

CONFRONTING THE UGLY TRUTH: THE (UN)MAKING OF A 'GOOD' WHITE
TEACHER ON THE CANADIAN PRAIRIES

By

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the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

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Abstract

Through this autoethnographic inquiry into the writing of poststructural, critical race, and critical whiteness scholars, I sought understanding of the social and political forces that made me as a ‘good’ white female teacher on the Canadian prairies and the consequences of performing this subject role over four decades of teaching within the public education system. I visualized this inquiry as a puzzle whose interconnected pieces I was compelled to identify and understand as part of my exploration as to whether I could (un)make my constructed subject identity and performance as a ‘good’ white female teacher. I needed to understand both the role I filled so well, according to the expectations of the system I served, and the harmful consequences of that invested performativity so that I could explore possibilities for conscious identity (re)construction and performativity. My research findings point to significant and grave consequences for everyone involved, including Indigenous students, students of colour, white students, and me. My research also points the way to hope and agency on this personal and critically introspective journey of truth and reconciliation.

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I also wish to dedicate this learning to all the students I have worked with over the years – Indigenous and non-Indigenous – because you deserved so much more.

I start from the premise that I cannot work against racism until I understand its place in my life and until I expose the ways in which dominant practices have worked to conceal my own part in racist acts. By uncovering and calling attention to these practices, I hope to create a location from which I can move forward.

(Norquay, 1993, p. 241)

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Chapter 1: Setting the Stage for the Problem

As a girl, I believed I had been born in the greatest country of all – Canada. I believed wholeheartedly in the ideas of freedom and equality that were promoted as its national values. My heart and mind thrilled to the historical account that my nation had been discovered by brave European explorers and forged from the wilderness to stand as a bastion of democracy and hope to the world. I was proud to call myself a Canadian because I believed in the master stories and lessons about how my country came to be and what it stood for. I believed in the messages of my nation’s goodness and benevolence as it reached out to help other nations and peoples in need.

That belief was a foundational piece of the puzzle that made me as a ‘good’ white female teacher, and it became problematic when I began to realize the truths that lay beneath the narratives and values I believed and espoused. That awakening to the realization that ‘all was not what it professed to be’ led me to this research journey in which I was compelled to ask, and seek answers to, questions that became life changing: How did I come to invest in these narratives and the professed values of the nation, and more importantly, how did those investments benefit me? How are these narratives and values connected to sociocultural conditioning and the roles I assumed in my life? What did white racial identity have to do with the narratives and conditioning that molded my life? And how did all these investments affect the students I professed to care about so much?

The focus of this research is my journey to understand the social and political forces that made me as a ‘good’ white female teacher and the consequences of performing this subject role without critical analysis and reflection over four decades of teaching within the public education system. I visualize this inquiry as a puzzle whose interconnected pieces I am compelled to identify and understand as part of my exploration as to whether I can (un)make my constructed subject identity and performance as a ‘good’ white female teacher. I need to understand both the role I filled so well, according to the expectations of the system I served, and the consequences of that uncritical and self-serving performativity. If I am to consciously and intentionally perform something different, I need to dispel the constructed narratives and ideologies that produced me as a particular subject identity to fill a strategic role within the public education system and engage in truth-finding and truth-telling.

The truth is that I was colonized, and I served the aims of colonialism within the public school system. Before I can engage in the imperative of decolonizing education, I need to decolonize myself, a process that has been deeply unsettling and disorienting (Mackey, 2016), and yet necessary as I recognize this process as a “difficult yet creative first step to engaging processes of imagining and putting into practice the making of a decolonized world” (Mackey, 2016, p. 38).

From the outset of this research, I am engaging in critical self-reflection and centering memories of my experiences, beliefs, assumptions, actions, reactions, and past practices as the focus for critique and reflection. This critical self-reflection is imperative for a number of reasons:

- To understand the combination of social and political forces that made me as a good female teacher;
- To analyze the impacts of that conditioning on me;
- To understand my white racial identity, how it works, and how it affects all that I say and do; and
- To understand and reflect on the consequences of my constructed white racial identity and invested performance as a ‘good’ white female teacher on the students I taught.

For years, I believed that I was focused solely on my students’ success and that I supported their individual potentials and abilities to be successful. I can no longer accept that ‘story.’ I am compelled to dig deeper to unearth beliefs, assumptions, and biases that informed my practice and relationships with students and the consequences of performing my unexamined white racial identity on students’ experiences of learning and school.

Howard’s (2003) statement that “critical reflection requires one to seek deeper levels of self-knowledge, and to acknowledge how one’s own worldview can shape students’ conception of self” (p. 198) haunts me. In spite of my belief that my teaching practice was guided by caring and ‘believing in students until they could believe in themselves,’ I have to interrogate the ways that my unexamined and self-serving whiteness shaped students’ conceptions of self.

Critical self-reflection about the impact of my white racial identity on what students experienced through classroom pedagogy and curricula aligns with what Howard (2003), Matias (2013), Picower (2009), and Utt and Tochluk (2020) all identified as essential for understanding and responding to systemic concerns about the underachievement of students who are traditionally marginalized by society. As much as I had convinced myself that I was there for all students I taught, I have to consider that I invested in an illusion. As much as I believed that I loved all my students and was there for each of them, I have to challenge this notion and consider whether my unexamined white racial identity created unsafe and unwelcoming classrooms for students who did not look like me (Matias, 2013). I have to “ask [myself] the important question of whether ‘who [I am/was]’ contributes to the underachievement of students who are not like [me]” (Howard, 2003, p. 198). As Picower (2009) suggested, this rigorous self-reflective process needs to be extensive, given my deeply rooted conditioning and the broad spectrum of critical concepts that produce intersecting racialized identities (p. 212). Without this critical self-examination, what has become clear to me is that I will continue to perpetuate what I have been conditioned to do (and what has benefited me), and that is to “recycle the structure of race and white supremacy in education and society” (Matias, 2013, p. 68).

Given that my purpose has been to unravel the historical, social, and political forces that made me in a comprehensive and critically reflective manner, a narrative style supported the way in which I was able to make sense of, and position myself within, the research. Because I sought deep and transformative understanding, I went back as far as I needed to make sense of the colonized systems into which I was born and whose ideology and rhetoric have informed my worldview and experience of society. For me, that meant beginning with the Doctrine of Discovery because the story of my ‘making’ and ‘unmaking’ does not start with me; it began long before my birth with the purposeful assumption of imperialism by European nations and their deployment of colonialism as a mechanism for imposing power and asserting superiority and self-proclaimed rights to land, people, and resources.

This research is organized, framed, and developed in a way that made best sense to me as I sought understanding of the ways in which dominant power structures have molded me and my understanding of life and society. Although the purpose of this research is my own meaning-

making and self-reflective journey, it is my hope that others who have been produced like me might recognize themselves in the excavation I have done and benefit from this work.

Given the “overwhelming presence of whiteness” (Sleeter, 2001) in the teaching profession, the probability that many white teachers were conditioned and subjectivated as I was, and the ongoing tendency to construct Indigenous students and students from other racialized and marginalized groups in terms of deficits and gaps, it becomes imperative that white educators engage in a similar process of critical analysis and self-reflection about the impact of their own white racial identities on students’ experiences of school and how those experiences contribute to predictable gaps in achievement and graduation rates.

I am no longer teaching within a classroom, but my work in professional learning for teachers remains connected to what happens in classrooms and schools with students. Systemic concerns about gaps in achievement and graduation rates were evident throughout my years in the classroom and they remain evident in the current discourse within the public education system. Addressing these gaps demands the critical analysis and self-reflection that Howard (2003), Matias (2013), Picower (2009), and Utt and Tochluk (2020) urged about the impacts of white racial identity on what students experience through classroom pedagogy and curricula. It is only when educators in all positions within the public education system reflect on the impacts of whiteness on racially marginalized students that possibilities will emerge for responding to systemic concerns about the underachievement of these students.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Engaging in Critical Autobiography

Like the students that Schick and St. Denis (2011) wrote about, I am from a white-identified, lower middle-class, second-generation immigrant family (p. 57). Descended from Western European pioneers, I grew up in a white farming community that was racially, culturally, and religiously homogeneous, and like Linton (2006), I was “never culturally challenged or made to feel different” (p. 82). As I moved into my teaching role, I assumed that “what [I] have and who [I am was] what the world need[ed] whether it want[ed] it or not” (Schick & St. Denis, 2011, p. 57). To find out that my first graduate class with Dr. St. Denis focused on my “own identity production as it is mediated by race, class, gender and other social positions” (2011, p. 57) surprised me as much as it did the students who were the focus of Schick and St. Denis’s (2011) writing. I had assumed that, in my teacher position, I was a “neutral, objective vessel of neutral, objective knowledge” (St. Denis, 2020), and I was oblivious to Howard Zinn’s observation that “when I became a teacher I could not possibly keep out of the classroom my own experiences” (1994/2002, p. 7, as cited by St. Denis, 2020). Until being challenged by anti-racist pedagogy in Dr. St. Denis’s classes, I had never thought to question what I brought to the learning space. This obliviousness to whiteness and the production of my own racial identity allowed me to continue to view myself as a helper and “the standard of what passes for normal” (Schick & St. Denis, 2011, p. 58).

Schick and St. Denis’s (2011) use of critical autobiographical writing to “engage in reflective social and political self-analysis” (p. 58) informed my approach and guided me to explore my own “social production... through the social, economic and historical frames in which it [was] produced” (p. 59). What appealed to my long-dormant and awakening rebellious spirit was their citation of Kumashiro’s (2000) challenge to “write in ways that trouble the already-familiar stories” (Schick & St. Denis, 2011, p. 59). This ‘troubling’ was necessary to understand the forces that produced me and the reproduction of inequality through the assignment and assumption of white privilege (Schick & St. Denis, 2011, p. 59). This ‘troubling’ was also a necessary component in disrupting my belief in the myth of meritocracy (McLean, 2018; St. Denis, 2020) and my myopic assumption “that the privileges afforded to White people are simply available to anyone for the taking” (Linton, 2006, p. 84).

Engagement in critical autobiographical writing deepened my understanding of the power of white privilege and my recognition that most of my successes in life were because “I benefited from a racial system that opened doors of opportunity for me to walk through and a White power structure that always assumed I would succeed” (Linton, 2006, p. 85). Critical autobiographical writing also challenged me to see “my own hand” in the institutions of white supremacy and racial discrimination and oppression (Linton, 2006, p. 82). As I took “up memories of my experiences with racism” and engaged in critical self-reflection, I deepened my understanding of how “my actions implicated me as a ‘figure in dominance,’ as a mainstream white person” (Norquay, 1993, p. 241). This “memory-work allow[ed] for an analysis of the social and historical forces that have influenced how I have lived in this world. By interrogating how I have constructed myself, and have been constructed into existing relations,” it was, and continues to be, my intention to confront my own implication as an “oppressor in racist practices” (Norquay, 1993, p. 249).

Engaging in Autoethnography

Critical reflection and critical autobiography informed the methodology for this research project, which is autoethnography: “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 273). I was both the subject and object of my research (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010) as I used memories of my “own experiences as worthy of the starting point for investigation into the larger culture” (Leavy, 2017, p. 144) and sought to “identify and interrogate the intersections between the self and social life” to reveal that “personal experience is infused with political/cultural norms and expectations” (Adams, Ellis, & Holman Jones, 2017, p. 1).

Through critical self-reflection about the narratives that informed my social and cultural experience, memories from my life and teaching practice, and responses to inquiry questions asked of me in a recorded interview, it was my intention to use autoethnography as “a method of inquiry, scholarly inquiry, that privileges the exploration of self *in response to questions that can only be answered that way*, through the textual construction of, and thoughtful reflection about, the lived experiences of that self” (Goodall, 1998, p. 3, as cited in Warren, 2001a, p. 47, italics in original). These reflections and memories, as well as artifacts from my teaching career such as

teaching goals, performance feedback, and excerpts from teaching references, provided data for analysis and critical reflection. Through this analysis, I sought to reveal the performativity of my subject role as good white teacher (and good white woman) as well as the consequences of that identity construction and repeated subject performance. My intention was to centre that this data exemplified repeated productions of the larger project of white supremacy and settler colonialism through my own investment in good white teacher (and good white woman) performativity.

With this self-reflective approach, I follow in the footsteps of anti-racist scholar Sheelah McLean (2016), whose self-study methodology turned the lens of analysis on herself and her students as she sought to analyze their discursive performance of white dominance and innocence in conversations about their learning in an integrative antiracist course in the same geographical context as me – here on the Canadian prairies.

In order to demonstrate the systematic approach to data collection and analysis that is demanded by the autoethnographic approach (Ngunjiri et al., 2010, p. 2; Pennington & Brock, 2012, p. 234), memories and reflections were collected through a recorded and transcribed interview in which a trusted colleague used inquiry questions [refer to Appendix C], as well as the information provided in my research ethics application, as a guide to the dialogue she held with me. Excerpts from the self-narrative that informed much my life [refer to Appendix A] and excerpts from teaching references and performance feedback [refer to Appendix B] were also used as artifacts of reference for critical reflection.

This self-reflective interview was transcribed [refer to Appendix D], and recurring components from my responses were identified and sorted into themes, which exemplified the discernment and description of patterns of cultural experience evidenced by the data that is expected in the writing of autoethnographies (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 277).

Two key questions guided this inner journey of truth and reconciliation:

- Can my constructed subject identity and performativity be (un)made so that I can (re)make myself consciously?
- Why did I invest in the narratives and processes of acculturation that made me as a good white female teacher? What benefits did I receive from this investment (McLean, 2021, personal communication)?

With respect to the question about the potential for my (un)making and (re)making, Norquay (1993) wrote about the “transformation [that] is possible through the interrogation of memories” as I worked “to uncover the places where dominant discourse and practices [were] at work to make invisible the details and events that do not fit comfortable mainstream accounts” (p. 249) and “interrogate[d] my history so that the invisible practices of my privilege [were] disclosed” (p. 250). I remain heartened by the potential for change in the present that can result from revisiting the past to understand the ways in which I was constructed into existing power relations and am implicated “on the other side of difference, as [an] oppressor in racist practices” (Norquay, 1993, p. 249).

With respect to the question about my investment and the benefits I received from this investment, I refer to Zeus Leonardo’s (2004, 2009) writing that challenged me to reflect more deeply than my initial understanding of ‘dysconscious’ from Joyce King’s (1991) description of “dysconscious racism” (p. 133). Initially, her description of her students’ understanding of inequity and cultural diversity as “limited and distorted” (King, 1991, p. 133) resonated with the stories I told myself about my understanding of inequity and racism:

Dysconsciousness is an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given... dysconsciousness accepts [the social order] uncritically... it involves a subjective identification with an ideological viewpoint that admits no fundamental alternative vision of society. (King, 1991, p. 135)

The idea of dysconsciousness felt like a safe explanation for what I was realizing about myself, and I rested within this ‘it’s-okay-because-you-weren’t-aware’ space for some time. I realize now that resting place should have set off alarm bells because it did not challenge me to further critical introspection. McLean’s (2021) questions and Leonardo’s (2004, 2009) writing about white investment compelled me to dig deeper into further critical reflection and truth-finding.

Accepting dysconsciousness as the explanation for my subject performance as a good white female teacher allowed me to sidestep my responsibility as an agent of my actions because I could rationalize the situation as happening almost without my knowledge, which secured my innocence in the process (Leonardo, 2004, p. 138). As a white female teacher, I willingly participated in discourses and practices that normalized white dominance, naturalized my white

privilege, and “obscured racial processes” at the same time as I maintained my “sense of [white] humanity” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 144). Thus, I needed to challenge my thinking with McLean’s (2021) questions and Leonardo’s (2004, 2009) words as I returned to what I had learned about the puzzle pieces that made me as a good white female teacher: “It is not a process that is somehow done to them, as if they are duped, are victims of manipulation, or lacked certain learning opportunities. Rather, the color-blind discourse is one they fully endorse” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 144) because it benefits them. Thus, as I returned to what I had learned, my constant reflection had to be, and continues to be: How did I benefit from this investment? What was it about a particular discourse that benefited me?

Before engaging in critical self-reflection of memory data, interview text, and career artifacts, it was necessary to engage in reading social and political analyses to debunk the assumptions, myths, and narratives in which I invested. As Norquay (1993) highlighted, “the stories we tell are constrained by the discourses that frame our vision” (p. 241). If I was to confront the making of my subject self and my investment in performing that subject identity, I had to reveal and critique the “dominant, taken-for-granted, and harmful cultural scripts... and stereotypes” (Adams et al., 2017, p. 3).

Key questions that framed my reading of social and political analyses of nation-building in Canada included:

- What are the lies underlying the narratives that informed my beliefs about the building of this nation called Canada and how my family came to settle on the land?
- How and why did I come to proudly identify with a racially dominant national identity?
- How did social conditioning through national narratives inform my roles within the family, church, and school?
- How was I constructed as a subject to fulfill roles that perpetuated and reproduced dominant power relations? As a white woman/teacher, what was I conditioned to perform?

- What were the rewards of my performance in this social conditioning? What were the social, political, and economic sanctions that molded and constricted this performativity?
- How did my performance of dominance uphold and reproduce the goals of public education? What greater project did my intertwined roles of good white teacher/good white woman serve?
- How did my unexamined white racial identity contribute to the normalization of whiteness and the reproduction of white supremacy?
- How was my social position as a white settler privileged and reproduced through my performativity as a white woman and teacher?
- How did the notion of individualism serve the reproduction of existing systems and structures of inequality?

Through a reading of social and political analyses of nation-building in Canada, my goals were to:

- surface that which I had been conditioned *not* to see and confront;
- understand how I came to participate in, and contribute to, the reproduction of white supremacy and racial oppression *of my own accord* while enjoying the advantages of this investment, denying my dominant role as an oppressor, and perpetuating myths of innocence; and
- challenge my assumptions of innocence about the benefits I accrued by investing in that conditioning and acculturation.

Thus, I used autoethnography to “frame [my] own critique of [my] white racial identity, as it relates to [my] classroom instruction” (Pennington & Brock, 2012, p. 225). As a white female teacher with over four decades of experience within the public school system, I “articulat[ed] insider knowledge of cultural experience” (Adams et al., 2017, p. 3) as I analyzed my white racial identity within the context of school through the lenses of critical theoretical perspectives (Pennington & Brock, 2012, p. 227), including those of poststructuralism, critical race theory, and critical whiteness. Therein, I became a critical researcher of my own life (p. 246) with the

goal of “attain[ing] new levels of consciousness and more informed ‘ways of being’” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 162, as cited in Pennington & Brock, 2012, p. 227).

Choosing autoethnography as a method for this research and writing required courage and vulnerability as I “d[u]g deeply into [my] own experiences” (Leavy, 2017, p. 145) and experienced the emotions that were released through this “intensely personal” research (Pennington & Brock, 2012, p. 226). Vulnerability also required acknowledgement that I cannot “control the nature of [my audience’s] response” (Leavy, 2017, p. 145) or how readers might interpret and critique the disclosures and exposures in my reflective writing (Ngunjiri et al., 2010, p. 8; Wall, 2008, p. 41).

Ethical concerns also had to be considered as I contemplated the implication of others in my reflective writing (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 281). I did not teach in a vacuum and so I considered the impact of this critical analysis on colleagues and school leaders with whom I have worked over the years. Because I am using memories of my teacher practice over four decades, it is both impossible to involve former colleagues and school leaders by inviting them to respond to what I have written (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 281) and important to highlight that the critical reflection and analysis that follows focus on memories of *my* assumptions and teaching practice as a way of taking full responsibility. I was careful to avoid specific connections to locations and schools or school divisions as a way of safeguarding former colleagues (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 281), and, given that I am writing about teaching within and for a colonial nation, the specific locations of my teaching practice within the nation do not really matter to my analysis or realizations.

As I grapple with these relational ethics, I also must consider Ellis’s (2000) ultimate question: “Does the contribution of the story outweigh conceivable ethical dilemmas and pain for characters and readers?” (p. 276, as cited in Wall, 2008, p. 50). My response is a definite yes. The only potential dilemma and pain is for those who remain invested in an innocent colonial story of Canada, and that potentiality cannot deflect me from this investigation. The tendency toward deficit constructions of Indigenous students and students from other marginalized groups and the resulting underachievement and negative conceptions of self *demand* this critical analysis and reflection by one good white female teacher on the Canadian prairies.

Chapter 3: Understanding Colonialism – Debunking Narratives that Made Me as a Colonial Subject

Building the nation and land settlement:

My heart and mind thrilled to the historical account that my nation had been discovered by brave European explorers and forged from the wilderness to stand as a bastion of democracy and hope to the world.

I believed that the land on which my grandparents had settled had been empty, virgin wilderness – land that was waiting to be claimed and cleared for farming.

Remembering the exciting tales of explorers that I read voraciously as a child, I contrast those heroic stories of brave adventurers and the settlement of this land with what I learned about “the founding of the Canadian nation... within the larger context of Eurocentric imperialism” (Thobani, 2007, p. 42). What follows is my attempt to debunk the narratives that I invested in about the settlement and building of this nation and to complicate the national narratives about its history. My focus on expressing what I learned in writing is an important part of my meaning-making process. In order to debunk long-held narratives that served my investment in a constructed heroic national identity and take my learning to a deeper level, I needed to be able to express what I learned in writing. Thus, the process that I undertook to go from initial reading and comprehension of the content I engaged with through my inquiry to being able to express my understandings in writing was focused on meaning-making, which is one of my goals – to understand the historical, political, and social forces that made me as a good white female teacher.

Beginning with the commonsense notion I held that this land was ‘discovered’ by brave European explorers, I questioned the assumptions I made in the use of the verb ‘discover.’ Oxford Languages defines ‘discover’ as follows: “to find (something or someone) unexpectedly or in the course of a search.” Were these daring explorers of my childhood memories on curious voyages of adventure to see what lay beyond the boundaries of their experience? Or, as I learned, were they on specific missions? Under whose orders, for what purposes, and with whose financing were they searching? These explorers undertook their voyages of ‘discovery’ on the orders of, and funded by, the monarchs of the European nations from whence they came for the

purpose of seeking, and returning with reports of, “potential sources of new wealth to the monarchs of Europe” (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), 2015, p. 52). First truth: greed was the motivation behind the voyages of these ‘brave European explorers.’ But there was something more sinister than greed to uncover and understand.

Informed by these reports and fuelled by imperialistic visions of growing power and wealth through empire-building, European nations began colonizing missions throughout the world to gain control of, and assert their sovereignty over, Indigenous lands (Mackey, 2016; TRC, 2015). I had to ask: By what right did they engage in this age of expansion and colonization? This assertion and imposition of power and control was based on the conceptual frameworks of the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*, both fantasies based on assumed “Christian and European civilizational superiority” (Thobani, 2007, p. 41) and constructed to grant “authority and entitlement to appropriate and possess Indigenous land” (Mackey, 2016, p. 42) (note the emphasis on ‘fantasies,’ ‘assumed,’ and ‘constructed.’). How was it possible that European nations gave themselves the right to appropriate and possess Indigenous lands because they declared themselves to be superior? It sounds highly *impossible* and yet, that is exactly what they did.

The Doctrine of Discovery, originating from Pope Alexander VI’s papal decree in 1493, granted divine sanction to Christian European nations to conquer and colonize ‘discovered’ lands as long as they converted the Indigenous peoples, whom they viewed as heathens existing in a ‘state of nature’ and in need of civilizing, to Christianity (Thobani, 2007; TRC, 2015). Thus, because Pope Alexander VI said so, Christian European nations got to conquer and colonize Indigenous peoples’ lands as long as they conquered their souls as well. These nations also assumed the right to exploit the peoples and lands they ‘discovered’ for the economic gain and benefit of their homelands (Moreton-Robinson, 2015; TRC, 2015, p. 45). This was imperialism-in-action, operationalized through the mechanisms of colonization and its methods of imposed power, control, violence, and exploitation.

There was more than the imposed fabrication of the Doctrine of Discovery to understand. The Doctrine of Discovery was linked to the concept of *terra nullius*, which was the constructed fiction of vacant land, or land belonging to no one before the arrival of Europeans, and therefore open to claim (Mackey, 2016, p. 45; Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 4; Thobani, 2007, p. 43; TRC,

2015, p. 46). What became clear was that this invented concept was used to rationalize Europeans' appropriation of Indigenous lands. In order to validate their claim to the land, colonizers applied the Western notion of property ownership based on European-style agriculture. From this perspective, ownership of property meant land under cultivation and improved through the addition of fixed buildings and boundaries (Mackey, 2016, p. 45; TRC, 2015, p. 46). In other words, ownership meant visible evidence of human control over the land (Mackey, 2016, p. 45). This concept of *human control over land* should not have been surprising, given Europeans' assertion of power *over* everything else from people to resources.

Perceiving no evidence of the European version of land ownership in the way that Indigenous peoples had lived on the land for thousands of years, European colonizers asserted their right to claim the land for ownership based on the law of first possession, which states: "What presently belongs to no one becomes by natural reason the property of the first taker" (Watson, 1985, book 41, as cited in Mackey, 2016, p. 45). Even though Indigenous peoples clearly inhabited the land, Europeans asserted their entitlement based on their cultural (and assumed to be superior) understanding that if something was in a natural state and was uncultivated and uncontrolled by humans, it belonged to no one and was available to the first taker (Mackey, 2016, p. 45). In contrast to Indigenous understandings of living in relationship *with* the land, Europeans asserted possession and control *over* the land, just as they asserted sovereignty and control over Indigenous peoples and "erase[d] Aboriginal title to ancestral lands" (Thobani, 2007, p. 41).

What became clear to me is that through the application of the Doctrines of Discovery and *terra nullius*, "colonial powers *conferred upon themselves* the authority and entitlement to appropriate and possess Indigenous land" (Mackey, 2016, p. 42, italics mine). If I were to state this 'conferring upon themselves' very simply, it might read something like this: 'as a colonial power, I get to take and possess your land because I say I have the power to do so.' What was becoming visible through my inquiry was not only the truth about what happened but the ways in which power works within a model of dominance and control.

Given the global context of European imperialism and colonialism, I needed to understand the colonial project in Canada. In its summary report, the TRC (2015) identified the Doctrine of Discovery as "the legal basis on which British Crown officials claimed sovereignty over

Indigenous peoples [in Canada] and justified the extinguishment of their inherent rights to their territories, lands, and resources” (p. 191). The TRC (2015) noted that the Doctrine of Discovery is not a policy of imperialism and colonization that belongs to the past. It continues to “form the basis of Canadian law today,” as it informs the continuing legal relationship between European descendants and Indigenous people (TRC, 2015, pp. 191–192). I was compelled to ask: how is it possible that a fabrication like the Doctrine of Discovery continues to inform our legal relationship with Indigenous peoples? I still had to learn about Mbembe’s insights about legitimizing or authorizing violence to be able to answer this question, and then, the continued assertion of white dominance would become clearer.

But first, I needed to expand my understanding of nation-building beyond the stories of early settlement that I read voraciously when I was young. In order to build a nation, territory had to be acquired and the land had to be settled and brought under human control. There it was again – the concept of human control *over* land. Based on European notions of private ownership and property, it had to be improved through “survey, enclosure, and planting” (Mackey, 2016, p. 51). Making land available for settlement required further fictional constructions, in which “Indigenous relationships to land had to be somehow defined as inferior” (Mackey, 2016, p. 48). Alarm bells rang in my head as I realized that another story had to be fabricated to validate the appropriation of Indigenous lands. Because they didn’t ‘possess’ the land according to European conceptions of property and because there was no visible centralized sovereign government over the land, Indigenous peoples were constructed as embodying a ‘state of nature,’ a state that, according to the influential seventeenth-century European political philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, was lacking in human control and associated with an inferior state of chaos and violence (Mackey, 2016, p. 48). When the seventeenth-century thinking of liberal political philosopher John Locke (also European) was added to the understanding of what kind of person deserves to own land, the God-given reward of entitlement to property was equated with the “transformative productive labour of industrious people” (Mackey, 2016, p. 50). Let me simplify the so-called ‘evidence’ that the British colonizers constructed to rationalize their imposed dominance in my words: ‘Because Indigenous peoples don’t assert control over the land in order to use it for their gain as we do, they are letting this land go to waste. They don’t survey, enclose, and plant it in order to improve it. It is clear that they don’t value work as we do; therefore, they are not deserving of entitlement to the land.’ It is important to stress that this was not an innocent

mistake based on a cultural misunderstanding. This was a deliberate move to assert and impose dominance over Indigenous peoples to gain access to their lands and resources.

But this was not all there was to the ‘spin’ that was fabricated. There was another layer to the fictional construction that cast Indigenous peoples as ‘less than human’ (Mackey, 2016, p. 52), a construction that was necessary in order to divest them of their land under the guise of a God-given right to do so. Here it was again – white male European colonizers strengthening their ‘case’ for imposition of dominance by asserting that God had given them that right. I had to pause for a moment to consider how that message was delivered – through white males who believed they were better than everyone else and therefore had the right to take anything and everything for their own benefit.

How did this additional constructed layer play out? Because Indigenous peoples’ worldviews and ways of being with the land did not align with Locke’s influential liberal theories of “property-based individualism,” they were defined as ‘savages’ needing to “be under the control of colonizing, sovereign, settler subjects” (Mackey, 2016, p. 53). (Remember that Locke was another seventeenth-century white European male.) Based on this supposedly rational and universal definition of [white] man’s entitlement to own land that he industriously improved through planting and husbandry, settler colonizers felt morally justified in their appropriation of ancestral Indigenous lands and the resulting dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands (Mackey, 2016; Moreton-Robinson, 2015). Further to this, they added the Lockean argument (because it served their interests to do so) that because Indigenous nations did not have a centralized sovereign government and had not built states in the European conception of statehood, there was “no need to respect their territorial integrity” (Mackey, 2016, p. 53). There it was again – evidence of white patriarchal Eurocentric superiority in this imposed universalization of one worldview and the assumption that any other way of being in the world was primitive and inferior and, therefore, in need of civilizing.

And let me keep in mind that this inferiorizing, or racial ‘othering,’ was a mechanism of the colonial project of imperialism around the world, an ideology of dominance and power founded in greed. Colonizers used the imposed force of their constructed laws to create racialized forms of power whereby white colonizers were constructed as civilized and superior and Indigenous peoples were constructed as uncivilized and inferior. Based on this constructed

binary that fixed identities into hierarchical categories, white Europeans were positioned at the top and Indigenous peoples were relegated to the bottom or outside margins as objects of oppression and exploitation (Thobani, 2007, pp. 37–39). This is further evidence of white Europeans asserting their superiority because they said so, and even constructing evidence in the form of racial models to back up their assertions, again because they said so.

While settler colonialism in Canada followed the model of colonialism elsewhere in the world, what was different in Canada was that settlers came to stay. In order to create the settler state, Indigenous populations had to be dispossessed of, and displaced from, their ancestral lands so that settlers could gain possession through assertion of claim and replace Indigenous peoples as the ‘rightful’ holders of the land (Mackey, 2016, p. 4). As Thobani (2007) asserted, “The suppression of Native peoples and of their socio-political orders, remains the necessary condition of Canadian sovereignty, as it does for the exaltation of the national as law-abiding subject” (p. 39). Here I contrast the stories of my youth that spun tales of building a nation from the wilderness, a land waiting to be claimed and cleared for settlement. The truth is that my family had access to the land that I spent my childhood on because Indigenous peoples had been dispossessed of it. That truth did not find its way into the stories of my youth. Constructed fictions to cover up the violence of what really happened and legitimize actions forms a unifying thread that weaves throughout this learning about the truth of nation-building and land settlement.

Achille Mbembe provided insights into how that appropriation was legitimized and erased so that I could grow up on constructed tales of heroism and adventure. Colonial sovereignty was imposed and sustained in the founding of Canada through three forms of violence identified by Mbembe and cited by Thobani (2007): founding, legitimizing, and maintaining violence. First, as part of Eurocentric imperialism, the founding of the Canadian nation was part of the “larger conquest of the Americas where Europeans, as Christians, claimed the sanction of a divine sovereign in their conquest of the peoples they designated heathens” (Thobani, 2007, p. 42). This founding violence included direct and coercive violence waged against Indigenous peoples in order to occupy and gain access to land for settlement, including wars, scalp bounties, poisoned food and smallpox-contaminated blankets, forced displacement, and starvation. “To claim a peaceful and orderly founding of a nation by Europeans anywhere on

this continent, innocent and unconnected to this orgiastic violence, as does Canadian national mythology, is clearly an exercise in absurdity” (Thobani, 2007, p. 43). And yet, that is exactly what comprised the narratives that I grew up on and believed for much of my life. From this perspective of deeper understanding, my investment in those narratives is clearly absurd, and yet, they not only informed my youth; I reproduced them through my teaching. There was much more to uncover and reflect on in terms of my investment and the truth of the violence that lay beneath the ‘feel good’ narratives.

Legitimizing or authorizing violence can be identified in the Doctrines of Discovery and *terra nullius* that were used to legitimize claims of sovereignty and European colonizers’ imposition of racial domination over the lands that are now called Canada. Although treaty-making was used to justify acquisition of about half of the country for settlement and development, assertion of Crown sovereignty and underlying title to the land was used to acquire the rest (Mackey, 2016, p. 9; Thobani, 2007, p. 48). The Crown’s objective for negotiating treaties was to appropriate lands for settlement and economic development and to extinguish Aboriginal title to land, which contrasted with Indigenous peoples’ objective to negotiate sharing of the land and its resources, which was consistent with their worldview (Mackey, 2016, pp. 64–65; Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 19). Daschuk (2019) added the necessity of treaty-making as a means for Indigenous Nations on the plains to secure their survival in the face of rapidly declining bison herds and increasing numbers of settlers to their lands (p. 79). The Crown’s capitalist view of land as a commodity whose title could be transferred contrasted with Indigenous peoples’ sacred connection to, and relationship with, the land (Mackey, 2016, p. 65) and secured the nation “as a white possession” (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 22). In what Mackey (2016) referred to as the ‘fantasy of entitlement,’ the Crown and the Canadian nation legitimized their sovereignty and right to land and resources based on their assumption of superiority and “repeated denial of Indigenous personhood and sovereignty” (pp. 9 & 11). Were those tales of exploration and settlement that I invested in part of legitimizing violence? In their elevation of white European explorers and settlers, their erasure of the violent appropriation of traditional lands, and their depiction of Indigenous peoples as ‘problems,’ these narratives legitimized my family’s right to the land we farmed. They legitimized the violence imposed on Indigenous peoples and gave settlers the same sense of entitlement to the land that the Crown and the Canadian nation assumed and imposed.

The maintenance of Crown sovereignty also required, and continues to require, violence in the form of legal control, “regimes of surveillance” (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 13), and sanctions. Control over the land and its resources had to be maintained. Laws had to institutionalize settler claims to the land and relegate Indigenous peoples to “zones of exclusion organized by the reserve system” (Thobani, 2007, p. 48), laws that were created by the same European colonizers who appropriated the land to uphold their dominance and control. Laws created the Canadian nation (i.e., the *British North America Act (BNA)* 1867) in which “the British and French were cast as the true subjects of the colony” (Thobani, 2007, p. 13) and obligations for Indigenous peoples were transferred from the provinces to the federal government (Battiste, 2013, p. 52). The erasure of Indigenous peoples as the First Peoples of this land in the BNA Act and the overt control imposed on them provided further evidence of legitimizing or authorizing violence.

Laws also created a system of apartheid that administered treaty obligations and governed Indigenous peoples separate from Canadians (i.e., the *Indian Act* 1876) (Battiste, 2013, p. 52; Thobani, 2007, p. 48). The *Indian Act* imposed total power and control over every aspect of Indigenous peoples’ lives and commanded their official existence as wards and property of the state (Mackey, 2016, p. 60; Thobani, 2007, p. 50). It took away their ability to identify themselves, defined who was eligible for Indian status and who was not (Thobani, 2007, p. 49), and delineated how someone could lose their status (TRC, 2015, p. 53). It even refused their right to personhood (Mackey, 2016, pp. 59–60), thus “empt[ying] Native peoples of their human status” (Thobani, 2007, p. 50). Thus, the violence of colonial law did not stop at physical control; these laws were constructed to destroy Indigenous peoples in all dimensions and in all aspects of their lives from governance to the ability to sustain themselves.

The imposition of elected patriarchal band councils usurped traditional governance structures and fragmented nations into smaller bands, banned the traditional participation of women in influential leadership roles in many First Nations, prevented the formation of confederacies by Indigenous nations, and “weakened the political power of Native nations by furthering and institutionalizing divisions within them” (Thobani, 2007, p. 49). The *Indian Act* empowered the government to veto decisions made by band councils and depose chiefs and councillors, thus creating a system of compliance and control (TRC, 2015, p. 55).

Individual and collective autonomy and agency was further reduced with the assignment of Indian agents to reserves, who were given complete power to dictate the lives and restrict the movement and economic activities of Indigenous peoples on reserves (Daschuk, 2019, p. 122; Methot, 2019, p. 9). They needed the permission of the Indian agent to sell, barter, or exchange any produce they grew (Carter, 1986, p. 458; Daschuk, 2019, p. 122; Methot, 2019, p. 9), which restricted their ability to become economically viable.

With access to the land gained for settlement and the ‘Indigenous problem’ relegated to reserves, the Canadian nation was constructed as white, through the legal sanction of white lawmakers. White settlers came to see themselves as having legitimate rights to the land because they were worthy members of a superior race and because the authority of the colonial state made it so (Thobani, 2007, pp. 51–61). “The institution of law made it possible for colonialists and settlers to rationalize and thus conceal [the] violence [inflicted upon Indigenous peoples], to systemize it in the interest of the reproduction of the nation-state” (Thobani, 2007, p. 62). Reflecting on the importance I have always given the laws of the nation and the pride I have taken in being a law-abiding citizen along with the insights gained from this research, I had to pause to consider the ways in which dominant power operates through the creation and imposition of laws. In that moment, the assumption that fairness, neutrality, and justice operate through the laws of the nation felt equally absurd to the claim of “a peaceful and orderly founding of a nation by Europeans” (Thobani, 2007, p. 43). The imposed power of this settler colonial nation is operating through these constructed laws. I had not questioned the laws of the nation prior to this inquiry because they worked for me and my settler family. I was never the object of their control and concealment. Rather, they legitimized my rights to land, mobility, and safety.

As I grew up in the decades of the 1960s and 70s on a mixed grain and cattle farm in northeastern Saskatchewan, I thrilled to the stories of my paternal Norwegian and maternal Scottish grandparents who had emigrated from their homelands to build a better life in this ‘land of opportunity.’ ... I embraced the stories of the sacrifices they made to create better lives for themselves and their children. During these formative years, I internalized these stories and believed that the land my family occupied belonged to us – our family’s possession – paid for through hard work and sacrifice.

The formation of a new nation required a national population. Immigrants were recruited from European countries to settle the Dominion of Canada, its formal title applied at Confederation in 1867 (Forsey & Hayday, 2019), and a further linguistic assertion of colonial power over land and peoples. Why were European countries the focus for recruitment? How was it that my Norwegian and Scottish grandparents emigrated and settled on land that had been appropriated from Indigenous peoples? They were not ‘true subjects of the colony’ as British and French had been identified in the *BNA Act* of 1867, but they were identified as ‘preferred races’ to help build the national population. “For over a century after Confederation, the state... organized and solidified white racial identity as *political* (citizen) identity. The nation’s racial identity, as well as its legal citizenship, thus became fused as white” (Thobani, 2007, p. 75). This explained the whiteness of my environment and experiences throughout my childhood and youth, and indeed, much of my life here on the Canadian prairies. I was born into a nation where to belong meant a white racial identity (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 6).

How did all these immigrants, “divided as they were by class, gender, ethnicity, even by regional and provincial interests,” come to “reconstitute themselves as Canadians... as national subjects, as subjects of a superior order” (Thobani, 2007, p. 56)? Identification as national citizens presented an illusion of equality in spite of experiences of socio-economic inequalities prior to and following immigration (Thobani, 2007, pp. 78 & 83) and invited the promise of significant material rewards (i.e., access to land and resources, mobility, and economic/employment opportunities) as settlers embraced a new national identity with shared collective interests. Participation in the construction of this national identity was the ticket to belonging in their new nation. In order to accomplish this, immigrant settlers had to deny and erase the violence that was enacted to gain access to land, and in doing so, they distorted the historical record so that they emerged as the legitimate heirs to the land and its resources (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 4; Thobani, 2007, p. 58).

As these narratives were created, the land [emptied of Aboriginal peoples] emerged as the defining feature of the nation and its character. “Canadian national identity is deeply rooted in the notion of Canada as a vast northern wilderness, the possession of which makes Canadians unique and ‘pure’ of character” (Thobani, 2007, p. 59). Their characterization as pioneering and persevering spirits emerged from this identification with the land as wilderness and the need to

conquer, claim and name it (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 29; Thobani, 2007, p. 59), and this identification with the land found expression in national art and story. As Moreton-Robinson (2015) explained, the landscape became the oppressor and violence committed against Indigenous peoples was denied. “By creating the landscape as oppressor, the values and virtues of achieving white possession can be valorized and Indigenous dispossession can be erased; the mythology of peaceful settlement is perpetuated and sustained” (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 29).

Given the truth of nation-building and the strategic creation of a white European national citizenry, why did I invest in the narratives I cited at the beginning of these two segments – the narratives about brave European explorers ‘discovering’ this land, the narratives about a nation forged from the wilderness by the hard work of early settlers who claimed ownership of the land they marked and cleared for farming? What was the benefit I gained from this investment? The truth is I invested in these narratives because they served my interests and my sense of belonging on the land. I got to spend my childhood on a farm because my family, offspring of white European immigrants, had access to land, bank loans, and government support during hard times (McLean, 2016, p. 69). The government policies that provided access to these resources for my family were explicitly created for families like mine – white citizens of the nation. It benefited me to invest in these narratives so that I could believe that my family had earned our successes “through superior morals and work ethics” (McLean, 2016, p. 69). Investing in these narratives allowed me to feel righteous and deserving about the advantages made available to my white family. In retrospect and after gaining this knowledge and analysis, they also provided a way for me to maintain my humanity and ease my conscience by erasing the genocidal policies directed at Indigenous peoples and the violent appropriation of their land so that my family could farm the land they had lived on for thousands of years. Instead of that brutal, ugly truth, these narratives allowed my comfort and fueled my belief that I had legitimate rights to call this land my country, an assumption that has benefited me from birth.

Investing in the narratives about a nation forged from the wilderness also provided an exciting backstory for me as a child. My appetite for these constructed stories grew because they provided a means for me to invest in a story that was much more palatable than the truth that I am now more knowledgeable about. I now understand that my investment in heroic tales of early

explorers and settlers preserved my innocence and the notion that my family and I had earned our place and right to this land.

Creating national mythologies of innocence and goodness:

As a girl, I believed I had been born in the greatest country of all – Canada. I believed wholeheartedly in the freedom and equality that were promoted as its national values. My heart and mind thrilled to the historical account that my nation had been discovered by brave European explorers and forged from the wilderness to stand as a bastion of democracy and hope to the world. I was proud to call myself a Canadian because I believed in the stories and lessons of how my country came to be and what it stood for. I believed in the messages of my nation’s goodness and benevolence as it reached out to help other nations and peoples in need.

How did this narrative come to inform the way in which I perceived myself and the nation into which I was born? This narrative was constructed intentionally to include and elevate white national subjects like me and to exclude Indigenous peoples who were displaced from their lands so that my settler family and other families like mine could claim them. This narrative was constructed to include qualities that national subjects like me were said to embody because of our alleged superior white racial identity and that non-nationals were said to be lacking because they were not white and, therefore, deemed to be inferior.

The selective process of creating a national identity employed binary constructions based on eighteenth-century European hierarchical racial classifications. Through these classifications, Europeans placed themselves at the top of the constructed racial hierarchy and bequeathed to themselves the qualities appropriate, and supposedly inherent, to their superior Christian and civilizational status. Racial classifications proved to be a useful tool in the colonizers’ arsenal as this fictional construction was used to legitimize their self-proclaimed superior status over Indigenous peoples whose oppression they justified through an imposed attribution of inferiority and a constructed ‘need’ for conversion and civilization.

These socially constructed hierarchical racial classifications were employed in the creation of the Canadian national identity as well. In denial of the colonial violence enacted to secure land and build the nation, a master narrative was created that elevated nation-subjects to embody qualities of a superior race. Thobani (2007) wrote:

There prevails in Canada a master narrative of the nation which takes as its point of departure the essentially law-abiding character of its enterprising nationals, who are presented (for the most part) as responsible citizens, compassionate, caring, and committed to the values of diversity and multiculturalism. Having overcome great adversity in founding the nation, these subjects face numerous challenges from outsiders – ‘Indians,’ immigrants, and refugees – who threaten their collective welfare and prosperity... These outsiders have routinely been depicted as making unreasonable claims on the nation and its precious finite resources. (p. 4)

This ‘outsider’ language was prevalent in discourses about those perceived as ‘others’ as I grew up:

I also heard narratives about others as I grew up, although I rarely saw them – Indigenous peoples and immigrants coming to Canada – narratives that spoke of Indigenous peoples who needed to quit complaining and asking for handouts, who needed to get jobs and make an honest living; narratives that spoke of the threat of newly arriving immigrants taking jobs away from Canadians. I usually heard these narratives expressed by the adults in my life in response to items on the news or as part of their discourse when they came to visit. I had limited exposure to ‘Indigenous peoples who needed to get jobs’ and ‘immigrants who were coming to take jobs from Canadians’ because I was surrounded by people who looked like me.

How did these narratives serve the grown-ups in my life and me as I absorbed them and they became a part of my worldview? What was the benefit of this racialized ‘othering’? Mackey (2016) and Thobani (2007) provided insights.

These discourses were part of the ‘fantasy of entitlement’ (Mackey, 2016) to which the Crown, the Canadian nation, and settlers subscribed to legitimize their right to land and resources based on their assumption of superiority and “repeated denial of Indigenous personhood and sovereignty” (pp. 9 & 11). They were also part of the process of constituting the national character that served to separate and elevate the white grown-ups in my life (and me) from racialized others in order to assert our superiority.

This process of constituting the national character was achieved through selective inclusion of what national subjects were said to embody and exclusion of what ‘outsiders’ were said to

embody. Thobani (2007) problematized the assumption that these qualities are inherent to certain individuals and communities and absent in others. Simply stated, national subjects perceive themselves to embody these qualities because they are constructed to perceive themselves in this way, not because these qualities are inherent within them. If national subjects focus on selective evidence to support their belief that they exhibit qualities such as being law-abiding, tolerant of cultural diversity, compassionate, caring, and believers in equality, and deny or erase evidence that would stand in contradiction to their embodiment of these qualities (just as evidence of violent appropriation of Indigenous land was denied and erased in the tales of brave explorers and settlers of my youth), they produce a narrative that is reproduced and sedimented as ‘the way they are’ each time it is spoken and shared – a fictional myth that elevates national subjects above those ‘others’ who are constructed to be devoid of these qualities. “In the case of Canada, the historical exaltation of the national subject has ennobled this subject’s humanity and sanctioned the elevation of its rights over and above that of the Aboriginal and the immigrant” (Thobani, 2007, p. 9). And herein lays the origin of the discourses I heard again and again in my youth. Power operated through the discourses that produced me to elevate white dominance and suppress Indigenous peoples and immigrants of colour.

What is noteworthy about this fictional reproduction is that *individual national subjects come to believe that they embody these qualities because of their superiority and moral goodness as do entire communities* (Thobani, 2007, pp. 9–10). Repetition creates perceived embodiment, as do “institutions of the state which recognize these qualities and reflect them back onto the subject as a measure of its own human worthiness” (Thobani, 2007, p. 9). When I asked myself about the benefit of investing in these narratives, the answer was clear. Because I was born to a white settler family, the discourses I heard allowed me to construct myself as superior and morally good and, further, to believe that I embodied these qualities. I did not have to prove it by my actions. The repetition made it so.

Foucault (1982), whose scholarship focused on the ways in which power operates through discourse, added to my understanding of how these professed national values came to characterize individuals as national subjects. This “desire to belong to the valorized category of humanity, to be seen by others as embodying it, to be able to claim it as one’s own property” (Foucault, 1982, p. 783) motivated national subjects, whose lived experiences in different

regions and provinces bore witness to socio-economic disparities, to come together under one condition and to be “shaped in a new form and submitted to a set of very specific patterns” (p. 783) – to recognize themselves as Canadian. This desire fed their collective amnesia about the violence enacted against Indigenous peoples to gain access to ‘national territory’ and influenced their selective focus on the hard work and determination of early settlers to overcome adversity and build a better life in a new nation (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 5). “Generations of settlers have grown up steeped in ubiquitous narratives about how their families (and other families like them) have worked hard on the land to build the nation” (Mackey, 2016, p. 18). It is in this selective process of mythologizing the building of the nation and the character of its national subjects that I recognize and understand how a stance of innocence and goodness was created and perpetuated.

As an important part of this inquiry process, I had to pause to reflect further on the benefit I gained from investing in the professed values of Canadian citizens and the mythologies of innocence and goodness. To be constructed as possessing such positive values served my sense of belonging and self-worth. Not only did I receive all the inherent privileges and advantages of being a white national subject, but I got to feel good about the kind of person I must be to receive such advantages. I got to feel deserving because I invested in a story that created that belief, and the advantages that I and my white family received could be perceived as evidence of our merit and worth. Believing in and perpetuating the national myths about the founding of the nation and the constructed values of its nationhood and citizens allowed me to construct myself as somehow ‘special’ and superior to those ‘others’ who were not as fortunate (and systemically advantaged) as I was to be born a white Canadian.

This investment allowed me to profess constructed positive qualities without critical reflection about whether my actions aligned with my words. This investment in self-characterization according to professed national values allowed me to believe that these qualities were inherent to me as a white Canadian. This investment was selective. It felt good to align myself with these values and to participate in the national myths. This investment allowed me to put blinders on to the reality of the Indigenous experience of nation-building at the hands of so-called good and benevolent Canadians. The truth is that I liked being constructed as someone

who possessed these values and so I invested in the myths and came to believe that these qualities embodied who I was.

NOT the master narrative of the nation:

In pursuit of the truth and to reckon more fully with my investment in the myths of the nation and my own supposedly superior qualities as a citizen of the nation, it is necessary to expose more of what really happened in the building of the nation and to reveal what was intentionally denied or erased from Canada's master narrative, especially here on the prairies, which has been the setting for most of my life and teaching practice. What follows is 'NOT the master narrative'; rather, it is an extensive 'rap sheet' of criminal actions and humanitarian travesties committed in the pursuit of capitalistic expansion and the imposition of white supremacy that directly counters the constructed myths and values that I invested in. What was done in the name of moral goodness and civilizational superiority fits more appropriately in the categories of fraud and coercion (TRC, 2015, p. 2) and barbarism and brutality. As I wrestle with what these stark truths say about the nation whose myths I invested in, I also struggle with what these truths say about the good person I believed myself to be as a citizen of this nation. Writing these truths requires me to acknowledge and reflect on them; it forces me to sit in the discomfort, disillusionment, and sense of displacement that result, given a lifetime of living within a constructed fiction about my nation and my character as a white national. Itemizing this 'rap sheet' of national crimes against Indigenous peoples on the prairies forces me to confront the dark side of settler colonialism from which I benefited and requires that I begin to reckon with the consequences of my investment in white dominance and assumed 'rights' to the land.

Intentional barriers to economic viability:

- On the prairies, First Nations' historic and viable base of survival in the bison economy and the fur trade was taken from them as they faced an increasing influx of settlers, acquisition of their ancestral lands by the Dominion of Canada, and displacement to reserves (Daschuk, 2019, pp. xxv & 79).
- In spite of the willingness and efforts of Aboriginal people to explore agriculture as an alternate economy to that of the bison herds and the fur trade and the insistence of First Nations chiefs that agricultural supports (i.e., training, implements, livestock, and seed)

be included as a key element of negotiated treaties, Department of Indian Affairs officials and suppliers worked deliberately to impede their efforts to sustain the lives of their people through agriculture. Surveyors were instructed to locate reserves on land that would not be needed for settlement or the planned Canadian Pacific Railway; that meant that reserve land was frequently unsuitable for agriculture. The provision of livestock and implements promised in the treaties to reserve families was inadequate in quantity and quality to meet their needs. Reserve families were caught in a double bind as supplies were not provided until there was evidence of cultivation, which required the supply of implements to cultivate the land. There were also problems with seed supplies, which were often damaged and did not arrive or arrived too late in the season for planting. The implements provided for reserve farming were inferior to those being used by settler farmers, and as no options were available on reserves for fixing or improving them and Indian agents controlled reserve farmers' ability to leave the reserve, they had to fix what they could with limited available resources. When reserve farmers were able to harvest grain, they had no access to grist mills to grind the grain so it could be used for food. With the disappearance of the bison, reserve families also lacked material for clothing and footwear, which made work and survival during inclement weather and freezing winters extremely challenging. Because of depleted hunting stocks, Indian agent control through the pass system to restrict their ability to hunt and gather food, failure to meet treaty promises to support the development of a successful agricultural economy, and lack of provisions to sustain them, reserve families starved (Carter, 1986; Daschuk, 2019, p. 133).

- The *Indian Act* implemented two systems that restricted Indigenous peoples' movements and efforts to be self-sustaining. One was the permit system that restricted Indigenous peoples on reserves "from selling, exchanging, bartering, or giving away any produce grown on their reserves without the permission of department officials" (Carter, 1986. p. 458). The other was the pass system that required written consent from the Indian agent or farm instructor to leave the reserve for any reason. The pass system, "implemented to limit mobility of treaty Indians keeping them on their reserves and away from European communities" (Daschuk, 2019, p. 161) made "reserves essentially places of incarceration" (p. 159).

- The Peasant Farming Policy (1889–1897) was instituted to “accommodate white farmers by limiting market competition from reserves and to minimize the cost of maintaining the reserve population” (Daschuk, 2019, p. 168). This “policy of deliberate arrested development” (Carter, 1986, p. 453) imposed further restrictions on reserve populations by subdividing reserve land into forty-acre holdings and reducing the land that individual families could cultivate to a single acre. No longer allowed to use the machinery they had been using, they were required to use only hand tools, which they had to make themselves, for planting, haying, and harvesting. Described as a “state-sponsored attack on the tribal system” (Daschuk, 2019, p. 160), subsistence farming on individual family plots was deemed necessary by government officials for Aboriginal peoples’ evolution from tribalism (Carter, 1986, p. 463). The Peasant Farming Policy allowed the identification of reserve lands that were not being cultivated, due to the imposition of subsistence farming, as ‘surplus’ and therefore available for sale to settlers (Carter, 1986, p. 463). This policy directly “contributed to the failure of agriculture as a practical alternative to the bison hunt” (Daschuk, 2019, p. 160).

Disease and epidemics:

- Smallpox, tuberculosis, scarlet fever, measles, mumps, and influenza, carried into the region by European settlers and traders, decimated First Nations populations (Daschuk, 2019).
- The extermination of the bison herds in the late 1870s resulted in a region-wide famine which dominion officials used to “further their own agenda of development in the west by subjugating the malnourished and increasingly sick Indigenous population” (Daschuk, 2019, pp. 99–100).
- Overcrowding in substandard housing with inadequate sanitation, limited access to clean water, and malnutrition due to insufficient and inferior or contaminated rations on reserves, preceded by years of hunger due to decimated game and bison stocks on the prairies, resulted in environmental conditions in which tuberculosis exploded and became the main cause of death on reserves. Those who did not die of tuberculosis were more

susceptible to infectious diseases such as measles, smallpox, whooping cough, and influenza. (Daschuk, 2019, p. 100, 164; TRC, 2015, p. 94).

- The chronic poor health of Indigenous peoples was directly linked to colonial policies that:
 - Separated them from their lands and disrupted their economies and food supplies, resulting in widespread famine.
 - Relocated Indigenous peoples to remote and economically marginal reserve lands where they were often dependent on rations from the government because there were not alternate food sources available – rations that were often substandard and insufficient, rations that were frequently withheld by government officials who misused their power and used access to food as a mechanism of control.
 - Enforced the withholding of rations to starve people into submission and acceptance of treaties or relocation from chosen reserve lands.
 - Reneged on treaty promises to support the transition to an agricultural economy and, in fact, restricted Indigenous peoples' ability to sustain themselves on reserve lands through the *Indian Act* and the intentionally debilitating amendments made to control and limit the lives and movement of Indigenous peoples on reserves.
 - Imposed overcrowded, poor living conditions on reserve populations where they did not have access to the materials, resources, or opportunities they needed to survive and thrive. (Daschuk, 2019; TRC, 2015)

In a macabre twist, government offices used the chronic poor health and high death rates of Indigenous peoples to construct the narrative that they were “biologically more susceptible to disease than the mainstream population” (Daschuk, 2019, p. 185) and that this was “simply the price that Aboriginal people had to pay as part of the process of becoming civilized” (TRC, 2015, p. 99). Daschuk (2019) stated “the decline of First Nations health was the direct result of economic and cultural suppression” (p. 186).

Starvation:

- “Rations were used as a means of coercing First Nations into submitting to treaty” (Daschuk, 2019, p. 114). Food was used as a criminal control mechanism to force First Nations peoples onto reserves and under the control of the Department of Indian Affairs. The Canadian government unapologetically used “starvation to complete the occupation of reserves” (Daschuk, 2019, p. 127) in order to “open the west to settlers and clear the way for the Canadian Pacific Railway” (Methot, 2019, p. 9).
- Rations were withheld deliberately to force the First Nations population out of the Cypress Hills after it was decided to use the southern route for the Canadian Pacific Railway (Daschuk, 2019, p. 123; Methot, 2019, p. 9).
- Food rations were withheld and left to rot in storehouses on reserves to cut expenditures and as a means of control (Daschuk, 2019, p. 184; Methot, 2019, p. 9). “Once the Indians were settled on reserves (and dependent on rations), the government could counter protests by withholding food” (Daschuk, 2019, p. 133). After the Cree resistance of 1885, rations were drastically cut to dissenting bands that were deemed to be disloyal to the government (Daschuk, 2019, pp. 163–164). The government used a policy of starvation to pacify and subjugate First Nations peoples who had been forced onto reserves.

Forced relocation:

- Some First Nations were forced “to relocate their reserves from agriculturally valuable or resource-rich land onto remote and economically marginal reserves” (TRC, 2015, p. 1).
- Communities were forced from their chosen reserves in the Cypress Hills to accommodate the decision to build the Canadian Pacific Railway along a southern route across the prairies. By forcing the removal of 5000 people from this area south of the proposed railway, “the Canadian government accomplished the ethnic cleansing of southwestern Saskatchewan of its Indigenous population” (Daschuk, 2019, p. 123).

Sexual exploitation – abuse of power by Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) employees:

- On reserves, DIA employees “had considerable power, and many took advantage of their positions” (Daschuk, 2019, p. 151). Aboriginal girls and women were sexually exploited

in exchange for food rations, and “girls as young as 13 [were] sold to white men in the west, some for as little as \$10” (Daschuk, 2019, p. 153).

Mass executions:

- After the Cree resistance of 1885, mass executions of the leaders were held at Battleford as a mechanism of retribution and intimidation of the reserve population (Daschuk, 2019, p. 156), as people from the surrounding reserves and children from the Battleford Industrial School were brought to witness the hangings and realize the governing power of the ‘White Man’ over the ‘Red Man’ (p. 157).

Forced assimilation and cultural genocide:

- The National Policy of John A. Macdonald and his Conservative Party set out to pacify and subjugate Aboriginal peoples against their will and to eliminate them as distinct peoples (TRC, 2015, p. 3). To that end, residential schools became a central mechanism of assimilation (see below). The policy of colonization “was dedicated to eliminating Aboriginal peoples as distinct political and cultural entities and must be described as what it was: a policy of cultural genocide” (TRC, 2015, p. 133).
- In 1895, the *Indian Act* was amended to ban Aboriginal spiritual ceremonies and practices (Daschuk, 2019, p. 171; TRC, 2015, p. 55).
- In 1920, the *Indian Act* was amended so that the government could force Aboriginal parents to send their children to residential schools (TRC, 2015, p. 54).

Residential schools – a strategic tool of forced assimilation and cultural genocide:

- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (2015) clearly identified the purpose of the residential school system that was created by the federal government under the leadership of Prime Minister John A. Macdonald. This system was “created for the purpose of separating Aboriginal children from their families in order to minimize and weaken family ties and cultural linkages, and to indoctrinate children into a new culture – the culture of the legally dominant Euro-Christian Canadian society” (TRC, 2015, Preface p. 1). Based on paternalistic and racist assumptions of Euro-Christian civilizational superiority and the cultural inferiority of Aboriginal people, residential

schools were part of the colonial government's policy to erase Aboriginal peoples as "distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada" (TRC, 2015, Preface p. 2) and "assimilate them into the Canadian mainstream against their will" (p. 3).

- Suzanne Methot (2019) provided a stark synthesis of the intent and scope of this colonial project:

From the 1870s to 1996, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) states that at least 150,000 Indigenous children were removed from their families and communities and sent to residential schools funded by the federal government and operated by the Anglican, Catholic, United, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches, where Indigenous children were forced to adhere to European societal and cultural norms, forbidden to speak their own languages, and alienated from their cultures, families, and communities. Parents were threatened with imprisonment or denied treaty rations if they failed to surrender their children. The RCMP were employed to forcibly remove children from their homes. Many students were physically, psychologically, emotionally, and sexually abused in the schools. According to the TRC, more than 3,000 children died in residential schools across the country, but the actual number is believed to be much higher, as the federal government stopped collecting annual death reports after 1917. In fact, former TRC chairman (now senator) Murray Sinclair believes that the number could be as much as 10 times higher – which would mean that 30,000 children died in residential schools. (pp. 9–10)

- Daschuk (2019) added environmental context to the infectious disease and death rates among children in these schools. He identified "overcrowding, poor nutrition, and neglect" as contributing factors to "systemic TB infection" and death (Daschuk, 2019, p. 176). In addition, influenza, pneumonia, and lung diseases caused high numbers of student death (TRC, 2015, p. 93). Just as chronic ill health and high death rates were cited as evidence of hereditary susceptibility in the general Aboriginal population, heredity was used to rationalize the contagion in residential schools and no responsibility was taken for the contributing factors of overcrowding and poor nutrition (Daschuk, 2019, p. 176).

- The TRC (2015) concluded that “the forced assimilation of children through removal from their families and communities – to be placed with people of another race for the purpose of destroying the race and culture from which the children came – [is] deemed an act of genocide under Article 2(e) of the United Nation’s Convention on Genocide” (p. 202).
- The TRC (2015) made further damning criticisms of residential schools:
 - “Well into the twentieth century, Indian Affairs continued to enforce policies for attendance for which it had *no legal authority*” (p. 62, italics mine).
 - “Taken from their homes, stripped of their belongings, and separated from their siblings, residential school children lived in a world dominated by fear, loneliness, and lack of affection” (p. 41).
 - “These children were sent to what were, in most cases, badly constructed, poorly maintained, overcrowded, unsanitary fire traps. Many children were fed a substandard diet and given a substandard education, and worked too hard. For far too long, they died in tragically high numbers. Discipline was harsh and unregulated; abuse was rife and unreported. It was, at best, *institutionalized child neglect*” (p. 43, italics mine).
 - “The failure to establish and enforce a national policy on discipline meant that students were subject to disciplinary measures that would not... be tolerated in schools for non-Aboriginal children” (p. 102). Residential school survivors reported punishments such as being confined to cells or locked in closets, basements and crawl spaces; being chained together; being beaten; having their heads shaved; being struck with boards or even hockey sticks; having to sit or stand in the snow without proper clothing; and being publicly shamed and humiliated for wetting the bed (pp. 102–104). “The failure to develop, implement, and monitor effective discipline sent an unspoken message that there were *no real limits on what could be done to Aboriginal children within the walls of a residential school*. The door had been opened early to an appalling level of

physical and sexual abuse of students and it remained open throughout the existence of the system” (p. 105, italics mine).

- “As educational institutions, the residential schools were failures and regularly judged as such” (p. 71) due to low expectations and meaningless, repetitive drill in highly regimented, overcrowded classrooms by staff who were often more committed to religious training than education and many of whom were unqualified as teachers. When Indian Affairs required residential schools to adopt provincial curricula in the 1920s, “Aboriginal students were subjected to an education that demeaned their history, ignored their current situation, and did not even recognize them or their families as citizens” (p. 75).
- “Because Indian Affairs officials had anticipated that residential schools would be self-sufficient, students were expected to raise or grow and prepare most of the food they ate, to make and repair much of their clothing, and to maintain the schools” which was “*institutionalized child labour*” (p. 77, italics mine) as “students often spent more than half [of each] day working for the school” (p. 78).
- Residential schools also provided a criminal mechanism of control over Aboriginal parents and families. The TRC (2015) cited Indian Affairs official Andsell Macrair’s observation: “It is unlikely that any Tribe or Tribes would give trouble of a serious nature to the Government whose members had children under Government control” (p. 58).

‘NOT the master narrative’ exposes the erasure within the master narrative of the nation that explicitly and intentionally molded a fictional national character based on a selective history that was taught throughout my years in public education. Investing in all that I was taught, I assumed that the content and my experience of public school were neutral and what I needed to learn as part of growing up to have a so-called normal life. Without questioning its purpose or its mechanisms, I learned the rules and expectations of participation and adopted the normative behaviours and attitudes that public education taught me were correct and right. Public education taught me that there was one way to understand and know the world, one way to be in the world, and I invested in that learning because it worked for me and reflected me as a young white female future citizen of the nation.

The assumed neutrality and normativity of public education:

In contrast to my assumptions that public education was neutral, engagement with critical literature taught me that it definitely is *not* a neutral enterprise. My inquiry took me into learning more about the role of public education through the writings of critical scholars like Althusser (1971), Foucault (1970, 1982), Apple (1990), and Wetherell and Potter (1992). For much of my life, both as a student and later as a teacher, I had never questioned the role of education because it worked for me. More truths were revealed in what I learned from these scholars.

Public education is an institutionalized mechanism of colonialism that aims to instill in students:

- Acceptance of existing power relations, with white supremacist patriarchy in the dominant position making all the rules that form the foundation of ‘the way things are’;
- A universalization of the superiority of whiteness and the Eurocentric worldview through the distillation of all there might be to know about the world through the selective lenses of compartmentalized Western knowledge disciplines;
- The chosen national values and narratives that will prepare them to be good citizens of the nation and that assimilate them under one condition (Foucault, 1982);
- An individualistic understanding of their identities separate from oppressive policies, systems and structures so that responsibility for any failure or perceived lack of success is attributed to the individual and some deficit within them rather than the purposefully constructed barriers in their way; and
- The behaviours and habits of mind required to participate as a “new generation of ‘schooled’ workers” (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 60) in the capitalist, market economy.

What was invisible and unquestioned during my schooling and for most of my teaching career was that “communities, countries and nations emerge from the action of powerful material, economic and political forces” (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 63), and it is the story these forces want to be used as the “general currency of explanation” that will be used as “the account of the way things are” (p. 62). In this way, one version – the dominant version – becomes established and accepted as commonsense and other versions are undermined, denied, or erased (Wetherell

& Potter, 1992, pp. 64–65). It is through this process of selective representation that national subjects are made and the “ideological state apparatus” (Althusser, 1971) of public education is key to this process.

According to Althusser (1971), whose writing provided foundational understanding of how power works through ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) such as schools, public education reproduces students as labour power by teaching skills and knowledge “which are directly useful in different jobs in production” (p. 4). Schools also instill normative behaviour in students that prepares them for the “socio-technical division of labour” (Althusser, 1971, p. 4) and “submission to the rules of the established order” (pp. 4–5). Althusser (1971) described the dominant role of schools as it takes children from every class at a very young age and then indoctrinates them over a period of years in a “certain amount of ‘know-how’ wrapped in the ruling ideology” (p. 18). He noted the stages at which youth are ejected from school into divisions of labour commonly associated with blue collar and white collar workers, which he noted to have different roles from ‘exploited’ (i.e., workers) to ‘agents of exploitation’ (i.e., capitalists and managers) to ‘agents of repression’ (i.e., soldiers, policemen, politicians, administrators) to ‘professional ideologists’ (i.e., priests), each “with the ideology which suits the role it has to fulfil in the class society” (Althusser, 1971, p. 19). In its labour-producing process, it is essential that the school is presented as “a neutral environment purged of ideology” (Althusser, 1971, p. 19) so that national subjects participate willingly in this indoctrination process, which I certainly did.

Foucault (1982), whose work focused on how power worked through discourses, described public education as a form of subjection whereby students are subjected to “a regulated and concerted system of power” in which they acquire selected aptitudes and types of behaviour through:

a whole ensemble of regulated communications (lessons, questions and answers, orders, exhortations, coded signs of obedience, differentiation marks of the ‘value’ of each person and of the levels of knowledge) and by the means of a whole series of power processes (enclosure, surveillance, reward and punishment, the pyramidal hierarchy). (p. 787)

Foucault’s (1982) description of the exercise of power in schools challenged me to consider how I, as an educator, exercised power over students – how I “incite[d], ... induce[d], ... seduce[d],

... ma[de] easier or more difficult, ... constrain[ed] or forb[ade]” (p. 789); how I “structured the possible field of action of others” (pp. 789–790) in order to produce certain kinds of behaviours, dispositions, and aptitudes, and that, upon critical reflection, contributed to the exaltation of the national settler identity and narrative of the nation.

I was compelled to inquire into the origin of this exercise of power, integrated as it was into the normative operations of public education (Apple, 1990, p. x; Foucault, 1970). Apple (1990) explained how schools’ focus on instilling “economic dispositions” (p. 61) came about historically in response to the change from an agricultural economy to an industrial one.

Schools were not... built to enhance or preserve the cultural capital of classes or communities other than the most powerful segments of the population. The *hegemonic role of the intellectual*, of the professional educator in this development is quite clear. (Apple, 1990, p. 61, italics in original)

Here was another pointer to my implication in the reproduction of dominance, not only in terms of the role I assumed in exercising power over students but in the curriculum and resources I used. Apple’s (1990) writing compelled me to confront whose knowledge and values I taught to students.

Whose knowledge and values were considered to have the most worth in what was deemed important to pass on to future generations (Apple, 1990, pp. vii–viii)? There is a clear connection to which group held/holds power in society, and that was/is the dominant white capitalist patriarchy. In order to perpetuate that power, the knowledge that educational institutions distilled/distills into students had/has to be controlled (Apple, 1990, p. 26) through standardized curricula and resources “organized around a system of principles and values that came from somewhere, that represent particular views of normality and deviance, of good and bad, and of what ‘good people act like’” (p. 63). Based on my own teaching experience, this controlled and selective process is not one that belongs only in historical accounts; it continues through the development and distribution of curricula in the present.

Control is also found woven into school structures, processes, and content. Apple (1990) challenged me to consider the ways in which schools control students through discipline, rules and routines, and norms of obedience and deportment. He also argued that “control is exercised

through the forms of meaning the school distributes” (Apple, 1990, p. 63). What counts as ‘legitimate knowledge’ in schools – the knowledge that all students must learn – originates with the socio-cultural group that holds power. It is this group that controls the narrative, the ideology, and the acceptable discourses of school because of their social, economic, and political power. There is nothing neutral about what students learn at school. They are being indoctrinated into the aptitudes and dispositions that will perpetuate existing power relations. It is no wonder that I succeeded in such a system because these aptitudes and dispositions served my interests as a white national, and they upheld and even reified my commonsense notions of family and nation. Because I benefited, I did not wonder about the experiences of students (and their families) whose identities, values, and interests were not served by dominant interests.

In order to reveal the ideological content of curricula and the connections to social, economic, and political power, Apple (1990) advocated that questions be asked about whose knowledge was selected, who was in control of the selection, and whose interests this knowledge serves. He also argued the need to question “why and how particular aspects of the collective culture are presented in school as objective, factual knowledge... how schools legitimate those limited and partial standards of knowing as unquestioned truths” (Apple, 1990, p. 14). These are questions that I never asked. As a member of the dominant cultural and racial group, I never had to ask. I was never forced to participate in my own erasure and denigration as Indigenous students were.

While professing the national value of equal opportunity for all, schools work to reproduce existing social, economic, and political *inequalities*, and in doing so, they function to keep those who hold power in power. Apple (1990) highlighted the importance of understanding the relationship between ideology and schools:

The study of the relationship between ideology and school knowledge is especially important for our understanding of the larger social collectivity of which we are all a part. It enables us to begin to see how a society reproduces itself, how it perpetuates its conditions of existence through the selection and transmission of certain kinds of cultural capital on which a complex yet unequal industrial society depends, and how it maintains cohesion among its classes and individuals by propagating ideologies that ultimately

sanction the existing institutional arrangements which may cause the unnecessary stratification and inequality in the first place. (p. 60)

As a student of, and teacher within, public schools, I invested in that narrative of equality and equal opportunity for all. I recognize it now as a move to innocence because it allowed me to participate in an ideology that denied the reality of disparity and inequity that was all around me and, often, right in front of me.

After reading Althusser (1971), Foucault (1970, 1982), and Apple (1990), the connections between the reproduction of society through the transmission of selected ‘cultural capital’ and the carefully chosen elements of the master narrative of the nation became clear. The public education system emerged from the building of the nation whose narrative was constructed based on “a system of exclusion” (Foucault, 1970, p 54) that denied and erased or excluded the traumatic histories and experiences of Indigenous peoples and violent settler colonialism from the national narrative. This ‘system of exclusion’ extended(s) to the knowledge system and worldview represented in the selective curricula taught in schools. When I reflect on whose voices, knowledge systems and worldviews were and continue to be excluded, I recognize that it is those without political, social, and economic power and capital. Foucault (1971) identified this exclusion as a “power constraint on other discourses” (p. 55).

This ‘power constraint’ is also witnessed in the control and limitation of knowledge and discourse within disciplines (Foucault, 1970, p. 59) that form the basis of school subjects. Through the established margins, rules, and methods that regulated/regulate knowledge disciplines, reality was/is reduced to what each discipline defined/defines in concrete, measurable terms as true and false. As Foucault (1970) expressed so clearly, this “principle of limitation” (p. 59) “pushes back a whole teratology of knowledge behind its margins” (p. 60). Thus, rather than introducing students to all there is to know and might be known about their world and their experience of it, subject- or discipline-based knowledge presents finite ways of knowing, categorizing, and measuring elements of the world, and in the process, what was selected knowledge becomes ‘the way things are’ through a process of “saturating the consciousness” (Apple, 1990, p. 5). Apple (1990) cited Raymond Williams’ explanation of the point of this “*selective tradition*... which is always passed off as ‘the tradition’” (p. 6):

But always the selectivity is the point, the way in which from a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis, certain other meanings and practices are neglected and excluded. Even more crucially, some of these meanings are reinterpreted, diluted, or put into forms which support or at least do not contradict other elements within the dominant culture. (p. 6)

This selective and saturating process clearly serves the interests of those who hold power in society. Althusser (1971) made it clear that schools do not operate in a vacuum. They are part of a whole system of political, economic, social, and cultural institutions, or ‘state apparatuses’ (Althusser, 1971), that serve the ideological interests of those who hold power. The entire system is based on unequal power relations and control: control over access to resources, control over what constitutes knowledge, control over the construction of a national identity. Although professing the national values of freedom and equality, Canadian society is profoundly inequitable, while producing itself as innocent of wrongdoing, and is experienced differentially through one’s place within a firmly entrenched class hierarchy that is founded in, and serves the interests of, those who hold political, economic, social, and cultural power. Like the nation I identified with so strongly, I produced myself as innocent while exercising power over students through my participation in the ‘selective tradition’ of public schooling.

As public institutions of a socially and economically stratified nation, schools perpetuate the ruling ideology through a selective knowledge tradition (Apple, 1990) and “a regulated and concerted system of power” (Foucault, 1982, p. 787) that conditions students for participation in the labour force of the capitalist market economy through differentiated access to “the ideology which suits the role [each will] fulfil in the class society” (Althusser, 1971, p. 19). Apple’s (1990) explanation of Bourdieu’s work in France further illuminated this differential conditioning process:

[Bourdieu] argues that the cultural capital stored in schools acts as an effective filtering device in the reproduction of a hierarchical society. For example, schools partly recreate the social and economic hierarchies of the larger society through what is seemingly a neutral process of selection and instruction. They take the cultural capital, the *habitus*, of the middle class, as natural and employ it as if all children have had equal access to it. However, ‘by taking all children as equal, while implicitly favoring those who have

already acquired the linguistic and social competencies to handle middle-class culture, schools take as natural what is essentially a social gift, i.e., cultural capital' (Dale, 1976, p. 4, as cited in Apple, 1990, p. 33). Bourdieu asks us, hence, to think of cultural capital as we would economic capital. Just as our dominant economic institutions are structured so that those who inherit or already have economic capital do better, so too does cultural capital act in the same way. Cultural capital ('good taste,' certain kinds of prior knowledge, abilities and language forms) is unequally distributed through society and that is dependent in large part on the division of labor and power in that society. 'By selecting for such properties, school serve to reproduce the distribution of power within the society' (Dale, 1976, p. 4, as cited in Apple, 1990, p. 33). For Bourdieu, to understand completely what schools do, who succeeds and who fails, one must not see culture as neutral, as necessarily contributing to social progress. Rather, one sees the culture tacitly preserved in and expected by schools as contributing to inequality outside of these institutions. (pp. 32–33)

Apple (1990) highlighted that the uneven distribution of knowledge that is available to different social and economic classes in society has its roots in uneven distribution of knowledge in schools. The formal and informal knowledge (i.e., the cultural capital) distributed through public schools "is used as a complex filter to process people, often by class; and at the same time, different dispositions and values are taught to different school populations, again often by class (and sex and race)" (pp. 33–34). As an educator, I am compelled to ask myself "which particular 'kinds' of students [got] what particular kinds of knowledge and dispositions" (Apple, 1990, p. 17). The labelling process used to designate students as particular 'kinds' of students is a chilling reminder that Apple's question will lead to uncomfortable and necessary truths about this filtering process in action. So, too, is my reflection on the numbers of students who were able to demonstrate the cultural capital demanded as evidence of success within the parameters of their public education and who were, thereby, 'selected' for higher education. Who went on to the nation's professed equal opportunities for success? Those who demonstrated the knowledge and dispositions required to maximize economic production (Apple, 1990, p. 61).

Anyon (1980) and Apple (1990) distinguished the differential curricula, pedagogy, discipline, and evaluation practices employed with different groups of students based on their projected class membership and economic role in society. Both writers highlighted the difference

in the dispositions, values, and cognitive and behavioral skills that were evidenced with students from different social classes, and both identified this ‘hidden curriculum’ as fundamental to the reproduction of existing power relations in society. Again, I am compelled to reflect on which kinds of students got which kinds of knowledge and dispositions. Which students were ‘selected’ for learning that focused on mechanical, rote learning, and compliant reproduction of steps that followed the rules to get the correct answer or the expected product in absence of meaning-making and connections to relevance in their lives? For what type of work and socio-economic status did *that* learning prepare them? Which students were ‘selected’ for learning that embodied greater flexibility, creativity, choice, and autonomy – learning that challenged them to ask their own questions and seek their own answers; learning that engaged them in societal and systemic analysis, in critical and contextual thinking, and in problem-solving and decision-making? For what type of work and socio-economic status did *that* learning prepare them?

In this ‘processing of people’ (Apple, 1990, p. 6), the distribution of differential knowledges and dispositions in schools prepares students to accept their impending inequitable socio-economic roles “without too much questioning” (p. 10). Saturated in compliant acceptance of ‘natural’ categories of existence and the professed neutrality of what is learned in schools, students become reproductive agents of the hegemonic order. Having internalized “the principles and commonsense rules which govern the existing social order” to the “very bottom of [their] brains,” students emerge from schools ready to contribute to “ideological and social stability” (Apple, 1990, p. 43). I found alignment between Althusser (1971) and Apple (1990) in their consensus about the importance of beginning this ‘ideological saturation’ early in the lives of children from all classes in order to ensure the most effective saturation levels. I am evidence of that ideological saturation process, as are the ‘successful’ students I taught.

Not only is the content of schooling essential in this ‘ideological saturation’; the social relations and forms of interactions within classrooms and schools preserve and reproduce socio-cultural power relations and prepare students for entrance into the world of work. Consider the socialization of children from their first days and weeks in school and the messages of restraint, what constitutes good behaviour (and therefore, good students), deference to authority, conformity to expectations, and what constitutes work and play. Consider the messages about student work that occurs within specified time parameters and is expected to meet certain

standards or criteria. Consider the qualities and traits of ‘good students’ that are rewarded, such as “diligence, perseverance, obedience, and participation” (Apple, 1990, p. 56). From the beginning of their years in school, children’s experiences teach them about the nature of work. How often is obedience and compliance within a hierarchical power structure more highly valued than ingenuity (Apple, 1990, p. 57) or critical thought and social analysis? I can attest to the approval I received for obedience and compliance and to the dearth of critical social analysis and true creativity in my experience of schooling as a student and for much of my career as a teacher.

Apple’s (1990) writing reflected my experience as a student and a teacher. Classroom interactions teach children how they are expected to relate to authority, and these lessons prepare them for compliant functioning in the labour market. Through the ‘hidden curriculum’ of institutional norms and expectations in schools, students are indoctrinated to comply and defer to authority, and to accept that what school teaches, explicitly and implicitly, is natural and normative, or the way the world works. Within this apparatus of ideological distribution, which students are deemed successful? Those who “become competent in the rules, norms, values, and dispositions ‘necessary’ to function within institutional life as it exists” (Apple, 1990, p. 51). I was one of those ‘successful’ students, a marker that I now recognize as a sign that I had ‘become competent’ in what the institution (and those in positions of authority) valued. What is even more important for this inquiry is which students I deemed ‘successful’ in my evaluative capacity as a teacher, and what determined their ‘success’? The answer is clear and uncomfortable, and essential for this inquiry into the truth.

From their first experiences of schooling, children begin the lengthy process of internalizing the work-related rules for their student role – a constituting process necessary to prepare them for entrance into the world of work and acceptance of its hierarchical structure and categories as normative.

The commonly accepted neutrality of public education is an intentional set-up that I invested in because it meant that I could claim a neutral role as a teacher and thereby remain innocent of implication in the reproduction of dominance. What I need to grapple with is that my investment in the assumed neutrality of the explicit and implicit curricula of schools had profound implications for students who were perceived to have ‘gaps’ or ‘deficits’ in their

attainment of knowledge and skills. Because of presuppositions about what was/is construed as valuable knowledge, I reflect on the comparisons I made between students and the assumptions I made about the problem existing within individual students or groups of students when I focused on ‘filling the gaps’ or ‘fixing the deficits’ (Apple, 1990, p. 30), rather than the selective tradition that underlies what is deemed valuable knowledge and skills

By attributing the problem within the individual (or groups of individuals), hegemonic or dominant power relations were/are preserved and reproduced. By focusing attention on individual ‘gaps’ or ‘deficits,’ attention was/is not directed toward what really produces inequitable performance and disparity in assessment results or test scores between groups of students, and that is the selective tradition of knowledge dissemination within schools that reproduces unequal social, political, and economic structures within society. My participation in this selective tradition of knowledge dissemination and making comparisons between students to identify so-called ‘gaps’ or deficits’ implicates me in the reproduction of dominance. Investing in the perception of my teaching role as a neutral one allowed me to maintain a stance of innocence while denying the real-life consequences of perpetuating this selective knowledge tradition on students whose knowledges, identities, and ways of knowing and being were denied, erased, or betrayed.

The assumed neutrality of the role of educator/teacher:

As a young teacher, I entered the world of public education primed and ready for my role. I knew I had to work hard to do what was expected and I knew how to deliver. I dutifully followed the provincial requirements for the content and skills my students needed to learn. I worked hard for many years to teach my students according to the dictates of the curriculum, using the resources that were provided, believing that I was doing right by my students, continually striving to be the best teacher I could be. I studied and followed the suggestions for implementation and instruction provided in the curriculum and recommended resources, believing that the key to success for my students was in the structured environment I created and the thoughtful, sequential learning path I planned for them.

Consider my surprise when I read Apple (1990): “By the very nature of the institution, the educator was involved, whether he or she was conscious of it or not, in a political act” (p. 1). The description of my teacher role as a political act was reason to pause and reflect. Always investing

in the commonly accepted neutrality of my teaching role within the public education system, I had never considered the political nature of that role in reproducing existing power relations and indoctrinating students to accept the status quo as normative. Just as the school as an institution is not separate from the power relations within the larger society in which it operates and the knowledge forms distributed by schools are not separate from those in positions of power who decide on them, I realized that I was not separate from the ruling ideologies and power structures within society, nor was I separate from the effects of the ‘saturation’ process in which I had been indoctrinated.

As an educator, I had to ask myself how these ideologies and normative power structures were reflected in my perspectives and guided my decisions and practice (Apple, 1990, p. 14). What “ideological and epistemological commitments [did I] tacitly accept and promote” (Apple, 1990, p. 14)? As I consider the positivist knowledge traditions I imparted, the behaviour management practices I used, and the labelling of students that guided my instructional decisions, a neutral stance is impossible.

Understanding that my instructional decisions and practices did not emerge in isolation to that which constituted me, I also had to delve into the process by which my consciousness was saturated with ruling ideologies throughout my childhood/youth. Although conditioned to believe that I was an individual in charge of my success and destiny, I have come to understand that I was not separate from the society that constituted me and that I am a product of that ‘saturation’ process.

The assumption of individuality and understanding the ‘saturation’ process that constituted me as a good white girl/woman:

The ‘making’ of a good white settler girl:

Steeped in the value of individual and familial hard work as the means to prove one’s earned success ..., I was also conditioned to contextualize that hard work within a traditional gendered female role and the compliance expected in learning to perform that role.

In spite of my belief that I was a “natural, abiding, self-evident individual” (Youdell, 2006, p. 34), it is essential to this (un)making process that I recognize that I was born into the ruling ideology of settler colonialism and its Eurocentric worldview. Thus, I did not begin my life forming my own thoughts and beliefs as the author of my own existence as I had believed. These

were formed for me. Through family, community, church, and school socialization processes, I was imprinted with the discourses, or “bodies of knowledge that are taken as ‘truth’ and [the lenses] through which [I was to] see the world” (Youdell, 2006, p. 35). I was immersed in these ‘bodies of knowledge’ through the discursive practices of speech, text, and representations such as images or gestures (Youdell, 2006, p. 35), and through this multi-layered and multi-faceted conditioning, I came to believe that this subjective view was reality, and therefore, normal and neutral. This socialization process was essential in constituting me as a subject who understood the world and reality through the ideological lens of those in power and who went on to reproduce that ideology, and thereby maintain existing inequitable power relations, through repeated iterations of the discourses that shaped and molded me – the discourses that served colonial, patriarchal, capitalist, white supremacist ideology – *of my own volition*. Important to this formative process was the *belief* that I was an autonomous individual so that I would not be aware of the way in which I was being molded as a subject, or a ‘certain kind of person’ – not of my own choosing but produced in and by discursive practices – and subject to existing power structures in society (Youdell, 2006, pp. 41–43).

My understanding of my subjective self as the sovereign, rational, agentic author of my own thoughts, beliefs, and actions is one that is commonly assumed and accepted (Weedon, 2004, pp. 5–8). However, Weedon (2004) problematized this commonsense notion and advocated for an analysis of “how subjectivities and identities are socially constituted in ways that serve particular interests, even while they may appear or be lived as obvious and natural” (p. 9) and reproduce “economic and social inequalities” (pp. 9–10).

My subjectivity – my understanding and experience of myself and who and what I could be in the world, as well as others’ understanding of who I was and could be (Weedon, 2004, p. 18; Youdell, 2006, p. 48) – was not my own as liberal notions of individualism had led me to believe. Rather, I was constructed to believe in the illusion that I was a self-constituting individual distinct from the “external landscape” of society (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 75), while being produced as a particular kind of person to serve a particular kind of role in service to perpetuating the ruling ideology of colonial, patriarchal, capitalist, white supremacy. Thus, while I believed I was free to be self-determining, I was bound by the restrictive edges of the role into which I was subjectivated. While I believed in individual autonomy, I was produced to perform a

function within a role that served the reproduction of dominant power relations. And what is most chilling about this hegemonic reproduction is that I participated in reproducing that illusion for students with my full cooperation and dedicated service.

In order to pursue the question of whether I can (un)make my subject role as a good white female teacher, I need to go back to the beginning and understand how I was constituted first as a good girl within my settler family of origin. How did I come to understand who I could be and who I could not be? How was I made knowable to myself through “everyday categorisations” (Youdell, 2006, p. 48), such as girl/boy, female/male, good/bad, hard-working/lazy, white/Other? I was categorized and then marked and defined by these categories. These categorizations became known to me as my identity, as they “impose[d] a law of truth on me which [I had to] recognize and which others [had] to recognize in [me]” (Foucault, 1982, p. 781).

Although I chafed at what I experienced as restrictive expectations and longed for the perceived freedoms of my brothers, I was raised to do as I was told, not to ask questions, and to be seen and not heard. I learned to quiet my rebellious protestations and impertinent questions if I wanted to avoid the wagging finger of shame and the threat of impending punishment. I learned that acceptance and approval from my family depended on being perceived as a ‘good girl’ and that meant acquiescing to imposed expectations from my parents, who knew better and had the power to impose sanctions.

Using Foucault’s understanding of discourses as not “reflecting ‘truth’” or the way things are, “but the very moment and means of the *production* of these truths” (Youdell, 2006, p. 35, italics in original), my identity was produced as a culturally specific and historically located conception of gender. Born as a female into a patriarchal family structure in the late 1950s, my gender was conceived in a particular way and, therefore, came to exist in that form (Youdell, 2006, p. 35). This conception of what it meant to be female informed the discursive practices (speech, images, gestures) of my parents and the other adults in my extended family, which, in turn, inscribed a whole system of meaning within me of what it meant to be a girl (Youdell, 2006, p. 35) that I was expected to recognize and embody so that others could recognize it in me (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). I became subject to, and regulated by, the categories that were imposed on me as my gendered identity.

“Gendered subject positions are constituted in various ways: by images of how one is expected to look and behave and by rules of behaviour to which one should conform which are reinforced by approval or punishment” (Weedon, 1997, p. 95). The primary images of how I was expected to look and behave came from observations of my mother and other adult females in my extended family and the ways in which they carried out their gendered roles and presented themselves in public or when visitors came to our home. The socially defined and gendered roles they were expected to fulfill and the ways in which they presented themselves in public filtered down to the expectations that were imposed on me in the ways that I was expected to help and the way I was expected to present myself when in public or when company came to call. The reminders to ‘act like a lady’ and to ‘be seen and not heard’ stand out in my memory, as do the expectations of helping with food preparation and the clean-up afterward as the males retired to the living room to talk.

The rewards for conforming to expectations of my female role in the family produced within me an understanding of what it meant to be a good girl. When I did what I was told, and especially if I did what was expected *before* I was told, I was deemed a ‘good girl.’ When I chafed at the expectation of performing traditionally female chores and yearned to do what my brothers got to do (not then recognized as *their* gendered conditioning), it was to no avail. No perceived ‘freedoms’ were gained and one look from my mother or father told me that I was inviting consequences that I did not want to experience. No complaining was tolerated, as everyone was expected to help and to do their fair share of the work, which, in my case, included jobs in the house, garden, and farmyard. Not wanting to be categorized as a ‘bad girl’ because that meant being shamed and shunned, I learned early to avoid the disapproving ‘shame on you’ or ‘you should be ashamed of yourself.’ And there was always the threat by my father of a freshly cut willow on my backside to keep me in line when I was too boisterous and my behaviour interfered with the ‘adult talk’ – a threat that was never actualized but one that stands out in memory as a threat that my child-self believed.

Within this family conditioning, I learned to submit to parental authority and to understand that the ultimate authority was my father. The threat of ‘just wait until your father gets home’ was enough to stop me in my tracks and suppress my youthful voice of resistance. This early training in patriarchal thinking was expressed by both parents in their assumptions of power *over*

their children, in the “division of labor by sex’ (Weedon, 1997, p. 82), and the expectations of compliance and dutiful helpfulness that would subordinate me as a woman in my “future social destination within patriarchal societ[y]” (p. 74). Inserted into specific culturally and historically contingent discourses about what it meant to be female, I was constituted to know myself as a feminine subject through repeated iterations and practices of reward and sanction, and to accept them as my lived experience (Weedon, 2004, p. 7).

I also heard narratives about others as I grew up although I rarely saw them – Indigenous peoples and immigrants coming to Canada – narratives that spoke of Indigenous peoples who needed to quit complaining and asking for handouts, who needed to get jobs and make an honest living; narratives that spoke of the threat of newly arriving immigrants taking jobs away from Canadians. I usually heard these narratives expressed by the adults in my life in response to items on the news or as part of their discourse when they came to visit. I had limited exposure to ‘Indigenous peoples who needed to get jobs’ and ‘immigrants who were coming to take jobs away from Canadians’ because I was surrounded by people who looked like me. Encounters with these others were fleeting.

Through watching and listening to the adults in my life, I learned that those who did not look like me or strive for the rewards of industrious labour like my family and the families around me were ‘othered’ and the object of criticism and judgment. What these adults said and did not say taught me that to know myself and be known by my white settler family and community, I needed to be recognized and known as a good worker. And so, I worked hard alongside my parents and siblings to meet this expectation of worth and basked in the light of recognition when my efforts resulted in occasional utterances of ‘you’re a good girl.’ The criticisms that were levelled at me when I was perceived to be idle (i.e., reading a book when there were jobs to be done), and therefore lazy, informed my understanding of how I did not want to be known. Being deemed lazy would categorize me with those ‘others’ who were the object of derision and exclusion. I needed to belong and belonging meant being included in the category of hard workers. These discourses, rewards, and sanctions affirmed the constructed national narrative that connected hard work and deserving white settlers.

What these adults said and did not say also taught me about the sanctity of the work of white settlers. Their discursive practices taught me that jobs *for white people like me* needed to

be protected from those ‘others’ who were coming to take them away. This protective stance and assumption that white settler identity equated with first right to jobs (i.e., the *best* jobs) was aided and abetted by the denial and erasure of historic colonial oppression and violence that enabled this self-centred stance.

These memories of ‘others’ and their relegation to the margins of society reveals another layer to the highly regulated subjectification process according to a gender hierarchy (Schick, 2000b, p. 301). Born into a white settler family, I was conditioned in hierarchical thinking and assumption of white dominance as I grew up and lived in a white settler farming community and experienced race through fleeting glimpses of those ‘others’ existing on the margins and posing a threat to hardworking families like mine. Not wanting to be like those ‘others’ and seeking to belong, I instinctively aligned myself with white settler families who were defining their subject identities by what they were not – what Judith Butler (1993) called the ‘citation of difference’ (p. 3, as cited in Schick, 2000a, p. 86) – and essentializing those ‘others’ in ways that would construct them as ‘always outsiders’ banished to the margins and disallowed access to belonging.

A further connection occurred within this highly regulated conditioning in gender and racial hierarchies (Schick, 2000b, p. 301). Like Schick (2000b), I remember being told to ‘act like a lady’ in my family, but “never once... did I have to be told to ‘act white’, for to ‘act like a lady’ already included what it meant to be white, straight, gendered, able-bodied, Christian, classed, and all other normative identities considered important when I was growing up” (p. 302). Being reminded repeatedly as a girl to be seen and not heard, not to be a bother to anyone, prepared me to conform to the assumed standard of good *white* woman (Schick, 2000, p. 302).

The ‘making’ of a good white settler woman:

As I matured and grew older, I added ‘good’ to the roles of wife and mother. I worked diligently to demonstrate ‘good’ in every role I took on, seeking to receive external affirmation of my worth.

Returning to Weedon (1997), I reflect on the rewards and sanctions that imprinted the expectations of compliance and dutiful helpfulness into the very fibre of my subordinate subject-self and produced me as a good white settler woman (p. 74). What was recognized and condoned by family, church, and community? Demonstrating respectability (Schick, 2000a) by getting

married and having children (in that order), keeping a good (i.e., neat and clean) home and manicured yard, growing a garden and being known by the amount of canning, pickling, and freezing that I accomplished, ensuring that my children presented themselves as good children (i.e., neat, clean, and well-behaved), and sacrificing self-interest for husband and family. What was sanctioned by family, church, and community? Demonstrating that I had a mind of my own when I questioned, challenged the status quo, wanted more for my life, thought differently, felt too much, shared too much, took initiative that brought attention to my skills and creativity instead of my husband's, or wanted to talk about issues or subjects that invited depth of understanding and critical analysis. I well remember the denial and erasure I experienced when my first teacher resource was published, an event that was a milestone for me, and one that was minimized and ignored by my husband and family. Feeling too much also brought censure from my husband and family, as did sharing too much of what was deemed 'private.' Those rewards and sanctions shored up and cemented the walls of my subjectivated self and restricted how I was to know and understand myself to doing as expected and remaining in a subordinate role of servitude to the interests of those who assumed the power to reward and sanction – namely, husband, family, church, and community.

Fellows and Razack (1998) referred to this pursuit of respectability as an attempt to avoid the risk of erasure and secure my place in the centre, even if that place was “in a subordinate position within patriarchy” (p. 339). As I sought belonging, and affirmation of that belonging, I was conditioned not to see how I was implicated in the subordination and oppression of others (Fellows & Razack, 1998, p. 339). Rather, my focus was only looking up the hierarchical gender ladder from my own position on the rung of white female. I did not look at the rungs below me to see who occupied those positions and what other hierarchies of difference such as race, class, ableism, and sexuality intersected with gender to extend that ladder far below and beyond my rung position, which was closer to the top than I realized.

That conditioning not to see also conditioned me to see myself as innocent of the oppression of others. Born into a white settler family, I never had to define myself in terms of race nor did I ever have to mark an identity box because I was already perceived as part of the dominant group. Even though I sought belonging through much of my life, I failed to realize that I already occupied a position of belonging simply because I am white. Fellows and Razack

(1998) explained that my birth into the dominant white group “meant that I was unmarked or unnamed” (p. 341). As I matured into a woman that “embod[ied] the [unnamed] norm,” I accepted that “subordinate groups simply *are* the way they are” (Fellows & Razack, 1998, p. 341) and came to know myself as innocent of the domination of others through their symbolic and material marking and containment (p. 342).

How did I come to know myself in this way? I embraced the premises of liberalism and the belief in the fundamental equality of all people while living and working in a contradictory social and economic structure built on unequal power relations (Fellows & Razack, 1998, p. 342). While I professed liberal ideals, I acquiesced to, and participated in, a colonial system that committed violence on, and cultural genocide of, Indigenous peoples to gain access to land to build the nation, that exploited the working class for the benefit of the capitalist economy, and that imposed gender hierarchies that centred the white patriarchy (Fellows & Razack, 1998, p. 342). I became a woman within a social structure that proclaimed equality for all and yet excluded those it deemed not equal (i.e., people with disabilities, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, women, racial minorities, Indigenous peoples). I became a woman within a social structure that “contained [differences] in the Other across a firm and visible border” (Fellows & Razack, 1998, p. 342) and denied the material experience of equality to those who were physically or spatially marked as different (p. 343).

I learned to define myself by what I was not, by distancing myself from anyone marked as ‘Other.’ In this distancing and acceptance of the classification and containment of Others marked as different, I participated in the “making of a dominant self... through imagining [myself] as everything the Other is not” (Fellows & Razack, 1998, p. 343). I built my identity based on what I was not – not on any true sense of who I am – as not male, not shameful, not of ill-repute or loose or wild or degenerate, not dirty or loud or disorderly, not disobedient, not coloured, not Indigenous, not shunned or marginalized (Fellows & Razack, 1998, p. 343). I sought belonging in the centre by distancing myself from all I perceived as not being accepted. What I could not admit but always feared was that my place in the centre was not fixed and that it (and my acceptance, belonging, and worth) was never secure. Thus, boundaries had “to be made and remade until the difference between the self and the subordinate Other appear[ed] natural and thus fixed” (Fellows & Razack, 1998, p. 343).

Another hierarchy becomes apparent in the highly regulated familial and social conditioning that produced my subject-self, and that is the hierarchy of class. Born into a working-class family with aspirations for middle class respectability, the importance of “the making of a middle class home...as the site of self-control, self-discipline, and order” (Fellows & Razack, 1998, pp. 344–345) becomes clear in my recollections of the discipline and close regulation that were features of my childhood home and expected as I married and created my own home. No ‘cracks’ were supposed to show in that pursuit of respectability, no signs of disorder or dysregulation. Creating clean ordered spaces and hiding any ‘dirt’ (both literal and figurative) were of utmost importance, as was the expectation that the family always presented a decent front. This pursuit of respectability provides a means of understanding the parental disapproval and sanctions when I was perceived to share too much. It also supports my understanding of family, especially maternal, shame that I felt projected onto me when my marriage ended in divorce, and I became a single mother. I exposed ‘cracks’ in the pursuit of respectability for all to see. My failure as a woman to make my marriage work and to create a respectable, well-ordered family home based on a gendered hierarchy was exposed for all to see. That shame and the ‘unbelonging’ I experienced taught me that I was deeply flawed and unworthy of belonging. I could no longer be recognized as the gendered subject-self by which my family and community had known me (Foucault, 1982).

The pursuit of respectability for the middle class that began “as a bourgeois morality in the eighteenth century... became everyone’s morality in the twentieth century” (Fellows & Razack, 1998, p. 349). The truth of Fellows and Razack’s statement is reflected in my mother’s focus on cleaning and the unending list of chores that were all about creating and maintaining order in our home, garden, and farmyard, and in the requirement that her children were also to portray order as they were told to be seen and not heard so as not to be a bother to anyone. The pursuit of respectability as everyone’s morality is also reflected in the fleeting experience of acceptance and belonging that I experienced with my mother when my children were babies and I was a stay-at-home mother. From this vantage point, I consider that she could recognize and know me as my gendered subject-self in this role. When the cracks appeared in the walls that formed that gendered subject-self, she projected shame onto me because she also experienced the shame of being perceived to fail in ‘right’ conditioning of her daughter for the gendered role she was to take in society.

As I reflect on the subjectification process that constituted me as a ‘certain kind of’ girl/woman, I connect to Haug’s (1987) memory work, which “suggests that individuals consciously and unconsciously ‘restructure the given elements of their lives until such a time as their existence becomes relatively uncontradictory’” (p. 40, as cited in Norquay, 1993, p. 245). I sublimated all the resistant, rebellious aspects of me in order to fit the role of good white girl-woman to which family and society assigned me and spent decades remembering and sharing my past experiences as unproblematic, as representative of the ideal. Norquay (1993) affirmed this process: “the desire to be accepted and confirmed often leads to empathy with and acceptance of experiences without examining them closely” (Norquay, 1993, p. 246). It is only now that I recognize and problematize the experiences of my past. What will continue to be important for me to keep front of mind as I continue this process of (un)making and engage in critical reflection of the impacts of this subjectivated production and performance is my implication in the oppression of others.

For mainstream women, not questioning our pasts and reordering our past experiences so they appear unproblematic ties us to the perception that difference is someone else’s problem – one we want to help solve, but not necessarily one in which we ourselves have played a role. (Norquay, 1993, p. 245)

Understanding the ‘saturation’ process that constituted me as a good white student/teacher:

The ‘making’ of a good student-subject:

Just as I learned to be a good girl from my family and a good Christian from my church, I learned to be a good student from the public education system. I learned that acceptance and approval by those in positions of authority – in this case, my teachers and principals – depended on doing what I was directed to do there too. Over the years of my public education, my grades, end-of-year awards, and scholarships at my Grade 12 graduation affirmed my growing ability to perform and produce as expected. While I often chafed at these expectations and the yearning to challenge the status quo still pushed its way to the surface from time to time, the approval (and sanctions) of those in positions of authority (teachers and principal at school and parents at home) proved stronger and, for the most part, I acquiesced and yielded to expectations of compliance and conformity.

The subjectification process inherent within public education produced a compliant, self-regulating student who achieved the markers of success – that is, the reproduction of discourses or bodies of knowledge deemed ‘truth’ (Youdell, 2006, p. 35) – imposed and expected by those in positions of authority. I exemplified those “particular constellations of identity categories... [that] are more or less compatible with school notions of good students and ideal (or acceptable) learners” (Youdell, 2006, p. 33). Instances of brief attempts at resistance and rebellion in high school surface in my memories, but overall, I fit the notion of the ‘good student’ and the ‘ideal (or acceptable) learner,’ and for that performance, I was rewarded with academic awards and scholarships. ‘Good student’ also meant that I complied with the rules and expectations of behaviour. Not only was that compliance expected in school; it was also expected at home, and I knew (and experienced) the sanctions from my parents when my behaviour resulted in corrective communication from the school. The familial messages of ‘do as you’re told’ and ‘perform as expected’ extended into the conditioning embedded within the schooling experience.

Schick’s (2000b) reflection on her experience of public education provided insights into my own experience. Like her, “my first days of [school] typifie[d] an entrance into highly regulated social relations of class, race, and heteronormativity” (Schick, 2000b, p. 301). I remember the rows of desks and the white female teacher who taught me what my role as a good student was. I learned to do as I was instructed – when to stand up and when to sit down, when to line up in rows of boys and girls, when to be quiet, when to work, and when to play. I learned to seek approval from the teacher as affirmation of correct behaviour and to seek red check marks on my work as affirmation of correct learning. I learned to regulate myself within the boundaries of what marked a good student and an ideal (and acceptable) learner (Youdell, 2006, p. 33), and those boundaries of good student behaviour were tied to “middle-class, white, Anglo-Saxon patterns of behaviour” (Schick, 2000b, p. 302) and their connections to the ‘pursuit of respectability’ (Fellows & Razack, 1998).

Also like Schick (2000b), “I arrived [at school] as a... child from a working-class family where education is valued especially for its job acquisition potential and access to a middle class lifestyle” (Schick, 2000b, p. 301). The message that schooling was important for getting a job was affirmed and repeated from my parents, especially my father who had quit school in Grade 9 because the expectation from his parents that he help with the harvest before returning to school

put him two months behind in his understanding of algebra and his teacher refused to help him catch up. (Interestingly, when my father's parents required that he help with harvest instead of attending school, they were not castigated for 'not valuing' school, as Indigenous parents are.) Thus, schooling was especially important to my father, as a high school diploma and its connection to future training and jobs were denied to him and he felt forced into farming. Just as my father experienced the impacts of hierarchical power structures within his family and the school, I, too, came to understand how those power structures worked through the extension of my lived familial experience into the realm of public education.

Schooling taught me to understand power as "something that resides in and/or is held by 'the powerful', whether the powerful is a monarch, government, institution, social group or individual" (Youdell, 2006, p. 34) and that is held "over another individual or group" (p. 34). Within this commonsense understanding of power lies the notion that power is a property that is possessed (Youdell, 2006, p. 34) and is therefore "a force exerted by those who have it, those in authority, against those who do not" (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 82). Schooling and its curriculum corroborated and extended "the notion of 'sovereign power', which is held, possessed and exercised" (Youdell, 2006, p. 35) that I had experienced within the hierarchical power structure of my family to be the way power worked in the world. Schooling further ingrained the notion of 'top-down' power embedded within hierarchical structures as I came to know and accept that teachers and principals held the property of power and they could exercise that power over me as a student through expectations, rewards, and sanctions, which were completely supported by the expectations, rewards, and sanctions of my parents.

What was invisible to me as a student (and, in time, as a teacher) was that power was operating through what Foucault identified as "'disciplinary power', which is productive and normative" (1990a & 1991, as cited in Youdell, 2006, p. 35). Disciplinary power is exercised through discourses, or "bodies of knowledge that are taken as 'truth' and through which we see the world" (Youdell, 2006, p. 35). The discourses that I was conditioned to accept as all there was to know, as the truth of my reality, were the Western knowledge disciplines presented as objective fact and existing apart from existing power relations (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). Through the "whitebread curriculum of... school" (Schick, 2000b, p. 302), the Western Eurocentric worldview was presented as the truth of reality, with no exposure to other knowledge systems

and ways of knowing. Discursive practices of text, speech, and representations constituted culturally specific and historically located bodies of knowledge that were presented and taken as ‘truth’ at the same time as they were being formed by those same bodies of knowledge (Youdell, 2006, p. 35).

“The historicity of particular discursive practices means that some discourses... do come to dominate and bound legitimate knowledge, and indeed, what is knowable” (Youdell, 2006, p. 36). Examples of this process can be found in the disciplinary knowledge of science and history. Scientific claims and theories were/are presented as fact disconnected from understanding that “scientific account[s] of reality” are “product[s] of complex social processes” (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, pp. 65–66). Historical accounts of events in the civilization of the world and the making of the nation were/are presented as fact disconnected from understanding that “any account of events is a discursive construction” (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 66) or a “version of reality” (p. 62) subject to, and representative of, existing power relations. These discourses did/do not reflect ‘truth’ or the way things are; rather, they were/are the means of producing those truths (Foucault, 1990a & 1991, as cited in Youdell, 2006, p. 35). My conceptions of reality and how the world worked were formed by the discourses I absorbed as ‘truth’ during my socialization. The more I imbibed these discourses, the more these subjective conceptions of reality became ‘self-evident’ to me.

I was also subject to “regulatory technologies” (Youdell, 2006, p. 36), another means through which Foucault’s ‘disciplinary power’ operates in schools and other institutions. My school subjectification is reflected in Foucault’s description of disciplinary power, which:

implies an uninterrupted coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result, and it is exercised according to a codification that partitions as closely as possible time, space, movement. These methods, which make possible *the meticulous control of the operations of the body*, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and *imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility*, might be called the ‘disciplines.’ (1991, p. 137, as cited in Youdell, 2006, p. 36, italics mine)

‘Uninterrupted coercion’ shows itself in the legal requirement that I attend public education from the ages of 7 to 16 years. The partitioning of space was identified by Foucault (1991) as one of the technologies of disciplinary power that was concerned with “enclosure, partitioning, the

establishment of functional sites, and the ranking or classification of bodies” (Youdell, 2006, p. 36). I consider my experience of the partitioning of schools into classrooms that are ranked and ordered by grade and designated for certain bodies of students. The partitioning of time is witnessed in the control of activity through timetabling and compartmentalizing of the school day. I reflect on my school experience of time-bound classes and discrete subjects and recognize the partitioning that Foucault described. I also recognize the imposed control over movement – when and how I could move within the classroom and the school – and what constituted ‘on task’ behaviour.

There is also recognition of my place within the power structure of schooling in the “‘hierarchical observation’ or ‘surveillance’ [that] underpins these [regulatory] technologies – the student, teacher, and school are each subject to the gaze of the next, and all are subject to the gaze of the state” (Youdell, 2006, p. 36). I was surveilled by my teachers, who were, in turn, surveilled by the principal, who was, in turn, surveilled by the school division, that was, in turn, surveilled by the state. This hierarchical surveillance produces bodies that are self-surveilling (Youdell, 2006, p. 36). Ordered and produced to be a docile body, I became self-regulated as I learned to control my body (and myself) in ways that reflected expectations imposed by those in positions of authority and power (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 84). Thus, I was produced as a student-subject who became knowable to myself as that which was expected of me (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 84). Self-regulation is the normalization of power as “force from ‘outside’ works as self-discipline from ‘within’” (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 84). This ‘force from outside,’ expressed through dominant power relations, organizes schools, teachers, and students to meet the needs of the state and the economy (Youdell, 2006, p. 37). This organization exemplifies the intertwining of power and knowledge as specific knowledges are constituted and deployed as ‘truth’ and the discursive deployment of these same knowledges produces power (Foucault, 1990a, p. 100, as cited in Youdell, 2006, p. 37).

Further intertwining of power and knowledge is revealed in the hierarchical binary thinking that produced the normative lens through which I was indoctrinated to see and understand the world. I learned to define “the dominant presence... *in terms of what it is not*” (Youdell, 2006, p. 39, italics in original). Indigenous was extrapolated to define what is not white; disabled was extrapolated to define what is not able-bodied; female was extrapolated as

not male; and Other was “extrapolated to define what is not the Same, what is not normal and taken for granted” (Derrida, 1988, as cited in Youdell, 2006, p. 39). Each extrapolation depended on the Other in its definition and inferred a hierarchy. That which was defined as ‘not’ was subordinate to the term that was privileged, and yet, the privileged terms – white, able-bodied, male – could only exist in relation to that defined as Other (Derrida, 1988, as cited in Youdell, 2006, p. 39). They were/are not absolute in their superiority; they were/are a hierarchical construction presented as truth.

Foucault (1990a & 1991) explained the subjectivation process of public schooling with precision: I was “subjected to relations of power as [I was] individualized, categorized, classified, hierarchized, normalized, surveilled and provoked to self surveillance” (as cited in Youdell, 2006, p. 41). I was categorized and marked as a white female student. “This impose[d] a law of truth on [me] which [I had to] recognize and which others had to recognize in [me]” (Foucault, 1990a, p. 212, as cited in Youdell, 2006, p. 41). This form of power made me a subject – “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to [my] own identity by a conscious self-knowledge. [I was the product of] a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to” (Foucault, 1990a, p. 212, as cited in Youdell, 2006, p. 41).

My subjugation was achieved through the performative power of discursive practice. I was produced as that which I was named (Butler, 1993, p. 13, as cited in Youdell, 2006, p. 42). Being recognized and named as a good girl and then as a good student imposed a reality on me that produced and constrained me simultaneously (Butler, 1993, p. 13, as cited in Youdell, 2006, p. 44). Designated as a good girl, I performed as a good girl. Designated as a good student, I performed as a good student. Althusser (1971) called this process of being produced or brought into being through naming as ‘interpellation.’ This production and performativity constrained my existence within the roles in which I was defined and apart from all other possibilities of subjectivity that existed. Weedon (2004) identified this curtailment as “one of the key ideological roles of identity” (p. 19) formation. In what she referred to as a recruitment process, dominant discourses require particular identity identifications with particular constructed values and roles (Weedon, 2004, p. 19).

The curtailment inherent within the production of particular subject roles results in “self-incarceration” (Butler, 1997b, p. 32, as cited in Youdell, 2006, p. 45). “Subject to the rules of

being a girl” (Butler, 1997b, p. 32, as cited in Youdell, 2006, p. 45), I was primed for the school discourses that expected good behaviour (i.e., cooperative, compliant, hardworking). Familial and school discourses ingrained the rules of who I could be and how I was to be known within the fibres of my being, and that ingrainment resulted in self-surveillance and lifelong incarceration within the limited and limiting subject role by which I was to be known.

The ‘making’ of a good teacher-subject:

The themes of compliance, conformity, and ‘being good’ continued to hold power over my choices as I grew into adulthood. In spite of my determination to pursue a career that was ‘different’ from more traditional gendered choices in university, by the end of my first year, I had defaulted to the career that I had always sworn never to pursue – that of a teacher because my mother had been a teacher and I had been determined not to follow in her footsteps.

It was during my pre-service practicums that all of the expectations of ‘good’ in other realms of my life converged within my new role as teacher. There, my work ethic and conditioned response to meet the expectations of those in positions of authority (in this case, my supervising teachers and college supervisors) were reinforced by their approval and recognition by the College of Education with an award for excellence in my internship. I had met and surpassed their expectations, even volunteering an additional month in the school in which I had interned, and I basked in this external validation of my worth.

As a young teacher, I entered the world of public education primed and ready for my role. I knew I had to work hard to do what was expected and I knew how to deliver. I dutifully followed the provincial requirements for the content and skills my students needed to learn. I worked hard for many years to teach my students according to the dictates of the curriculum, using the resources that were provided, believing that I was doing right by my students, continually striving to be the best teacher I could be. I studied and followed the suggestions for implementation and instruction provided in the curriculum and recommended resources, believing that the key to success for my students was in the structured environment I created and the thoughtful, sequential learning path I planned for them. I worked diligently to find creative and experiential ways to ensure that my students experienced success, critical only of my ability to make the required learning meaningful and accessible for my students, never of the learning path itself and the external parameters that defined it. It was my premise that their success was dependent

on my belief in their ability to succeed and my ability to determine what they needed in order to achieve that success. Convinced that reaching their potential was within reach for all of them, I taught the ideal that they could be anything in the world they aspired to be if they dreamed big enough and worked hard enough.

When multiculturalism was introduced, I embraced this ‘celebration of diversity’ and exposed my students to other cultures in the world. How meaningful and engaging my classes were as students learned about different ways of life and the traditions that immigrant groups brought with them to Canada, the nation that provided a welcoming place for all people and all cultures.

When inclusion was introduced, I worked even harder to support all students in meaningful learning. Whatever the education system asked of me, I did, learning more and finding ways to implement new approaches and ways of understanding into my practice. Never questioning the system itself, I was commended for my ability to respond to new initiatives and implement them effectively with my students.

As a young teacher, I trusted in the education system and its institutions. I trusted that those in positions of authority knew what was best and I followed their lead with diligence and exactitude. The values of goodness, tolerance, and inclusion, espoused as a nation and the guiding principles of its institutions, informed all that I sought to be. Defined by a lifetime of accommodating the expectations of others, I received approval and affirmation as a good teacher, even a master teacher. Being good had molded me; being good meant doing what was asked to the highest degree possible. Being good meant seeking validation of my worth in approval reflected back to me from those in positions of authority. As a good woman-teacher, I learned to look outside of myself for affirmation of my worth and that worth was found in meeting the indicators of success as determined by others in positions of power and authority. I had known no other way.

The same subjectivation process that produced me as a good white girl and a good white student continued to produce me as a good white teacher. As an inherent part of this process, I inhabited the figure of autonomous individual and teacher while I was radically dependent on the direction, expectations, standards, affirmation, and approval of those in positions of power (Butler, 1997, pp. 83–84, as cited in Youdell, 2006, p. 44).

Affirmation and approval came early in my career. What follows are excerpts from my performance review as an intern in 1978:

Polite, courteous and congenial;

excellent rapport with students – sensitive toward their needs;

a great asset in boosting staff morale.

Very well-organized; industrious and hard-working;

always willing to try new methods

and to teach even more than required.

Consistent discipline –

can keep order conducive to learning.

Very mature student and an exceptional teacher;

very dependable;

maintained an excellent level of competency.

What stands out to me after reading critical scholars like Althusser, Foucault, Apple, and Wetherell and Potter is what was reinforced in my performance: well-organized, industrious, hard-working, willing... to teach even more than required; consistent discipline; can keep order conducive to learning; dependable. I was recognized and affirmed for my ability to maintain “a regulated and concerted system of power” (Foucault, 1982, p. 787) that was marked by discipline, order, organization, and hard work. The affirmation I received in this feedback resulted in recognition with a Bates Award for my internship, which informed my continuing performance as teacher when I entered my first contract. I knew what those in positions of power were looking for, and it was clear that I knew how to deliver on what was required. Although I thought of power in terms of those in positions of power above me, my reinforced performance was a perfect illustration of the ‘regulated and concerted system of power’ that I instituted within my practice.

I became the perfect teacher-subject as I practiced self-surveillance and regulated myself and my instructional practice to ensure that I kept meeting, and exceeding, the markers of success of my subject role. In keeping with the truth-finding and truth-telling of this inquiry, I liked meeting those markers of success. I liked receiving affirmation and recognition from those in positions of power above me. That affirmation and recognition thrilled me, and my pursuit of more affirmation and recognition added fuel to my efforts to perform as expected. In my constitution as a particular kind of subject (i.e., a white female teacher-subject), I became subject *to*, and dependent *on*, the system and its discourses and power structures.

And so, from early on in my career, affirmations of my ability to perform as expected strengthened this dependency:

Daybook well done – careful and purposeful.

Excellent developmental and sequential procedure in daily and long-range planning.

Excellent teacher-pupil rapport.

Learning atmosphere – impressive.

Students participate willingly and with enthusiasm.

A very well-developed program of classroom management.

Teacher self-control and consistency – excellent.

Skilful management of a very large class.

Excellent knowledge of subject matter.

Teaching standards – very high (corrections up to date).

A delightful classroom to visit!

Commended for a student-centred

yet structured and disciplined classroom.

The students in this classroom are in good hands.

I feel the dissonance between my remembered delight in receiving such affirmation and the jarring recognition of what was clearly a highly regulated performance that reproduced and subjectivated students within existing dominant and inequitable power relations.

I had internalized the teacher-subject role into which I had been interpellated (Althusser, 1971), and through multiple repetitions, these ‘performances’ became ingrained as commonsense, and my constructed teacher identity was sedimented by the reiteration of discursive practices, representative of dominant ideology, over time (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 78).

One of the questions that compelled further investigation as I pursued the question of whether my constructed white female teacher identity can be (un)made was how I was constituted ‘not to see.’ How was it that I performed my role of teacher-subject so exceedingly well for so many years without recognition of the relation between the content and practices of school and the ideology of those who hold social, political, and economic power? Althusser (1971) pointed out that the “universally reigning ideology of the School” is covered up and concealed as “a neutral environment purged of ideology” (p. 19). The “massive inculcation of the ideology of the ruling class” to reproduce “the relations of production in a capitalist social formation” (Althusser, 1971, p. 19) had/has to be hidden in order that parents willingly send their children to school where teachers willingly impart the ruling ideology. I recognize my invested teacher-subject self in Althusser’s writing:

How many (the majority) do not even begin to suspect the ‘work’ the system (which is bigger than they are and crushes them) forces them to do, or worse, *put all their heart and ingenuity into performing it with the most advanced awareness. So little do they suspect it that their own devotion contributes to the maintenance and nourishment of this ideological representation of the School*, which makes the School today as ‘natural’, indispensable-useful and even beneficial for our contemporaries as the Church was ‘natural’, indispensable and generous for our ancestors a few centuries ago. (1971, p. 20, italics mine)

Prior to this inquiry, what was not visible to me in my teaching practice was my willing participation in the production of compliant workers to feed “the relations of production” (Althusser, 1971, p. 36) of the capitalist system and devoted citizens who freely subjected

themselves to the ruling hegemonic ideology and accepted their place within the prevailing inequitable power structures. I was produced to believe in the ideals and values that I passed on to students, just as I was produced to condition children for their place in continued reproduction of the dominant status quo. I realize that I never had my own autonomous identity, just as the self-identity I taught was an illusion for students. Just as I had been subjectivated, they, too, were already subjects as soon as they were born into their families of origin. They were born into ideologies about the way the world worked and their place within it that were determined even before their births. I became a part of the social mechanism that ‘hailed’ them and interpellated them as subjects who would go on to serve and reproduce existing inequitable power relations and systems of oppression (Althusser, 1971).

Realizing the hidden layers to the functioning of “ideological state apparatuses (ISAs)” (Althusser, 1971) is like dropping a pebble into a pond and watching the ripples extend to the margins and beyond. The dominant ideology of the ruling class is the pebble dropped into the pond, and it interpellates, or brings into being, ripple after ripple – generation after generation of subjects who ‘freely’ choose the roles by which they are named, embrace the myths and promises of the nation, and willingly subject themselves to the dictates and expectations of the ISAs in which they function. They do not realize that they are a means to an end. In spite of a curriculum that professes the importance of self-esteem and self-worth, the only worth each individual subject has is its compliance to, and reproduction of, the ruling hegemonic ideology and existing inequitable power relations.

I do not stand apart from these generations of ‘ripples.’ I willingly invested in the mythical narratives of the nation, wanting to believe in, and benefiting from, them and the values they were professed to exemplify, while suppressing the voice within me that did not subscribe to the constraining roles into which I was born and conditioned, suppressing that voice of truth in deference to voices of assumed authority. In that suppression, I betrayed my own sense of knowing that something was not right. Through the process of sedimentation (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 78), I was ‘made’ into a subject – a subject who freely (and I suggest, knowingly) subjected herself to the commandments of those in positions of authority and reproduced their hegemonic agenda, because I benefited from that subjection and the recognition and affirmation it brought.

Schick (2000b) identified a chronology of normative activities that made it natural to participate in her construction as a teacher – a chronology in which I recognized myself. As a new teacher, “a role and the norms to accomplish it had already been prepared for me and by me; all I had to do was make it official” (Schick, 2000b, p. 300). In Schick’s retelling of her first experience with her first class, she realized that she had a performance to enact, as did her students. Her critical reflection on that experience provided insight into the roles being performed in the classroom environment. Teachers and students are all engaged in role performativity, and those roles are defined by dominant white societal expectations of what makes a good teacher/student.

How had the role of teacher and “the norms to accomplish it... been prepared for me and by me” (Schick, 2000b, p. 300)?

The process of my becoming a teacher had been established long before... the norm of teacher is accomplished by a set of practices and discourses marked by identities within race, gender, class, sexual orientation – identities in which I most often participate as unconsciously as breathing. (Schick, 2000b, p. 301)

Born into a working-class, white settler family with aspirations for middle-class respectability and subjectivated into a gendered role of caretaking and helping, I was the perfect candidate for a teaching role in the public education system. White, heteronormative, female, and conditioned to be compliant and do as expected, I met the “unspeakable norms” about “who can be a teacher and how she will act” (Schick, 2000b, p. 302).

I also saw myself reflected in Schick’s (2000b) recollection:

Never once did I question whether my racialized identity, my whiteness, was a factor in my applying to become a teacher. *The whiteness that made me suitable for the job was so necessary a precondition that there was no need to notice...* Because teaching is largely a white-identified profession, and since whiteness is unmarked, the profession presents itself as racially neutral and normal. Because white domination has colonized the definition of what it means to be normal (Dyer, 1988), a ‘normal’ teacher is white.” (p. 303, italics mine)

This normalization of teachers as white is validated by my recollection of predominantly white education classes in university and predominantly white colleagues on teaching staffs throughout

my career. What is noteworthy about my recollection is that I had never questioned the overwhelming whiteness of my profession nor its seeming normalcy. I simply accepted this unmarked norm as the way things were (Fellows & Razack, 1998, p. 341) and came to see my role as normal and neutral.

In addition to my whiteness, what is important to my understanding about my defaulting to, and suitability for, a teaching role is the gendered ingraining to do what was expected of me and to expect others to do the same.

This is a normative position of the working-class and middle-class white woman/mother in the public/private sphere of teaching. These are the women who can be trusted with the reproduction of social values and norms – norms that support their own desires to be socially respectable and upwardly mobile... taking care of the other in gender-appropriate roles has been one of the ways white women can escape some of the marginalization caused by patriarchy and participate in public life ‘legitimately’ and with authority. (Schick, 2000b, p. 303)

I reflect on the legitimacy and authority that a teacher role afforded me within the community as a role model and within the classroom as the voice of authority – legitimacy and authority that I did not get to experience in any other way within the patriarchal structures of family, community, and school; authority and legitimacy granted to me by patriarchy as long as I performed white, middle-class, gendered social norms (Schick, 2000b, p. 299) of servitude, self-sacrifice, and compliance through the practice of self-surveillance and self-discipline. This upward movement from working class to middle class legitimacy and respectability was justified by the conviction that I was making a difference (Schick, 2000b, p. 302). Striving to be recognized and known as good, tolerant and caring, I constituted and reconstituted the professed values of the nation – the micro (me) a reflection of the macro (the nation).

The underside and illusion of this profession of ‘good’ is that anything that is not caring or not tolerant is not available for examination (Schick, 2000b, p. 302). “Instances of intolerance must be rationalized, denied, or repressed so that the teacher identity can remain” (Schick, 2000b, p. 302). This response of rationalization, denial, and repression of anything that might be identified as uncaring or intolerant aligns with my familial experience of never showing cracks in the pursuit of respectability (Fellows & Razack, 1998). It also challenges me to ‘remember more

closely' and reflect on instances of intolerance within my own teaching practice. Given that I am a product of my socio-familial conditioning, I recognize that rationalization, denial, and repression cannot be attributed only to my parents. Such an attribution would be a move to innocence.

Just as I had recognized that there was a “desired and dominant way to present oneself” (Schick, 2000a, p. 88) within my family as a girl and in school as a student, I recognized this desired and dominant norm of self-presentation in teaching and the importance of achieving and maintaining it to earn further affirmation and recognition, which is evident in these excerpts from performance feedback from 1996-2008:

A consummate professional – a master teacher.

Has the ability to make students feel better about themselves

Which results in an incredible learning atmosphere.

One of those rare teachers who never sits throughout the school day

And is in constant interaction with her students.

Conscientious and diligent –

can always be counted on to do her work very well and thoroughly.

Combines “good heart” with a “good mind” and a work ethic that is exceptional.

Her student-centred focus is informed

by her knowledge of best practices

and the courage and conviction to bring those practices to life in our schools.

Well-respected professional educator and colleague.

A life-long learner, up to any challenge that she may encounter.

An excellent teacher and mentor.

I note the attributes of self-presentation that were affirmed – conscientious, diligent, dependable (can always be counted on to do her work very well and thoroughly), well-respected, student-centred – and which I performed so well.

Teachers who embodied this idealized norm were constructed as loving, caring, and helpful:

Combines “good heart” with a “good mind” and a work ethic that is exceptional.

Superior ability to connect with students.

Combines knowledge, passion for learning, and ethic of care for her students.

[Students] are truly lucky to have you as their teacher and their champion.

That you care for the students is so evident – and they feel it too.

Loving, caring, and helpful were certainly attributes by which I constructed myself as teacher. On the surface, it seemed a beautiful ideal and expression of goodness and innocence – a teacher who loved and cared for her students as though they were her own. What was happening beneath the surface is a different matter, embedded in power relations and quite the opposite of innocence. My “desire for legitimacy, authority and power” found a proper way to embody the desire to dominate in my ‘dream of love’ (Robertson, 1994, as cited in Schick, 2000a, p. 91). Embedded within that professed ideal of loving and caring for students was a pursuit of power that was unrealized in other domains of my life. In my position of authority within the classroom, I held power *over* students, even as I professed to love them as my own children. I held power over them, just as my parents had held power over me. Thus, I maintained and reproduced patriarchal hierarchical power structures within my ‘dream of love’ and co-created ‘family’ with students.

I reflect on the recognition I received as a good teacher, even a master teacher, and it no longer makes me feel ‘good.’ What once was sought after as affirmation of my worth now rings hollow and leaves me feeling empty. *Good girl, good woman, good student, good teacher – good, good, good* – the descriptor and the borderlines for the subject positions in which I was produced – the kind of child-youth-adult-teacher I was conditioned to become out of all the possibilities that existed. Good produced the bars on the cage in which I lived my life. My

acceptance of that conditioning as normal and neutral and reflective of reality made the bars invisible to me, even as they constrained me and molded me this way, but not that way. I believed I was free, an individual who was fully autonomous. That belief was essential to my captivity because it meant that no guards were needed. Social and family sanctions and the ever-present spectre of shame kept me in line believing that this way of being was *normal*. ‘Good’ now produces a strong visceral response. ‘Good’ means subjugated. ‘Good’ means acquiescing. ‘Good’ means production to be compliant and acceptable to those in power positions. ‘Good’ means internalized indoctrination, trapped behind the bars of a cage I could not see.

‘Good’ is no longer an affirmation that I seek because I understand what it means. My inquiry has also revealed that I need to understand what it means to be constructed as the invisible norm; I need to understand what it means to be constructed as white.

Understanding whiteness and what it means to have a socially constructed white racial identity:

Matias (2016) stated, “Whites have the task of understanding their own Whiteness” (p. 102). Although “we have all been racialized under a White supremacist system” (Matias, 2016, p. 102), the experience of that racialization differs depending on where one’s subject position is located – in the normative white centre or in the margins where everything that whiteness is not is relegated. Thus, in this section, I respond to Matias’ (2016) charge to “place a mirror before my whiteness” (p. 107). Without this understanding and deconstruction, I will perpetuate a hidden curriculum of whiteness despite my commitment to social justice (Matias, 2016, pp. 107–108).

A strategic “cultural/historical construction achieved through white domination” (Dyer, 1988, p. 46), whiteness is the unmarked normative centre in which white bodies are privileged as inherently superior and “against which difference is measured and defined” (Weedon, 2004, p. 17). From this central position, whiteness is constructed as everything it is not and marked by what it excludes as ‘other’ and casts to the margins (Matias, 2016; Weedon, 2004). Those who are born into white bodies seldom recognize or acknowledge white racial construction within this normative subject position (Weedon, 2004, p. 17), while those who are born into non-white bodies must endure the effects of this artificial measuring and marking as a lived experience of exclusion and marginalization. As Frankenberg (1993) explained, “whiteness, as a set of

normative cultural practices, is visible most clearly to those it definitively excludes and those to whom it does violence, [while] those who are securely housed within its borders do not examine it” (pp. 228–229).

What this means for me is that because I was born into a white body, I was accepted within dominant society. My racial status was clearly marked as white within my family, my community, and the classroom spaces of my public schooling, even though I never recognized or verbalized it that way (Warren, 2001c, p. 197). My identity was raced in that acceptance, and I benefited from that “collective passing” (Warren, 2001a, p. 44). Those I perceived as not looking like me (i.e., non-white) were defined from my unexamined subject position as ‘other.’ Each time I participated in this socially conditioned measuring and marking, I remade whiteness as the status quo, a fictional and privileged subject position constructed to be normal and neutral, “the natural, inevitable, ordinary way of being human” (Dyer, 1988, p. 44). No one spoke of this categorizing and labelling as the process of hierarchical and racist definition that it was. It was part of the waters in which I lived and breathed; it was the way things were. I constructed my white racial identity as what I was not, the “nondefined definer of other people” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 197), never looking within to realize, that by defining myself as what I allegedly was not, an inner emptiness resulted. Who was I really? How could anything of substance be found when my identity was defined by what I supposedly was not and by constructed national myths and purported values?

What this also means is that “as the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations” (Lipsitz, 1995, p. 369). I benefited from unearned advantages because I was born into a white body and assumed a white racial identity. Those who were not born into white bodies experienced the organizing principle of whiteness as exclusion from belonging and systematically imposed barriers to success. I got to experience a sense of belonging within my community and dominant society because I am white, and this created an illusion of unity with other white people. I/We could believe in the liberal ideology of individualism and the narrative of meritocracy because the entire system was set up to work for white people like me. Doors of opportunity opened, and I experienced the perception of success as the result of my work ethic and values that reflected those of dominant society. Until recently,

I did not acknowledge the role of my white racial identity in those opportunities and perceived successes because the organizing principle of whiteness was normalized. Accepted as commonsense, I never questioned it.

Applebaum's (2010) discussion of Judith Butler's conception of subject formation and performativity is an important frame of reference for understanding my white racial construction. My racial identity formation was an effect of discursive regimes of power (Applebaum, 2010, p. 53) that "exclude[d] and foreclose[d] the possibility of certain identities" and centred "normative ideals" (p. 57). In order to maintain my white racial status, I was "*compelled* to performatively reiterate these norms" (Applebaum, 2010, p. 58, italics in original). These "ascribed categories of identity provide[d] [me] with *positions of subject status* from which [I] [spoke] even though they [were] constraining and not of [my] choosing" (Applebaum, 2010, p. 59, italics in original). As I discursively repeated, or performed, these ascribed normative ideals, they "*congeal[ed] over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being*" (Butler, 1990, p. 33, as cited in Applebaum, 2010, p. 59, emphasis added by Applebaum). My white racial identity was constructed because I repeatedly performed what was expected and regulated by dominant social norms in order to belong (Applebaum, 2010, p. 59; Warren, 2001b, pp. 95–96).

Whiteness "as a privileged cultural category" (Warren, 2001b, p. 91) does not maintain itself. It requires people like me who reiterate those norms because it benefits us to do so. This repeated performance made me complicit in perpetuating these normative ideals, which are a construction of white supremacy, and in "sustaining hegemonic social structures" (Applebaum, 2010, p. 59), which perpetuate the dominant power regime of whiteness. I made and remade whiteness "through a repetition of mundane and extraordinary acts" that "elud[ed] scrutiny and detection" (Warren, 2001b, p. 92). Because I did not recognize my own production through repeated enactments of white normativity, my white racial identity appeared as something I was, rather than something I did (Warren, 2001c, p. 200). The unquestioned naturalness of my white racial identity acted in collusion with my willing acceptance of all the benefits that came with such an identity, which, in turn, resulted in a wilful ignorance to, and denial of any responsibility for, the social inequities that surrounded me (Applebaum, 2010, p. 15). As long as I benefited from a system constructed to advantage those like me who were born into white families, I was not forced to confront the disadvantages the same system constructed for those who were not like

me. I did not have to challenge social inequities because, as the system was set up to serve the interests of people like me, I did not have to ‘live’ them.

“Whiteness is a socially constructed category that is normalized within a system of privilege so that it is taken for granted by those who benefit from it” (Applebaum, 2010, p. 9). What does it mean to know, that having a socially constructed white racial identity, I exist within this system of privilege and take it for granted? What are the ways I benefit from it? How does the continuance of this structural privilege sustain systems of white dominance and racial oppression?

Historic realities like colonial nation-building, the harsh dictatorial restrictions of the *Indian Act* and the legalized imposition of residential schools on Indigenous peoples, restrictive immigration policies and voting rights, and unequal access to citizenship and property constructed the fictional identity of whiteness in this country (Lipsitz, 1995, p. 370). For generations, this systematic “possessive investment in whiteness” (Lipsitz, 1995, p. 371) created structures of favoritism and advantage that benefited white racial identities and worked to ensure their success in this ‘land of opportunity’ [for white settlers]. White people who benefited, and continue to benefit, from the structural advantages that were established for the strategic creation of a white citizenry, without acknowledging those advantages, maintain the status quo and sustain historically constructed systems that differentiate between racial identities. Ignorant of this historical and ongoing construction of white privilege for much of my life, I, like many other white people, was susceptible to the discourse that blamed the victim (i.e., Indigenous peoples and peoples of colour) and attributed my advantages to familial and individual values and work ethic rather than to historically constructed systems of favoritism (Lipsitz, 1995, p. 379) that affected my “life chances and opportunities” (p. 383) in a positive way and increased my chances of success, contrary to the barriers that were placed in the paths of those who were not deemed white.

Embedded within these racially differentiated structural advantages was the right of exclusion to those deemed not-white (Harris, 2003, p. 81). “The possessors of whiteness were granted the legal right to exclude others from the privileges inhering in whiteness; whiteness became an exclusive club whose membership was closely and grudgingly guarded” (Harris, 2003, p. 81). White racial identity as the key to membership is evidenced in the restricted access

to land and citizenship in Canada's history that ensured that the nation would be controlled by and for whites (Moreton-Robinson, 2015). Whiteness was the measure of who could belong in the history of Canada's immigration laws (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 5). And white racial identity continues to provide relative privilege today. Regardless of class position, even those whites who are without power, money, or influence benefit through relative political and institutional advantages (Harris, 2003, p. 84).

Advantages constructed for those of white racial identity that originated in injustice and overt oppression were legitimated and naturalized through legal affirmation (Harris, 2003, p. 85). "Materially, these advantages became institutionalized privileges; ideologically, they became part of the settled expectations of whites" (Harris, 2003, p. 85). What transpired through capitalist, patriarchal, white supremacy and systematic racial oppression became normalized as 'the way things are' to white people like me. The historic and ongoing systemic causes of social and economic inequities became obscured to those who benefited, and continue to benefit, from structural advantages and institutionalized privileges (Harris, 2003, p. 85). However, "for Indigenous people, white possession is not unmarked, unnamed, or invisible; it is hypervisible" (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. xiii).

White privilege: Begin the list with:

- ✓ Sociohistorical structures of advantage and opportunity for white people,
- ✓ The right to exclude from those structural advantages, and
- ✓ The sense of naturalized entitlement that resulted from the lived benefit of those structural advantages.

Beyond these unearned advantages that I cannot "renounce through individual volition" (Applebaum, 2010, p. 15) because the world continues to re-inscribe these structural advantages and institutional privileges by virtue of my white body, I have the "ontological privilege" (Sullivan, 2014, p. 73) of being seen as an individual and not being defined by "stereotypical constructions based on assumptions of race" (Warren, 2001b, p. 103). Thus, I receive the benefits of my racial group membership, and yet, I am not perceived through the lens of essentialist stereotyping based on dominant perceptions of 'deficiencies' within my racial group. The actions of members of my racial group do not determine what I am expected to do or how I

am viewed by others, as Indigenous peoples and people of colour are. Because I am white, I have the privilege of being perceived as an individual. If I do something wrong, it is my individual actions that are judged. If an Indigenous person or person of colour does something wrong, those actions are frequently judged as a reflection of the inherent tendencies of that racial group (Sullivan, 2014, pp. 72–73).

White privilege: Add to the list:

- ✓ Ontological privilege as a “manifestation of [white] racial dominance” (Sullivan, 2014, p. 73).

Shannon Sullivan (2006) referred to another feature of white dominance/privilege as “white ontological expansiveness,” which is the assumption by white people that they should be able to move into and out of all spaces – “whether geographical, psychical, linguistic, economic, spiritual, bodily or otherwise” – as they wish (p. 10, as cited in Applebaum, 2010, p. 17). Not only do white people tend to presume that all spaces are or should be at their disposal, they presume they should be welcomed (Sullivan, 2006, as cited in Applebaum, 2010, pp. 16 & 30). Even the ability to choose spaces to inhabit is a privilege assumed by white people.

White privilege: Add to the list:

- ✓ ‘White ontological expansiveness.’

“The conditions of white supremacy make white privilege possible. In order for white racial hegemony to saturate everyday life, it has to be secured by a process of domination, or those acts, decisions and policies that white subjects perpetuate on people of color” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 137). Ongoing processes of white domination secure the privileges and advantages that white people accrue “by virtue of being constructed as white” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 137). In what Harris (2003) referred to as the “reified privilege of power,” these “beneficiaries of racially conferred privilege [assume] the right to establish norms for those that have historically been oppressed pursuant to those norms” (p. 85). Dominance and privilege work hand in hand.

White privilege: Add to the list:

- ✓ The ‘reified privilege of [white] power’ and the assumed right to establish norms for those deemed ‘other.’

White privilege is seeing oneself represented in the knowledge valued as most worthwhile in the provincial curricula and in seeing one's ancestral past positively reflected in the carefully crafted history of the nation. White privilege is seeing the accomplishments of white culture "from civil society, to science, to art" (Leonardo, 2004, p. 149) as evidence of the positive contributions made to civilization by white people and those worth elevating to the public gaze. What remains hidden to most white people is that these 'advancements' and 'contributions' were enabled by a political system that "consistently enable[d] the majority group [i.e., white people] to remain ahead" (Leonardo, 2013, p. 94). What allows most white people to continue to enjoy the benefits afforded to them by this white supremacist system is that they believe their advantage was earned meritoriously (Leonardo, 2013, p. 102). What also remains obscured to white people is the process whereby whiteness "define[d] and construct[ed] itself as the pinnacle of its own racial hierarchy" (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. xx). Simply stated, whiteness places itself in a position of superiority because it says so.

White privilege: Add to the list:

- ✓ The elevation of white representation and knowledge as evidence of white superiority (even though it was a fictional construction).

Another white privilege assumes the right of belonging to appropriated land, as well as the privilege of living in denial of this historic appropriation and dispossession. Moreton-Robinson (2015) used the concept of "white possessive logics" (p. xii) to explain the rationalization and reification of the nation's ownership and control of the land from which they dispossessed Indigenous peoples. This concept extends beyond the nation-state to its white citizens. It becomes clear that an assumed privilege of white settlers is the right of belonging and feeling of attachment to this land because the grand narrative manufactured about Canada's past privileged the representations of white settlers as "the people who made this country what it is today" (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 4). I realize that it is because of my white racial privilege that I can call this land home and assume that I belong here.

White privilege: Add to the list:

- ✓ The assumed right of belonging to appropriated land, and

- ✓ The privilege of denying the racist history that provided my family's access to land as a property of whiteness (Harris, 2003).

The system of power that supports white privilege emerges in stark clarity (Applebaum, 2010, p. 31), as does the realization of "how deeply white privilege is embedded in white ways of being" (p. 35) when one sees the list in its entirety:

White privilege:

- ✓ Sociohistorical structures of advantage and opportunity for white people.
- ✓ The right to exclude from those structural advantages.
- ✓ The sense of naturalized entitlement that resulted through the lived benefit of those structural advantages.
- ✓ Ontological privilege as a "manifestation of [white] racial dominance" (Sullivan, 2014, p. 73).
- ✓ 'White ontological expansiveness.'
- ✓ The 'reified privilege of [white] power' and the assumed right to establish norms for those deemed 'other.'
- ✓ The elevation of white representation and knowledge as evidence of white superiority (even though it was a fictional construction).
- ✓ The assumed right of belonging to appropriated land, and
- ✓ The privilege of denying the racist history that provided my family's access to land as a property of whiteness (Harris, 2003).

Understanding white privilege as the system of white structural advantage into which I was born demands that I recognize that my daily taken-for-granted benefits and opportunities are legacies of Canada's colonial past and decades of racist decisions, policies, and practices, a history that I inherited and which I must come to terms with as the truth that was obscured for me and that has been 'hypervisible' to those who were, and continue to be, oppressed (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. xiii).

Beyond the unearned advantages that have been provided to me because of my white racial identity, I need to understand how whiteness operates if I am to decolonize the white racial conditioning in which I have been steeped and disrupt the continued reproduction of white supremacy through ingrained performativity. What *are* the practices and moves of whiteness? How do they make me complicit in the reproduction of white supremacy and the maintenance of systemic injustice?

One of the ways in which whiteness operates is through the assumed permission to remain ignorant of the nation's racist history and continued structural and institutional racism. Applebaum (2010) referred to this "systemic white ignorance" (p. 6) that gives whites permission "to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant and destructive" (McIntosh, 1997, pp. 291–299, as cited in Applebaum, 2010, p. 38) as "one of the ways that whites *actively* perpetuate systemic injustice" (p. 33). This ignorant oblivion allowed me to continue to benefit from unjust, inequitable systems while these systems remained unchallenged, which then protected white interests like mine (Applebaum, 2010, p. 36). If I could claim that I did not know, then I could rationalize that I was not complicit in systemic injustice and my moral goodness remained protected. If I did not know, I could not be held responsible, right? I even had the privilege of not needing to ask questions to learn what it was that I did not know. And I was supported in that "epistemology of ignorance" (Mills, 1997, as cited in Applebaum, 2010, p. 37) by the existing systems of racially differentiated oppression and privilege. I got to perceive the world through the lens of white supremacy and entitlement as the natural order of things *despite* the reality of the resulting inequities and injustices that surrounded me. And I got to deny anything that contradicted that fiction because, as a member of the dominant social group, I was supported in doing so. Thus, when I saw news stories about living conditions on reserves, I could deny my moral responsibility to challenge this and, thus, remain apathetic (Applebaum, 2010, p. 37). I could deny the connection between the historical and ongoing systems that benefited me and oppressed others, and through my denial and apathy, I was complicit in perpetuating these same systems of injustice and oppression. Applebaum (2010) suggested that this kind of ignorance is willful.

not necessarily because the ignorance is consciously or deliberately manufactured but instead willful *because such ignorance benefits the person or the social group the person*

is a member of. Members of the dominant group... have a vested interest in not knowing.”
(Applebaum, 2010, p. 39, italics in original)

An underlying element to ‘not knowing’ must be added to this practice of whiteness. This element challenges the idea of innocence that might be assumed in a genuine lack of knowledge. It is the arrogance of “believing that one knows” (Applebaum, 2010, p. 39) how the world works. This “‘ignorance as knowledge’ is socially sanctioned” (Applebaum, 2010, p. 39) and supports white people’s dismissal of the knowledge and experiences of those who have experienced systemic injustice. If I, as a white person, can deny and rebuff the experiences of someone who has not experienced the structural advantages I have, I can maintain my sense of moral innocence. One of the tactics of whiteness that serves the perpetuation of its privilege is systemic willful ignorance that is arrogantly paraded as knowledge.

Another practice of whiteness is the socially sanctioned focus on individualized understandings of racism which maintain the invisibility of the social construction and reproduction of race and racial difference. Understanding racism as “individual manifestations of personal prejudice and hostility” (Lipsitz, 1995, p. 381) maintains the invisibility of white normativity as the basis for demarcating difference (Applebaum, 2010, p. 8).

As long as racism can be attributed to ‘bad white people’ and the violence and discrimination that victims of racism endure, then ordinary, often well-intentioned white people do not have to consider their own complicity in the perpetuation of systemic racism.
(Applebaum, 2010, p. 9)

Individualistic notions of racism as individual actions do not consider the historical and ongoing systemic nature of racism and create an illusory focus on creating change in the actions of individuals (Warren, 2001b, p. 102) who are considered racist and *always other than the subject*, for “very few whites exist who actually believe they are racist” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 144). When racism is reduced to individual intent, “whites hold no responsibility for the perpetuation of racism and therefore they are free to keep inequities in place through their own inaction” (Warren, 2001b, p. 103). Systemic inequities disappear from one’s attention when they do not impact one’s life. Structural advantages remain invisible as white people, buoyed by the discourse of liberal individualism, believe that their own meritorious efforts result in their opportunities and success (Leonardo, 2004).

Collective exercises of group power relentlessly channeling rewards, resources, and opportunities from one group to another will not appear to be “racist” from this perspective because they rarely announce their intention to discriminate against individuals. But they work to construct racial identities by giving people of different races vastly different life chances. (Lipsitz, 1995, p. 381)

Another maneuver of whiteness is found in the discourses of denial that fuel the ideologies of colour-blindness and meritocracy. Perpetuating these ideologies ensures the maintenance of white innocence while avoiding any responsibility for systemic racism or need to challenge hegemonic power structures. Colour-blindness is a strategy of denial whereby white people claim that they do not see race and that “everyone supposedly is equal” (Sullivan, 2014, p. 86). These proclamations result in “den[ial] and dismiss[al of] how racism exists in the lives of the marginalized” (Applebaum, 2010, p. 41). By claiming they have moved beyond race (Sullivan, 2014, p. 85), white people refuse to acknowledge the realities of racialized experiences and how colour operates as an “organizing principle in social and cultural relations” (Lipsitz, 1995, p. 369). In this refusal, white people maintain their self-image as morally innocent non-racists who have evolved beyond racism, as evidenced by their claim to see people – just people – and not “the racial categories on which racism depends” (Sullivan, 2014, p. 9). The colour-blind maneuver also allows white people to avoid critical reflection about the systemic advantages they receive which “leave[s] the hierarchies [of dominant power] intact” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 143).

“If they do not have to acknowledge their privilege, then they can rely exclusively on individualistic explanations for inequality” (Applebaum, 2010, p. 44). What this results in is “locat[ing] strengths and weaknesses in the individual, rather than considering the systemic issues that surround those abilities” (Warren, 2001b, p. 101). Here, the ideology of meritocracy comes into play, and white people make judgments about ‘others’ who do not make it, assuming that “the opportunity structure [is] open and institutions [are] impartial or objective in their functioning” (Applebaum, 2010, p. 44). These judgments result in victim blaming and attribute disparity in social outcomes to lack of motivation, values, or work ethic – attributes that become essentialized as representative of racialized groups.

The ideologies of colour-blindness and meritocracy work together “to keep whiteness secured as the cultural centre through a logic of race evasion” (Warren, 2001b, p. 98). Both ideologies assume that everyone begins from a place of equality and that everyone has equal opportunities for success. Both ideologies evade the organizing principle of race in differentiating people’s life chances, in spite of the published data that reveals stark patterns of racial inequality and inequity (Warren, 2001b, p. 101). Both ideologies normalize the dominant position of white people in society (Leonardo, 2004, p. 144) and performatively reconstitute whiteness as the unmarked centre against which everything is defined. Thus, both ideologies protect and maintain the status quo of dominant power structures, or white supremacy.

Whiteness also operates through the narrative of the white saviour or the benevolent helper that is based on white people’s belief in their moral goodness. As Matias (2016) identified, “the White savior narrative is indoctrinated in the minds of countless White teacher candidates” (p. 9), a well-oiled narrative that resonates within me as I remember my own teaching practice. What catches my interest for this inquiry is Applebaum’s (2010) contention that even the most well-intentioned benevolent practices may contribute to systemic racism (pp. 180–181). When the assertion of white power that assumes knowledge of what is best for a student(s) is embedded within the performance of “saviority” (Matias, 2016, p. 9) or benevolent helper, it ignores and “denies the humanness and lived experiences of people of color” (p. 14). When pity feeds the white appetite to know what is best and to ‘make a difference’ in the lives of marginalized students, that emotion “objectifies and sentimentalizes the... Other while deflecting racist culpability” (Matias, 2016, p. 25). Feeling sorry for students without “taking action that shows caring in practice” (Matias, 2016, p. 27) results in superficial discourses and “politically-correct performances” (Boltanski, 1999, as cited on p. 27) that fail to acknowledge the history of oppression and systemic racism that are direct causal links to students’ circumstances.

Assumed white superiority in defining what ‘caring’ looks like is also problematic and is infused with hierarchical power dynamics. How could I possibly presume that my expression of caring was what a student (or their family) needed and that I knew/had what they needed? Were my claims of caring and love for students connected to my conditioned need to be recognized as morally good? Or were they authentic and grounded in action to work against inequitable, racist educational structures and for equitable education representative of all students (Matias, 2016, p.

38)? Because I am only newly informed about structural and institutional racism, the answer to those questions is clear.

Matias (2016) also challenged me to consider further questions: What kind of “narcissistic sense of purpose” laid within “the assumption of role of white saviour” (p. 75)? What meaningful relationships had I had with Indigenous people and people of colour? What experiential understanding did I have of the lives of Indigenous students/students of colour and their families? “The White teacher, a self-proclaimed savior, impacts her students when her ways, beliefs and decisions reflect *her* reality and not that of her students” (Matias, 2016, p. 75, italics in original). Whiteness becomes the operating principle and dynamic, as she asserts her white racial subjectivity over her students. This process “becomes a systemic oppression that bequeaths white privilege at the expense of the beliefs, realities, truths, experiences, and speech of people of color” (Matias, 2016, p. 75).

When confronted with the reality of racialized experiences and the spectre of historical and ongoing systemic racism, the operations of whiteness can be witnessed through white emotionality and discourses of denial and evasion (Matias, 2016). White emotionality expressed through crying, defensiveness, aggression, accusations of reverse racism, and resistance are tactics that work together, like ideologies of colour-blindness and meritocracy, to avert the white gaze from critical analysis and reflection and thereby uphold hegemonic white power structures and advantages. These emotions further exemplify the “narcissism of whiteness” (Matias, 2016, p. 69) because they dominate space and subordinate the voices, emotions, and experiences of people of colour to those of white people. The hegemonic power of whiteness is re-centred, and white supremacy remains intact (Matias, 2016, p. 69).

Working in concert with the emotionality of whiteness are discursive moves of denial and evasion. To resist knowledge of, and avoid responsibility for, their complicity in systemic oppression, white people may engage in a number of moves, including “remaining silent, evading questions, resorting to the rhetoric of ignoring color, focusing on progress, victim blaming, and focusing on culture rather than race” (Hyttén & Warren, 2003, pp. 65–89, as cited in Applebaum, 2010, p. 92). Each of these moves functions to avoid implication in systemic oppression and serves to protect white privilege. “The mere fact that they can question the

existence of systemic oppression is a function of their privilege to choose to ignore discussions of systemic oppression or not” (Applebaum, 2010, p. 43).

Haviland (2008) identified further discursive moves by white teachers and students that she described as “powerful yet power-evasive” (p. 44). By avoiding words such as ‘racist’ that might offend others, they marked themselves as good white people. Making false starts and instant edits of speech when speaking about race and racism “water[ed] down statements and challenges that need[ed] to be made” (Haviland, 2008, p. 45). Practicing safe self-critique about *past* practice proved to be a way of avoiding reflection about current practice and how it reproduces white domination (Haviland, 2008, p. 46). Changing the topic functioned as a way to shift the focus and avoid responsibility, which could also be identified in moves to frame opinions with ‘I don’t know’ or expressions of uncertainty (Haviland, 2008, p. 46). Haviland (2008) explained:

Each of these discourse moves enabled us to shift focus away from the fact that our Whiteness gave us unearned power and dominance. By carefully avoiding acknowledgement of the power that Whiteness conferred on us and instead positioning ourselves as less than powerful, we avoided seeing ourselves as powerful agents with an obligation to disown our unearned privileges and fight to reform the institutions that conferred such privileges on us. (p. 44)

Awareness of these tactical and self-protective moves of whiteness is important not only for reflection on my past practice but for ongoing awareness of ways in which this ingrained and conditioned whiteness might show itself, even as I intend to challenge and disrupt it. “White privilege is something white people tend to assert even as they seek to challenge it” (Applebaum, 2010, p. 19). Thus, I conclude this section on understanding my white racial identity by engaging with the question: What must I always keep in mind about whiteness, even as I challenge it?

I need to remember that I cannot renounce systemic white privilege of my own volition because the system will continue to re-inscribe those unearned advantages due to my outward packaging in a white body (Applebaum, 2010, p. 15). Even if I want dis-identify from the white race, I cannot, because “the flow of institutional privileges that subjects who are constructed as white enjoy” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 137) will continue.

A conception of responsibility is necessary that can explain how even those who are committed to acknowledging complicity are not absolved from complicity and that *no white person is morally innocent, that no white person can stand outside the system.* (Applebaum, 2010, p. 46, emphasis added)

Thus, I will need to maintain vigilance as I engage in work to challenge existing racist structures. Referencing Butler's work on subject formation and performativity, Applebaum (2010) referred to need for vigilance as "agency under complicity" (p. 55). There can be no certainties as I move forward, and I must forever question the assumptions that underlie my thinking. I must take "the position that *nothing – neither our self nor our good intentions – is unaffected by power relations*" (Applebaum, 2010, p. 55, emphasis added). Thus, I must continue to question and reflect on my identity and way of being in the world as an "*effect of power regimes*" (Applebaum, 2010, p. 56, italics in original). How might my discourse and actions "reinscrib[e], rather than challeng[e] norms that transmit power (Applebaum, 2010, p. 174), even as I desire to take an agentic stance in challenging dominant systems? How might I inadvertently re-centre whiteness as the normative centre against which everyone is defined, even as I desire to disrupt that re-centring? I cannot now, or in the future, assume that anything I do or say is innocent or outside of the insidious influence of white dominance. Thus, uncertainty and humility must inform my axiology (values) so that my ontology (way of being in the world) does not reproduce white supremacy and normativity, in spite of intentions to challenge and subvert the system (Applebaum, 2010, pp. 82–84).

Understanding that "there is no innocence to hide behind" (Applebaum, 2010, p. 183) and that I am and always will be a subject formed in and through dominant power relations imparts a deep sense of ethical responsibility to remain vigilant to the ever-present potential of re-centring whiteness, to continue learning and interrogating my practices, beliefs, and what I think I know and understand, and to commit to sustained anti-racist pedagogy and action with a learner stance grounded in humility.

Understanding that my white worldview was constructed as a selective way of viewing, understanding, and being in the world, I must check my thinking with Indigenous peoples and people of colour. Although my awareness has grown, I must remain vigilant to that which I still cannot see and which is seen and experienced in glaring clarity by those whom white normativity

has deemed ‘other.’ In what Applebaum (2010) referred to as a “radical call for listening,” I must also “be able to hear anger and criticism without becoming defensive” (p. 195). When I feel that defensiveness, I must challenge myself to get curious and lean into any guilt, anger, or discomfort (Matias, 2016) because in that discomfort lays possibility for transformation and new understanding of how whiteness operates in and through me (Yancy, 2008, pp. 240–241, as cited in Applebaum, 2010, p. 196). Rather than projecting my uncomfortable emotions onto someone else in a defensive manoeuvre, Matias (2016) challenged me to recognize the emotion as an opportunity for inquiry into, and interrogation of, why am I feeling this way (p. 94).

Another area where vigilance is needed as I check my thinking with Indigenous peoples and people of colour is the violence that can be committed on them through “repetition of confessionals of White privilege” (Leonardo, 2013, p. 100). When white people like me are newly aware of their structurally advantaged social location and succumb to the need to confess without any accompanying action, each advantage that we share reminds Indigenous peoples and people of colour of the lack of advantage and barriers they face and reinforces our white privilege (Leonardo, 2013, p. 100). A better use of everyone’s time and energy would be for me to listen to “minority knowledge about White privilege” (Leonardo, 2013, p. 101).

While I need to listen and learn from Indigenous peoples and people of colour, I must also realize that the burden of my social construction as a white person – “at best, [an] ‘antiracist white racist’” (Matias, 2016, p. 94) – is mine to carry and that I must “engage in the *burden of race* [myself] without relying on the support and guidance from people of Color” (Matias, 2016, p. 94, italics in original). My complicity in sustaining and reproducing inequitable and unjust structures and systems is my responsibility. Within that responsibility is the imperative to engage in work for systemic change for humanity’s sake.

My complicity as a “foot soldier” in the “army of Whiteness” (Leonardo, 2013, p. 102) is also mine to carry. Although I did not “call the shots” as a white woman in a patriarchal system, I “carr[ied] out the reproductive work of whiteness” in education (Leonardo & Boas, 2013, p. 315). Leonardo and Boas (2013) explained this reproductive work:

The White and female teacher speaks to the world for her students, and she speaks to the students for the racialized nation state. Determined to “make a difference,” she toils endlessly to affect change in her band of students. Her position as schoolteacher

automatically implicates her within the institution of schools, which maintains a core objective of producing proper citizens for the nation. Like all public schoolteachers, she must represent the state's interests, and if she does not, the stakes are high. That the teaching majority is made up of White women demonstrates their "fitness" for the occupation, where she continues to instill virtue through feminized whiteness, creating conditions for a feminized White supremacy. Her whiteness is a currency of power that is aligned with White, patriarchal state power. Yet, as a woman, she is marginalized from the absolute power of the masculine state. (Leonardo & Boas, 2013, pp. 320–321)

The willing part I played in domesticating children and youth for the nation-state requires internal reconciliation that is still in process. I anticipate that, like the illumination of my white racial identity and disruption of the normative reproduction of whiteness, this reconciliation will always be in process.

As part of this always-in-process journey of inquiry and critical reflection, I have experienced anger, disillusionment, and loss as I "learn[ed] that everything on which [I] ha[d] based [my] identity, emotionality, behaviors, and speech [was] nothing but a lie" (Matias, 2016, p. 110). Always, I understand that the emotions of guilt, shame, and betrayal that I experience as part of this decolonizing process are NOTHING in relation to the "loss of their humanity through subjugation, degradation, violence, and oppression" (Matias, 2016, p. 110) that Indigenous peoples and people of colour have experienced. Deeper than my own subjective emotions and far more gut-wrenching has been recurring and profound grief with each realization of the damaging impacts of my unquestioned white performativity on the students I professed to care about so much. The next section will explore and analyze those impacts.

As I proceed, I find reassurance for this next step in the words of Lipsitz (1995): "but those of us who are 'white' can only become part of the solution if we recognize the degree to which we are already part of the problem – not because of our race, but because of our possessive investment in it" (p. 384).

Chapter 4: The Consequences of ‘Good White Teacher’ Performativity

I was beginning to sense that there was something wrong with the system. Not just sense – I knew there was something wrong. I was beginning to look critically at the system itself. As yet, I had no idea how I had been conditioned to perpetuate that system. I was not yet conscious of the harmful impacts on the students I cared about so much because of my decades-long performance to meet the external expectations of the system.

This section seeks to reveal the consequences of ‘good white female teacher’ performativity, with a particular emphasis on what I can surmise from this vantage point as the harmful impacts on students. It is important to premise this section with the acknowledgement that the impacts on students that will be surfaced are based on *my* understanding at this point in time after considerable engagement with scholarly literature by poststructural, critical race, and critical whiteness scholars and *not* on experiences from the perspectives of students who were in my classes over the years. Thus, it is important to recognize that while the consequences that I have come to understand and perceive are based on research from multiple, critically acclaimed scholars, they are filtered through my understanding, realizations, and reflections.

In order to surface these consequences, I met with Racquel, a trusted fellow educator, to engage in an interview/dialogue guided by the questions identified in Appendix C and the intent of my research as described in my Behaviour Research Ethics Application. That interview was recorded and transcribed. From the transcribed text of that interview, I identified three themes that will provide the focus for the analysis and reflection that follows:

- Reproduction of white dominance and normativity through conditioned compliance.
- Toxic positivity, invested idealism, and wilful ignorance.
- Deficit ideology and theorizing.

Reproduction of white dominance and normativity through conditioned compliance:

I never wanted to be a teacher. I... defaulted to education... midway through my first year in university ‘cause I was determined not to be a teacher. I didn’t want to be a teacher. I didn’t want to follow in my mom’s footsteps... it was interesting that I started university, I wanted to go into something that was non-typical... I was determined not to do... the typical thing,

and by the end of my first year, I had defaulted to education which was interesting. I think I went into [the role] doing as I experienced, and it's interesting that I never really thought about my role until I've been doing this research and what that role actually was.... I wasn't looking for anything underneath that role... I didn't go into it, like wanting to make a difference; it was default. (Appendix D, p. 176)

What stands out for me in this interview excerpt is my initial resistance, and eventual default, to the traditional female role of teaching. At that point, the gender conditioning that made me perfectly suited for this societal role was a point of rebellion within me. However, in what appears to be a decision that was made for me long before my feeble protestations that I wanted to do things differently, I defaulted to conformity and suppressed the inner rebel that wanted something 'non-typical.' The mold had been made for me; I had been prepared; and all that was needed was for me to succumb to the mold, which I did with increasing diligence and commitment.

In response to Racquel's follow-up question about how I perceive my role now that I have done this research work, I highlighted that my assumption of this teacher role enacted "Leonardo's phrase, 'teachers as foot soldiers' of the army of whiteness" (Appendix D, p. 177). My performance as teacher was an example of entrainment: I began to perceive, think, and do as the system and dominant power relations wanted me to perceive, think, and do.

I just assumed this role. I didn't question it, I complied to all the requirements, and in fact, I overdid them, that I served the role of public education which is to prepare children and youth to be good citizens, to enter the workforce and to be compliant workers, to follow, ... to do what they're told, and to reproduce the ruling ideology... I never questioned that, ever, ever, ever. Curriculum was just curriculum... I never questioned curriculum or resources; it was just the way things were. This was what students needed to learn. ... I was a foot soldier. Without actually being issued orders, I followed expectations to the 't.' (Appendix D, p. 177)

When I think back to when I started teaching... I taught very much as I had experienced school... everybody in rows, and... follow the rules, do these processes. (Appendix, p. 184)

What stands out as I reflect on my role as a teacher is my assumption of the positive nature of educating students to fit the norms of society *as it was constructed to serve the interests of those who held/hold social, political, and economic power* and to be good citizens of a nation *as it had been constructed around whiteness as the normative centre*.

I always assumed [that educating students to fit into these norms was positive] because I was big on... what it means to be a good citizen... and on the surface, that's what it appears, but in the research that I've done, there is... what feels like a very heavy, almost sinister, underbelly to that because what it's doing is reproducing... society as it exists for the benefit of the few at the top... It reproduces inequity; it reproduces... whiteness as the normative centre so whiteness, white racial identity is... seen as desired... the whole country was set up for that.... It was built as a country for a white citizenry, and when you look at... access to property, access to voting rights, access to immigration even, that was very limited for a certain kind of person that would fit in this constructed white citizenry, and so, the benefits of people identifying with that whiteness... helped them find belonging and gain access to all of the advantages that the system created for them. Those were not equally available to everyone, and in fact, there were barriers put in place if you were deemed not white. (Appendix D, pp. 177–178)

My uncritical and conforming teacher practice prepared students for their roles in society *as it was*, including the inequities, with whiteness as the normative (and constructed) centre of the way things are. This assumption of the positive nature of what I was teaching aligned with my uncritical assumption of the neutrality of my teaching role, which was anything but neutral.

It's interesting, like that... political side, when I was reading Michael Apple's writing, he talked about... everything teachers say and do is a political act. I never thought of that. I saw what I did as normal, as neutral. This was the way things were; this is what I did. Like I really never thought about this ... is the bigger picture of what I'm doing. I just taught kids and I taught them what I was supposed to teach them. (Appendix D, p. 179)

I remember times when I asked why students had to learn this or that, but I never went beyond a momentary rhetorical question or a statement of frustration to a deeper reflective analysis about what I was teaching students. I did not apply a critical lens to what I was teaching. I assumed that my teaching activity was neutral and objective because I did not take a political

stance (Apple, 1990, p. 8), when, in fact, everything I taught, from the content and skills of the curriculum to the way I managed my classroom, was political and served the interests of the dominant power structure and the reproduction of inequitable social and economic structures as they are.

More detail is needed about exactly what was reproduced through my normative teaching practice. The themes that emerged from my literature review were reflected in glaring clarity as I recognized my role and the impacts of my performance of that role in writing by poststructural, critical race, and critical whiteness scholars. That deep engagement with critical literature and research has provided the mirror that I needed to be able to see myself reflected truthfully and perceive the impacts of my conditioned and invested performance as a ‘good white female teacher.’

Based on what surfaced in the text of my interview, what follows is an itemized summary of what I reproduced within the theme of white dominance and normativity through my ‘good white’ teaching practice.

- **Reproduction of existing dominant power structures and ideologies through acceptance of, and engagement in, the socially sanctioned indoctrination process of children and youth into the dominant societal values.**

What is desired is compliance. What is desired is people who will reproduce the status quo and keep hegemony, which is... the dominant power structures, intact.... That was the role I perceive myself as having now, and I did it exceedingly well. (Appendix D, p. 178)

and I just did my part as a good white woman teacher in serving that whole machinery because public education is an institution of the dominant society... (Appendix D, p. 178)

... and when you go back to what people like Althusser wrote about in the 1970s ... talked about there’s a reason that... families give up their children at such a young age and why the institution of school keeps them for as long as it does because... that’s the time it takes for indoctrination to happen. (Appendix D, p. 178)

And so... I just helped perpetuate all of that, and I didn’t see it, I didn’t know about it, and to me, that’s disturbing... and I did it willingly, and I did it very well. (Appendix D, p. 179)

I conditioned students to accept society with all its inequities and political, social, and economic structures without question, as the way things are. I re-enacted the same conditioning in dominant ideologies of colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy in which I had been steeped with hundreds of students over the span of my teaching career.

I did this through unquestioned implementation of the master script within the school curriculum that reproduced the dominant values, ideologies, and power structures of Canadian society. What that unquestioned implementation accomplished is reflected in what Swartz (1992) wrote:

Master scripting silences multiple voices and perspectives, primarily legitimizing dominant, white, upper-class, male voicings as the ‘standard’ knowledge students need to know. All other accounts and perspectives are omitted from the master script unless they can be disempowered through misrepresentation. Thus, content that does not reflect the dominant voice must be brought under control, *mastered*, and then reshaped before it can become part of the master script. (p. 341, as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18, italics in original).

One version of reality was presented through the curriculum I taught and the resources I used. That version of reality not only served the interests of those who held power; it helped maintain their power to determine and legitimize what mattered/counted for student learning. Thus, my compliance and unquestioning acceptance of “school curricula [that] mainly reflect[ed] the point of view of powerful people who organize[d] it” (Schick & St. Denis, 2003, pp. 58–59) contributed to the maintenance of their power to decide what children and youth learn. In my uncritical acceptance of the content and the process of public education as the way things were/are, I reproduced the system as it was/is and I contributed to the indoctrination of students just as I had been.

Even when I engaged and supported students in developing critical thinking and reflection skills, it was always within the parameters of the curriculum, never on the parameters themselves (Apple, 1990, p. 87). As expected and conditioned, I “embod[ied] ‘appropriate’ ways in which students [could] begin to reason” (Apple, 1990, p. 83) without applying a critical lens to the socialization function that I was expected to fulfill in preparing students for the “normative

structure required by our society” (p. 83).

Just as I had been socialized, I contributed to the reproduction of society as it functions, with all its social and economic inequities, *as if it were a natural phenomenon rather than a constructed system that can be changed*. I contributed to the reproduction of compliant citizens and workers who would “ignore the actual working of power in cultural and social life” (Apple, 1990, p. 83). I recreated my own socialization within my students, and in doing so, not only did I help to maintain existing power structures and socio-economic inequities as the way things are, I conditioned my students to accept society as it is, to accept knowledge as presented, and to accept their roles and place within an inequitable society without question. By socializing students to receive and transmit the dominant values of society, I failed to empower them in true critical, creative, and contextual thinking that would support them in creating new values that would serve a more just and equitable society (Apple, 1990, p. 93).

The result of my ‘good white’ teaching practice was the perpetuation of what Battiste (2013) termed “a culture of nationalism imposed by the state [that was] not reflective of the heritage, knowledge, or culture that students [brought] to education, or their skills and shared traditions” (p. 29). That ‘culture of nationalism’ reflected the colonial intent of the educational system in Canada, which “was created to maintain the identity, language, and culture of a colonial society, while ignoring the need to decolonize” (Battiste, 2013, p. 30).

- **Reproduction of Western knowledge systems.**

Without questioning, I reproduced the knowledge systems, Western knowledge systems, Eurocentric knowledge systems. (Appendix D, p. 178)

You have to think about what knowledge is perpetuated. There’s a choice made, and it... perpetuates the knowledge that those in power want children and youth to know. (Appendix D, p. 178)

Never did I question the curriculum and what it represented. *Never* did I see that what was there was a choice that might have a purpose. *Never* did I question what wasn’t there from *all* that could be learned. (Appendix D, p. 184)

My teaching practice reproduced, in my students, compliant acceptance of selected

knowledge within curriculum as objective and factual truth (Apple, 1990, p. 14) without any critical reflection about:

- what knowledge was chosen for inclusion in the curriculum,
- where this knowledge came from,
- whose knowledge it was or what social group was represented within the knowledge that was chosen, and
- whose interests/what purposes it served (pp. 14 & 16).

I engaged in “teach[ing] a silent curriculum of Eurocentric knowledge that [was] not accommodating to other ways of knowing and learning” (Battiste, 20013, p. 66).

- **Reproduction of the existing class system and inequitable social order within capitalist economic structures.**

And Althusser also talked about, the system is set up to let go of certain kids at certain times in their educational journey, so you think about the kids who leave at sixteen years of age, what level of work are they destined for? You think about the kids who end with their grade 12, what level of that work... that economic workplace hierarchy will they end up at? (Appendix D, pp. 178–179).

Battiste (2013) would agree with Althusser’s writing:

The current structure helps preserve class structures and a ruling elite rather than sort out everyone according to their inherent capacities. The status quo also argues for family or parental responsibility to be passed to the state in the form of compulsory education. These educational purposes imply a disintegration of the family and culture for the abstraction of society as defined by a standard curricula, and its defined outcomes and successes as identified as graduation from high school and now some post-secondary school, college, or university. (p. 29)

Without the ability to critically analyze social, political, and economic structures, or their resulting social and economic disparities, my teaching practice was “relatively impotent in exploring the nature of the social order of which [my students and I] were a part” (Apple, 1990, p. 10). My teaching practice did not support my students in situating their learning within the

larger social, political, economic, and historical contexts of their lives nor did it help them understand the “political, social, ethical, and economic interests and commitments” (Apple, 1990, p. 14) that impacted, and would continue to impact, their lives and their families and communities.

- **Reproduction of whiteness as the dominant normative centre.**

The ‘box’ [represented by the dominant system] benefits the perpetuation of the system the way it’s set up, which is whiteness as the norm, like it’s the centre against which everything is defined. It perpetuates... white supremacy, and white supremacy, not as extremists, but the dominance of whiteness, of... this way of the viewing the world, and of measuring everything against itself as what it’s not. (Appendix D, p. 185)

It’s not perceived, but that is the measuring stick. When you look at the norms by which we measure kids. You look at the standardized testing, the provincial testing that we do. Those are not based on other knowledge systems; those are based on Western knowledge systems which come out of Eurocentric thinking which is the birthplace of ‘white.’ (Appendix D, p. 186)

For most of my teaching career, I taught provincial curricula without critical analysis of whose worldviews, knowledge systems, and perspectives were represented and whose were missing. Not only was I conditioned for compliance and acceptance of knowledge that society defined as normal and normative (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 31) through a steady diet of dominant narratives and history in my own education, but I perpetuated this curricular diet that “largely remain[ed] reflective of white, Western, or Eurocentric interests” (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 298) with scores of students over the years. As I continued to reproduce the dominant culture’s standards and values as the norm, my unexamined practice maintained “the construction of [white] racial dominance” (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 298) and the marginalization of those who were different or perceived as ‘other.’

Not critiquing the curricula or the teaching materials that were provided, I utilized textbooks and resources that normalized white dominance and provided “partial, biased knowledge” about the other (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 31), resources that constructed stereotypes of others perceived as having racial and cultural identities. These stereotypes perpetuated “racism by omission as well

as commission” (Kailin, 2002, p. 84) because they were utilized without critical analysis of who was represented in texts or how they were portrayed, whose perspectives were included, or when multiple perspectives were provided, whether an embedded hierarchy placed privileged portrayals and information before that of the unprivileged (Kailin, 2002, p. 84). Through repeated exposure to subtle hierarchical placements, not-so-subtle omissions, and blatant misrepresentations that decontextualized and primitivized Indigenous peoples and people of colour (Kailin, 2002, p. 158), students constructed incomplete, erroneous, and negative stereotypes of those who were other than white.

“Racism by omission and commission” (Kailin, 2002, p. 84) was also enacted through the purposeful construction of a “normative Canadian history [that] produce[d] Canada as a nation that is ‘tolerant’ and ‘innocent’” (St. Denis, 2011, p. 310) and the misrepresentation and exclusion of Indigenous experiences and perspectives about the ‘making of the nation’ in curriculum and resources. This practice served an oppressive function as

all curricular materials, educational philosophy, and pedagogical techniques combine[d] to inculcate an ideology that denigrate[d] a group, omit[ted] or misrepresent[ed] the history and status of a group, [and] limit[ed] access to knowledge that would enable the individual or group to participate in all cultural institutions. (Harris, 1992, p. 277, as cited in Ladson-Billings, 2005, p. 135)

I contributed to that oppressive function by not teaching my students to critique representations or the knowledge that was presented to them.

Through repetitive, uncritical performativity of my good white teacher role, I contributed to public education’s indoctrination process – a process that had conditioned me to compliantly assume my role in society and that conditioned students for acquiescent assumption of their roles in society as it is constructed around the dominance of whiteness and existing hierarchical and inequitable power structures.

That good white teacher performance resulted in further consequences for students – consequences that surfaced during my interview. These impacts are identified and summarized in the chart that follows:

- **Denial of students’ experiences of oppression, erasure, and internalized racism.**

...we did... a lot on human rights and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and violations of human rights. I remember doing extensive work on racism and apartheid. South Africa was the focus. The States were the focus. Human rights abuses were... in other countries, so it was either relegated to the past or it was in other places, but never did we turn that reflective lens around and look at the injustice that was all... around us, but we weren’t noting, I wasn’t noting. So it was always about other places, other times. (Appendix D, p. 195)

... when I went to school, what I saw reflected me. And... I’m just trying to imagine myself now, if I had... year after year after year of an education experience where nothing I learned about reflected me and my family and where, what we’re all about, and how we are in the world and how we perceive in the world, or what our experiences have been, doesn’t that erase me? *Doesn’t that negate me?* (Appendix D, pp. 202-203)

This approach to oppression and human rights violations turned our focus outward from where we were situated to other places and times. What that ‘looking out from centre’ did, without a critical gaze at the inequitable realities that lay around us, was to deny the systemic oppression and human rights violations that students and their families/caregivers had experienced historically through colonialism and systemic racism and continued to experience on a day-to-day basis. Within this outward gaze was buried an assumption that all students (and their families) experienced life as I did, that all students experienced the same system of advantages and opportunities that had been provided for me. This assumption denied the real-life experiences and challenges those students and their families were facing, and in that denial, their experience of “oppression as a lived experience” (Norquay, 1993, p. 248) was erased.

That denial meant that I did not really see students or their families. I avoided students’ racial identities believing that this avoidance “distanced me from being considered racist” (Ullucci, 2007, p. 3). Everything Indigenous students and students of colour experienced in the classroom reflected that they did not matter, from the preponderance of white narratives and history to the lack of positive and accurate representations of people who looked like them in their curricula and resources to the refusal to recognize problems in schools that were/are outcomes of racial and class inequities in society (Ullucci, 2007, p. 3). This “refusal to

acknowledge the costs and benefits associated with one's racial and cultural identity" (Ullucci & Battey, 2011, p. 1196) allowed me to "claim to treat everyone the same... [while] shut[ting] down the need to discuss inequality" (p 1197) in our classroom, school, community, and nation.

I examined and discussed inequality and racism with my students but always in the context of other times and in other places. It was always about other countries and never about Canada. We studied human rights and examined human rights violations *in other countries*, never with a self-reflective lens and never with any recognition of the racist history and institutions in our own country. In this 'looking out' rather than 'looking within,' I failed my students because the reality of the inequities and barriers they faced were never acknowledged, and the "daily advantage of white privilege" (Schick & St. Denis 2003, p. 63) remained starkly evident to them and unacknowledged by me.

I failed to recognize and acknowledge that while I had experienced the process of racialization into a white identity under a system that benefited whiteness, Indigenous students and students of colour (and their families) had experienced their racialization within a system of structural disadvantages and systemic racism (Matias, 2016, p. 102). What I also failed to recognize was that "when a person of colour internalizes the whiteness that is constantly imposed onto her, she can develop an internalized racist's depiction of herself," which results in internalized inferiorizations and constant questioning of racial identity (Matias, 2016, pp. 102–103). Realization of this impact runs in opposition to all that I professed about learning and a classroom environment that was inclusive of all.

Another consequence of the normalization and dominance of whiteness within the school experience is what Leonardo (2013) identified as the "formation of double consciousness" (p. 95) that students of colour develop in order to navigate and survive a system that is built on white values. Leonardo's writing compelled me to critical self-reflection as I connected to what had been shared with me about Indigenous students having to walk in two worlds:

In effect, successful students of color live in two worlds: inside their own community and the White standard imposed from outside. They may resist Whiteness at every turn, but do not emerge from many years of formal schooling unscathed or unchanged... Students of color have to become 'White' on some level, at least culturally, in order to achieve –

otherwise they confirm White fears about their uneducability. (Leonardo, 2013, p. 96)

I failed to recognize the weight of having to “navigate a compulsory [whiteness] that imposes itself on them as a coercive force” (Leonardo, 2013, p. 96). And in that failure to recognize, *I failed those students and denied their humanity and the reality of their school and societal experience*. The grief I feel in that recognition does not begin to approach these students’ experiences of negation and erasure under my care.

- **Closer teacher-student relationships with those students who reflected ‘good student’ performativity.**

When I think back to the racial identity of those kids who would come in and hang out with me, and just use my classroom as a space, they were white students... I also think about the students in classrooms that I felt closer to than others, and I have to reflect on, so why was that? Why was that? What did they reflect back to me that... supported that closer relationship?... The students that I think I felt closer to were the students that also reflected back to me what was expected of them as good students... there were *growing* relationships in my last years of teaching with Indigenous students but when I think about the closest ones, they were all white... I also have to consider the... predominantly white student population. But it also makes me reflect... so were they also the good students? And maybe not all was good because they were academically the best, but they were... enthusiastic, they wanted to hang around with me, they... did whatever I asked of them, and they... tried hard, they worked hard, they fell into everything that I... professed. (Appendix D, pp. 191–192)

This raises questions about conditional belonging experienced by students, in spite of my belief and professions that my classroom was a space for all students. Did students experience belonging with me and in my classroom space if they fit the dominant worldview? If they looked like me, thought like me, spoke like me? If they did not challenge the system and complied with what was expected? I always thought that I had great relationships with students, but I understand now that I really was not in relationship with *all* students. My strongest student relationships were with those students who reflected back what I wanted to see. I am not alone in this self-questioning. Schick (2000b) also noted the connection between a teacher’s love and acceptance and students whose performativity reflected the teacher’s influence (p. 306).

This impact raises the question of what students experienced who did not reflect the ‘good student’ performativity of my expectations. In what I professed to be a ‘classroom family,’ did these students experience what I had experienced within my own family when I did not perform or comply as expected? Did they experience the disapproval, intolerance, and shame that I remember so clearly from my own familial experience? That experience of unbelonging impacted my sense of worth so by extension, conditional belonging in my classroom had to communicate damaging messages about self-worth to those students I professed to care about so much.

- **Messages about what mattered in my classroom.**

- Working hard and meeting expectations:

I think that what mattered was doing what was expected... being industrious, trying, because I always used to say..., if you try, I’m here with you, but it was that message of work hard. If you work hard, you’ll succeed... Conducting yourself according to expectations, whether that was with... learning or with behaviour and conduct to one another. (Appendix D, p. 192)

- Compliance and acquiescence to my power and control:

There was a thread of control throughout my teaching, so when I think about when I started, and I did as I had learned to do. It was very much teacher-directed, students follow, so... not really a reciprocal relationship at all... I initiated; they did as I asked. It was just very compliant. And when I look at how that control evolved through the years of my career, so by the end, we were... collaborating on the norms for our classroom, but I certainly directed those... we would reflect on them... so I was inviting their voice more... but the control still sat with me. There was a relinquishing of control in sometimes co-constructing our learning journey or what... learning would look like... but when I think back overall, there was a definite thread of teacher control, teacher dictated in terms of learning... By and large, I determine[d] the learning journey; I determine[d] how that would unfold... There was student choice... and there was some student voice, increasingly more so, but there was still that thread of control. (Appendix D, pp. 192–193)

- Success as measured by demonstrating required learning:

What mattered was student success to me. I wanted them to... feel that sense of 'I did it.' I got it! I got it! Or, a sense of pride, like that was really important to me, but I also recognize that it was all still within the determined learning, within the box, the structured box of public education. (Appendix D, p. 193)

It is clear that what mattered in my classroom was preparation for the world of work with my emphasis on industriousness and appropriate conduct, compliance within a hierarchical structure of authority, and success as measured by external measures – all elements directly connected to participation as future workers in the hierarchical system of the market economy.

- **Messages about what learning was/is.**

...learning as prescribed, learning as pre-determined... structuring learning based on a learning path within outcomes. I hadn't opened up to consider how... I could work with students... so that their learning might look different and might be more meaningful to them... So by and large... except for some... circumstances where we actually co-constructed the learning together... overall, learning was as prescribed, without questioning it... Within that prescribed learning, I wanted to make it meaningful for students... and make it experiential to students, so it's interesting that I had those aspects in my teaching but I didn't see the box. I didn't push through the walls of the box. (Appendix D, p. 194)

...what I tried to do was make it experiential... like hands-on... we definitely used a constructivist approach to... students developing their understanding... I would work very hard to make the required learning meaningful to them so that they... developed their own understanding of it... and I used lots of discursive strategies to do that, but it wasn't so much about how does this sit alongside *your* worldview and how might this look... from a different perspective. I think the most we would have done with perspectives might have been... in ELA or sometimes in Social Studies, what might the experience have been from... a different point of view, but *never* from the perspective of oppression or marginalization or... systemic injustice. Never. (Appendix D, pp. 194-195)

I failed to recognize that in spite of an active, experiential, constructivist approach to learning, this approach was actually a passive one because all of this 'active, experiential' learning where students were given opportunities to construct their own understanding still

occurred within the defined parameters of pre-determined learning that dominant and powerful voices had identified as important for students' future participation in Canadian society as citizens and workers. All that my hands-on, experiential approach to learning accomplished was to perhaps make the required curricular diet of key understandings, knowledge, and skills a tad more palatable during the ingestion phase. The diet was still what the dominant knowledge system says it is within each discipline, and those who held/hold power within dominant society determined/determine the elements of knowledge that comprise that diet.

- **A one-way notion of respect through the reproduction of hierarchal power structures.**

I perpetuated a hierarchical structure of authority, because it was always power over because that was just the way it was, and I just did my part as a good white woman teacher in serving that whole machinery. (Appendix D, p. 178)

When I reflect on the 'classroom family' that I professed, I recognize the reproduction of hierarchical patriarchal thinking embedded within my assumption of power *over*, rather than power *with*, students. Inherent within the notions of respect within my classroom was the socially constructed definition of respect that equated to the expectation of respect toward me as the adult in a position of authority.

Demanding and expecting respect from students as a condition of their being in my classroom was a reproduction of the notion of respect within hierarchical colonial power structures. Absent from that notion of respect was any sense of mutuality and reciprocity that might find expression in an equitable and just learning community (Matias, 2016, pp. 15–17). The colonized notion of respect that I enacted within the classroom denied my students' "human right to a respect that is not self-serving or self-catering to one group over another" (Matias, 2016, p. 16). *This hegemonic expectation of respect did not require reciprocal respect for students' humanity or recognition of all they brought to the learning space of the classroom environment, including the lived pain of colonial violence experienced by Indigenous students and their families. My assumption of power over students reproduced colonial power relations and perpetuated colonial violence.*

Toxic positivity, invested idealism, and wilful ignorance:

A number of sub-themes emerged within this theme, each of which results in significant and detrimental consequences for students. Although the following discussion will focus on one sub-theme at a time, it is important to note that they work together and result in related and compounding harmful impacts on students. The sub-themes that will be explored in the following section include:

- Believing in, and propagating, the myths of the nation.
- Wilful ignorance of the barriers and disadvantages faced by students and their families.
- Multiculturalism and the celebration of diversity.

- **Believing in, and propagating, the myths of the nation.**

I was a believer in the myths of the nation, like the stories about Canada as a nation, building this nation, Canada as a nation that is based on... the Charter of Rights and Freedoms... I was really big on... we were a nation forged from nothing... the explorers, this democracy built on all of these ideals... I digested those, I embodied those, and I just lived and breathed them, and I really did think that we were all of those values that we profess, that we were the history that was taught, and so I perpetuated that with students... I had no idea that it was all a construction. It was a fictional construction that presented one view and that those values that we profess... it was like the beacon for other people, come to our lands, we'll welcome you – not really... and that we go and we help other countries, and just living on those stories, so that again was that liberal idealism... I perpetuated that, and that is actually... not the truth of what happened, and I didn't help my students understand that fully... I just think about the reproduction of a generation of citizens who continue to believe in the myth and who perpetuate that thinking, and I think that's one of the reasons that we struggle to understand when people talk about structural racism or systemic racism because the... narratives that are perpetuated just sort of obfuscate that. You know, it's sort of... everybody has equality of opportunity here in Canada. No, they don't. (Appendix D, pp. 186–187)

Propagating the constructed narratives of nation-building and the espoused national values impacted white settler students and Indigenous students in different ways. It is important to note

that I cannot assume to know what my students actually experienced, but what I shared during the interview is what I think the impacts might have been from my perspective based on the understanding I have gained through intensive engagement with scholarly research and writing.

Perceived consequences for white students:

One thing that I regret is that I set up white settler students to continue as me... assuming that their view of the world, their experience of the world, was... normal and neutral and the way things are, and assuming... that you just work hard and you get ahead and look at our family, we're successful... but not understanding the advantages that were put in place, historically and continuing, that ensure that certain people have more opportunities... or a better chance at success than others. So I think what I did is I limited their ability to understand the world and the way it *actually* is. I perpetuated the myths; my practice perpetuated hard working, industrious, *compliant* workers; and yes questioned...*within* what was expected. I mean, we didn't challenge systems. We didn't challenge structures. We didn't wonder about – I think – because I didn't see that there was *power* speaking through everything that we did. That was totally oblivious to me, and so I just went on reproducing it. (Appendix D, pp. 187–188)

The continual diet of white superiority and privilege in their school experience set white students up to expect the world to operate in the same way. Educated in one-dimensional hegemonic ideology, white students were conditioned to accept the dominant culture's worldview as normal and normative and not to recognize their privilege and the systems and structures that worked for them and not for others. Thus, they continued in ignorance, as I did, contributing to the marginalization and oppression of others “when they participate[d] in the privileging of certain identities” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 37) and accepted this inequity without question.

Educated to view whiteness as the invisible norm for their lives, white students did not “develop skills of critical and compassionate thinking... and bec[a]me educated to indifference or intolerance” (Kailin, 2002, p. 83). I think of all the classrooms of students I taught that were filled with students who looked just like them. When I consider this homogeneous childhood and adolescence, I am compelled to consider the losses in terms of all that they did not experience and learn, in spite of the fact that many of them came from very privileged and affluent homes. They learned a curriculum dominated by white ideology and knowledge within mostly white classroom

communities. I never taught them to question why this was so when there was such diversity in Canada and the world. I never taught them to question or challenge why the area in which we lived was dominated by white farm families. Just as I had done, they learned to accept “the overwhelming presence of whiteness” (Sleeter, 2001) as the way things were. This shallow, unidimensional experience of life and view of the world did not prepare them for the multiplicity of experiences and worldviews in the world – for the *humanity* of the world.

White-centeredness is not the reality of [the white child’s] world, but he is under the illusion that it is. It is thus impossible for him to deal accurately or adequately with the universe of human and social relationships... Children who develop in this way are robbed of opportunities for emotional and intellectual growth, stunted in the basic development of the self, so that they cannot experience or accept humanity. This is a personality outcome in which it is quite possible to build into children a great feeling and compassion for animals and an unconscious fear and rejection of differing human beings. Such persons are by no means prepared to live and move with either appreciation or effectiveness in today’s world. (Abraham Citron, 1969, pp. 14–16, as cited in Kailin, 2002, p. 83, italics mine)

While professing the language and celebration of diversity through the multiculturalism focus, the entry point for learning was the assumption of “‘normal’ (i.e., expect them to have the normative, privileged identities)” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 29), and so white students saw themselves reflected again and again in the language and practices of schooling and did not develop the ability to engage authentically with those they perceived as different from the norm. Rather than expanding their views of the world to include all expressions of humanity, schooling limited their view to superficial, incomplete, decontextualized knowledge of the ‘other,’ which exacerbated the illusion of difference from the norm and prevented any true development of empathy or ability to understand the circumstances and experiences of those deemed to be ‘other.’ Their experience “reinforce[d] the binary of ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 35).

Conditioned in the myth of meritocracy and the language of success through individual merit and effort, white students learned to see their classmates who were unsuccessful as inferior and needing help that they were positioned to give. How often did I ask a white student to help an Indigenous student, a student of colour, or a student from an impoverished family? How laden with assumptions of capability and superiority was that unexamined practice (Kailin, 2002, p. 24)? What

assumptions of innocence and superiority were ingrained in white students by this practice?

Their school experience set white students up to believe and invest in whiteness as “the invisible standard of success against which others are marked” (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, pp. 307–308). How could they not? Their only experience was the Western knowledge system and standards of literacy and numeracy as the markers of their success – all white standards of success. Knowing nothing else, how could white students not embrace these standards as what everyone needed to do to be successful?

White students’ experience of multiculturalism and racism in other places and times focused their attention on racism as *other than them* and *other than their country*, denied the reality of racial disparity in front of their eyes, and re-centred whiteness by always looking outward and never within (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 304). They learned to deny racism in their country because “relegating what is racist to historical and faraway practices whitewashed Canada and portray[ed] it as a raceless nation” (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 305). Rather, I focused their learning on the myths of the nation as a peacekeeper and as benevolent, offering aid and support to other nations in their time of need. “Turning the student [and teacher] gaze in another direction silence[d] the awareness of and interest in local and everyday racism” (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, pp. 304–305).

Schooled in understanding racism as something that happened in the past or happens in other places, white students continued to deny that racism existed in Canada and perpetuated the cycle of denial and judgment of those who experienced its effects. With this distorted understanding of racism, white students were unprepared and ill-equipped to grapple with social unrest and racial protests that shone a glaring light on the inequitable experiences of those who were not like them. They were unable to recognize and critique structural oppression and felt threatened when protestors cited white privilege and demanded the same treatment and opportunities they had. With no understanding or awareness of the role of dominant power relations in creating positions of privilege for them and marginalization for those deemed to be ‘other,’ they reacted and protested that their families worked hard to get to where they were at, and if others hadn’t achieved that success, then they needed to work harder. Without understanding of the power dynamics in dominant culture, they saw protests and social unrest as ‘us’ versus ‘them’ and lashed out with fearful instincts to protect what was theirs. Conditioned to believe in the myths of the nation and the rightful dominance of white ideology, white students moved to protect their unacknowledged

privilege accordingly.

Perceived consequences for Indigenous students and students of colour:

What non-white students experienced, I would suggest, would be that they didn't see themselves. They didn't see themselves represented in much of any way, a little bit more so in the last decade of my teaching, because I was... changing... my practice. I was including... treaties and residential schools, the understanding of that, but not to the depth it deserved... So I would suggest that they didn't see themselves in their learning; that... all around them, there was evidence of not fitting, of being other, and the message that to succeed... it looked one way, which I think invalidates, it would *have* to invalidate their sense of identity. (Appendix, p. 188)

From this vantage point of understanding, I want to emphasize the recognition that *every time I upheld the national narratives of settlers surviving, enduring, and building a nation from the wilderness, I participated in the cultural genocide of Indigenous people* who were dispossessed of their lands through imposed colonial sovereignty, and who were subjected to political-legal policies whose goal was to marginalize and assimilate them, to reduce their population, and to eventually extinguish their existence as distinct Indigenous nations and cultural identities (Thobani, 2007, p. 62). Just as Canadian colonial powers constructed the nation-state identity through imposed dominance and assumed cultural and racial superiority while constructing its innocence through narrations of national myths about the building of the nation and the character of its settler citizens, I participated in this process of 'becoming Canadian' and in asserting sovereignty and dominance while claiming innocence, each time I shared and upheld the myths of the nation (Thobani, 2007, pp. 55–64).

• Wilful ignorance of the barriers and disadvantages faced by students and their families.

Three sub-categories, all of which relate directly to this performed wilful ignorance, emerged within this sub-theme:

- i. My premise of 'believing in kids until they could believe in themselves.'
- ii. Ideologies of individualism and meritocracy.

iii. Colorblind ideology.

An explanation of the erroneous assumptions that underlay each of these sub-categories is provided in the following chart, followed by reflective discussion about the damaging impacts of these ideologies on Indigenous students/students of colour and white students.

i. My premise of ‘believing in kids until they could believe in themselves’

(Racquel) You were talking about on your professional growth plans, it was like believing in kids until they believed in themselves, putting this down... on your professional growth plan so, as I’m seeing you describe them, it seems like you’re going, can you believe how ridiculous those are? And so I’m... so curious about why you’re going can you believe I put that down because I think to somebody observing them, it would be, well I absolutely want a teacher who believes in my kids; I absolutely want a teacher who.. loves them...

(Linda) That’s a very... liberal idea because it’s much more than that... There was, yes, believing in kids, caring and loving for kids, but that’s not everything... I had no recognition of... the oppression that students might be facing, the inequities that students and their families were facing. I had no... recognition or understanding of, particularly with Indigenous students coming in, what barriers they would be experiencing *because* of systemic racism, historical and ongoing, that Indigenous families experienced. That... was a very... idealistic frame... for me to come into the classroom. (Appendix D, p. 181)

That idealistic frame was based on the following assumptions:

- It assumed... that everybody was starting from the same place, that everyone had the same chances of success, and all I had to do was believe in them until they could... until they believed in their own self-worth. *What would have been even more supportive of their feelings of belonging and that I actually saw them and who they were* was getting to know them more, their circumstances more, understanding just the whole... structural advantage and disadvantage, understanding

	<p>intersectionality, all of that kind of thing, would have helped me be more present to every student and what they were bringing into the classroom. (Appendix D, p. 181)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There was an assumption that when students stepped into the classroom they were just ready to learn, and if they weren't ready to learn, well, they needed to get ready to learn, and so all of the life experience part, like there was so many assumptions that I made about that not mattering in the space of the classroom because the classroom was about learning and we needed to get to work and we needed to get things done, and I, I just think I could have been more present to each student and who they... actually were. (Appendix D, pp. 181-182) <p>What did those students need from me instead of these assumptions? First of all, I needed to recognize that everyone was/is NOT starting from the same place and everyone did/does NOT have the same chances of success. While supporting students' sense of self-worth is important, my assumption that all I had to do was believe in them was an incredibly ignorant enactment of superiority and denial of the truth of their lived experience. How could I claim to believe in them when I did not truly see them or recognize who they were and what they and their families had experienced and continued to experience? <i>This wilful ignorance contributed to further negation and erasure.</i></p>
<p>ii. Ideologies of individualism and meritocracy</p>	<p>You know, so many units that I would do over the years, from the first years 'til, even to renewed curricula, ... there's often these personal-philosophic units... that are... all about me, which is very much individualistic, and it's about... dreams and hopes and wishes, but it's still based on that idea of individualism and meritocracy, where if... you work hard, you can be successful, and there's so much more involved in it than that... that worked for me to believe in because the structures were set up for white people like me to have doors open for them, and that doesn't mean that everybody who looks like me is equally... successful, but there is more likelihood that we will have opportunities</p>

than there would be for someone who has been systemically oppressed. (Appendix D, p. 182)

The ideology of meritocracy tells a particular kind of story about how the world works in a way that masks the truth about inequalities in society. If students and teachers believe that “individuals succeed or fail according to their own merit,” they also “‘understand’ why some excel and others flounder” (Lewis, 2001, p. 799). The common understanding of schools as neutral sites of instruction and transmission of knowledge obfuscates their role as “cultural and political sites in which the prior social order is reproduced” (Lewis, 2001, p. 799). Lewis (2001) went on to highlight that “significant bodies of research have demonstrated that merit and effort are differently rewarded, supported, encouraged, funded, and framed. The ideology of meritocracy, however, manages to successfully naturalize the resulting large gaps in school achievement” (pp. 799–800). *These gaps in school achievement are the direct causal result of the systematic racialized oppression of, and cultural genocide enacted upon, Indigenous peoples in this nation that professes equal rights and opportunities for all.*

Applebaum (2010) revealed another assumption within the ideology of meritocracy when she discussed the moves by idealistic, well-intentioned white teachers to increase the agency and responsibility of ‘at risk’ students. The assumption that students have the same choices available to them that I, as a white middle-class woman, have available to me, and that all they have to do is work harder, is fundamentally ignorant and blind to the reality of their lives and the barriers that they and their families face (Applebaum, 2010, p. 17). By engaging in this ideology and seeing students through this lens, I “perpetuat[ed] a system of oppression that constructs the day-to-day reality of students” (Applebaum, 2010, p. 17) through my “inability to recognize the restrictions of choice that circumscribe... students’ lives” (pp. 17–18), while at the same time, I was allowed to think of myself as working to make a difference in the lives of these students.

<p>iii. Colorblind ideology</p>	<p>I've really connected with the colourblind ideology because that is how I operated was we're all equal; we're all just people... that was the discourse that I used without a recognition of... the systemic issues and barriers that are in place for so many people or... a racially differentiated experience of life... for so many.... It's like operating life with blinders on. (Appendix D, p. 195)</p> <p>Raised on the belief in meritocracy and individualism, I was taught not to see race or attribute racial inequities to imposed structures of dominance and practices of marginalization and oppression by the dominant white culture. I was conditioned in colour-blindness (Gebhard, 2018; Kailin, 2000; Ullucci, 2012; Ullucci & Battey, 2011) so that I could claim that I did not see the colour of my students' skin and that I treated them all the same. Colour-blindness allowed me to deny the role of race in the opportunities to which one had access in life and to remain in "collective ignorance" (Ullucci & Battey, 2011, p. 257). I accomplished this, even as I claimed to believe in equality but remained outside of critical debates about racism and blatant inequalities that were right there for me to see in the lives of my students, in my community, and in society.</p> <p>My denial of race as a defining factor in students' experiences of school meant that I did not examine and critique my own teaching practice as one that ignored the racialized barriers my students faced and reproduced the norms and values of white dominance as the markers of success (Ladson-Billings, 2005, p. 143). Denial meant that I did not examine my own privilege and the marginalization of others within the dominant system of power relations (Gebhard, 2017, p. 13). Denial resulted in maintenance of innocence and superiority (Schick & St. Denis, 2003, p. 65). Denial allowed me to remain neutral and distance myself from potential consideration as a racist (Ullucci, 2007, p. 4). That attempt to distance myself from racism perpetuated it. Paul Gorski (2021) equated colorblindness with perpetuating racism: "If I don't see race, then I can't recognize racism, and if I'm not working to eliminate racism,</p>
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	<p>then I'm perpetuating racism. That's where color-blindness leaves us — racism.”</p>
<p>Damaging impacts these toxic ideologies have on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous students and students of colour • white students 	<p>What damaging impacts did these three toxic ideological frameworks (i.e., premise of ‘believing in kids until they could believe in themselves,’ and ideologies of individualism, meritocracy, and colorblindness) have on Indigenous students and students of colour?</p> <p>And so, I think about all of those assumptions, and although I said I saw kids, that I saw them for who they were, I think I didn't see <i>all</i> of them because they can't be separate from what's going on in their lives. They cannot be separate from that. They bring that in. And, I think about... the worldviews that they brought in, the knowledge systems, but there was an assumption that there was one way to do things. And, and so, I just think that, as much as I loved my students, and I did, it has gutted me... to realize how limited that was because <i>I didn't see all of them. I didn't see all of what they were facing.</i> There was an assumption that, like me, they could just work hard and they would be successful. Or that they could just... set goals, and I mean I don't even know why I believed in that because my own life was... not evidence of that, but that was... the story, right? That's what we teach kids. You just set goals and you reach them. You dream and you reach it. (Appendix D, p. 182)</p> <p>I think the sadness, the grief, is in realizing how limited my idea, my understanding of the world was, and how that limited my ability to be there as an ally, as an advocate for and with kids... I've always been very values driven, but I betrayed those... because... there were assumptions underlying my beliefs and my approaches, that didn't allow me to actually see who was in front of me and... create learning that was <i>truly</i> responsive to them... <i>but on a much deeper level of allowing all of them in the classroom and... learning from and with them... that's the loss that I feel, and I think there was a loss for them, and there was a loss for all of us because we didn't get to expand... our sense of what can be, of all</i></p>

possibilities. (Appendix D, p. 183)

I... didn't actually see them and all of them and what they were experiencing. I saw what I wanted to see. I assumed that... when they came into the classroom, that they were ready to learn. That was the expectation – to be ready to learn. And that negates anything that's going on outside the classroom walls and even within the classroom that's happening under the surface... so there's a certain blindness there, and ignorance, of the lives of students and who they are as people. And I think that *I saw them in a very limited way.* (Appendix D, p. 196)

... by perpetuating the myths and ideologies that I perpetuated, and as much as I wanted them to believe in themselves, if that is the message that I am communicating all the time, and they don't succeed, *what does that tell them about who they are?* And I always was big on... self-worth and students believing in themselves, but *their experience was that there had to be something wrong with them because they couldn't succeed, and they were surrounded with messages that all you have to do is work hard.* And the messages don't align with students' experiences and chances in life, and let's face it, *still in Canada, dependent on the colour of your skin... your chances for success and your chances for opportunities are still not as great as my children who were born into white bodies.* (Appendix D, pp. 200-201)

Sullivan (2014) wrote about the harmful effects of teaching non-white children colorblindness: “Such lessons implicitly teach them that race is bad, which can encourage a self-deprecating internalization of white superiority given that non-white people are seen as quintessentially raced” (p. 91). While professing not to see the colour of my students' skin and that I treated everyone equally, *the result of this liberal ideology was to deny the lived racialized experience of students and their families and further inferiorize them while claiming to love them all the same.* As Sullivan (2014) pointed out:

when children of color are told by their teacher that skin color doesn't matter, they don't necessarily take away the message of equality that teachers presumably intend. They just as often are taught that race is something that should not be acknowledged or talked about, which makes it impossible for them to challenge their society's belief that white is good and everything not white... is bad. (p. 91)

Thus, when I did not talk about race and yet students experienced the effects of race every day in all aspects of their lives, I have to ask myself what messages they received about their identity and worth. Reflecting on the themes and units I engaged students in around self-worth and self-identity, what is the message that is communicated to Indigenous students and students of colour when race and the racialized experience of living in this society are not talked about and only whitewashed aspects of your identity matter, when only the parts of you that I, as your white teacher, am comfortable talking about matter? *The message is that you don't matter. The message is that I don't truly see you or honour who you are or the perspectives and experiences you bring to our learning space. The message is that I erase you; I negate you.*

What damaging impacts did these three toxic ideological frameworks have on white students?

Not talking about race and propagating the colorblind ideology of not seeing race meant that white students were taught "to ignore or disregard the power dynamics of white domination [which] in turn increase[d] the likelihood that children [would] develop unconscious habits of white privilege, all in the name of supposedly being non- or anti-racist" (Sullivan, 2014, p. 91).

Strategies of color blindness help create a racialized psyche for white children that is embedded in an epistemology of ignorance and that ironically perpetuates the existence of racism without racists. Supposedly "blind" to color, children whose early racial awareness has been whitewashed will not be able to respond to the racially and racist-ly

structured world in which they live and from which they benefit in ways that promote racial justice. Nor will they be able to see the active (though perhaps not consciously deliberate) role they and other white people play as agents of racial inequality. *This lack of understanding can be considered a cognitive dysfunction, yet because it is a dysfunction that allows white children to ignore their participation in racial oppression, it enables them to function extremely well as white privileged people in a white privileged world.* (Sullivan, 2014, p. 91, italics added)

- **Multiculturalism and the celebration of diversity.**

When multiculturalism became a big thing, I leapt on the ‘celebration of diversity’ bandwagon. We did a lot in my classes on celebrating diversity and learning about... family origins, but it was very much the additive approach. It was... like foods and dances and costumes, and it was... essentializing because it talked about people as this is who you are; it’s about your traditional dress or a dish or a story or a celebration... We were learning *about* the other in very superficial... ways so I think about... what that communicated to students about... individuals who originate from other cultures, who have different ways of being. We never went that far. We never considered... their histories, the oppressions, the injustices that they faced. It was all... this liberal notion of let’s feel good about listening to some music and reading some stories, and we’d have some multicultural fairs, and... I’ve learned, it was essentializing because it painted everybody with one brush and it was just so superficial, and it was almost voyeuristic, you know? Like we’ll just do some sampling, but it didn’t require any shifts in our understanding. It just helped us to feel good because look at how diverse we’re being.... it’s something that I’ve realized didn’t actually support students in seeing people and *all* of people, without operating on... Western-based assumptions about them. (Appendix D, pp. 201–202)

I adopted the “language of multicultural education” (Kailin, 2002, p. 51) wholeheartedly, believing that “education about the other” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 31) demonstrated my willingness to embrace and celebrate the notion of cultural diversity, a notion that “allow[ed me] to opt out of considering racial justice while deriving social and cultural benefits from diversity awareness” (Gorski, 2019, p. 59). In this whitewashed celebration of diversity, “white students learn[ed] about diversity – not *racism*, but *diversity* – in ways that [were] most comfortable for them” (Gorski,

2019, p. 59). Together with my primarily white students, we celebrated their cultural heritages at the most superficial level – celebrations, foods, dress, arts, music, holidays, traditions – rarely venturing deeper to investigate the historical and economic factors that brought their families to this nation or the societal issues they faced when they arrived, and never examining the racist history of the ‘making of the nation’ that provided them with access to land, residency, and eventual citizenship.

In this early and misguided version of incorporating cultural awareness in my teaching practice, students’ experience of culture was essentialized (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 33) through tokenizing, ‘one-size-fits-all’ expressions such as dance, food, arts, and holidays. This ‘learning about the other’ as a curiosity (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 307) did not challenge inequities or racism and how they are playing out in the institution of school and its culture (Gorski, 2021). Rather, it “flatten[ed] race into a nonthreatening smorgasbord of interesting tastes and textures and eras[ed] the history of exploitation and oppression between racial groups” (Sullivan, 2014, p. 98). This practice “reinforce[d] a power structure whereby Whites have control and power to be the determiner of what constitutes cultural diversity” (Matias, 2016, p. 78).

As a proponent of the ‘celebrate diversity’ movement, I never “question[ed] why diversity or difference [was] an issue in the first place. Diverse from what? Different from what?” (Kailin, 2002, p. 126). The multicultural approach that I adopted with such vigour presented my classroom as a neutral space where all students were assumed to be equally positioned (St. Denis, 2011, p. 312) and did not examine the historical and social construction of diversity and race that was “tied to relations of domination and power” nor did it examine the “reality of these power relations and... the experience of oppression and exploitation” (Kailin, 2002, p. 126). My practice of celebrating diversity did not require me or my predominantly white students to interrogate the historical and ongoing systems of advantage from which we benefited, nor did it disrupt our ideologies of superiority and innocence in the face of the ongoing reality of inequality in all realms of society (St. Denis, 2017). And, unlike marginalized or oppressed ‘others’ that we learned about in such superficial and tokenistic ways, we could withdraw our focus at will (St. Denis, 2017).

The multicultural approach of learning about the other that I adopted in the name of celebrating diversity:

- “ignored[d] the differential experiences of white students and students of color” and the role of racism “as the crucial determinant of the life chances” of Indigenous youth and students of colour (Kailin, 2002, p. 52).
- failed to address the fundamental understanding that “the most different thing about [people] is the way [they] are treated and to question the reasons for this differential treatment” (Kailin, 2002, p. 126).
- failed to address the historical construction of difference and turn students’ gaze on the white centre of power (Warren, 2001a).

In particular, within the context of this prairie province, my practice of teaching units about Indigenous culture and history without meaningful integration of Indigenous worldviews, experiences, and perspectives throughout the curriculum (Kumashiro, 2000; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; St. Denis, 2011) resulted in a number of negative effects. Battiste (2013) noted that “the ‘add and stir’ model of bringing Aboriginal education into the curricula, environment, and practices... continues to sustain the superiority of Eurocentric knowledge and processes” (p. 28). Learning *about* Indigenous peoples objectified them and situated them in the past. It assumed the superiority of Western epistemology to learn *about* Indigenous peoples without actually respecting their knowledge and wisdom. Learning *about* Indigenous peoples created them as objects of interest, not as people with different epistemological and ontological frameworks from whom we could learn and with whom we could re-imagine relationships (Mackey, 2016, p. 127).

Additionally, there was resistance from white settler students who questioned why they had to learn about the past and what it had to do with them when they were not there. *Their resistance emerged as a natural effect of my additive approach and ignorance of Canada’s racist history and continuing practices.* I did not support students in understanding the larger racialized context of historic oppression and marginalization and how their racialized positions benefit or cost them and their families. When white settler students questioned why they had to learn about Indigenous culture or participate in cultural activities, once again, it was me who did not support them in making the connections to the racist erasure of Indigenous culture and language through the nation’s historical, colonial practices to gain access to the land and resources (St. Denis, 2011). I witnessed their concern about racist practices and infringements of human rights in other countries,

and I did not provide the same opportunity for them to open their hearts and minds to the racialized, dehumanizing experiences of Indigenous peoples and peoples of colour in their own country. That responsibility lies with me.

I hold responsibility for another limitation of my additive approach of learning about the Other (Leonardo, 2013). This approach did not support students in understanding the primary position of Aboriginal peoples as the First Peoples of this land (St. Denis, 2011, p. 311). *How could students understand “the specific and unique location of Aboriginal peoples as Indigenous to this land” when my practice “equat[ed] them with multicultural and immigrant groups (St. Denis, 2011, p. 311), as “one perspective among many” (p. 313)?* How could they understand Aboriginal sovereignty and Canada as a colonial state when I did not understand it myself (St. Denis, 2011, p. 311)? How could they understand the ethical imperative to meet the obligations of Treaty promises and address Indigenous land claims when their teacher did not ‘get’ the need from the depths of her being (St. Denis, 2011, p. 309)?

Like the state policy adopted in the 1970s to re-invent the national identity as post-colonial (Mackey, 2016), my multicultural approach “*reproduced the colonial erasure of Aboriginal peoples as the original presence in the country*” (Thobani, 2007, p. 144, italics added) as it embraced the re-characterization of Canadians as tolerant and accepting of cultural difference, while hiding historical and ongoing racist violence. As I ‘celebrated’ the cultures of others with students, I reproduced the national narratives of tolerance and acceptance while keeping the dominance and power of whiteness intact and ignoring the inequities created by systemic, structural, and institutional racism – inequities that were often right in front of me and experienced by students and their families within my classes.

Deficit ideology and theorizing:

Deficit ideology and theorizing work hand-in-hand with grit ideology to inform constructed narratives about Indigenous students and students of colour that ‘blame the victim’ for not succeeding within an education system that was founded in white supremacy and operates to problematize, marginalize, and erase them.

I think about... assumptions that I made about Indigenous students coming into my classroom... from a reserve school, and they had done their schooling there, and there was information that preceded them about... their skill levels, and so, that's what I got caught in, was *deficit... theorizing, about how am I ever going to catch them up? How am I ever going to fill those gaps? So, seeing them as something that needed to be filled or fixed, rather than incredibly strong, resilient, courageous young people who came into a [predominantly] white settler school...* [Appendix D, p. 188]

There were deficit assumptions made about them, and... that they just needed to try harder, that whole grit ideology... if they just tried harder... with no recognition of the structural disadvantages, the systemic racism that they and their community members, their family members, had faced. No recognition of what racism they might be experiencing in the hallways of the school, the white school that they came into. [Appendix D, pp. 188–189]

Perceiving this group of Indigenous students through the lens of skill gaps and seeing them as problems that required fixing provides a strong example of deficit ideology and theorizing. Gorski (2021) explained deficit ideology as identifying the source of the disparity or the problem *within* Indigenous students or students of colour. Thus, the problem is attributed to the marginalized through a constructed perception of lack and inferiority. The result of this deficit ideology is the practice of attempting to adjust something about these students (e.g., behaviours, mindsets, skill development) rather than focusing on eliminating my own racism premised on indoctrinated racist ideology. Gorski (2021) emphasized that if my focus is on adjusting students rather than eliminating the racism within me and the system, then I am engaging in deficit ideology. Thus, my focus on what these students lacked (and therefore, what I needed to adjust or fix) rather than their strengths perpetuated the deficit ideology that is operating all the time within the school system. Deficit ideology attributes the primary cause of disparities to these students, their families, and their communities, which leads to the notion that something needs to be fixed within them. This assumption that they need fixing and that we know what they need does not address the disparities and inequities that are pressing down upon them (Gorski, 2021).

In their 'fixing,' I urged them to try harder, assuming that they needed more resiliency and grit. Herein lays the connection to grit ideology, which is also connected to the myth of meritocracy. This assumption ignores the policies, structures, and systems that were put in place

to provide opportunity to and benefit white people and to marginalize and disadvantage Indigenous peoples and peoples of colour (Gorski, 2021).

Presuming we can resolve racial inequities by simply teaching students of color to have grit is like presuming we can resolve climate change by teaching coastal communities to swim faster. It shifts the onus of responsibility away from schools and onto the very youth who are cheated out of equitable opportunity – and who, due to this cheating, often already tend to be quite resilient... What good is grit against curricular erasure or inequitable school policy? (Gorski, 2019, p. 59)

Those students demonstrated persistence and resilience every day as they returned to a predominantly white school and to a classroom where their teacher viewed them through the lenses of deficit and grit ideologies. *What needed 'fixing' was definitely not the students; my deficit assumptions and their resulting marginalization were what needed fixing.*

When Racquel posed a question about the story I told myself before these students came into my class and where that story came from, I was challenged to reflect on the narratives that informed that deficit-based lens and their origins.

I was set up to think that way. In what I've learned... during this research... that's how anybody who's deemed other or non-white is set up to be, *especially* Indigenous people. They were set up as not white, therefore, inferior, deficient... and so I think that... I absorbed that. And I think it's the talk of school as well. We talk about skill gaps. I know I hear that now with Covid. There's all this worry about the gaps in skills, and... I think because of this work, my head keeps going to, but what about the kids? What about the individuals who are there... in front of you? [Appendix D, p. 188]

It comes from teacher talk... in the hallways, at breaks, after school... in the staffroom... it tended to be about, or what I remember is, is more that catching them up, catching them up to what? Some assumed level that they're supposed to be at. I also think... about the resource that was viewed in *Understanding and Finding Our Way*. The individuals who were the voices and main people in the film were looking at that resource that only came off the shelves... in 2014, so it was... like I remember resources like that. Those resources that... perpetuated the idea of Indigenous peoples in the past, as primitive people... the

discourse that I listened to growing up which was... about First Nations people, like quit complaining and just get out there and get a job and work hard like everybody else.... It's all a part of it, and... so it's the waters... that I was in, so nothing specific... that says that *this* is what caused me to think in a deficit way, but I think it's the way Indigenous peoples have been constructed in the minds of white settler people like me, and that was *a purposeful construction to legitimate the actions that were taken against them*. [Appendix D, p. 190]

The memories of the deficit assumptions that I made about Indigenous students before they even arrived in my classroom have caused me to reflect deeply. My assumptions were based on the socio-historical racism that informed my worldview and belief system – what Gorski (2021) termed ideological racism. Because I perpetuated the story of racism as defined by individual acts of hatred against others, I did not recognize or perceive the impacts of that strategic systemic and historical racism on the families of these students nor the continuing marginalization and oppression of these students and their families due to the collective refusal of settler society to acknowledge the truth of our violent racist past. Operating based on these unexamined deficit assumptions perpetuated ideological racism (Gorski, 2021).

Implementation of curriculum and resources that normalized works by white authors and presented one worldview – the Eurocentric worldview that privileged white people and erased or marginalized Indigenous peoples and people of colour – ingrained messages about white superiority and exceptionality just as they ingrained messages about Indigenous inferiority and characterized Indigenous peoples as social and economic ‘problems’ (TRC, 2015). Steeped in racist images in public education and popular culture for most of my life, I was conditioned not to recognize the implications of those representations in creating deficit narratives and stereotypes of Indigenous peoples and people of colour.

My blindness to it, my inability to see it, was part of the social mechanisms that generated the availability of the stereotypes in the first place... I am meant not to see them because I am a part of a social system that we all, every one of us, participates in maintaining. These uses of color spring from a historical legacy that hides its tracks, covers its beginnings, and eludes detection by relying on a rhetoric of normality that makes such images flow over us without suspicion. (Warren, 2001a, p. 38).

The steady diet of racist representations of oppressed and marginalized groups had obfuscated the process of the normalization of whiteness and the oppression and marginalization of non-dominant groups. As Dyer (1988) pointed out, the product reveals the process by which those in positions of dominant white power defined themselves as everything non-dominant groups were not. Constructing non-dominant groups to be departures from the norm, “the norm [i.e., whiteness] has carried on as if it is the natural, inevitable, ordinary way of being human” (Dyer, 1988, p. 44).

Norquay (1993) questioned the constructed understanding of difference that has informed our conditioning. “Difference is never simply a descriptive term; it always signifies a social relation of domination/subordination, reproduction/resistance. Differences do not simply exist; they are constructed and all constructions of difference are integral to power relationships” (Norquay, 1993, p. 243). In dominant society, whiteness has been constructed to be the norm, and difference has been associated with deviance (Lorde, 1984, as cited in Norquay, 1993, p. 243). Binary constructions, such as good/bad and superior/inferior, result from this association of difference with deviance. What I did as a white teacher in my deficit construction of the Indigenous students coming into my classroom was a construction of difference that subordinated them and located me on “‘the other side of difference’: the side of domination” (Norquay, 1993, p. 244).

Deficit thinking not only problematized Indigenous students; it also problematized students’ families (Gebhard, 2017, 2018; Kailin, 2002; Picower, 2009; Pollack, 2012; Ullucci, 2007). I remember expressing similar comments to those shared by the teachers in Kailin’s (2002) study about parent-teacher conference days when few, if any, Indigenous parents showed up. My perceptions and narrative were through the lens of ‘here I am doing everything I can for their child and they don’t care.’ I did not pause to consider what steps I might take to begin to build a relationship with them or what their own experiences of school and education might have been. I did not consider the potential re-traumatization that entering a school might cause. I “had little critical understanding of racism or of the cultural and historical backgrounds of [my] students” (Kailin, 2002, p. 16) or their families. I taught about residential schools; I knew about the generations of forced child removal and abuse, and yet I did not make the connection to what schools might symbolize to students and their families in the present. Was it because *I placed*

Indigenous history in the past and did not connect it to ongoing, intergenerational trauma and colonial violence?

As I complained about Indigenous parents' lack of involvement in their children's education, whether it was student conferences or school events and activities, why did I not ask about what factors might be contributing to this lack of involvement (Kailin, 2002)? Why did I not consider whether they felt welcomed or whether their voices mattered? Why did I (and the school) not consider how student conferences or events might be organized differently? Why could I not see that the obstacles were all of my (and the school's) construction and not a failing of the parents? Why did it never occur to me to attend a function in their community (Kailin, 2002; Picower, 2009)? How could I dare to make assumptions about people with whom I had so little experience? And yet I did.

Another assumption lay in the perception that the "problems students faced were situated solely in their presumably problematic home lives, rather than in institutional racism" (Picower, 2009, p. 210). This presumption allowed me to continue to place responsibility for 'achievement gaps' on students and their families who 'did not value education' rather than on the ways in which I (and the school) were "inequitably serving them" (Picower, 2009, p. 210). "Aboriginal family dysfunction" (Gebhard, 2018, p. 2) was assumed and this devaluation of students' home lives (p. 9) was used as a rationalization for inequitable achievement. The link that "the constitution of Aboriginal parents as incompetent stem[med] from a long history of forced removal of Aboriginal children from their homes" (Gebhard, 2018, p. 7) was unrecognized, as was the implicit valuation of "white child rearing practices and approaches to education" (Ullucci, 2007, p. 3) and the devaluation and marginalization of "non-European traditions" (p. 3). Instead, I continued to perpetuate the hegemonic understanding of individualism and the attribution of "issues around poverty, housing, and violence" to individuals, "instead of the outcomes of oppressive structures that are the legacies of colonialism" (Gebhard, 2018, p. 9).

Problematizing students and parents exemplified how the myth of meritocracy played out in 'blame the victim' messaging (Kailin, 2002; Schick & St. Denis, 2003, 2005; Ullucci, 2007). Assuming that schools were neutral spaces and believing that equal opportunity for success existed for all students if they worked hard enough, the failure of Indigenous students (and students from other marginalized groups) to achieve markers of success reflective of the

dominant white culture's standards and values was attributed to their failure, not to any "bias in the system" (Ullucci, 2007, p. 4). The 'blame the victim' assumption denied the "racism and race privilege in curricular practices" and ensured the continuation of "the effects of colonization" (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 296). Rather than recognizing and countering the racist assumptions and practices that marginalized students who were "other than the norm" (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 26), I assumed that the responsibility for overcoming these barriers belonged to those who experienced the negative effects of inequality (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 296).

With a deeper understanding of how deficit ideology operates to problematize Indigenous students and their families, what do I perceive as the impacts? Once again, I cannot presume to know these consequences with certainty. What follows is what I can surmise based on my engagement with research and writing by critical race and critical whiteness scholars.

It's interesting that... the same students that I spoke about – and they're the ones that are most recent in my mind... because... I recognize the deficit thinking that I had in them coming in, and over the year that I spent with them, I got to know them as incredible young people, and I would say that we did develop relationships, and I... did get to know them, but what spoke to me greatly in this work was the assumptions that I started with, and I *know* they had to feel those. *I know, I mean I might have had a smile on my face and welcomed them into my classroom, but we all know, we can sense what someone is feeling about us even when we try to mask it.* [Appendix D, p. 191]

As much as I want to hold onto the belief that all students were welcomed into my classes, the memory of those Indigenous students making the transition to a predominantly white school challenges that liberal notion of 'all were welcome.' How could those students feel welcomed when all I could think about was the information about their skills gaps that preceded them and the time and effort it was going to require of me to get them caught up to grade level? How this deficit lens "contaminated the teaching and learning in the classroom" (Milner, 2006, p. 82, as cited in Ullucci & Battey, 2011, p. 1199), I can only surmise. My assumptions about them were based on historical racist constructions of inferiority, and rather than working to empower them as I believed I did for my students, *I disempowered them from the beginning with my unexamined deficit-based racist lens.* My automatic default to deficit thinking with regard to

Indigenous students, in particular, aligned with “colonial ways of knowing in teachers’ narratives that position Aboriginal peoples ‘as victims who are lacking’... and provided solutions and support by the ‘all knowing’ non-Aboriginal ‘rescuers;” (Madden, 2016, p. 13, as cited in Gebhard, 2018, p. 7).

Perceptions of ‘gaps’ or ‘deficits’ also resulted in normalized lower expectations of these, and other marginalized, students’ academic capabilities and permission to fail (Gebhard, 2017, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Matias, 2013; Ullucci, 2007). Low expectations resulted in “abdication of responsibility” (Pollack, 2012, p. 93), which was revealed in conversational narratives with colleagues about marginalized students and their families, stories that

frequently [told] of incidents and personal experiences that convey[ed] and... strengthen[ed] [our] belief that disparities in academic achievement and other school outcomes [were] caused by students’ culture, class and supposed endogenous deficiencies – factors over which [we had] no control. (Pollack, 2009, as cited in Pollack, 2012, p. 94)

Students’ perceived deficits were not limited to gaps in skill development. They were evident in assumptions about their motivation to learn and lack of discipline (Gebhard, 2018; Kailin, 2000). These assumptions were intrinsically related to other labels and stereotypes that clouded my ability to *see* students for who they were as individuals with a wealth of experiences, perceptions, strengths, and talents (Kailin, 2002). How often were Indigenous students and students from marginalized groups labelled as ‘at risk’ – at risk of what? Not conforming to dominant white norms? Not meeting dominant white standards? How often were Indigenous students, in particular, perceived as fearful or intimidating, especially when they gathered in groups (Kailin, 2002, pp. 104-105)?

I even remember seeing them sitting together in our foyer, and feeling tentative about going past them. Had those been white kids clustered in the foyer, I would *never* have hesitated, so what did that hesitation tell me? What did that tentativeness tell me? It’s that... in a cluster... there’s... some kind of danger there, and I liken that to what I often hear about assumptions that are made about black kids. I think about what... an Indigenous colleague... has shared with me, watching kids in a high school... seeing those kids and there was a hallway where they would cluster. Of course, they clustered there... We would never question white... teenagers clustering together, but of course, they clustered to find

support, to find belonging with one another, and she talked about what she noted with them, when they were hanging out together, their body language, their bodies were more relaxed, they were talking with one another. The bell would go, the hoods would go up, the tension, like she could see the marked difference as they had to leave where they felt some belonging to go out into those predominantly white hallways, predominantly white classrooms, and so she would watch them armor up. When she told me that, I recognized, and I immediately thought back to Indigenous kids coming into my classroom, hoods up, and even other kids coming in with hoods up, but I think particularly of that group of Indigenous students coming in, in middle years, very challenging time to come in, and *I never recognized the strength and courage it took for them to come into a white classroom with a white teacher who could only think about, oh my goodness, how am I ever going to catch them up to the other kids?* [Appendix D, p. 189]

As I reflect on the perception of threat from this vantage point, I was not seeing them as other teens whose natural tendency was to hang out with their friends. What was it about First Nations students doing what every other teenager did that felt threatening? The problem did not rest with the students; *the problem was me and the ingrained stereotypes that conferred immediate judgment on them.* This instantaneous perception of fear, identified as a “hegemonic understanding” (Picower, 2009, p. 202), resulted from my “construction of different as dangerous” (p. 203) that formed through my socialized absorption of stereotypical labelling. Feelings of apprehension about the apparently ‘tough’ Indigenous students when they first came into my classes revealed more about the stereotypes embedded in me than the students. Why would they not come in with inner walls up and defences in place? Stereotypes informed by dominant narratives caused my preconceptions and apprehensions, which, in turn, impacted my initial impressions of these students. When I think of the assumptions and judgements I made based on harmful stereotypes (Gebbard, 2018), I realize that *I was the obstacle for Indigenous students, not them.* “What [I] saw was a stereotype that clouded [my] vision” (Kailin, 2002, p. 9) and *prevented me from seeing what these students had to offer and might accomplish.* The connection between these labels and these students’ position outside the [white] norm was invisible to me at the time. That these stereotypes were “challenged only by those whom society wanted to remain silent” (Kailin, 2002, p. 9) was also not recognized, and as I engaged in

practices that labelled students and limited their opportunities for success, *I contributed to that silencing.*

I think of an experience with a student; this was an Indigenous student coming down a very crowded hallway, a middle years hallway, slamming lockers... like hitting them and obviously agitated and calling us all a bunch of racists... that experience stands out because I felt, in that moment, like, oh my god, this is reverse racism... The thing is I didn't understand is there's no such thing because racism is built on a structural, systemic understanding of racism and there's no way that student had the power to create anything that would systemically or structurally disadvantage me... the thing is I... never once thought 'what happened in that student's life over the days prior, 'cause he is an Indigenous student in a primarily white collegiate; what happened in the days or the hours leading up to that incident, that that was the straw that broke the camel's back, that caused the reaction? It was just like 'what's with him'? Like that, look at the aggression; that's reverse racism. And you could just feel this collective drawing back from this student. *Never once did I think or wonder about what's... happening with him? What has caused this... reaction.... what has led up to this? ... how could I inquire into that and find out what's going on and actually do some listening instead of operating on assumptions?* [Appendix D, p. 197]

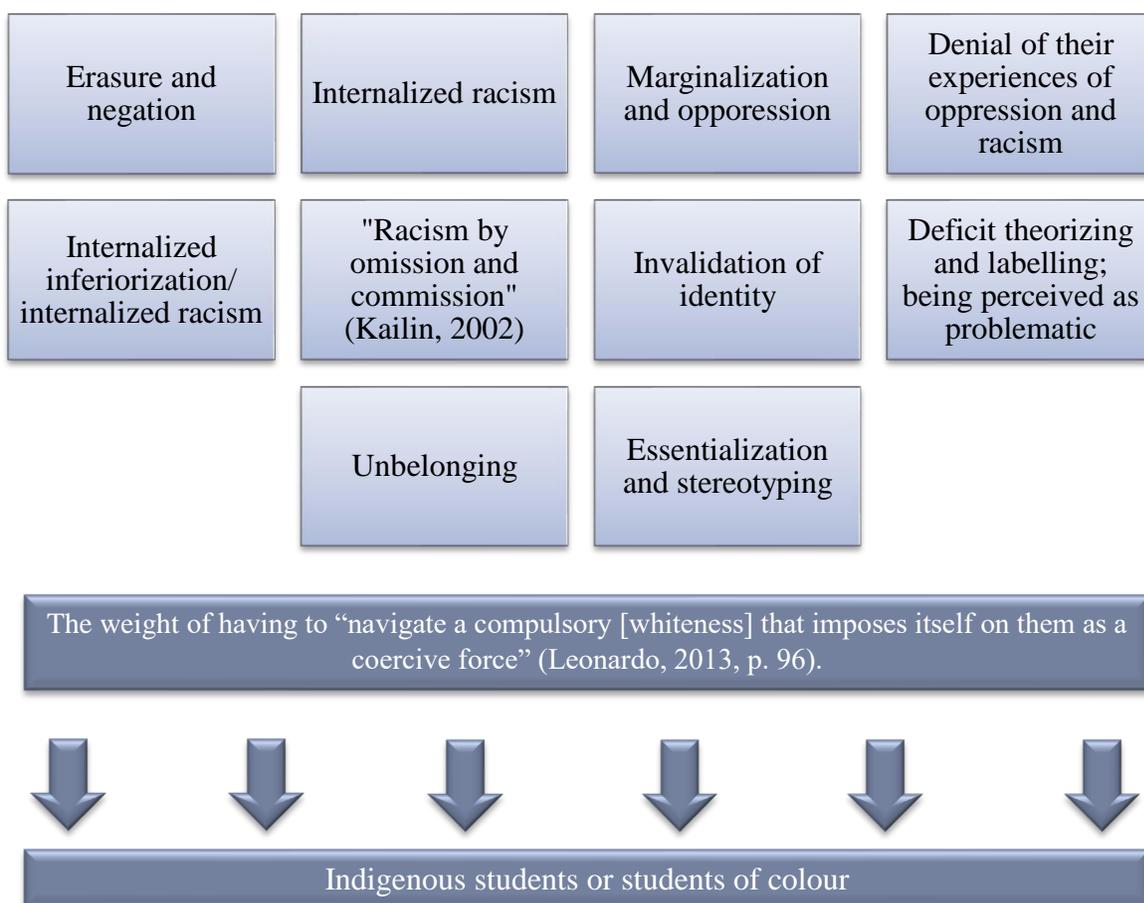
Socialized to be fearful of Indigenous people (and therefore, students), I "interpret[ed] their behaviours as particularly threatening or hostile in ways I wouldn't interpret the same behaviours in white students" (Gorski, 2021). The socially and historically constructed fear of the racialized other (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 54) was expressed through the deficit assumption that I made about this Indigenous youth's reactive behaviour. And in that assumption, *I made the problem about him and not about the racism he might be experiencing within the white institution of public schooling.*

So when I think about... making deficit assumptions about kids. There's very real harm in that. Like when I see you as gaps or deficits that need to be filled, what does that say about how I perceive you... as a person of value and worth? And that gets communicated...in so, so many ways. I think about the harm that is done. Like when I went to school, what I saw reflected me. And I try to, I'm just trying to imagine myself now, if I had... *year after*

year after year of an education experience where nothing I learned about reflected me and my family and where, what we're all about and how we are in the world and how we perceive in the world, or what our experiences have been, doesn't that erase me? Doesn't that negate me? ...If we see kids as deficient, if we have... unrecognized racist assumptions operating beneath the surface, where we're making judgments about a student based on their racial group, how does that not get conveyed to that child or that youth and become part of how they see themselves? And I think what that does is it contributes something that I've learned about which is internalized racism where you think of yourself as, you just internalize it all, and that's how you think about yourself. And so while I professed to be wanting the best for students, and I really believed that I did, there were some messages there that did the opposite. And... I think that I'm only just beginning to realize the harms. [Appendix D, pp. 202–203]

At this point in my decolonizing journey, these are the harmful impacts of my good white teacher performativity that I have been able to identify. This is the truth that I needed to recognize and begin to come to terms with as I decolonized my indoctrinated subjectivity and white performativity. The enormity of the harm is grave and becomes even more sobering when one considers that these are harms identified through scholarly research and critically reflective writing and *not* as shared by the students and their families who experienced and endured these harms.

I imagine the crushing weight and cumulative, enduring harm of these impacts of white performativity on Indigenous students and students of colour as follows:



As I embarked on this emotionally difficult research journey, I was asked why I would engage in such a journey given that I am no longer teaching and I could take this knowing to the grave. At that point in my new-found awareness, the only answer I had was so that I would do no more harm. My research accomplished more than my intent to expose the subjectivation process that made me as a good white female teacher and the grievous harms that resulted from that white performativity. I also found reason for hope and agency as I move forward, which is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 5: What Gives Me Hope and Agency?

[This journey] has been disorienting because when you realize that everything that you believed, everything that you did was based on a lie, on a construction, and you thought it was the way the world is... it is disillusioning... and it has been emotionally difficult, and yet, I have never thought of stopping because this is about kids. This is about young people... I always had the best of intentions, always... I never... can think of a time when I did not want the best for my students. What I didn't understand was that the best, that the version of best was constructed and reproduced what the dominant power structure decreed was best, so I didn't recognize how power was working through me to reproduce what those in positions of power wanted to be reproduced... But, always, throughout my career... I had the best of intentions, and it took me... a while to understand that *people with the best of intentions can do harm*. And my desire in this is that I do no more harm, because I did harm. I did... this is not about a fanciful wish to learn more. This is *I have to*, and I can't go back and fix that, but I can do better, and to do better, I have to understand more, and I have to understand what's operating behind the surface appearance of the system so that I can help students see it and understand their own circumstances.

[Appendix D, p. 200]

And so... would I recommend that other teachers do this? They *have to*. They *have to*. Because... I believe that most teachers have the best of intentions. They want to do good by kids, just as I did my whole career. And I worked endless hours to do right by kids, but I did so much harm. I did so much harm, and I didn't even realize it. So, yes, they have to, for kids, 'cause that's why we're all there, for everybody's kids, and we talk about creating a better world. You know, we talk about peace with kids and we talk about human rights, but this is *boots on the ground*. *How do I see each one of you in my classroom? What assumptions am I making about you? What thinking is fueling my thinking about you, and the way I perceive you and the way you are in the world?* [Appendix D, p. 201]

From birth, I was steeped in the construction of binaries that categorized, divided, isolated, and alienated human beings. Binary constructions of superiority and inferiority, deserving and undeserving, normal and deviant, capable and deficient were/are limiting frameworks of perception that were/are imposed through dominant power structures and reproduced through

socialized discourse and white performativity. Because my assumptions and perspectives about my fellow human beings were conditioned and reproduced through repetition, they are *not* inherent to my being. I can *decondition* myself and emerge from this research journey more fully human and able to engage in respectful, reciprocal relationships with other human beings. This is not just an expression of hope born of an idealistic heart and mind.

Hope lies within the words of Apple (1990): “The kinds of institutional and cultural arrangements which control us were built by us. They can be rebuilt as well” (p. 13). Frankenberg (1993) provided a clue as to how this rebuilding might happen: “knowledge about a situation is a critical tool in dismantling it” (p. 10). Youdell (2006) corroborated this hope when she highlighted the shifting focus of Foucault’s writing in the 1990s to “the potential for subjectivated subjects to be otherwise... through the self-conscious practices of subjects, even if these subjects come into being through the condition of subjectivation” (p. 42). Understanding that I was “made subject by and subject to discursive relations of disciplinary power,” I can also “engage self-consciously in practices that might make [me] differently” (Youdell, 2006, p. 42). My subjectivation as a good white female teacher does not need to continue as determined by the boundaries of the cookie-cutter mold in which I was made. The impacts of this subjectivation and white performativity do not need to continue to be experienced by those who are constructed differently. But hope alone is insufficient. Hope does not equate to action for change.

Where do I find agency to constitute myself differently? Citing Judith Butler’s work, Applebaum (2010) identified agency’s location: “Agency is to be found in the very occasion of perpetuating power” (p. 63). Yes, I was constituted as a good white female teacher-subject, but that does not mean that my teacher-subject performativity is determined. Rather, I can “disrupt the repetition of [the] social norms” (Applebaum, 2010, p. 64) that constituted me and reproduced me within a prescribed role each time I repeated them. These discourses do not have inherent authority or truth; rather, they acquire authority through repetition. I can find agency through counter speech – that is, discourse that challenges the historicity of the norms that govern discursive practices as well as the assumptions that lie within commonsense discourse (Applebaum, 2010, p. 69); speech that counters commonly accepted and repeated discourses that assume binary constructions and relegate human beings into fixed positions based on artificial ‘boxes’ that divide us and limit human potential.

Power is perpetuated through performativity, “a culturally and historically contingent act, which is internally discontinuous, [and] only real to the extent it is repeated” (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 34). Warren (2001a) identified the potential of “locating race in its own process of reiteration” and, in doing so, interrupting “the generative power of performativity” (p. 105) to reiterate racial categories. As Warren (2001c) argued, “Race is... performance – a repetition of acts that strategically obscures its own production, thus appearing as something we are rather than something we do” (p. 200). Thus, interrupting repeated acts of interpellating other human beings into pre-assigned categories that have implications for their life chances will also interrupt the reproduction of existing dominant power relations that ascribe meaning and advantage by race. Warren (2001d) advocated “doing whiteness differently”– that is, “an enactment of self that is reflexive, critical, and responsible” (p. 453).

‘Doing whiteness differently’ means more than understanding my own subjectivation; it means “understanding students as subjectivated through ongoing performative constitutions” (Youdell, 2006, p. 48). Thus, agency also means “interrupt[ing] these performatives in order to constitute students differently” (Youdell, 2006, p. 48). “Through repetition and re-citation” (Youdell, 2006, p. 50), I can transform normative student constitutions that interpellate students into being as ‘at risk’ or ‘demonstrating gaps’ or being ‘different’ or deficient in some way when measured against the constructed narratives of history and normative white ideals. I can choose to see them through an informed strengths-based lens that interpellates them as human beings with inherent talents, strengths, and qualities of being. Each time I interrupt normative constitutions and use purposeful, informed discourse to perform differently, I will unsettle enduring inequalities that are produced through the unexamined performative practices of schools and teachers.

‘Doing whiteness differently’ also means operating from a deeper understanding of racism that recognizes its historical roots and ongoing operation in the practices, structures, systems, and institutions of society, including the institutions of public education. Knowledge *is* power. Gaining an understanding of institutional, structural, and systemic racism gives me agency to think outside of a lifetime of conditioning, to critique the systems and structures themselves, to comprehend what I have been a part of, and to consciously choose how I show up in the world.

Understanding racism as “one group, the white group, ha[ving] the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices” (Dismantling Racism Works, 2021) moves me past individualistic notions of racism to understanding the social and institutional power that created/creates systems of advantage and disadvantage based on race. This understanding gives me agency because it empowers me to consciously identify racism in action through its practices and its societal and systemic impacts. Being able to recognize and name racism opens the door for me to step outside of compliance and use all means at my disposal within my sphere of influence to raise awareness about how racial inequity operates and the need for racial equity in classrooms, schools, and other institutions connected to public education. Being steeped in Western ideology, white supremacy, and patriarchy, the dominant power system continued to benefit from my understanding of racism as individual and based on interpersonal actions. I needed to understand the power dynamics at work beneath this limited understanding of racism in order to push back and challenge the system as the way things are. My conditioned acceptance of the normativity and goodness of white supremacy and nationhood perpetuated the existing power structures and racial inequities. This realization compels me to support and challenge other white people like me to begin to question that which they take to be normal, or the way things are.

The way things are is not the way things have to be. The outcome and experience disparities that we see, and hear/read about, in society, communities and schools *are predictable by race* and are the result of a long history of systemic racism. Agency can be found in that realization and the knowledge that I can intentionally, and with awareness, perform something different *for* the children and youth I always professed to care so much about. I reflect back to my oft-professed goal of ‘believing in kids until they could believe in themselves.’ I assumed that I could support them in developing their self-worth enough to experience success without acknowledgement of the inequitable racist systems and structures that I was helping to perpetuate intact and unquestioned and in which they would either experience systemic advantages or disadvantages based on their racial identities. Agency is found in understanding equity beyond individualistic notions of success and nationalistic professions of equal rights and freedoms.

Equity is not merely about *giving every student what they need to succeed* in an individual sense. This way of imagining equity obscures our responsibility to address institutional bias and inequity. Instead, equity is a process through which we ensure that policies, practices, institutional cultures, and ideologies are actively equitable, purposefully attending to the interests of the students and families to whose interests we have attended inequitably. By *recognizing* and deeply understanding these sorts of disparities, we prepare ourselves to respond effectively to inequity in the immediate term. We also strengthen our abilities to foster long-term change by *redressing* institutional and societal conditions that create everyday manifestations of inequity. (Equity Literacy Institute, 2021, italics in original)

Understanding equity supports my understanding of what actions will work toward justice and not inadvertently re-centre white racial power. Understanding that equity is “redistributing access and opportunity to be fair and just” (Equity literacy Institute, 2021) gives me agency because it defines what is needed and moves me beyond my ‘helping’ tendency. Further refining my understanding is the definition of educational equity by Due East Educational Equity Collaborative (2021):

Educational equity is academic success and belonging for each and every student. Educational equity is about individuals, relationships, and systems. A school that is educationally equitable is one in which *we accept and value each individual for who they are and provide the structures, environment, and resources each student needs to reach their greatest potential.* [emphasis added]

Gaining insights from the Due East Education Equity Collaborative (2021) into what equity feels like for students provides me with a framework for assessing my words and actions, which must continue to be interrogated for re-centring white normativity and dominance:

- I am valued for my strengths and contributions.
- I am respected for who I am.
- My voice is heard and appreciated.
- I feel cared about and I care about others.
- I see myself, my family, and my community represented.
- I feel comfortable and welcomed.

- I am confident and challenged.
- I am empowered to achieve my goals and full potential.
- I see my place and responsibility in creating a better future.

These statements provide a framework for me to honestly self-assess my perceptions of how each student might respond to these statements. Can I honestly answer that each student is valued for their strengths and contributions? That each student is respected for who they are (rather than how well they reflect back my expectations)? That each student's voice is heard *and* appreciated (rather than tolerated or redirected)? That each student feels cared about (from their perspective) and cares about others? That each student sees themselves, their family and community represented in their learning (rather than a 'whitebread' curriculum)? That each student feels comfortable and welcomed (based on unconditional rather than conditional belonging)? That each student feels confident and challenged (based on their experience and perspective)? That each student feels empowered to achieve *their* goals (not mine) and full potential? That each student sees their place and responsibility in creating a better future (based on understanding agency and responsibility to the whole of creation and humanity rather than an individualistic notion of success)?

These statements not only provide a framework for my own critical self-reflection. They provide an assessment framework for gathering responses from students and their families. How would students respond to each of these statements? How would families respond? How might their responses inform changes to my assumptions and in my practice? Students' and families' responses can provide tangible goals for 'doing whiteness differently' as I understand that the voices and experiences of all within the school environment tell the whole story of the institution and its practices. When I truly seek to listen and understand the experiences of students and families in school, then I am compelled to respond in ways that address the experiential inequities that surface.

Understanding and applying an equity lens to each policy, practice, and procedure in schools and classrooms (e.g., attendance policies, homework policies, discipline practices, literacy and math tracking, the language of learning gaps, textbook/resource use, grading students according to standards) in terms of who is benefiting and who is marginalized (Due East Educational Equity Collaborative, 2021) provides a tangible way for me to begin to recognize

institutional and structural racism. Moving beyond recognition, the question of how we can maximize benefit and eliminate marginalization (Due East Educational Equity Collaborative, 2021) frames the racial equity work that needs to be done within the classroom, school, and system. This lens provides a way to ask the right questions and engage in discussions for the sake of all students' success and belonging. Understanding how deficit ideologies work through programs and initiatives designed to 'help' marginalized students (and their families) navigate or 'fit' within the system more successfully without examining the system and its structures, policies and practices helps me perceive the normative assumptions by which they operate so that I can challenge their ideologies.

Understanding structural and systemic racism provides a lens to perceive that the problems of inequity do not reside within particular students or their families. The issue is not that they need to try harder or do better; rather, the challenge is for me to reflect on my own ideology and the assumptions that inform my words and actions. I also need to recognize the policies, practices, procedures, and structures that were set up to hold them back and to seek changes that will maximize benefit, success, and belonging for all students (and their families), and, in particular, those who have been most marginalized by normative practices in schools. Understanding structural and systemic racism and the way it operates, and has operated, to disadvantage Indigenous students and students of colour and their families supports my ability to interpret their actions and behaviours within *true* contexts instead of interpreting them through the lenses of meritocracy and colourblindness and the ideology of individualism that informed my teaching practice.

Knowledge and informed understanding *is* power because it frames actions and changes that are needed in order to achieve educational equity, including:

- Critically examining the school and its environment, practices, policies, procedures, and assumptions and recognizing how they operate to advantage or benefit white students and to continue to oppress and disadvantage Indigenous students and students of colour.
- Making changes to policies and practices to minimize disadvantage and maximize advantage for all students. For example:

- Critiquing policies aimed at ‘fixing’ Indigenous students and students of colour and instead fixing the conditions that marginalize them (Gorski, 2019).
 - Critiquing behavior or dress code policies that result in disproportionately harsher consequences for Indigenous students and students of colour (Gorski, 2019) and changing these policies.
 - Critiquing and addressing racial bias in discipline referrals and referrals for student support.
 - Critiquing and addressing homework policies that assume the same level of advantage and support for all students.
- Making changes to curriculum and resources to provide multiple perspectives and maximize representation for all students.
 - Ensuring that the most marginalized students have access to learning materials, technology, healthy food, higher-order pedagogies, relatable curricula, and equity-conscious teachers (Gorski, 2019).

Understanding that I need to address the causes underlying Indigenous students or students of colour feeling isolated, not succeeding, not attending, and being perceived to have ‘gaps’ by listening and learning from their experiences and perspectives opens avenues for agency and change. Rather than perceiving these indicators of experiential inequity as problems within the students and their families, I need to turn the focus of critique on *my* actions and assumptions and on the policies that I am enacting because they exist. I need to shift my gaze to the barriers, biases, and inequities that are operating through my unexamined practice so that I can map out how racism is operating. This critique will inform tangible actions that I can take to engage more ethically and justly with these students and their families.

Gorski (2019) uses the #FixInjusticeNotKids principle: “Effective equity efforts focus not on fixing students of color, but on eliminating racist conditions” (p. 61). An ethical imperative fuels this work for racial justice and equity for all students and their families.

The extent to which we choose to offload our responsibility to address racial equity is the extent to which we leave that on the shoulders of the most marginalized. In that moment, I

am choosing to have someone else carry that – someone else who doesn't have the platform or power structure or the age or the voice that I have. (Gorski, 2021)

Due East Educational Equity Collaborative (2021) provides specific indicators of educational equity in schools and classrooms:

- Authentic relationships with and among students, staff and families.
- Curriculum, instruction and assessment that is adaptive as well as responsive to – and reflective of – the student learners.
- Resources and supports required for learning are provided for all learners.
- High expectations for each student, with all students meeting academic expectations.
- Welcoming and safe school environments.
- An understanding and articulation that schools are a key setting for the formation of societal equity.

These indicators inform how I can work toward being a racially equitable educator who:

- Welcomes and honours each student as an inherently worthy human being with skills and talents to be recognized and nurtured.
- Understands learning to be a reciprocal, holistic, interconnected, relational journey that I co-construct and engage in with students.
- Seeks opportunities to step out of the silos of subject area disciplines and away from the four walls of the classroom to engage in cross-curricular, contextual land-based and place-based learning that is relevant and meaningful to students.
- Ensures that students can see themselves represented in their learning and that they will know that their voices, perspectives, and experiences matter.
- Responds to the learning needs, interests, strengths, and learning preferences of each student.
- Addresses barriers to their full engagement and sense of belonging and ensures every opportunity for each student's success.

In the words of Marceline DuBose (2021), “Rather than teaching students to do school the way we want them to do school, tap into their genius and talents and capacities and leverage that in their educational outcomes.”

Critical race and critical whiteness scholars provide further insights into what agency looks like in the classroom with students.

Agency through a critique of whiteness:	<p>Leonardo (2013) challenged educators to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider norms of safety and whose safety is protected through these norms (p. 84).• Work with students to challenge normative stereotypes about Indigenous peoples and peoples of colour (p. 113) and to understand that racial othering was a systematic, historical construction that is not inherent and can/must change.• Valorize Indigenous peoples and people of colour in content and curriculum, thus elevating the voices and stories of those who have been marginalized and erased from education in the past (p. 112).• Support students in locating and critiquing whiteness in schools through an examination of “which books count as the canon, whose perspectives are legitimized, and whose voices are relegated to ‘special interests’” (p. 84).• “Familiariz[e] students... with the codes of Whiteness [to] allow them to understand the taken-for-granted, or Whiteness passing as simply good values or a universal human nature, when, in fact, it is particular and partial” (pp. 84–85).• Challenge and question the normativity of whiteness as the standard of what defines knowledge, success, and worth, and to work with students to understand that whiteness as an ideology is being challenged, and not them as individuals.
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<p>Agency through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT)</p>	<p>Matias (2016) advocated that educators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ CRT as a conceptual framework so that students understand that racism is endemic to society and, in particular, that Indigenous students and students of colour understand that the racist aggressions they experience are not isolated events but part of a much larger picture of systemic racism. “When they are spoken aloud, they disrupt dominant narratives and allow people of colour to feel supported, heard, and validated, which, in turn, contributes to <i>everyone’s</i> understanding of a larger dynamic of race” (p. 129). • Teach counterstories, counternarratives and counterhistories – counter to the dominant or master narrative – so that students understand “how race, racism, and white supremacy are enacted” (p. 129). <p>Leonardo and Boas (2013) suggested that teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work to understand and teach race not as a personal crusade but as a sociohistorical construct through which we are all (unequally) produced.” (p. 322) • “Critically reflect on racialized and gendered histories and how [they] are implicated in them. • Teach race as a structural and systemic construct with material, differential outcomes that are institutionally embedded not reducible to identities. • Make race and race history part of the curriculum and fight for its maintenance within the curriculum. <p>Ladson-Billings’ (1998) explanation of Critical Race Theory as “an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction and reconstruction: deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of</p>
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human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power” (p. 9) informs the necessity of incorporating the following into teacher stance and practice:

- Understanding racism as “so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order, it appears both normal and natural to people in this culture” (p. 11).
- Using storytelling “as a way to integrate experiential knowledge of oppressions” (p. 11) in society and within the educational system (p. 14).
- Critiquing liberal ideologies of individualism (pp. 11–12), meritocracy, colorblindness, and the celebration of diversity (p. 18).
- Infusing minority cultural viewpoints and perspectives to “help overcome ethnocentrism and the dysconscious (King, 1992) drive or need to view the world in one way” (p. 13).
- Understanding “the official school curriculum as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script” (p. 18) with the resulting erasure or ‘sanitation’ of stories of Indigenous peoples or people of colour.
- Critiquing the distortions, misrepresentations, omissions, and stereotypes of school curriculum content (p. 18).
- Countering deficit constructions of ‘at risk’ Indigenous students and students of colour and the “race-neutral perspective [that] purports to see deficiency as an individual phenomenon” (p. 19).
- Critiquing traditional instruction and assessment practices that utilize a one-size-fits-all approach and assume one body of content that is reflective of a ‘culturally specific’ curriculum for all students (p. 20).

Lewis (2001) upheld the need to develop student understanding of the truth

of Canada’s past and how historical events, policies, and practices inform their understanding of current inequities (pp. 787–788). Students need to learn about the history of race in Canada (e.g., settlement and Treaty-making, the reserve system, the Indian Act, residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, immigration laws) to guide their understanding, interpretation, and response to present-day racial realities (e.g., unemployment, suicide rates, reserves without adequate housing, potable water, schools, and infrastructure, number of Indigenous peoples living below the poverty line, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, school drop-out rates, overrepresentation in prisons, foster care system) (Lewis, 2001, p. 788).

Lewis (2001) also advocated for critical multicultural or anti-racist education that locates the origins of school failure differently than traditional multiculturalism and its focus on the home and culture (p. 803).

Anti-racist or critical multicultural education says that although we cannot ignore social, cultural, and home factors, much of the blame must be located in institutionalized racism in the classroom, school, and society. Differences in performance are understood as being produced not by differences in ability or motivation, but by the “organization, conduct, and content of pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment.” (Olneck, 1993, p. 243, as cited in Lewis, 2001, p. 803)

The writing of Moreton-Robinson (2015) further accentuated the importance of using the lenses of CRT and critical whiteness scholarship to:

- Develop informed recognition of “how... Indigenous peoples have been sociohistorically constructed through first world Western knowledge systems that are ontologically and epistemologically grounded in differentiation” (p. xvii).
- “Operationalize race as a category of analysis” to recognize and understand the social construction of white identity and “‘institutionalized systems of power’ and racialized practices” (p.

	xviii).
Agency through incorporating critical dialogue about race and whiteness alongside mandated curriculum	<p>Matias (2016) structured the teaching of required content within a high school history curriculum in a way that centered the counterstories of people of colour, marginalized Eurocentric normative history, and engaged students in critical dialogue about race. Matias (2016) cited the need to incorporate a “critically-raced curriculum that counter[s] the silencing of race in textbooks” (p. 131) and “problematizes one-sided historical accounts or the master narrative with multiple perspectives” (p. 132).</p> <p>Key elements of Matias’s (2016) deliberate approach are informative to agentic action that teachers can take to teach required curriculum through the lenses of CRT and critical whiteness studies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In her critical race project, Matias (2016) articulated content objectives (or outcomes) that were directly linked to required curriculum alongside “critical race objectives [that] strategically and directly link[ed] the content objective to an overarching CRT analysis of how oppressions of race, class, and gender are operating within the content itself” (p. 132). “Including critical race objectives in the pedagogy attacks and disrupts the invisibility of whiteness in the curriculum, prompting racial justice and discourse” (p. 133). • The importance of modelling “critical race metacognition (CRM)” as a “cognitive scheme students can apply to better understand race” similar to metacognitive think-alouds that teachers use in literacy instruction (p. 133). Matias began by having her students review selected media such as newsreels, videos, commercials, political cartoons, articles, and movie clips to examine and reflect on “what is being said about Blackness and unsaid about the presumed innocence of Whites” (p. 133). Then, she applied CRM to required curriculum content pieces. • The need to explicitly teach critical race language and vocabulary

such as “racial battle fatigue, racial microaggressions, white supremacy, and counterstorytelling” (p. 133) so students “can talk about the mechanisms of racism” (p. 147) and come to understand their racial identities (p. 157). Students were “provided with lots of opportunities to model, read, write, talk and listen to one another using their new vocabulary in meaningful ways” (p. 134).

- The need for students to “hear, feel and internalize counterstories” (p. 149) to “better understand a marginalized perspective” (p. 150). The need... to center the marginalized experience of people of Color in order to re-examine society” (p. 151).
- The need to learn a raced curriculum that teaches the history of race and racism and that problematizes the master narrative so that students can no longer “subscribe to white epistemology of ignorance” (p. 149) and proclaim that they didn’t know.

Matias (2016) explained that

This learning, hearing, internalizing is essential to moving from making racism, oppression and marginalization about people of colour and something that is lacking in them to recognizing systemic racism as operating through and maintained by ‘White’ people who benefit from the systems/structures, and from ‘not seeing race.’ (p. 149)

Integral to this process is the development of white students’ ability to reflect on what it means to have a white identity in a society founded in white supremacy – what Matias (2016) referred to as the “essence of transformative praxis” (p.150).

Warren (2011) cited Dolen (2001, p. 120) to inform and frame his belief:

that teaching is activism, that changing students’ consciousness is important to contesting social and cultural structures that perpetuate

gender, race and ethnic, class, and sexual inequalities... that teaching students how ideology works [...] allows them to engage critically with the various discourses they encounter and by which they are shaped. (p. 21)

Warren (2011) wrote about how “activism comes to life in the context of a pedagogy” that creates possibility “by interrogating the structures that bind us” (p. 22). Direct connections can be made between the hope and agency found in Warren’s writing and the writing of Matias (2016). Providing students with the language and the conceptual and historical understanding so that they are able to explain, analyze, critique, and reflect on what they observe and experience is essential to creating potential for transformation and ‘seek[ing] together different ways of knowing and being in the world’ (Warren, 2011, p. 22). In order to create this place of hope and possibility, Warren (2011) understood that “social justice and social action in the classroom is about students, not you” (p. 25) or “an abstracted agenda that rob[s] education of its soul” (p. 25).

Premised on keeping pedagogy always within a critical context, Warren (2011) defined teaching as ‘love’:

- “Meeting students where their passions are... beginning with them and connecting their energies with the task expected of them” (p. 25).
- “Keeping a critical vision at the foreground and being willing to do the difficult work required, allowing for the possibility (and, perhaps, the probability) that it is us that needs to change as we move together in the struggle for freedom” (p. 26).
- “Working with students... to challenge the assumptions embedded in the arguments presented – pushing them for more critical dialogue” (p. 26).
- “Seeing the world in all its loss and imagining ways of healing” (p. 30).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Leading with a critically engaged love that seeks not just community, but community with a purpose, a goal, a hope, a vision of equality that trumps hate and division” (p. 30). <p>Warren’s (2011) aim for teaching informed my understanding of possibility: “to displace the expectations, ask students to imagine knowledge differently, and to work together [to] expand the limits of our own imagination” (p. 31).</p>
<p>Agency through the framework of relational autonomy and responsibility</p>	<p>Mackey’s (2016) writing in <i>Unsettled Expectations</i> also provided guidance as to what agency might look like in classrooms and schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Colonization and decolonization are about relationships, and therefore <i>the possibility of decolonization depends on all parties changing how they relate to one another</i>” (p. 12, italics added). • The need to engage in what Taiaiake Alfred (2010) called ‘radical imagination’: “In order to decolonize, Canadians and Americans have to...reimagine themselves, not as citizens with the privileges conferred by being descendants of colonizers or newcomers from other parts of the world benefitting from white imperialism, but <i>as human beings in equal and respectful relation to other human beings and the natural environment</i>” (Alfred, 2010, p. 6, as cited on pp. 15–16, italics added). • “Embracing uncertainty... in order to unsettle the expectations, axiomatic assumptions and practices that emerge from centuries of embedded colonial and national frameworks that have limited our vision and our ability to relate to others. Uncertainty, in fact, may open channels to listening, relating and creating in new and unexpected ways. Moving beyond the limitations and cages of settled expectations and embracing the potential creativity that ‘ontological uncertainty’ could generate might be one way to help us imagine and practice less defensive and perhaps even decolonizing forms of settler-Indigenous relations” (p. 37).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engaging in reciprocal, respectful relationships between “connected yet autonomous equals” or “relational autonomy” (p. 166) that “work[s] to communicate and respect across difference, asserting both autonomy and relationship” (p. 158). Consider what this might look like between teachers, students, and families as co-learners, learning from and with one another as multiple epistemologies and ontologies are explored.• Exploring Indigenous worldviews, epistemologies, and ontologies and considering how they speak to us rather than assuming one universal way of being in the world (p. 166). This does not mean appropriating Indigenous symbols and relationships to land for self-serving purposes, but engaging in a careful approach that always keeps in mind the ingrained tendency to reproduce colonial patterns of domination and appropriation (p. 167).• The importance of providing opportunities for students to hear the voices of Indigenous peoples telling the silenced stories of their histories as well as of their resilience, spirit, and strength to counter the constructed images of inferiority and the ongoing settler ideologies of <i>terra nullius</i>, settler entitlement based on the notion of ‘building the nation from nothing,’ and the construction of Indigenous peoples as belonging in the past.• When the perception is made that history has been constructed to create a mythical narrative, the need emerges to know more, to find out the truth, to understand history, and ‘the way things are’ in a different way. Realizations will be made that if social hierarchies have been constructed and held in place through purposeful, one-sided narratives, they can be contested by opening to all voices and stories. From there, possibility emerges “to imagine different ways of relating to Indigenous peoples and understanding history” (p. 172). Here is that transformative space where students are engaged in considering where to go from here and in what ways they want to
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	relate to one another. Here, in this space of possibility and potential, emerges an understanding of responsibility <i>to and for</i> one another as distinct from individual conceptions of responsibility as understood in liberal ideology (Mackey, 2016, p. 175).
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As I consider what gives me hope and agency for moving forward, I am also aware of the resistance I will face as I engage in “the work of racial justice and decolonizing white colonial minds” (Matias, 2016, p. 171), as well as the discomfort I know I will experience in the face of that resistance. I will take Matias’s (2016) counsel to know where I stand and to remind myself that I “stand for the prospect of a greater humanity” (p. 171).

I must also remember that “racism, patriarchy, capitalism, and heterosexism do not stop upon crossing the threshold of a classroom” (Matias, 2016, p. 171). These ideologies will surface in classroom conversations and students conditioned in this “dominant rhetoric [will try] to structure the conversation” (Matias, 2016, p. 171). The focus of critique and reflection must be on the dominant, taken-for-granted ideologies in order to develop awareness of the impacts of these power structures. The ‘prospect of a greater humanity’ demands this unwavering focus, as does the belief that all students need to develop awareness of the familial, cultural, and societal conditioning that is forming their identities so that they can consciously choose how they show up in the world.

Chapter 6: Concluding Thoughts

I well remember the evening a number of months ago now that I made the following realization: just as Canada constructed its nation-state identity through imposed dominance and assumed cultural and racial superiority while constructing its innocence through narrations of national myths about the building of the nation and the character of its settler citizens, I was subjectivated to impose my racial and cultural dominance through repeated performativity of good white woman/good white teacher while professing my innocence through good intentions and characterizations of ‘helper’ and ‘saviour.’ I realized that I had been constructed as a mirror image of the nation that produced me, and just as a mirror image does not think about its reflection, neither did I. Just as a mirror assumes neutrality in the images it reflects, I also assumed neutrality. Unlike a reflection in a mirror, the neutrality that I assumed was a lie. Everything I performed reproduced existing inequitable power relations. Everything I performed assumed and reproduced white dominance and its sidekick of purported innocence.

That realization is part of this process of (un)making, as is understanding myself both as a product of, and a willing participant in, ongoing settler colonialism who benefited, and continues to benefit, from material and experiential advantages because of my white identity and whose white performativity caused grave consequences for the students I professed to care about so much. My white performativity reproduced “what the colonizers have always done” (Kailin, 2002, p. 135):

- I expected students to leave their identities, languages, cultures, and experiences at the door and enter a world of learning constructed around the ideology of the dominant white culture (Kailin, 2002, p. 135).
- I maintained the illusion that my classroom (and the school) was a “neutral, multicultural space” (St. Denis, 2011, p. 312) where all were positioned equally for success and “den[ied] the role of race in oppression (Picower, 2009, p. 200). In doing so, I contributed to the privileging of white students while marginalizing others (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 36).
- I engaged in the discourse of multiculturalism that minimized and prevented the authentic prioritization and integration of Indigenous content, experiences, history, and

perspectives in students' curriculum while supporting my belief that I was "becoming more inclusive and respectful" (St. Denis, 2011, p. 313).

- My engagement with the rhetoric of multiculturalism negated the First Peoples status of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and equated them with other racialized minorities (St. Denis, 2011, p. 311).
- I ingrained in students the belief that Canada is "a fair and just country" (St. Denis, 2011, p. 315), "innocent of any wrongdoing" (Backhouse, 1999, as cited in St. Denis, 2011, p. 310), benign, tolerant, and an "advocate of... equality" (p. 310).
- I perpetuated the myth of meritocracy and denied the history of oppression of Indigenous peoples and people of colour in this country. In that denial, I also participated in blaming the victim and using the 'bootstrap myth' to attribute their perceived lack of success to their lack of effort.

I began this research journey with two key questions in mind regarding my own inner journey of truth and reconciliation:

- Can my constructed subject identity and performativity be (un)made so that I can (re)make myself consciously?
- Why did I invest in the narratives and processes of acculturation that made me as a good white female teacher? What benefits did I receive from this investment (McLean, 2021, personal communication)?

I reflect on these questions in what follows.

Racquel asked me what being (un)made meant to me during my interview:

So that is in the title of my thesis – The (Un)making of a Good White Teacher on the Canadian Prairies... The 'un' is in brackets [to] connote... the fact that this will continue to be a process... I was made into a certain identity, a gendered identity... I was called into being as a good girl, as a good woman, as a good student, as a good teacher, and I learned to... reflect that calling into being. And so, when I think about the making of me, I was constructed. I wasn't aware of it because I... indulged in the... ideology of

individualism... that I create my life path, and... I set goals and dreams and I... work to achieve them. In spite of the fact that my life did not actually reflect that... I espoused those ideologies. And so, my life chances and opportunities were also connected to the ways I had been constructed. And so, certain doors opened for me, not too high up the hierarchy, and so I think about (un)making – it's pulling all of this apart because... I remember the first days of starting to learn about all of this. And it was just like... what rock have I been living under that... I had no idea of this? And it was really very much like... I was under all of these veils... and as I pulled each veil off, I could see clearer, but I was also struck by... realiz[ing that] I'm seeing more but I don't even know how much more there is to see. So the (un)making will be a lifetime process. The (un)making is pulling each of those layers of indoctrination and conditioning aside so that I can actually see clearly, and I think that what my desire is in this (un)making is that I can actually consciously choose, more consciously choose, who I am, what I stand for, and that... my actions, my beliefs align, my words align because I've lived a life... where what was professed did not align with actions and experience and evidence all around me, and I think the greatest thing I'm striving for is being integrous... being aligned, and more consciously aware of what I'm bringing into the world... what I'm saying, and I have to stay humble. I have to stay... as a learner because whiteness, that normativity of whiteness is always operating, always. Power relations are always operating around us and through us and informing what we do. So, this is kind of like walking the thin line... and each step is... I just have to trust and I'm going to make mistakes and I'm going to fall off, but I *have* to keep going because I want to be aligned and I think deconstruction is about that. And... I had wondered... can I reconstruct myself? But that would... imply that I can just put myself back together... So I think the reconstruct? I... can't actually; that's not going to be a *fait accompli* when this is done. [Appendix D, pp. 204–205]

Thus, I can answer my question about whether the understanding gained through this research process will be enough to (un)make me. No. I cannot (un)make my social location and the subject identity of good white woman/teacher into which I was interpellated. Where I have agency is my *performance* of this subject identity. This is the beginning to a lifetime process of continued learning and vigilance to the tendency of my deeply ingrained whiteness to re-centre

itself and operate based on conditioned assumptions of white normativity and superiority. Matias's (2016) powerful insight aligns with my realizations:

It is one thing to become aware that one is white and acknowledge the privileges afforded to such a racial marker, but it is another thing to understand the self so intimately as to realize one's own complicity in whiteness and why one needs to reject whiteness in order to fully participate in racial justice, and to continually engage in that discomfort. When these individuals see *their own dehumanization in whiteness*, they can finally be part of a joint effort for humanity and not one of patronizing missionary support. *Whites need to re-humanize by understanding how whiteness has dehumanized them in the first place.* (pp. 183–184, italics added)

There is a huge cost to the ideology and normativity of whiteness. It costs people their humanity on both sides of the racial divide it constructed, albeit with very different consequences. It dehumanizes the people it marginalizes and oppresses, and it dehumanizes the oppressors it creates. The realization of the ways in which whiteness has dehumanized and limited me to a constructed role that served the interests of those in power is one thing. The realization of the harms that complicity in whiteness caused – I have not been able to find words that describe what that realization does within me, and nor should I focus on finding them because what is important is what I *do* with this realization:

It becomes an ethical responsibility. Like when I talk about an imperative... this doesn't feel really good to do, but guess what? Every marginalized student who has come through our classrooms, their experience hasn't felt very good either. [Appendix D, p. 209]

I can't even say that I will do no more harm because even with the best of intentions, I can't guarantee that what I do is not... perceived as such by another person. I can't, but I *can* stay humble, keep learning, make mistakes, learn again, listen, seek feedback from people who have... Moreton-Robinson...wrote about... Australia and the Aboriginal experience there, and that which has been invisible to us, she referred to it as *hypervisible* to anyone who has been oppressed. Like it is there in their faces all the time. So I think for you and me... it's being open to... that feedback, and... we need to do it and make mistakes and get up and do it again because people who are marginalized, people who are

racialized cannot keep carrying the load. Not if we want a humane world... not if we want a one-world humanity. [Appendix D, p. 211]

In the spirit of the truth I seek, I also have to add further thoughts about the critical reflection McLean (2021) challenged me to engage in regarding the benefits I received from investing in the narratives and processes of acculturation that made me as a good white female teacher. My investment in King's (1991) use of 'dysconsciousness' as a comfortable rationale for my good white female teacher performativity was a clarion call to continued vigilance for white moves to innocence. Revisiting Leonardo's (2004, 2009) writing, as McLean (2021) urged me to do, brought me to another phase of unsettling and deepening as I realized that I could not claim 'not knowing.' As I reread his writing, I realized that I had found another layer to my truth-finding. I invested in the narratives and moves of white supremacy because it benefited me, and I got to enjoy the advantages that being born white and aligning with white ideologies and systems brought me.

Thus, this chapter is not a conclusion to the process of (un)making. I do not get to congratulate myself on reaching a destination; rather, this is an opportunity to pause, reflect on what I have learned and recommit to continuing this learning. The roots of white supremacist acculturation run deep within me. And so I pause to reflect on the layers I have made visible and to wonder at what rooted layers still lay buried within me. Even with the best of intentions (again) within this research process, committed as I have been to learning, unlearning, and relearning, I still performed whiteness in what critical race and critical whiteness scholars identified as a move to innocence when I invested in 'dysconsciousness' as a 'feel-good' rationale for supposedly not knowing or being aware. I must remain vigilant, humble, and open to teachers who pose critical questions for reflection and that provide potential openings for further realizations.

That continued critical self-reflection and learning will be necessary as I move forward with my work to support teachers. This research journey and the realizations that have resulted from it have both informed and transformed my work as I use what I have learned and experienced to support teachers in their own journeys of learning, introspection, and realization through professional learning opportunities, connections to resources that will support their

learning, and supports for reflective conversations that are necessary to inform efforts to decolonize and engage in reconciliation.

As I pause in this research journey, I consider the narrative that I began with [refer to Appendix A] – the narrative that formed the foundation from which I performed my good white woman teacher subject-identity – and wonder what I might write now. And so I close with introspective writing about the internal space I occupy at this point in my journey of (un)making and (re)making.

As a girl, I believed I had been born in the greatest country of all – Canada. I believed... I was proud... I believed... I know the story because I lived it, and yet there were layers to that story that I needed to come to understand and make visible so that I might reveal the truth that lay beneath the story and perform my white subject identity with intentional difference and integrity.

It is difficult to reconcile the memory of the certainty with which my girl-self invested in those myths with the tentative and emergent internal space I now occupy. I spend a lot of time within this raw and uncertain space and have come to appreciate its lack of foundational definition, its ebbs and flows. It is a vulnerable space from which tears can flow, anger can surge, disillusionment can wilt, knowing can calm, resolve can ground, and hope can take wing. It is a space in which pain co-exists with intention and commitment; it is a space that shifts and changes with each layer of truth I expose; and it is a space that keeps calling me back to continue doing this work of (un)making and (re)making.

A lifetime of teaching work and the ways in which I knew myself lay in shreds at my feet. When I look back, it is difficult to see anything worth holding onto, and maybe, just maybe, that is exactly how it is meant to be. Even though this introspective research journey has gutted me and turned me inside out so that it feels like I have nothing left from which to move forward, I sense that is what truth-finding and truth-telling are meant to do.

What can be daunting in moving forward is my recognition of the deeply entangled roots of white supremacy within me. I have pulled up many of the roots, shaken off the soil that nourished them, and left them to wither in the light of truth. But other roots still lie within me seeking

opportunities to sprout and grow anew when I assume that I have found a resting place. There is no place to rest easy on this journey.

What lies ahead is the ever-evolving creation of a different way of being and doing in the world. That process must shift from truth-finding and truth-telling to reconciliation. Just as uncertainty colours my internal space, it limits my gaze forward. I do not know what the process of reconciliation will look like. I do not know how I can possibly reconcile the truth of the harms that students experienced with me. I do not know if such a state is possible, and I sense that, too, is exactly the way it needs to be. What I do know is that this research journey has changed my life; it has transformed me in ways that are both known and still becoming known to me. I anticipate that the journey of reconciliation will shift and change with each tentative step I take forward. And the truth that I have revealed through this research journey will fuel those steps, as will the ever-present call from my heart that urges me on to do what is humane and just.

Thus, I will “embrac[e] uncertainty” so that I might “open channels to listening, relating and creating in new and unexpected ways” (Mackey, 2016, p. 37). I have found a name for the internal space I inhabit – “ontological uncertainty” (Mackey, 2016, p. 37) – and it is from this space that I will continue to learn, imagine, and practice what decolonization and reconciliation might look like.

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Appendix A: Self-Narrative

As a girl, I believed I had been born in the greatest country of all – Canada. I believed wholeheartedly in the idea of freedom and equality that were promoted as its national values. My heart and mind thrilled to the historical account that my nation had been discovered by brave European explorers and forged from the wilderness to stand as a bastion of democracy and hope to the world. I was proud to call myself a Canadian because I believed in the master stories and lessons about how my country came to be and what it stood for. I believed in the messages of my nation’s goodness and benevolence as it reached out to help other nations and peoples in need.

As I grew up in the decades of the 1960s and 70s on a mixed grain and cattle farm in northeastern Saskatchewan, I thrilled to the stories of my paternal Norwegian and maternal Scottish grandparents who had emigrated from their homelands to build a better life in this ‘land of opportunity.’ I believed that the land on which my grandparents had settled had been empty, virgin wilderness – land that was waiting to be claimed and cleared for farming. I embraced the stories of the sacrifices they made to create better lives for themselves and their children. During these formative years, I internalized these stories and believed that the land my family occupied belonged to us – our family’s possession – paid for through hard work and sacrifice.

As a girl, I heard these same narratives echoed from white settler families in the surrounding community. What I saw and heard in my white-populated surroundings validated the stories and experiences I was absorbing from my own family. Just as my family faced and overcame adversities as they “built a life from nothing” (McLean, 2018), these families had earned their hard-won successes because of a strong and determined work ethic. They, too, had ‘pulled themselves up by their bootstraps’ and made new lives for their families. The evidence was there for me to see in the cleared fields, accentuated with pushed-up rows of broken trees and marked by property lines, and the developing yard sites with their burgeoning lines of granaries and the fenced corrals and pastures filled with growing herds.

I also heard narratives about others as I grew up, although I rarely saw them – Indigenous peoples and immigrants coming to Canada – narratives that spoke of Indigenous peoples who needed to quit complaining and asking for handouts, who needed to get jobs and make an honest living; narratives that spoke of the threat of newly arriving immigrants taking jobs away from Canadians. I usually heard these narratives expressed by the adults in my life in response to

items on the news or as part of their discourse when they came to visit. I had limited exposure to 'Indigenous peoples who needed to get jobs' and 'immigrants who were coming to take jobs from Canadians' because I was surrounded by people who looked like me. Encounters with these others were fleeting. I remember a Métis family camped along the side of the grid road that was on the way to my maternal grandparents' homestead, land that my father was farming. I remember watching for the Métis family from the back seat of our family vehicle when my mother took meals to the field. I remember that this family was there for a while and then gone. I wondered what had happened to them and where they went. Just as they had been there and then gone, my focus went on to other things.

Steeped in the value of individual and familial hard work as the means to prove one's earned success and witness to the judgment of those who did not work or who threatened the availability of work for families like mine, I was also conditioned to contextualize that work ethic within a traditional gendered female role and the compliance expected in learning to perform that role. Although I chafed at what I experienced as restrictive expectations and longed for the perceived freedoms of my brothers, I was raised to do as I was told, not to ask questions, and to be seen and not heard. I learned to quiet my rebellious protestations and impertinent questions if I wanted to avoid the wagging finger of shame and the threat of impending punishment. I learned that acceptance and approval from my family depended on being perceived as a 'good girl' and that meant acquiescing to imposed expectations from my parents, who knew better and had the power to impose sanctions.

This understanding extended to my religious upbringing. I was raised in Protestant churches – first Lutheran and then United. Trained to believe in a paternalistic God from whom I needed to beg forgiveness because I was inherently bad and needed to atone for my sins, it was affirmed that I needed to seek acceptance and approval by doing exactly what this God (and the male ministers) wanted me to do as a good Christian. By the time I reached confirmation age at 13, I was well marinated in 'thou shalt and shalt not.'

Just as I learned to be a good girl from my family and a good Christian from my church, I learned to be a good student from the public education system. I learned that acceptance and approval by those in positions of authority – in this case, my teachers and principals – depended on doing what I was directed to do there too. Over the years of my public education, my grades,

end-of-year awards, and scholarships at Grade 12 graduation affirmed my growing ability to perform and produce as expected. While I often chafed at these expectations and the yearning to challenge the status quo still pushed its way to the surface from time to time, the approval (and sanctions) of those in positions of authority (teachers and principal at school and parents at home) proved stronger and, for the most part, I acquiesced and yielded to expectations of compliance and conformity.

The themes of compliance, conformity, and 'being good' continued to hold power over my choices as I grew into adulthood. In spite of my determination to pursue a career that was 'different' from more traditional gendered choices in university, by the end of my first year, I had defaulted to the career that I had always sworn never to pursue — that of a teacher because my mother had been a teacher and I had been determined not to follow in her footsteps.

It was during pre-service practicums that all of the expectations of 'good' in other realms of my life converged within this new role as teacher. There, my work ethic and conditioned response to meet the expectations of those in positions of authority (in this case, my supervising teachers and college supervisors) were reinforced by their approval and recognition by the College of Education with an award for excellence in my internship. I had met and surpassed their expectations, even volunteering an additional month in the school in which I had interned, and I thrilled to this external validation of my worth.

As a young teacher, I entered the world of public education primed and ready for my role. I knew I had to work hard to do what was expected and I had learned how to deliver. I dutifully followed the provincial requirements for the content and skills my students needed to learn. I worked hard for many years to teach my students according to the dictates of the curriculum, using the resources that were provided, believing that I was doing right by my students, and continually striving to be the best teacher I could be. I studied and followed the suggestions for implementation and instruction provided in the curriculum and recommended resources, believing that the key to success for my students was in the structured environment I created and the thoughtful, sequential learning path I planned for them. I worked diligently to find creative and experiential ways to ensure that my students experienced success, critical only of my ability to make the required learning meaningful and accessible for my students, never of the learning content or pre-determined sequential path and the external parameters that defined it. It was my

premise that their success was dependent on my belief in their ability to succeed and my ability to determine what they needed in order to achieve that success. Convinced that reaching their potential was within reach for all of them, I taught the ideal that they could be anything in the world they aspired to be if they dreamed big enough and worked hard enough.

When multiculturalism was introduced, I embraced this ‘celebration of diversity’ and exposed my students to other cultures in the world. How meaningful and engaging my classes were as students learned about different ways of life and the traditions that immigrant groups brought with them to Canada, the nation that provided a welcoming place for all people and all cultures. When inclusion was introduced, I worked even harder to support all students in meaningful learning. Whatever the education system asked of me, I did, learning more and finding ways to implement new approaches and ways of understanding into my practice. Never questioning the system itself, I was commended for my ability to respond to new initiatives and implement them effectively with students.

As a young teacher, I trusted in the education system and its institutions. I trusted that those in positions of authority knew what was best and I followed their lead with diligence and exactitude. The values of goodness, tolerance, and inclusion, espoused as a nation and the guiding principles of its institutions, informed all that I sought to be. Defined by a lifetime of accommodating the expectations of others, I received approval and affirmation as a good teacher, even a master teacher. Being good had molded me; being good meant doing what was asked to the highest degree possible. Being good meant seeking validation of my worth in approval reflected back to me from those in positions of authority. As a good woman-teacher, I learned to look outside of myself for affirmation of my worth and that worth was found in meeting the indicators of success as determined by others in positions of power and authority. I had known no other way.

As I matured and grew older, I added ‘good’ to the roles of wife and mother. I worked diligently to demonstrate ‘good’ in every role I took on, seeking to receive external affirmation of my worth. It seemed that I was destined to continue my life defined by external characterizations of ‘good.’ But my story and path were not set.

Somewhere around the mid-point of my teaching career, that young rebellious voice that I had been conditioned to repress early in my life began to resurface. At first, its voice was quiet,

niggling at best, and I was able to ignore it. But this time, it would not be pushed down. That inner voice of resistance became louder and demanded that I take heed. As a teacher who had espoused the values of the education system and exemplified its pedagogy and practices for years, I began to recognize that something felt ‘off’ – that what the system professed to value and what it practiced were not in alignment. As recognition of this incongruity grew, I realized that I could no longer rest easily in being the conforming and compliant teacher I had always been. I chafed against a system that espoused values about supporting the growth of the whole child and being inclusive of all learners but whose practice continued to push kids through a ‘one-size-fits-all’ system that was more about compliance and meeting unilateral standards than about empowerment and self-determination. While that inner resistance grew, I was uncertain and even fearful about how to use my voice to express the incongruity I was seeing. Conditioned for compliance for decades, I didn’t have the words or the sense of knowing within me to take a grounded stand.

I was beginning to sense that there was something wrong with the system. Not just sense –I knew there was something wrong. I was beginning to look critically at the system itself. At that point in my journey, I had no idea how I had been conditioned to perpetuate that system. I was not yet conscious of the harmful impacts on the students I cared about so much because of my decades-long performance to meet the external expectations of the system.

Appendix B: Snippets of the Performance of a Good White Teacher (1978 – 2016)

Internship (1978)

Polite, courteous and congenial;

excellent rapport with students — sensitive toward their needs;

a great asset in boosting staff morale.

Very well-organized; industrious and hard-working;

always willing to try new methods

and to teach even more than required.

Consistent discipline —

can keep order conducive to learning.

Very mature student and an exceptional teacher;

very dependable;

maintained an excellent level of competency.

First Year of Teaching (Australia – 1982)

Met [students'] academic, social, and personal needs

with gentleness, clear capacity, and thorough professionalism.

Teaching style reflects intelligence,

detailed and perceptive planning,

warm concern for her children, and

courteous, open relationships with the school's public.

Ready cooperation, ease with colleagues, and warm personality (noted with pleasure).

Entirely competent teacher.

Making an excellent teaching contribution to the school.

Back to Saskatchewan (1983–1985)

Daybook well done – careful and purposeful.

Excellent developmental and sequential procedure in daily and long-range planning.

Excellent teacher-pupil rapport.

Learning atmosphere — impressive.

Students participate willingly and with enthusiasm.

A very well-developed program of classroom management.

Teacher self-control and consistency — excellent.

Skilful management of a very large class.

Excellent knowledge of subject matter.

Teaching standards — very high (corrections up to date).

A delightful classroom to visit!

Commended for a student-centred

yet structured and disciplined classroom.

The students in this classroom are in good hands.

1985–1990

One of my best teachers —

excellent planning and presenting skills;

friendly to students;

creative;

excellent classroom management skills.

Dedicated to her chosen profession and puts students first.

1990–1995 (Time away for parenting)

1995–1996

Dedication to her profession and her students.

Extremely well-organized classroom.

Clearly outlined goals and objectives in lessons.

Student management skills are very good.

High expectations — innovative;

encouraged students to consistently strive to achieve their best.

Demonstrated preparedness,

compassion for students;

good rapport with students in all aspects of school life;

support and cooperation with staff and administration.

Challenges and excites her students to

conscientious work habits in a positive learning environment.

Commitment and caring — an integral part of this teacher's life and work.

A great asset to any school.

1996–2008

A consummate professional — a master teacher.

Has the ability to make students feel better about themselves

Which results in an incredible learning atmosphere.

One of those rare teachers who never sits throughout the school day

And is in constant interaction with her students.

Conscientious and diligent —

can always be counted on to do her work very well and thoroughly.

Combines “good heart” with a “good mind” and a work ethic that is exceptional.

Her student-centred focus is informed

by her knowledge of best practices

and the courage and conviction to bring those practices to life in our schools.

Well-respected professional educator and colleague.

A life-long learner, up to any challenge that she may encounter.

An excellent teacher and mentor.

2008–2010 (Away from teaching)

2010–2016

Superior ability to connect with students.

Combines knowledge, passion for learning, and ethic of care for her students.

Pulls such depth from students and scaffolds for the whole class so well.

[Students] are truly lucky to have you as their teacher and their champion.

That you care for the students is so evident — and they feel it too.

Exceptionally talented educator — an integral addition to staff.

Exemplary ability and understanding in best practice and division initiatives.

Continues to embody what professionalism in the teaching profession

is supposed to look like.

Truly a pioneer.

Appendix C: Guiding Questions for the Recorded Dialogue

- How did you perceive your role as a teacher in the public education system? How did you perceive your role as a *female* teacher?
- What was the story you told yourself about your role as a teacher, in particular, your desire to be known as a good teacher (Brown, 2018)?
 - What factors contributed to knowing yourself as a good teacher throughout your career?
- What were some of the assumptions you made about your teaching practice in terms of:
 - the goals for your teaching?
 - the content and pedagogy of your teaching?
 - the environment for learning in your classes?
- How did your teaching practice change over the course of your career?
- How did your understandings and approaches to classroom management change over the years of your teaching practice? What are your realizations about the impacts on students?
- What was the story you told yourself about your teacher-student relationships (Brown, 2018)?
 - How did you perceive the students you taught? Their families?
 - In particular, how did you perceive students who didn't look like you or experience the world as you did?
 - What are some assumptions and beliefs you held about Indigenous students and their families? Where did those assumptions and beliefs come from?
- What messages did you communicate about what mattered in your classroom? In your teaching practice?

- What messages did you communicate about what *learning* is?
- What messages were communicated through your teaching practice about race and racism, other forms of oppression, social justice, whiteness, Indigenous peoples and people of colour, culture, Canada?
- What messages did you communicate to students about the following:
 - Achieving success and experiencing failure
 - Belonging
 - Identity and who they were as individuals
 - Being seen as individuals with experiences and challenges outside the classroom
 - Their value and what they brought to the classroom – their strengths/gifts/talents, experiences, worldviews, ways of seeing and being in the world, the challenges faced by them and their families
- How were students judged and labelled in your teaching practice? How did you perceive those who were not identified as “good students” (i.e., conforming to white normativity and expectations)? Did you perceive and understand their “armoring up”? Did you perceive and understand the vulnerability and fear they had to mask?
- What did I teach and transmit about individual and collective power and agency? What messages did I communicate about power?
- What experiences with racialized students stand out in your memory? Why?

Appendix D: Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Racquel

Interviewee: Linda Aspen-Baxter

Prior to the interview, I provided Racquel with a copy of my Behaviour Research Ethics Application and the research questions I had prepared (see Chapter 3: Methodology). These research questions provided the basis for a semi-structured interview/dialogue, the text of which has been transcribed below.

Linda: I'm loaded up with coffee and I am so grateful to you, Racquel.

Racquel: And I, you. Thank you for inviting me into this journey with you because it is, it is really, no, it really is when, as soon as I go in here, I am just invigorated by your journey.

Linda: And I think my hope this afternoon is that what surfaces is what needs to be heard and worked with for kids, for teachers, like that's my, that's my hope because this is not about me. This is about, now this part is about what happens in school, what happens in classrooms, so that's my hope is that I can bring, bring, bring forward what needs to come forward.

Racquel: Okay.

Linda: 'Kay.

Racquel, Okay, so let's start, and just, okay, so, so knowing that these are, are the questions you asked, and so I went through all of the questions and I added just a few things of note but if I go off tangent and and something comes up in there, there might be things, you see I have notes all over, all over here in a binder so things might...

Linda: And I think that's okay, Racquel, because this is a dialogue, right? And I think that as things, uhm, as, as things emerge, there should be other questions. Like it's not, and those questions, they're just best guess about what might surface, what needs to surface, so...

Racquel: 'Kay. Okay, so I'm, I'm just going to start with this first one which was, um...how did you perceive, so the question is: How did you perceive your role as a teacher in the public education system? And I'm I'm interpreting this in terms of how did you perceive your role, I'm interpreting a little bit here in terms of why did you want to be a teacher? Like, what did you

perceive the role of a teacher was, so I don't know if I'm shifting it a little bit there but there's, there's a reason a person wants to become a teacher.

Linda: Well, and it's interesting because I never wanted to be a teacher. I, I defaulted to education, uh, at the, like midway through my first year in university 'cause I was determined *not* to be a teacher. I didn't want to be a teacher. I didn't want to follow in my mom's footsteps. Um, she was a teacher so everything in me was like, no don't do this. And it was interesting that I started university, I wanted to go into something that was *non* typical 'cause there was a bit of a rebel in me at that point, and I started in compu-, I started in, uh, pure m-, no, I started in computer science, and like, the thinking just wasn't my - I was frustrated by it, and then I went to pure math, uh [laugh] because I was determined not to do the typical, uh, the typical thing, and by the end of my first year, I had defaulted to education which was interesting. So I don't know when I think about how did I perceive my role, I don't know that I ever really had a, oh, I've always wanted to be a teacher, and I want to do all of this for kids. Um, I think I went into it doing as I experienced, and it's interesting that I never really thought about my role until I've been doing this research and what that role actually was. I just assumed, um, teacher is teacher. I didn't, I wasn't looking for anything underneath that role, I think I wanted to do good things for kids. I loved, I love kids, and I thought so that was a good fit. Um, and, um, but I didn't go into it, like wanting to make a difference; it was default.

Racquel: Okay, so interesting that you were, you were, you know in terms of going into math and computer science, it sounds like when you say you didn't want to go into that role, you didn't say female role, but I'm interpreting that to be I was not going to do the typical female teacher female role which was you were going to be a teacher, you were going to be a nurse, you were going to be a-

Linda: Well, and in fact, I remember studying for finals in my second year, so just four months into education, and my mom making a comment to me that if I'd gone to secretarial school, I'd be done by now, and I remember looking at her and going, and I would just *die* in a role, I never said it, but that was the message, so I think there was an anti-, like a do anything but that, and then I fell into it anyway.

Racquel: So then, so you're saying you didn't perceive your role as a teacher until you started doing this work. So now that you've started doing this work, how, how, so the question was how *did* you, but how *do* you perceive your role, how do you perceive what your role was then?

Linda: Well, it's interesting because I always come back to, um, Leonardo's, um, phrase, "teachers as foot soldiers" of the army of whiteness, and I remember using that in a response once and Verna saying to me, "Do you even know what that means?" And I looked at her, and it was like, well, yeah, I know what that means but I didn't *really* know what it means, and I think now I see with glaring clarity, uh, that because I just assumed this role, I didn't question it, I complied to all the requirements, and in fact, I overdid them, that I served the role of public education which is to prepare children and youth to be good citizens, to enter the workforce and to be compliant workers, to follow, you know, to do what they're told, um, and to reproduce the ruling ideology. Um, and I never questioned that, ever, ever, ever. Curriculum was just curriculum; like, I never questioned curriculum or resources; it was just the way things were. This was what students needed to learn. And now I look at that and go, yes, I was a foot soldier. Without actually being issued orders, I followed expectations to the t, dotted every i, crossed every t, put a period at the end of every sentence.

Racquel: So, um, if I'm hearing you right, the responsibilities were to educate people to fit in to society. Am I missing an adjective to society? To-

Linda: Society as it –

Racquel: Because I would say that –

Linda: Sorry –

Racquel: No I, no go on. I was just um, suggesting society, um, that that would be the overarching goal of education in general would be to help socialize people, um, to be active citizens in their society, so it sounds like when you're talking about your responsibility to educate students, um, to fit into these norms that you're not necessarily speaking about it as a positive.

Linda: Well, I always assumed it was because I was big on all the, you know, what it means to be a good citizen, and all of those things, and on the surface, that's what it appears, but in the

research that I've done, there is a what feels like a very heavy, almost sinister, underbelly to that because what it's doing is reproducing, um, society as it exists for the benefit of the few at the top. Like, it is, it reproduces inequity; it reproduces, um, whiteness as the normative centre so, whiteness, white racial identity is, I mean, that is seen as desired. I mean, the whole country was set up for that. Um, it was built as a country for a white citizenry, and when you look at, um, access to property, access to voting rights, access to immigration even, that was very limited for a certain kind of person that would fit in this constructed white citizenry, and so, the benefits of people identifying with that whiteness, um, helped them find belonging and gain access to all of the advantages that the system created for them. Those were not equally available to everyone, and in fact, there were barriers put in place if you were deemed not white and, so, when I say there was a shadowed, heavy underside to this, what, what, my role was as I perceive it now, and it was good that I didn't question because, um, according to the system, because uh, what is desired is compliance. What is desired is people who will reproduce the status quo and keep hegemony, which is, which is, the dominant power structures, intact. Um, and so that was the role I perceived myself as having now, and I did it exceedingly well. Without questioning, I reproduced the knowledge systems, Western knowledge systems, Eurocentric knowledge systems; I, um, I perpetuated a hierarchical structure of authority, uh, because it was always power over because that was just the way it was, and I just did my part as a good white woman teacher in serving that whole machinery because public education is an institution of the dominant society, and uh, so, there, you have to think about what knowledge is perpetuated, there's a choice made, and it, and it perpetuates the knowledge that those in power want children and youth to know, and when you go back to what people like Althusser wrote about in the early 1970s, um, talked about there's a reason that children, families give up their children at such a young age and why the institution of school keeps them for as long as it does because it indoctrinates, that's, that's the time it takes for indoctrination to happen. And I can't help but think about things that I've seen in the last little while about how the creativity of children drops as they're in school. You know, they come in as eager learners and, and they're just natural inquirers, and, and that investment in learning they've measured it, and it drops off, and it's because we condition, the *system* conditions for compliance. And Althusser also talked about, the system is set up to let go of certain kids at certain times in their educational journey so you think about the kids who leave at sixteen years of age, what level of work are they destined for? You know, you

think about the kids who end with their grade 12, what level of that work, that capitalism, that economic workplace hierarchy will they end up at? And so, um, I just helped perpetuate all of that, and I didn't see it, I didn't know about it, and, um, to me, to me, that's disturbing, and hopefully, not everyone is as compliant as I was, but I am, and I did it willingly, and I did it very well.

Racquel: But if that's the role of the system, that's what you were hired to do.

Linda: Yes. And I never thought about that until now. It's interesting, like that that political side, when I was reading Michael Apple's writing, he talked about, like, everything teachers say and do is a political act. I never thought of that. I saw what I did as normal, as neutral. This was the way things were; this is what I did. Like I really never thought about this is my role; this is the bigger picture of what I'm doing. I just taught kids and I taught them what I was supposed to teach them.

Racquel: So, tell me about that as a female teacher.

Linda: Well, I think that where that becomes differentiated is I think about my family conditioning prepared me to be acquiescent to the male head of the household, and even my mom, as we learned from reading bell hooks, subscribed to patriarchal thinking. Um, and so, uh, even though, so that thinking was, was, how our household operated, and what I grew up to believe in is that you, you seek approval and affirmation from the male head of, or authority figure, and that continued in school too. My principals were all male, and I, I think that, I can remember it meaning a lot when, when a principal would notice me, or when I was practice teaching or interning, when the *male* teacher or the intern supervisor affirmed what I was doing. There was something extra in that. Uh, and so, when I think about my role as a female teacher, it's interesting that I always, I-I made a conscious decision at times in my life when opportunities were there to step into leadership positions to stay in the classroom, and I wonder now, I think about I would say to myself, "I never want to be a suit" because I perceived uh them as authority figures, you know, as removed from the students and I wanted to stay with the students, and now I wonder how much of that had to do with, you know, a lot of my identity with students was caught up in caring about them so much, loving them so much. I always talked to them, about them as *my* kids, and about our classroom as, as our family, and it's interesting how that crept into my practice, and so I wonder whether that self-talk and that understanding of my role as

helper, carer, you know, lover of children, found itself expressed better in the sort of the mom of the classroom, rather than in a leadership position so, um, I think there's a lot tied up with traditional concepts of females, mothers, teachers. I think that there's a lot intertwined in that because I saw myself as supporting kids, um, helping them, loving them, even believing in them until they could believe in themselves. I mean I have that in some of my goals from probably in the 90s. I mean I have that written as my professional goals, and you know, so it was about the kids, and it's interesting that even when I started to question the system, and I started to feel the dissonance between what the system professed to do and the actual practice of schooling, I never considered that there were opportunities to, to push that forward. Those would have been leadership qualities, right? And I never, I felt timid about doing anything about that, and I had never developed that part of me.

Racquel: Um –

Linda: Feels like I'm having a counselling session here (laughs).

Racquel: No, no, no. I-I've got to start writing a few more things down here. Um, so, you, you talk about yourself, the whole piece of what you're doing is you're unpacking being a, a, um, unpacking your white, the good white teacher role, you're unpacking that piece, right? Does that sound right?

Linda: Right.

Racquel: So, you want, so you talked about you really wanted to be known as a good white teacher.

Linda: And I don't know that I saw myself as a *good* white teacher but I wanted, but the white part, I didn't recognize in myself until now. I never, like, a white racial identity? Racial identities were for other people. That was, that was my understanding, and that's part of how whiteness is constructed. But I think I wanted to be known as a good teacher.

Racquel: So I'll come back to the recognition of your whiteness, um, in a minute, so a good teacher was someone, who if I'm hearing this right, a good teacher was somebody who, um, didn't challenge the system.

Linda: Yep.

Racquel: A good teacher was recognized by *male* colleagues?

Linda: Especially, I would say. That seemed to, I don't know, seemed to carry more weight within me somehow. It seemed to matter more. Um, a good teacher did what was expected, and in fact, like met all the markers, all the expectations, so, curriculum, use of recommended resources. You know, everything that was asked of me, I did it, and I did it to the best of my ability, so, so that's all compliance, isn't it.

Racquel: A-Again, perhaps the job we were hired to do. Um, okay, so, so when you said, now I recall what I was going to ask you, you were talking about on your professional growth plans, it was like believing in kids until they believed in themselves, putting this down, these were on your professional growth plan so, as I'm seeing you describe them, it seems like you're going, can you believe how ridiculous those are? And so I'm, I'm, I'm so curious about why you're going can you believe I put that down because I think to somebody observing them, it would be, well I absolutely want a teacher who believes in my kids; I absolutely want a teacher who, um, loves them, so-

Linda: Well, I think that, and – *and* – an awareness that it's not just, um, it takes, that's a very, um, I don't know liberal idea, um, because it's much more than that. Like there's, there was, yes, believing in kids, caring and loving for kids, but that's not everything. That will not, there was, I had no recognition of, um, the oppression that students might be facing, the inequities that students and their families were facing. I had no, um, recognition or understanding of, particularly with Indigenous students coming in, what barriers they would be experiencing *because* of the systemic racism, um, historical and ongoing that Indigenous families have experienced. That, that was a very, um, idealistic frame, frame for me to come into the classroom. It assumed, um, that everybody was starting from the same place, that everyone had the same chances of success, and all I had to do was believe in them until they could, you know, until they believed in their own self-worth, and yes, that is important *and*, what would have been even more supportive of their feelings of belonging and that I actually saw them and who they were was getting to know them more, their circumstances more, understanding just the whole, you know, structural advantage and disadvantage, um, understanding intersectionality, all of that kind of thing, would have helped me be more present to every student and what they were bringing into the classroom. But that didn't enter my mind. Like I, um, there was an assumption

that when students stepped into the classroom they were just ready to learn, and if they weren't ready to learn, well, they needed to get ready to learn, and so all of the life experience part, like there was so many assumptions that I made about that not mattering in the space of the classroom because the classroom was about learning and we needed to get to work and we needed to get things done, and I, I just think I could have been more present to each student and who they, who they actually were, 'cause this is another thing that I think about. You know, so many units that I would do over the years, from the first years til, even to renewed curricula, you know there's this, there's often these personal-philosophic units about, that are kind of like all about me, which is very much individualistic, and it's about, you know, dreams and hopes and wishes, but it's still based on that idea of individualism and meritocracy, where if I, if you work hard, you can be successful, and there's so much more involved in it than that. Um, you know, it, it, um, like that worked for me to believe in because the structures were set up for white people like me to have doors open for them, and that doesn't mean that everybody who looks like me is equally, is equally successful, but there is more likelihood that we will have opportunities than there would be for someone who has been systemically oppressed. And so, I think about all of those assumptions, and although I said I saw kids, that I saw them for who they were, I think I didn't see *all* of them because they can't be separate from what's going on in their lives. They cannot be separate from that. They bring that in. And, I think about, you know, the worldviews that they brought in, the knowledge systems, but there was an assumption that there was one way to do things. And, and so, I just think that, as much as I loved my students, and I did, it has gutted me [pause] to realize how limited that was because I didn't see all of them [voice breaking with emotion]. I didn't see *all* of what they were facing. There was an assumption that, like me, they could just work hard and they would be successful. Or that they could just, you know, set goals, and I mean I don't even know why I believed in that because my own life was evidence, not evidence of that, but that was, that was the story, right? That's what we teach kids. You just set goals and you reach them. You dream and you reach it.

Racquel: So, when you say that, I'm, I'm, is the sadness coming that, that, there was a deficit thinking that when you come into this, if you're not successful, it's just because somebody doesn't believe in you and guess what, I can believe in you and then you can do it. Is the sadness in..

Linda: I think the sadness, the grief [voice breaking], is in realizing how limited my idea, my understanding of the world was, and how that limited my ability to actually be there as an ally, as an advocate for and with kids. I see that now, and I so wish I could go back and have a do-over, um, but I, but because with what I understand now, I, I might have a better chance of actually seeing kids. Like I thought I saw them and who they were, but did I actually? Or did I see, did I actually see those kids who reflected back the good student, who is compliant and works hard and, you know, does what they're asked. Is that what I saw? Like, I have to question that. And, and, did I really see those kids who were struggling? If they were obviously struggling, I did, but how many have walls up s- and that have been in place for so long to survive, who came in and went out and didn't make waves, but I actually didn't see them at all. Not in actually who they were. I mean obviously I saw them; I'm talking at a, I'm talking at a deeper level, and so I think the grief comes from [pause] just a sense of [pause] I think not, how to put this in words? It's a lot of things because I've always been very values driven, but I betrayed those, um, because my, there were assumptions underlying my beliefs and my approaches, um, that didn't allow me to actually see who was in front of me and, you know, create learning that was *truly* responsive to them. When I think about, I think in the last decade of my teaching, I, I think I was much more responsive to, to students, and I involved them much more in their learning, and we did so much more group, collaborative learning and we would have class meetings and we would talk things through and we would, we would create learning paths together, that kind of thing, and so maybe that was on the way, but it still assumed one way of knowing, like one, one worldview; it still assumed, um, that the knowledge that was in the curriculum was the knowledge that needed to be learned, and yes, that was my job, but I didn't question that there was anything else, and so, in a classroom where I hoped that all of my students could feel that they were seen and valued and had a place, on a, maybe on a surface level, I was working toward that, but on a much deeper level of allowing *all* of them in the classroom and, and learning from and with them, um, I think, I was moving toward that, but that's the loss that I feel, and I think there was a loss for them, and there was a loss for all of us because we didn't get to expand, um, our sense of what can be, of all possibilities, so –

Racquel: So it sounds like your shift has been, um, less in, um, conforming to what I'm telling you and more about how are we going to, what do we all bring? There's a different social piece

versus a, you know, the conformity model versus the, um, collaborative. They have some agency.

Linda: Right, and I think that, when I think back to when I started teaching, um, you know, I taught very much as I had experienced school. Like it was very, you know, everybody in rows, and you know, everything was very, you know, follow the rules, do these processes. But even from the beginning, I was very grounded in experiential learning. Like that has always been a part of, of my practice, and so, that part, um, I think, supported kids, but, you know, and, and it did shift to allow more student voice, more co-construction, um, you know, but within all of that, you know, and there was a focus on creativity, on critical thinking, all of those things that the renewed curricula asked for, but *never* did I question the curriculum and what it represented. *Never* did I see that what was there was a choice that might have a purpose. *Never* did I question what wasn't there from *all* that could be learned. *Never* did I question, um, you know, recommended resources, like probably, mmm, in the 90s, mid-career, I would have been, I was looking at, um, you know, messages in resources and what they said about, um, First Nations people, so that awareness was there, but if it was a, um, a recommended resource - and I mean I even helped create teacher and student resources for publishers - in all of that, I never questioned the approach, what was being taught to students, so I, I worked on developing higher level thinking skills, collaborative skills, all of those things, student agency, yes, student voice, still within the box. It was still within the box. And yet there was something within me, more and more in the last years that I was teaching, that felt the dissonance, that there was, that, you know, I was looking at mission and values statements on the walls of schools, and going, this is what we say we are and do, but the system still carries on, pushing kids through, um, and assuming that, you know, uh they're all going to be ready, uh although, I mean, the goals of education say that, you know, we will accomplish these things by the end of Grade 12 and that everyone will do it in their own way on their own time, we still push kids through in a grade-based way, an age-based way, um, and I didn't know, I didn't know what to do with that. You know, when I think about, you know, when inclusion came in, and so when I started teaching, there were still special ed classrooms and, and kids with intensive needs were in those classrooms, and so I saw the change to bringing students *into* classrooms, but you know, I think about what, what that meant now, and I think about, so I was th-, we were thinking about level of learning needed and the supports that were needed to put in place for those students, but it was still within the box of

public education and what the *box* said was important to learn. It was not inclusive in the way of - I welcome *you* with your background, your experiences, your ideologies, your worldview, your knowledge systems, your perspectives, *all* of you into my classroom. So it was still, it was inclusion and bringing students in who were previously, yes, marginalized within the school, bringing them in, still, to a dominant worldview, a dominant knowledge system that needed to be reproduced to create future citizens, and what do those future citizens feed? They feed the status quo. Those are the ones who will be successful.

Racquel: So the box is the dominant system.

Linda: Yeah.

Racquel: and the dominant knowledge, which comes from European, Christian perspective, Euro-

Linda: Eurocentric, yep, and just, and because of *all* the possibilities of what could be learned, of all possibilities, *this* is what is prescribed as important learning. And it's only now that I can go, huh, that's interesting, and I'll never forget, um, in my first anti-racist, anti-oppressive learning, the questions about , well, whose knowledge is it? For what purpose is this knowledge chosen? And it's like –

Racquel: And what would your response to that be?

Linda: It was like, I had *never* thought of that before – not once – because it was just assumed this is the way things are, this is what's normal, this is what's needed. I didn't question it. And that's what made me such a good foot soldier of, of the white system because public education is white.

Racquel: And so that knowledge would have benefitted the people currently in power? That knowledge would have benefitted – who, who would that, who does the box benefit?

Linda: The box benefits the perpetuation of the system the way it's set up, which is invested in whiteness as the norm, like that's the centre against which everything is defined. Uh, it perpetuates the capitalist system. It perpetuates patriarchy by and large. It perpetuates white supremacy, and white supremacy not as extremists, but the dominance of whiteness, of this, just this way of viewing the world, um, and of measuring everything against itself as what it's not.

Racquel: So that's the value. The value is this white system. The value is this, and everything else is less than.

Linda: [pause] Uhhmm. Right, it's not going to catch me nodding! Um..

Racquel: [laughing] It's not going to catch Linda nods. Insert Linda nods here...so I don't know that that resonated with you necessarily, that whiteness is the measuring stick of how good you are.

Linda: Yes. It's not perceived, but that is the measuring stick. When you look at the norms by which we measure kids. You look at the standardized testing, the provincial testing that we do. Those are not based on other knowledge systems; those are based on Western knowledge systems which come out of Eurocentric thinking which is the birthplace of 'white.'

Racquel: Right. Right, right.

Linda: So, that's what I mean, and so we talk a lot about citizenship, um, and what kind of citizens do we *really* want? We want citizens who are going to comply. And I also think, so here's another piece that's in there. So, I, I was a believer in the myths of the nation, like the stories about Canada as a nation, building this nation, Canada as a nation that is based on, you know, uh, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, like I did so much work on that with students, uh, and we looked at human rights abuses in other countries; never looked here, never looked next door at the, at the, you know, at the reserve and the fact that there are, you know, unhealthy living conditions or water that is not drinkable. Human rights oppressions were in other countries. So were racist incidents. So were incidents of racism, like it was all outside of where we were or in the past, and um.

[distracted by notification of an incoming email – lost place in thinking]

Picked up the thread of the conversation: So I was really big on, like, we were a nation forged from nothing, you know, the explorers, this democracy built on all of these ideals. Like I-I digested those; I embodied those, and I just lived and breathed them, and I really did think that we were all of those values that we profess, that we were the history that was taught, and um, so I perpetuated that with students. And it was all, I had no idea that it was all a construction. It was a fictional construction that presented one view and that those values that we profess, um, you

know, and it was like the beacon for other people, come to our lands, we'll welcome you – hmmm – not really, um, and, that we go and we help other countries, and just living on those stories, so that again was that liberal idealism, just like believing in kids until they believe in themselves. So I perpetuated that, and that is actually, um, that is not the truth of what happened, and I didn't help my students understand that fully. In the later years of my teaching career, I mean, I was teaching about treaties; I was teaching about residential schools, certainly not to the depth that I understand now. Uh, you know, a little bit about racist immigration policies, but not to the depth that I understand now. And so, I just think about the reproduction of a generation of citizens who continue to believe in the myth and who perpetuate that thinking, and I think that's one of the reasons that we struggle to understand when people talk about structural racism or systemic racism because the, the narratives that are perpetuated just sort of obfuscate that. You know, it's sort of, well, everybody has equality of opportunity here in Canada. No, they don't.

Racquel: So, would you have said that those students who were Indigenous or, or, non-settler or non-white, I suppose, um, would you have said that they saw the disconnect between what you were teaching? Or, so I guess what I'm getting at here is, is what do you think that teaching that knowledge system, or teaching that, those assumptions, that meritocracy, that, that history, um that leaves out the treaty education and our history, uh, what do you think the impact of that was on your students, maybe non-Indigenous and Indigenous students?

Linda: Well, I'm hearing, I'm hearing Verna's voice in my head because I cannot assume to know what my, what my students actually experienced. Um, but I can say what I think from my perspective. One thing that I regret, um, is that I set up white settler students to continue as me; like, they, assuming that their view of the world, their experience of the world, was the, was normal and neutral and the way things are, um, and assuming, you know, like that you just work hard and you get ahead and look at our family, we're successful. Uh, but not understanding the advantages that were put in place, historically and continuing, um, that ensure that certain people have more opportunities for succeed, or a better chance at success than others. So I think what I did is I limited *their* ability to understand the world and the way it *actually* is. I perpetuated the myths; my practice perpetuated hard working, industrious, *compliant* workers; um, and yes, questioned, yes, creative *within* what was expected. I mean, we didn't challenge systems. We didn't challenge structures. We didn't wonder about – I think – because I didn't see that there

was *power* speaking through everything that we did. That was totally oblivious to me, and so I just went on reproducing it. What, um, non-white students experienced, I would suggest, um, would be that they didn't see themselves. They didn't see themselves represented, um, in much of any way, a little bit more so in the last decade of my teaching, um, because I was, I was changing, changing my practice; I was including, you know, uh, treaties and residential schools, the understanding of that, but not to the depth that it deserved. And I, too, you know, I identify with teachers who go, but what if I get it wrong and feeling very tentative about it. So I would suggest that they didn't see themselves in their learning; that it was, um, that all around them, there was evidence of not fitting, of being other, and the message that to succeed, like, it looked one way, which I think invalidates, it would *have* to invalidate their sense of identity, um, and I know for sure, like when I think about, and you and I have talked about this previously, about assumptions that I made about Indigenous students coming into my classroom, um, from a reserve school, and they had done their schooling there, and there was information that preceded them about, um, their skill levels, and so, that's what I got caught in, was deficit theo-, you know, the deficit theorizing, about how am I ever going to catch them up? How am I ever going to fill those gaps? So, seeing them as something that needed to be filled or fixed, rather than incredibly strong, resilient, courageous young people who came into a white settler school with so much that we could learn from them, and, I know you asked me when I brought that up when we were talking earlier, about where, where that story, where those assumptions came from. And I think that the best answer that I can come up with right now is, um, that I was set up to think that way. In what I've learned, um, during this research, um, that's how anybody who's deemed other or non-white is set up to be, *especially* Indigenous people. They were set up as not white, therefore, inferior, deficient, um, and so I think that, somehow, I absorbed that. And I think it's the talk of school as well. We talk about skill gaps. I know I hear that now with Covid. There's all this worry about the gaps in skills, and, and I think because of this work, my head keeps going to, but what about the kids? What about the individuals who are there, you know, in front of you? And I think that, so I think that yes, there was, there was deficit assumptions made about them, and just, that they just needed to try harder, that whole grit ideology, you know, if they just tried harder, um, with no recognition of the structural disadvantages, the systemic racism that they and their community members, their family members, had faced. No recognition of what racism they might be experiencing in the hallways of the school, the white school that they came

into. And you know, Racquel, I even remember seeing them sitting together in our foyer, and feeling tentative about going past them. Had those been white kids clustered in the foyer, I would *never* have hesitated, so what did that hesitation tell me? What did that tentativeness tell me? It's that, it's that, um, you know, in a cluster, they're there for suspect, there's some kind of, some kind of danger there, and I liken that to what I often hear about assumptions that are made about black kids. I think about what, um, an Indigenous colleague and friend has shared with me, watching kids in a high school collegiate - and I know I'm really rambling, but I'm just kind of going one thought to the next - seeing those kids and there was a hallway where they would cluster. Of course, they clustered there. Of course, they clustered there. We would never question white, white teenagers clustering together, but of course, they clustered to find support, to find belonging with one another, and she talked about what she noted with them, when they were hanging out together, their body language, their bodies were more relaxed, they were talking with one another. The bell would go, the hoods would go up, the tension, like she could see the marked difference as they had to leave where they felt some belonging to go out into those predominantly white hallways, predominantly white classrooms, and so she would watch them armor up. When she told me that, I recognized, and I immediately thought back to Indigenous kids coming into my classroom, hoods up, and even other kids coming in with hoods up, but I think particularly of that group of Indigenous students coming in, in middle years, very challenging time to come in, and I never recognized the strength and courage it took for them to come into a white classroom with a white teacher who could only think about, oh my goodness, how am I ever going to catch them up to the other kids?

Racquel: So, do you think, so, so there's a few things coming through my mind in terms of you say that you were set up to, to understand that, for that to be a commonplace understanding. You were set up to understand that. Just from a tangible point of view in terms of somebody watching it, do you think the set-up happened, and perhaps I'm just putting through just some of my own experiences as a teacher, did that happen in the staff room with conversations? Did that happen when the student file went over to you? Did it happen, I mean that, and I only share this when I went to go sign my own daughter up for school, in a small town school, and I could choose between English or French, and I chose to put her in English 'cause we weren't sure we knew enough French, and the secretary said, um, well, are you sure you want to put her in English because usually just the poor kids go in English. Now, what she meant was, um, that's where the

Indigenous kids, that's the Indigenous student stream, and so if you want to filter out of the Indigenous student stream, you go into the French immersion stream. So, so I guess maybe my question –

Linda: Notice the separation and the relegation to a stream. Like, yeah.

Racquel: Yes, *yes*. So, so that becomes my question then. When you say that we were set up to do that, were there moments, are there moments or memories you have of something like that, that would have been like, oh yes, right, like I, what made it commonplace, I guess? I mean, you know that's what you think, and maybe you don't have a memory; maybe it's just that it was just generally understood and, and that's what makes it commonplace. You don't actually know where it came from; it's so commonplace and pervasive you don't know where it came from.

Linda: I think it did come, and yeah, that's part of it, 'cause as I'm listening to you, I'm trying to think about what it was. But I do think it comes from teacher talk, you know, um, in the hallways, at breaks, after school, um, in the staffroom, um. And nothing particular, but that, you know it tended to be about, or what I remember is, is more that catching them up, catching them up to what? Some assumed level that they're supposed to be at. I also think, I can't help but think about the resource that was viewed in *Understanding and Finding Our Way*. The individuals who were the voices and the main people in the film were looking at that resource that only came off the shelves, I think, in 1994 [correction – 2014], so it was, um, like I remember resources like that. Those resources that were, that perpetuated the idea of Indigenous peoples in the past, as primitive people, that, that kind of, um, setting up them up to see them that way, or, um, as the, the discourse that I listened to growing up which was, you know, about First Nations people, like quit complaining and just get out there and get a job and work hard like everybody else. Um, you know, I think it was, it's all, it's all a part of it, and, and so it's the waters, the waters that I was in, so nothing specific; there was nothing, um, that says that *this* is what caused me to think in a deficit way, but I think it's the way Indigenous peoples have been constructed in the minds of white settler people like me, and that was a purposeful construction to legitimate the actions that were taken against them. So, I think there's multiple threads there, Racquel.

Racquel: So, then, tell me about your, um, teacher-student relationships, um, and I'm especially curious about your teacher-student relationships, and I, I think I'm probably going to be, in my mind, I have a dichotomy in my mind, and this may not be the case; there may not be the

dichotomy, but as I'm reading through this, I'm wondering, was there a way that you had student-teacher relationships with Indigenous students, and was, or visible, visibly Indigenous students because certainly that would be a consideration, versus students that were not Indigenous? Was there a dichotomy there? Or, maybe just tell me about that, those teacher-student relationships.

Linda: It's interesting that those, that the same students that I spoke about – and they're the ones that are most recent in my mind, um, because of the, I recognize the deficit thinking that I had in them coming in, and over the year that I spent with them, I got to know them as incredible young people, and I would say that we did develop relationships, and I, I did get to know them, but what spoke to me greatly in this work was the assumptions that I started with, and I *know* they had to feel those. I *know*, I mean I might have had a smile on my face and welcomed them into my classroom, but we all know, we can sense what someone is feeling about us even when we try to mask it so, um, that is a regret, but I did get to know them as incredible young people who had so much to offer, and I would spend time with them at lunch time, and, you know, at other times, to support them in being successful [chuckles] according to what we needed to do. Um, so it did turn out, um, I would say in a more positive vein than what it started. When I think about, generally speaking, relationships with kids, I've done a lot of reflecting about that because, um, I genuinely enjoyed being with the students in my class, and I would, very, probably about mid-point in my career, I did not go to the staffroom for breaks anymore. I left my classroom open. I was there before school; I was there in breaks so that kids could gather, and my classroom became a gathering place for kids. Um, now for some of those kids, they were kids who didn't fit, who didn't belong out in the hallways, or who found the hallways to be a, perhaps an intimidating place to be. When I think back to the racial identity of those kids who would come in and hang out with me, and just use my classroom as a space, they were white students. And, so that's something to think about. Um, because the space was open, and we were in, I've always taught in predominantly white, white schools in rural Saskatchewan so, um, maybe that's not surprising. I also think about the students in classrooms that I felt closer to than others, and I have to reflect on, so why was that? Why was that? What did they reflect back to me that made, that supported that closer relationship? And, um, you know, I have to think about the kids that I, I became very close with because they were involved in drama which was my extracurricular interest. Um, you know so it was kind of, the students that I think I felt closer to were the

students that also reflected back to me what was expected of them as good students. Um, and there might be more to that than I've unpacked just yet, but I think about yes, there were *growing* relationships in my last years of teaching with Indigenous students but when I think about the closest ones, they were all white.

Racquel: Okay, that is interesting.

Linda: It is. Mind you, I also have to consider the sort of, the predominantly white student population. But it also makes me reflect on, so were they also the good students? And maybe not all was good because they were academically the best, but they were, they were, they were enthusiastic, they wanted to hang around with me, they wanted to, um, they, they did whatever I asked of them, and they were, they tried hard, they worked hard, they fell into everything that I, um, that I professed, so –

Racquel: So that's a good segue into my next question, or your next question here. What do you think that communicated, um, to the students in your classroom about what mattered? Or, I guess, what message did you communicate about what mattered in your classroom? It sounds like some were better at, um, reflecting it back to you -

Linda: Just as I had been, yep.

Racquel: Yeah, yeah. So –

Linda: I think that what mattered was doing what was expected, you know, even though, so it was all of those traits that, you know that we are developing in students, you know, being industrious, trying, because I always used to say, just, you know, if you try, I'm here with you, but it was that message of work hard. If you work hard, you'll succeed. So, being industrious, um, sort of conducting yourself according to expectations, whether that was with um, you know, with learning or with behaviour and conduct to one another, just sort of being collaborative, congenial, supportive, like in, in the last years of my teaching, we were much more community oriented because, I mean, I had expanded in terms of my approach. But I, I reflect on what – I think there was a thread of control throughout my teaching, so when I think about when I started, and I did as I had learned to do. It was very much teacher-directed, students follow, so, um, not really a reciprocal relationship at all. It was just I initiated, they did as I asked. It was just very, very compliant. And when I look at how that control evolved through the years of my career, so

by the end, we were, we were collaborating on the norms for our classroom, but I certainly directed those, um, you know, and I certainly, you know, I was the one, I mean we would reflect on them and we would, we would think about what we needed to do, so I was inviting their voice more but it was certainly, I think it was moving toward a version of shared voice, but the control still sat with me. There was a relinquishing of control in sometimes co-constructing our learning journey or what, or what learning would look like, so there was some release there, but when I think back overall, there was a definite thread of teacher control, teacher dictated in terms of learning. Now, I would be much more open to, you know, sort of, a genuinely teacher-supported learning path that was initiated by students, and I think I was moving toward that, but by and large, I determined the learning journey; I determined how that would unfold. Um, there was student choice; of course, there was, and there was some student voice, increasingly more so, but there was still that thread of control. So I forget what you asked me; you asked me about relationships.

Racquel: No, I had moved on. No, I was asking you about how you communicated what mattered in your classroom.

Linda: Right. That was what we were talking about. [Pause] I think –

Racquel: So, can I –

Linda: I would say what mattered. I would like to bring out; like I'm thinking about some students who had more intense needs right now is what's coming up for me, and I think what mattered was student success to me. I wanted them to, to feel that sense of I did it! I got it! I got it! Or, a sense of pride, like that was really important to me, but I also recognize that it was all still within the determined learning, within the box, the structured box of public education, but I did, like what mattered, um, from my perspective anyway, and we would celebrate, you know, students being successful, celebrating students, like their ability to be autonomous learners, to know what to do next. There was still control in that because I, like there was my determination of what came next. I mean, that was my job as well, um, but that, that mattered. It wasn't just, um, teaching of content and you get it or you keep up and you know, I don't care about you. I *did* care about how they were doing and I think what's become very clear to me is that it was all about within the structure as it's set up to reproduce citizens for Canadian society.

Racquel: So, just piggybacking on that, what messages did you communicate about what learning is? And if I'm hearing you correctly, and maybe just is it that you're saying, um, that learning is, um, understanding how the sy-, how to fit into a hierarchical system? Or, what is learning? What are the messages that you communicated about what learning is?

Linda: I think what comes to mind is learning as prescribed, learning as pre-determined for you. You know? Um, I hadn't yet, um, opened my purview to consider, like let's follow where students want to take it, and um, and then me helping them to weave in outcomes with that. I was still very much, um, just structuring learning based on a learning path within outcomes. I hadn't opened up to consider how, um, I could work with students to do that so that their learning might look different and might be more meaningful to them, and I think about the work we're doing now, um, so maybe, taking the beginning steps towards that? So by and large though, um, except for some, you know, some circumstances where we actually co-constructed the learning together, and it was, like, they'd say, "Hey, Ms. B., could we do this?" And it was like, yeah, let's go for it, and we actually did that, and created it *totally* with student voice, and it really stands out in my memory, but overall, learning was as prescribed, um, and like, without questioning it. I'm going to add something to that. But within that prescribed learning, I wanted to make it meaningful for students. So it was really important that I would take that learning and make it meaningful and make it experiential to students, so it's interesting that I had those aspects in my teaching but I didn't see the box. I didn't push through the walls of the box.

Racquel: So, I'm curious about how you would make a Eurocentric curriculum that, I think as you've said, omitted other ways of knowing, um, how would you make that relevant to someone who comes from a family, a culture, a way, a way of being that that's not relevant to them. How, how did you, or what might have been some strategies to make that relevant to them? Or, was it just to make it fun? I guess I don't want to put words into your mouth; I'm curious about that piece. If they don't see themselves in the content as you alluded to before, just because it's a Eurocentric piece, and then it's always been important to make it relevant, in what ways were you able, or did you try to make it? In what ways did you -

Linda: I think what I tried to do was make it experiential so I would, like hands-on. So we would, I was never, you know, a lecture, it was always, we definitely used a constructivist approach to developing, students developing their understanding. Definitely. Uh, especially as

that came more into education. In the very early years of teaching, oh my goodness, it was workbooks and it was all of that. From early on, the importance of hands-on learning was, was, was in my teaching. Yeah, there were a lot of workbooks and clipped corners in my first years of teaching. But, um, I would say, not so much, um, I would, it's interesting, I think about activating background knowledge and building from where they are, but the relevance piece, not so much. I would work very hard to make the required learning meaningful to them so that they could, they developed their own understanding of it, um, and I used lots of discursive strategies to do that, but it wasn't so much about how does this sit alongside *your* worldview and how might this look in a different, from a different perspective. I think the most we would have done with perspectives might have been, you know, sort of in ELA or sometimes in Social Studies, sort of, what might the experience have been from, you know, a different point of view, but *never* from the perspective of oppression or marginalization or, um, you know, systemic injustice. Never.

Racquel: So, um, this just, um, comes back here. What messages, um, do you think about oppression, a big word, I don't know how often it's used, or even in teaching discussions, but what messages do you think were communicated about oppression or racism in your teaching practices? Like, you say that wasn't something you incorporated –

Linda: Well, we did, we did, 'cause I remember, I remember doing a lot on human rights and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and violations of human rights. I remember doing extensive work on racism and apartheid. South Africa was the focus. The States was the focus. Human rights abuses were, like, in other countries, so it was either relegated to the past or it was in other places, but never did we turn that reflective lens around and look at the injustice that was all, really all around us, but we weren't noting, *I* wasn't noting. So it was always about other places, other times. And then there was the, there was the message, and this is really, um, I've really connected with the colourblind ideology because that is how I operated was we're all equal; we're all just people. And yes, I have to admit, that was, that was the discourse that I used, um, without a recognition of, of the systemic issues and barriers that are in place for so many people or, or a racially differentiated experience of life, um, for so many. And so, that's a very, I don't know, it's very, it's like operating life with blinders on. You know, if I just, if I just think this and sing la-la-la-la-la, you know, I don't have to see what's all around me.

Racquel: So, then for students who *were*, say, experiencing racism, oppression, um, how do you think they might have been affected? What do you think the impact of those teaching practices would have been? Again, you can't speak for them, but, but I have a feeling part of your journey is that you have a sense that that *did* impact them in a way that was negative, and so what is that sense about, um, like I guess I have the question here about, um, what's the story that you're telling yourself about the impact that had on students who, who, because, who were oppressed or racialized?

Linda: Well, I come back to I, like, didn't actually see them and all of them and what they were experiencing. I saw what I wanted to see. I assumed that, um, you know that when they came into the classroom, that they were ready to learn. That was the expectation – to be ready to learn. And that negates anything that's going on outside the classroom walls and even within the classroom that's happening under the surface. Um, so there's a certain blindness there, and ignorance, of the lives of students and who they are as people. And I think that, I saw them in a very limited way. I saw them as students, and I'm actually, I'm teaching people. Um, and there is a difference there. There's still a lot to unpack here, but um, I sense that. I also, when you were first asking the question, a memory came up of a student, of several students I've had, who come from impoverished families, who didn't have the material things that they needed to meet basic needs. Um, and what came up for me was the immediate 'helper' in me; the, um, me coming to the rescue, so buying groceries for them, bringing clothes for them, and while those are, what I have learned since then, those are mitigative, so they help in the moment but they actually don't change anything about their circumstances. Um, they don't address any of the structural barriers or the, uh, anything that's happening in their lives that is causing or contributing to those circumstances. You know, I think of students that I've fed, students that I've paid for them to go to the cafeteria to get meals, and it was just an understood thing between myself and the cafeteria, the guy in the cafeteria, that when they came through and said Ms. B said for me to get lunch, um, that that was done, and so there was that 'helper' tendency in me. Um, but I never went so far as to consider the, the structural disadvantages that they and their families were, were experiencing.

Racquel: How would it have impacted you to know that?

Linda: I think at that point, I would have felt completely unable to do anything about it, and even now, that is a part of my learning, so how *do* you challenge the systems and structures that are in place. That's big, and I'm not saying that I am there yet, but I think what's key is that I didn't recognize it. I didn't recognize, um, structural and systemic barriers and disadvantages that are there. And so that prevented me from actually, truly seeing kids, students, as individuals, as people with families and, and lives that were, you know, so much more was going on in them than just what was happening in the classroom. You know, I think about, um, and I know that this is a question later on, but it seems to, it seems to impact now. It's, I think of an experience with a student; this was an Indigenous student coming down a very crowded hallway, a middle years hallway, slamming lockers, uh, like hitting them and obviously agitated and calling us all a bunch of racists. And I think what's interesting now, is that that experience stands out because I felt, in that moment, like, oh my god, this is reverse racism. Um, and the thing is I didn't understand is there's no such thing because racism is built on a structural, systemic understanding of racism and there's no way that student had the power to create anything that would systemically or structurally disadvantage me. Um, and the thing is I never, in that moment, ever thought, and I think of an Indigenous colleague and friend who has been very instrumental in my journey and the stories that she has shared, never once thought "what happened in that student's life over the days prior, 'cause he is an Indigenous student in a primarily white collegiate; what happened in the days or the hours leading up to that incident, that that was the straw that broke the camel's back, that caused the reaction? It was just like "what's with him"? Like that, look at the aggression; that's reverse racism. And you could just feel this collective drawing back from this student. Never once did I think or wonder about what's, what's happening with him? What has caused this, this reaction, obviously a reaction; what has lead up to this? Like you know, how could I inquire into that and find out what's going on and actually do some listening instead of operating on assumptions? So those are some things that stand out, Racquel.

Racquel: The white normativity would have been to have just, uh, brushed that; that this was *their* problem, not yours, that there was a deficit in that person that they would have-

Linda: Yeah, look at how angry they are; look at how violent they are. Good students would never come down the hallway banging at locker doors and calling everybody racists. Yeah.

Racquel: Right.

Linda: But never a, in that moment, I would hope that I would do better now, but never even considering that that was an indication, that reaction indicated that some things had happened leading up to that, and my Indigenous friend and colleague has talked to me about, you know, um, the racism that kids, that kids experience in schools, and, and, like how many microaggressions; they may be micro and they may be more macro aggressions; how many slights, how many, how many incidents of not being seen or recognized or, um, have happened for that? And it might not even have just been within the walls of the school.

Racquel: Right, right. So, so, I'm going to jump back here into some of these pieces here. Um, and perhaps we've touched on this, so I don't want to miss about any of these different pieces, but, um, I do want to ask this one. It's a bit off of the list here, but if you were to define white normativity for the urban dictionary, I want to type white normativity for the urban dictionary so that I can understand what that is because I think that's a big part of what you're talking about is this white performativity and white, um, normativity. Um, how would you – urban dictionary wants to know.

Linda: Okay, so I would say it would be that this western worldview is the way things are. It is what is normal; it is what is neutral; it is the assumption of, um, that.. so whiteness was described as everything it was not. So we, we define, so we are not Indigenous, and they were defined as deficient, inferior; we are superior, we are civilized, we are, uh, that was the whole message of the civilization of the world and the imperialism and colonialism was to go out and civilize and convert people to Christianity so whiteness is built on a lot of that thinking. Um, I think white normativity is assuming that the way we see the world as white people is the way the world is, it's the way things are. It assumes one way of seeing things, one way of being in the world. Um, it assumes all of the structures that have been set up for us, and that includes capitalism, it includes the patriarchy, and it includes the *supremacy* of whiteness as the measure for what is worthwhile, what gets the structural advantages, like when you think about who got to vote first, or who got to own property, who got to get the good jobs so that's not really an urban dictionary. To explain it, how would Ruth Frankenberg explain it? Um, it's a way of being in the world; it's an ontology, but it's constructed, it's constructed based on everything that it is not. We're not that; we're, we're this. But it's all, it's this, whiteness is like putting all of us who have, were

born into white bodies at the apex of civilization. Look at us; look at how good we are. Um, and the performativity is the re-enactment of it all of the time. Um, and assuming that it is normal. Like me teaching the prescribed curriculum which is based on Western worldview, Western knowledge systems; that reproduces whiteness because then those students assume that that's the way to see the world, and understand the world, and understand themselves in the world.

Racquel: So, would it be fair to say that whiteness is a way for people with very light skin to feel superior? Or, is that not enough?

Linda: Whiteness is a category that's been constructed for those of us who, by virtue of our birth, were born into white-skinned bodies, because, um, I've also heard Indigenous colleagues talk about, even their own children, if they're lighter-skinned, they have an easier time of it than their children who have, who have darker skin.

Racquel: Because of white normativity?

Linda: Uhhmm. And it was, you know, through, through the whole colonial history of our country, uh, who were the leaders? The leaders were all white males. White males decreed what was; they made the policies. They enacted the laws, and so, that is, that has been set up to appear normal, but it's a construction. And, okay.

Racquel: Okay, not, that's okay. So I have a, I have, um, on the bottom, and now that I've realized this, I was thinking we were only 45 minutes in, I realize we're an hour and 45 minutes in, and I was thinking if we're only 45 minutes in, we're golden. We're an hour and 45 minutes in. 'Kay. Um, so, so what I'm curious about here is, well first of all, I'm just going to say, the standout journey that I, the standout so far, you know for me, is that teaching, these are *people* we're educating. These are *people* we're working with, not students, not this collective body of subjects. These are people; that bit was just a key piece for me. Um, but I have this piece here, this question, and the question says, can you describe a bit about the journey or the steps that you took to unpack your role, and now these would be my words here, as a player in perpetuating colonization. So you've taken this journey, and I'm saying that you're taking this journey to unpack, like you're having this realization that you were a player in perpetuating colonization.

Linda: Uhhmm.

Racquel: Or white supremacy.

Linda: Yeah, absolutely. So, like the colonial system.

Racquel: So, your journey has been going through this in-depth research through your masters, through your thesis. Is that the path that you recommend for others? Is this a path you even recommend? Is this a journey you feel might be worthwhile for others to embark on – to sort of, um, to unpack their role as players in colonization? Maybe, I'll just ask that. Do you think that is a journey-

Linda: Absolutely.

Racquel: Okay.

Linda: Absolutely. It has been, um, challenging and difficult. It has been disorienting because when you realize that everything that you believed, everything that you did was based on a lie, on a construction, and you thought it was the way the world is, um, it is disillusioning, um, and it has been emotionally difficult, and yet, I have never thought of stopping because this is about kids. This is about young people, and I think of, I always had the best of intentions, always. Like I never, ever can think of a time when I did not want the best for my students. What I didn't understand was that the best, that the version of best was constructed and reproduced what the dominant power structure decreed was best, so I didn't recognize how power was working through me to reproduce what those in positions of power wanted to be reproduced, so I didn't recognize that. But, always, throughout my career, even though I defaulted to education, I would say, especially as I got my feet under myself as an educator, I was there for students. I had the best of intentions, and it took me, it took me a while to understand that people with the best of intentions can do harm. And my desire in this, is that I do no more harm, [voice breaking] because I did harm. I did, and I just think about, um, so this is not about a fanciful wish to learn more. This is I *have to*, and I can't go back and fix that, but I can do better, and to do better, I have to understand more, and I have to understand what's operating behind the surface appearance of the system so that I can help students see it and understand their own circumstances because by perpetuating the myths and ideologies that I perpetuated, and as much as I wanted them to believe in themselves, if that is the message that I am communicating all the time, and they don't succeed, what does that tell them about who they are? And I always was big

on, you know, self-worth and students believing in themselves, but their experience was that there had to be something wrong with them because they couldn't succeed, and they were surrounded with messages that all you have to do is work hard. And so the messages don't align with students' experiences and chances in life, and let's face it, still in Canada, dependent on the colour of your skin, and we could go into other marginalities as well, but mine is mostly focused on racism as the main oppression, your chances for success and your chances for opportunities are still not as great as my children who were born into white bodies. And so, what would I recommend that other teachers do this? They *have to*. They *have to*. Because we are, I believe that most teachers have the best of intentions. They want to do good by kids, just as I did my whole career. And I worked endless hours to do right by kids, but I did so much harm. I did so much harm, and I didn't even realize it. So, yes, they have to, for kids, 'cause that's why we're all there, for everybody's kids, and we talk about creating a better world. You know, we talk about peace with kids and we talk about human rights, but this is *boots on the ground*. How do I see each one of you in my classroom? What assumptions am I making about you? What thinking is fuelling my thinking about you, and the way I perceive you and the way you are in the world. And so, my hope is, at the very least, that I do no more harm. You know, I think about, I'm just going to weave one more thing in here because it's one piece I want to talk about. When multiculturalism became a big thing, I leapt on the 'celebration of diversity' bandwagon. We did a lot in my classes on celebrating diversity and learning about, you know, family origins, but it was very much the additive approach. It was that very, uh you know, it was like foods and dances and costumes, and it was so, it was essentializing because it talked about people as this is who you are; it's about your traditional dress or a dish or a story or a celebration. But it didn't look at where multiculturalism *actually* emerged from, which was from the Civil Rights movement of the 60s, and critical multiculturalism is what you and I talk about so often is about space for every student to bring in their voice, their perspectives, their worldviews, their experiences, and that they're seen and that they're recognized, and that learning is for, they can see themselves in their learning. We were learning *about* the other in very superficial, just very superficial ways so I think about that, and I think about what that communicated to students about, you know, individuals who originate from other cultures, who have different ways of being. We never went that far. We never considered, you know, their histories, the oppressions, the injustices that they faced. It was all, you know, this liberal notion of let's feel good about

listening to some music and reading some stories, and we'd have some multicultural fairs, and it was just, well, I've learned, it was essentializing because it painted everybody with one brush and it was just so superficial, and it was almost voyeuristic, you know? Like we'll just do some sampling, but it didn't require any shifts in our understanding. It just helped us to feel good because look at how diverse we're being. So I wanted to weave that in because it's something that I've realized, um, didn't actually support students in seeing people and *all* of people, without operating on, you know, sort of Western-based assumptions about them. So-

Racquel: Okay, I have two, two things, and I think the power end there is they have to; like if your last line in your thesis isn't "they have to", I don't know what it's going to be. To me, that's just, that's just power. There's two questions that I wish I asked prior to that because I think that was the punch line that then the commercial wraps up, and [indistinguishable because Linda is laughing] and it all heads off that way. And probably something that comes back to me a number of times because I can tell that there's intuitive piece and I can tell that there's a sadness doesn't cover it, grief doesn't cover it, maybe an anger covers it, maybe all of that, that harm. Like, I can hear you saying, I can't unwring that bell; harm was done. And when you speak of that, as a tangible piece, somebody else looking in, I heard you saying in the last piece is part of that harm is what does that do to their self-esteem if I say to them you just have to work hard and they've worked hard, but I haven't considered any of the other things going on in their life, that this is their self-esteem, and clearly, that self-esteem impacts your whole life.

Linda: Uhmhhh.

Racquel: Is there more to the harms, not that self-esteem is not sufficient. I'm not suggesting that that impacts so much. Would there be some, some, some words, categories you could put to the harm? It's complex; it's an onion; it's complex, I know.

Linda: Oh, that's a really interesting question. So, some things come to mind. So when I think about, um, making deficit assumptions about kids. There's very real harm in that. Like when I see you as gaps or deficits that need to be filled, what does that say about how I perceive you, um, as a person of value and worth? And that gets communicated, because, you know, um, in so, so many ways. I think about the harm that is done. Like when I went to school, what I saw reflected me. And I try to, I'm just trying to imagine myself now, if I had, you know, year after year after year of an education experience where nothing I learned about reflected me and my

family and where, what we're all about and how we are in the world and how we perceive in the world, or what our experiences have been, doesn't that erase me? Doesn't that negate me?

Oh, I think about, if we see kids as deficient, if we have un, unrecognized racist assumptions operating beneath the surface, where we're making judgments about a student based on their racial group, how does that not get conveyed to that child or that youth and become part of how they see themselves? And I think what that does is it contributes something that I've learned about which is internalized racism where you think of yourself as, you just internalize it all, and that's how you think about yourself. And so while I professed to be wanting the best for students, and I really believed that I did, there were some messages there that did the opposite. And, um, I think that I'm only just beginning to realize the harms. I think that I can feel, like when I think about practices of, um, you know, what certain kids get to do, like, the kinds of, even the kinds of learning that certain kids get to do. I think about the student you were helping, who is a senior student, who got basically a primary worksheet given to him. There were assumptions there, and I can think back to, especially in the early years of my teaching, but even as inclusion became a thing, and um, I, I worked really hard, even kids on IIPs or IEPs, depending on what your school calls them, so that they were doing meaningful work that was related to what the other kids were doing, but I know that isn't always the practice and that often they're doing very, um, work that is very limited in terms of what we think they're capable of, and, and what I would call, busy work, or the kids, like I think about the Indigenous colleague and friend, who has been such an important guide on this journey, who is an incredibly bright, professional woman, went into a school and the assumption, she was put in a student-support classroom because it was assumed that she would have reading difficulties. And she was there for some time, but there was an assumption made that's where she would be. And I think about the streaming that I've witnessed, the labelling of students, and that labelling that designates them for certain paths and maybe I didn't initiate those, but I participated in them and accepted them. And I did not recognize, when you think about the harm, how much does that labelling and streaming impact a student's life chances? And that's where Michael Apple would say that there is *nothing* that an educator does that is neutral because everything we do impacts that student's being, their life, their life chances. It's enormous.

Racquel: Well, I don't want to – I have two other questions but I could just leave them for you to self-reflect on later, if you like, 'cause this is, you know, heavy stuff.

Linda: Oh, I'm okay. If you want to ask them, you go ahead.

Racquel: Okay.

Linda: If you've got time, 'cause I –

Racquel: I do, yes.

Linda: Okay.

Racquel: So I have two. I think you've kind of touched on them. They're two sort of separate. So, you've been talking about – maybe it's three if I put this general on here. What does being unmade mean to you?

Linda: Oh, interesting question, very interesting. So that is in the title of my thesis – The (Un)making of a Good White Teacher on the Canadian Prairies. I think it is, and the 'un' is in brackets, I think it denotes or connotes, I guess, the fact that this will continue to be a process. But I was made into a certain identity, a gendered identity. I was constructed as such, and so, um, and Althusser would call that interpellation. I was called into being as a good girl, as a good woman, as a good student, as a good teacher, and I learned to, um, reflect that calling into being. And so, when I think about the making of me, I was constructed. I wasn't aware of it because I, I, you know, I indulged in the, um, the ideology of individualism that, you know, that I create my life path, and, and, I set goals and dreams and I, I work to achieve them. In spite of the fact that my life did not actually reflect that, um, I, I espoused those ideologies. And so, my life chances and opportunities were also connected to the ways I had been constructed. And so, certain doors opened for me, not too high up the hierarchy, and so I think about (un)making – it's pulling all of this apart because it's like, I remember the first days of starting to learn about all of this. And it was just like this, like what rock have I been living under that, that I had no idea of this? And it was really very much like, like I was under all of these veils, you know, and as I pulled each veil off, I could see clearer, but I was also struck by, in one class where I was the lone, um, white settler person in the class, I remarked one day, 'cause I realized that while I was beginning to recognize more and I was listening to my peers, colleagues, share around me, I realized I'm

seeing more but I don't even know how much more there is to see. So the (un)making will be a lifetime process. Um, the (un)making is pulling each of those layers of indoctrination and conditioning aside so that I can actually see clearly, and I think that what my desire is in this (un)making is that I can actually consciously choose, more consciously choose, who I am, what I stand for, and that I can actually, my actions, my beliefs align, my words align because I've lived a life where the ideology, where what was professed did not align with actions and experience and evidence all around me, and I think the greatest thing I'm striving for is being integrous, like being aligned, and more consciously aware of what I'm bringing into the world, um, what I'm saying, and I have to stay humble. I have to stay, um, as a learner because whiteness, that normativity of whiteness is always operating, always. Power relations are always operating around us and through us and informing what we do. So, this is kind of like walking the thin line, um, and each step is, um, I just have to trust and I'm going to make mistakes and I'm going to fall off, but I *have* to keep going because I want to be aligned and I think deconstruction is about that. And I and I don't know – I had wondered about can I reconstruct myself? But that would, I think it would imply that I can just put myself back together and be –

Racquel: ...around to being an individual – if I can just unpack this, now I can actually make myself as an individual, which is the lie you were-

Linda: Yeah. So I think the reconstruct? I, I can't actually; that's not going to be a *fait accompli* when this is done. I think what I'm, I'm taking tentative steps to be aware and, and to think about what I value. Well, and actually, I think about humanity and what I, you know, what do the values I've always professed and believed in actually mean, boots to the ground? Um, and, not just what's professed to be, so, that's a lot of words; I don't know if it actually expresses it, but that was a really good question.

Racquel: [laughs] And the words I wrote down as you were saying this, it sounds like active consciousness raising. It sounds like it's a process of active consciousness raising, and, and it sounds to me like you are trying to, you are on a journey that you will likely never arrive to of that self-actualized teacher.

Linda: Well, and someone who actually listens more than I assume, um, and I've had that message from, um, some very wise and kind and patient Indigenous colleagues who, you know,

in our work with *Understanding and Finding Our Way*, invite people to listen more than they talk.

Racquel: Okay, I'm going to invite you to two other questions. I'm going to invite you to two other ones.

Linda: Okay.

Racquel: What actions, 'cause I know you've talked about disrupting, disrupting the making of the, but, but disrupting the education system I think you've sort of talked about or disrupting, oh, this is the question. I think it came from reading your REB there. What actions do you see yourself taking? What actions might you take to disrupt that deeply ingrained performativity? What actions might you take to disrupt that deeply ingrained performativity of good white settler teacher?

Linda: Well, I think the first thing is awareness of, of what they are so that's been part of the research that I've just finished is on understanding whiteness and what it means to have a white racial identity and also how whiteness operates, like how it operates to keep itself sort of the privileged stance in the room. And so, I think awareness of that, but beyond that, I would say that I am, the steps that I'm taking are, like, an Indigenous colleague and I have planned a two-day Beginning Your Journey to Becoming an Anti-racist Educator. Um, and a lot of that is awareness of the assumptions that we make about students, um, and the deficit theorizing that we do, and the engagement in these myths, these ideologies like meritocracy, colourblindness, but all of that seeks to keep white normativity at the centre and not to recognize what's happening all around us. So, I'm moving ahead with that even though there's a part of me that has felt, 'well, I'm not quite ready to do the work; am I ready?' But I have to be, and I will learn as I do it because I anticipate that there, you know, there may be resistance and so the compliant person, you know, the indoctrinated, compliant one here is like 'how am I going to face up to resistance?' but I think that's part of the learning and I can't wait to start. I need to start, and I will learn as, as I continue. Um, I'm, I'm learning to, pose, I'm learning to question, um, and how to pose questions of assumptions that are made about the way things are done and learning to question, you know, especially when people say this is the way we always done them, you know, and invite thinking about other things. So, it is, it is definitely, the learning has just begun; the learning how to challenge, um, has just begun. I read a, a, um, I just finished reading Cheryl

Matias's book, *Feeling White*, and I was really excited by what she suggested in there because she talked about teachers, um, so you have to teach a curriculum. So she was interested in how do you teach what's required *and* teach kids, provide opportunities for students to develop a critical mindset, critical perspective, and so, she used, um, so this was based in the States, and she used the American occupation of the Philippines which is required learning in high school History class. So there was the what do they need to learn, but beside that, was a critical pedagogy curriculum, so there was the required learning *and* what kinds of thinking do I need to develop? So they're still learning what they need to learn, and she was still doing what she needed to do as a teacher who was hired to teach that, but she was lining up almost like two curricula, so what is required *and* then what is required to help students develop a critical anti-racist, anti-oppressive, um, mindset so that they begin to think about other perspectives, bring in other pieces of information that would, would add to a more comprehensive understanding. And so, I want to explore that more because I think that has great potential for work that you and I can do together. Because I think it does, because teachers are required to teach the curriculum, and I think the curriculum has moved. There is opportunity to bring in other worldviews now, so there has been a movement there. Whether that is happening to the extent that it can is, is, you know, up to teachers, um, but I think that there are ways to do that. And so that is sort of where I want to go next, like a second-stage – so this is *Beginning Your Journey to Becoming an Anti-racist Educator* but then I think the next workshop or intensive that we create, because we know that they need to be more than just a, a one-day thing, is really looking at the pedagogy. So, how do you actually teach for this, to support students in developing this lens? So –

Racquel: Um...

Linda: And those are baby steps. Those are just baby steps.

Racquel: That sounds huge. If those are baby steps, that sounds huge. You mentioned that you might feel resistance, from whom on this journey? So, on this journey, as you're disrupting that performativity, um, where, yeah, resistance from whom?

Linda: I would anticipate that, um, you know, as we set up this two-day intensive that those would be people coming who are ready to begin that journey so I don't anticipate as much resistance there. But let's say that a school division contracted us for this two-day intensive and it was a requirement that you attend. I would anticipate resistance there. And so, um, that's been

a part of my learning as well, and it's really just in the beginning stages of, you know, how does whiteness operate to protect itself? So that white normative, normative, privileged stance that we have because life has pretty much worked for us, um, so anything that threat- can be perceived as threatening. So, one thing that we are doing is we're putting that out there up front in ours and we're saying, you know, if you're feeling any of these emotions – defensiveness, denial, anger, disillusionment, loss, grief – like, there's a whole, um, a whole range of emotions that you can feel. It's, that's good because you're on the journey. And, and, and it's an indicator that you are, and so, what we're going to do, and that is what, that comes from reading Cheryl Matias, is we're going to invite them to inquire into those, so rather than, so anticipate that it's going to happen and just wonder about it. Inquire into it. Where is that coming from? Why am I feeling this way? Because it's going to give you more information. And another thing that we're going to do to, and something that I learned that became very apparent to me from bell hooks, was that we are not, this is not an attack on people, on individuals. We're not calling people bad. This is about, um, this is about becoming aware of thinking. This is about challenging conditioned thinking. So it's not about making people wrong or bad or, you know, we're not trying to make people feel that way as a target. This is about challenging thinking, that until you start to see it and question it, you just accept as... the way you are, the way you conduct yourself.

Racquel: Yeah, that's powerful. That's a powerful piece. So, this is for sure my last question. For sure on this one [laughter]. I asked you before, um, you know, um, about you chose to complete your master's to unpack this for yourself. I would suggest that not everybody is willing to put in this much work. Yet, unpacking this piece, um, is something, um, suggested that is, that is worthwhile work for every teacher, every person. Um, and so, do you see an accessible way for somebody to start this journey?

Linda: Well, that's what we're trying to do with, um, with the planning that we've done with Beginning Your Journey. There's a lot of support in that for understanding things, um, elements of this that are important for educators to understand. I think that what, I think that what is really important for anybody who's willing to begin this journey is that there are people along the way who are there to support you, and who, um, that you won't be doing this alone. Like, there are people who are doing this work. That is what I've experienced. Just sort of like so glad you've joined us. Uh, so glad that you are, like there is support there. And there is support for, for what,

what you will go through, uh, but there's also not a enabling of staying in the 'oh, I feel so bad', that, because that will not help students. And that's where I always remember being told by someone who had already done this work, 'oh yeah, you work through that pretty quickly.' Because this is about, it becomes, it becomes, and I don't want to use the word moral because moral gets equated with, with, um, the whole, um, Christian conversion that happened with residential, so that feels like not the word I want to use, but it becomes an ethical responsibility. Like when I talk about an imperative, yeah, this doesn't feel really good to do, but guess what? Every marginalized student who has come through our classrooms, their experience hasn't felt very good either. Their families, uh, you know, when we question, 'well, you know, we set up these student-led conferences, or these parent-teacher interviews, and they don't come.' And it's all about what we've done for them. But we never think about how it might feel for them to enter a school that is based in, where school itself is, signals trauma. Uh, so, is there an accessible way? Well, that is some of the work that I intend to keep doing, and I, I will keep doing. I don't know what all of that looks like yet, but if my, what I have done in this, and what initially started off as just my solo journey, I wasn't thinking about doing this for other people, at all. But I'm beginning to accept that more and more, that this, this experience might actually be supportive for other teachers, and in that case, if that support supports them in being there in more authentic, real ways for students, um, as people, then, yes.

Racquel: Was there an article, I can't remember, like you said, once, once you saw this, you couldn't unsee it. What, what made you see this? I can't remember. Was there a reading, was there an article, was there a class?

Linda: Once you see what?

Racquel: Once you began to see that, oh my gosh, I've actually been causing harm. Oh my goodness, I've actually been a pawn in perpetuating this. Like, I kind of remember there being a moment for you where you were saying 'I can't not-'

Linda: Okay, um, [pause] there was a quotation, um, about, so this was my assumption of being neutral, a neutral, I don't know, uh, role in the classroom. I never saw it as political, but there was a quote, and I'll have to go back and find it because I have it somewhere about, um, I mean, students and the effect on students of what teachers bring into the classroom. Um, and it was that particular quote, and ooh, I can't think of, I would be able to find it, but that is the one I

remember realizing that as much as I had professed in believing in students, as much as I had professed in, that their sense of their own self-worth was so important, that my dysconscious, uncritical, just performance of my role, good little foot soldier, had resulted in how they, harm to how they saw themselves. I distinctly remember that afternoon, and just sobbing, like that was the knife that just cut, because I realized that I had actually done the opposite of what I intended, and I remember I stopped, and I just sobbed, and then I just went and walked, I just walked for hours because I just, I had to just let it process. And, it still cuts at me. Cause I wanted the best for kids, and I didn't do the best by them. And so there's a critical lens to bring to that, but there's also, uh, a bit of a soul-destroying lens to that as well. And that's what, that is what compels me to keep going because it's not okay just to leave that.

Racquel: Right, like you had this sculpture of this good white woman and you personified it so well, and then all of a sudden, you took a hammer to it and went "Damn you!" And then who are you after the glass is shattered and broken?

Linda: Oh! That is, oh. That is profound, Racquel, because that is what some researchers have written about, that if whiteness is defined by everything that it's not, when you actually look within, there's nothing there. Because it's not actually built *of* anything. It's just 'we're not that; we're not that; we're not that.' Um, and I would say that that equates with, yeah, like I- beyond what I was constructed to be, part of this is I had, I have no idea of who I am, really. Because in spite of the narratives that I perpetuated about 'you're your own person; you know, you make your own decisions in life; you set your own goals; you, you know, *you* are the driver of your life' - my whole life was evidence to the contrary. And when I, kind of, put a pause to it and started looking deeper, like there was a real feeling of being lost, like loss *and* lost. Because then, who and what am I? So I don't have very long left to figure it out, but I'm doing, I'm going to do my darndest to figure it out.

Racquel: But it's haunting; it's haunting.

Linda: It is.

Racquel: To feel like I actually performed this so well, I even got my Academy Award.

Linda: Oh, yes.

Racquel: And, it's hollow. Like-

Linda: Completely. Completely. Yeah, it's really, it's, it's disconcerting, disorienting is the word too, and you keep on, because then, we need to figure this out. When I think about, um, First Nations, um, worldviews and knowledge systems, everything is done for the next generations. And so, I think, uh, so much of what I've learned about Indigenous worldviews and knowledge systems and ideologies, all of that, it's about, you know so much of Western culture and, you know, dominant white culture is like every man for the-, or every individual for themselves; it's me, me, me; it's accumulate, accumulate, accumulate. And, you know, from an Indigenous perspective, it is for the next generations; it is for all. And so, that is also a part of whatever I do now, I can't go back and fix, but I need to do something that is actually more aligned with my beliefs and what I value. It's not quite as profound as 'they have to,' but it's all I've got left.
[laughs]

Racquel: Linda, thank you for letting me, um, ask you all these questions about your journey and the reason I am so curious is because I, I, I'm looking at your journey, and I, when you say disoriented, you're validating feelings that I feel as I go through this, and um, just the work you've put into this, and it's part of the reason why I kept asking you about, you know, you gotta tell me more about the harm, cause I, what if I don't see it? And if I don't see it, I'm worried I'm going to keep doing it, and, and, how do we name this, and how do we see this, and

Linda: I think the most we can do, Racquel, is be open to the possibility that we are, because even, because I can't even say that I will do no more harm because even with the best of intentions, I can't guarantee that what I do is not, um, is not perceived as such by another person. I can't, but I *can* stay humble, keep learning, make mistakes, learn again, listen, seek feedback from people who have, um, I think it's, uh, Moreton-Robinson spoke about, uh, wrote about, uh, Australia and the Aboriginal experience there, and that which has been invisible to us, she referred to it as *hypervisible* to anyone who has been oppressed. Like it is there in their faces all the time. So I think for you and me, um, it's being open to, to that feedback, and, um, I think that, and we need to do it; we need to do it and make mistakes and get up and do it again because people who are marginalized, people who are racialized cannot keep carrying the load. Not if we want a humane world, not if we are, not if we want a one-world humanity. And that's certainly

what I would like my kids to experience more and I think about, you know, next generations. I would love to see that, so, we can't know would be my answer.