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Understanding the Past to Unpack the Present: Lessons from the Classroom

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Abstract: The findings from data collected in classrooms or about a course are used to understand the strengths and challenges of teaching and learning, and the changes that need to be implemented. These same findings can be used reflexively to unpack the decision-making process of the instructor. This paper draws on qualitative survey data collected from students in a third-year sociology of race and ethnic relations course in Canada, as well as course assignments used over an eight-year period to demonstrate that interpretations of research findings must always be partnered with reflective teaching practice—as how findings are addressed in the classroom (and, therefore, how they are understood) shift with evolving pedagogical frameworks.

Keywords: race and ethnic relations; history; multiculturalism; racism; sociology; reflective teaching practice; critical pedagogy

Nearly a decade ago, I taught my first course pertaining to race and racism. The course was entitled "Race and Ethnic Relations in Canada." It would be my course to teach, and I was full of ideas about all the current events I wanted to discuss in class, imagining a course where we debated policies and practices pertaining to topics like immigration, terrorism, and multiculturalism. As I was designing the course, I decided that while I wanted to spend a significant amount of time on contemporary issues, it was important to provide a refresher on Canada's history of race and ethnic relations. At the time, I was worried that students would find the history lessons boring since I would be covering material that they should have already learned. However, their reactions to these lessons were not boredom or frustration, but rather surprise and dismay. And it was these reactions that laid the foundation for the next nearly decade of building and rebuilding this course.

In this paper, I will discuss the data I collected in 2015-2016 from two sections of this third-year sociology course on race and ethnic relations, and how the findings from this study informed my teaching practice over the next eight years. I will utilize this course as a case study to show how while the findings from the original study remained consistent, my own interpretations of these findings evolved, resulting in shifting assessments throughout the years— reinforcing the importance of engaging in reflective teaching practice.

Reflective Teaching Practice

Engaging in reflective teaching practice can be defined differently based on how one conceptualizes 'reflection' (or reflexivity), how one understands who the 'teacher' is, and what it means to 'practice'. The definitions become even more nuanced when we consider that all three concepts exist on spectrums: the extent to which one is reflective, or is a teacher, or practices. Reflective teaching practice calls on teachers to take time to pause and reflect on how they conceptualize teaching and teaching excellence (e.g., de la Rosa, 2005), and the ways in which they connect theories of teaching to practice and vice versa through praxis (e.g., Ryan & Murphy, 2018; Torres-Harding & Meyers, 2013; Zimmerman, 2009).

The latter is considered a cornerstone of critical pedagogy, whereby Freire (1970/2018) argued that for education to be transformative, there must be active praxis. Critical pedagogy demands teachers to reflect on how power differentials have impacted education, and the ways in which we might be reproducing these very power structures in our classrooms (e.g., Giroux, 2020). However, engaging in reflective practice as informed through a critical pedagogy lens requires teachers to not only become aware of the ways in which power is being produced and reproduced in the classroom, but to be actively engaged in dismantling these power structures. This can include shifting how the content is covered (e.g., Katz, 2014), and the ways in which the content is assessed (e.g., Serrano et al., 2018). Another way in which dominant discourses of power can be challenged in the classroom is to invite students to be active knowledge producers, moving away from the traditional model of assuming that the teacher is the expert in the room who dispenses knowledge, while students are passive recipients of said knowledge, something that Freire (1970/2018) discussed as the 'banking concept of education'. Instead, considering students as knowledge producers means that both teachers and students learn with and from one another (e.g., Giroux, 2020; Zimmerman, 2009).

However, power structures cannot be disrupted if one does not first recognize they exist. Therefore, one cannot be critical of something one does not know, which further reinforces the need for teachers to reflect actively on their teaching practice. Part of this reflection requires teachers to think through their own pedagogical development, which Ryan and Walsh (2018) outline as requiring understanding of the self, the system, and the learner. Essential to this understanding is being aware of the theory of learning that the teacher is using to anchor their teaching (e.g., Baird et al., 2017).

With increased understanding of their own pedagogical frameworks, teachers can be much more intentional in designing their courses (including their assessments) to reflect their pedagogy. However, Black and Wiliam (2018) point out that education scholarship often chooses to focus either on pedagogy or on assessment, without considering the importance of contextualizing assessments (or assessment-based decisions) in pedagogy. They argue in favour of a model that considers the intricate connections between pedagogy, theories of learning, course design and assessment (Black & Wiliam, 2018, p. 556), whereby any shift in one component, will result in (and be a result of) other components.

Whether one actively considers all components of Baird and Wiliam's (2018) model or a combination of components as they relate to one another, there is a fundamental demand for reflective teaching practice. Without considering how pedagogy is informed by theories of learning or how pedagogy informs course design or how the socio-political context in which the course is being taught impacts pedagogical leanings or assessments, one may find themselves making decisions that are ad-hoc rather than intentional, or reactive rather than proactive. Drawing on a third-year sociology course that is taught at a university in Alberta, Canada, I will illustrate how the ways in which we interpret our research findings (from the classroom) is indicative of our pedagogical approach—and that even as findings remain unchanging, the ways in which we understand them will not.

Addressing Tensions in Teaching and Learning Race and Ethnic Relations

Teaching courses pertaining to race and ethnic relations can be challenging due to the sensitivity of the topic and the emotional responses it could evoke. As such, much of the scholarship on teaching and learning topics like racialization and racism discuss different approaches or strategies that teachers can use to address this issue. The first approach to addressing the challenges of teaching race and ethnic relations is based on being reflexive about how the positionalities and social

locations of the teachers and students impact the classroom, and being intentional about creating classroom environments that make space for complicated discussions.

Barnett (2019) speaks to how it is important to establish a foundation of trust within the classroom, and that part of the way to do this is to allow space for students to be transparent about both their hopes and their fears in taking a course about race. Bauer and Clancy (2018) point out that part of the challenge in having conversations about race is due to the racialization of the classroom, and that when working at institutions that are predominantly white, one must slowly introduce concepts to help ease students out of their comfort zones. As such, when teaching courses that pertain to these topics, it is important to consider how to discuss the complexities of these issues without getting stuck in emotional roadblocks or landslides.

It is not enough to consider how the racial and ethnic identities of students might make for challenging class environments. We must also consider the role of faculty. Brookfield (2019) argues that the nature of these types of courses can lead to instructors making missteps in their class, not only as they navigate the emotions of their students, but also their own. How the faculty member teaching the course is racialized can impact how both students and teachers experience the course (e.g., Housee, 2008). Teachers may also feel tension about teaching concepts like racism and whiteness while working in institutions that are built on these hierarchies of privileges (e.g., Mowatt, 2021).

The second approach that is seen within the literature to address the tensions of teaching courses pertaining to race and ethnic relations emphasizes the importance of pedagogical decision-making. Having a clear idea of one's pedagogical framework will help to develop curriculum that can navigate the difficult conversations that are likely to arise in courses that discuss race, racialization, and racism. Brooms and Brice (2021) speak to how their use of critical race pedagogy as influenced by W.E.B. Du Bois's work has laid the foundation for their own courses pertaining to race relations. Cherry-McDaniel (2016) and Daigle and Sundberg, 2017 anchor their courses within a decolonization framework. Kishimoto (2016) emphasizes the importance of reflecting on how pedagogy informs not only our work within the classroom, but also how we engage outside of the classroom, such as being involved in advocacy efforts and community engagement. Fonseca and Wahab (2021) articulate that when teaching courses that discuss topics like white supremacy, one is not just teaching 'about' but also teaching 'against', emphasizing that those who teach on these topics are also involved in a form of 'social transformation'. Knowing our motivations for teaching can be a grounding force in these types of courses (e.g., Kolluri & Edwards, 2023).

A third approach within the literature considers the relevance of history. Being able to contextualize concepts within history can be a strategy that helps to manoeuvre through challenging topics. Eikenberry and Sellers (2021) argue the importance of starting with history as "facts" with students and using these taken-for-granted truths to build up to more controversial topics. Flanagan and Hindley (2017) point out that providing students with historical context can help them to understand present forms of racism. However, it is imperative for teachers to recognize what we choose to include (and exclude) in this history is informed by our own agendas, further shaping how students will engage with the material (Hinton and Ono-George, 2020).

While the scholarship on teaching and learning race and ethnic relations may emphasize the importance of any one of these approaches, there is no debate that all should be considered when teaching material that may be perceived as controversial. In fact, these strategies are interconnected. Our pedagogy will inform the type of classroom environment we create, the ways in which we reflect on positionalities, and what history we teach and how we teach that history. Arguably, the easiest of the three approaches to implement should be the last one, as it is grounded in presenting historical events, where teachers can rely on the notion that there are taken-for-granted 'truths.' But

what happens when the history that is taught prior to university emphasizes a narrative of race relations that is more fiction than fact?

Teaching and Learning Race and Ethnic Relations in a Canadian Context

Teaching courses on race and ethnic relations within a Canadian context can be especially challenging because the Canadian history that is taught in elementary and secondary school is one that often minimizes or completely erases the stories of individuals who are not racialized as white in favour of those who are (e.g., Kelly et al., 2021; Pandolfi & James, 2017; Wright-Maley, 2022). The lack of representation or the misrepresentation of these populations and their contributions to the development of Canada is not always intentional. As Marom (2016, 2017) points out, educators can feel anxiety and apprehension about discussing certain topics in the classroom because of a lack of knowledge of the material. In a study of teacher candidates in British Columbia, Marom (2017) found that these teacher candidates were more likely to celebrate diversity at a superficial level because they did not know how to have more critical discussions on these topics in the classroom. The lack of knowledge can also lead to complete omission of topics (e.g., Indigenous content) because of the mistaken belief that the material is being taught by others (Marom, 2016).

The more informed and confident the instructors, the more beneficial it may be for students. However, sometimes the material being taught may be too singular in its approach, which could further marginalize students. As Pandolfi and James (2017, p. 91) argue after examining a series of texts on the histories of various populations in Canada:

> The books in this series not only do not contribute to integrating the experiences of minoritized Canadians but also do not fundamentally fracture the historical narrative of Canada. Rather, these narratives tend to re-inscribe an uncritical acceptance of Euro-Canadian narratives informed by discourses of whiteness, individualism, and conquest.

This framing of Canadian history can lead to questions of belonging among students who are not racialized as white. However, even when racism is taught, the ways in which it is conceptualized might do more harm than good (Bryan, 2012), especially, when these conceptualizations favour a colour-blind perspective of racism. When teachers, particularly teachers who are not racialized as white, are responsible for teaching this content in constructive ways, it can also heighten their emotional distress (Shim, 2014), which further illustrates why lessons about racism might be avoided.

Osborne (2003) points out that Canadians have been struggling for decades over how to incorporate history into the classroom, often fluctuating between whether Canadian history helps or hinders the nation-building project. The emphasis on multiculturalism over racism can lead Canadians to believe that racism is an issue for other countries, and not for them (e.g., Wright-Maley, 2022). There has been strong advocacy to incorporate more criticality in Canadian education, particularly in relation to its curriculum on multiculturalism (e.g., Eideoo et al., 2011; Galcyzynski, Tsagkaraki, & Ghosh, 2013; Lawyer, 2018; Sleeter, 2018).

When I taught my first third-year level race and ethnic relations course at a university in Alberta in Winter 2015, I wanted to dive into the present debates and tensions. I decided, however, to include a little history of race and ethnic relations to function as a refresher before we moved into the present. I assumed that students would have enough background knowledge of the past for me to spend more time discussing the present and speculating on the future. However, I quickly learned that much of the brief historical context I provided was new material for my students, and that they wanted more—more than I had prepared.

This led to the development of a research project, in which I collected qualitative survey data from students during the 2015-2016 academic year to determine students' understanding of the relationship between Canadian history and present in terms of race and ethnic relations. The findings informed not only how I crafted the lectures for the course, but also led to an evolution of assignments over the next eight years, each year striving to help students learn enough about the past to engage meaningfully with the present. In this paper, I will first discuss the findings from the original study, before demonstrating how these findings informed my teaching practices. My own evolution with respect to the course illustrates the need for more intentional reflective teaching practice—especially for new teachers—because while the findings have remained consistent, how I have interpreted and addressed them in the classroom has not.

Methods

Over the course of the 2015-2016 academic year (Fall and Winter semesters), a qualitative project was conducted among students registered in a third-year Sociology course focused on racial and ethnic relations in a university in Alberta, Canada. There was one section of this course taught per semester, with a maximum enrollment capacity of forty students per term. While this course was mandatory for a handful of students who were completing a degree specializing in diversity, it is predominantly taken by students who do not require the course to graduate. Therefore, students taking the course included those who were taking it purely due to interest, those who only registered because it fit their schedules, and those who required it to graduate. As the university does not collect race-based data, it is difficult to discern ethnic and racial make-up of the student body, although more than half of any class I have taught in the past decade are racialized as white. Due to the nature of the university (both in size and location), it attracts students primarily from within the province, with many from small towns.

To determine how their views and knowledge base on race and ethnic relations in Canada were affected by the course, data was collected through three anonymous electronic qualitative surveys. One was completed during the first two weeks of the course, the second was completed at the halfway point of the semester when discussions of the histories of ethnic populations in Canada had been completed, and the third survey was completed at the end of the semester. Participation was voluntary, and students were asked to provide non-identifiable pseudonyms. Students were also told that they did not have to complete all three surveys but were asked to provide the same pseudonym if they chose to do so. Students later revealed that they were unable to recall the pseudonym they had initially provided, and therefore, created new ones for each survey. As such, no conclusions about the changes in attitudes and beliefs at the individual level can be drawn from the data collected in this study.

The surveys were completed with Survey Monkey. Students in the classroom were provided with a link to the study, and were encouraged to participate, but were told that their participation would have no bearing on their performance in the course. All three surveys consisted of ten questions. The first survey primarily collected demographic information, including level of interest in the course material, as well as their level of knowledge on topics at the beginning of the semester. As the surveys were being completed during the semester (including the start and mid-point of the semester), identifying information was not collected to ensure anonymity. Therefore, demographic information was focused primarily on year of study, the size of their high school, size of the town in which they attended high school, and location of the high school (in province, out of province, or out of country). Although it would have been interesting to collect data on the racial and ethnic identities of participants, this would have been information that could have made the student easily identifiable (e.g., a participant identifies as Black on the survey, and there is only one student who

would be racialized as Black in the class). Therefore, data that could identify participants was not collected as per the ethical guidelines of the institution.

The second qualitative survey focused on what they had learned to date, and what they were curious to learn more about. The third qualitative survey asked students to speak about the topics that stood out for them, as well as their views on learning about the history of ethnic relations in Canada. The surveys were entirely voluntary, and as per ethical guidelines, students were told that their participation in the study would not impact their grades in any way. As both the professor of the courses and the primary investigator of this research project, all measures were taken to ensure that students did not feel pressured. This may be why participation rates were low, and steadily decreased with each survey. During the Fall 2015 semester, seventeen students completed the first survey (42.5% of the class), eleven students completed the second survey (27.5%), and four students completed the third survey (10%). In the Winter 2016 semester, eleven students completed the first survey (27.5%), thirteen students completed the second survey (32.5%), and four students completed the third survey (10%). While participation rates may have been lower than desired, they clearly illustrate important findings in terms of students' limited awareness of Canada's history of race and ethnic relations.

The average year of study across participants was 3.4, where most participants were completing the course in their third or fourth year of study. A few participants completing the course in their second or fifth year of study. All but five participants completed their high school education in Alberta. Of the five who did not, three students completed high school in a different province, and two completed high school outside of Canada. All but seven participants attended high school in cities. Of the seven who did not, five stated their high schools were in villages, while one shared theirs was in a town. The seventh participant did not respond to this question.

The results were coded and analyzed using MAXQDA, a qualitative analysis software. Line coding was completed for action codes prior to completing thematic coding (Charmaz, 2014; Lempert, 2007). Coding was completed for each survey (first, second, and third), and then across all three surveys for both sections (Fall 2015 and Winter 2016). The paper presents results across both semesters, as no significant differences were found between them.

At the time this course was taught, "Aboriginal" was still the most widely used term, which is what students used in their responses. In this paper, however, this term has been replaced with "Indigenous" in square brackets to be more reflective of what students use in class today. No other changes were made to the students' responses.

The Layout of the Course

The course was structured so that the first half of the semester was spent discussing the history of race and ethnic relations in Canada. It began with colonization and settler-colonialism before moving to a discussion of residential schools and their effects on Indigenous Peoples. The course then discussed the history of Quebec, the Quiet Revolution, and the struggle for sovereignty. Within the lectures on French Canada was a discussion of Acadians and the "Great Upheaval." The history of immigration focused on the various policies for restricting and welcoming certain ethnic and racial communities. Within this discussion was also acknowledgement of the history of Black migration into Canada, including the history of slavery. The final portion of this section of the course consisted with discussion of multiculturalism in Canada, and the history of this policy. The lectures on this topic also included a discussion of the differences and similarities between multiculturalism and interculturalism. The final weeks of the course were focused on racism and white privilege, and numerous examples of these in a contemporary context, including cultural appropriation.

Results

Selective Canadian History: "I never knew this happened in Canada"

One of the most common responses from students was their lack of knowledge on the topics that were covered during the term. Students spoke of not realizing just how severe residential schools were. While many had been educated on residential schools at some point prior to taking this course, they had not fully understood the dire conditions of these schools, or the rationale for them.

It is important to acknowledge that the students taking this course had completed high school at least two years prior (e.g., 2012 or earlier), and had therefore, not gone through the education system since the unveiling of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC, 2015) findings, which were released in 2015, outlining the impact of residential schools on Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Since the TRC, there has been more intentional efforts for school curriculum to educate children on Indigenous Peoples. However, the Federal government of Canada issued its apology in 2008 (CBC Archives, 2018) following more than two decades of various religious institutions issuing their own apologies. Therefore, while the TRC findings may not have been established, the recognition of the role of Canada in residential schools was known—which is what makes these findings particularly important.

Two questions in the surveys that demonstrated the lack of knowledge that students had on the topic of Indigenous Peoples and colonization were "Explain what you learned that was new" (if they answered 'yes' to a preceding question on whether or not they learned anything new), and "What (if anything) did you find most surprising about the information that has been covered to date?". Participants wrote about knowledge they had gained about Indigenous Peoples, suggesting that even though they should have been exposed to these topics much earlier than university, they were only learning about these topics in any depth in an undergraduate third year Sociology course.

When asked about one new thing they had learned, one participant stated: "Similarly, it was an eye-opening experience to learn about our [Indigenous] history within Canada. I had a perception that Canada was a peaceful, peacemaking country friendly to all kinds of people, but I was terribly wrong." Their newly gained knowledge about the experiences of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and the history of colonization was echoed among other participants:

> I think the most surprising about the information covered is how truly badly [Indigenous] people were affected from residential schools. While I knew what happened to them was not okay and that they needed to be compensated, I did not realize the extent of this harsh treatment.

With respect to Indigenous Peoples and residential schools, many students also stated that they had at least some knowledge on this issue and did know that it was important to consider how residential schools impacted Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships. However, there were areas in the course where students shared that they had absolutely no knowledge of these events, such as the 'Great Upheaval' and Quebec sovereignty movements, Canada's history of slavery, and Canada's history of immigration.

Students in western Canada are not necessarily educated on eastern Canadian history and affairs (beyond the settlement of Europeans), and thus perhaps it should have not come as a surprise how many students were unaware of French politics and history in Canada. As one participant so candidly shared:

> I never understood why Quebec wanted to have sovereignty before. As I was raised in a family with very strong feelings about the French part of Canada due to the actions of people like Trudeau (literally giving the finger to western Canada). I was always just told it was because they were French. But with an explanation of the Quebec Act and the idea of this distinct identity and government that did so much for their province, I have a more clear understanding.

To what extent would Canadian attitudes about Quebecois politics and the ways in which they choose to govern themselves be altered if they had a better understanding of the history of the province and its people?

The history of immigration in Canada was also a topic that left students feeling surprised and dismayed. Overwhelmingly, respondents indicated that they had not been aware of Canada's history in terms of its immigration policies, and just how exclusionary and racist they were. As one participant stated:

> What I've taken away most thus far was that the Canadian government promotes itself as a tolerant land open to immigration but in reality feels this way to boost its sagging birthrate. If its birthrate was above 2 it probably wouldn't be so tolerant, like when this country first started.

The findings from this study demonstrate students' lack of knowledge on several topics relevant to race and ethnic relations in Canada. In a survey question asking them about how previous courses (including pre-university) covered the material in the class, respondents noted that they had little to no knowledge on the topics. Participants stated that while they may have taken courses in elementary and high school that should have addressed the topics we discussed during the semester, they did not get detailed or adequate information on all the topics covered. As one participant stated:

> I feel that these courses briefly touched upon all of the topics mentioned, however, as the courses weren't focused primarily on these topics, there wasn't in depth discussion. They offered a basic understanding of how racial discrimination occurred historically and its current repercussions, although Canadian references weren't used so much as general concepts and ideas.

It is important to note that the topic that students felt they had been exposed to the most in pre-university courses was that of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and residential schools. However, while students mentioned they had been taught this topic, this was also one of the topics in which they claimed they learned something "new" or "surprising." This could be indicative of the fact that while they knew Indigenous people existed, and that there were complicated relationships between settlers and Indigenous people, they did not learn about what precisely made these relationships so complex.

Canadian History and its Impact on the Present

Participants in this study were asked two questions about learning about Canada's history. In the second survey they were asked: "How does having knowledge of the history of Canada impact your understanding of contemporary issues of race and ethnic relations in Canada?" In the third survey they were asked about their thoughts about separating the current course into two different courses:

one focused solely on historical race and ethnic relations, and one focused on contemporary race and ethnic relations. Every single participant who responded to this question adamantly asserted that knowledge of history was crucial to understanding contemporary issues in Canada. For example, one participant claimed:

> I definitely think that the history part of the course is needed, because it really helps to give a background understanding of why some groups still continue to feel disadvantaged today. Also, it's eye opening to realize that Canada wasn't always a 'we love multiculturalism' kind of country, even though that's what we're constantly told. Basically, it helps to give us a more objective view of our country.

Participants shared that having knowledge of history was necessary for several reasons, including a better understanding of how Canada has changed (or not) over time, as well as understanding why various communities in Canada might feel marginalized. Participants appeared to believe that a course focused only on the present and contemporary issues of race and ethnic relations in Canada would be ineffective as the historical context allows for a deeper and more accurate understanding of Canada:

> I feel like it is very important that you incorporate the history of various Canadian populations in future semesters. It may be in the past but the history plays a great part on the issues that are contemporary. Focusing strictly on contemporary issues will be ineffective. I believe this because some people are unaware of Canada's history and how it was not all peaceful. Incorporating contemporary issues is important as well, to show how certain issues are still being dealt with today. Having SOCI [course number] without Canada's history will not be as effective as having a SOCI [course number] with just contemporary issues. A mixture of both is good.

Without understanding the past, it would be difficult to understand why some Canadians proclaim there is racism in Canada:

> It makes it a lot easier to understand why some groups feel disadvantaged and are advocating for change. For examples, I knew [Indigenous] were discriminated against, but by studying their history and seeing all of the different treaties and such, it really makes it possible to see the hardships they've endured over the years. Basically, studying all of this has really been able to put everything into perspective because you can really see how the history has shaped certain groups' views and relations with other groups.

Reflective Teaching Practice: From Findings to Course Assignments

While formal data was collected during the 2015-2016 academic year, these findings continued to be observed in each subsequent semester of teaching the course through class discussions, assessments, and course evaluations. Students remained consistent in their surprise about how much they did not know about the history of race and ethnic relations in Canada, and they continued to wonder why they were not taught this material before. However, while they as students remained steadfast, as the teacher, I have not. As I reflect on the past eight years of teaching the course since the study was completed, I see how the ways in which I interpreted the findings and the ways in which I addressed them in the classroom have shifted as my own pedagogical framework became more firmly established.

Teaching History: Students as Passive Recipients

Students' responses revealed not only a lack of awareness of Canadian history of race and ethnic relations, but disappointment that the first time they were being exposed to this content was in a third-year optional university course. My initial response to this was that I needed to not only expand discussion of historical context within the lecture material, but that I also needed to construct course assignments that emphasized the role of history and the importance of learning it. For the 2016-2017 academic year, I assigned a take home final in which students were asked to respond to one of two questions pertaining to the role of history:

1. Canada can be seen as either a model or a warning to other nation-states when one examines its historical and contemporary race and ethnic relations. Using THREE events or situations as discussed in class, explain whether you believe Canada serves as a model that should be emulated by others, OR serves as a warning of what not to do. Use only course materials (readings and lectures) to substantiate your response.
2. Scholars argue that the narratives of history and past impact contemporary relationships. This is often referred to as the 'weight of history' argument. Canada has several different narratives, including the narrative of discrimination and the narrative of inclusion. Using THREE events or situations as discussed in class, explain which narrative you think MOST strongly has impacted contemporary race and ethnic relations in Canada, and why. Use only course materials (readings and lectures) to substantiate your response.

This assessment was built on the premise that students were lacking knowledge in something, and that they must demonstrate that they were no longer lacking. But more importantly, they had to demonstrate they had learned what I alone taught them in the classroom (through lectures and readings). In retrospect, I can see how at this point in my career, I genuinely believed in the very traditional model of teaching and learning, in which students were empty vessels to be filled (Freire, 1970/2018). And this is why I was so disheartened that they had not been "filled" sufficiently prior to entering my classroom. My initial reactions to the findings of the study, and the way in which I interpreted them was that elementary and secondary schools had failed to do their job, and that it was now my responsibility to make up for it.

The take-home test yielded insightful responses, and the teacher who was still new felt pride that her students were able to engage with the material that was presented in class. However, with each subsequent semester that I taught the course, students continued to lament in class discussions about all that they did not know. Suddenly, rather than feeling resigned to 'making up' for the knowledge they missed prior to university, I felt anxiety. I started to realize that there was so much more they did not know that I did not have the time to cover. I still held firmly to the traditional model that there were knowledge gaps to be filled, but I began to realize that I alone could not fill them. Therefore, in the 2018-2019 academic year, I had them work on a project about Canada's history of racism and advocacy, which consisted of both a group project and an individual final paper:

1. Group Project: Groups will be responsible for creating a short video (2-3 minutes) entitled "The Canada You Didn't Know", where they will highlight one example of systemic racism in Canadian history, and an example of anti-racist advocacy (as done by a racialized individual or group).

2. Individual Final Paper: This paper is to be completed individually. Each member will articulate their own understanding of the example of systemic racism and advocacy in Canada, and how it shaped the landscape of racial and ethnic relations in Canada.

This assignment had students going beyond the classroom in search of history they did not know, and then sharing these histories with their classmates. As such, I was no longer solely responsible for covering all there was to know—and they were able to complete the course realizing that there was even more material beyond what was covered in the classroom.

This assignment was a tremendous success, as students focused on several different, often unexpected topics and racialized populations. Some individuals were asked to present their work at a university-wide event on the topic of history and advocacy. Students not only presented their projects, but also spoke to how fascinating it was to learn about historical events they had never been taught before.

My initial applications of the findings from the survey data were about emphasizing the role of history, and lack of awareness for students. I interpreted the findings as 'they did not know something because teachers prior to me failed them, and it was my responsibility to 'fix' the problem.' However, with each subsequent year that I taught the course, I continued to hear comments like "I didn't know that" from my students. I began to see the challenges of teaching all history in meaningful ways (and recognized my misplaced blame on elementary and secondary school teachers), and I realized that my initial interpretations of the findings were based on a pedagogical framework in which students were stripped of agency, where they were always passive recipients of knowledge (Freire, 1970/2018). And although I was able to 'fill' them with new knowledge, I could only do this for students who opted to take my optional third-year course on Race and Ethnic Relations—and even still, there would always be more to learn than I could teach.

Teaching to Share: Students as Active Producers

As a sociologist, I naively believed that the very act of teaching about race and ethnic relations in a province that was not incredibly open to such material meant that I was dismantling hierarchies of power. However, the ways in which I was teaching, and in blaming elementary and secondary schools, I was continuing to reinforce the hierarchy through the implication that only the few (like me) had the power to change things. I was keeping the power structure in place through this very top-down approach to teaching.

The 'Canada You Didn't Know' assignment from the 2018-2019 year led to an event on campus that was open to all, and as I watched my students become the experts, and pass on their knowledge to people who would never take my class, I started to realize that it was not enough to simply teach students the importance of learning history, I also wanted them to appreciate that they had access to information that others did not, and that they can be active agents rather than passive recipients in the dissemination of course content. While it was gratifying to know that students were learning something new in my classroom, I wanted them to gain experience in actively sharing knowledge outside of the classroom. If they "didn't know," then it made sense, that others did not as well.

Therefore, in the 2019-2020 academic year, students were partnered with community organizations to create an infographic focused on raising awareness about a specific topic (e.g., supports for Indigenous seniors). While the infographics were completed in groups, students individually had to write papers to show how Canada's history of race and ethnic relations may have led to the exclusion of their specific population of focus (e.g., Indigenous seniors), and what strategies can be implemented to ensure inclusion of said population moving forward.

Students told me that they appreciated collaborating with community partners, and seeing how their knowledge can be applied outside of the classroom. However, there were also hiccups with inviting organizations (including the loss of class time) that led me to removing these partnerships in future classes. At this point in my evolution as a teacher, I was beginning to think about assessments that were tied to critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970/2018; Giroux, 2020), but I had not yet truly begun to engage with the framework. As a result, while I wanted students to be able to produce and disseminate knowledge, I felt there was still important content they had to learn, and as such, I was unwilling to sacrifice class time to continue to incorporate community organizations in my classes.

However, I still wanted students to recognize the importance of disseminating knowledge beyond the classroom. Therefore, in 2022-2023, students were asked to complete a Conversation Starter Resource Project:

> University students are in a privileged position, where they can learn concepts that not everyone can. Often this learning is seen as something to be done for tests or assessments only. However, it is important to consider how our knowledge can be shared outside of the classroom. For this assignment, students will select any concept covered in topics 1-5 and will create a resource that will help people outside of the classroom to "learn" the concept.

This was a group project, where students were encouraged to be strategic and to pick a specific organization or population that they thought would most benefit from learning the material. Students chose a wide variety of populations and organizations, ranging from newly promoted managers in a company to teenagers who were turning to Instagram for their information. Groups that were interested in pursuing careers in health, for example, chose to target populations like medical students, or nurses. Students were also creative in coming up with resources that best suited their populations, ranging from video games to picture books to podcasts.

I also incorporated language into the course outlines that the material they produced may be shared so that they recognized their roles as knowledge producers and mobilizers:

> As this assignment is to promote knowledge mobilization, the resources that are created may be shared for public consumption. This can take the form of the resources being posted on a [University name] hosted website and/or being disseminated to other students and faculty (e.g., SOCI 100 classes), etc. Please note that when resources are shared, only your first names will be included (unless you choose to post your full names on the final submission) or unless you specify otherwise. Once all resources have been graded, students will be offered an opportunity to make any corrections/revisions that are needed before they are used for knowledge mobilization.

Critical pedagogy emphasizes the importance of toppling the power structures that are entrenched within the education system (Freire, 1970/2018). The first iteration of assessment in this course (the take-home exam) maintained the status quo of power in the classroom: the teacher as the 'knower,' and the student as the 'learner.' The second iteration of assessment (the final paper and video on the Canada they did not know) continued to maintain a power differential but recognized that the teacher was not the only 'knower,' and that students must learn how to seek out other resources for learning. The third and fourth iterations of the course (infographic for community partner or resource for a particular population) was when there was a dramatic shift in how I conceptualized my role as teacher. I was no longer the only 'knower,' and students were no longer

simply 'learners.' Instead, students became 'knowers' too, capable of producing and disseminating content beyond the confines of a classroom.

However, while the knowledge they were producing and disseminating may be used to create structural change, this was not necessarily the intent of the resources, nor was it made clear to students how what they were doing could be connected to dismantling hierarchies of power and privilege. Therefore, during the 2023-2024 academic year, I designed an assignment that directly addressed the question of whether students should learn content related to race and ethnic relations prior to university:

> University students are in a privileged position, where they can learn concepts that not everyone can. Although there is increasing pressure to introduce concepts about race, racialization, and racism to students prior to university, there is often push back. In this course, students are going to consider how to make a 'sales pitch' to convince one of eight different stakeholders that we should OR should not be introducing concepts related to race and ethnic relations to students in elementary and secondary school.
>
> This is a group project, where students will first form groups of 5 students (their choice of group members), prior to signing up to make a presentation to one of the following eight stakeholders: 1) Government; 2) School Board(s); 3) Teachers; 4) Parents; 5) Taxpayers and broader community members; 6) Students; 7) Teachers Colleges; 8) Textbook publishers.

Students created compelling pitches to the class, where their classmates pretended to be the relevant stakeholders. They showed insightful consideration about the reasons for why their stakeholders might resist school curriculum changing to include material relevant to race and ethnic relations and made convincing arguments for why the stakeholders should reconsider. For example, the group on taxpayers decided to focus specifically on small business owners, and why their worry about their taxes potentially rising to make room for changing curriculum (and related expenses) would be offset when they had employees that would be well-equipped to working in an increasingly globalized world. Listening to their classmates' presentations was also meant to help students realize that making larger social and political changes requires the buy-in from many different populations, and that they cannot use the same argument or same piece of evidence to convince all parties.

I contextualized this assessment at the beginning of the semester by telling my class that students often reported that they wished they had learned the material covered in class prior to university (obliquely referencing my own 2015-2016 study). I presented them with the social problem and told them that curricular changes at the elementary and secondary level require much more oversight and buy-in than post-secondary curricular change. Therefore, they are reminded about how societal structures impact education. However, through the assignment, I wanted them to recognize that power is dynamic, and that they can be actively involved in changing these power structures. As such, I was not assessing them on what they knew, but on how they could use it to create change.

Reflecting on Reflecting Teaching Practice

As I reflect on the past eight years of teaching this course, I see how I took the initial findings of the study in the most literal sense: "I didn't know, and therefore, I must be taught." As time passed, I reinterpreted the findings as "I didn't know, so you don't know either; you should be taught." My latest interpretation of the findings is "What I know and do not know are impacted by societal structures. If I want to know, how can I remove the structural barriers to my learning?"

What the qualitative survey results revealed eight years ago continue to be demonstrated in class discussion and course evaluations. And in fact, it is becoming increasingly clear that Canadians are lacking foundational knowledge with respect to the history of the nation, if we consider the reactions to the discovery of the mass graves in 2021 (e.g., Eneas, 2021; Lindeman, 2021). The news was shocking to Canadians, not only due to the discovery of the graves themselves, but also due to learning more about Canada's history of residential schools (e.g., Heidenreich, 2021). In partnership with attention to anti-Black racism through the Black Lives Matter movement (e.g., Buchanan, Bui & Patel, 2020) and the spike of anti-Asian violence during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Balintec, 2022), the discovery of the unmarked graves forced Canadians to acknowledge their own lack of understanding of Canada's history and ongoing presence of racism.

The lack of knowledge about Canadian history continues to be an ongoing problem, but how I have understood this problem, and how I have contextualized my role in addressing this problem has changed. Each year, I consider a new and unique way to address the findings because my own pedagogy has shifted. My understanding of how students learn and why teachers teach has evolved. In engaging in reflective teaching practice, and in having the advantage of being able to use an empirical study of a course as an anchor, I can observe the importance of ensuring that our reflective teaching practice is not limited to a semester but instead considers the course holistically from its conception.

Conclusions

The reactions of my students that there was a Canada they did not know is representative of a larger national problem: we don't know our history, which makes it harder for us to understand the present. While this can certainly, and quite easily, lead to the recommendation that we teach Canadians more about our history, this is not a sufficient solution—because there is always more history than we can teach. There is always more to learn than can be taught in a class or a grade or a formal education. And over the past eight years, I have learned (and relearned) this lesson, as it guides the development of my own pedagogical framework.

This paper reveals the importance of contextualizing any studies completed in and of the classroom within a pedagogical framework. How the study was designed, and how the findings were interpreted, were influenced by my own understanding of what it meant to be a teacher at that moment in my professional development. As I look back at how often I redesigned the assessments of the course, I can understand that these changes were reflective of the growing pains of my pedagogical framework development. However, because I did not realize this, I was unable to truly comprehend why I was so dissatisfied with my assessments—it was because I had not yet actively reflected on the connection between pedagogy and assessment (Baird & Wiliam, 2018). If I could revisit my younger self, I would tell her to take time thinking through these connections before making any changes to the course.

This paper draws on a research project that is not without its limitations in terms of its size and scope. It further relies on retroactive reflections rather than using entries from an ongoing reflective teaching practice journal. This paper also is based on my own reflections of changing course design of a course that I am solely responsible for teaching.

Future studies examining the reflective teaching practice of new teachers over time would provide insight, as would a study of how scholarship of teaching and learning anchors the findings from these projects within larger pedagogical frameworks. We must learn the past to understand the present—this does not only apply to how we teach history in the classroom, but also to how we understand how our own histories of pedagogical reflection impact the present ways in which we structure our courses.

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