

## Restructuring the Historical Framework

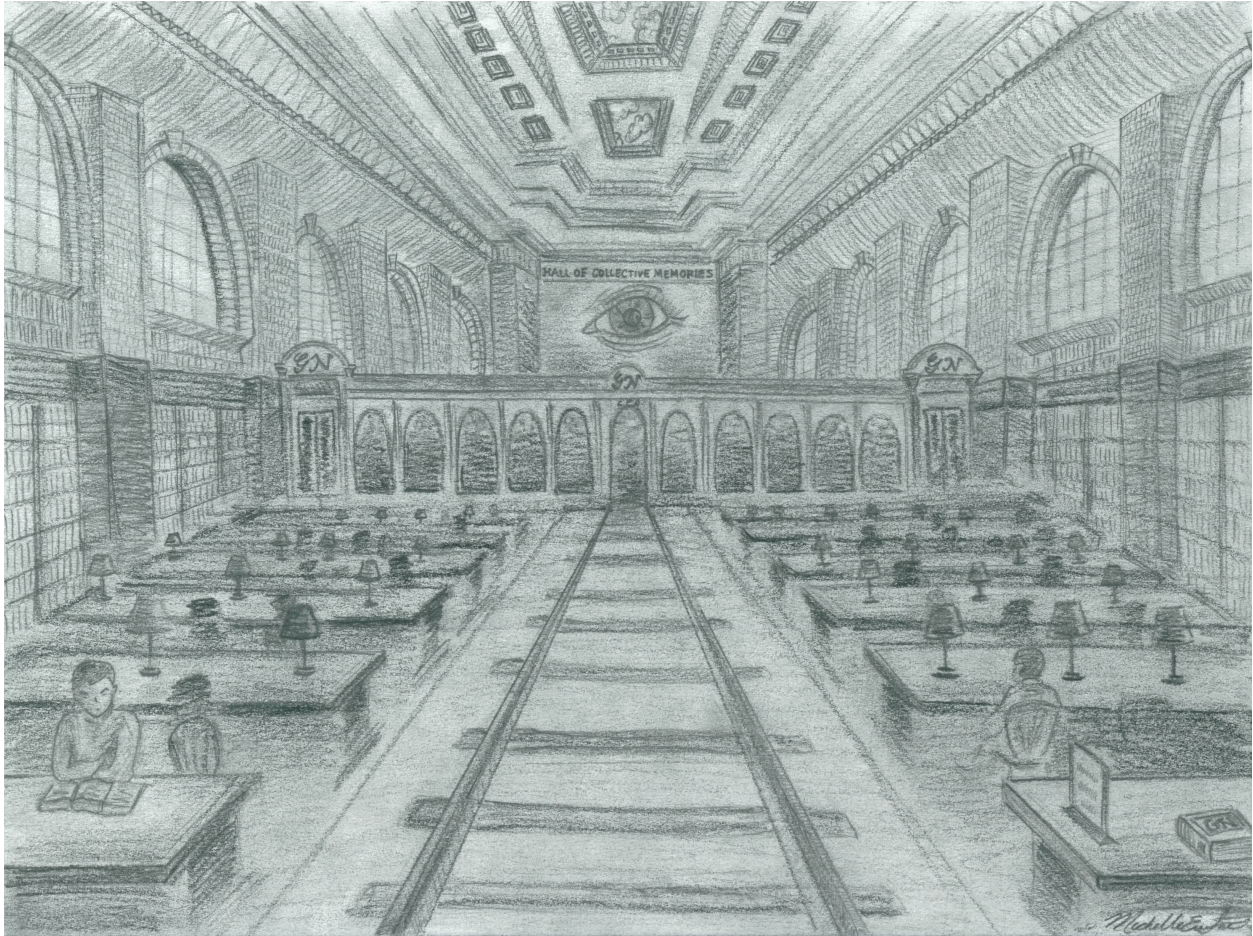
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The current Alberta Social Studies curriculum places a strong emphasis on recognizing the importance of multiple perspectives in the interpretation of Canada's past. With the limited time and the multitude of historical perspectives that are vying for acknowledgement and attention, teachers have to deal with incorporating various historical interpretations, stories, and social issues which are all equally significant into their lessons. In order for teachers to deal with multiple perspectives, it is not enough for teachers to merely "add on" the alternative perspectives to the grand narrative, doing so will not "escape the framework of the grand narrative" (Stanley, 2006, p. 41). The main focus still remains on the Europeans, but with attempts to "multiculturalize" the story (Stanley, 2006, p. 40). Social Studies teachers should approach dealing with the various perspectives that compete for veracity by restructuring the historical framework in which multiple perspectives become embedded. Add-ons only allow for enrichment of historical content, but the embedding of multiple perspectives creates the tension of disrupted common sense thinking (Tupper & Cappello, 2008, p. 566) as a requirement for the possibility of "narrative competence" – the ability to weave and learn from multiple story-ings of Canada's past (Rüsen, c.f. in den Heyer, 2005, p. 2)

The three drawings that I have created represent the progression from the overall arching grand narrative of Canadian history to the introduction and embedding of the multiple perspectives to aid the possible narrative competence of the student. The silencing of the "others" and their interpretations of the past are represented by the components of the first drawing which takes place in a study hall. This setting is important because it instils a sense of silence that prevails over the perspectives that struggle to be heard. The room is suitably named the "Hall of Collective Memories" because it represents what "we" have chosen to remember and what "we" have chosen to forget (Francis, 1997, p. 11). The Eurocentric perspective, characterized by the eye, maintains the focus of the drawing as the Canadian Pacific Railway, symbolizing the creation of myths, runs through the partitioned wall. The CPR creates the "invented image" of who is defined as a Canadian (Francis, 1997, p. 27), thus creating the insiders and outsiders of history. Outside the wall the voices of the others have become faint echoes that go unheard and are kept enclosed in the books, which are told through the perspective the "white man." The others' interpretations remain only as "side bars" (Stanley, 2006, p. 42) of the page, perpetuating the notion that, although incorporated in the grand narrative, they will always be outside and never included within the text of the grand narrative.

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<sup>1</sup> Ms. Smith was a student in den Heyer's social studies curriculum and pedagogy course. This is a revised version of an assignment she completed for the course.



While silence prevails in the first drawing, the second drawing brings silence into the historical thinking of multiple perspectives. No longer does the silence prohibit the others' perspectives from creating the tension needed to allow students to break free from the grand narrative framework. Instead, the students are shown struggling with this notion and making attempts to escape from the "white box" that represents the curriculum and dominating Eurocentric view on history (Tupper & Cappello, 2008, p. 562). Acknowledging these tensions, the created symbol of Canada in the background is depicted without a stem. This indicates that the restructuring of the historical framework has disrupted the foundation of the grand narrative which feeds the myths and stories that are perpetuated in Canadian history. The scene behind the sky is filled with birds representing the multiple perspectives that have been shut out from the telling of Canada's past. Lastly, the footprints represent the significance that an individual has on history. The individual is unable to see it now, but with the restructuring of the thinking process the individual will be able to realize that historical events that may seem insignificant now may actual be quite important later.



The final drawing represents the overall realization of the ways racism and race-thinking create the mythologically informed imagined community of Canadian insiders and outsiders. The individual is simply represented with a single outline; however the picture is filled in with words and sentences representing the fluidity of identities (Stanley, 2000, p. 95). The body is left blank to represent the process of unlearning what has been learned throughout the individual's schooling process. By restructuring the students' historical thought process, teachers are able to achieve three things: the exploration of one's own past (represented by the writings on the left section of the picture); the understanding of how people's histories are intertwined (represented by the collection of sentences throughout the picture); and the sense that the space in which we inhabit has been constructed by those who lived before us (represented by the quotes on the right side from Francis' article about the creation of myths) (Stanley, 2006, p.47). By achieving all three, individuals are able to develop a new set of understanding and historical thought process on the entire construct of historical interpretations.



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By focusing on embedding multiple perspectives rather than simply adding on to the grand narrative, teachers are able to “make history visible in all their complexities” (Stanley, 2006, p. 47). Doing so allows students to understand the importance of epistemology and ontology when interpreting history. This approach creates a disruption in the students’ previous historical approach and enables them to connect the multiple perspectives of the past with the present (den Heyer, 2005, p. 2). This ultimately enables students to think about the complexities of the world in which they live in, where the embedded multiple perspectives in historical thinking allows them to better “make sense” of their world (Tupper & Cappello, 2008, p. 576).

## References

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