Introduction to the Retrospective Issue

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This fall, *Canadian Social Studies* is capping off its twentieth year, with fifteen of those years as an open source online journal. In celebration, the Associate Editors have put together a selection of articles from the archives. It was difficult to choose from the outstanding contributions over the last two decades, but we have picked a selection to offer insights into the concerns of the past that still live with us today. Drawing inspiration from Gert Biesta (2010), the criteria we chose to pick these articles was guided by the following question: *What might be educational about social studies education?* In bringing forth articles that lend insight into this question, we were interested in exploring the aims and purposes of social studies.

Biesta (2010) noted that schools have three distinct but interrelated aims: "qualification," "socialization," and "subjectification." Qualification takes the form of training for particular skills, such as political literacy or supposedly "practical" skills that serve as a sort of job training. Socialization initiates students into existing, dominant orders—how they ought to speak, behave, and think. Both qualification and socialization are useful to a degree, but they do not allow for new thinking or new ways of being in the world. Thus, the more educational aim of schooling is subjectification, the process by which we *become a subject* who can take critical distance from the current status quo. Subjectification, thus, entails more consciously examining what we as educators are doing on a daily basis in and out of the classroom, and then provides an opportunity to generate new, more creative and ethical ways we might live together. Ongoing issues such as sexism, ethnocentrism, racism, and terrorism highlight our need for the educational aim of subjectification—the need for classrooms where independent, interconnected thought is not only tolerated, but also nourished and cultivated. The following articles provide a variety of ways for researchers and teachers to do just that.

In *Unmentionable Things in Social Studies: Women's Issues?* (1997), J-C Couture invited his readers to consider how we, as educators, cannot escape the political aspects of teaching. This article resonates today as much as it did back then. Through an engagement with a diverse group of writers from Judith Butler to bell hooks to Donna Haraway, Couture, a white male in Alberta during a deeply conservative political time, takes the reader through a journey of subjectification that allowed him to interrogate the patriarchal coding of social studies. Couture learned that he was "as much a subject" as what he taught (p. 82), and thus his sensibilities as a social studies educator morphed to reflect the politics of gender and respectful engagements with feminist perspectives. Couture came to see the ways in which we do not use language as much as "language uses us" (p. 81). As a doctoral candidate then, and an associate coordinator of research

for the Alberta Teachers' Association now, Couture continues to lead and support research that calls for *education,* rather than a much-diminished form of *schooling* that only seeks to replicate the current way of things.

In *Two Terms You Can (and Should) Use in the Classroom: Cultural Homogenization and Eurocentrism* (2000), George Richardson discussed how the media portrays globalization, and suggested ways to encourage students to analyze and critique these portrayals. Richardson, then a new professor at the University of Alberta with more than twenty years of classroom experience, provoked both researchers and teachers to think about why globalization might be difficult to teach, and suggested ways we might deal with this situation: "In an age of globalization when consumerism and cultural conformity appear to leave less and less room for independent thought and action (para. 20)," Richardson argued that media literacy programs are one way to encourage active, responsible citizens. Like Couture (1997), Richardson (2000) attended to the importance of considering language as interconnected to our (potential) thinking processes as we become subjects to our own educational formation.

Where were you when you heard about the attacks on the World Trade Center, and what was your reaction? In his article, *Teaching After 9/11* (2003), Robert Gardner related his experiences as a social studies teacher in a large and diverse urban high school, whose students expressed a multitude of reactions to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Gardner thoughtfully recounted his students' comments and concerns, and described the upheaval that has occurred in North America in the two years since the attacks. Now, more than a decade later, similar concerns abound in Canadian social studies classrooms—polarizing discourses, contending loyalties, and identity politics. Despite his extensive experience, Gardner (2003) realized that he needed to "re-learn the content of [his] trade, almost as a beginning teacher" in terms of both what he taught and how he approached the subject he thought he knew so well (para. 12). Teaching social studies thus called for new ways of being in the classroom. For Gardner, who continues to teach high school social studies in Edmonton, 9/11 has ruptured the binaries of us/them and here/there, and is an event that can be taught in ways that emphasize our connections to a larger world. Gardner's article, paired with that of Richardson, provides a space to think about issues of terrorism in ways that open up thinking, rather than foreclosing the possibilities for generative thought about how we might live together more ethically.

In *We Interrupt This Moment: Education and the Teaching of History* (2005), Jennifer Tupper explored the interplay between what we consider to be the past and present, as well as how we imagine the future. Through the technique of interruption, Tupper highlighted often forgotten content about women in social studies while recounting her experiences as an Assistant Professor teaching undergraduate students. Tupper illuminated how dominant narratives silence women in history and shapes our minds regardless of our gender. When we examine the stories we tell—whose they are, how they are being told, and whose are neglected—there is an opportunity to re-read and re-think: "Such questions, when used in the classroom, create the necessary pre-conditions for students and teachers to pause in their readings of the past so that they may critically re-read it" (para. 15). Although it may be easy to slip into frustration or anger when students assume a narrow view of the past and present, Tupper illustrated a way educators might work with students to interrupt and subvert the narratives that shape such troubling views. Tupper provides a way for us all to take critical distance from the status quo and work toward

better ethical relations with each other. Tupper is currently continuing such endeavours (and others) as Dean of Education at the University of Regina.

The final article we chose for this retrospective issue was: *Unsettling Our Narrative Encounters Within and Outside of Canadian Social Studies* (2014), by Nicholas Ng-A-Fook and Robin Milne, a professor and a graduate student at the University of Ottawa respectively. In this very recent article, the authors engaged with the work of Roger Simon to thoughtfully address social studies during the early stages of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: "Part of decolonizing the explicit, implicit, and null school curriculum involves learning how to remember the narratives that inform our understandings of Canadian history" (p. 93). Through the writing of "shadow texts" (i.e., secondary responses to unresolved questions from a primary narrative; See Simon & Eppert, 1997, p. 184), the authors show how we can document historical traumas such as Indian Residential Schools in ways that are respectful—acting as a witnesses while we teach and learn. As those residing in the land now called "Canada" are struggling with what reconciliation can mean, this article posits one way that we all, as treaty people, can work pedagogically toward more peaceful and respectful ways of being together on this land.

What are the educational purposes of a social studies education? One (of many possible) responses to that question is that social studies provides an opportunity for teachers and students to un/re/learn how we have, and are, living with each other. As educators, it is vital that we interrogate our core assumptions, and how they frame our research, classroom practice, and daily lives. J-C Couture, George Richardson, and Robert Gardner reflect on how we talk about historical and contemporary events, thus setting the stage for more thoughtful narratives that open up possibilities for interconnected relationships. Tupper as well as Ng-A-Fook and Milne provide two different, but generative ways, of opening up our conceptualizations of the past that will ultimately cause us to re-think our present and future as well. We wish to thank these authors, as well as all the other contributors to *Canadian Social Studies* over the last two decades, for their contributions to not only this journal, but also for their commitments to the greater field of educational theory and practice.

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