Exposing Structural Violence, Making Invisible Structures Visible: A Case For Current Conflict Instruction in the Elementary Classroom

By

Sarah Zaharuk

Submitted to Garfield Gini-Newman

A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements For the degree of Master of Teaching Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to answer the question: How can teachers nurture a deep understanding of the stated and actual roles, related costs, both financial and others for students to learn about contemporary Canadian military involvement in current international conflicts in the elementary classroom? This is a qualitative study that I begin by examining relevant research in the field and follow up with interviews conducted with exemplary elementary and secondary teachers who are doing or have done this work in Toronto.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada for supportive funding for this study. I would also like to thank all of the members of the Toronto Coalition to Stop the War and the Canadian Peace Alliance, two top-drawer anti-war organizations that have done and continue to do great work in this country, to offer alternatives to the pro-war agenda that the current government is committed to. I would also like to acknowledge the brave work of the white rose campaign that coined the fraise “we will not be silent”, not now and not ever.
Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Research Study

The 2004\(^1\) social studies curriculum for grade six places a heavy emphasis on global knowledge; understanding Canada’s role on the international stage is a clear expectation (Ontario Ministry of Education 2004, 49). However, there is reason to believe that policy expectations are not being met (Bickmore 2005, Sears & Hughes 2006). It is mandated in the Ontario Social Studies Curriculum of 2004 that students in grade six should be able to “describe Canada’s participation in different international accords, organizations and/or programs, such as…NATO” (2004, 48). With this clear articulation regarding the Canadian military in the curriculum, I suggest that inserting teaching time regarding the current role of the Canadian military internationally, would be an invitation for students to examine and assess the role of the military and give students an opportunity to use mandated critical thinking skills as well as become aware of their country as a global military power. Presenting these issues would engage students in critically thoughtful examination of the Canadian military’s role on the global stage in grade six. In addition, this level of political knowledge would necessitate a considerable time allocation to the study of government and the process of political engagement. Bickmore (2006) in her Pan-Canadian study articulates that there is not enough time being spent on political education in the classroom, she states that there is little time for social studies, the traditional area for explicit political citizenship education (18). Given this clear outline by the ministry regarding the level of knowledge grade six students are supposed to have, the question I would like to ask a sample of Ontario teachers is, are they creating opportunities to learn about contemporary Canadian military conflict in the elementary class room?

\(^1\) I am quoting the 2004 social studies curriculum because the 2013 version has not been out long enough to be studied.
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Purpose of the Study

Teaching current conflict in elementary school is an under researched phenomenon in the Canadian context, Fine-Meyer (2013) states that the current method for teaching war is a reductive process of battle narratives, where educators lose an opportunity to engage students in a full study of war, one that includes the experiences of ordinary citizens to whom the students can relate (3). By contextualizing conflict in an exclusively historical narrative, students are denied access to the knowledge of the current reality of Canada’s involvement in contemporary conflict. I believe this research can make a significant contribution to the field of teacher education in Canada. A study conducted at the Center for Education and Research in London England shows that many teachers feel intimidated to teach political issues because they do not identify as “experts” on the material (Yamashita, 2006, 32).

My objective is to help teachers understand how their country is implicated in international conflict and translate that to their students. It is important to question what the Canadian military is doing abroad and have students’ trouble why our military is there in the first place. Stoddard (2009) highlights the fact that it is problematic in an education system that operates under the guise of being open and democratic to have students take a position on something they are not informed about (425). Canada’s role in international organizations such as NATO, that they are mandated to understand according to the curriculum, is difficult for students to take an informed stance on because it is so often not covered. It is negligent for Ontario teachers to privilege old narratives that Canada is a global peacekeeper by teaching war and conflict as history, situated deep in the past, and leave current conflict out of the teaching time all together.
Research Questions

• How can teachers nurture a deep understanding of the stated and actual roles, related costs, both financial and others for students to learn about contemporary Canadian military involvement in current international conflicts in the elementary classroom?

• Do teachers create pedagogy that includes the culture and perspective of the country that the Canadian Forces has active operations with?

• How do teachers present the Canadian Forces? What part of the curriculum do they draw from?

Background of the Researcher

I believe I am uniquely qualified to conduct this research because I acted as the volunteer coordinator for the Toronto Coalition to Stop the War for two years, at which time I was exposed to huge networks of peace activist as well as activists from countries such as Afghanistan where the Canadian military has a current presence. Working with war-resisters, as well as those who stand in solidarity with the soldiers of the Canadian military has given me a balanced perspective from which to conduct my research. I also spent significant time in my undergraduate degree, at York University in International Development Studies, looking at the role of social movements that prioritize peace. While I was at York I also took part in the No Bill 94 Campaign. Bill 94 was a controversial piece of legislation that sought to ban the niqaab (face veil) in all public institutions in Quebec. I was moved to become involved in this campaign because of the national rhetoric that was prevalent in the media at the time, that the “Canadian military was in Afghanistan to liberate women from their burqa’s”. Many Afghan women spoke out against this narrative, specifically Malalay Joya (former member of Afghan parliament) who articulated, “You cannot liberate a people with bombs”. Just as Afghan women
were outraged by the NATO presence in their country so were Muslim women in Canada outraged by the legislation that sought to ban their clothing. It was by listening to the strong voices of Muslim women that I was moved to act in solidarity with their request.

My study of social movements has given me insight into the potential for social change, and the level of education necessary to mobilize people. I believe that educating children about the role the Canadian military plays around the world is key to developing their political consciousness as well as their civic knowledge. Doyle (2012) articulates that schools that do not offer reflection and instruction regarding contemporary political events are not training their students for democratic citizenship. Ontario classrooms and education journals are teaming with peace building curriculum. Peace inside the classroom, and roadmaps to peace on a National and International level are extremely important, however the importance of peace may be lost on children who have no understanding of contemporary conflict.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 includes the introduction and purpose of the study, the research questions, as well as how I came to be moved to research and write on this topic. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature that includes an examination of citizenship education/political socialization, curriculum documents, teaching controversial issues, methods for teaching current conflict as well as my theoretical framework. Chapter 3 provides the methodology and procedure that are used in this study, including information about the sample participants and data collection instruments. Chapter 4 is a compilation of the data that I retrieved in interviewing three educators who have taught current conflict in various capacities. Chapter 5 is the discussion, where I compare my findings to the literature and make further recommendations for next steps and best practice for teaching current conflict. References and a list of appendixes follow at the end.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of the Chapter

What is invisible cannot be spoken to; teachers are gatekeepers of knowledge, it is they, to some degree, who chose what students are exposed to. Although they are mandated to teach the Ontario Curriculum they have a tremendous amount of freedom regarding what and how it is taught. Current international conflict is often categorized as a controversial topic that many teachers shy away from (Yamashita 2006). In this literature review, I examine a spectrum of work that explores research regarding, first citizenship education, because it is the area of educational research that deals most explicitly with political engagement. Second curriculum documents as well as various approaches to teaching controversial issues, in this section I offer my theoretical framework in order to foreground the lens that I suggest is necessary for unpacking controversial issues. Lastly I explore a variety of work that deals with the methods some teachers have employed to teach war and current conflict. This review is intended to situate my work, on realizing the place of current international conflict in the elementary curriculum, in order to provide a background to position myself against. This literature review will inform my approach to answering my research question: How can teachers nurture a deep understanding of the stated and actual roles, related costs, both financial and others for students to learn about contemporary Canadian military involvement in current international conflicts in the elementary classroom?
Citizenship Education/ Political Socialization

Sears and Hughes (2006) validate the notion that political education must begin well before high school, if students are going to develop an engaged political consciousness. There is a growing body of evidence that suggests students’ political attitudes and behaviours are relatively set by age 14. Torney-Purta and Vermeer (2004), for example, argue "A variety of studies of elementary and middle school students, including the IEA Civic Education Study, shows that in democratic countries the average student is already a member of his or her political culture by age 14" (As cited in Sears and Hughes 2006 23). By age 14 students are in grade 9, for most this is their first year of high school, a powerful time of identity formation and peer influence. In grade 10 students are offered a civics course which describe how the various levels of government function, however because citizenship education is not a specific topic or subject area but rather a phenomenon Sears and Hughes (2006) have major concerns about what they perceive as “the conflation of citizenship and character education in Canada” (13).

They argue that Canadian schools “equate good citizenship with the good person, man or woman who helps others, respects other people's rights, obeys the law, and is suitably patriotic” (13). In order to further explore this phenomenon I will draw on the work of Evans (2006) who suggests that, of the Canadian teachers he surveyed, variations existed regarding how much each focused on values e.g. cultural, moral, legal and how much emphasis each placed on beliefs that related to being of a ‘good’ citizen (42). Although Evans (2006) findings are similar to Sears and Hughes (2006) on this topic, Evans argues that Canadian teachers are implementing various teaching strategies that promote engaged citizenship at the high school level. These instructional strategies include: voting on class decisions, drawing on expert opinions regarding current events
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(beyond the text book) as well as using the classroom space itself to “highlight current issues from magazines and daily newspapers on bulletin boards, as well as organizing desks in particular ways to facilitate discussion” (43). I argue that the former does not make up for the later. Having strong civics education programing in high school does not make up for the lost opportunities and conflating “good citizenship” with “being a good person” in elementary school. It is for this reason I suggest teaching current conflict and the political knowledge associated with it at the elementary level is critical, so that students arrive at high school with a battery of arguments that they can take with them into their civics classes.

Imagine the level of engagement if students arrived at high school armed with an understanding of how current conflict manifests as well as the geopolitics and natural resources that are involved in the escalation to violence. When students understand, at an early age, that being informed about and understanding current conflict is part of being a good citizen this understanding could translate into a form of engaged citizenship that could include and go beyond voting and could incite agency in political life.

Bickmore (2006) argues that knowledge of international conflict has the potential to incite critical debate among students and teachers, which is an important characteristic of critical democratic engagement. However, she also states that it is imperative that examples of specific instances of international and social conflict appear in the curriculum because, from her research, there is an area of concern regarding teacher’s international and political knowledge being minimal (27). Her analysis specifically highlights the lack of specificity and examples offered to teachers within curriculum documents regarding difficult subject matter such as conflict. Her comprehensive study, examines the connection between critical engagement with social and political conflict and democratic
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participation, which is the fuel for my work. She outlines precisely why current conflict should be taught in early grades.

Curriculum Documents

Bickmore (2006) takes the position that the assumptions embedded in the curriculum seem to be that learning about us (Canada) and how we should act is paramount to more complicated political engagement, which translates to mean that social cohesion is more important than political consciousness (36). This kind of meaning making from the curriculum is part of the motivation for my study. From my experience attending public schools in Ontario as well as working in three different TDSB schools, I have seen for myself that teachers tend to ignore conflict almost completely. Bickmore (2006) concludes, “citizenship education that marginalizes conflicting voices is unlikely to provide a solid foundation for more pluralist democracy, thus the curricula appeared to emphasize assimilation more than democratic engagement” (36). It is the absence of conflicting voices or multi faceted perspectives in the social studies curriculum that needs to be addressed. Teachers need examples of current conflict to teach to.

It is on this point that Bickmore (2006) and Evans (2006) concur, for they both stress that curricula are political documents, learning goals and material are deliberately chosen to privilege certain perspectives and as such guide teachers options and practice. Evans (2006) cites Ross (2001) who states "Curriculum is not a neutral document" and goes on to highlight the work of curriculum theorists (Eisner, 1985; Miller and Seller, 1985, 1996; Ross, 2000; Wiles and Bondi, 1998) who have stressed the same point (1). Curriculum documents could be a tool for raising student’s consciousness regarding the causes of violent conflict in the world if it were inserted as a mandatory teachable moment. By avoiding conflict in the curriculum a powerful talking point is lost and a
culture of ignorance can be promoted. Because so much of the elementary curriculum is focused on national understanding rather than international and global understanding there is little space for restructuring social relationships that are rife with conflict, rather assimilation into the national narrative is promoted (Bickmore 2006). In the grade 6 social studies curriculum\(^\text{2}\) it states, “describe the connections that Canada shares with the rest of the world e.g., Peacekeeping…” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, 48). The word peacekeeping is the only reference to the Canadian military’s operations in this curriculum document. This word connotes benevolence and does not foster the notion that these operations may not be entirely benevolant. Nor does this word choice allow for the potentially dissenting perspective of those on the receiving end of these operations.

**Theoretical Framework**

It is on the topic of curriculum documents that I have chosen to address my theoretical framework. I have chosen the work of Giroux (1988) to explain the phenomena of political agency and the role that critical literacy plays therein. According to Giroux (1988) “curriculum itself represents a narrative or voice, one that is multilayered and often contradictory but also situated within relations of power” (71). These relations of power are made evident in the choices of what and how the teacher presents the material they are mandated to cover, as well as the material in the curriculum itself. The curriculum therefore is presented as a narrative that students consume regarding what is important to know. For Giroux (1988) “curriculum is another instance of a cultural politics whose signifying practices contain not only the logic of legitimation and domination, but also the possibility for transformative and empowering forms of

\(^{2}\) At this point in the study I have not yet referenced the 2013 social studies curriculum because it has not been out long enough to study and all of the literature that I have cited deals with the 2004 version.
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pedagogy” (71). I argue that the logic of legitimation and domination are articulated in the absence of examples of current conflict in the elementary curriculum. It is this absence that legitimates the actions of the Canadian military, because there is no specific naming of how Canada is involved in conflict in the social studies curriculum, it is unlikely that students will be given the opportunity to debate the nature of the Canadian Forces missions. This comes into sharp focus around Remembrance Day with the programing that many teachers offer which suggests that WWI was fought for the freedom of all Canadians, without any context to what the war was actually about. Although this is not current conflict this is a part of the school year that many teachers program around unquestioningly. I suggest that Remembrance Day could be a space for what Giroux (1988) calls “transformative and empowering forms of pedagogy”. Pedagogy that unpacks the nature of colonialism and the role that Canada played in the war as a common wealth country, as well as what it meant to be part of the British Empire at that time. Clearly this would only be relevant in the junior grades.

This type of deeper understanding regarding the nature of the Canadian state is what I will refer to as critical literacy. For Giroux (1988)

The concept of critical literacy needs to be developed in conjunction with the theoretical notions of narrative and agency, then it is important that the knowledge, values, and social practices that constitute the story/narrative of schooling be understood as embodying particular interests and relations of power regarding how one should think, live, and act with regard to the past, present, and future (68).

Critical literacy in my estimation draws the connection between knowledge and power and the necessity to insert current conflict into the curriculum. It is this type of curriculum and pedagogy that could establish the ideological conditions and social practices that could engage political awareness and agency, which might inspire a kind of citizenship,
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rooted in informed direct democracy.

Giroux (1988) draws heavily on the work of Paolo Freire’s approach to literacy, which is that of a “dialectical relationship between human beings and the world, on the one hand, and language and transformative agency, on the other” (64). In this sense literacy becomes a project of constructing one’s voice for the possibility of empowerment and action. This dialectical relationship to literacy informs my argument that students need to know the reality of what the Canadian Forces are doing internationally, as well as the military agenda of the current government in order to take informed positions on what their country is doing. It is my hope that by having students see themselves as citizens who have agency and power in the political system that they will be inspired to join or create social movements that will shape the destiny of their country as well as become critical of policies at all levels of government.

Teaching Controversial Issues

For the purpose of my study I am going to name current conflict as a controversial issue and it is the work of Yamashita (2006) that will qualify why I have made that choice. Yamashita (2006) found\(^3\) that the main challenge for teachers presenting current conflict was that few felt confident enough in the subject matter to present it accurately, and thus tended to avoid it when possible (38). In my preliminary informal research at two teacher’s conferences in Toronto and two different TDSB schools I came to the same conclusion, that it is this lack of confidence that makes current conflict a controversial issue to teach. According to Yamashita (2006) it is the complexity of the topic of war that teachers find intimidating (38). I agree that it is intimidating and challenging to present

\(^3\) Although Yamashita’s study was conducted in England the work of Bickmore (2006) and Evans (2006) illustrates that these conclusion are similar in the Canadian context.
multiple perspectives regarding complex issues often pertaining to ethnicity, place, natural resources, historical displacement and conflict. This can overwhelm teachers and leave them feeling that it is simply too much to tackle a topic as complex as, for example, the conflict in Afghanistan.

Yamashita (2006) suggests that there must be more pre-service training on the topic of teaching controversial issues to remedy this problem as well as in-service support in the form of workshops and training programs (36). The conclusion of this study recognizes that in order for teaching current conflict to happen at the elementary level there needs to be more teacher support from the state in order to prepare students to be informed citizens.

In agreement with this line of thinking are Oulton et al. (2004) who argue that the inclusion of controversial issues in the curriculum will better prepare future citizens to participate in the resolution of said controversies. Their article looks at policy initiatives in England that are designed to encourage public participation in controversial issues that affect society as a whole and that promote ideas of what some conceptualize as citizenship. Their work presents different notions of how to present controversial issues for teachers. Oulton et al. (2004) suggest that introducing students to multiple perspectives is a key part of teaching controversial issues. Students need to learn skills that will “allow them to uncover how particular knowledge claims may serve the interests of different claimants” (495). This is precisely the skill set that I believe students at the elementary level are ready for. Students need to be able to unpack, for themselves with teacher guidance, how it is that the claims made by the Canadian military serve it’s own interest and the interests of the Canadian state. I believe that students need this skill set for reading the media critically. The realization of this skill set can be promoted through the
active engagement with current conflict in the elementary classroom.

**Methods For Teaching Current Conflict**

One way to broach the topic of current conflict in the classroom is to couch it in terms of social justice. According to White (2008) Social justice "involves exploring the social construction of unequal hierarchies, which result in a social group's differential access to power and privilege" (83). This definition can be mapped onto the relationship that other Nations could have to the Canadian Forces missions in their countries, for example many of the people that live within the political boundaries of Afghanistan do not identify with the government of Afghanistan. Therefore there are certain groups/tribes within the country that support the presence of NATO while others do not support that presence. Students should be able to ask where is the social justice for those in Afghanistan who do not want a Canadian military presence there?

By introducing current conflict through the lens of social justice, teachers are opening the door to the perspectives of those on the receiving end of the Canadian Forces missions. Merryfield (1993)\(^4\) in her year long study of how teachers introduced the Gulf War to students found that some of those she documented presented entire units on the middle east, these same teachers updated their daily lesson plans to include news that was happening live in the region (34). All of the teachers were able to make the links to their curriculum despite the current nature of the conflict. This was done in order to give the perspective of those affected by the American presence there. White (2008) takes this idea a step further by suggesting that students associate an issue of social injustice to one in their own lives where “they were marginalized, watched as bystanders, acted as allies, or

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\(^4\) Although this study was conducted in the United States, the examples of teaching strategies can be used in the Canadian context as well.
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took part in marginalizing others” (84). The purpose of this reflection is to explore the feelings involved as well as locate them selves in the situation of injustice. White (2008) states that a role-play exercise could follow, where different perspectives are tried on in order to understand the multiple facets of complexity that can surround issues of conflict.

This multi-faceted approach to teaching current conflict is exactly in line with what Fine-Meyers (2013) suggests is the way that war should be taught. She asserts that war should be taught as a complicated, contested event where there is space given for students to unpack and think critically about the impacts of war in order to understand the workings of the military industrial complex (2). She also troubles the presentation of war in history textbooks as a story of battle narratives that ignores the experience of women and children as well as the environmental impacts on such things as food production. Fine-Meyers (2013) also takes issue with the “glory of war” narrative as it is often presented in high school, she agrees with presenting war through a “social justice lens that focuses on the human and environmental cost of war that encourages students to act as peace advocate in their communities” (2). In order for students to become advocates of peace they must first understand the depth of the impacts and horrors of war.

McMurray (2007) in his article about how to teach the Vietnam War advocates the use of guest speakers such as veterans in order to offer a subjective account from those who have fought in the conflict. He suggests that students interview the veterans in order to gain a more personal understanding of their experience in military service (432). Another innovative teaching technique that McMurray (2007) presents is that of celebrating the beauty and uniqueness of the culture that your country is in conflict with. He gives the example of a teacher who chose to explore the ancient practice of Vietnamese water puppetry as a way for students to reframe how they perceived their
countries’ enemy. This unique art gave American students incite into the rare beauty of a culture they knew little about.

For young learners studying war from the perspective of children who are involved or impacted by it, is an effective point of entry. Crawford (2009) states that picture books are a developmentally appropriate way to deliver tough subject matter about war to children. In order to make these resources more accessible to teachers Crawford (2009) has compiled a list of all of the war related picture books printed in the United States. He has divided these books thematically so that teachers may chose how they want to present the book to their class according to said themes: coping with loss, separation from loved ones, the power of friendship, impact on ordinary citizens, symbolic exploration of war. These themes are designed for primary students; however, an excellent resource for junior students is the graphic novel, which incorporates pictures as well.

Botshon and Plastas (2010) offer a feminist critique of the graphic novel *Persepolis* that is the story of one girls experience in Tehran after the fall of the monarchy and the rise of the Islamic regime. This book is a complicated text that would not be entirely appropriate for junior students, however, that being said I would use parts of it in my class, perhaps a few pages in order to illustrate some of the complex themes that are relevant for Canadian students. The themes of: Western perceptions of gender in the Middle East and a non-dualistic approach to Iranian society that presents the complexity of the revolution and the Islamic regime. This text would be an ideal choice to be included in a unit on unpacking Islamophobia and the role it plays in justifying current conflict in the national narrative. Botshon and Plastas (2010) suggest that *Persepolis* is a text that “encourages students to question the source of their (perceived) national insecurity and
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Offer models of agency rooted in the homeland (Iran) they have been encouraged to fear” (2). The authors conclude that this text “functions well as a counter narrative to dominant Western notions about gender and the Middle East” (2). I believe that the medium of a graphic novel is particularly effective for junior students because the pictures allow them to conceptualize things they potentially have never seen.

On the topic of pictures Alter-Muri (2004) suggests that art is an excellent medium for students to process their thoughts, anxieties and feelings about war. Her suggestions for teaching conflict are two fold; first she states that students could be presented images of artwork that has been produced from conflict areas either in the present or past. Second that students attempt to make art in the art style of the piece the teacher introduces them to. Alter-Muri (2004) suggests that students respond authentically to conflict through the medium of art (perhaps collage or oil pastels) she states, “there are many ways that art is important in coping with war. Art can be a connection to a former identity and a bridge to the future. Art can document events and serve as an act of resistance (18). Similar to Freire’s approach to literacy that it is a “dialectical relationship between human beings and the world on one hand, and language and transformative agency, on the other” (As cited in Giroux 1988, 64). Alter-Muri (2004) believes that art can be a medium through which dialectical thinking can be realized in the space where students can create responses to political uncertainty, and war (15). It is the creative process that can be conceptualized in the Freirian style because it promotes the agency of the student who may not be able to verbalize how they are feeling about current conflict but perhaps they could express their reaction to it through the medium of art.

Concluding Remarks

This literature review has highlighted a gap in the research that I believe I will be able to
speak to with my study. This gap will be addressed with my research question: How can teachers nurture a deep understanding of the stated and actual roles, related costs, both financial and others for students to learn about contemporary Canadian military involvement in current international conflicts in the elementary classroom?
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

Procedure
The purpose of this study is to attempt to answer the question: How can teachers nurture a deep understanding of the stated and actual roles, related costs, both financial and others for students to learn about contemporary Canadian military involvement in current international conflicts in the elementary classroom? I do so by first examining relevant research in the field and second interviewing exemplary teachers who are doing this work in Toronto. In order to find the exemplary teachers needed for my interviews I have contacted anti-war activists and community organizers that I know in Toronto. I have asked that he place my request for participants out to anyone they know who might do this work. I have also attended various conferences and attempted to meet teachers that way.

I was able to interview three teachers one at the elementary level and two at the secondary level who do this work. I conducted three semi-structured interviews and the information that I gathered in the interviews reflects the beliefs, experiences and practices of these teachers who are teaching current conflict, in some form, in their classrooms. I then transcribed the interviews and coded the data according to themes that emerged from the questions that I asked.

Instruments of Data Collection
After drafting my research questions I submitted them to various academics that I know and trust for their review. Upon receiving minor feedback I made the necessary changes and proceeded with my interviews. I consulted one of the key organizers within the Canadian Peace Alliance (CPA) and asked him if he knew any teachers. He told me about an organization called Educators for peace and Justice. He said that they have an internal list serve and he would ask if they could please circulate my call for research subjects. I
did not hear back from anyone from this call. I then attended the Educating for Peace and Justice conference at OISE in September 27th of 2014. At this conference I met two of my research participants and they agreed to be interviewed for my study. I met my third participant through a friend who had worked with said participant on a campaign a year prior. Upon meeting with each participant individually I conduct semi-structured informal interviews in person.

**The Participants**

The participants will be referenced by pseudonyms in this research to maintain their anonymity. Following is a brief introduction to their qualifications.

- Participant A, who will be referred to as Samantha, has been a teacher for five years in a French immersion TDSB school, she currently teaches grade 7. She has a Masters degree in International Development with a specialization on women in conflict zones, and spent two years in a PhD program before becoming a teacher.

- Participant B, who will be referred to as Josh, has been a teacher for ten years and currently teaches grade ten in a TDSB high school. He is a member of *Educators for Peace and Justice* and an outspoken activist for public education.

- Participant C, who will be referred to as David, has been a teacher for fifteen years and has a PhD in English. He currently teaches in a TDSB high school at the grade 10 and 11 levels. He has been an activist for public education for over ten years both inside the union (Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation-OSSTF) and outside with *Educators for Peace and Justice* as well as an activist and organizer with *Independent Jewish Voices* an organization that does solidarity work with the Palestinian community.
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Data Collection and Analysis

Upon collecting the data from my interviews I will transcribe the interview questions and responses, I will read and re-read the data in order to glean the meaning. The aspects that will be investigated from the interviews are the practices and methods that the participants’ use for teaching current conflict as well as questioning how these teachers perceived the instruction on current conflict has impacted their students. Each of these aspects is linked to the research question: How can teachers nurture a deep understanding of the stated and actual roles, related costs, both financial and others for students to learn about contemporary Canadian military involvement in current international conflicts in the elementary classroom?

I will begin the process of analyzing the data by highlighting key themes within the responses and colour coding them accordingly as well as making notes to myself, of particularly potent quotes as I go along. According to Creswell (2013) “the process of coding involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in the study, and then assigning a label to that code” (184). Coding the data will help me identify the key themes that emerge from the participant data.

Ethical Review Procedures

I follow the ethical review approval procedures for the Master of Teaching program. Prior to any interview I provided each participant with a letter of informed consent, which they signed (See appendix for consent form). The participants kept one copy and I kept one copy for the records of this study. The participants were informed that they have the right to terminate the interview at anytime without question should they need to. They were also informed of the purpose of the study and my responsibility to keep their interview
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confidential. I informed them that they have the right to review or revise any answers they give me or change their mind about the use of their data at any point in the research process. In order to keep the anonymity of the participants I use pseudonyms and store my data on an encrypted USB key.

Limitations and Strengths

There are several limitations to my study. My sample size is very small, with limited information to draw conclusions; because my sample size is small I will not be able to address variables such as ethnicity and gender. Part of the strength of my study comes from the uniqueness of the topic, because teaching current conflict is an under researched phenomenon in Canada, my work has the potential to impact the teaching community as well as deepen the political engagement of young learners. The method and strategy for teaching current conflict that has emerged from these exemplary educators also contributes to the strength of my study. The teachers that I have interviewed identify as activists and as such are principled in their anti-war approach to teaching various subjects.
Chapter 4: FINDINGS

This chapter will take the trajectory of my study in a slightly different direction, given the nature of the data that was produced from my interviews. Of the three exemplary educators that I interviewed, none gave any explicit instruction on the nature or function of the Canadian military specifically. However, all of my participants re-mapped current conflict and the Canadian military on to how the state relates with First Nations. As such, my study has redefined Canada as a site of contemporary current conflict. Although I was initially looking for explicit instructional strategy regarding international current conflict, what my interviews produced surprised me. Each of the seasoned educators that I interviewed has taught that Canada itself is a site of current conflict between the government (and sometimes military) and the First Nations of this land. As cited from participant C in his interview, “In the eyes of the Indigenous people from whom this land of Canada was taken by force, the military we like to celebrate is an occupying army; its triumphs are their defeats” (Participant C, February 28th 2015). It is this quote that has guided me to reframe how I present my findings in this chapter.

There is one glaring omission from the list of themes in my study and that is a working definition of what current conflict means. I approached this research with the assumption that current international conflict that involves the Canadian military would be a shared definition among the participants that I interviewed. I was wrong, as evidenced in the following pages, what defines current conflict is more nuanced than the government intervening and sending boots on the ground into a conflict zone. At the end of this chapter I compile a working definition of what current conflict means from the findings of my interviews.
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This chapter is organized by theme; each theme will be presented with a heading and subsequent sub-headings that are supported by data from the participant interviews. Throughout the chapter I connect the work that the participants have done to the broader trajectory of the project, which is to formulate a working model for how to present current conflict in the elementary classroom. I then summarize what I have gleaned from my participants and conclude.

Themes:

1. Political Education
   - Social Justice
   - Mainstreaming Conflict
   - Social Justice as a Framework or Lens

2. Space for Conflict in the Curriculum

3. Instructional strategies
   - Conditions of Production Circle
   - Economic Portfolio Project
   - Defining Structural Violence
   - Socratic Method
   - Looking at Policy
   - Issue (year long) Portfolio Project
   - Multiple Perspectives

4. Rememberance Day
   - Plenary Approach
   - Remembrance Day Dramatization Performance

1. Political Education

In this section my aim is to unpack the meaning and significance of political education, because many educators think of current conflict as a form of political education, which is inappropriate for the elementary classroom. According to Samantha this could not be

5 Because it was not possible to locate more than one elementary educator who teaches current conflict, I have drawn on two teachers from the secondary level. However, with some adjustment, their programs could be deployed at the elementary level.
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farther from the truth. When I asked Samantha what constituted political education she replied:

I think all education is political, I don’t really think that there is education without politics because even if someone purports to be neutral they are always coming at their teaching and learning from a particular perspective, so to me political education simply means education. Whether or not it is recognized that it is political, and making that explicit is also very important. For me that is what political education is, it’s education teaching and learning.

By this definition the very act of teaching and learning is political and it is impossible not to assume a particular perspective, neutrality is a myth. Therefore, making the statement that teaching current conflict is too political for the elementary classroom is a political choice, in and of itself. Josh believes that exposing invisible structures that operate in society is the very heart of political education. He defines it as follows:

Political education, to me it means, infusing what I do in the classroom with the students, with an over-arching aim of exposing structures that exist within society. So for me that means within an audio production course, science class sociology course, coming at whatever it is we are doing within the curriculum with an eye towards exposing invisible structures. Embedded within the curriculum, or whatever resource we are using, with the goal of having students, once they are visible, able to decide what to do about them so they can contest, they can resist, they can accept. But the goal to me is to remove the passivity of the education experience and the content delivery, and frame it with that over-arching goal.

Josh takes political education a step further; he makes political education about removing the passivity of the educational experience and exposing the invisible structures that operate within society. Why then is it important that we as educators expose said systems? Why should we teach about conflict and how or why our country is implicated in it? This leads to the question, is political education a form of teaching social justice?
Social Justice

Social justice is a term that is used a great deal in pre-service education programs across the country. It is a catchall term that can mean many things. I asked my participants to define social justice and what it meant to them. According to Samantha:

I have a lot of problems with the idea of social justice education. Because I don’t really feel like social justice should be seen as some sort of stream or unit within an educational program. For me and again justice isn’t just about society like I mean you know there is social there is economic there is so many types of justice that people are struggling and fighting for and it’s not enough to look at different initiatives around the world to sort of lessen the blow of conflict or have Canada go in and provide humanitarian aid or look at organizations such as the Me to We foundation and Free the Children and how Canadian kids have contributed to improving the lives of kids elsewhere. The reason I feel that is not a good approach is because it separates the people in the conflict zones from the do-gooder good Samaritan Canadian state and people/citizens and rather than seeing the people in the conflict zones as having all of the potential needed to actually fight back against the state or foreign occupation and also to rebuild after the fact with monetary support. It is basically taking away their agency and not looking at the fact that there are very skilled and educated people in those countries that can actually do all of that work. And also not looking at the fact that, right now that current system that we find ourselves in there is really no such thing as justice or social justice because despite everyone’s best efforts in the world’s hottest conflict zones there is not even a semblance of justice being had by any of the people involved in any of the conflicts. So I think that social justice education is a way to sort of dampen the reality of what it’s like to live in the conflict zone and also to push focus away from the fact that Canada itself is actually a conflict zone. And to push focus onto conflicts in other parts of the world actually it’s a de-politicizing approach to take when teaching about conflict, rather than it being an empowering or a positive force in the instruction of political education.

Here Samantha contextualizes social justice as a kind of “project or module” that can be added into any program to make educators feel like they are contributing to being “good Samaritans” and thus building on the national narrative that Canada acts as a force for

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6 I have included this large block quote from the participant because I feel it is necessary for the reader to fully comprehend what the participant is saying in her own words before I interpret and paraphrase her remark.
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peace and good in the world. Samantha gives examples of Canadian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that purport to promote social justice both at home and abroad. She believes that this form of NGO led “social justice” actually contributes to the formation of racist tropes that depict other nations as helpless and lacking agency, as well as lacking an educated professional class who are capable of governing their own societies. The most instructive portion of Samantha’s response is her perception of what “social justice education” can do, she suggests that approaching social justice in this way softens the reality of what it’s like to live in a conflict zone which pushes the focus away from the fact that Canada itself is a site of current conflict. She suggests that beginning a program by looking at conflict in other parts of the world is a de-politicizing approach, she prefers to approach current conflict from the Canadian context which she feels is empowering for what she prefers to call political education.

Samantha critiques social justice education but offers political education as the antidote:

I think political education is a great term to use because I think that that is more all encompassing and it is less de-politicizing obviously it’s explicitly political and I think for me, the goal is to really see teachers and learners really looking at education as political. So its not just something, oh let’s learn about conflict today, but its something that will come up in every aspect of your teaching, because it doesn’t matter if you are doing science or math or language, conflict is such an integral part of, and war, unfortunately is an integral part of our society today.

Mainstreaming Conflict

Samantha is clear that conflict needs to be mainstreamed as part of our teaching in every subject at some point. She advocates against a modular approach that sees social justice as a project that teachers can add on to their existing program. Samantha encourages her students to see their education as a political process that will involve becoming informed
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about current conflict.

Social Justice as a Framework or Lens

Josh on the other hand, uses the term social justice as a framework, for him social justice can operate as a lens that students can look through, when given the opportunity to approach an issue from multiple perspectives:

Social justice means, I look at it within a global framework with an eye towards absence of fear and to me that is a take on Ursala Franklin’s peace definition. When I think of social justice in creating a world that not only has the absence of war but also the absence of fear and taking that over-arching global framework and honing in within an anti-oppression framework, so within the school system approaching curriculum within those parameters. So creating more equitable spaces that are safe and inclusive and richer within that framework.

For Josh, the idea of social justice acts as a framework to introduce/expose some of the less visible or invisible parts of society. He wants to instill an absence of fear in his students and he feels he can attempt to do that by helping them understand how the world operates. For example, Josh exposes structures such as the relationship between finance capital and arms production and how they relate to the economy. In this example, taken from his financial literacy unit in his social studies class, Josh is fostering deep analytical thinking skills and asking his students to look at some of the hard truths about what stimulates the economy. While doing this he feels it is very important to create a safe space where students feel included and empowered; he does this by invoking an anti-oppressive framework. By introducing his students first to anti-oppressive language in the classroom and then transferring that to the over-arching global framework where student can imagine a world without war.

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7 It is important to remember that Josh teaches high school so his students already have an understanding of war and conflict on a global level.
Although both educators have different takes on the meaning of social justice education, they both advocate teaching current conflict as an integrated part of their programs, either because they believe it promotes social justice or because they promote teaching and learning as a politicizing project. Regardless of their semantic differences on this point both educators see space in the curriculum for teaching current conflict.

2. Space for conflict in the curriculum

Samantha approaches teaching current conflict in a nuanced way; she sees a great deal of space in the curriculum to cover this topic. There is actually a lot of space especially in grade 7 and 8 the new curriculum: history and social studies and geography gives a lot of space for teaching about war and different types of conflict, for me it’s an integral part of my program. A few examples would be the conflicts between the first people of this country or turtle island and the colonizers who came here and their relationship and that’s something that is covered in grade 7 and 8 and in fact in the new curriculum it is brought up even earlier on in the junior grades so there is a lot of room to develop that throughout the years. From grade 4 up until grade 8 and in terms of the geography program there is actually a lot there. Especially in the grade 8 program but even in the 7 program because in the physical geography which is grade 7 there is a lot of room for looking at resource extraction and how that effects different communities and the conflicts that ensue because of that process. And then in grade 8 there is tones of opportunity whether it be looking at migration and how people move and obviously one of the things that comes up a lot is migration because of conflict and war so, those are just a few examples amongst many.

Samantha makes it clear that conflict can be introduced as early as grade 4 in the geography program and certainly in the grade 7 and 8 history/social studies curriculum. What is central for Samantha, in her approach to teaching current conflict, is seeing Canada itself as a site of conflict. She emphasizes this point multiple times throughout her interview; she believes it is very important that her students understand that their country has been an aggressor nation towards the First Nations peoples of this land. She also emphasizes the importance of recognizing that the Canadian state takes the side of
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multi-national resource extracting corporations when it comes to issues such as tar-sand
development and mining exploitation, projects that First Nations oppose. It is on the point
of resource extraction where Josh highlights current conflict for his students in his grade
12 science course:

When I was exploring conventional fuel sources in the context of that
course we were looking at, it was around the time of the second Iraq
invasion post 9/11 and looking at some of the print articles that were being
written, the analysis of the rational underpinning that particular invasion. In
the context of the Iraq invasion within an SNC4M course where we are
moving away from conventional fuel sources to renewables for the
environmental impact, to do a geo-political impact and the consequences of
an invasion like that and the way I set it up in the class was: here’s what’s
going on now, here is one article that highlights and parrots the
governments rational for engaging in this conflict, here is an analysis that
contests that rational, this is not just about getting bad guys and there might
be something deeper, more complex that the government is taking an
interest in this particular region at this particular time. And finding a few
different view points that exist in between or around, or are completely
different and presenting students with that info or having them research it,
and try and make sense of that. So as part of that I remember doing a
conditions of production circle with the students where they had to think
about the sources that they were getting and not only what is this person
saying but also who’s funding and what organization to they belong to. How
do you make sense of the messaging you are getting? And all of this to me
fit within the purview of the mandate of that course which is scientific
literacy and in order to have scientific literacy a big part of which, the most
obvious application of which, is good decision for your health and your
society and we were looking at conflict in the context of energy
consumption/production, mining.

Josh brings current conflict into his science class by exposing some of the invisible
structures that operate to incite conflict, such as the need for fossil fuels. He invokes
instructional strategies that call on the student’s capacity to think critically about how and
by whom the knowledge that they are drawing on was produced.
3. Instructional Strategies

Conditions of Productions Circle

In the context of his science course Josh uses a *conditions of productions circle* to foster a sense of inquiry into the source of knowledge that his students are drawing on. This practice actively troubles what the students believe to be true about what they read. They are asked to investigate the article (i.e. what were the conditions under which the article was produced) who wrote the article, what organizations do they belong to and where do they get their funding? This probes the students to ask themselves, how do I make sense of the messaging I am getting? What motivates the author and what is the truth from their perspective, might their truth be different if their conditions of production were different? Using the *conditions of production circle* is one way to expose some of the invisible structures that contribute to the narratives that support current conflict in the media.

Economic portfolio project

Another tool that Josh uses in his classroom is what he refers to as the *economic portfolio project*:

So the portfolio, and this connects with the idea with having them understand current economic dogma, so as part of that they are building a stock portfolio using an allocation of a million dollars. At this juncture I have given them ten companies within which they can invest that million dollars, so they have mediated this on yahoo finance, we are actually looking at transferring it over to Google which runs a little bit more of a flexible portfolio, but yahoo finance website is really good in both providing a depot for their own portfolio and also a lot of news that comes in with regards to the companies that are on the stock exchanges, so they’ve had to research how to read a stock chart, they’ve had to understand what those indicators mean in terms of value of a particular company and then they have to make decision at this very early stage of the course, where to put their million dollar allocation and so they have done this and one of the reasons why that I have picked this particular medium for having them engage the issues that we are going to delve into within the course, is that it gives them a taste of, a literacy in an area of finance that they often leave high school with no sense of, and it also sets them up to do some meta-
Building an economic portfolio is one of the ways that Josh scaffolds his students into understanding the connections between conflict and investment. For example, although the portfolio project is centered on tech stocks such as Hewlett Packard and Apple, Josh makes connections between conflict minerals\(^8\) such as coltan (a mineral that is essential in building computer hardware), which is harvested largely in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The harvesting of this mineral is associated with human rights abuses in the DRC. Here Josh exposes the invisible connection between the stock investments that the students are making and the demand for a conflict mineral, and how the two are related. By scaffolding the students into seeing this connection he is exposing the invisible structure that underpins the correlation between conflict minerals and computer hardware. He has designed his course in such a way to front-load the thrilling aspects of market investment (the gambling/watching the investment shrink or grow) and then follows up with education regarding the outcomes of such investment, as well as the social implications of what investing can do.

It is on the point of exposing the structure that connects computer hardware to conflict that Samantha and Josh share pedagogical approaches. They both explicitly present systemic violence as a kind of structure that exists. Samantha defines systemic violence as *structural violence*.

\(^8\) I use the term "conflict mineral" to refer to minerals that are harvested in conditions of military conflict such as forced/slave labour.
Defining Structural Violence

Samantha explains one of her instructional strategies for teaching conflict as defining structural violence:

So structural violence is a way of looking at violence that actually attributes violence to the actual system in which we are a part of. So it’s not a matter of individual actions or even group actions it’s a structure that is put in place, so a system allows or even encourages certain types of violence against different groups of people and also against the environment rather than looking at things from the perspective of... people are evil and human nature inevitably leads to violence and conflict, it’s looking at things like the government and different policies in relation to resource extraction in relation to land grabbing and infrastructure, in relation to production and consumption all of these policies are actually what allows people to participate in conflict and in fact forces them to do so. Whether it be on the side of those who are in power within that structure, or whether it be on the side of those who are resisting that violence because it’s a matter of survival for them.

Samantha goes on to explain how she frames structural violence in the context of teaching colonization in Canada.

**Socratic Method**

I tend to go for a Socratic sort of method where I pose questions and let students draw their own conclusions based on the information I provide for them. So for example when I’m teaching about the relationship between aboriginal people and the colonizers whether it be European so French and English or current day state, the government/Stephen Harper, I often pose questions and then provide them with information and let them draw their own conclusions. For example in my grade 8 program I teach about residential schools as part of the later half of the program which looks at the relationship between the colonizers or the new Canada, so Macdonald’s new Canada and the people who lived here and were being basically massacred by the new Canada.

She then unpacks the policy that acts as the enforcing vehicle for said structural violence.
Looking at Policy

I give them information and they are allowed to sort of say to themselves well this doesn’t really seem like the Canada that I know, so looking at policies around residential schooling. Looking at policies around the expansion towards the west and basically just showing them what John A Macdonald had to do to build the railway in the west, What happened to all those people? What happened to the buffalo? Look at the policies in the residential schools, what did people eat? What did they learn? What happened to them? How come there are so many kids that died? And I just pose these questions and the kids find the information and their able to then draw their own conclusions.

Having the students uncover their own evidence from the policies that enacted structural violence from the Canadian state onto the First Nations is a key part of Samantha’s pedagogy. She never tells her students what to think; in fact she stands against that:

I was able to use the same method and have them draw their own conclusions about conflict and about, especially in grade 4, when the old social studies curriculum was in place and they were learning about medieval times. Them saying that this sort of set up here between the knights and the aristocracy versus the peasants this is just not fair. So I think we can draw on children’s capacity for empathy we can pose questions, and that is the best way to teach about conflict because often times they are less biased and they are still forming their opinions about the world and they are still drawing conclusions and they are able to look at things from multiple perspectives and then decide for themselves where they fall. Because it’s not about making kids think like you, it’s about making them critical thinkers, so thinking about the information that is presented to them, whether it be in the classroom or whether it be on TV or from their parents, and say well you know this doesn’t really make sense, what about this other perspective and then drawing their own understanding and also making them understand that once you have an opinion that it doesn’t necessarily mean that that opinion wont change that they will be able to, through learning, revise their opinions and their outlooks, so that is also very important when teaching about conflict.

Samantha’s Socratic method, coupled with her inquiry method approach to policy empowers her students to form their own opinions about conflict and how it operates in the Canadian context.
Issue (year-long) Portfolio Project

On the point of fostering inquiry skills Josh has created an issue portfolio project where students choose a social issue they feel connected to and track it in the media, read about it and engage with major players in the discourse. By allowing them to choose their “issue” he is ensuring that it is not his views of what is important that get covered but rather the method of media tracking and active citizenship that are fostered as well as a personal connection to the issue by the students.

I want to have students follow an issue for long enough and deeply enough that they can get a sense of the meanings and the way those meanings are mediated in the different ways they get information… I want them (students) to develop an understanding of both current economic dogma, the history of where it came from, the nuances of the macroeconomics… and apply them to issues that matter to them that they feel connected with. I want them to outreach with someone in the media who is covering that particular topic, an activist involved in those issues. Someone who writes or protests against that particular movement and have them see a particular issue as deeply and from as many different perspectives as possible so that they can be as informed as possible in advocating for change within that particular area. So a year of tracking, I hope turns into a lifetime of tracking and activism…

Although this project has not yet connected directly to current conflict for any student so far, Josh is hopeful that someday one of his students may choose to look at the increase in federal funding to the Canadian military or the role of the Canadian military on the international stage in years to come. For now, his intention is to help his students feel a personal connection to the issue they choose to focus on, and that the tracking element will scaffold them into feelings of ownership as well as heightened citizenship.

Multiple Perspectives

Another instructional strategy that is crucial for Samantha is the way that she presents the multiplicity of stakeholders involved in any conflict. She repositions her program to that of the subject involved in any conflict; she does not focus on the over-arching battle
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narratives but rather the personal accounts from the subjectivities of those involved. She does this to help students to relate to those who are involved in conflict.

I was teaching unit on WWI and the approach I was taking was looking at the different stakeholders in the conflict. So rather than looking chronologically at the war or looking at the battles or looking at causalities I was looking at the different people involved. So looking at the black battalion and the involvement of African Canadians. Looking at women’s involvement, looking at the working class’s involvement and I remember when we were looking that module on African Canadians involvement I had a young man who was of Italian origin, saying what about white history? Why are we talking about all these other people, what about white history? I said to him, as you are going to see in your WWII unit at that time Italians were not considered white and at that time they were largely discriminated against in the war. And they were persecuted because the fact that they were Italian and it’s only very recently that they are considered to be white.

In addition to centering subjectivity she also unpacks some of the racist dimensions of conflict. Samantha believes that it is important for her students to understand the systemic operation of racism that is often heightened in national narratives at times of war or conflict, largely to justify punitive acts of violence.

4. Remembrance Day

The plenary approach

Remembrance day is a tradition in the public school system that is conservative in nature and traditionally honours soldier sacrifice. Typically the ceremony involves veterans, wreaths, red poppies, trumpets and is very formulaic and routine. All three participants have proposed alternative arrangements for their schools regarding Remembrance Day. Josh states that:

Our school is named for a Quaker peace activist and we do things differently with our [remembrance day] program because of that connection… We have made a concerted effort over the years to look at honouring sacrifice but recognizing that it is civilians that pay the greatest price and suffer the greatest consequences of war and sacrifices. And we have done that in couple of different ways. We have never had a traditional
Remembrance Day ceremony, like the one that they have next door. What we try to do is we have, both a symbolic representation of civilian sacrifice, we’ve been involved with the white poppy campaign before, and an actual ceremony, or I wouldn’t even classify it as a ceremony, it’s more of a plenary on consequences of conflict from the civilian perspective. So we have had activists who have come from countries, now living in Toronto, talking about their experiences living in a conflict. Trying to de-bunk some of the myths that surround the glorification of that kind of conflict.

By centering civilian sacrifice in their plenary the educators involved in the alternative Remembrance Day service at Josh’s school have been highlighting the less “glorious” aspects of war and how it impacts the people who didn’t volunteer to be a part of it. By hosting guest speakers who have actually experienced armed conflict first hand, they are giving voice to the true horror of war beyond the rhetoric of serving Queen and country.

**Remembrance Day Dramatization Performance**

At Samantha’s school they have a drama club where the students were given the opportunity to create a dramatization that was offered at their schools Remembrance Day ceremony.

We have a drama club at our school and our first production this past year was to actually put on a piece, a dramatic piece for remembrance day. So the materials used are the kids own imagination, and looking at when you think about war what are the things that come to mind putting those things together and creating, actually we created a poem based on students thoughts around war and conflict. And then we put that poem to a movement piece and created a sound scape that invoked war and so it was the students putting forward their ideas about war and it gave us the opportunity to talk about war in a more broad and expansive way than usually a Remembrance Day ceremony would allow. And it was quite good because it did showcase not only the sacrifices of soldiers, which is every where in a remembrance day assembly it looked at the sacrifices of other people, civilians loosing family members and loved ones but also of those who are often forgotten in conflicts like nurses and doctors and their daily struggle in working on conflict zones. It ended up being quite a rich experience and it was great because we were then able to make that intervention at the Remembrance Day assembly, which was again quite traditional and there was military personnel there, there was a wreath and the revere and the moment of silence. But at least there was the intervention made by the students that broadened the scope of what Remembrance Day
Here Samantha explains the impact of inserting the student’s performance into the traditional Remembrance Day ceremony at their school. She suggests that having the students contribute a piece that reflects their interpretation of the impacts of war that are not necessarily celebrated, such as the sacrifices of the doctors, nurses and civilians is important because it helps the students understand more of the whole picture of the magnitude of those who are affected by conflict. She also felt that the creative component was important because it gave the students space to respond in an expansive and non-rational way. By allowing the students to write a poem and put it to movement on a soundscape, they were being encouraged to think outside of the prescription of what is traditionally allowed to be in a Remembrance Day ceremony. This dramatization was actually a way for students to insert their subjective renderings of war into a state sponsored ceremony and feel like they could impact the landscape of how their whole school “remembered” war. By turning over the creation of what is remembered to the students the educators who designed the ceremony are empowering them to re-shape the narrative that is consumed. Although Samantha fully supports this re-working of the ceremony she is cautious not to antagonize her students because she is aware that some may be apart of military culture in some way:

One thing that’s very important is that you don’t want to antagonize your students, who oftentimes are involved in that military culture, whether it be through cadets, I have a lot of students who are in cadets. Or whether it be having a parent or other relative in the military, I don’t aim to antagonize, because it’s not about them seeing my perspective it’s about them drawing their own conclusions. So really having discussions allowing them to question their participation in that culture and also to be able to question their parents or relatives participation.

Here Samantha makes it clear that educators should be cautious when presenting a
Remembrance Day program that is less than conventional because it could offend some students who come from military families or who are involved in cadets themselves. She has never personally encountered any blowback from students but imagines that it could happen.

**Concluding Remarks**

For the purpose of this research I conclude, after thoroughly unpacking all of my participants interviews that current conflict can be defined as: any space where state sponsored violence is sanctioned. As such, Canada itself is a site of current conflict between the state and First Nations and according to my participants, starting with the conflict that is happening in their own back yard’s is the best place to begin, with students who are being introduced to the operation of systemic violence for the first time.

There is space in the elementary curriculum to begin a dialogue about current conflict and the operation of state sanctioned violence. The question I will answer in the following chapter is how can educators begin this conversation in the elementary classroom when so few resources exist to support them?
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Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

Curriculum Connections

My theoretical framework will inform this discussion and couch the interpretation of my findings in a discourse of critical pedagogy. According to Giroux (1988) “curriculum itself represents a narrative or voice, one that is multilayered and often contradictory but also situated within relations of power” (71). This interpretation of curriculum as a narrative is relevant because the absence of military coverage in social studies curriculum in Ontario creates a vacuum of power; where students are kept in the dark regarding what their country’s military does both at home and abroad. I have argued in this paper that the absence of current conflict in the elementary curriculum is an issue that robs students of the opportunity for critical engagement on the topic of the Canadian military, by not informing them of what the military is and does. However, in this discussion I would like to take that argument a step further and suggest that it is not only the absence of current conflict in the curriculum that is a problem but also an absence of any instructional guidelines regarding the military. Because there is no expectation that teachers provide instruction about the function of the military it would be foolish for me to suggest that teachers should create programming around current conflict. The first necessitates the later, in the 2013 social studies/history, geography curriculum for kindergarten to grade 8 the military is referenced four times (outside of the glossary), twice in grade 5 in reference to the British military and how it related to First Nations and twice in grade 6 (in the sample questions) where the students are asked to “identify Canada’s military alliances” and “what are some countries in which Canada had a military presence” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

9 I have chosen to cite the 2013 version at this juncture because it has been out for two years, and as such it is relevant to cite it now, although this version does not vary considerably from the last, on the issue of military/current conflict.
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Education 2015). It is unrealistic to expect that any teacher would touch on these sample questions when there is no explicit guideline anywhere else in the curriculum as to the function or purpose of the Canadian military. It is easy to deduce that because of this lack of coverage in the curriculum, teaching the function and purpose of the military is being omitted all together.

What is dangerous about this scenario is that students are completing their public education with almost no instruction regarding the changes that have taken place in the Canadian Forces since 2006. Funding for the military has quadrupled since 2006 (Canada First Defense Strategy 2015) while funding for post-secondary education has been reduced, causing a drastic increase in tuition fees. As such, the prospect for many young Canadians, facing crippling student debt, is a poverty draft. Youth unemployment is at an all time high of 17.1% in Ontario (Geobey 2013). Many students are entering the military upon completion of high school, with the promise of free tuition for post-secondary education, without any knowledge as to the nature of the missions they will be embarking upon or the function of the institution they will be employed by. It is in voice of Giroux that I invoke the argument that by not educating our students about the military we are contributing to a state that is currently expanding it’s military without public consent or interest. There is no space for critical inquiry into the nature of the Canadian military when there is no knowledge of it. As Sears and Hughes (2006) argue there is a growing body of evidence to prove that student’s political attitudes and behaviours are relatively set by age 14. It is for this reason that education regarding the military and current conflict be introduced at the elementary level in order to promote their engagement on the topic. The vehicle by which the current government is carrying out this expansion of the military is the Canada first defense strategy.
Canada First Defence Strategy

The Canada first defence strategy is a public document posted on the Canadian Forces website, it states: “The Canada first defense strategy is a roadmap for the modernization of the Canadian Forces, building on the Government's investments in the military since taking office in 2006” (Canada First Defence Strategy 2015). The key to this modernizing enterprise is:

Stable and predictable funding that is committed to provide predictable funding increases over a 20-year period. Building on Budget 2006, which increased defence baseline funding by $5.3 billion over 5 years, the Government has committed through Budget 2008 to raise the annual increase in defence funding to 2 percent from the current 1.5 percent starting in fiscal year 2011-12. Over the next 20 years, these increases will expand National Defence's annual budget from approximately $18 billion in 2008-09, to over $30 billion in 2027-28 (Canada First Defense Strategy 2015).

This radical increase in funding begs the questions why is the military expanding in this way, and for what purpose? The strategy goes on to outline the benefits that this military expansion will have for Canadian industry:

The Canada First Defence Strategy will also have significant benefits for Canadian industry. The infusion of long-term stable funding it provides will enable industry to reach for global excellence and to be better positioned to compete for defence contracts at home and abroad, thus enabling a proactive investment in research and development and opportunities for domestic and international spin-offs as well as potential commercial applications” (Canada First Defense Strategy 2015).

Canada has since become a global leader in arms production citing the largest arms contract won by a Canadian company10 in Canadian history in 2014, procured by Saudi Arabia (Cudmore 2014). The federal Conservative government has ushered in these

10 General Dynamics Canada won a contract for 10 billion dollars from the Saudi government.
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changes for Canadian industry in order to remove restrictions on the transfer of hundreds of Canadian-made, military-related goods as part of a plan to make Canada a global arms exporter (Berthiaume 2013). Here is the evidence that the current government’s plan is to make Canada into a global leader in arms trade as well as a major player and aggressor-nation on the world stage. I believe our students have the right to know about these changes, and begin to engage in a dialogue about the shifts in domestic and foreign policy that will impact them directly.

Implications

The implications of this study for professional teaching practice are that teachers, as public intellectuals, should be concerned that there are major governmental changes taking place and they are not being reflected in the curriculum. As such, it is the role of individual teachers to take it upon themselves to educate their students as to the changing nature of the military and state, due to the transfer of funding away from social services and towards military. Clearly, I am aware that the teaching profession is an extremely demanding one and as such, it cannot be incumbent on the teachers themselves to go out and research these changes. As a time saving strategy, I suggest that a non-governmental organization (NGO) be created, that acts as a think-tank and produces unit and lesson plans, ready-made for teachers to access. I draw on the Ontario Justice Education Network (OJEN) as a model for what I suggest be produced. OJEN.ca is an excellent depository of information regarding the Ontario justice system and I suggest a similar website be created and called the Canadian Military Expansion Education Network. It would exist as a non-profit, employing two staff members, as well as an umbrella organization that could touch base with peace advocacy groups, veterans groups as well as policy alternatives associations and act as a resource sharing center and website for educators to access. This would
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necessitate a comprehensive funding strategy to be governed by the not-for-profit act\textsuperscript{11}. Our website would offer program resources and local activities from an easy to use drop down menu. The type of programming that would be offered would be some of the best practice evidenced in this study.

**Recommendations for Practice**

It is my recommendation that teachers adopt into their pedagogy, a practice of exposing invisible structures. The way I suggest approaching this is by making the connections between industry and appointed government positions evident. In grade 5 social studies, strand B: *People and environments: the role of government and responsible citizenship*, there is ample opportunity to highlight the military as a branch of the Canadian government and a way to *investigate* who and why certain ministers are appointed to the positions they are. For example the Canadian Association of Defence and Security Industries (CADSI), is a professional organization that represents the interests of the defence and security industry, those who produce weapons, vehicles and other provisions and infrastructure for armed conflict. On their public website the following statement was issued:

Christyn Cianfarani, President of the Canadian Association of Defence and Security Industries, today congratulated the senior public servants who received new assignments from Prime Minister Stephen Harper this week. “We have had the privilege of working with Michelle D’Auray at Public Works and Richard Fadden at National Defence and we thank them for their support of the defence and security industrial sector.” Ms. Cianfarani said. “We wish them success in their new assignments.”

Ms. D’Auray served for several years as Deputy Minister of Public Works and Government Services, and will now become the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in Paris. Mr. Fadden leaves his post as Deputy

\textsuperscript{11} Canada not-for-profit corporations act 2009
Minister of National Defence to become the National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister (CADSI 2015).

This statement draws a clear connection between CADSI and Stephen Harper’s appointed defense administration. This is evidence of the invisible structure that exists between the Harper administration and the CADSI. I suggest that teachers let their students connect those dots and scaffold them into seeing why it would be beneficial for the Canadian Association of Defense and Security Industries to have former members hold powerful positions in public office. This investigation would lead to a yearlong portfolio project that would have students explore the connections between industry, government and the financial market in order to render a clear picture of how war/current conflict is a driving force in the Canadian economy. Financial literacy can be part of a teacher’s multi-literacy approach to the topic of current conflict. With conflict as the lens that students gaze through, teachers can unpack how the oil economy and the Canada specific oil sands are part of the conflict driven economy.

Having this complicated and complex conversation in elementary school better prepares students to engage with and conceptualize the invisible structures that motivate the expansion of the Canadian military; in order to help students to begin to understand concepts that take years and years of technical understanding to master.

**Conclusion**

The conclusion of this study is a call to action, being an educator is a political task and we are living in a time of war. All of the educators that I interviewed have inspired me beyond words. I recognize that each of them had permanent jobs that were protected by unions, and for that reason, they were able to address political subject matter with security and little fear of reprisal. This does not diminish their bravery in my eyes, it simply is not the
case for many educators in Ontario, and as such, it can be risky to speak truth to power. But of this much I am certain, if we do not speak out against the fast-paced militarization of the Canadian state and the policy and legislation that seeks to strip of us our right to descent such as the proposed bill C-51 (anti-terrorism legislation) does, we will soon be unable to recognize the country we are living in. Therefore, it is with great urgency that we must bring guest speakers into our classrooms that have fought or lived in conflict zones to share their horror stories. Let us unpack for our students the invisible structures that motivate and perpetuate war, let no child finish elementary school without a clear understanding between the collusion between the state and the arms industry. The conflict in Iraq and now Syria that Canada has lead bombing campaigns in (Globe and Mail 2015) must be understood as the violation of international law that it is, and young Canadians must not be kept in the dark any longer.

If we begin each year with the acknowledgment that Canada is a contemporary site of current conflict, between the First Nations and the Canadian state we are giving a frame of reference for young Canadians who have never seen or conceptualized violent conflict in a meaningful way. We need to celebrate the courageous First Nations Land Defenders as examples of people who have survived violent state repression and are fighting back. We need to include the perspectives of those most affected by the missions of the Canadian Forces and learn about their cultures and ask, why is it that our boots are on their ground?

_________________________

12 Land defenders are First Nations people who defend the land with their bodies, to protest all forms of environmental degradation.
REFERENCES


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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Questions

- Background experience: How long have you been teaching? What grades have you taught? How did you develop an interest in political education? What does political education mean to you? Where do you see space for teaching about war and conflict in the curriculum?

- What does social justice mean to you?

- What is the connection between building a portfolio and social justice? Why are you having your students do this project?

- Why do you believe teaching about war/current conflict is important for your students? What factors inspire you to teach current conflict?

- What instructional strategies do you use to teach current conflict?

- Can you describe for me an example of how you have taught about Canadian military involvement in current international conflict? How did this lesson fit with the curriculum? What were your learning goals? What instructional strategies/methods did you use? How did students respond? How successful was the lesson at engaging students in critical thinking about the issues? What do you think they learned?

- Have you taught about Canada’s military involvement in Afghanistan?

- [If yes] Can you describe that lesson for me? How did this lesson fit with the curriculum? What were your learning goals? What instructional strategies/methods did you use? How did students respond? What do you think they learned?

- Have you taught about Canada’s military involvement in Haiti?

- [If yes] Can you describe that lesson for me? How did this lesson fit with the curriculum? What were your learning goals? What instructional strategies/methods did you use? How did students respond? What do you think they learned?

- Can you tell me if and how you connect Remembrance Day to Canada’s military involvement in current international conflict? What materials do you use? What are your learning goals? What instructional strategies/methods do you use? How do the students respond?

- Can you recommend any factors and resources that support this work?
• Can you tell me about any challenges that you have encountered and how you responded to them?

• What advice might you offer a teacher considering integrating war and current conflict into their teaching who are hesitant or feel ill prepared?
Appendix B: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ___________________

Dear ___________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying teaching current conflict in the elementary classroom for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Mary-Lynn Tessaro. My research supervisor is Garfield Gini-Newman. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 40-minute interview that will be recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher name: Sarah Zaharuk

Phone number, email: 647-746-4663, sarah.zaharuk@mail.utoronto.ca

Instructor’s Name: Dr. Mary-Lynn Tessaro
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by ______________________________ (name of researcher) and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ______________________________________

Name (printed): ______________________________________

Date: _______________________