University of Alberta

Unlearning the Monster:

Teaching English language arts with an anti-colonial, feminist approach

by

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Abstract

This paper uses an autoethnographic approach to explore how educators can build solidarity with non-White students and unlearn White supremacist ontologies present in education. It critiques policies, particularly *Teaching Quality Standard (TQS5)* and anti-racism commitments, which position English language arts teachers as the primary agents of change in anti-racism and equity efforts, highlighting how such policies indirectly place the responsibility on educators while maintaining a hierarchical power dynamic that absolves educational boards. The paper is framed by an anti-colonial theoretical perspective, examining how the Colonial Matrix of Power (CMP), influenced by Aristotelian logic, perpetuates White supremacy in education. Feminist methodology is discussed as a tool for resisting these colonial structures and informing alternative pedagogical practices. The paper's structure is later divided into two sections: Section A examines *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) by Dimaline, finding that White teachers in Alberta are often ill-equipped to teach Indigenous literature, relying on violence-centered approaches. In response, feminist pedagogy and Indigenous-futurism are suggested as alternatives. Section B explores *The Hate U Give* (2015) by Thomas, critiquing colonial frameworks in anti-racism efforts and advocating for anti-colonial approaches centred around African American vernacular to disrupt embedded racism in education. The paper concludes by emphasizing the importance of journaling as a reflective practice for confronting biases and shifting pedagogical paradigms.

Keywords: English language arts, English language arts teachers, anti-colonialism, colonialism, pedagogy, feminist, White supremacy in education, education, educational policy, Colonial Matrix of Power, Violence-centered literature, resources, teacher education, professional development

Adapted Journal Entry From Late- December 2024 "Where it All Began." *I am taken all the way back to my own experience as a high school student while reflecting on the path that has led me to attempt to better understand the interplay between educational policies, pedagogy, and how students may become marginalized within the education system. However, before I further explore these ideas, I pause my thinking to consider why I have centered myself in this inquiry? Reed Danahay (1997) tells us that "autoethnography in its most simplified definition is the study of the self" in which the "researcher is the subject of study" (as cited by Hughes & Pennington, p. 4, 2017). There is a profound irony in my choice to become a secondary English language arts (ELA) teacher, given that my relationship with grade school education was anything but positive. However, since memories are unreliable and often clouded by the retelling of narratives to ourselves, I am merely left with a vague, but visceral impression of my education. Perhaps even more curious than becoming a teacher, is the fact that in hindsight, as I finish a Master's degree in Educational policy with a specialization in social justice, I now recognize the privilege I held as a White student in the Canadian education system, despite certain setbacks I experienced.*

With this new perspective, I recognize how the students that I have taught, who are truly marginalized by the system, have ignited my desire to explore questions around marginalization in education. I have also come to see that as their teacher, I have unwittingly become part of the problem, which is why I have positioned myself at the center of this discussion.

As I fall further into adulthood, the painful moments from my time as a student become less tangible, and perhaps the distance is why I have become a central part of the issue. In order to find the patience and empathy necessary to function in a high school classroom as a teacher, I find that I must stay connected to my troubled younger self—as if living in a perpetual state of

arrested development—my adolescent-self must always be within reach. Everything about that version of myself must be available when I teach: her pain, her angst, and her powerlessness.

As a young woman, I found community among other 'broken' kids— those from turbulent homes, alienated by a system that demanded conformity, and struggled with unaddressed learning disabilities. School made me feel powerless, which bred indifference. Despite my struggles, I clung to ELA because I loved to write; however, around grade nine, I lost interest because the themes, characters, and the teachers seemed so abstract and so far-removed. Of all my memories, what I remember most is the feeling of resentment. This antipathy, however, sparked a paradoxical desire to both belong to and also understand the forces within the education system that led to my disaffection. With this personal history, I feel a weighty responsibility to unearth these issues and course-correct my practice and pedagogy in order to break the cycle.

Purpose and Statement of Problem

Though existing research has analyzed teachers' responses to *Teaching Quality Standard 5* (*TQS5*) (Scott & Gani, 2018; Kanu, 2005), it is limited to the experiences of Social Studies teachers. As such, this paper attempts to address an important gap by focusing on ELA classrooms, and even more specifically, on the 'resources' and pedagogical practices necessary to enact these policy changes. Following the *TQS5* amendments, many teachers, regardless of their previous knowledge on the subject, began incorporating Indigenous authored texts into their lessons (Webb & Mashford-Pringle, 2022). For Social Studies teachers, the process of introducing Indigenous authored texts challenged and reshaped teachers' pre-existing beliefs about Indigenous peoples (Scott & Gani, 2018), though often resulting in perfunctory and superficial understandings (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020). Likewise, Kempf (2022) notes that the

ability of White Canadian teachers to build an "emotional capacity" for students of colour, while incorporating anti-racism and unconscious biases practices into their pedagogy, "can be slow, hard to see, hard to track, and hard to quantify" (p. 17). In short, Kempf (2017) found that this process requires time-intensive reconstruction of teacher's ontological perspectives.

Overall, while many teachers may be willing to unlearn the Eurocentric ontologies that perpetuate the marginalization of Indigenous students and students of colour, the literature suggests that fear of potential consequences may lead educators towards hollow interpretations of materials and passive nods to policy amendments (Kanu, 2005; Scott & Gani, 2018; Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020). These responses, however, fail to create sustainable change, and perhaps most importantly, in the ontological views of White students, who are not directly confronted with racial oppression. Accordingly, I ask: How do teachers engage in solidarity, as co-conspirators, with Indigenous students/students of colour, using non-White authored texts in ELA classrooms? Furthermore, how can educators navigate the constraints of policy amendments while maintaining a sense of security, without fear of jeopardizing their careers? Given these foundational questions, I suggest that in order to create an anti-racist, decolonized educational system, we must first confront the colonial legacies shaping our educational practices today.

Positionality

Before I discuss my theoretical framework and methodology, it is crucial to position myself as a White woman, especially as I depend on the theories and knowledge of non-White scholars to guide my inquiry. As a White woman taking up questions of anti-racism and decolonization in Western ELA classrooms, I look to Nager and Geiger (2014) to consider how I might avoid simply resecuring my privilege. The authors explain that while categories such as

class and ethnicity cannot be dismissed, we must acknowledge that these categories also reinforce colonial ontologies that maintain White supremacy in academic contexts (pp. 82-83). Therefore, although I have encountered some minor experiences of marginalization (i.e., a learning disability and early childhood socioeconomic struggles), I recognize the considerable privilege I hold as a White woman in education. Given this, I especially want to recognize the insights of Indigenous and Black professors who taught me about the deeply paradoxical nature of acquiring this knowledge at the epicenter of Western epistemology: the university.

Outline of Paper

I begin this paper by describing my choice of an autoethnographic methodological approach as a means to better understand how to build relationships of solidarity with non-White students, and how to unlearn the White supremacist ontologies taken up in Western academia. Following from here, I give a comprehensive overview of policies positioning teachers as the principal agents of change when it comes to inaugurating amendments to the *TQS*, specifically *TQS5*, and relate such changes to board-mandated anti-racism and equity commitments, in which I find that ELA teachers have been indirectly identified as needing to spearhead these changes. Next, I problematize these policies using Bacchi's (2017) "What's the problem represented to be" (WPR) methodology, and see that through specific word choice and evasion, the board maintains a hierarchical position vis-à-vis staff, thus excusing their culpability. Having set-up these foundational policy underpinnings that inform the purpose of this paper, I discuss my use of an overarching anti-colonial theoretical framework. In this crucial section of the paper, I review literature that explores how the Colonial Matrix of Power (CMP), rooted in Aristotelian logic, informs modern practices of education, from which I argue that certain vestiges of the era of Enlightenment continue to support a Westernized ontology of White supremacy in education.

Subsequent to this larger theoretical discussion, I take up the conversation of feminist methodology as an act of resistance in the face of White supremist ontology in education, and explain how feminist theoretical frameworks inform the pedagogical practices that I suggest.

The remainder of this paper is organized into two main sections, each focusing on a different area of study: Section A examines Indigenous literature through Demaline's novel *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), and Section B explores African American literature through Thomas' novel *The Hate U Give* (2015). Both sections follow a consistent structure for clarity, beginning with a personal (autoethnographic) journal entry, followed by a subsection on the relevant policies and theoretical framework(s) I use to analyze the specific resource. Each section also integrates academic literature to explore the broader implications of the inquiry. In Section A (*The Marrow Thieves*), findings reveal that, because they lack a professional body of knowledge to adequately attend to the policy amendments directed towards them, many White teachers in Alberta are not well-equipped to teach Indigenous literature. As a result, these teachers reflexively lean towards violence-centred themes and/or performative pedagogical approaches. In response, and as a means to support educators, I look to feminist pedagogy as a way to disrupt the trend of adopting Western pedagogical approaches to these texts. In the conclusion of this section, I draw from the literary genre of Afro-futurism to explain how Indigenous-futurism may provide a lens for teachers to approach Dimaline's novel in a way that centres on possibilities for hope, wisdom, language, and the divine-feminine.

Finally, in Section B (*The Hate U Give*), I look more closely at anti-racism and equity commitments made by school boards across Canada, and find that attempting to solve race-related issues using a colonial framework is unreliable and that sustainable change must come from a collective approach, antithetical to colonial structures, in order to disrupt varying forms of

racism embedded within education and pedagogy. In response, I look to anti-colonial pedagogical theorists and consider what a rejection of colonial education could look like in a classroom setting, noting that White teachers must be willing to de-centre their fears and associated microaggressions, and that this move requires a readiness to face false notions of difference, and to accept learning from diverse forms of knowledge. To conclude this section, I look at the power of journaling, as an introspective exercise for both teachers and students and a space to confront unconscious bias and anxieties. I conclude this section of the paper by reemphasizing the importance of avoiding pain-based narratives, and highlighting the significance that language plays in our understandings of ourselves and others, and our ontological views of culture.

Library Search

The literature searches for this paper spanned approximately two years (2023-2025), primarily drawing from courses taken as partial fulfillment for this Master's degree: Policy Issues in Education, Black Studies in Education, Critical and Feminist Pedagogy in Education, and Race, Racialization and Education. In addition to course related materials, I conducted literature searches for the final papers in these courses, as well as for the explicit purpose of this capping project. To acquire additional literature, I relied on several databases from the University of Alberta's Library (U of A) website, including: Academic Search Complete; African American Communities; Alberta Education Authorized Resource Database; EBSCO Discovery Services; ERIC (via EBSCOhost); JSTORE; and Literature Criticisms online. I also used Google Scholar, though any viable matches acquired at this source were vetted through the above U of A databases.

For all the above searches, I followed the same process. I began by generating thematic terms relating to the specific topic (e.g. Teaching Indigenous literature, Teaching Black literature, feminist pedagogy in secondary classroom, etc.) and I then tracked search terms, which was followed by further investigation with synonyms and variations of Boolean operators. After gathering a sufficient number of sources and related journals, or exhausting the search, I reviewed the papers, which were either kept or discarded based on relevance. All journals used in this project were peer-reviewed, except for one article from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), referenced to fill a gap in the literature.

Autoethnography: Both Methodology and Method

Hughes and Pennington's (2017) insights regarding autoethnography serve as the foundation for my use of this method. The authors explain that autoethnography is akin to other qualitative approaches, such as ethnography and narrative inquiry, and that "each examines how people understand relationships between humans and their sociocultural contexts" (p. 6). The distinction between these approaches, however, pertains to the question(s) framing the larger inquiry. For example, Hughes and Pennington show that while ethnographic studies may ask, "What can be learned from the cultural contexts of 'others'?" (p. 6), an autoethnographic approach shifts this question away from the observation of the "other" towards the self. As such, I adopt as a foundational question scaffolding this inquiry, "What am I learning by examining my identities, power, privileges, and penalties within one or more cultural contexts?" (p. 6). In this paper, not only will I reflect on how I have navigated policy amendments that challenge my ontological and cultural position, but perhaps more importantly, I grapple with the challenges of, as a White woman, teaching Indigenous and Black authored literature to a diverse secondary

student population. Moreover, I also examine how I can leverage my power and privilege as a White teacher as a way to prevent further harm to students of colour.

Given the parameters for a Master's capping project, conducting research with other teachers was not a viable option, and I should therefore note that especially in regards to my interpretations and findings, this is a significant limitation. Nevertheless, Hughes and Pennington (2017) confirm that for teacher researchers, "autoethnographic techniques [are of value] precisely because of the qualitative genre's capacity to engage first-person voice and to embrace the conflict of writing against oneself as one finds oneself entrenched in the complications of one's positions" (p. 10). For the reasons described above, where I discuss my motivations for centring myself in this discussion (including the parameters of this project and the internal conflicts I have and continue to confront in education), I employ autoethnography as my methodological focus, as well as a method for assembling data, through which to analyse the cultural context and tensions that arise in teaching resources authored by non-White writers.

Since I want to understand how to better create a relationship of solidarity with my Indigenous students/students of colour while using non-White authored texts, I must engage in a disruption of my own ways of thinking. For Rodriguez et al. (2017), autoethnography can be used to facilitates just such an unsettling, as "[o]ne of the most important rationales for doing autoethnography is precisely to help reveal power, domination, privilege, and penalty in both the extraordinary and the mundane social issues of our larger cultural contexts" (p. 59). Therefore, the driving force behind my inquiry is a desire to uncover how, in the work I do, power, domination, and privilege can be collapsed in the classroom.

In taking up the matter of how I will use autoethnography as a method, Crotty (1998) describes two potential forms that the approach can assume: triangulation and assemblage. While

triangulation involves taking three different perspectives on a point of interest, assemblage is the "collection of multiple items that fit together to provide multiple perspectives" (as cited by Rodriguez et al. 2017, p. 61). Despite their differences, however, both adopt the Foucauldian method of *problematizing* the central discussion. "[P]roblematization," Crotty notes, "guides autoethnographers toward a critical and reflexive *new-self* using questions such as: 'Who am I to be making this statement?. . .Whom does my statement benefit [and] Whom does my statement harm?'" (as cited by Rodriguez et al. 2017, pp. 156–157). In response to Crotty's questions, I am "making [these] statements" because I have witnessed a drastic shift in my pedagogical approach to teaching Indigenous and Black authored literature since I began teaching these particular texts. However, despite my best efforts, when I approached these texts from a White academic lens, I could not help but notice an imbalanced thematic approach that minimized characters as naive, uneducated, and/or ignorant to cultural norms, while simultaneously overemphasizing Indigenous and/or Black impoverishment. Through initial reflection, I realized that it was necessary to abandon this lens, and to re-educate myself in the possibility of potential pedagogical approaches that did not perpetuate harm.

Therefore, my goal in this paper is threefold: as a means to provide an authentic education to students, to continue the process of unlearning the White supremacist ontology emphasized in Western academia; to halt my contributions to pedagogical acts of epistemicide; and to disrupt neo-colonial agendas in ELA curricula. Given these objectives, I find the assemblage approach best suited for my inquiry. Following Rodriguez et al.'s (2017) criteria, I have amassed academic articles that "straddle multiple temporalities" (p. 62) of my career (pre-service and in-service), EPSB's policies, and personal journal reflections based on my teaching experiences with these texts. This assemblage allows me to analyze the complexities of teaching

non-White authored literature, and to examine how my own identities and privilege invariably shape the learning experiences of my students.

Policy Amendments Positioning ELA Teachers as Inaugurating Changes

As a White secondary ELA teacher working in Alberta, I aim to incorporate Black and Indigenous literature as a way to decolonize the classroom and challenge Eurocentric knowledge. More pragmatically, however, ELA teachers have been tasked with applying recent provincial and Board policy changes that thankfully address systemic inequalities and the marginalization of Indigenous students and students of colour. Three key policy amendments, albeit implicitly, influence the texts that should be taught in ELA classrooms, encouraging a shift away from Eurocentric literature.

Throughout, these policies emphasize the use of the term *resources* rather than texts, a term with ambiguous connotations, at least in the context of high school curricula. However, the ambiguity also suggests a possible connection to the Humanities. For example, *The Alberta Program of Study* (2003) (*APOS*) for ELA uses *resources* to describe the tasks of literary analysis, including the expectation that ELA students will "experiment with a variety of strategies, activities and resources to explore ideas, observations, opinions, experiences, and emotions" (1.1.2. point b., p. 16). The word *resources* is noteworthy, due to its lack of specificity. An advanced search of the online Oxford English Dictionary (2024) reveals that a "learning resource" is defined as "various materials designed to assist with learning, such as books, audio-visual aids and websites, made accessible in a library, school, etc." (n.p.). Given that the *APOS* uses the straightforward term *text* 344 times, yet reserves *resource* in sections dealing only with analysis, it is crucial to note that carrying forward the term *resources* into policy creates the

space to initiate a broader interpretation, especially in relation to how we understand and ontologically position such *resources*.

First, changes to the *TQS* (2023), specifically *TQS5*, "Applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit" (Alberta Government, p. 6), stresses the importance of "using resources that accurately reflect and demonstrate the strength and diversity of First Nations, Métis and Inuit" (Alberta Government, TQS5, Point d., 2023, p. 5). Granted, the Alberta Government calls for other competencies to be met, this policy in particular impacts the ELA curriculum due to its focus on the term *resources*.

Second, EPSB's (2021) revised "Anti-racism, Reconciliation and Equity" policy (HAAB.BP) aims to "use resources and materials that represent the cultural diversity of the community" (Section C., point 2. n.p.). This policy, which "recognizes that racism exists in [their] schools" (HAAB.BP, A. Anti-racism and Discrimination, n.p.), simultaneously enlists ELA teachers in addressing the goals of anti-racism.

Lastly, EPSB's (2020) "First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education" (HAA.BP) policy, also emphasizes that they will "work towards truth and reconciliation through. . .using culturally responsive resources that reflect. . .the strength and diversity of [Indigenous] communities" (Section B, point 5., n.p.), and again with the goal of "[s]tudent success and academic achievement … [being met by] identifying and using culturally relevant resources" (Section C., point 3., n.p.). Importantly, these policies emerged in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, particularly Call 63, which urges educators to "[build] student capacity for. . . empathy, and mutual respect" (p. 7). When compared to the APOS for ELA (2003), which sees "the study of literature allow[ing] students to experience, vicariously, persons, places, times and events that may be far removed from their day-to-day experiences" (p.

1), it becomes clear that ELA teachers are positioned to play a pivotal role in enacting these changes towards reconciliation.

Policy Analysis- Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to Be" (WPR) Methodology

Using six interconnected questions to analyse the structure of policy (appendix A), Bacchi (2019) provides a set of tools for identifying the "implicit representations of what is considered to be the 'problem'" within policies (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012, p. 21). Through the process of asking Bacchi's six questions, researchers can effectively come to recognize some of the underlying motivations that caused a policy to be established. Contrary to the prevailing assumption that public policy provides resolutions and results, Bacchi sees that because of their tendency towards paternalistic language, policies cause further problems within society (p. 21). Therefore, to better understand where EPSB is situated in relation to anti-racism, I will use Bacchi's approach as a method for uncovering the actors of the Colonial Matrix of Power (CMP), which I will be further investigating in the following section.

I will here look at the policies comprehensively. Bacchi asks us to first identify the problem within a policy. From my observations, the 'problem' appears to be public perception of the Board – those actors such as parents (foremost), media, politicians, and the larger community are looking in. Recognising that public perception is the focus, I move to Bacchi's fourth question, in which we are tasked to look at what might be "unproblematized" (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012, p. 21). Throughout the EPSB policies, the "apparatus of enunciation" (as mentioned by Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) repeatedly states: "The Board acknowledges that. . ." (NO. HAAB.BP, 2021, pp. 1-4), which appears to act as a pledge (of sorts) for change, as the choice of words creates a façade of humility as a result of seeming complicity. However, nowhere does the policy explain this language, nor does it outline how it has become responsible

for the construction (and resolution) of the problem. Therefore, if we go on to "problematizing the problematization" (Bacchi, 2019, 44.46 mins.), which is part of Bacchi's fourth question, we see that the Board appears to be equivocating. Nevertheless, because of its tone of good faith, the Board holds its position of authority, and maintains its hierarchical position within the system of the CMP.

Theoretical Position

Un-adapted 'Journal' Entry- Late September 2019 " Corner Page of My Day-Timer." *How did we get to this point? I mean, how did we, teachers, education, public school, get to the point of seeing and teaching from this one point of view? Why do I feel the need to double check with my [department head] to see if it is okay to teach this poem from a First Nation's point of view? And, maybe more importantly, why are the kids so lost, so unaware, and even judgmental of this [Indigenous] perspective? Is it not just a 'given' that the environment matters? I think I need to go back to school. I think I have to figure this out.*

The excerpt above was taken from the corner of a page in my daily agenda. I began teaching full-time in 2018 and have consistently kept journals that include meeting notes, stream-of-consciousness writings, intentional entries, and to-do lists. However, some of my most genuine reflections arise during the process of planning and organizing. This particular entry responds to teaching Duke Redbird's poem, *The Power of the Land*, to a group of ELA grade 10 students. The poem animates the land, drawing parallels between human consciousness and that of the land. Despite studying Indigenous short stories, my students struggled to grasp the concept of the land as sacred. They primarily viewed the land as a resource to be extracted, a perspective at odds with Indigenous understandings. While my pedagogical approach at the time may not have aligned with Vygotsky's *zone of proximal development* (a theory posing that learning is best

accomplished when students are met in the space between what they can do with no assistance and what they might need assistance with), this experience left me with the desire to explore how Eurocentric ontologies have become centred as foundational in our educational system. This question remained unresolved until my Master's studies, in which a Black Studies course introduced me to theories and ideas that provided a sense of clarity.

Anti-Colonial Theoretical Framework

To understand our current ontological position within Westernized education and pedagogy, we must explore the past. Freire (2015) defines Western pedagogy through the "banking concept of education" (p. 73), where the student is the passive receiver of knowledge bestowed upon them by the teacher. Although Freire originally discussed this concept in 1921, the model remains embedded in Western cultural norms of education. The "banking concept" not only expects students to accept knowledge delivered in the classroom as truth, but it also "[projects] an absolute ignorance onto the [student]" (p. 72), assuming that the student either knows little, or what they do know must be renovated. Importantly, though Freire positions himself as deeply critical of Western and Eurocentric educational norms, this is not to say that Freire's views are antithetical to the pivotal educational theory of a figure such as John Dewey, who inarguably shaped Westernized pedagogy, though with a focus on inquiry-based learning. In fact, as Deans (1999) confirms, "Dewey and Freire largely overlap in their theories of experiential learning; however, he then continues, "they depart on the larger ideological purposes of education, with Freire more inviting of critical reflection on race, class, and power" (p. 15). In other words, the distinction with Freire is that he understood education as inherently political, with students' cultural and epistemological views playing a vital role in the classroom. Given that the current policy amendments that I described earlier address matters of race, class, and power,

reflecting on these ideas is essential, especially when it comes to unlearning the educational system that necessitated anti-racism and First Nations policies in the first place.

I begin by turning to Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012) to understand the Colonial Matrix of Power (CMP), which is a term that describes a systemic structure under which hegemonic powers control the ideological mechanisms of Western civilization. According to these authors, the CMP stems from Aristotelian laws of logic, which operate as "the seed for the semantic construction of binary opposition in Western thought" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 154), and which have become ingrained in the status quo epistemology of Western cultures. Historically, as the Enlightenment coincided with colonization, Western supremacy was justified through Aristotelian logic and the emergence of science. As Andrews (2021) confirms, "the Enlightenment emerged at a time when Europe had laid waste to much of the world through genocide and slavery and was asserting dominance through colonial expansion" (p. 2). In essence, Western European thought was built on the notion of mandatory comparison and binary opposites, and at a time when European dominance reigned supreme by way of violence, the creation of the *other* became a guiding principle for this framework.

Further legitimizing the Western European epistemology was the hegemonic presence of the church during the Enlightenment, at which point "the rhetoric of modernity was built on the opposition between Christian and non-Christian, masculine and feminine, white and nonwhite, progress and stagnation, developed and un-developed, First and Second/Third World" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 155). Over time, these epistemological worldviews of dominance and supremacy became entrenched in the cultural understanding of Western nations, seeing themselves as 'civilized' and 'logical.' Moreover, as such categories became established in thought they also became established in law, precisely at a time when the world was being

colonized, perceptions were being recorded, legal and educational systems were being designed, and nations were being defined (Andrews, 2021). What remains starkly unaddressed as a result of this worldview, however, is the existence of other cultures, civilizations, and ways of knowing, which since they do not always adhere to the Aristotelian laws of contradiction and instead "conceive [the world as] complementarity and not [in] opposition" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 154), have become systematically devalued and oppressed (Andrews, 2021; Kundanani, 2023; Willinsky, 1998). Putting Mignolo and Walsh (2018) into conversation with Andrews (2021) and Willinsky (1998), it becomes clear that this narrative is merely a Western European invention, and that it has long underpinned the accepted notion of Western supremacy over knowledge.

Willinsky (1998) elaborates on how explorers and writers spanning the Renaissance to the Victorian era, including the likes of Columbus and Bacon respectively, scripted the New World and created a lore by redefining and repurposing other cultures' ways of life to fit the European model. As Willinsky (1998) writes, "making sense of the New World became an enormous education project in which an age had to reconstruct itself. . .by transforming its past into new resources" (p. 25). In this understanding, European ontologies became imposed on Indigenous ways of life, renaming and classifying people, animals, and land in European terms, driven by an impetus of domination upheld by Christian beliefs. "The adventurer-scholar," noted Willinsky (1998), "would bring order to what was strange, dividing up nature and world by name and map as if to make them over anew" (p. 24). In practice, this process of re-narration was a complete disavowal of the pre-existing understandings by those who were native to the lands. Through such reinterpretation of the world, European epistemology unsurprisingly became a central facet of education. Here, I return to Freire's "banking concept of education," insofar as

even when inquiry occurs in classrooms today, the framework employed for understanding often still operates by transforming other ways of knowing into the Eurocentric, colonial narrative.

Eurocentric epistemology, rooted in colonialism, has become so pervasive that it is now the de facto system globally, returning to the very places and people from which knowledge was initially extracted and reinterpreted through a Eurocentric lens, which is now proposed as the only 'logical' way of knowing. Western pedagogy is thus a byproduct of the extractive model resulting from the CMP. As Freire (2015) argued, the "interest of the [oppressive force] lies in changing the consciousness of the [student] not the situation which oppresses them" (p. 74). The CMP, under which Western pedagogy operates, is a paternalistic framework that allows for social hierarchies and binary oppositions to be passively accepted. Moreover, what cannot go unsaid is the fact that the economic underpinning of the colonial expansion project was capitalism, which has further influenced Western educational structures. Thus, the cultural ontology of competition, inherent in capitalist thought, permeates the educational system and reinforces Western supremacy.

Since Enlightenment-era thought was built on the appropriation of other cultures' knowledge, dismantling pre-existing biases is crucial for decolonizing education. As Andrews (2021) argues, "decolonizing the curriculum has to mean more than being a bit critical of European thinkers. . .to build an anti-racist society, we need to rethink the underlying biases of the knowledge that produced the world" (p. 18). In practical terms, such biases are ingrained in individuals and manifest in modern educational settings; for example, as the everyday microaggressions that regularly reinforce White supremacy in classrooms. As Oberai and Anand (2018) affirm, "unconscious biases are a fact of life; no one can deny them" (p. 14). To create an

anti-racist, decolonized educational system, we therefore must first confront the colonial legacies that continue to shape our educational practices today.

Feminist Theoretical Framework and Position Informing Pedagogy

In this part of the discussion, I respond from a feminist theoretical standpoint to confront the (above described) colonial legacies shaping our educational practices. Throughout this section, I interchangeably use the term research and pedagogy; as pedagogy involves the creation and dissemination of knowledge in the classroom, and as both processes share a continual cycle of inquiry and learning, pedagogy is thus closely tied to research in the form of praxis.

In what follows, I first turn to the work of Indigenous scholar Eve Tuck (2009) who, like Willinsky (1998) and Andrews (2021), understands Westernized education as largely constructed through extraction, creating myths about other peoples, lands, and ontologies. In turn, these mythical narratives often portray a "damage-centred" narrative, defining certain communities as broken and/or in deficit.

Given that teachers in Canada are educated within colonial, Eurocentric institutions, damaged-centred research and curriculum is the status quo state of affairs, looking "to historical exploitation, domination, and colonization to explain contemporary brokenness" (Tuck, 2009, p. 413). To disrupt this cycle in the context of academia, including the sphere of pre-service teachers, Tuck (2009) proposes a "theory of change" (p. 413) and a new pedagogical design that prioritizes "*desire* instead of damage" (p. 416). With such a theory, Tuck argues, we can reconsider our stance on what is "considered data, what constitutes evidence, how findings are identified, and what is made public and kept private" (p. 413). Importantly, desire here refers not to the reflexive definition of corporeal lust, but rather about a longing to enrich and expose truths regarding historical knowledge. "Desire based. . .frameworks," Tuck notes, "can yield analysis

that upends commonly held assumptions. . .ignorance, and paralysis within dispossessed and disenfranchised communities. Desire [is about] hope, the vision, the wisdom of lived lives and communities" (Tuck, 2009, p. 417). When Tuck's ideas are applied to ELA curriculum and pedagogy, the emphasis shifts from canonical texts to non-White authored *resources*, especially those that are focused on the potential for change, and where the insights embedded within such narratives value non-White communities as holding essential ontological knowledge.

Tuck's (2009) ideas align with those of African American scholar King (2019), who similarly critiques the university as functioning with interests rooted in colonial extractive practices. King's (2019) work brings into view the physic work that is necessary for destabilizing the colonial framework, and proposes that in the process of research (i.e. the teachers' development of curriculum and pedagogy), and in order to move into a place of disruption, we must consider our physical responses when encountering information about bodies of colour. By considering our innate psychological reactions to what makes us uncomfortable when encountering narratives about Black, Indigenous, and other bodies of colour, "it is possible to render [ourselves] available for being radically rearranged by Blackness" (p. 48). Given that "Alberta's teaching workforce remains predominantly white" (Berg, 2023, n.p.), it is especially important to heed King's warning regarding White researchers, where in addition to considering our physical reactions, she asks us to question our interests when it comes to discussing bodies of colour, and to interrogate how our unconscious biases may lean towards a "damage-centred" narrative.

Finally, I bring Indigenous professor Kim TallBear (2014) into the conversation, and draw attention to her understanding of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) (p. 1). Like the previous two feminist scholars, TallBear understands academia, and by extension

institutionalized education, as inherently colonial projects that foster deep-seated hierarchical structures. TallBear (2014) challenges this model by proposing a "Standing With" approach (p. 2), that shifts the paradigm from an extractive model to a model instead concerned with giving and sharing. While the sophistication of TallBear's Standing With theory lies in its utter straightforwardness, what TallBear calls for involves a complete reversal and comprehensive disruption to the Westernized educational approach. For TallBear, "A [teacher] who is willing to learn how to 'stand with' a community. . .is willing to be altered, to revise her stakes in the knowledge to be produced" (p. 2). In order to make this disruption a reality in the classroom, TallBear argues, teachers must de-centre themselves as the sole bearers of knowledge and be willing to also learn from their students. Standing With requires teachers to also reflect on the use of their inherent power within the classroom, and to consider if and how their position as teacher may be perpetuating damaging narratives and status quo hierarchical structures. Especially important for the context of this paper, TallBear's approach provides teachers with the possibility to act as co-conspirator with their students and with the *resources* that they teach.

Section A: Teaching Cherie Dimaline's novel *The Marrow Thieves*

Adapted Journal Entry- May 4, 2024 "Trying Out 'Standing With'." *This discussion of Dimaline's young adult novel, The Marrow Thieves, originally took shape as a final paper for a critical and feminist pedagogy course that I took as part of my Master's degree. Having taught the novel several times to low-streamed grade eleven students, I wanted to critically reflect on my own rationale and reflexive desire to centre the novel study on topics of trauma. Granted, the novel broadly deals with themes of damage to Indigenous peoples, I also recognized there was a great deal more to the narrative. Therefore, I wanted to practice "Standing With," by considering alternative themes such as the wisdom of Indigenous teachings, language, and*

survival. After writing a final paper, I expanded my initial findings, included additional research on pedagogy, and transformed the paper into a presentation accepted at the English Language Acts Council conference in 2024.

At the conference, I shared my original findings, and I provided concrete pedagogical strategies detailing how The Marrow Thieves might be implemented by (White) teachers wanting to engage in "standing with" their students of colour, as well as with texts by non-White writers. During the question period, I was met with positive feedback from both White and non-White ELA teachers from around Alberta, with the exception of one White, male teacher, who proposed a barrage of questions around the theme of trauma. In short (un-adapted), he questioned why focusing on trauma was "taboo," when in "reality," according to this teacher, "all" Indigenous people experience intergenerational trauma, and in his opinion, our job as teachers is to therefore inform students about this trauma. He felt that "hyper focusing" on "joy" was a "pipe dream," and that it is simply not our job as ELA teachers to try to "rearrange" the truth.

Policy in Relation to *TQS5* and Using Indigenous Literature

In the aforementioned statement of problem, research analyzing teachers' responses to *TQS5* exists; however, as Webb and Mashford-Pringle (2022) note, "there [is] a gap in the literature. . .with regards to incorporating and teaching Indigenous content" (p. 58), which Scott and Gani (2018) also confirm. Added to this gap, the research that has been done on this subject focuses only on social studies teachers, signalling a need to further report on the particular conditions and experiences of ELA classrooms. Overwhelmingly, the authors studying this topic (Scott & Gani, 2018; Webb & Mashford-Pringle, 2022; Witherspoon & Milne, 2020) found that both pre-service and in-service teachers are ill-equipped to teach Indigenous content in their classrooms because they lack understanding on the subject. Moreover, Scott and Gani (2018)

observed that Alberta teachers encounter "emotionally laden barriers that work to repel narratives and information that might cause crisis in the self" (p. 176), and that this cognitive dissonance leads teachers to abandon their efforts in pursuit of personal comfort. When teachers took this route and prioritized their comfort, the presentation of Indigenous *resources* became performative, leaving students with one-dimensional understandings that preserve "damaged-centred" Eurocentric ontologies (Scott & Gani, 2018; Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020).

Theoretical Underpinnings and Debates

Witherspoon and Milne (2020) draw attention to policy frameworks (in Canada) by emphasizing that current policies, including school board policies, adhere to individualistic learning frameworks that replicate Westernized pedagogical norms rather than adopting, or even allowing space for, Indigenous educational and pedagogical methods. Since Eurocentric policies underpin the recent amendments, teachers are left abandoned to navigate authentic pedagogical changes on their own. Despite these observations, Meade (2023), in her doctoral research on the *TQS5*, identifies a potential shift in teacher's attitudes and a "willingness and courage to enter into. . .learning" (p. 168) about Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies. Still, despite these possible shifts in teachers' attitudes, and since the research reveals that many teachers are unprepared to take up these tasks on their own, there is an urgent need for de-colonized/ing professional development rooted in equally de-colonized/ing academic literature. Due to this gap, I refer to Wong's (2023) CBC article to ground my subsequent discussions.

In their 2023 article, Wong interviews Indigenous education professor Niigaan Sinclair, who confirms that ELA classrooms are the ad hoc location for initiating TRC-related changes; Wong further elaborates on the uses of literature as a gateway to empathy. Like Hartman (1997), who theorizes the literary portrayal of slavery violence, Wong's findings, based on Sinclair's

insights, indicate that practices of empathic identification may potentially create a false affinity between marginalized characters and privileged readers (Martin, 2022).

Hartman's (1997) term, "violence of identification" (p. 20), describes the phenomenon of White readers engaging with violent texts about Black bodies under the guise of assumed empathy. She explains that, in such contexts, empathy only exists because "the effort to counteract [i.e. feel empathy for] the commonplace callousness to black suffering requires that the white body [the reader] be positioned in place of the black body in order to make this suffering visible and intelligible" (p. 19). As Hartman's observations illuminate, such attempts at empathy only ensure the erasure of the 'Other' and by extension the maintenance of White supremacy. Her insights also draw attention to larger concerns with the word "empathy" in policy frameworks, which can likewise apply to Indigenous bodies in the context that the policy seeks to address. Hartman's theory invites teachers to consider alternatives to "damage-centered" themes, akin to Tuck's (2009) desire-based framework, in which teachers are instead encouraged to focus on wisdom and possibilities of hope embedded within the literature.

Wong (2023) also draws attention to the issue of performativity. Sinclair, as reported by Wong, explains that "[t]he problem with putting Indigenous perspectives … only in the … Humanities is that … we think we can drop in a novel or … poem by an Indigenous person [and] … say Reconciliation is here" (n.p). These insights are consistent with board policies that "represent a kind of public performance — idealized board statements and wish lists with little specification of roles and responsibilities" (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020, p. 16). Following from this crucial limitation, it is no surprise that superficial policies generate likewise superficial pedagogical responses. This issue, coupled with a lack of teacher preparedness, and unresolved unconscious biases aiming to protect the White-self and Eurocentric ontologies, reveals the fact

that Westernized pedagogical approaches must remain a primary topic for further discussion in the process of un-learning.

Abandoning Tragedy: Beginning with Afro-Futurism

The genre of Afro-futurism, which is located in both the overarching genres of hard and soft sci-fi, provides "places [for] the imagination at [its] core to [consider] an alternate narrative for understanding Black experiences" (Myron et al., 2019, p. 58). Regardless of whether the narratives of science in such stories are fantastical or realistic, they offer alternatives, encouraging readers to explore a wealth of "what if" possibilities. More specifically, Afro-futurism counters colonial narratives, fostering pride in Black readers and the development of a sense of "'fictive kinship'" (Myron et al., 2019, p. 58). Futurism thus allows readers to reach into both the past and future, or temporalities more fantastical in nature (outside of time as we know it), to experience and imagine their desires for a different world. Indigenous-futurism shares similarities to Afro-futurism, but focuses on oppressions specific to Indigenous peoples, reshaping historical narratives about violence and loss. This way of thinking directly relates to TallBear's desire-based model, in which pain, loss, and brutality are de-centered and power, joy, and possibility are brought to the forefront, flipping the reader's gaze toward the future as an act of resistance. A central caveat of both Afro- and Indigenous-futurisms highlights "the divine feminine" (Myron et al., p. 59) — the powerful woman as the antithesis of patriarchal Eurocentric values.

As Hartman's (1997) work illustrates how reading for empathy can reinforce White hegemony, futurism potentially creates a natural barrier of protection from this phenomenon. As Morris (2021) tells us, the futuristic aspect of *The Marrow Thieves* allows "non-Indigenous people. . .to navigate the dark history of colonialism" in Canada, while simultaneously providing

a "portal for surveillance" (11:45 minutes), in which the character's lives, although rooted in truth, are far enough removed that readers do not immediately usurp their experiences (i.e. to take on a *pretendian* approach). As Kolopenuk (2023) articulates, "Pretendianism is a problem," which involves the "long-standing existence of playing Indian, race-shifting, self-indigenizing, and fraudulent identity-claiming" (p. 469). Against this possibility, an approach guided by Indigenous futurism encourages readers to avoid what Hartman terms a "violence of identification (p. 20)."

Abandoning Tragedy: *The Marrow Thieves* as Indigenous Futurism

As Morris (2021) argues, Dimaline critiques capitalism within an Indigenous-futuristic context, thereby connecting her story directly to colonial settler culture. Unlike colonial realism, which keeps readers trapped in victimhood, colonial-futurism allows for a shift from abstract reconciliation to tangible decolonization, allowing readers the opportunity to move beyond "nebulous ideas like reconciliation. . . to actionable ideas of decolonization" (Morris, 2021, 15:30 minutes). In other words, when teachers program their curriculum from this perspective, they should move alongside and practice "Standing With" the novel, going beyond colonial-realism by embracing such themes as survivalism and empowerment.

Moreover, Dimaline also critiques the nuclear family by examining its supposed superior position over other possible forms of kinship relations. For example, the protagonist in *The Marrow Thieves*, Frenchie, belongs to a found family led by a gay man and an elderly woman—figures who typically experience real oppression in the real world. By examining the bonds these characters forge, readers may be invited to confront the neo-colonial epistemology that reinforces the nuclear family and maintains capitalist structures. Through this confrontation, Minerva, the matriarch in the story, may be seen as the character holding cultural knowledge, survival skills,

and language, establishing the center of power within the group. As Rosanowski (2020) describes this power dynamic, "by destroying the European family structure [and] patriarchal governance structures" (p. 62), the novel effectively takes on a feminist lens. In this, we can see how the consequences of futurism in literature are not merely fantastical, but shifts the possibilities for change into our real-world.

Rosanowski (2020) further elaborates on such futuristic possibilities by highlighting the father figure, Miig, a gay man, who clearly does not fall into the heterosexual, Christian model of manhood. By placing him second to Minerva in the novel's found family, Dimaline offers a new type of future where power potentially assumes different forms. Although Miig teaches the boys traditional male-centred activities such as how to hunt and track, which creates a paradox for students to grapple with, the importance placed on these skills plays a subordinate role in relation to what Minerva teaches, which is language, homemaking, and child rearing. In these novel family dynamics, we have opportunities as teachers to build in conversation and activities that allow students to investigate their own beliefs about these various social roles. Finally, at the novel's end, when it is "revealed [that language] is the means to liberation" (Rosanowski, 2020, p. 63), we come to see the futuristic possibility of women standing at the heart of recovery from colonization, and through love, power, strength, and emphasizing the importance of language, transcending the physical circumstances of pain and oppression.

Section B: Teaching Black literature with Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*

Adapted Journal Entry- December 2023 " Who Am I to be Teaching this Text."

Sitting in a circle alongside forty-one grade twelve students, we completed a reading session of Angie Thomas' The Hate U Give. I begin a line of post-reading analysis questions, beginning with those involving the protagonist "Starr." I ask: What are your initial thoughts about Starr;

Who is she and what do you think her life is like? One student, a White boy, begins speaking. He says (to the best of my memory) that she is a poor, Black girl. She wants the best for her friend, but (and I remember this phrase clearly), "she doesn't know anything or understand the world." I was dumbfounded, and responded to this student, Why do you think this? A second student added: because of the way she speaks. At this moment, I recall feeling a cold sweat forming on my palms and a mixture of anger and helplessness. What was I doing teaching this novel? Had I overextended myself? I collected my thoughts, stood up, and walked to my desk. I quickly found a "Crash Course" video about the Civil Rights movement and the Jim/Jane Crow era. Before I began playing the informational videos, I asked the students to raise their hands if they had heard of these points in history— only four did so, and each of these students was Black.

Using Black Literature in Relation to EPSB's "Anti-Racism and Equity" Policy

Unlike the previous section on policy in relation to *TQS5* in Alberta, which had more robust findings, I encountered a gap in the literature regarding "Anti-racism and Equity" policies in Alberta schools and school boards. Therefore, I expanded my search to include all of Canada. The Canadian Teachers Federation (CTF) (2024), who conducted a document review to understand anti-racist policies in Canadian education, found that "school board policies frequently positioned racism as an interpersonal issue or as matters of representation (for example. . .curricular resources)" (p.13). Moreover, the CTF (2024) also highlighted that "almost all policies" frame anti-racism as either "attending to human rights legislations" or "[r]econciliation with Indigenous Peoples," which dissociates boards from taking responsibility (pp.13-14). However, by conducting a further policy analysis using Bacchi's WPR methodology, I am able to draw different conclusions.

Informing the EPSB's "Anti-racism and Equity" (ARE) policy (2021, HAAB.BP) is an Action Plan (2021), designed by an "internal steering committee" (p. 10) who enacted the policy under the superintendent's approval. The ARE policy outlines three overarching sections, further characterized by subsections, calling attention to the necessity of professional development (PD) for division staff to meet policy expectations. Given that the ARE (2021) policy admits that "[t]he Board recognizes that racism exists in [their] schools" (HAAB.BP, A. Anti-racism and Discrimination), when the ARE policy is considered using Bacchi's WPR approach, as outlined by Bletsas & Beasley (2021), the Board effectively distances itself from the issue, instead placing responsibility on staff. This "'silence,'" as Bacchi's model suggests, assumes that staff perpetuate racism due to a lack of PD, without concrete measures for how teachers can implement changes. Silencing, however, is common in policy and not unique to EPSB. The overarching issue is that colonial institutions, like school boards, are attempting to solve racism within Eurocentric, paternalistic systems of policy, and that such issues instead require alternative solutions to disrupt and address Eurocentric supremacy.

Theoretical Underpinnings and Debates

In view of the policy demands to implement PD, which is supported by the CTF, this section explores how PD with a focus on anti-racism might be ethically implemented for sustainable change. Reinke et al. (2021) argues that "one-shot mandatory (or voluntary) [PD]" (p. 2) has limited impact on reshaping the thinking of White teachers. The authors further assert that tenable anti-racist pedagogy "is rooted in disruptive, interconnected collective action aimed to disarm structures that reproduce hegemonic ideals" (p. 2). In other words, dismantling racism within education is not about fixing racism per se, but rather about collective disruption. Referencing Love (2019), the authors outline four discreet themes for educators to consider when

approaching anti-racism: "rejecting false notions of human differences; acknowledging lived experiences [of racialized peoples]; learning from diverse forms of knowledge; [and] challenging systems of racial inequalities" (Reinke et al., 2021, p. 2). From these themes, teachers have a concrete framework from which to shape curriculum, some examples of which I will explore in the following sections.

Reinke et al. (2021) also address the widely held assumption by many White teachers, supported by Scott and Gani (2018, p. 173), that anti-racism pedagogy can only be implemented by teachers of colour. The authors, however, challenge this assumption and suggest that it is dangerous to hold such a belief, as it can shift responsibility away from White educators, and potentially cause harm by expecting educators of colour to address trauma within predominantly White institutions. Juárez (2013), as cited by Kempf (2022), stresses that: "White supremacy is. . . a white problem, and the responsibility for addressing it falls first and foremost to white people" (p. 8), and in this context, shifting responsibility is a form of unconscious bias that often manifests in the form of microaggressions. Here, the notion of being a co-conspirator comes into view— White educators, although they may not be directly responsible for racism, must take on accountability, which is not to say, though, that taking on this concern is about being a saviour. On the contrary, White educators must de-centre themselves and create space and opportunity for non-White authored texts and supporting resources to take the forefront. Guenther et al. (2021) further emphasize the importance of White facilitators addressing racism, by reminding us that education, as seen by bell hooks (1994) and Freire (1970), has the capacity to "subvert unequal structures and practices" (p. 615), but only if White teachers and facilitators, when addressing racism and White supremacy, avoid status quo Western pedagogical frameworks.

The Power of Journaling through White fragility and reading Black-authored literature

The work of reading texts that are far removed from White teacher's and student's lives can be difficult, potentially revealing their White fragility. Likewise, reading these texts can also be challenging for non-White students. For instance, as Wolfsdorf and Ballou (2023) note, in their study of graduate students reading *The Hate U Give*, they found that White participants often struggled to articulate their perspectives, with one member noting: "'I didn't know how to assert my own perspective. . .even as an ally'" (p. 333). This uncertainty regarding how to navigate such challenging feelings was also felt by students of colour, with one such student writing in their journal: "I'm constantly wrestling with my identity among people that share no similarities to me'" (p. 328). Addressing the possibility of such challenging emotional work, Wolfsdorf and Ballou (2023) suggest that teachers, before engaging their students in conversation, must prepare their classes with the necessary language and contextual knowledge underpinning the setting of these resources. In doing so, teachers empower students to navigate these narrative spaces. Moreover, the authors found that "white students often step back when discussing the topic of race" (Wolfsdorf & Ballou, 2023, p.335), which instinctively leads many teachers to encourage students of colour to spearhead conversation. This move, however, is a microaggression, and reveals the teacher's unconscious bias that they may themselves be incapable of conducting race related conversations on their own. To overcome these fears, Wolfsdorf and Ballou (2023) recommend that teachers ask, through journaling, "why does this unsettle me?" (p. 329), and recognize that there may be some earnest, independent academic labour required to meet the expectations of navigating such conversations. Both students and teachers alike can use the power of journaling to explore their feelings, and by anonymously sharing reflections written by students, teachers can create space for all voices in the classroom to be heard.

Teaching *The Hate U Give*: Avoiding Pain-Based Narratives

Given that *The Hate U Give* opens with a poignant scene of police brutality, well-intentioned White teachers may concentrate on this violence, as a means to foster empathy and conversations with students. Kempf (2022), however, warns of the "high costs of harms caused by calls for folks of colour to tell their race stories to White folks," explaining that when White educators engage only with these narrative features, we objectify the lived experiences of people of colour and "[commodify]. . .racialized pain for white gain" (p. 9). Here, we can return to Hartman's (1997) "violence of identification" (p. 20), where empathy only emerges for White readers when they position themselves "in place of the black body" (p. 19). Nevertheless, Wolfsdorf and Ballou (2023) explain that centering conversation around characters is necessary, but like Hartman (1997) and Kempf (2022), they encourage us to support students' learning through a framework of resistance, and to reframe the novel by looking at the characters themselves as actors of change.

Understanding language: African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

In her 2020 study, Baker-Bell (2020) explored the use of AAVE in Thomas' novel with a group of Black-identifying ninth-grade ELA female students. Her goal in this study was to foster discussions about language and identity, allowing students to express their impressions of AAVE through drawing and journaling. Using Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP), Baker-Bell theorized how racism becomes internalized and White supremacy persists in academic settings. As she explains, since AAVE is often criticized and policed in classroom contexts, such procedures work to silence students and texts that use AAVE, "insisting that Black students code-switch to avoid discrimination" (p. 9). Unsurprisingly, this dynamic is a central theme in Thomas' novel. This insistence, Baker-Bell continues, on using and reading White academic language, is a

microaggression founded on an inherent hierarchical assumption that White academic language is more valuable than AAVE. Since Thomas' novel primarily employs AAVE, understanding this vernacular is crucial for grasping the cultural context and dismantling the underlying biases that the novel critiques.

As Baker-Bell (2020) argues, when teachers view AAVE as unintelligent or vulgar, this implies a deficiency not only in the characters, but also Black culture more broadly. Therefore, CLP encourages non-AAVE speakers to reassess their assumptions by engaging with AAVE as a new language. By treating AAVE as a decorous lexicon, rather than a deficient offshoot of 'appropriate' language use, we can begin the process of dismantling internalized racism. Moreover, she proposes a flexible framework for teaching AAVE in ELA classrooms, noting that prescriptive methods are insufficient. Here, she urges teachers to teach the history of the vernacular, recognizing that AAVE initially came into existence as an act of resistance intended to subvert White supremacy. Baker-Bell's suggestions regarding language thus create opportunities for teachers to explore a lexicon with their students, and since such language is often unproblematically appropriated by White speakers, to consider what such appropriation means, within a larger framework of ontological self-understanding.

Findings and Conclusion

ELA Teachers in Alberta have been indirectly tasked with spearheading policy amendments that ultimately need to be addressed in all subjects. Given that the *APOS* for ELA focuses some attention on activating a student's sense of empathy, boards have reflexively been relying on literature, and by extension non-White authored *resources,* as a conduit to identification. Approaching literature in this way, however, without first providing ELA teachers with the necessary PD, poses two major issues. Firstly, even when teachers are well intentioned,

their presentation of non-White authored *resources* is often performative, leading to inadequate and potentially damaging interpretations and representations of Black and Indigenous bodies (Kanu, 2005; Scott & Gani, 2018; Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020). Under these circumstances, it is no surprise that the burden of acting equitably, especially when posed as a means of upholding a teacher's obligation to board mandated policy, leads them to commit (likely unintentional) microaggressions in their teaching. Secondly, through adherence to an extractive model of curriculum, policy silently (in so far as it is not directly named) relies on non-White authored *resources* to fix the systemic issue of racism. By solely relying on the voices of non-White authors, however, especially when teachers are unprepared to engage in pedagogy as a form of meaningful solidarity, it is easy for the effects of the CMP to take hold. Therefore, if ELA teachers hope to act as co-conspirators while simultaneously fulfilling their responsibility to policy amendments, they must also engage – paradoxically – in a process of unlearning Euro Westernized pedagogy; this is only possible, however, if teachers are themselves intrinsically motivated to educate themselves on this knowledge.

Furthermore, navigating the constraints of policy amendments while maintaining a sense of personal security – that is, without fear of jeopardizing their careers – requires careful consideration on the part of ELA teachers. In the earlier descriptions regarding how to approach Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* and Thomas' *The Hate U Give*, teachers are compelled to straddle two opposing worlds: the world within their classroom as a co-conspirator, and the world of public perception, largely maintained and controlled by the board. Teachers' curricular programing must likewise strike a delicate balance: between pedagogical approaches that remain adherent to Westernized practices rooted in Aristotelian logic and quantifiable results, while simultaneously deserting such status quo thematic approaches, thus working within the margins

of what is deemed acceptable discourse in the context of public education. As such, taking on this kind of work requires that teachers undergo an immense paradigm shift, which not only takes a great deal of time, but also requires that teachers embark on an education far beyond what could ever be provided on PD days (at least, that is, as they are currently composed). What this implies is that the task of ethically approaching the *TQS5* and anti-racism commitments, especially for White educators, can only be accomplished alongside a renovation of the education system itself. Furthermore, if lasting and sustainable change is indeed what school boards hope to achieve, teachers will need to be re-educated at the university level.

Limitations

This paper presents some limitations, in part due to the constraints of the capping project itself, which does not afford for research to be conducted in actual classrooms, and also due to the space constraints of the paper. As a result, many of the topics discussed in this paper would benefit greatly from being expanded upon further. In particular, the topic of co-conspiratorship is especially deserving of further investigation, as is the notion of teachers' intrinsic motivations to undertake anti-racism pedagogy in their classrooms. The description of how to approach non-White authored texts in this paper provides some specific insight pertaining to *The Marrow Thieves* and *The Hate U Give*; however, this topic yields a robust literature and should be explored further. Moreover, students' and parents' voices are also an important factor to be considered in relation to the topic of incorporating non-White authored texts in ELA classrooms.

Implications for Field of Study

Currently, there is little research investigating how ELA teachers might approach new anti-racism and Indigenous-focused policy amendments within their classrooms. To adequately support ELA teachers in their pedagogical practices, this vast gap in academic discourses

desperately requires further investigation. Given that ELA teachers are at the forefront of this change, and the literature supports the notion that PD is required, there are opportunities for universities in Alberta, and throughout the country (perhaps in diploma and certificate programs), to explore the idea of offering short intensive programs specifically designed for the purpose of how to teach non-White authored texts. Moreover, boards could also provide in-house PD delivered by accredited instructors, from such university departments as Native Studies, Gender and Social Justice, Social Justice and International education, etc. Unlike diploma and certificate programs, such interventions would entail no direct cost to teachers.

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Appendix A

Bacchi's (2016) WPR Chart: What's the Problem Represented to be? (WPR) approach to policy analysis

Question 1: What's the problem (e.g. of "gender inequality," "drug use/abuse," "economic development," "global warming," etc.) represented to be in EPSB's HAAB.BP "Anti-racism and Equity" policy?

Question 2: What deep-seated opinions or assumptions underlie this representation of the "problem" (*problem representation*)?

Question 3: How has this representation of the "problem" come about? (i.e. what social, cultural, political, economic, etc., aspects may have occurred to initiate the development of the policy in the first place?)

Question 4: What is left unproblematic (silenced) in this problem's representation? Where are the silences? Can the "problem" be conceptualized differently?

Question 5: What effects (e.g. conversations, aspects becoming at odds with each other, lived experiences) are produced by this representation of the "problem"?

Question 6: How and where has this representation of the "problem" been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?

The above was adapted from: Bacchi, C. L. (2016). *Poststructural policy analysis: A guide to practice*. (S. Goodwin, Ed.) Palgrave Pivot. (p. 26)