

TRANSFORMING
THE CANADIAN
HISTORY
CLASSROOM



IMAGINING
A NEW "WE"

SAMANTHA
CUTRARA

Transforming the Canadian History Classroom

Imagining a New “We”

SAMANTHA CUTRARA



UBC Press · Vancouver · Toronto

Contents

Acknowledgments / ix

- 1** Meaningful Learning: Imagining a New “We” / 3
- 2** The Present of Today’s Past: Current Trends and Curriculum / 42
- 3** Students Speak: A Desire for Connected, Complex Canadian History / 65
- 4** Teaching the Others in the Room: Limiting Connection, Removing Complexity / 101
- 5** Meaningful Sites of Teaching: The Need for Time, Space, and Place / 145
- 6** Historic Space: Meaningful Learning in Canadian History / 166

Notes / 203

Works Cited / 207

Index / 240

1

Meaningful Learning Imagining a New “We”

Who do we imagine when we imagine Canada? What do we imagine? Who and what make up Canada’s past? Who and what define Canada’s future?

We can answer these questions from a variety of perspectives, but, as cliché as it sounds, you have to look to the past to understand the future. Perhaps this is why there is so much debate about what and who should be part of the national history curriculum. Formal history education provides a structured basis for imagining a national community, grounded in the past with growth toward the future. “This is who and what Canada is,” curricula seem to assert. “Use this knowledge to invest in our strengths and rectify our weaknesses,” it encourages. When we look at the history of history curriculum in Canada, we can see an evolution in the stories we tell – from allegiance to the British Crown to a critical acknowledgment of our mistakes in the past (Osborne 2000, 2002) – but Canada as a good place, a peaceable place, a place with respect for government and a tolerance for difference, remains a strong metanarrative snaking its way through the learning objectives and expectations across the provinces.

Yet, with a rapidly changing Canadian population and the impetus to answer the calls to action made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Canada is rethinking the stories it tells about itself – the heroes we worship and the events we commemorate – because who and what Canada is is also changing. The 2011 census highlighted that Canadians represent two hundred different ethnicities and that 19 percent

of Canadians identify themselves as a visible minority (Statistics Canada 2013). As a nation growing through immigration (Statistics Canada 2017c), one in five Canadians is foreign born, with over 2 million immigrants making Canada their home since the year 2000. Statistics Canada projects that, by 2031, 30 percent of Canadians will be a visible minority with a mother tongue other than English or French and that 55 percent of these people will be immigrants or the Canadian-born children of immigrants residing in urban centres (Statistics Canada 2010). Visible minority and immigrant populations are generally younger than the population as a whole, with almost 34 percent of the immigrant population between 2006 and 2011 under the age of twenty-four and 19 percent under the age of fourteen (Statistics Canada 2013). Aboriginal populations in Canada are also growing – the fastest-growing population in Canada – due to high birth rates and a greater claim to Aboriginal identity. Aboriginal populations are also young and metropolitan. One-third of Aboriginal people are under the age of fourteen and over half live in metropolitan centres (Statistics Canada 2017a).

These demographics suggest that, following our sesquicentennial, Canadian classrooms, especially in urban centres, will be host to young transnational and (post/neo)colonial populations in ways that could never have been imagined at Canada's Confederation (Statistics Canada 2017b).¹ These youth will have Canadian identities layered with experiences and histories from all over the world. They will come to experience ethnic and cultural diversity as a normal part of being Canadian and will see Canada in the same way they see their own lives – as multilayered, global, networked, and in need of justice. While the vision and enactment of an idealized multicultural Canadian identity is rarely, if ever, perfect, research shows that Canadian youth recognize and take pride in their diverse enactments of Canadian identity. And so, as these youth mature, this pride will challenge the ways concepts and enactments of citizenship, nationality, and belonging in Canada are neither as straightforward nor as connected as they once were imagined to be (Ahmad Ali 2008; Grant 2016; Ostaszewski, Frey, and Johnson 2018; Tastsoglou and Petrinioti 2011; Wenshya Lee and Hébert 2006). Our job in our history classrooms, I venture, is to help students make sense of these experiences and concepts as part of being a *Canadian* – a twenty-first-century transnational and (post/neo)colonial

Canadian – who will work toward greater justice for people on this land and around the world.

However, history and citizenship education in North America has been notorious for promoting a one-dimensional understanding of national belonging that is far from the realities and stories of most young people today (An 2009; Ong 1996; Salinas and Alarcón 2016; Vickery 2016). Canadian history education often reaffirms a vision of Canada as a nation developed through European settlement and commercial trade, with growth based on making progress through the wilderness, gaining independence and freedom through military involvement, and developing a tolerance for multiculturalism. This version of Canada leaves out the violent history of colonialism, the state’s perpetration of continuous racial injustice, and the desire (and actions taken) to make, and keep, Canada white. This version of history fails to complicate stories of colonialism, settlement, and/or migration; it fails to question and complicate the ways gender and sexuality have acted and interacted to frame and define respectability and class; it fails to trace the development of the nation as the development of neo/colonial capitalist expansion; it fundamentally fails to reflect the complex history of the complex world Canadian students are living in. The absence of these histories in how we teach Canadian history means that these stories of colonialism, migration, race, gender, and capitalism fail to be invited in and explored in our classrooms as having a lasting legacy on the present. But it is these stories, these complex and intersectional stories, that frame the lives young people lead today, and, as this book will show, are the stories that young people want taught in schools.

The lack of recognition of how the complexities of the past affect the realities of the present has lasting ramifications for how young people understand their place in the past and future of Canada. Students who do not see their experiences reflected in history have a limited understanding of their self and a sense of disconnectedness with the nation and their peers (Dei 1997; T. Epstein 1998; Létourneau 2004; Levstik 2000). George Dei (1997) found that the absence of Black people in the Canadian narrative contributed “to Black students’ sense of invisibility and lack of status as Canadians,” which directly correlated to the choices Black students made to continue or not continue schooling. As one of Dei’s research participants

said: “It’s like you’re learning about somebody else’s history ... It started to take a toll on me after a while” (138).

At the post-secondary level, Tony Waters (2005) found that students repeatedly stated that the history they learned in their undergraduate history courses was “real” because it discussed conflict and struggle, while the history they learned in high school was “fake” because it was overly patriotic and positive. Waters’s experience indicated that students felt that they had to choose between these two narratives: they were either for or against the national story – they could not be both. In his research with ethnic Estonians recollecting Estonia’s entry into the Soviet Union in 1940, James Wertsch (2000) found that people could carry du(a)el(ing) national histories: the official narrative of the state and the personal narrative that reflected their experiences. People could easily recite the official version of the national story, but Wertsch found that they *believed* the other one, the personal one, the one that aligned with their lived experiences. This finding led Wertsch to question whether it was possible to teach beliefs, as well as knowledge, about history.

While teachers often want to avoid conflict and division in the classroom (Pomson and Ron 1998), these findings suggest that teaching an official and sanitized version of the national story does not actually lead to greater cohesion in the classroom. The dualities of national history – real versus fake, official versus personal – indicate that many histories can be present in the history classroom at the same time and that these histories can be at odds with one another. Not acknowledging the multiplicity of histories that we carry around with us can separate more than bring together and fail to demonstrate how the congruence of narratives that make up the past are the very stories that tell who “we” are in the present. As Jamaican Canadian dub poet D’bi Young (2016) stated at Historica Canada’s 2016 event, *An Evening Celebrating Black Women in Canada*, “issues around racism and sexism and classism and ageism and ableism and homophobia and all of those things, are really about a lack of self-knowledge” – a lack of awareness about who and what have come before and the lack of understanding we may have about the connections we all share. Seeing these connections, understanding these connections, *appreciating* these connections brings us closer to breaking down an “us” versus “them” mentality and getting to a greater a sense of “we” that can take into

account multiple stories and lived experiences as being simultaneously part of the nation.

Yet, as Kent den Heyer and Laurence Abbott (2011, 630) found, for many history educators, the concepts of “we” and “they” in history education “are assumed rather than taken up as the starting points for historical work across the disciplines.” Teacher candidates do not recognize that a grand narrative of Canada exists to homogenize and define “Canadian” by stipulating who and what is part of our national identity and who and what are Other. Because they fail to begin with the grand narrative, teachers also fail to problematize it and thus even solidify it, exacerbating who is “us” and who is “them” in the Canadian nation (den Heyer and Abbott 2011; Létourneau and Moisan 2004). However, it is the very concepts of “we” and “they” embedded in the grand Canadian narrative that need to be interrogated in our transnational and (post/neo)colonial Canada, especially for the transnational and (post/neo)colonial youth in our classrooms today.

When young people look at the world around them, they see populist politics, climate injustice, public health crises, war, displacement, and other structural effects of a world that will provide them with less stability than it did previous generations. We are beginning to see that youth are fighting back and demanding that world leaders be more accountable for the racial, gendered, economic, and environmental inequities that shape our world today (Earl, Maher, and Elliott 2017; Pinter 2018; Pires 2018; Teotonio 2018; Vandermaas-Peeler et al. 2018). These activities will not be confined by national walls but will be networked, digital, and global (Middaugh, Clark, and Ballard 2017). These youth are preparing for this world – these youth *are* this world – and to be successful they need to stand on a solid historical foundation that brings together more than separates. A solid historical foundation that reflects the world students see around them. Not a series of stories that fail to hold weight for the connections and complexities young people embody today.

So I ask: How can Canadian history education better take its place in this conversation? How do we teach Canadian history in ways that prepare today’s youth for enacting change in this world? How do we teach Canadian history in ways that allow transnational and (post/neo)colonial experiences to be understood within Canada? How can we imagine a Canadian identity in the Canadian history classroom that ensures that the world outside the

classroom is contextualized inside the classroom? How can we bring these stories together to speak for a Canadian “we” that comes together to fight against and dismantle national and global systems of inequity? How can we transform the Canadian history classroom to imagine a new “we” that holds space for the multiple ways one can be a Canadian? These are the central questions we, as history educators in the twenty-first century, must answer in both our pedagogies and our classroom practices.

To move forward in Canada, to develop a historically grounded sense of “we” in our history classrooms, to transform who we could be and what we could do in our history education, we need to be in a better position to understand Canada as a multilayered and complex narrative of colonialism, migration, inequity, and resistance. This does not just mean ensuring that a diversity of perspectives is heard, but rather capturing how the *structures* of our nation enable some stories to define how we understand the nation and other stories to be superfluous, or peripheral, to these understandings. The findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC 2015a), for example, have resulted in more Indigenous content in Canadian classrooms, but the Commission was very clear that content inclusion alone will not lead to reconciliation. Rather, reconciliation needs to be understood as the development and ongoing maintenance of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples based on respect for the land and for the people whose epistemologies, cosmologies, and experiences have been grounded in that land for thousands of years. It is a change in the structure of Canadian knowing, committing, and relating to each other and the land that the Commission has advocated for, but the stories that support this change are the ones settlers have been trained not to hear or rather to “evidence” away (Cutrara 2018; Seixas 2012).

The history classroom seems like an ideal place to develop the fodder for a new “we” in Canada, a place to deconstruct the stories we have been told and to find new ways to put them back together again. A place where stories can grow and change, shrink and be replaced, augment and develop who Canada is now and who it could be in the future. A place to put stories back together again in ways that acknowledge how injustice in the past has led to structural exclusion in the present. To put stories back together again in ways that decentre the voices and aims of our country’s founders who tried to legislate away the very cultural and ethnic diversity Canada is

known for today. To put the stories of Canada back together again in ways that provide a foundation for greater social action. To put the stories of Canada back together again in ways that demonstrate how the past is visceral, and present, and courts both the inequity and the resistance we see around us. This is not an impractical and idealistic imagining of Canadian history education, but a transformative one designed for the *student* – not for the nation, or for the history, or for the discipline. To transform the Canadian history classroom is to see history education as being able, and willing, to do something different, to do something radical, for the young people in the room and the ways they can be in this country together.

However, so often when we talk about history education, we focus on *teaching* – on better methods, greater resources, more professional development. This is important – we need to ensure teachers are equipped to do this difficult work in their classrooms – but when we *only* talk about teaching, when we *only* focus on teaching, we fail to focus on *learning*. We fail to focus on students: who they are, what they know, and what they need for the future. When we only focus on the work of the teacher, not on the experience and needs of the student, we can inadvertently slip into what Paulo Freire (2006) calls the “banking” model of education, whereby teachers “deposit” content into students’ heads, as if students were nothing but empty vessels. Another way to think of this is as education for transmission, not transformation (Miller and Sellar 1990). Where education is designed to be repeated by the student, not activated into something new.

When we make the explicit effort to think about *learning* rather than teaching, we can be reminded that the students in our classrooms are people before they are students. They are young Canadians who will inherit the world we are creating. They are not empty vessels waiting to be told the rules of Canadian legitimacy. They are young people interested in understanding the rules of the society they see around them. They are interested in understanding why those rules do not always make sense, how those rules can seem to challenge their own lived experience, and how those rules are not neutral or unchanging. They may also be interested in seeing how those rules can be challenged, sublimated, subverted, re-written, and radicalized. How people like them are in a position to seize these rules, “invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them,” to quote Michel Foucault (1980a, 151).

When we think about learning over teaching in our history classes, we can start seeing how young people are in their history classes waiting to be shown, whether they recognize it or not, that history is possibility, not predetermination (Freire 2004, 59–60), and we, as history educators, can guide them toward this knowledge. If we want our students to be literate in navigating their world, they need to know that their stories, their transnational and (post/neo)colonial stories, are there. And that we recognize the pain in their disavowal. And that these stories are not individual experiences but *national stories*, and to learn them is the work that *all* Canadians have a responsibility to engage in, not just the ones who feel their voices are missing. When we focus on *learning* Canadian history, rather than *teaching* Canadian history, we can provide space for the transformative exploration of the Canadian past to help young people see themselves in the Canadian present and future.

This focus on students and their learning is what I call *meaningful learning* in Canadian history education. Meaningful learning in history education involves history that has significance to students' lives now and in the future, both inside and outside the classroom, framed with interpretations of the past that align with their sense of familial or community history in and for the wider world. This sense of meaningful learning in Canadian history is both affective and political. Ideally, in their learning, students would feel a connection to history and be reaffirmed in their understanding of how complex the world is today. With this knowledge, students can be stirred to make change for a world that has greater justice for themselves and others. This definition draws on Joseph Novak's (2010, 18) definition of meaningful learning as the "constructive integration of thinking, feeling, and acting leading to empowerment for commitment and responsibility." For Novak, meaningful learning requires three things: connection to prior knowledge, meaningful material, and the assent of the learner. He identifies that meaningful learning happens when students have space to negotiate meaning of new, meaningful content in a positive emotional climate (Ausubel, Novak, and Hanesian 1978; Novak 2010), which develops their sense of "I'm okay" and grounds their sense of self in the classroom community (Novak 2010).

While Joseph Novak comes from a learning science background, the idea of "meaningful learning" can also be found in radical and critical

approaches to education, specifically in the work of Freire (2006) and bell hooks (2010). Freire writes that an emancipatory approach to education, a “pedagogy of the oppressed,” is a problem-posing approach to teaching and learning that makes people and their histories the starting point for education. It is education, he writes, that is imbued with a “profound trust in people and their creative power” (2006, 75). bell hooks (2010) also identified the importance of centring people and their experience in her articulation of an “engaged pedagogy” that involves a mutual and interactive relationship between teacher and student, with ongoing dialogue based on trust, confidence, and a belief in democracy. Taken together, these ideas stress the importance of the learner, what they already know, what they need to know to move forward in a healthful and secure manner, and the importance of material that can be discussed and actively explored while doing so. This approach to teaching and learning decentres a canon and decentres the ego of the teacher in favour of the student and their needs for the present and future.

To learn Canadian history *meaningfully*, then, is to connect the past with what one understands about the present, the complex and diverse present, in ways that will have a positive and lasting impact on one’s sense of self. To learn Canadian history *meaningfully* means students come to know themselves in a past that has denied the multiculturalism that is now lauded in the present. To understand what truth and reconciliation means when decolonizing and Indigenizing Canadian culture makes many Canadians, especially many Canadian leaders, uncomfortable. To understand how power and privilege work through present-day remembrance and commemoration practices. A meaningful learning approach to teaching Canadian history means that today’s diverse, transnational, and (post/neo)colonial youth are able to see themselves in the future *and* past of Canada, and that their needs for learning history are integrated in the practice and pedagogy of teaching Canadian history. This transformative approach to history education does not rely on inventing new stories about history, but rather demonstrating the connections we have with the complexity of the past and doing so in ways that demonstrate a care for students as whole and complex Canadians.

Nationalist discourses are designed to define “us” in opposition to “them.” But transforming the history classroom to develop a sense of “we”

is premised on ever-increasing circles of inclusion and connection: the inclusion of the students and histories in the room; the inclusion of controversial and difficult histories as present in our understanding of the past; the inclusion of Indigeneity and ways we have to continue developing relationships of reconciliation; the inclusion of time and space to research and think through what we know and how we know it, along with what we do not know and why we do not know it; the inclusion and care for the Other and acknowledgment of their presence through their structured absence. This transformation is based on an “ethical relationality” that is an “ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other” (Donald 2012, 535).

A relational and connected approach to teaching and learning Canadian history, however, is not an easy fit in today’s curriculum. Over the last decade, Canadian history curricula across Canada have been focused on an approach to teaching and learning history that supports the development of students’ “historical consciousness” through the Benchmarks of Historical Thinking. This approach to history curriculum is more transactional than it is transformative, in that it focuses on the development of rational, skills-based problem solving through the discipline, rather than on personal and social change through a collaborative exploration of the ecological, intuitive, and interrelated conceptions of knowledge (Miller and Seller 1990). Rather than focusing on potentially divisive stories, the historical thinking approach focuses on the questions that “everyone” asks about the world around them – questions such as: How did things get to be where they are today? What group do I belong to and how did we come to be? How do we judge actions of the past? Are things getting better or are they getting worse? What stories should I believe? What stories should we tell? What can I do to make the world better? (Seixas 2006b, 15). Understanding how to think through these questions should be the focus of Canadian history education because, according to Canadian educational theorist Peter Seixas (2006b, 21), “there are too many origins, too many heroes, too many stories” in Canadian history for history education to do otherwise.

However, the questions that Seixas identifies that we *all* share about the world around us are very similar to the questions Justice Murray Sinclair said that Indigenous youth in Canada have been unable to answer because of their violent estrangement from their own histories – questions such as: Where do I come from? Where am I going? Why am I here? Who am I? (Sinclair, Wilson, and Littlechild 2015). The idea that teaching Canadian history should start with everyone having the same questions about the world they live in, and that these questions provide a neutral starting ground for engaging in the disciplinary study of the past, glosses over the fact that history does not affect us all equally and that we do not come, we *cannot* come, to learning history with the same questions either. This presumption of an equal starting ground through these questions conceals the politics in the present and past in ways that are not healthful in students working through, or beyond, them in the study of history.

I make this argument early as a way to position my thinking in the larger landscape of history education in Canada. I explore the history of historical thinking in further detail in Chapter 2, and recognize the ways this thinking is embedded in the fabric of contemporary curriculum. However, given that the historical thinking approach to history curriculum had not been integrated in the curriculum when I conducted my research, the critiques I have of historical thinking (Cutrara 2010, 2012, 2016a, 2018b, 2019) are an *implicit* rather than explicit focus of this book. Instead, the current inquiry and primary-source-focused history curriculum used across Canada can be *complemented* by an approach to pedagogy that places students and their meaningful learning at the centre of how teaching and learning is organized. This complement, this radical visioning of history education, is the focus of this book.

The majority of evidence I use in this book draws on research I conducted in four high school history classrooms in Toronto in 2011. Greater details follow, but, in sum, the purpose of this research was to understand the relationships in a history classroom that supported or curtailed the possibilities for meaningful learning. As I discuss throughout, I found that although students were keen to learn history “meaningfully,” they were presented with content and instruction in their Canadian history classes that had nothing to do with who they were or what they wanted to know. The

Canada they learned about in school was disconnected from the Canada they saw around them, and so students stated, and acted in ways, that demonstrated a “hatred” of Canadian history and Canadian history education.

But what I also saw and heard in these classrooms, and what I highlight in this book, is that these students represented a diverse group of young people trying to make sense of who they were in this place called Canada. They wanted to learn Canadian history in ways that acknowledged and cared for their complex connections to Canada more so than, or at least alongside with, the mainstream story of Canada. Yet these desires were not always seen, acknowledged, or even recognized as valid for understanding Canadian history. Because of the tension that developed from the denial of students’ desires, relationships were not developed in the classroom – between the teacher and the students, the students and the content, the teacher and the content – in ways that could have invited students to learn meaningfully from the Canadian past.

This book focuses on those experiences in order to demonstrate the meaningful possibilities that can be imagined when students’ desires to learn history are put first. This is not advocating for curricular change as much as advocating for a pedagogical approach that is more transformative than transactional or transmissive. This work encourages a shift in how a class may engage in their history education so that the focus is less on remembering facts or assessing evidence and more on the meaningful learning that can be engendered when those facts and that evidence are used to develop a greater, more affective engagement in imagining a nation that includes them. This book is a call for a radical imaginative history education practice in Canada, by placing students – and the stories they carry, the stories they want to hear, the histories they desire to be part of – at the centre of what is done, and can be done, in the history classroom, and using that centre to ratify and support a historically grounded vision of who “we” are in Canada today.

Critical Theory for Reading Canadian History

To advocate for a more student-centric, meaningful learning approach to Canadian history education, I situate this work within the traditions of critical theory and critical pedagogy. Our history in Canada is so messy,

so complicated, so violent that we need to approach teaching the Canadian past with critical tools that can tackle how we can currently be one of the most diverse countries in the world and yet have an unreconciled colonial history marked by resistance to this very diversity. To move forward in our understanding of Canada, we need to move past add-and-stir or drag-and-drop methods of teaching diverse stories from our past (Cutrara 2016b) and instead use theoretical tools that can help us understand how difference has been constructed in the past and the lasting ramifications these constructions have on the present. Critical theories such as critical race theory, feminist theory, and poststructuralist theory challenge systems of oppression like white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism that structure our society. If we use critical theory(ies) such as these to understand Canadian history, we can open up space for more nuanced, critical, radical, and transformative ways of addressing the continued inequity in the Canadian present.

Reading history through a critical race theory (CRT) lens places the analysis of race and racism at the forefront of understanding society. CRT evolved out of post-civil rights American legal theory and has influenced different disciplines and research methodologies, including those in education (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). When viewed together, the work of Derrick Bell (1980, 1987), Cheryl Harris (1993), Kimberlé Crenshaw (1988, 1995), and Richard Delgado (1988, 1989, 1990) defined what is now seen as the three central concepts of CRT. These are:

- 1 racism is endemic in North American society, it is not “merely an individual pathology ... [but] a vast system that structures our institutions and our relationships” (Vaught and Castagno 2008, 96);
- 2 liberalism, and the accompanying ideas of neutrality, objectivity, colour blindness, and meritocracy, support white supremacy and maintain the subordinate position of many people of colour;
- 3 because reality is created and structured through stories, narratives, and interactions, counterstories and experiential knowledge by and about people of colour can challenge what is presented as reality and be used “as sources of critique of the dominant social order which purposely devalues them” (Stovall 2006, 244).

When understood within the context of these three ideas, CRT points to ethno-cultural differences coded as “race” as being dynamic, contextual, and relational. Race, then, is not a fact, but a “system of socially constructed and enforced categories, constantly recreated and modified through human interaction” (Gillborn 1995, 3). This “postmodern” conception of race breaks open a simplistic reading of skin colour and focuses on the power relations woven through cultural interpretations – power relations directly correlated to the type of opportunities and legitimacy one has in society (Ross 2009).

Because race has been shown to have no standing in a scientific framework (Rose and Rose 2005), some have argued that referencing “race” as an aspect of one’s social identity continues to categorize and separate people based on their skin colour and, in so doing, supports a white supremacist agenda (Darder and Torres 2003). But there is a “reality of a racialized society and its impact on ‘raced’ people in their everyday lives” (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995, 48), and so using CRT as a lens through which to view the world invites us to more critically interrogate these realities and the influences they have on our lives. When we use CRT to think through the past and present, we come to recognize and examine the social and political reality of differences based on “race” and can ask questions about the operation of these racial differences in our lives – questions such as when and how race is used, by whom, and to what ends (C.I. Harris 1993, 1763). Using questions such as these to frame one’s engagement of race and racism (past and present) acknowledges that, as a complicated, constructed, and referential category, race is an important predictor of one’s lived realities and cannot be ignored simply because it lacks biological merit.

If we use these ideas to help us understand Canadian history, we see how race has operated (and continues to operate) to stratify and ratify society along racial lines in ways that support white European colonialist privilege over the experiences of those who are racialized. With a CRT reading of Canadian history, we come to see that Canada was not a country that intended to be multicultural; rather, it was a country that intended to stay white. As McKittrick (2006, 95) writes, the “‘making’ of Canada situates a struggle that enmeshes race, whiteness, and the soil as they are attached to the nation’s legal, political, and ideological claims of colonial superiority.”

The Indian Act, 1876, for example, was an aggressive attempt to enmesh race, whiteness, and land together in ways that attempted to manage and control Indigenous populations. The act defined who was an “Indian” and stripped First Nations populations of legal personhood, the ability to share traditions, and the agency to interact with whom and where they chose (Joseph 2018). The act is not just a “body of laws that for over a century have controlled every aspect of Indian life.” Rather, it is a “regulatory regime” that has provided “ways of understanding Native identity, organizing a conceptual framework that has shaped contemporary Native life in ways that are now so familiar as to almost seem ‘natural’” (Lawrence 2003, 3).

This act was aggressively enacted as a “regulatory regime” in the 1884 amendment that increased the role of residential and industrial schools in Indigenous life. These government-sponsored religious schools were designed to “emancipate” Indigenous students from their “tribal governments” and facilitate students’ “final absorption into the general community” (J.S. Dennis in a memo to Prime Minister John A. MacDonald in 1878, quoted in TRC 2015b, 55). The mandate of these schools was to “kill the Indian in the child” by removing First Nations’ children from their homes and forcing them to work and learn under violent white ideologies and practices.² Up until 1920, these schools were voluntary, but in 1920, as a response to declining voluntary enrolment, an additional amendment was added to the act that allowed the Canadian government to compel First Nations’ children to attend these schools (TRC 2015b, 62). As Bob Joseph (2018, 53) writes, while “other policies were harsh but could be worked around ... when the government took the children from their families, it was unbearable.” The violence of, and in, these residential schools tore apart communities, cultures, languages, and senses of self in ways that continue to have lasting effects today. The release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s final report in 2015 revealed the extent of the physical, psychological, and sexual abuse in the residential school system that overtly and wilfully attempted cultural and spiritual assimilation for over 150,000 Aboriginal children between 1870 and 1996.

While Canada worked to eliminate racial diversity from *within* Canada, it also tried to prevent racial diversity from *entering* into Canada through immigration policies that privileged white immigrants from Britain, France, the United States, and Germany. In the words of one Member of Parliament

in 1903, these were the immigrants who were welcome because they belonged “to the races to which we belong, they are men who tend to the elevation of our population, and to the progress of our country. They are accustomed to our institutions, they are suitable to our climate, and we desire to get them” (Thomas Sproule, quoted in Kelley and Trebilcock 1998, 131). Race was both implicitly and explicitly codified in these immigration policies, and in the 1919 amendment to the Immigration Act, for example, immigrants could be prohibited from entering Canada if they were deemed unsuitable to the “climatic, industrial, social and educational, labour or other conditions or requirements of Canada,” because of their “peculiar customs, habits, modes of life and methods of holding property and because of their probable inability to become readily assimilated” (“Immigration Act Amendment, 1919” n.d.). The “peculiar customs” of immigrants or their suitability to the Canadian climate were often overlooked if immigrants fulfilled the need for labour and/or settlement.

Chinese and Taiwanese men, for example, were brought to Canada in the 1880s as “guest labourers” to expand the transcontinental railway. Often given the most dangerous work, such as handling explosives, these labourers experienced poor working conditions, were paid meagre wages, and incurred expenses for which they had to pay out of pocket – unlike the non-Asian workers (Chan 2019). Chinese and Taiwanese workers were met with hostility and were seen at best, as a necessary evil in the development of the country. As Prime Minister John A. MacDonald declared in 1882: “Either you must have labour or you can’t have the railway.” However, even MacDonald objected to these workers becoming permanent settlers in Canada. He also stated that once the work was completed, he would “join to a reasonable extent in preventing a permanent settlement in this country of Mongolian or Chinese immigrants” (quoted in Kelley and Trebilcock 1998, 94–95). Many of these Chinese and Taiwanese labourers died in lonely, hostile conditions, with legislation like the Chinese Exclusion Act, 1923, making it difficult for those who remained to establish Canadian homes in the decades following the completion of the railway.

Eighty years later, in the 1960s, the West Indian Immigration Scheme encouraged educated single women from the West Indies to temporarily immigrate to Canada as domestic labourers in white households, forgoing

both their education and class privilege in their country of origin to better themselves and/or to see another country (Henry 1968). Although “coloured” British subjects were not desirable in the Canadian nation because, according to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration in 1955, they were not “a tangible asset, and as a result are more or less ostracized [and t]hey do not assimilate readily and pretty much vegetate to a low standard of living” (quoted in Carty 1994, 217), West Indian immigrants could provide cheap labour in Canada, especially when appeals to white domestic immigrants fell flat (Henry 1968). When faced with an unfriendly, ignorant, and prejudiced society (Henry 1968), these women lived in isolation and were called “our loneliest immigrants” in an article for *Maclean’s* magazine in 1961 (Lamming 1961).

However, while these brief examples demonstrate Canada’s legacy in using and exploiting the labour of racialized immigrants when it suited its needs, diversity in Canada today cannot solely be equated with immigration. Such a view implicitly privileges a vision of a white, colonial “ethnic nationalism that represents the nation in terms of consanguinity” (Montgomery 2005, 314). People of colour have been Canadian for centuries but can still be asked where they are really from (Chapra and Chatterjee 2009; Paragg 2015; Shadd 2001). It is as if, for example, “‘Black Canadian’ or ‘African Canadian’ is – in the public perception – a contradiction in terms” (Shadd 2001, 11). It is these beliefs that can result in a denial of belonging for racialized Canadians in the Canadian present. As McKittrick (2006, 99) writes, “the geographies of black Canada also tend to be constructed according to narratives of absence or elsewhere.”

Take for example, the community of Africville. Africville was a village outside of Halifax, Nova Scotia, that was settled in the mid-eighteenth century by Black people who were freed slaves, Maroons of Jamaica, or formerly enslaved people who became refugees after the War of 1812. In the 1960s, almost two hundred years after its founding, in the name of urban renewal, the City of Halifax bulldozed the houses and community buildings in Africville, citing “blighted” and “dilapidated” living conditions (Tattrie 2019). However, the living conditions were blighted and dilapidated because the government made them so. Despite being landowners and paying taxes accordingly, residents of Africville did not receive any

municipal services such as water, sewer, or garbage removal, and, added to that, in the 1950s a dump was built at the edge of the community, resulting in even more slum-like conditions (Nelson 2009). Africville became a slum because the municipal government viewed the space and its inhabitants as expendable to the Canadian nation. They were not Canadians with the full rights and privileges held by their white neighbours in other Halifax communities.

How do we reconcile these histories in our understanding of our Canadian identity? How can we come to terms with how “the image of the respectable, peaceful, multiculturalism-loving Canadian citizen, descendant of the two founding nations, France and Britain, goes hand in hand with its opposites: the Indigenous ‘Indian,’ the Black, the immigrant newcomer and the refugee” (Austin 2010, 19)? How do we make sense of the eradication of non-white peoples in Canadian history when multiculturalism has been lauded as a defining Canadian value, and, along with bilingualism, has been a policy since 1971 and enshrined in law since 1988? It is by using the theoretical tools of CRT that we can come to see how these historical visions of Canada are still coded within policies and practices that reference and organize cultural, ethnic, and “racial” differences today. CRT can help us go beyond a celebration of multiculturalism and toward a critical understanding of culture, ethnicity, and race that is needed to fully understand the Canadian past and present.

While multiculturalism is a codified way for us to understand and respect diversity in Canada, it can unwittingly (re)affirm principles that keep ideas about “us” and “them” more stable than we intend. Multiculturalism in Canada does not do what we think it does – bring diverse cultures together. Instead, it manages “a colonial history, an imperialist present, and a convoluted liberal democracy” in ways that “needs and creates ‘others’” to subvert demands for anti-racism and political equality (Bannerji 2000, 10, 97). Because the central tenets of multiculturalism come from a liberal, rather than from a radical, understanding of self and society, multiculturalism implicitly affirms an individualistic, progress-focused management of difference for an ordered capitalist democracy. It also obfuscates the acknowledgment of the First Peoples of this land and our need to understand what colonialism is, how it has operated, and how it continues to shape Canadian identity today (Dion 2005; St. Denis 2011).

Multiculturalism thus provides a centre, a white centre, for managing difference in ways that keep, maintain, and celebrate that white centre and the privileges that come with it (Bannerji 2000; Mackey 2005).

Approaching diversity through a belief in a multicultural utopia does not allow us to explore how colonial practices and legislation, exploitative labour policies for immigrants, and restrictive rules related to migration and cultural expression have been built into Canadian law and society, and how just because these politics, policies, and practices are “in the past” does not mean they are not present in our lives today. On the contrary, these ideas and practices are very much woven into the structure of Canada and they have a continued impact on the present in ways that challenge the vision of multiculturalism we may now laud. As Ahmad Ali (2008) writes, young people in Canada may celebrate Canadian multiculturalism, but they will face disappointment when they begin to have greater experiences with the structural racism built into our country.

Racism and the limits of multiculturalism, however, cannot be understood in a vacuum. Black feminist theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1995) stressed the importance of intersectionality in understanding social divisions and stratification. That is, race, gender, class, and sexuality cannot be understood as separate from each other; they are interconnected and contingent on the other. Because history “is not simply what happened in the past but, more pointedly, the kinds of *knowledge* about the past that we are *made aware of*” (Burton 1992, 26; emphasis in original), critical race and feminist theories have pushed our histories in new directions, and so we no longer expect to just learn the histories of white men in our classrooms anymore. However, even with the inclusion of people of colour, women, and labourers in our national histories, these histories remain “precarious,” they may still be positioned as add-ons, and thus by exploring both the inclusion and exclusion of these histories from our national narratives, we can see how historical narratives can operate to “discursively maintain the invisibility” of how race, gender, and class operate in society (Rooney 2006, 359). This is the difference between including people of colour, women, or labourers in our study of the past as a way to highlight different perspectives, and using the study of the past to explore how differences in race, gender, and class come to be constructed in ways that maintain white supremacist patriarchal capitalism. It is through using

history to understand how society is structured that we can better comprehend the ways power and privilege function through the structures we often accept as normal.

To explore these ideas more fully, we can complement CRT and intersectional feminist theories with postmodern and poststructural theories. Postmodern and poststructural theories are about the disbelief in meta-narratives and the structures they support and that, in turn, support them (Lyotard 1997). Postmodern and poststructural theories, drawing on literacy analysis, are theories which help us understand how the world is created by patterns, stories, and signs that shape what and how we come to know and believe is possible. These patterns, stories, and signs become the structures, the (meta)narratives, that seem to define the world and how we may operate within it. Working with postmodern and poststructural theories in our study of the past allows for a “new way of analyzing constructions of meaning and relationships of power that call ... unitary, universal categories into question and historicize ... concepts otherwise treated as natural ... or absolute” (Scott 1988, 33).

It is through postmodern and poststructural theories that we can better explore how history is not a canonical narrative of the past, but rather a medium for constantly refashioning, remoulding, and retelling what happened in the past for the purposes of the present (see, for example, Foucault 1980c; Jenkins 1997; Scott 2001). As Iain Chambers (1997, 80) writes, “history comes to us not as raw, bleeding facts but in textual production, in narratives woven by desire (for truth) and a will (for power).” Harvey Wallace (quoted in Kaye 1991, 71) argues that “all history is a production – a deliberate selection, ordering, and evaluation of past events, experiences and processes.” Feminist historian Joan Scott (2001, 290) calls history a “fantasy echo,” a “fantasized narrative that imposes sequential order on otherwise chaotic and contingent occurrences.” It is with postmodern and poststructural theories that we can begin to see the ways in which history provides a lens on “the problems of its own times more fully even than those of the era about which it is supposed to be concerned” (Ferro 2003, xi). By using postmodern and poststructural theories in our study of history, we can begin to see, and thus prepare to challenge, the ubiquity of social structures and narratives that are preventative to full equity and justice for all.

However, students are not introduced to these complexities when they learn history. For most students, the history they learn in school is a collection of simplified national narratives that are fashioned by political whims and presentist desires. Rather than explore the power and privilege embedded in the past, students are presented with a hollow grand narrative that blurs the lines of then and now to present an ordered story of what may, or should have been, rather than the messy experiences of what was. There is a destiny and a certainty to the histories taught in schools and it is only by denying these mythical narratives as the natural and undisputed points of national origin that we can provide more openings for that which is Other in how we teach, learn, and understand the past (Foucault 1980c, 80). This opening for Other is an opening for justice, an opening that is integral for change and transformation.

Contrary to the idea that postmodernism or poststructuralism are not useful for thinking about history or history education because they are a labyrinth with no exit, destruction with no solution, life with no opportunity, an assault on the promise of education (Barton 2006; Seixas 2000), these theories highlight how story and language are systems of knowledge that shape and are shaped by power and privilege. Part of our work in the study of history is to see how precarious these structures are, to crack them open, and to show how they exclude more than they include. Grand narratives are like a house of cards: once built, the house may look stable and solid, but it is hollow and precarious, one quick breath away from collapse. Grand narratives need the empty spaces, the absences, the spaces *between* the cards to inflate their size and stability. But when looking closely, when examining what the house of cards really is, there is more emptiness, more absence to the structure, than substance.

These ideas come via Jacques Derrida who understands meaning as being negatively constituted by what it is not. In his work, Derrida (1978) emphasizes that things like words, concepts, and texts have many voices; voices that are acknowledged, validated, and amplified and voices that are excluded, disavowed, and actively silenced. Because of the multitude of voices within a word, concept, or text, their meanings are never stable, never absolute, they shift and change depending on the context, era, or speaker. They are a “signifier” of something else, something that is bigger than the thing itself. Think of the concept of “fake news” – the words “fake”

and “news” came together in the late 2010s to signify a concept that is politically charged in ways beyond their individual word use. It will be very difficult in the next decade, for example, to not think of those politics when the words are used together. Or think of the impossibility of direct language translation. Every language is a reflection of the culture and society which uses it; it is impossible to transpose one set of words onto another set of words and think the meaning will remain the same. Each word, concept, and text is a signifier of a culturally, socially, and historically contingent phenomenon. They are never centres of meaning beyond themselves.

Because words, concepts, and texts are not fixed, because they represent a particular moment of use, Derrida writes that when we do not take their stability for granted, words, concepts, and texts can crack and reveal meaning beyond themselves. When we challenge their supremacy as being the centre of meaning, we can witness words, concepts, and texts being both the need and the attempt to make order from disorder, meaning from chaos, a normalcy from uniqueness. We can watch words, concepts, and texts turn on themselves and *deconstruct* in ways that show the cracks of where logic is illogical. This is not destroying words, concepts, and texts, but *playing* with them, or allowing for the possibility of play, which can then invite the acknowledgment, and perhaps even subversion, of the power within them.

Deconstruction is often understood as the tearing apart of ideas, but deconstruction is about finding the politics and *play* of meaning behind that which is implied and acknowledging an Other that is purposefully absent(ed). In this way, deconstruction is not “a form of critical analysis which aims at tearing apart everything it finds in its way”; rather, it is a way of reading beyond the negativity of critique and toward a positive reconstruction of taken-for-granted knowledge (Biesta 2001, 32). Deconstruction is a way of acknowledging that “the function of this [imaginary] centre [is] not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure ... but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure ... limit[s] what we might call the *play* of the structure” (Derrida 1978, 278 emphasis in original). Deconstruction is not an apolitical critical analysis but an *affirmative* ethico-political attitude that concerns itself with the Other (Eg ea-Kuehne and Biesta 2001), with an openness to the Other, with

an openness to the unforeseeable coming of the Other, or to what Derrida refers to as “justice” (Biesta 2009). Deconstruction is an *affirmation* of what is excluded and forgotten, not a critical refutation of what is there. “Deconstruction” is about moving the cards around to see the absences, to see the fallibility of the house, and to provide fodder for new forms of “play.” When folded into how we teach history, we can think of these ideas organizing our teaching and learning to foreground that there are other stories out there, that those stories narrate a different view of the world, and that we can develop those stories as a way to make sense of the world around us. Foucault (1980a, 151) writes that “the successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing [the] rules ... [and who can] invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them.” If one were to apply postmodern and poststructuralist ideas to history education, one’s students would be invited to question the structure of history and to invert it to think through, and even challenge, the operations of power that work to exclude certain peoples and experiences from being seen in the past as well as in the present. With postmodern and poststructuralist theories, our students, and ourselves, would be invited to “estrangle that which seems familiar, comprehensible, and easily readable” and blast “existing narratives open, rupturing their silences and highlighting their detours” (Segall 2013, 478–79). Teaching and learning history using these bodies of theory is a way of bearing witness to the operations of power written into our national narratives, to listen to what is being silenced and to reclaim the spaces within them for our own stories and experiences.

Thus, by taking a postmodern or poststructural approach to history education, we are not just accepting the world that our grand narratives narrate – we are instead rewriting that world by seeing the deconstruction of the stories we have been told and listening for the stories that have been denied to us. A postmodern or poststructural approach to history education, along with CRT and intersectional feminism, allows us to recognize the rules and expectations of the grand narrative, expand our understandings of the past beyond them, and actively challenge, and transform, our understandings of ourselves, our pasts, presents, and futures through our study and exploration of the past.

Critical Pedagogy for Teaching Canadian History

We can use critical theories to understand structural exclusions of peoples and experiences in Canadian history, but, as this book shows, it is in the *practice* of teaching history where the limitations of these stories operate. Transforming the Canadian history classroom does not require that Canadian history teachers know Canadian history in its entirety. However, it does require them to acknowledge that the stories and experiences that students bring into the classroom are structured by intersectional systems of race, gender, and class, and that acknowledging these stories and experiences allows us to think of Canadian history in different, more complex, ways. Transforming the Canadian history classroom starts with a critical understanding of Canadian history, but it also starts with believing that students have the ability and desire to know and understand these histories and, with that knowledge, to work toward a more just and equitable Canadian future.

A teacher should facilitate learning, not just teach well, and this work involves a deep care for students and an understanding of who they are as individuals. However, history teachers teach with a purpose that they defined before becoming a history teacher (van Hover and Yeager 2007) and this purpose can be at odds with the needs of the actual students in the room. While students are drawn to active instruction and histories that explore injustice, teachers have been shown to avoid active teaching methods and teaching “controversial” histories (Ares and Gorrell 2002; Crowley and Smith 2015; Dion 2005; Harris and Haydn 2006; Kinchin 2004; Levstik 2000; Winn 2004). Teachers can even encourage the retention of problematic narratives because keeping these narratives intact is easier and less professionally contentious than challenging them (Létourneau and Moisan 2004). White teachers in particular can employ strategies such as silencing, social disassociation, separation from responsibility, and use of personal stories to distance themselves from embedded racism and its power in the nation (Case and Hemmings 2005; Crowley 2016). However, the tools of critical pedagogy can help us understand and challenge the limiting and oppressive practices within education, and in doing so, help us feel more equipped to engage in the difficult work of transformation in our classrooms.

Critical pedagogy is a body of educational theory that is committed to the “ideal and practice of social justice within schools” as well as to the “transformation of social structures and class conditions within society that thwart the democratic participation of all people” (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2017, 2). The aim of education from a critical pedagogical perspective is to ensure education is developed and practised in ways that help to “build more egalitarian power relations, to strengthen the voices of learners, and to inspire critical consciousness, in order to promote social change” (Cho 2012, 1).

Much of the work of critical pedagogy builds on the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who begins his now classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by saying that dehumanization – one group denying the humanity of another group – contributes to and justifies a stratified system of oppression (Freire 2006, 43–45). For Freire, the intent of education should be to restore humanity to all people by understanding our value as separate from the oppressive reality that serves the interests of the powerful. Freire advocates for a “problem-posing approach” to education, whereby people and their histories are the starting point for engaging in learning. The problem-posing approach is “based on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action” (84). It relies on ongoing dialogue between educator and student whereby each can learn from and with the other. This is a shift away from a “banking model” of education that is designed to deposit information into students’ heads, and toward education committed to talking *with* students rather than *at* them (B.D. Schultz and Banks 2011, 51). Freire (2006) argues that the critical literacy garnered through problem-posing in education is based on the cooperation, unity, and cultural synthesis that is the essence of revolutionary action.

Drawing on Freire’s work, other scholars – notably Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, Michael Apple, Roger Simon, and bell hooks – have teased out the ways in which the micropolitics of the classroom, the politics of the curriculum, and the system of schooling can either constrict or transform the educational experience for students. Like Freire, many of these theorists come from a critical literacy background and they advocate for students to both literally and metaphorically read the word *and* the world. According to those who do critical pedagogical work, these commitments

can be achieved through educational approaches that include genuine dialogue, love for people, and the courage to confront and resist oppression (Orelus 2014, 2).

bell hooks (2010), in particular, strongly advocates for the importance of love in education designed for freedom and democracy. hooks defines love as the interdependent combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust that teachers must have for their students. By teaching with love, she argues, teachers get to know students for who they are and to lead them in the passionate pursuit of knowledge (159). For hooks, love makes education fundamentally about the responsibility to serve and to engage freedom for the betterment of democracy. This vision of education breaks with the idea that learning is private, individualistic, and competitive. Critical thinking as part of this education, hooks argues, is a form of *engaged pedagogy* designed to restore students' will to think and respond to knowledge with and for others.

If the goals in critical pedagogy are to “build more egalitarian power relations, to strengthen the voices of learners, and to inspire critical consciousness, in order to promote social change” (Cho 2012, 1), then hooks's (2010) concept of love is important for developing the trust needed for learning in the service of a more democratic and equitable future. However, love of – or care for – students can also be limiting if teachers do not integrate these actions with a critical awareness of the ways that privilege, protection, and disavowal work in our enactments of these relationships.

Nel Noddings's cited work on the ethics of care in education is often cited as foundational to the conceptions of care in education. Noddings (1984, 2005) conceives of care as a reciprocal relation between carer and cared-for that is complete when the cared-for accepts the care that is being extended. However, in this conception, Noddings places too strong an emphasis on the recipients of care in the caring relationship and not enough on the carer. She writes that the caring between teacher/student may not take place if the student, as the cared-for, is “stubborn, insensitive, or just plain difficult” (Noddings 2005, xv). This vision of a “stubborn, insensitive, or difficult” student fails to take into account the context and content of the relationship and the expectations of care, on both sides, that shape what is being defined as “care” but also as “stubborn, insensitive, or difficult.”

Critical pedagogues argue that Noddings’s conception of care lacks a contextual analysis of gender, race, and class that acknowledges the power dynamics related to the acceptance or denial of care. From this, they contend that her conception of care is based on a trope of white motherhood that not only may fail to respond to or reflect the needs of students of colour, but can also infantilize them (Antrop-González and De Jesús 2006; Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2002, 2005; Pang, Rivera, and Mora 2000; Rolón-Dow 2005). While Noddings does not focus on culture in the caring relationship, “culture counts” (Gay 2010, 8). As Pang, Rivera, and Mora (2000, 27) argue, “because much of caring involves the building of relationships among teachers, students, parents, and other community members, culture must be an integral aspect of the caring framework.”

The caring relationship in a classroom is not a reciprocal and straightforward interaction between teacher and student. Rather, because the majority of the power in the classroom lies with the teacher, the caring relationship is “asymmetrical” with the teacher shouldering the “burden of vulnerability” to develop a consistent and unconditional relationship that meets students where they are. “The teacher cannot control exactly how students will relate to them, interpret their actions, or understand the basis for their relationship” (Bullough and Pinnegar 2009, 249), thus it is up to the teacher to demonstrate multiple ways of acknowledging and caring for the student and their cultural communities in ways that support students’ comfort and safety in the classroom.

It is important to be attuned to the dynamics of culture and care because, for students to make the choice to learn – really learn and not just memorize – they need to feel safe with the educator and with what is being taught. Students need to believe that accepting what the teacher is offering, be that care or content, will not be *subtractive* to their sense of self and cultural connections outside the classroom (Valenzuela 1999). In his essay “I Won’t Learn from You,” Herbert Kohl (1994) writes about this safety when he discusses the role of assent in learning. He describes the active and willed process young people go through when they are choosing to learn or not-learn. Kohl begins with his confusion that the Spanish-speaking grandfather of one of his students refused his offer of English lessons. In thinking through this rejection, Kohl reflects on his own

experience as a teen who chose not to learn Hebrew. Kohl realized that his choice to not learn Hebrew was an active and willed choice to not isolate his mother who was cut out of conversations held by the Hebrew-speaking members of his father's family. It was not that he did not want the knowledge of the Hebrew language. He did not want to exacerbate the unequal power dynamics he intuited came from speaking this language in his household.

With the reflection on these experiences, Kohl argued that sometimes allowing yourself to learn can turn you into someone you do not want to become. Not-learning can be a statement of who you are, and who you are asserting yourself to be, in that space. In those educational settings where students see no "middle ground" between the self and learning "subtractively" (Valenzuela 1999), students can make the active choice to be wilful agents who choose not to learn. In making this choice, they are not opting to fail. Rather, they are making the "conscious and chosen refusal to assent to learn" in order to maintain their integrity in the face of a compromise to their sense of self and culture (Kohl 1994, 41).

One of the ways to support students' safety and sense of self in the classroom is by enacting culturally responsive education (Ladson-Billings 1995). Culturally relevant education is not "subtractive" education. It is designed for cultural familiarity that can support students' active choice to learn. Culturally relevant educators prioritize content that connects with students' lives and histories in ways that draw on what students already know and provides depth and context to the world they see around them. If "the most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows" (Ausubel, Novak, and Hanesian 1978, ix), then ensuring that the curriculum and pedagogy are responsive to the students' culture(s) is a way to set up the learning task so that prior knowledge and meaningful material are at the centre of how students enter into learning. This focus on the student and the development and articulation of students' prior knowledge invites education to be the "key to a student unlocking the mysteries of their existence and provid[ing] the road map to creating their own knowledge" (R. Brock 2014, 290).

In developing my own educational style – in creating a classroom environment in which I hope that students feel safe to learn from and with me, and where they are willing to share their prior knowledge and what is

© UBC Press 2020

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without prior written permission of the publisher.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Transforming the Canadian history classroom : imagining a new “we” /
Samantha Cutrara.

Names: Cutrara, Samantha, author.

Description: Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20200211293 | Canadiana (ebook) 20200211439 |
ISBN 9780774862837 (softcover) | ISBN 9780774862844 (PDF) |
ISBN 9780774862851 (EPUB) | ISBN 9780774862868 (Kindle)

Subjects: LCSH: Canada – History – Study and teaching. | LCSH: Classroom
environment – Canada.

Classification: LCC FC155 .C88 2020 | DDC 971.0071—dc23

Canada

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada (through the Canada Book Fund), the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

Set in Zurich, Univers, and Minion by Artegraphica Design Co. Ltd.

Cover designer: Will Brown

UBC Press
The University of British Columbia
2029 West Mall
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2
www.ubcpres.ca