text of the social studies space and the ways in which this can be both a site of racialized supremacist reconstitution and contestation. To do this, I offer some reflections on my observations as a racialized white male teacher, confronting my own experiences as they crash up against my own scholarly and epistemic commitments. Consequently, I explore my own personal experiences but do so in a

necessarily critical fashion (Smith, 2013). While I don't want to suggest that my own experiences are (or should be) reflective of the struggles, confrontations and necessary frustrations of the social studies context for all, I do want to illustrate how the critical text of the social studies classroom is fraught with ambivalence, quizzicality and, by attempting to work through exclusions, productively frustrating.

The Epistemic and Pedagogical Context

Disciplinary context. For the past two years, I have been attempting to plant the seeds of dissent against a racialized pedagogical and educative context in which whiteness manifests itself regularly (Carr & Lund, 2007; Levine-Rasky, 2000; Marx, 2004; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005). Scholars theorizing the racialization of space adeptly argue that space is not neutral and instead reflects and (re)produces racializations and its consequences (Baldwin, Cameron, & Kobayashi, 2011; Frankenberg, 1993; Goldberg, 1993; Kobayashi, 2003). The classroom space is much like this as well. As Sleeter (2001) argues in relation to the American context (a pattern that translates relatively well to Canada), there is an "overwhelming presence" of racialized whiteness. The classroom space is one of whiteness, one in which racializations can fester as something "they" are but not "us," the neutral whites who are not confronted with our own racialized identifications. Consequently, there is an imperative to emphasize a reading of the world, the social studies curriculum and the classroom space in a different way.

This space is not just a geographic space of whiteness—history bears down upon the discourse of the classroom with its racialized and exclusionary might. In his work theorizing an anti-racist history, Stanley (1998; 2000; 2002; 2011) makes this abundantly clear by suggesting that the social inhabited space is a product of historically grounded racializations and their attendant exclusions. The historical genesis of these categories (Banton, 1998; Hannaford, 1996) and the brutal (and unseen) projects of colonialism (Smith, Ng-A-Fook, Berry, & Spence, 2011; Stanley, 2009) have shaped what we know of the world that is addressed through the social studies curriculum. The social studies space is thus a product of historical and geographic imposition, a space in which the racialized legacies of a politically and culturally violent geography and history impress their views on the epistemologies of our teacher candidates.

The space also remains highly contested with regards to citizenship. Notions of "nationness" and citizenship within the classroom generally reflect the ostensible needs of the populace at the time (von Heyking, 2006), suggesting that citizenship education is more purposive in its existence as a social tool. Indeed, the very notion of active citizenship that defines many perceptions of citizenship (Davies, 2006; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) implies responses to the context in which one finds her or himself. As with much research, however, this research is divorced from "on the ground" teaching (a complication that teacher candidates often lament). Aside from the oft-levied complaint that it is too time consuming, citizenship education frequently reflects the principles of character education (learning and cultivating good and positive dispositions), something Ponder and Lewis-Farrell (2009) notice when asking children what constitutes the "good citizen" (p. 130-131). As noted about the English context, the "dominant tradition has been for citizenship education that reinforces the status quo by binding students to a superficial and sanitised version of pluralism that is long on duties and responsibilities, but short on popular struggles against race inequality" (Gillborn, 2006a, p. 99). The persistence of a discourse on citizenship that focuses on "responsible citizenship" and the role of government suggest that, although the expectations encourage planned action, the problems Gillborn elucidates will get reflected in our context.

Lived context. All of this occurs under the political and cultural influence of the social context in which the pedagogical development is occurring. Specifically, we are all training to be educators (myself included) in the Canadian province of Ontario, a province that, as part of the self-congratulatory multicultural nation of Canada, prides itself on notions of inclusion and tolerance. However, the notion that Ontario is wholly inclusive and free from the discourses around race and other means of unequal categorization are not supported in the literature (e.g. Ali, Salem, Oueslati, Mc Andrew, & Quirke, 2011; Van de Kleut, 2011). Exacerbating this is the ever-increasingly intense focus on numeracy and literacy skills for students in the classroom, focal points that ultimately minimize time spent on doing potentially interrogative and investigative social studies work.

The curricular context, at first glance, appears to support notions of inclusion and equitable representation. Subtle reminders persist, however, that serve to bifurcate the global population into us/them categories. For example, the curriculum uses past-tense language to represent Aboriginal (indigenous) populations as having existed in the past, relegating their culture and experiences beyond the current moment. As noted, students in grade six should be able to, “describe the attitude to the environment of various First Nation groups (e.g., Nisga’a, Mi’kmaq, James Bay Cree) and show how it affected their practices in daily life” (Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 31). Why do we have to assume that attitudes affected practices and do not still inform Aboriginal encounters with the environment? Indeed, the whole curricular area for grade six students is titled, “First Nation Peoples and European Explorers” (Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 31),¹ yet the emphasis appears to be on Aboriginal peoples only as they existed in relation to European explorers. Examples such as this highlight the ways through which subtlety in the social studies curriculum frames and creates difference.

Finally, the context itself is structured by the pedagogical lessons that I create and manage. As a racialized white and heterosexual male, my subjectivity is representative of the “normative template of Canadianness.” In this way, the dominant stories told of who we are inform and correspond to my own relationship with the nation. In other words, my own conceptions of Canadian socio-political life correspond to the dominant stories that I seek to unravel. Without question, the congruence that inheres within my relationship to these stories necessarily shapes my own teachings of Canada, however much I may work against the grain of normative teachings.

The course. The course itself occupies a space within the nexus of my own pedagogical commitment, the nature of education in Ontario, an educational history plagued by turbulence and strife (Gidney, 1999; Pinto, 2012) and the racialized context of the classroom space. Within this space, I work to carve out a location from which students can appreciate the complexity of social knowledge in a way that is pedagogical and applicable to the professional requirements of teaching in Ontario.

An obligation to cover curricular demands ultimately frames how the course is structured and taught. While social studies and what constitutes it as an area of inquiry is complex and difficult to define (see Case & Abbott, 2013; Maxim, 2003), the course followed the principles and subject areas outlined by the curriculum. In this way, the focus on history, geography, citizenship, global and environmental issues was done through the subject areas in the

¹ It is worth noting that the Ministry of Education has released a revised version of the social studies curriculum and that this expectation is from the older version, which was used to teach the teacher candidates.

curriculum which includes studies of government, Aboriginal peoples and their relationship to European explorers, the local community and the geography of Canada (to name a few).

There were two assignments for the course. First, students were expected to critique a pedagogical and academic resource relevant to teaching social studies, an assignment that was designed to foster and encourage critical encounters with ideas and resources central to current social studies pedagogy. This assignment elicited various types of responses from students, with some passively critiquing the resources with others enthusiastically exploring the issues and ideas present in both resources. The second assignment was a unit plan that was intended to help students generate ideas about implementing ideas in the classroom. This assignment, while helpful in generating instructional materials for the teacher candidates, often reflected simplistic discussions of complex social issues. For example, the three Ss approach to representing multicultural contexts (saris, samosas and steel bands), an approach that prioritizes the inclusion of lifestyle differences as a means of improving the lives of the excluded (Troyna & Williams, 1986), dominated.

The Literacies of Social Studies

In light of this epistemic and pedagogic context that gets shaped through the imposition of historic, geographic and political legacies, it is essential that social studies be (re-)read and done so against the grain of taken-for-granted notions. In some ways, this is difficult given the conceptual ambiguity and multiplicity of definitions for the field itself (Case & Abbott, 2008, 2013; Evans, 2004; Kirman, 2008; Maxim, 2003; Wright, 2005). For this reason, I structured my course around different literacies, namely historical, geographic and citizenship based ones.

The investigations of exclusions were filtered through a variety of literacies in the classroom space. When teaching history for example, my emphasis was on historical literacy (Goudvis & Harvey, 2012; Metzger, 2007; Walker, 2006). Specifically, I focused on the disciplinary practices of historical thinking (Lévesque, 2008; Seixas & Morton, 2013; Seixas, 2006), a set that, when used collectively, “tie[s] ‘historical thinking’ to competencies in ‘historical literacy’” (Seixas, 2006, p. 2). As with literacy skills more broadly, students learn to read history as a living text, one that is interpreted and analyzed for meaning. I taught geography in a slightly different fashion but using the same set of principles. Instead of focusing on the methods of historical thinking as the framework for being historically literate, students were encouraged to think of space in more subjective fashions. Space was something that had to be read, not something that had an existence independent of human interaction. The candidates were also encouraged to conceptualize geography in relation to their literacy practices in the classroom with one reading focusing explicitly on the suturing of geography with literacy in the classroom (Hinde, 2012). The course also focused on citizenship, a practice that, in its active conceptualization, requires a re-reading of the world. There was an emphasis in my pedagogy with fostering positive dispositions towards justice oriented citizenship, a model through which teachers, “work to engage students in informed analysis and discussion regarding social, political, and economic structures” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 243). Through this, I encouraged the teacher candidates to think of how they and their students might re-read the world around them in light of the historic and geographic lessons that are central to the curriculum that they would be teaching. The final week focused on global education and citizenship, a class that modeled its literacy development around similar ideas found in the previous week’s discussion on citizenship education.

Ultimately, the production of lessons, knowledges and ideas entailed a critically literate look at what constitutes social studies. As critical literacy scholars note, a critical approach to literacy

entails, “being able to tease out various agendas, purposes, and interests represented in texts” (Stevens & Bean, 2007, p. 4). As a field concerned with the production of knowledge about the social world, social studies necessarily calls for the critical faculties of a literate student and teacher. The critical literacy of social studies fostered within my pedagogic space involved the critical examination of the ‘text of social studies’ and consequently, a deconstruction of the agendas and purposes that inhere in the text, subtext and discourse of the field. What follows is an elucidation of my experiences confronting, constructing and working through this critical literacy of social studies, one that ultimately makes impossible a social studies with guarantees.

Stripping Social Studies of its Guarantees

Over the last two years, I’ve had the opportunity to teach four sections of social studies methods, itself one half of the “Personal and Social Studies” methods course that runs in the winter term (January through the end of March). As one half of a course, the social studies component runs for only five weeks for a total of 17.5 hours of instructional time, itself not enough time to successfully contend any intrinsically essentialist or racialized orientations to knowledge and epistemology (as if any amount of time could). Given the breadth and confusion around the concept of social studies as a term itself (Case & Abbott, 2008, 2013; Maxim, 2003; Wright & Hutchison, 2010; Wright, 2005), the self-imposed epistemological imperative to re-shape student conceptions of the text of social studies seemed to take on greater levels of import and frustration. This process of re-shaping social studies as a critically literate exploration of social knowledge necessitated a process through which I stripped the subject of its guarantees. Specifically, the need to re-shape perceptions of the field meant that I had to remove any of its guarantees about knowledge, the comforts of the “grand narrative,” the simplistic notions of citizenship and the visible and pervasive foreclosure on understandings about the global context. Each of these contestations was filtered through my own anti-racist epistemological commitments, a process that impelled me to “shift out of neutral” (Kelly & Brandes, 2001) by working through a politics of anti-racism (Dei, 1993; 1996; Okolie, 2005). The political approach to teaching social studies was done purposively to account for what scholarship has made abundantly clear—teacher candidates frequently reflect tropes of whiteness in their ontological views and/or exhibit anger/frustration in the perceived threat to their racialized subjectivity (Aveling, 2006; Marx, 2004; Solomon et al., 2005). Consequently, the political orientation to social studies within the confines of the classroom was done to account for an expected and realized resistance on the part of the students.

Encountering colonial Canada. Throughout the course, I heeded Stanley’s (2000) call for a post-colonial anti-racism, a call that is especially salient in light of Lawrence and Dua’s (2005) claim that the colonized Aboriginal voice is excluded from anti-racism projects. In an attempt to forego this and risk colonizing the anti-racist space (a possibility that is invariably present as a white male educator), I worked to foreground and privilege the idea of decolonizing the social studies space, effectively removing any guarantees of intellectual safety in the classroom for both myself and the students. The first work at engaging colonialism was in our lesson on history, a discipline ripe for anti-racist engagement (Stanley, 1998; 2000; 2002) and one that implicates everyone in the classroom space, including myself, as I work along with the students to understand our own relationships to history. Indeed, the study of historical contexts gives rise to the creation of spaces through which students can confront organized exclusions that themselves produce negative consequences for the excluded (Stanley, 2014).

The first encounter with relations of colonialism came as part of a lesson on the methods of historical thinking. In particular, I used the historical thinking benchmark focused on the moral and ethical dimension of history to broach a discussion on colonialism. As Seixas (2006) notes,

“historians attempt to hold back on explicit moral judgments about actors in the midst of their accounts. But, when all is said and done, if the story is meaningful, then there is a moral judgment involved” (p. 11). To broach this with my students, I presented to them a rather uneventful picture of a Sir John A. MacDonald (Canada’s first Prime Minister) statue being unveiled. I began by asking them what they could glean from this picture, who it was and why it might be significant. What followed this was a different picture of the same statue after it had been vandalized. Instead of being a simple aimless act of vandalism, the perpetrator(s) had been purposeful in defacing the statue with various epithets reflecting what might be expected as an emotional response of a colonized people. Scrawled over the base and body of the statue were the words “murderer” and “colonizer” and the phrase “this is stolen land.” Augmenting this act of resistance against the valorization of one of the architects of Canadian colonial oppression was copious amounts of red paint, ostensibly symbolizing the blood that adorns the dead hands of MacDonald.

I asked students what they thought of this second picture and, more importantly, why they thought it was vandalized the way it was as a means of ascertaining whether or not they recognized the banality of colonial markers (Stanley, 2009) in everyday monuments. In discussing this act of vandalism (or moment of resistance depending on your viewpoint), I informed students of MacDonald’s rather racist views (Stanley, 2011) in the face of prevailing social views that laud his accomplishments. In this moment, I worked through, with the students, what it meant to live in a state structured in dominance (Hall, 2002), complementing earlier discussions of the ways in which curricular exclusions are reflective of a national history predicated on collective amnesia. In part, this was a response to a seeming lack of exposure with any ideas as to why the statue was defaced the way it was. Consequently, we worked to better understand how it is that colonialism elides the organized exclusions and racializations of the colonized that it depends on.

Acts of dominance historically, however, are not confined to colonial relations. Neglecting the experiences of other groups would be a reflection of exclusionary practices themselves. In recognizing this, I did not wish to reinforce what Shadd (2001) calls the, “[obliteration of Black presence] from the Canadian psyche” (p. 11) or undertake such practice in relation to any other racialized non-white group. Yet, such obliteration appears, in hindsight, to have been undertaken with unseen and inadvertent fervor. In some ways, attempts to decolonize the space inadvertently led to a colonizing in which non-Aboriginal and non-nationalist narratives of the land were excluded, their presence obliterated and their voices subsumed under the umbrella of history.

Citizenship. Not content with accepting the scholarly conflation of social studies with citizenship (Carpenter, 2006; Chapin & Messick, 2002), I taught it as a separate area of inquiry. I decided to teach it this way to introduce to students the contentious relationship between citizenship and issues of race (El-Haj, 2007; Gillborn, 2006a) and indeed, citizenship with exclusion in a broader sense (Adamoski, Chunn, & Menzies, 2002; Taylor, 1999).

Part of the lecture involved an explicit discussion of exclusionary citizenship. As political philosopher Charles Taylor (1999, 2002) argues, democracies are exclusionary enterprises, which, through demanding some semblance of cohesion, will necessarily exclude particular groups. However much the term “citizenship” in a democracy might be subject to change (von Heyking, 2006), it has always had some element of exclusion. Arnot (2003) for example argues that gendered exclusions inhere in citizenship, something that correlates with the exclusion of women from articulations of the nation (Yuval-Davis, 1993). I raised this point in a rather limited fashion in the class, pointing out the delay that characterizes the conferral of voting rights for

women in Canada. Such discussion doesn't really unsettle student conceptions of proscriptive "rights based" citizenship however since the "narrative of Nellie McClung" (a major figure in the right for women's suffrage) and the rights of women were widely known and easy to associate with citizenship. What is more pervasively absent from the student teacher understandings were the racialized dynamics in exclusionary citizenship. Students refrained from broaching the topic of citizenship and inclusion within the polity with regards to racialized exclusions—conversations about inequitable voting rights and legal equity for different racialized groups remained unspoken. Indeed, the racialization that precipitates the creation of racisms that Stanley (2014) argues for is notably absent in discussions for many of the students. The direct consequence of this is the deracialized conversation about citizen rights within the nation-state.

Part of this process of exploration also involved a commitment to reminding them to consider the language that they used to frame the citizenship projects that they devised, encouraging them to think carefully about the implications. Such a process proved rather precarious in the classroom. Take for example an incident that occurred in a lecture last year. I asked the class to get into groups and devise an active citizenship activity that they could do in their own classroom. In part, this was designed to address what appeared to be a general sense of confusion around why, as Westheimer & Kahne (2004) suggest, "personal responsibility" is an insufficient lens through which to read citizen engagement as a critical response to the issues in the world. Many of the students had graduated from Ontario high schools where there is a rather unfortunate implicit conflation of citizenship with the mandated forty hours of community services that each graduate needs to complete, and I felt the need to unsettle such beliefs. In so doing however, I encountered a rather different resistance. While many groups did resort to devising volunteer based programs, I am reminded of one group in particular that resisted in a different but equally troubling way. This group wanted to establish a breakfast style program in the school where "fortunate" students could help provide breakfasts for those who came to school hungry. Upon hearing this, I encouraged the students to reflect on how this might be perceived by those who were beneficiaries of the program, namely the "less fortunate" students in front of the more privileged ones. The group resisted, suggesting that everyone would be helping, to which I responded that this did not address the issue of student safety in light of the perceptions that this might propagate. The group members noted after class that they felt "threatened" by my critique of the program and indeed such a word showed up on one of my course evaluations. In part, this seems to reflect a troubling comfort with the language used, which itself suggests an element of paternalism. As Heinze (2008) argues, "one dimension of 'liberal' racism to which Whites have been blind is the disempowering message that their well-intentioned paternalism evokes" (p. 8). The tensions in this moment may have also been exacerbated by gendered differences—as a man, I was confronting the position and beliefs of a group of women. Thus, it is conceivable that intersecting social categories heightened the feelings around a threatened paternalism.

A final contention that I encountered was the unsurprising "rights discourse." Various scholars note the limits of rights-based discourses in unsettling the consequences and act of racism(s). Among this group are the critical race scholars, themselves highly suspect of the capacity for liberalism to effect substantial change (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2010; Gillborn, 2006b; Ladson-Billings, 1998). For this project however, I focus on the work of Henry and Tator, specifically on their theory of democratic racism. For these scholars, democratic racism is defined by the conflict between liberalism and the racism that is facilitated by its application to racialized social arrangements (Henry & Tator, 1994; 2002; 2006). In a democratically structured world, discourses of equal opportunity, multiculturalism and liberalism organize perceptions of the racial milieu that not only preclude amelioration but also facilitate

the widespread acceptance of symbolic gestures of inclusivity (Henry, Tator, Mattis, & Rees, 2009).

The entrenchment of democratic racism reveals itself in students' disposition towards discussions of rights and responsibilities. This manifested itself specifically in a discussion of rights in Canada. Although students lacked more sophisticated knowledge of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (the national document, enshrined in the constitution, that outlines the basic freedoms of all peoples), they were familiar with its integral role in defining rights in the state. This discussion was not the primary vehicle through which liberal complacency manifested itself however. In the week on history, students discussed the evolution of rights in Canada as outlined by the Canadian Human Rights Commission. In this discussion, Canada was generally regarded as a country with a surprising past, with students expressing discontent at previously egregious instances of racism. However, interpreting these insights in light of the contemporary context frequently yielded few confrontations with the racialized present. Despite pointing this out, students rarely went beyond saying things such as "oh yeah, rights are still taken away from people now," suggesting either a rather limited knowledge of the actual abrogation of rights and/or a certain complacency with rights as they exist now.

Global education. In our final week (this past year), we covered global education, an area that McLean, Cook and Crowe (2006) argue needs to be addressed in initial teacher preparation. Although many refer to this as global citizenship (Gaudelli & Fernekes, 2004; Heilman, 2008; Martin, Smolen, Oswald, & Milam, 2012), I strayed away from an exclusive focus on citizenship to address understandings of the global context. I did this for several reasons. First, contrary to what some scholars might proclaim (Ramirez & Meyer, 2012), education has not prioritized the "post-national" world over nationalist orientations. A quick look at the Ontario Ministry of Education's (2008) policy document about textbook authorization will make this abundantly clear as it is explicit in requiring nationalist orientations. Second, the emphasis in this lecture was on having students engender a global perspective and not necessarily (although this is not to preclude) an orientation to change.

In this lecture, I addressed what Case, Sensoy and Ling (2013) call the problem of "national fanaticism" with regards to the principle of fair mindedness in global thinking. In this discussion, I reminded students to problematize their understandings of the nation and question the practice of thinking inwardly when reading the news. I wanted students to think about the ways in which the nation is presented everywhere in rather banal ways (Billig, 1995) while recognizing that this representation structures their understandings of the national space. In part, the work here was done to unsettle the race/nation nexus (Goldberg, 2002; James & Shadd, 2001; Roman & Stanley, 1997) by complicating the idea that much of what we understand of the world is understood through perhaps unseen nationalist and racialized lenses.

One exercise that addressed this topic was quite simple. To focus student attention on the constraints imposed on meaning by the national container, I showed students a copy of an *Al Jazeera* news article about the "Idle No More" movement. This article, entitled "'Idle No More' and Colonial Canada: Activists Call to Reenvision Canada's Relations With Its Indigenous People" (Christoff, 2013) discusses the Aboriginal movement and the ways in which this is reflective of a pattern of ongoing colonialism in Canada. I prompted students to notice the subtle discursive difference in this article from wholly nationalist news sources such as the CBC, the federal government-funded national broadcaster. Students quickly picked up on the presence of a colonial lens in the article. However, I don't know how students read the word "colonial." As Schick and St. Denis (2005) argue, "Canada is constructed as generous and tolerant by 'giving away' land to white settlers" in the popular imaginary (p. 302). For all I know, colonial resonated

with this rather troubling understanding of generosity or it was historicized in their imaginings as something that “was” and not “still is.”

Possible Moments of Potential

As a self-reflective piece, it is difficult to infer the effect of the pedagogical encounters with exclusions or whether or not there is a new “texture of social studies life.” The resultant consequences of such a process can nonetheless be discerned from two divergent moments that occurred towards the end of the term.

The first moment is evaluative. Upon reading over their final assignments, I couldn’t help but initially feel a sense of concern that there was a reproduction of what Troyna and Williams (1986) call the “saris, samosas and steel bands” approach to multiculturalism. Similar to the concerns about the “food, fun, festivals and foolishness” that Writer (2008, p. 4) notes with regards to superficial multiculturalism, there was a consistent tendency to resort to myopic and rather simplistic representations of culture. In part, it appears that students were caught up in a perceived incapacity of younger students to engage some semblance of complexity around cultural identity. This fallacious notion belies what Zhao and Hoge (2005) suggest is the preference for “school subjects that are fun and challenging” (p. 218). While I do not want to suggest that pre-service elementary school teachers infantilize their students, they defer to simplistic notions of culture and childhood disinterest in complexity. Such deference is used to justify limited teachings. However, I also saw a pervasive trend through which teacher candidates actively desired to include the voices of the excluded in their planning. My emphasis on the empowerment of the excluded narrative of social studies appeared to have taken root in their epistemological understandings affirming Stanley’s (2014) that antiracism education begins with engaging the meanings of the excluded.

The second moment reflects the teaching experiences of one particular student. In an email, said student recounted with joy a moment in which the contestation of exclusions structured their lesson. In the email, this student suggested that, although they weren’t teaching social studies, they had the opportunity to broach the notion of excluded voices in a language arts lesson. In this lesson, they discussed the authority of certain texts in which, expectedly, students conferred upon textbooks a particular authority. As a response, said teacher had the students question who wrote the texts and what “facts” were included and excluded. In highlighting the exclusions present in texts (Nasser & Nasser, 2008; Smith et al., 2011; Wang, 2006), the teacher candidate explored the authority and dominance of the narrative made available in the text. Such work, although not necessarily contesting racialized exclusion, does bring into circulation the notion that exclusion operates in even the most “non-exclusive” spaces.

The Future

In the two years in which I have taught this course, I have come to realize a few things about teaching a social studies without guarantees. First, knowledge with students needs to be broached in ways that are unfamiliar, an imperative that acknowledges with students that these unfamiliar ideas may also be unfamiliar to the educator (especially, but not exclusively, if they are racialized white). The primary issue with exclusions is that they become familiar to the point of complacency, consequently structuring the knowledges of everyday life. Objecting to such a process can begin by reframing how teacher candidates perceive the “epistemology of the everyday.” An example of this can be seen in work around treaty education (Tupper & Cappello, 2008; Tupper, 2011; 2012), through which treaties between First Nations, Inuit and Métis

peoples and the Canadian government can be used as a counter-story to the nationalist narratives that dominate public consciousness.

Second, and building on the previous point, teacher candidates need to be made aware of the ways in which their language practices are a reflection of a certain “proficiency” at exclusion. The banal language practices of everyday language are powerful, with the capacity to reify nations (Billig, 1995) and exclusionary discourses. In their teachings (and indeed my own), the language used to represent groups needs to be interrogated. As Stuart Hall (1997) argues, “symbolic boundaries keep the categories ‘pure’, giving cultures their unique meaning and identity” (p. 236). Recognizing the ways in which we sometimes articulate and reify these symbolic boundaries is a requisite step in contesting exclusions. In speaking of “their” culture for example, how are “we” establishing symbolic boundaries? How might they have differing interpretations of these symbolic boundaries and are said boundaries open to reformulation or permeability?

These suggestions are, at best, tentative. Picower’s (2009) premonition about the woeful insufficiency of one course to catalyze disruptive orientations to white supremacy highlight what has been said here – this is not an easy process, one that can be packaged into a syllabus, handed to students and presented as a sort of “anti-racist almanac.” The very existence of an on-going conversation around racism and its exclusions highlights this seemingly insurmountable yet potentially scalable discourse of exclusion. In light of this, it would be easy to resort to a history of (anti-)racism/colonial studies by looking back at the work of scholars such as Frantz Fanon and even individuals like Cree writer and political activist Harold Cardinal and defer to a cynicism that has become the indelibly intrinsic character of academic scholarship. Cynicism however will only get you so far, and, with that, I conclude with the following. However easy it is to suggest that no pedagogical exploration itself will be “cheerfully sufficient” (to take the antonymous version of the Picower excerpt), it’s worth contextualizing our pedagogies without guarantees as part of a larger project, one that is ever changing and reformulating. Indeed, isn’t all teaching without guarantees?

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