



Unsettled Histories: Transgressing History Education Practice in New Brunswick, Canada

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we examine national trends in Canadian history education with regard to decolonising history education and how those trends have been manifested in the context of the province of New Brunswick's Anglophone education system. We begin with outlining three key characteristics of Canadian history education: it has been assimilationist and destructive for the languages, cultures, and collective memories of Indigenous Peoples; it has turned in recent years to an emphasis on teaching historical thinking; and there is an ongoing scholarly and professional debate in Canada about the best way to include attention to Indigenous Peoples and their history in Canadian schools. We show how these trends have been and are present in New Brunswick and argue that unsettling traditional approaches to history education involves rethinking approaches to historical content and processes as well as taking seriously the capacity of young people to engage deeply with the past.

KEYWORDS

Canada, History education, Indigenous Peoples, Historical thinking, Assimilation, Critical pedagogy

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Introduction

During the 2009 Massy Lectures, Wade Davis addressed a large crowd at the University of Toronto on the subject of Indigenous and ancient wisdoms in the modern world. The well known professor and anthropologist from the University of British Columbia was articulating an evaluative response to questions he had often received throughout his career: What does it matter if traditional cultures and belief systems disappear around the world? What impact does the loss of another culture somewhere else in the world, through assimilation and extinction, have on life, say, growing up in Canada?

A decade later, the need to articulate a response to these questions should appear unnecessary, especially given Canada's truth, reconciliation, and healing process and the subsequent steps being taken across the country to both support and implement the 94 Calls to Action put forth by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools (TRC) (2015). Governments, post-secondary colleges and universities, as well as public education institutions, have slowly begun responding to the TRC's recommendations. However, as Davis expressed with concern that evening, and of particular relevance for history education, "if someone needs to ask the question, can he or she possibly be expected to understand the answer?" (Davis, 2009, p. 165).

While public debates in Canada regarding Indigenous knowledge systems, wisdom, and ways of being may well be predicated on the idea that cultures ebb and flow in and out of existence, a perceived consequence of the arc of developing civilizations over time, attitudes of ambivalence are often perpetuated by those who have not had to endure cultural assimilation, racism, or systemic abuse. The persistent myth of Canada, for example, as "a young, modern society, free from the old hierarchies, cultural prejudices and embedded traditions of the Old World... a classless, meritocratic and democratic society, open to newcomers and to new ideas" (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 162), operates as a privileged sentiment often presented with nationalistic sincerity. A recent Prime Minister, for example, stated, apparently without irony, that "Canada has no history of colonialism" (Vancouver Sun, 2009, n.p.).

It is this privileged ambivalence and mythic nationalistic sincerity that should offer collective concern. Given the current climate of public history debates in Canada and around the world, it is important to assess how prepared public education and teachers of social studies and history are to deal with discussions about decolonization and contested histories with young people. Additionally, it is important to address the efficacy of recent trends in history education as part of a collective response to individuals asking *why does this matter?*

In seeking to address that question, we agree with Clark and Sears (2020, p. 262) who "contend that the injustices of the past both in terms of the experiences of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and many other parts of the world, and in how their history has been portrayed or ignored, in academic and public history, mandate separate and substantial attention to Indigenous perspectives in history education." This article is meant to contribute to that aspect of conversations about the theoretical underpinnings of history education by examining a specific temporal context.

New Brunswick, the focus of our paper, is the only officially bilingual province in Canada, with dual Francophone and Anglophone systems of education. As well, there are numerous community operated First Nation¹ schools that have evolved in the wake of the federally-run Indian Day, Industrial, and Residential School systems. In this paper, we examine national trends in history education and how they have been applied in the context of New Brunswick's Anglophone system. Specifically, we explore the adequacy of attention being given to decolonizing history education. We are non Indigenous, Settler, English speakers who have benefited from living in a colonial context that privileges our background and perspectives. As such, we do not claim to represent the perspectives of the peoples of the Wabanaki Confederacy, Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik and Passamaquoddy, who have occupied the territory about which we write from time immemorial.

We are, however, experienced history educators seeking to write in the spirit of reconciliation called for in the report of the TRC (2015).

In what follows we examine policy, curricula, and practice to explore the question: is decolonizing history education in New Brunswick possible under current educational realities? We begin by outlining national trends in history education in Canada before providing some context to New Brunswick. We then turn to analyzing the application of these trends to New Brunswick with specific attention to how Indigenous perspectives, histories, and contemporary issues are addressed in curricula and practice. Finally, we offer ideas for moving forward and explore how expanding critical history education opportunities alongside Indigenous perspectives may provide the best vehicle to support decolonization in New Brunswick history education.

The Canadian Context

Canada is a settler colonial country with a history of complex relationships between and among Indigenous peoples, European settler populations, African-Canadians, and more recent immigrant minorities from around the globe. Kymlicka (2007) argues that struggling to work out these relationships has been “central to Canadian history” (p. 39). As part of that struggle the Canadian state has, he contends, developed a unique institutional response to diversity with regard to three classes of minorities: Indigenous Peoples, French Canadians, and immigrant/ethnic minorities. Within this framework the experiences of African-Canadians has been largely muted. According to Afua Cooper (2006) “The erasure of Black people and their history is consistent with the general behaviour of the official chroniclers of the country’s past... bulldozed and ploughed over, slavery in particular ... erased from its memory. This in a country where the enslavement of Black people was institutionalized and practised for the better part of three centuries” (p. 7). Any comprehensive examination of colonialism and decolonization in Canadian education would require an examination of the experience of African Canadians, as well as peoples of other backgrounds often brought to, or allowed into, the country to serve the interests of European colonizers. In response to current trends in policy and practice within the Canadian state, and due to the limitations imposed by an article length treatment of the subject, we have focused our article on Indigenous Peoples. Readers should be aware this is only part of the story of colonialism in Canada.

Recently, for a range of reasons but largely due to the report released by the TRC (2015), there has been significant focus by Canadian governments on the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the Canadian state. The former Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, established the TRC following his national apology on behalf of Canada where he admitted, “Two primary objectives of the residential school system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture” (CTV News, 2008, n.p.). While the last of these federally supported schools, and residences, closed in the 1990s, the current government says it has made implementing the Calls to Action of the Commission, and reconciliation between Indigenous and Settler Peoples more generally, a key priority (Government of Canada, 2019).

Justice Murray Sinclair, the Chair of the Commission, commenting on the horrific history of abuse and cultural degradation described in the report said, “Education is what got us into this mess . . . but education is the key to reconciliation” (Watters, 2015, n.p.). Flowing from this, a number of the 94 Calls to Action set out by the commission are related to education generally and several of those have to do with history education. Table 1 provides a summary of the latter.

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

- Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students . . .

63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

- Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect

See the full set of calls to action at:

http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

Table 1: Selected calls to action from the TRC

In Canada administrative and legal authority for education is constitutionally delegated to the provinces and territories rather than the federal government. Some provinces have taken steps to improve curriculum and teaching in this area, while others lag behind. In Alberta, for example, all social studies curricula have to pay substantial attention to both francophone and Aboriginal perspectives across a range of topics and issues covered (Alberta Education, 2005). New Brunswick, the province where we work and on which this article is focused, is taking steps to initiate new programs in this area but those are much less developed than in Alberta. This kind of variation is typical across the country.

Having said that, there are three national trends that are important for contextualizing our discussion of history education in New Brunswick. There is not space for a detailed exploration of these here, but in brief they include:

- Canadian education in general, and history education in particular, has been assimilationist and destructive for Indigenous Peoples. Mi'kmaq scholar, Marie Battiste (1998; 2013; 2016a; 2016b) has spent her career describing and documenting what she calls *cognitive imperialism* in Canadian schooling. She describes this as “whitewashing the mind as a result of forced assimilation” (2016b, p. 2). Similarly, Clark (2007) traces the history of how Indigenous Peoples have been dealt with in school history textbooks across Canada. She concludes by arguing:

The narrative in Canadian history textbooks is overwhelmingly one of progress—progress in taming the wilderness and the people who lived in it at the time of European arrival; progress in establishing orderly (European) systems of law and government; progress in building efficient networks of transportation, communication and trade. (p. 111)

Consistent with this, since the nineteenth century history education in Canada “has been dominated by an authoritative, colonial, nation-building narrative intended to instil nationalistic identity and patriotism” (Gibson & Case, 2019, p. 255).

- The past twenty years has seen a revolution in approaches to history education in schools. In Canada and around the world educators are embracing a new approach to teaching and learning which includes knowing historical information but moves beyond that to focus on developing historical thinking. There are a number of specific frameworks for historical thinking, but common to them all is an emphasis on developing student competencies with the key disciplinary processes of historical work – students are expected not only to know what historians know, but also how historians know (Lévesque, 2008; Seixas, 2004). The

approach to historical thinking delineated by Seixas and Morton (2013) is the dominant one in provincially mandated curricula across Canada.

- There has been vigorous scholarly debate in Canada about the best way to include attention to Indigenous Peoples and their history in Canadian schools. Central to these debates is the question about whether traditional, disciplinary approaches to teaching history, such as those embodied in historical thinking approaches, are in and of themselves colonialist in that they are grounded in a Eurocentric epistemology. Indigenous scholars and others have made the argument that it takes much more than a change of topics to Indigenize the curriculum, change must also include a reframing of the nature of knowledge itself. Battiste (2016b) puts it this way:

Since the 1970s provincial education authorities have taken great strides to include multiculturalism, heritage and treaty rights, and human rights in research, policy reform and inclusive educational practices. But education has not yet transformed the social constructions of Eurocentrism. (p. 3)

Some argue that historical thinking is grounded in these Eurocentric knowledge constructions and “imposes a settler grammar over the study of the past” (Cutrara, 2018, p. 253). Others make the case that “the significant and important changes that history educators must undertake to address the TRC’s Calls to Action can be implemented without radical epistemological restructuring of the discipline of history, as some would suggest” (Gibson & Case, 2019, p. 253). The debates are vigorous and by no means close to being settled.

All three of these national trends – a tradition of assimilationist and patriotic approaches to history education; a recent move toward historical thinking as an organizing framework for history teaching and learning; and a growing commitment to address Indigenous history in the context of contentious debates about how best to do that – provide context for our discussion of history education in New Brunswick.

The New Brunswick Context

Consistent with the settler colonial fabric that provides the contours of Canadian society, New Brunswick is not isolated from the enduring realities of European imperialism and colonization. The contemporary arrangement of reserve communities in present day New Brunswick and displacement of First Nation families is rooted in deliberate efforts to undermine Indigenous sovereignty, culture, language, treaties, and ancestral lands.

The original inhabitants of the territory, the Mi’kmaq, Wolastoqiyik, and Passamoquoddy, have lived on these lands from time immemorial well before the arrival of European settlers in the early 1500s and continue to do so. According to hereditary Mi’kmaq chief, Stephen Augustine (2016), ceremonial friendship treaties were established early with European settlers forming the foundation of relations today. However, as Augustine explains:

We did not surrender our sovereignty or our land. We negotiated peace and friendship, allowing various European powers to create settlements on our shores and share in the vast resources ... the treaties were never understood as a surrender of our lands or of our Aboriginal rights. Actually, the treaties that we negotiated with the English in the 18th century had as their purpose recognition and guarantees of our Indigenous rights. (p. 17)

Peace and Friendship Treaties evolved in the 1700s as an attempt to maintain just relations, collective security, and to address the rapid influx and encroachment of Europeans due to colonial wars. However, these agreements “were not land-surrender treaties, nor were they treaties agreeing to relocation ... they were about mutual respect, mutual peace and mutual prosperity” (Palmater, 2016, p. 24).

After Canada became a confederated Dominion in 1867, the task of working through the perimeters of these relations within a newly established nation among many Indigenous nations passed from the British Crown to the Government of Canada. As the pattern of encroachment, re-settlement, forced relocation, and conflict with Indigenous Peoples expanded across the central, western, and northern portions of the country, negotiating treaty agreements was no longer a choice but a necessary condition of survival for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. The numbered treaties that exist in the central and western parts of the country are the outcome of this colonial expansionism. Historian James Daschuk argues the treaties “became the means by which the state subjugated the treaty Indian population” (p. 125). According to retired Supreme Court Chief Justice Beverly McLaughlin, what unfolded during this period is nothing short of a “cultural genocide” (*Globe and Mail*, 2015, n.p.).

As treaties of peace and friendship in Wabanaki territory were developed within the context of mutual respect, peace, and prosperity, they are unique in that they were negotiated without explicit conditions of surrendering territory. Consequently, the historical context of present-day New Brunswick has much to offer broader dialogues and debates regarding decolonization, education, and national historical narratives. Implementing the TRC’s 94 Calls to Action, particularly as it relates to Indigenous epistemologies as part of historical learning, is especially important in a region where treaties, Indigenous rights, and settler-colonial histories are poorly understood by the public and education system at large. If there is any agreement to be found, many see education as a critical pathway forward in addressing the unsettled past.

National trends in history education, the perpetuation of New Brunswick operating as a settler-colonial territory, and issues such as those addressed by Wade Davis offer an important point of departure in exploring the current state of critical history education in schools (Seixas, 2004). This raises important questions such as, are we prepared to ask critical questions about ourselves and the sites we mediate in our lives? Moreover, as the foci of education, how are public pedagogies supporting young people as active agents of historical discourse and learning? In understanding what is at stake, is there any urgency to a growing international concern that when it comes to learning complex histories “little is taught or learned in schools” (Low-Beer 1986, p. 113 in Sheehan, 2012, p.107)?

For Wabanaki Peoples living in present-day New Brunswick – Mi’kmaq, Wolastoqiyik, and Passamaquoddy – the array of experience related to undermined knowledge systems, languages, and cultural operates as an enduring contemporary reality (Battiste, 2016a). Inter-generational trauma, systemic racism, and the persistent exposure to language loss and the threat of cultural extinction has not lessened with time. While the current decolonization efforts have expanded the dialogue, these realities are stubbornly fixed and ubiquitous.

Scholarship in historical thinking demonstrates young people’s capacity for developing significant knowledge and skills about the past and other aspects of social phenomena (Brophy & Alleman, 2006; Barton & Levstik, 2004, 2008; Wineburg, 2018). Brophy and Alleman (2006), for example, argue that “primary-grade students are interested to learn a much greater range of social studies content than many educators give them credit for” (p. 433). However, social studies and history education, particularly at the elementary level, has been hampered by being considered a low priority with a number of structural conditions flowing from and including virtually no professional learning opportunities as well as subpar curricula and resources (Sears, 2018).

As it relates to current trends unfolding in history education in Canada, the persistent belief that “children and adolescents are not capable of something so cognitively demanding” (Barton, 2012, p. 198) forms the foundation of a much broader context confronting the experiences of young people when learning about complex histories in school. While developing the necessary cognitive dissonance needed to recognize and trouble the operation of official histories is itself a difficult task for teachers, decolonization requires constant, and repeated, exposure to those realities to enhance conceptual understanding.

As disciplinary history methods continue to draw increased attention in provincial and territorial social studies and history curricula across Canada, it is important to ensure Indigenous epistemologies regarding historical learning are not hampered by what scholars have identified as “the (over) proceduralism of historical thinking” (Ng-A-Fook & Smith, 2017, p. 66) and potential settler grammar (Cutrara, 2018) disciplinary history is capable of reinforcing. This is a sound critique and cause for concern, especially given the limits of disciplinary understanding among many teachers assigned to teach history.

Unsettling Histories

Although there has been considerable effort over the past decade to revise social studies and history curricula, provincial governments across Canada have long been plagued by curricula and mandated textbooks with an affinity for silencing, promoting historical erasures, and perpetuating racist stereotypes of Indigenous Peoples. When Chief Dan George offered his *Lament for Confederation* in July 1967, in British Columbia, as a response to events celebrating Canadian Confederation, his critique of settler colonialism involved identifying history textbooks as an enduring source of both racism and colonial power (Carleton, 2011). George’s challenge to the embedded racist stereotyping of Indigenous Peoples in textbooks was quickly followed by scholarly and political works, including *Teaching Prejudice: A Content Analysis of Social Studies Textbooks Authorized for Use in Ontario* (McDiarmid & Pratt, 1971) and *The Shocking Truth About Indians in Textbooks!* (Manitoba Indian Brotherhood, 1974) among many others who have since offered important critiques on the representation of Indigenous Peoples and national myths. Recently, Cree scholar Dwayne Donald (2011) pointed out that because “the significance of colonialism as a social, cultural, and educative force has not yet been meaningfully contemplated” both the historic and contemporary “learned habits of disregard” (p. 91) continue to persist despite efforts at educational reform.

In 1952, a decade prior to Chief Dan George’s *Lament for Confederation*, the Province of New Brunswick, published *New Brunswick and Its People: The Biography of a Canadian Province* (MacNutt & Trueman, 1952). As described by its authors, the purpose of the publication was to provide information about the history of the province, designed to assist those wanting to know more about regional history.

In keeping with many textbook accounts on nation formation in Canada, the publication followed a linear progressive scheme that traced New Brunswick’s “birth”, through “childhood”, onto “adolescence”, and finally to “maturity” marking the “steady and well-founded progress made in the economic and social life of New Brunswick” (1952, p. 46). In the first chapter, simply called *Birth*, commentary is offered on early explorers to the region with specific focus on Samuel de Champlain, the French-English rivalry, the British conquest, and the Acadien Expulsion in the 1750s. This is followed by a chapter titled *Childhood* describing the Pre-Loyalist, the Royal Proclamation of 1763, the Revolutionary War in the United States, the coming of the Loyalist as the “foundation of the province” (p. 19), and the War of 1812. The third chapter *Adolescence* describes the development of natural resources, boundary disputes with the United States, Crown lands, and the building of railways, before the final section titled *Maturity* shifts to a discussion of Confederation in 1867 and “religious and educational development” as markers of the province’s “coming of age” (n.p.).

Propagated as an abridged history of New Brunswick, the text performs the work of historical silence, erasure, and racism. Where there is mention of Indigenous Peoples, it is done so under the heading *Before the White Man Came* where the authors provide a few paragraphs regarding the territories and its people prior to the arrival of Europeans, offering little context to the rich and complex histories, traditions, languages, and cultures of the Wabanaki only to say that “they have left little except their names and their legends” (1952, p. 4).

Few details are given by the authors regarding the full impact of the Indian Act² on Indigenous Peoples living in the region nor is there mention of the government’s compliance in using

education and federally-run Indian Residential and Day Schools as a tool, in what Indian Affairs Annual Reports describe, as emancipating children from a perceived condition of ignorance and superstitious blindness.³ Of course, neglected are any discussions directing attention to centuries of colonial violence, broken promises, and failed treaty relations. Also missing is any outward sense of the accomplishments and valued contributions of First Nations.

This invisibility continues to be normalized in public narrative schemes today, as are other simplistic representations of Indigenous people as ‘warriors’, ‘exotic’, ‘problems’, ‘protestors’, and ‘uniquely spiritual’, a pattern that emerges in education curricula and in textbook depictions used in schools across the country (Clark, P. 2007). According to Aboriginal educator Susan Dion (2000), fundamental to understanding these racist stereotypes and embedded assumptions is a recognition that “there is far more to being First Nations than beads and feathers and that our identity is not something that can be pulled on and off like a pair of jeans” (p. 354). Apart from tropes positioning Indigenous people as other, relationally to dominant society, Dion (2004) notes that spaces need to be reclaimed where “Canadians are called upon to begin the work required to face a shared history that requires responsible attention” (p. 74).

Government sanctioned textbooks are not complex histories but often function as dominant narrative schemes acting to conceal the past rather than to reveal its complexities. By offering simplistic understandings of the past to create notions of insider/outside, they involve discursive tools to mix history, memory, and myth to communicate what Hobsbawm (1990) called “the nation’s programmatic mythology” (p. 6). The mythology described above can be easily traced throughout early and contemporary history texts in the public domain and in schools, memorials, museums, place names, and geography throughout New Brunswick.

Settler-colonial histories in New Brunswick have persisted as exclusionary *progressive* tropes of nation building focused on the legacy of British Empire Colonialism and the adoption of British institutions and practices, what Battiste and Semaganis (2002) have described as a form of “cognitive imperialism” (p. 93). Battiste (2013) points out that this white-washing of the mind has given licence to “dominant English languages and European discourse” (p. 26) further diminishing Indigenous languages and knowledges, perpetuating a cycle of systemic discontinuity, trauma, and settler-colonial violence.

New Brunswick’s programmatic colonial mythology persists on multiple levels in both public and private discourse revealing the need to help young people makes sense of how these long-standing structures of colonization persist. Failing to give students access to complex analytical processes and re-claimed histories hampers the development of important cognitive tools needed for productive social and political engagement, and for critical historical evaluations. The idea of living in a post-colonial society is largely a romantic notion and it will remain just that unless public pedagogies re-imagine and explicitly recognize that “not everyone enters our common spaces under conditions of equality” (Stanley, 2006, p. 47).

While contemporary narratives have shifted with policy and practice over the years to include the voices of Francophones, they often fail to adequately address difficult histories and policies of the past impacting contemporary languages, cultures, and identities. While other provinces, such as in Alberta, have mandated attention to these perspectives throughout the K-12 curriculum, New Brunswick provides limited opportunities and resources for teachers to do so. Cutrara (2018) observes that even when attempts by teachers are made to integrate the perspectives of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis into history classrooms many “are not necessarily moving beyond simply telling these stories and toward a more complex exploration of colonialism in Canada” (p. 253). Similarly, Scott and Gani (2018) have found significant, ongoing resistance among teachers when encouraged to provide sustained attention to Indigenous perspectives in social studies classrooms.

Where schools do offer direct opportunities for teaching about complex histories and Indigenous issues, there is little evidence to suggest they are used to contest, offer nuance, or to unsettle. Rather, classrooms often focus on material cultural history or function as spaces for information gathering without the expressed goal of decolonizing and debating the contested past.

According to Dion (2009), even when Indigenous counter-narratives are provided to support classrooms, teachers and students often seem unaware of their ongoing positionality and attachment to dominant narratives that serve to silence and deligitimize Indigenous experience.

Difficulties within New Brunswick are compounded by a paucity of research illustrating what exactly is being taught and what students are actually learning in social studies and history classrooms. Although research in citizenship and diversity education in New Brunswick (Hamm et al. 2018; Peck et al. 2008) has revealed noticeable gaps in student understandings of ethnic and cultural diversity, there is limited scholarship illustrating how classroom history pedagogy is unfolding. Anna Clark's (2009) comparative research on Canadian and Australian students is the only clear example in which students and teachers alike are demanding greater agency and complexity when learning and teaching about the past.

Indigenous scholars have rightfully challenged practices they perceive are solely focused on "teaching history well, pastoral care, and citizenship education" (Dion, 2009, p. 178). As a result, it remains unclear the extent to which social studies and history education in New Brunswick achieves what it mandates, supports the needs of teachers, prioritizes Indigenous epistemologies and historical perspectives, and attends to the embedded prior knowledges of young people with an array of cultural backgrounds and contexts.

Illusions and Cemented History Education Practice

In 2010 the New Brunswick began infusing elementary social studies and high school history curricula with the conceptual and procedural knowledge of historical thinking (Seixas, 2006; Seixas and Morton 2013). In Canada, historical thinking is primarily filtered through the influential work of Peter Seixas' six big concepts (establishing historical significance, using primary evidence, identifying continuity and change, analyzing cause and consequence, taking historical perspectives, and understanding the ethical dimension of historical interpretations) and has been widely accepted as an approach that helps young people developed enhanced historical consciousness and greater conceptual understanding.

While debate about reconceptualizing learning history has continued in scholarship, with some Indigenous scholars arguing "the closer we move toward historical thinking... the further we will get from answering the TRC's Calls to Action" (Cutrara, 2018. p. 254), teachers have primarily remained on the periphery of these dialogues in large part due to standards of professional practice, limited disciplinary expertise, and lack of access to pertinent history education literature. While Sandwell and Von Heyking (2014) argue that many educators are beginning to demonstrate abilities in engaging students in the complexities of historical learning, anecdotal evidence suggests that various forms of "celebratory heritage" (Seixas, 2014. p. 14) approaches persist in New Brunswick schools.

Far from building capacity to support competencies for critically evaluating historical interpretations, decolonization, and exploring concepts such as nation, culture and identity, celebratory heritage uses iconic representations and stirring celebrations to foster a strong sense of national identity and social cohesion amongst citizens of a nation state. Celebratory heritage has its place where and when opportunities are provided to critique its practice, influence, and impacts on people's lives. However, the unintended consequence of celebratory heritage without critical reflexivity is that it often perpetuates settler colonial racist attitudes and undermines the efforts of decolonization.

Some updated curricula in New Brunswick encourage students and teachers to learn about the past by developing historical thinking competencies and understandings of Indigenous societies through inquiry. Given the limited dedicated time afforded history education, it is unclear what actually is being taught and what students are learning. Moreover, it is alarming that the New Brunswick K-12 social studies curriculum does not outline any detailed Indigenous epistemologies, world views, and perspectives, how they differ globally, in what context, and why understanding these various knowledge systems is relevant for decolonizing historical learning.

At the elementary and middle school levels, curricula overviews and outcomes do offer declarative statements highlighting what students “will do”. For example, the grade 5 social studies curriculum overview reads:

Students will examine the roles of historians and archaeologists in investigating the past and will use historical inquiry to consider how primary sources are discovered, evaluated, and used to construct historical knowledge. In studying this, students will gain an understanding of how we learn about the past... First Nations and Inuit societies in what later became Atlantic Canada are the focus for exploring decision-making in societies. Interactions between societies is examined through interactions between the British and French and between the British and French and First Nations and Inuit (New Brunswick Department of Education, 2013, p. 37).

However, apart from traditional representational tropes of Indigenous people, there is limited evidence to suggest that teachers are able to manage what curricula prescribes. Nor is there any realistic expectation of how students are examining the disciplinary roles of historians and archaeologists while also developing critical historical understandings of the complex socio-historical interactions of European colonizers, First Nations and Inuit.

In grade 4, the curriculum is focused exclusively on the concept *Exploration* suggesting that “students will develop both an understanding of what exploration is, and the various aspects of exploration including stories of impact on both the people exploring and the people, place, or idea bring explored” (New Brunswick Department of Education, 2012, p. 32). However, framed in this way poses the risk that students will merely explore romanticized official narratives of Canadian history without being encouraged to unearth the enduring impacts of colonization. Nor is there any outward sense that Indigenous epistemologies are utilized to deepen conversations about the embedded notions of exploration within the Canadian context.

At the middle school level, grade 6 and 8 social studies curricula provide a complete erasure of Indigenous peoples’ cultures, experiences, and histories living in Canada, and there is limited emphasis on the impacts of imperialism and globalization impacting Indigenous societies and cultures around the world. For example, in grade 6 one of the outcomes articulates that “students will be expected to illustrate an understanding of how cultures from around the world have contributed to the development of Canada’s multi-cultural mosaic” (New Brunswick Department of Education, 2006, p. 25). Unfortunately, the embedded discourse simply reinforces Canada in the narrowest sense as “a classless, meritocratic and democratic society, open to newcomers and to new ideas” (Kymlicka, 2003. p. 162) and does little in addressing decolonization as Indigenous scholars prescribe.

More than any other level, grade 7 appears to offer the most genuine promise for meaningful engagement in debates about the operation of colonization, its history and continued persistence in New Brunswick and Canada. Focused entirely on the concept of “Empowerment” this level marks the first time that a direct reference to the Indian Act appears anywhere in social studies curricula. Additionally, unit overviews articulate how Indigenous people have been undermined economically, politically, culturally, and socially in Canada.

One outcome in particular expects students to “Explain how the expansion and development of Canada during the 1870s and early 1880s affected various peoples and regions” while another asks students to “evaluate the conditions of everyday life for diverse peoples living in British North America in the mid-1800s, including Aboriginal peoples, African-Canadians and Acadians” (New Brunswick Department of Education, 2005, pp. 22-23).

However, one finds the outcomes do very little to trouble the concept of ‘nation’ within a settler colonial context, nor is the representation of Canada as an expanding and developing nation directly critiqued for debate and discussion. Additionally, nowhere is there a discussion about what nationhood means to Indigenous people within a historical and contemporary perspective. The textbook approved by the Government of New Brunswick for use alongside the grade 7 social studies curriculum does provide substantial opportunities to explore a variety of important in-

depth themes related to Indigenous, African-Canadian, Acadian, and ethnic-minority experiences and issues. Unfortunately, like many racist representations noted in mandated textbooks, the full effect is that contemporary resources fail to disrupt romanticized and Euro-centric Canadian nation-building attitudes, myths, and narrative schemes that have dominated over the past century.

As Cutrara (2018) and Dion (2009) suggest regarding history teaching practice, in these circumstances without adequate resources, time, and professional development opportunities teachers employ story-telling and information gathering techniques rather than staging classrooms as debates and spaces for open critique. Additionally, schools and teachers resort to utilizing guest speakers and periodic school-wide events to highlight material culture, ethnic diversity, and multi-culturalism without addressing the inequities that exist within and among these relations. Without balancing these opportunities with meaningful discussions about conflict and violence inherent in the past and present, and how we come to interpret these histories, we do young people an injustice in preparing them for the challenges they will face in their lives and to the goals of decolonizing education.

Outside the individual discretion of teachers across the New Brunswick K-12 Anglophone system, the only course devoted entirely to studying Indigenous histories and perspectives is a grade 12 elective Indigenous Studies course, currently being revised. However, despite its most recent iteration, employing an optional course at the very moment young people are shifting into their adult lives may not be the most productive strategy in which to respond to the TRC's Calls to Action. Scholarship makes clear that these opportunities must occur at much earlier grade levels when young people are prime ready for exploring debates and discussions over the contested terrain of complex histories.

According to the grade 11 Modern History curriculum:

Students need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to become active citizens ... and if students are to become individuals who will, in an informed way, be engaged and make a difference in their community and/or their world, they will need history instruction consistent with best practices and current research for teaching and learning ... students will need to be able to critically analyze social, political, and economic forces that have shaped the past and present and apply those understandings in planning for the future. This is why history, whether as a part of social studies, or as a separate course, is an essential part of every NB students' education (New Brunswick Department of Education, 2012, p. 1-2).

Beyond the curated language of New Brunswick social studies and history curricula, limited understanding remains regarding how critical history opportunities are being offered as "an essential part of every NB students' education" (New Brunswick Department of Education, 2012, pp. 1-2). Certainly, important questions persist over how decolonizing history education is being treated as an essential feature of every students' experiences from K-12, nor is it clear how teachers are adequately prepared and supported to use Indigenous perspectives in the classroom.

If national trends correlate in any manner to the New Brunswick context, it is highly probable that the general low-priority given to social studies in Canadian education is impacting pathways to decolonization and the abilities of teachers to utilize Indigenous epistemologies, and the tools of historical thinking, to support students. Some researchers suggest that difficulties translating trends in history education and Indigenous scholarship into classroom practice has been slowed by the culture of professional teaching in Canada. Recently, a well-respected New Brunswick social studies teacher discerned:

Few teachers engage in practices in their own lives that reflect historical thinking – much to the same degree that we teachers do not think critically – we are institutionalized to a degree – we jump at the sound of a bell – we walk through the same doorframe at the same time every day. Our routines are often established for us. It is difficult to create another culture. One of the few times

that we pretend to be applying the skills of reasoning is at the negotiation of a new contract (Morton, 2012, p. 206).

Compounding this problem is Barton's (2012) concern with how children and young people continue to be perceived as incapable of handling the nuances of historical thinking and learning. So too is his suggestion that "in too many classrooms students are not provided with the scaffolding necessary to participate in the complexities of historical understanding; instead, the subject either is ignored altogether or students are simply asked to absorb settled and unproblematic narratives" (p. 198).

In these circumstances, missed opportunities to develop nuanced capacities for unsettling and challenging difficult histories become cemented as commonplace practice. Gibson and Case (2019) observe that it may be counter-productive to increase curricular resources and learning supports unless "non-Aboriginal teachers are knowledgeable and open-minded enough to sensitively teach about the complexities of Indigenous perspectives and interpretations of history" (p. 277). We would be well advised to heed these warnings; failing to do so is not an option anymore.

Conclusion: Finding a Pathway

Battiste (2013) admits that "any attempt to decolonize education and actively resist colonial paradigms is a complex and daunting task" (p.186). She insists that:

Educators must reject colonial curricula that offer students a fragmented and distorted picture of Indigenous peoples, and offer students a critical perspective of the historical context that created that fragmentation. In order to effect change, educators must help students understand the Eurocentric assumptions of superiority with the context of history and to recognize the continued dominance of these assumptions in all forms of contemporary knowledge (p. 186).

For this to occur, efforts at disrupting and resisting dominant Eurocentric pedagogies must seriously consider "education within the context of Indigeneity and Indigenous knowledges, as well as opening up opportunities for critically examining the various complex layers and tensions inherent in historical and colonial relations" (Styres, 2017, p. 195). However, some Indigenous scholars have argued that the writing back to empire approach "has not produced changes in the way history is understood and taught in schools... as historians and history teachers [want] to find common ground with historiographies that appear worlds apart" (Marker, 2011, p. 98).

Although some scholars are wary of the potential rift that exists between Indigenous epistemologies and disciplinary approaches to historical learning (Cutrara 2018), this does not necessarily imply a chasm that cannot be bridged. While Gibson and Case (2018) seek dialogue for finding common ground, Marker (2019) argues that if children and youth can come to understand and become aware of the centrality of land and ecology in "Indigenous mindscapes as they learn about the history of colonization that shattered sustainable ways of life" (p. 197) there is the potential for a substantial paradigm shift in educational opportunities.

For this reason we are increasingly drawn to expanding and theorizing the concept of historical-mindedness. Shifting away from the 'settler grammar' many Indigenous scholars are concerned with in contemporary iterations of disciplinary frameworks of historical thinking, Osborne (2006) describes historical-mindedness as "a way of viewing the world that the study of history produces... it is the result of the enlargement of experience that arises from the study of other times and other places [and] it is the ability to situate the immediate concerns of the present in some kind of comparative perspective and to see the world as it appears to others" (p. 125). In other words, historical mindedness offers a critical encounter with the world and our place in it asking us specifically to evaluate "ourselves and our capabilities as historically situated human beings" (Osborne, 2006, p. 128). Addressing the primary weakness of historical thinking, "its attitude towards knowledge...which it variously ignores, takes for granted, or treats as

instrumental to the attainment of historical thinking” (Osborne, 2006, p. 125) historical-mindedness combines a concern for narrative, situated context, and knowledge systems that has the potential to reconfigure the goals and purposes of studying history, our relationship to community and cultural ecologies, and perhaps revising our thinking about diversity and cross-cultural sustainable living. This opens space for the consideration of Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies in the classroom.

Importantly, additional theorizing of historical-mindedness may provide increased attention and engagement with oral histories in a manner that historical thinking approaches do not easily accommodate. Noting the absence of oral history education in current efforts to prioritize disciplinary history, Ng-A-Foot and Smith (2017) suggest that “solely focusing on disciplining the past can work to exclude the narratives of those who have stories to tell that are yet to be reflected in “official” textbook versions of Canadian history” (p. 66). The authors go further in arguing that oral history education could offer “a pedagogical site for teachers and students to challenge grand narratives that are still reproduced through the disciplinary techniques for doing history... as a praxis for pushing the limits of historical thinking in education” (p. 66).

We feel this is an important objective to pursue, one that historical-mindedness is particular well-positioned to expand. As oral narratives are positioned prominently in Indigenous history epistemologies, it is appropriate that any dialogue focused on decolonization and Indigenizing history education specifically must revisit approaches that could serve, in practice, to do the opposite of its intention. Transgressing history education practice entails “sacrificing some conventional ways of teaching Canadian history” (Marker, 2011, p. 111). Now, more than ever, may be an opportune moment to do just that.

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Endnotes

¹ The Canadian Constitution Act of 1982 recognizes three groupings of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: “the Indian, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada.” First Nations are particular groups from among the “Indian” peoples.

² The Federal legislation governing relations with a significant portion of Canada’s Indigenous Peoples

³ Access to Indian Affairs Annual Reports, 1864-1990, are available online through Library and Archives Canada

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