Curriculum in Flux:

A Practitioner's Journey of Understanding the Impact of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Victor Brar

Surrey School District, Canada

Introduction

The year 2020 has been marked by political and social unrest in Canada, as the Canadian government again finds itself in conflict with Indigenous[1] peoples[2] over issues of land and Indigenous sovereignty. This latest conflict is forcing the country once again to face up to its dark past of "cultural genocide[3]" committed against Indigenous people dating back to at least the 17th century. To address the injustices that Indigenous peoples have faced at the hands of the Canadian government, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in 2008. Since the conclusion of the TRC in 2015, Canadians[4] have struggled with acknowledging the historical abuse of Indigenous

---

[1] The terms "Indigenous", "Aboriginal", and "First Peoples" are often used interchangeably and there appears to be no universally accepted definition of the term "Indigenous" (Allan et. Al., 2015). I use the term "Indigenous " because it is an "inclusive and international term to describe individuals and collectives who consider themselves as being related to and/or having historical continuity with "First Peoples." (Allan et. Al., 2015). No disrespect is intended by the use of this term.
[2] There is a common understanding the literature that Indigenous peoples are not a single cultural group, but rather regard themselves as belonging to multiple culture's, each having its own history and cultural practices.
[3] "Cultural Genocide" was the term put forth by the TRC to describe the government's policy towards Indigenous peoples. It is defined in the section titled: Historical context.
[4] I draw a distinction between Indigenous peoples and Canadians (non-Indigenous peoples). There is a common understanding in the literature surrounding reconciliation that Indigenous peoples do not self-identify as Canadians.

peoples at the hands of Canadian governments, while attempting to reconcile and move forward.

As the country struggles to understand its historical misdeeds, the same struggle is playing out in Canadian Social Studies curriculum[5], particularly in textbooks. The TRC has served as a very important catalyst in galvanizing curricular change toward more accurate portrayals of Indigenous ontology and epistemology, and being more inclusive of them. Prior to reconciliation, curriculum was exclusionary, and it portrayed relations between the government and Indigenous peoples in a unidimensional way that presented a sanitized Eurocentric version of history. The curriculum made little or no mention of the cultural genocide that Indigenous peoples endured and gave limited attention to representing their cultures. Textbooks were deliberately written from a Eurocentric angle that depicted Indigenous peoples as primitive and ungrateful beneficiaries of colonisation, with limited attention to their cultural achievements.

Since the publication of the commission's findings, there has been a shift in Canadian Social Studies curriculum towards indigenization[6], which includes a more authentic portrayal of the adversarial and paternalistic nature of colonisation and provides greater and more authentic inclusion of Indigenous histories and cultures. As the

---

[5] The term Canadian Curriculum does not imply a national curriculum but refers to the collection of individual provincial curricula, given that education is a provincial responsibility in Canada.

[6] Indigenization is a comprehensive process of which curricular change is just one aspect (Pidgeon, 2016).

curriculum shifts, however, there must be also be corresponding shift among practitioners. I have wondered, as a South-Asian elementary school teacher in British Columbia, how I might navigate the changes recommended by the TRC, and this paper outlines my conceptual journey through that process.

Since my journey is still ongoing, this paper presents my current understanding of the situation. As an educational practitioner, praxis is of primary importance in my work, and therefore, in this paper, I have chosen to address questions that arise in regard to epistemology, ontology, and practicality, as they relate to curricular content and pedagogy. My recitation of this journey begins by tracing the historical context of relations between the Indigenous peoples and European newcomers. Next, I progress to uncovering how Indigenous peoples have traditionally been depicted in Canadian Social Studies textbooks. I also describe why I have chosen to focus on the role of textbooks in consolidating the misunderstandings of Indigenous peoples that are still prevalent among non-Indigenous peoples. Thereafter, I provide a brief description of the TRC, which since 2008 has been a main driver of curricular change. I also briefly outline the shift that has occurred in the British Columbia Ministry of Education with respect to indigenization. Then, I move on to the challenges that Social Studies practitioners face in adopting a new Social Studies curriculum that is historically accurate and inclusive of Indigenous ontology and epistemologies. The paper ends with recommendations that address some of the challenges, which, sensitively addressed, can move the conversation

toward improving relations that, up to now, have been largely unproductive and adversarial.

Historical Context

The history of frequent Indigenous contact with Europeans in Canada dates back to the 16th century, when French and British powers laid claim to large parts of North America and established their colonies (TRC, 2015a), whose primary purpose was the extraction of resources to provide means for imperial expansion (TRC, 2015a, p.15). To justify their colonization, Britain and France operated in Canada under the "Doctrine of Discovery" (TRC, 2015a, p18), which granted the British and French a moral, legal, and religious right to appropriate "*terra nullus*", or no man's lands (TRC, 2015a, p. 18). This doctrine held that Indigenous people did not own their lands but simply *occupied* them (TRC, 2015a, p18).

The Doctrine of Discovery would set the stage for all subsequent relations between the British and French and the Indigenous peoples of Canada. With the British conquest of New France, Britain became the sole power to claim Canadian lands, until Canada secured its independence in 1867. The attitudes, perceptions, and policies of the government, described as paternalistic, assimilationist, and overtly racist (TRC, 2015a), flowed directly from the Doctrine of Discovery. In 1883, Canada's prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, described Indigenous peoples as "savages," whose children must be

"withdrawn as much as possible from parental influence" (TRC 2015a, p25). After Confederation, the policy of the Canadian government remained one of assimilation, which was laid out very clearly in the *Indian Act* of 1876. The Indian Act enshrined the willingness of the Canadian government to assimilate Indigenous peoples forcibly into European ways of thinking, speaking, and behaving, which the government regarded as superior.

The TRC characterized the overall historic policies of government towards Indigenous peoples as "cultural genocide," defined as:

> the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next. (2015a, p. 5)

The practice of assimilation was modeled on the reformatories and industrial schools for children of the urban poor in Britain. Known in Canada as industrial schools, these were established in the late 1800's, funded by the government, but administered primarily by the Catholic Church. The "industrial schools" became the infamous residential schools, whose primary purpose, according to Public Works Minister Hector Langevin in 1883, was

> to separate [the children from] their parents during the time that they are being educated. If you leave them in the family they may know how to read and write, but they still remain savages, whereas by separating them in the way proposed, they acquire the habits and tastes—it is to be hoped only the good tastes—of civilized people." (TRCa, 2015, p. 29)

Residential schools existed in Canada from the 1830s until 1990 (Shui, 2008). Amendments to the Indian Act in 1920 gave the government the authority to forcibly compel Indigenous children to attend residential schools (TRC, 2015a, p. 32). Attendance was forced upon Indigenous parents under coercive terms and the government utilized the levers of law enforcement and the judiciary to do so (TRCa, 2015).

The residential school system involved as many 150,000 children and caused irreparable harm in many cases (TRC, 2015). The legacy of the residential school system included loss of language and culture, loss of identity, loss of sense of place, and loss of indigenous ways of knowing and learning (Shui, 2008). Many children were forcibly removed from their homes and deliberately sent to schools far away from their villages, so there could be no family contact; this broke important family ties (TRCa,b,c, 2015). The conditions in residential schools were not only substandard in regard to living conditions and care, but many children also endured sexual predation and physical and psychological damage at the hands of missionaries. The political policies of assimilation and paternalism were not exclusive to the political domain, but these policies extended into general education, particularly the Canadian Social Studies curriculum.

(Mis)Representation of Indigenous Peoples in Canadian Social Studies Textbooks

The cultural genocide, which Indigenous people have suffered for over a century, has not been accurately reflected in the Social Studies curriculum, particularly in textbooks published prior the TRC report. I focus particularly on textbooks, because they are still regarded as a "universal medium" of instruction (McCluskey, 1993, p. 3). From my viewpoint as a practitioner, the textbook continues to be the bible from which most practitioners teach and, therefore, its importance in shaping attitudes about Indigenous peoples cannot be overstressed. The content of the textbook can have long lasting

implications. The textbook's role in shaping the values and beliefs of a country cannot be underestimated, because the textbook serves as a "'supreme historical court' whose task is to decipher from all of the accumulated 'pieces of the past' the 'true' collective memories which are appropriate for inclusion in the canonical national historical narrative" (Podeh, 200X, p. 66). The textbook serves as a benchmark of legitimacy, and it can have a significant impact upon a student's concepts of ontology and epistemology.

Given the significance of the textbook in shaping the views of generations of Canadians, it is important to explore its representations by tracing them over the decades since the 1960s, when studies were first conducted on this topic (Shui, 2008). Studies of textbooks reveal differences in the representations of European and Indigenous peoples, the former being expressed in the national and dominant narrative of the country. European people were described in Social Studies textbooks as industrious nation builders (Miles, 2018) whose righteous motives were to "civilize heathen tribes." The depiction of European settlers in a positive light justified policies of paternalism and assimilation, since these policies were designed to reform "uncivilized" peoples. Eurocentrism propagated ideals of reciprocity, fairness, and equity, which led to the coercion, abuse, and fraud perpetrated among Indigenous peoples by Canadian governments (TRC, 2015a).

Textbooks have perpetuated "epistemicide," defined as "the deliberate silencing of voices and epistemologies that are inclusive and holistic" (Barret et. al., cited in Siemens, 2017, p. 129). Several key reports[7] have reviewed the depictions of Indigenous people in Canadian Social Studies textbooks (cited in Shiu, 2008). These studies have found disparaging terms such as "heathen," "savage," "hostile," "warlike," and "rebellious" (Shiu, 2008, pp. 42-48). Over time, there had been a softening in the language, but the underlying tone of European superiority remained until advent of the TRC. Indigenous peoples were portrayed overwhelmingly and consistently as untamed, lazy, primitive, and uncooperative groups, who impeded the development of a Christian ethos.

The textbooks reinforced these descriptions of indigenous peoples with illustrations. Shiu (2008) examined the secondary Social Studies texts in the Surrey School District in British Columbia and found that they marginalized Indigenous peoples. History simply happens to Indigenous peoples; they are portrayed as objects, rather than subjects, of history, who sit passively in the presence of their European conquerors, who are standing. Europeans are illustrated in positions of power or heroism. Negative stereotyping of Indigenous peoples has been addressed by the TRC. It is important for our discussion to gain an understanding of the TRC's mandate and function, since it is currently the main driver of curricular reform in Canada.

---

[7] Semial reports include: Seventh Annual Indian and Metis Conference (1961), Study Group on the Canadian Indian and Eskimo Port Credit University Women's Club (1966), Ontario Human Rights Commission Report, McDiarmid and Pratt (1971), Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission Report (1971), Manitoba Indian Brotherhood Report (1974), Alberta Education Report, Decore et. al (1981), the O'Neil Report (1984), the Clark Study (2007)

Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Ministry Mandates

The need for reconciliation was recognized as early as 1969, but it was not until 2008 that the government took the serious step of forming the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The TRC has been the largest effort undertaken by the Canadian government toward achieving better relations with Indigenous peoples. The mandate of the TRC was twofold. First, the TRC wanted to "reveal to Canadians the complex truth about the history and the ongoing legacy of the church-run residential schools, in a manner that fully documents the individual and collective harms perpetrated against Aboriginal peoples and honours the resilience and courage of former students, their families, and communities" (TRC, 2015c, p.3). Second, the TRC wished to "guide and inspire a process of truth and healing, leading toward reconciliation within Aboriginal families, and between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal communities, churches, governments, and Canadians generally. The process was to work to renew relationships on a basis of inclusion, mutual understanding, and respect." (TRC, 2015c, 3).

Education was one of the core areas identified as needing change (Siemens, 2017). Of the TRC's 94 Calls to Action, one fifth related to education (Siemens, 2017). Because they relate to curriculum, Calls to Action # 62 and 63 are of considerable importance to practitioners. Calls to Action 62 and 63 read as follows:

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to: i. 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. ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms. iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms. iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including: i. 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. ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history .iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect. iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above." (TRC, 2015c, p.289).

The British Columbia Ministry of Education has mandated that practitioners integrate the TRC's Call to Action into the new curriculum, which has been slowly rolled out in the province since approximately 2010. In the new Social Studies curriculum, the Ministry (2019) describes its Indigenization process in this way:

> In B.C.'s redesigned curriculum, Indigenous knowledge and perspectives are integrated throughout all areas of learning and are evident in the curriculum's rationale statements, goals, big ideas, mandated learning standards, and elaborations. The First Peoples Principles of Learning offer a crucial lens for curriculum, placing a significant importance on the authentic integration of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in relevant and meaningful ways. The intent behind this integration is to promote a growing understanding of Indigenous peoples in B.C. that will contribute to the development of educated citizens who reflection and support reconciliation. This approach to Indigenous education encourages enlightened discussion among teachers and students in all areas of learning and grade levels, and this approach values and prioritizes Indigenous knowledge and perspectives that can only be found in B.C.

Implementing the Ministry's mandate of indigenization has not been easy, and practitioners have encountered many challenges.

Challenges for Educators

As a practitioner, I see many epistemological, ontological, and practical issues that need addressing before there can be a meaningful shift towards developing curriculum that reflects authentic Indigenous history and their ways of knowing and learning. These issues have muddied the waters in regard to moving forward as suggested by the TRC.

Challenges of Definition

There is no consensus as to what reconciliation means (Miles, 2018). Different groups, such as policy makers, curriculum designers, and teachers, appear to understand the term *reconciliation* in ways that may not mirror reconciliation as envisaged by the TRC[8]. These differences in understanding produce practical difficulty for me as a practitioner in determining how to steer my class toward the TRC's definition of reconciliation. According to Coulthard (cited in Miles, 2018), reconciliation has been utilized in three distinct ways that include: "Indigenous self-healing after experiencing symbolic or structural violence," a "process of restoring damaged relationships between

[8] The TRC has defined reconciliation as ""reconciliation" is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behavior" (TRC, 2015c, p. 113).

individuals and groups," and a "process of bringing divergent entities into harmony" (Miles, 2018, p. 297). Denis and Bradley (2016), found that reconciliation is invoked in two different ways. The first is described as the "mainstream vision," which is partially in line with the conception put forward by the TRC, where reconciliation takes on the meaning of change through curricular reform, en-route to local healing and relationship building (Miles, 2018). The second "radical vision" regards reconciliation as an effort to pacify Indigenous peoples towards reconciling with colonization rather than undoing it. The more radical vision advocates restitution as a necessary precursor to reconciliation, which is defined as restoration of Indigenous lands and sovereignty (Miles, 2018). Such different perspectives have vastly different implications for Social Studies teachers, curriculum designers, and policy makers regarding the critical questions of "who", "what", "when", "where", "why", and "how" of any curriculum for indigenization. Because there is no symmetry among policy makers, curriculum designers, and educators concerning this term, I am afraid that many K-12 teachers may be marching toward different goals. As an individual practitioner, I also suspect that few Social Studies teachers have read the TRC reports and have familiarized themselves enough with the TRC's definition to integrate it with their classroom practice. From where I stand, few professional development opportunities regarding the TRC's calls to action have been offered to teachers in British Columbia.

Challenges of Narrativity, Temporality and Identity

Apart from the confusion created by the different definitions of reconciliation, Social Studies teachers must also contend with several other complex dilemmas that include narrativity, temporality, and identity (Miles, 2018). *Narrativity* refers to how narratives are created and made concrete, which in itself is a contentious subject (Miles, 2018). Questions of which Indigenous stories to include and who gets to make those decisions come to the forefront and raise issues of power and control that need to be bridged. Although the TRC offers a framework for dealing with this matter, it is quite general, and it provides broad parameters that do not necessarily provide the finer details that are important for students. Many school districts have Indigenous departments that deploy Indigenous educators who visit classrooms to help students understand authentic Indigenous ways of knowing, but they are few in number, and they get spread thin[9]. Meaningful inclusion of Indigenous knowledge needs additional Indigenous teachers who can represent the keepers of Indigenous knowledge.

Another challenge with respect to narrativity is that the dominant Canadian historical narrative has been one of nation building (Miles, 2018). The new (post-TRC) Social Studies curriculum is more inclusive of Indigenous histories and cultures, but

[9] The Surrey School District has a population of 73, 948 students and 6 Indigenous helping teachers. (Surrey school District, 2020).

issues of misrepresentation and Indigenous governance still run counter to the predominant narrative of nation building. Once again, Indigenous peoples may be regarded as “the other” because they do not fit the national narrative of nation building (Miles, 2018). If so, they will continue to be regarded as disruptive groups who fail to assimilate with our mainstream society. Practitioners must learn to teach Indigenous history in the manner recommended by the TRC, which includes openly dealing with issues of land claims and sovereignty in order to interrupt the dominant narrative of nation building, which envisages an enterprising homogeneity among all Canadians. Might our efforts to refashion the Social Studies curriculum into a more authentic and honest reflection of Indigenous history become a divisive force and create a circular dilemma that can have no clear solution? Scholars have suggested that stepping beyond the vortex of this dilemma and treating Indigenous history and cultures in authentic ways will require the rejection our history as it is understood, as well as the rejection of European epistemology, which would be no small feat for individual teachers (Gibson & Case, 2019).

A second challenge that Social Studies teachers in Canada must contend with is *temporality* (Miles, 2018). Temporality refers to present day’s dismissal of the past wrongs of the Canadian government against Indigenous peoples, since those events are long past. Temporal reasoning fails to consider that the past transgressions continue to

benefit non-Indigenous people today. Exempting present day non-Indigenous people from the cultural genocide of the past will not address the fact that we still enjoy the benefits of colonial practices in the past (Miles, 2018). Temporality situates Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples as adversaries and raises another dilemma for which there is no easy solution. Is it possible to reflect "truth" in a Social Studies curriculum when that "truth" itself might shackle non-Indigenous Canadians to actions committed in the past, from which there can be no absolution? In a dispensation where the misdeeds of an earlier colonial nation will benefit Canadians in perpetuity, can we expect a reformed Social Studies curriculum to assist in the reconciliation of the Indigenous populations with non-Indigenous Canadians?

A third challenge that teachers, policy makers, and curriculum designers must face is one of *identity* (Miles, 2018). How is it possible for non-Indigenous peoples to represent Indigenous peoples in a manner that is authentic? And by (mis)representing indigenous peoples, Social Studies teachers may live with the fear that they are further transgressing the spirit of our Indigenous peoples (Miles, 2018). Donald (2009b, as cited in Scott, 2018) refers to this as the "cultural disqualification argument," where teachers feel that they should not invoke Indigenous ways of knowing because they do not speak with an authentic Indigenous voice (p. 40). The majority of Canadian teachers are of European heritage. Is it even possible for them to interpret Indigenous history and ways

of knowing in authentic ways? There are Indigenous teachers who assist their Canadian colleagues but, in a large school district, Indigenous teachers form a small minority who are in high demand and difficult to access.

Challenges in Ontology

Another significant challenge that I see in implementing authentic Indigenous ways of knowing and learning is ontological in nature. The TRC has recommended that curricular reforms in Social Studies should be much more inclusive of Indigenous truths. On the surface, this seems to be accomplished simply by including Indigenous ontologies and epistemes in the curriculum, but what happens when there is a clash between European and Indigenous ontologies? Some scholars (Smith, 2012) suggest that Indigenous and European epistemes are irreconcilable and contradictory, which creates new problems for practitioners. There are apparent differences in what constitutes truth; for example, Gibson & Case (2019) demonstrate that there is a significant difference between European and Indigenous interpretations of events such as the Numbered Treaties, with the former interpretation viewing them as a permanently closed matter, and the latter believing they are open to revision. Another example relates to ontological differences in opinion regarding the origins of the Indigenous peoples. Textbooks suggest that Indigenous groups began to populate North America some 15,000 years ago by crossing a land bridge, which now lies under the Bering Strait. In contrast, Indigenous

ontology suggests that peoples have "come *from* the land not *to* the land (Gibson & Case, 2019, p. 260). These types of ontological contradictions create a dilemma with respect to objective "truth" and how there can be more than one "truths" concerning the same topic. As a practitioner, I am left wondering how it is possible for me to transpose this apparent contradiction for my Grade 5 students, so that it can make sense to them.

Challenges in Epistemology and Axiology

Apart from there being ontological differences that complicate authentic Indigenization of curriculum, there are also several epistemological challenges. First, because the narrative that dominates Social Studies curriculum comes from a Eurocentric traditional history teaching approach that emphasizes a collective history, it becomes problematic to integrate Indigenous epistemologies because there are multiple versions. Given that most teachers are educated within Eurocentric ways of knowing, it may be hard for them to resolve this matter. "People too often become so deeply situated in particular matrices of historical understanding that it limits their ability to see the past in ways that depart from the dominant narrative" (Scott, 2018, p. 33). There are multiple Indigenous epistemologies, because all Indigenous peoples do not belong to a homogeneous cultural group. This makes it difficult for teachers to discuss issues that are broad in scope, or on a world scale. Scott (2018) identified this issue in his study of five teachers in Alberta and the practice of indigenization in their Social Studies classes. Like Scott (2018), I have found it easier to integrate Indigenous epistemologies when

dealing with a specific event relating to a particular Indigenous culture, but more difficult when the scope broadens to a world scale. For example, Scott (2018) found that his subjects avoided Indigenous epistemologies when they were discussing world issues related to globalization, but found them easier to incorporate when discussing historic events like the Great Depression. Scott (2018) argues that the problem of scope exists because the dominant Canadian perspective does not emphasize the relationship between Europeans and Indigenous peoples as one of reciprocity and interdependence, so that Indigenous peoples are not regarded as having a significant impact on global affairs. Scott (2018) argues further that, because Indigenous groups are viewed as not involved in world affairs, teachers see no reason to include Indigenous ways of knowing when they are examining world affairs.

Second, there are epistemological and axiological differences with respect to time and the value of local knowledge compared to universal knowledge (Marker, 2011, cited in Gibson &Case, 2019). In western consciousness, time is assumed to be linear, whereas in Indigenous cultures it is understood to be cyclical. In western cultures we seek to establish "universal truths," whereas in Indigenous cultures truths can be localized. Indigenous cultures believe in the mediation of spirits, as human beings cultivate relations with the animal, vegetable, and mineral populations whom they encounter on their traditional lands, whereas no such relations with other natural "beings" can be

entertained among the epistemic assumptions that we commonly value in the western world. The challenges of indigenizing curriculum are multiple and complex; however, I believe there are several adjustments that could yield positive results.

Moving Forward

In spite the challenges related to epistemology, ontology, axiology, and practicality, it is incumbent upon Social Studies teachers to move the indigenizing project forward. Given the influence that Social Studies curriculum and textbooks have in shaping the shared consciousness of non-Indigenous Canadians, teachers have an important role to play in the process of reconciliation and Indigenization, and I would like to outline a few recommendations here. My recommendations do not necessarily resolve all the challenges that I have discussed, but rather the few that I have tried to resolve within my own approach to indigenizing curriculum.

Congruency in Understanding Reconciliation

As I suggested earlier, I feel that there may be a significant level of intergroup and intragroup asymmetry among policy makers, curriculum designers, teacher education faculties, and practitioners as to the precise aims of curricular change. As a practitioner, I find that there is a general idea of what needs to be accomplished, but very little takes the form of precise understandings and goals. Given this incongruity, I wonder how

impactful curricular change can be, if key stakeholder groups are proceeding in different directions? There will need to be a greater push on the part of the Ministry of Education, teacher education programs, and practicing teachers toward a common understanding of what authentic reconciliation must mean and what it can look like in the classroom. A common macro understanding of reconciliation will not suffice, given that authentic change must first appear at the micro level. In order to move the country toward the validated reconciliation envisioned by the TRC, non-Indigenous Canadians will need to develop specific understandings of various Indigenous histories and cultures.

Textbook Changes

Given the influence of textbooks in shaping our collective images of Indigenous peoples, changes must be made to contemporary Social Studies textbooks. I will suggest three important changes and consider several additional questions that arise from them.

First, should the contents of textbooks be age specific? Should the very disturbing aspects of colonisation be filtered with respect to age? I believe that the true nature of the injustices experienced by Indigenous peoples can only be fully conveyed by clarifying extreme examples of assimilation and paternalism, but will students in the elementary grades be able to stomach the vivid images involved? Before educational practitioners can begin to teach students about Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, there will

need to be an open and transparent conversation about our legacy of historical injustices. Making the invisible visible is a necessary precursor to any curricular change, but this step is difficult for me as a teacher because the invisible aspects are so disturbing. The TRC has described the treatment that Indigenous peoples have received at the hands of successive Canadian governments as "cultural genocide"; however, are elementary aged children able to grasp this legacy of injustices without experiencing shame themselves? Should some content be made age specific? And by invoking age specifications in regard to content, would practitioners be modeling authentic reconciliation as envisaged by the TRC, or would they be providing their students with a sanitized version of colonisation?

Second, it should go without saying that textbooks must include Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, which means that textbooks need to feature the voices of Indigenous scholars and writers. Teachers and students need to hear the voices of Indigenous people rather than our Eurocentric interpretations, and this Indigenous content should be prominently positioned in textbooks and respectful of the Indigenous communities represented (Gibson & Case, 2019). Social Studies curriculum should move away from the textbook as its sole resource and begin to identify multiple resources, including Indigenous oral traditions (Gibson& Case, 2019). The Supreme Court of Canada[10] has already recognized Indigenous oral traditions as admissible and

[10] See Supreme Court of Canada cases: *Simon v. The Queen (1985),* and *R v. Marshall (1999).*

relevant[11], and the time has come to recognize them as curricular resources. Meaningful reconciliation must take root in our textbooks.

Third, textbooks also need to interrogate historically laden terms, such as "assimilation," "settler," and "colonizer." Textbooks have presented them as neutral terms (Gibson & Case, 2019), and many elementary school children regard them simply as "words I learned in Social Studies." The vocabulary used when discussing Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations is rooted in specific ideologies, and those ideologies need to be unpacked in textbooks so that students can effectively ground their understandings of reconciliation. Textbooks and teachers need to reveal that these words are value laden, and they carry different associations for Indigenous peoples than they carry for the non-Indigenous majority (Gibson &Case, 2019).

Reconciling Conflicting Epistemes and Ontologies

For educational practitioners, reconciling the apparent contradictions between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies is difficult. But bridging these "contradictions" is crucial for curricular change, because bridging relates directly to the ways that students acquire knowledge of history, and it is on this front that Gibson & Case (2019) make two recommendations. The first recommendation is that the bridging

[11] See Carlson, Fagan, & Kahaneko-Friesen, (2011); Perks &Thompson (2006)

is possible without radical epistemological or ontological change on the part of the practitioner, and it should be approached on a case-by-case basis. Gibson & Case (2019) argue that many epistemological and ontological differences are a result of differences in perception rather than deeper differences in "truth." From this point of view, Indigenous peoples' understandings of human origins in North America should not be seen as problematical. For Gibson & Case (2019), the different understandings are more concerned with definitions and perceptions of time than with differences in the essential origins of Indigenous peoples. They argue (2019) that paleo-archaeological evidence demonstrates that Indigenous peoples began to migrate into North America approximately 15,000-20,000 years ago, and this represents time immemorial for Indigenous peoples. Therefore, when Indigenous peoples claim that they have come *from* the land they are correct, because for them these thousands of years represent an eternity, which suggests differences in beliefs that are not necessarily indicative of epistemological and ontological contradictions (Gibson & Case, 2019).

A second recommendation toward bridging ontologies involves questions of objectivity and "truth." Different cultural groups should be able to agree on the basic principles of nature. In order to achieve consensus on issues affecting the natural world, Gibson & Case (2019) suggest, somewhat ironically, that practitioners should utilize "western rationality," because "its core principles of faith are few and include

assumptions that are generally acceptable to diverse groups" (Gibson & Case, 2019, p. 264). They admit that the "western rationality" approach is not without its flaws; they state, however, that "the rigorous gathering and examination of evidence is the least prejudicial forum for enabling diverse groups to set out, debate, and reconcile the warrants for their conclusions of the past" (Gibson & Case, 2019, p. 264). Perhaps, at the very least, a rigorously applied Western rationality can assist us in reducing our own inherited prejudicial assumptions.

Promoting A Historical Thinking Approach

As an educational practitioner, I have observed that much of the pre-2015 Social Studies curriculum was rooted in the "traditional history teaching" approach, which valued content and the promulgation of a common Canadian narrative (Gibson & Case, 2019). With traditional history teaching, student learning was measured by the ability to memorize facts and connect these facts in a manner that would result in a common history for all Canadians. Peter Sexias (2017) is a leading scholar of Social Studies curriculum. He has attempted to move us away from an exclusive focus on content and the common narrative toward an "historical thinking" approach, where content is married to critical questions. This approach not only needs to be espoused by practitioners, but it also needs to be woven into textbooks. Rather than asking students exclusively first-order questions about content, both textbooks and practitioners must ask students second-

order, critical thinking, questions. The suggested approach does not confine either practitioners or students to Eurocentric conceptions of history, since students are encouraged to move away from superficial first-order concepts and toward second-order concepts, which include those related to "historical significance, primary source evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspectives and ethical dimensions" (Gibson & Case, 2019, p. 266). The benefit of historical thinking is that it is generative, and it enables practitioners and students to "do" history actively rather than consuming it passively (Miles, 2018, p. 300). Historical thinking enables practitioners and students to understand that there can be multiple and differing perceptions about any topic and that each perspective has its own possible merits. Sexias' (2017) pedagogical approach liberates practitioners to discuss topics that at first seem contradictory. It creates space for diverse perspectives and incorporates Indigenous perspectives, while simultaneously inviting ethical judgements (Gibson and Case, 2019), something rarely done in the past.

To the credit of our Ministry of Education, it has grounded the post-TRC curriculum in Core Competencies,[12] of which criterial thinking is one. The core competency of critical thinking mirrors the historical thinking approach advanced by Sexias (2017). It enables practitioners to move past superficial first-order questions and

[12] Core competencies are proficiencies that students must demonstrate in critical thinking, communication, and social-emotional learning irrespective of subject area (BC Ministry of Education, 2020).

toward critical examinations of history that can respect diverse perspectives of history, including the currently dominant Eurocentric narrative of nation building. The core competency of critical thinking is also not unidimensional, but is presented rather as series of six gradational profiles, where students can progress beyond simple critical thinking skills that involve yes/no types of response and move toward more complex reasoning wherein students establish their own frameworks, criteria for reasoning, and evidence-based conclusions.

Promoting an Interdisciplinary Approach

A final recommendation necessary for changing Social Studies curriculum to promote reconciliation relates to an interdisciplinary approach to Social Studies. Traditionally, academic subjects have been approached as discrete units of study that have minimal overlap. However, there is consensus within the literature that Indigenous cultures have a holistic view of the world, in which concepts and ideas are interconnected. Therefore, as an educational practitioner who intends to Indigenize the curriculum, an important move for me will be to study history as an interdisciplinary challenge that meshes Social Studies with Science, Language Arts, and other traditionally separate curricula, with a view to creating a pedagogy that meaningfully includes holistic Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and learning.

Closing

TRC commissioner, Justice Murray Sinclair, commented that education was the vehicle that got us into this problem and, therefore, it must be the vehicle to take us out. Reconciliation must begin with schooling and within our approach to the Social Studies curriculum. Curriculum and textbooks have played a distinctive role in shaping the collective (mis)understandings that many Canadians share about Indigenous peoples, and textbooks must now become agents of reconciliation. The role that Social Studies curricula, and its textbooks, have played in conditioning generations of Canadians to Eurocentric views of Indigenous peoples cannot be minimized. The TRC has very clearly described the cultural genocide that Indigenous peoples have experienced at the hands of Canadian governments and the schools that have been agents of this genocide. The TRC has brought us full circle to a promising place of renewal, and it has exhorted educators to take the first steps towards reconciliation by indigenizing their curricula to provide a voice for Indigenous peoples. I am determined I will take these first steps and encourage other teachers to take them.

References:

Allan, B., and Smylie., J. (2015). First Peoples, Second Class Treatment: The Role of Racism in the Health and Well-Being of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Wellesley Institute, 1-17.

Barret, M.J., Harmin,M., Maracle, K.B., Patterson, M., Thomson, C., Flowers., M., & Bors, B. (2017). Shifting Relations with the More-than-Human: Six Threshold Concepts for Transformative Sustainability Learning. *Environmental Education Research*. 23(1), 131- 143.

BC Ministry of Education, (2019). Indigenous Knowledge and Perspectives. https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/indigenous-education-resources/indigenous-knowledge-and-perspectives-k-12-curriculum

BC Ministry of Education, (2020). BC's New Curriculum: Core Competencies. https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/competencies

Bopp, M., Brown, L., and Robb, J., (2017). Reconciliation within the Academy: Why is Indigenization So Difficult? Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, pp. 1-10.

Clark, P. (2007). Representations of aboriginal Peoples in English Canadian history textbooks: Towards Reconciliation. In E. Cole (Ed.) *Teaching the Violent Past: History education and reconciliation* (pp. 81-120). New York, NY: Rowan and Littlefield.

Gobson, L., and Case, R., (2019). Reshaping Canadian History Education in Support of Reconciliation. Canadian Journal of Education. 42(1), 251-284.

Marr, J., (2019). An English Language Teacher's Pedagogical Response to Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. New Directions for Teaching and Learning. 157, 91-103.

McGregor, H., (2017). One Classroom, Two Teachers: Historical Thinking and Indigenous Education in Canada. *Critical Education*. 8(14). 1-18.

Miles, J., (2018). Teaching History for Truth and Reconciliation: The Challenges and opportunities of Narrative, Temporality and Identity. McGill Journal of Education. (53(2), 294-311.

Pidgeon, M., (2016). More Than a Checklist: Meaningful Indigenous Inclusion in Higher Education. *Social Inclusion*. 4(1), 71-91.

Podeh, E. (2000). "History and Memory in the Israeli Education System: The Portrayal of the Arab-Israeli Conflict in History Textbooks (1948-2000)." *History and Memory,* 12 (1), 65-100.

Sexias, P., & Morton, T. (2013). The big Six: Historical Thinking Concepts. Toronto. Nelson.

Scott, D., and Gani, R., (2018). Examining Social studies Teachers' Resistances Towards Teaching Aboriginal Perspectives: The Case of Alberta. *Diaspora, Indigenous and Minority Education*. 12(4) 167-181

Shui, D., (2008). How are We Doing? Exploring Aboriginal Representations in Texts and aboriginal Programs in Surrey Secondary Schools. Doctoral Thesis, Faculty of Graduate Studies UBC, pp 1-196).

Siemens, J., (2007) Education for reconciliation: Pedagogy of a Canadian Context. *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education*. 8(1) 127-135.

Surrey School District (2020). Fact Sheet.
https://www.surreyschools.ca/ParentServices/ParentInfoBrochures/Documents/Surrey%20Schools%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf
Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015a). What we have learned. Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation of Canada. Published for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. McGill-Queen's University Press Montreal.
Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015b). Canada's Residential Schools: The Legacy. Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Volume 5. Published for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. McGill- Queen's University Press Montreal.
Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015c). Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation. Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Volume 6. Published for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. McGill-Queen's University Press Montreal.