



It's textbook: controlling the narrative about residential schools in Ontario classrooms

Connor White

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47989/ir30CoLIS52249>

Abstract

Introduction. Between 1831 and 1996, 149 residential schools were established in Canada with the purpose of assimilating young Indigenous children by stripping them of their language, culture and history. However, residential schools have been historically absent as a topic of study in Ontario primary and secondary school classrooms.

Method. This study examines the way curricula and textbooks approved for use in Ontario classrooms by the Ministry of Education between 1998 and 2024 help control information taught to students about residential schools.

Analysis. These materials are analysed to examine the evolution in the number of times residential schools are mentioned as well as the quality of these descriptions to better understand the culture of information control which surrounds the topic of residential schools.

Results. These educational materials contain a lack in both quantity and quality in the description of residential schools despite a slight increase in the number of times residential schools are mentioned in these materials after 2013.

Conclusion. These results reflect the effects of political information control on educational materials and its impact on the way residential schools have been relegated to the margins of Canadian history in favour of a nationalistic White settler colonial narrative.

Introduction

In 2021, members of the Tk'emlups te Secwépemc First Nation undertook an archaeological survey of the site of a residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia to try to identify possible grave sites on the school's grounds. In their preliminary report, they indicated that the area contained suspected grave sites of up to 215 children, some as young as three years old, who were victims of the residential school system. Canadian and international media quickly seized this evidence and published several news articles on the topic (Nasser and Lloyd, 2021, May 28). This news was met with shock, surprise and outcry throughout the country and the world. The main thought running through the minds of many Canadians was the same: *'How did we not know?'* (Yoshida-Butryn, 2020).

The following paper will seek to answer this question by analysing the way in which residential schools are discussed in curricula and textbooks published in Ontario between 1998 and 2024. These two mediums were chosen as they are the main, government-published educational materials which outline what the Government of Ontario expects students to learn in classrooms. The eight curricula and 28 textbooks published by the Ministry of Education in Ontario during this period did not mention, or hardly made mention of, residential schools prior to 2013. In the past decade, changes have been made to these documents in order to include this history in classrooms and correct the historical absence of residential schools in Canadian education. While the number of times residential schools are mentioned by the Government of Ontario in curricula and textbooks has increased, the quality of these descriptions leaves much to be desired.

This research fits into a broader narrative of information control in education related to the history of minorities and disenfranchised communities. Due to White, nation-centrist conceptions of history in many western nations, minority groups – including BIPOC, 2SLGBTQIA+, and women – have often been relegated to the margins of history and underrepresented in the nationalistic narratives which are taught to children in classrooms. Many researchers, such as Tonia Sutherland, Saidiya Hartman, Krista McCracken, Skylee-Storm Hogan-Stacey and Marika Cifor, have discussed these topics in recent works by outlining the epistemic injustices which minorities face every day, but which are rarely discussed in history books, or in classrooms. This study proposes to add to these works by uncovering the ways in which government regulation in the development of textbooks and curricula in Ontario has created a network of information control which purposefully marginalises the history of residential schools. Using various methods of information control, including mentioning, argumentation strategies, linguistic realisation and placement, curricula and textbooks are being used as political tools of neo-colonisation, which continuously perpetuates cultural genocide.

For the purposes of this study, no other additional educational materials were investigated. While teachers and individual schools are free to supplement what is taught in the classroom with their own lesson plans, videos, media or other forms of knowledge, these materials reflect independent choices rather than official, standardised expectations of the materials which should be taught. As such, while the sources should be acknowledged, the study of their impact on what students learn about residential schools in Ontario classrooms would be better served by a future, in-depth analysis.

Historical context

The history of residential schools in Canada is long and dark. Between 1831 and 1996, a total of 149 residential schools operated in Canada under the control of religious institutions and the Canadian government (Interactive Map - NCTR, 2020). They operated in every province and territory with the exception of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, with some residential schools even being located in large metropolitan centres such as Winnipeg, Manitoba (Assiniboia), Regina, Saskatchewan (Regina), Edmonton, Alberta (St. Albert and Edmonton), Calgary, Alberta (Sarcee, St.

Joseph's, and Morley) and Vancouver, British Columbia (St. Paul's). At their peak in the early 1930s, more than 80 schools were in operation at once, housing over 17,000 students. It is estimated that over the 167 years during which residential schools were in operation, approximately 150,000 First Nation, Inuit and Métis children attended schools in one or many of these institutions (Residential Schools in Canada, n.d.).

These students were forcibly removed from their homes by government, police and church officials, along with civil officers such as therapists and counsellors. Once at school, students were often stripped of their names, and they were forbidden from practising their culture and language in order to assimilate into White, Canadian culture. Students faced hunger, loneliness, as well as psychological, emotional, sexual and physical abuse (Residential Schools in Canada, n.d.). Students often faced illnesses because of malnutrition, overcrowding and the generally poor conditions at the schools. It is estimated that anywhere from 2,000 to 10,000 children died while attending residential schools. Many of their bodies were buried on the grounds and, more often than not, parents were not notified that their children had died (National Student Memorial Register, 2019; Residential Schools in Canada, n.d.). The children who survived, known as Residential School Survivors, continue to struggle with deep trauma, including generational trauma, as a result of the long-lasting psychological effects of their experiences. The effects of residential schools continue to impact Survivors and their families in various ways including financially, emotionally, medically and psychologically (Rice, n.d.).

Despite the large number of schools and students, the location of some of these schools in many of Canada's largest cities, and frequent pleas by Indigenous leaders and Elders for recognition and reconciliation on the topic of residential schools, reconciliation was only first offered by the Canadian government in 1998. The Liberal government at the time, led by Jean Chrétien, offered a Statement of Reconciliation which acknowledged the abuse suffered by children who attended residential schools. In 2007, the damage inflicted by residential schools upon Indigenous peoples was further recognised by the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. This agreement aimed to bring a '*fair and lasting resolution*' to the legacy of residential schools (Government of Canada, 2021). Following this agreement, Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued an official apology on behalf of the Canadian government in 2008.

During this same period, the United Nations issued Declaration 61/295 titled the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) on September 13, 2007. The purpose of this declaration was to affirm '*that indigenous peoples are equal to all other peoples*' and recognise the fact that Indigenous peoples in states colonised by various European powers during the era of colonisation have been subjected to and '*suffered from historic injustices as a result of [...] their colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources*' (United Nations, 2007, pp. 2-3). The document outlines a series of articles which would guide nations to create a framework for reconciliation and healing including providing resources for self-governance, education, healthcare and justice while recognising and acknowledging historical injustices and their long-term effects on Indigenous individuals and communities. The declaration was met with worldwide acclaim and was adopted by a majority of 143 states with 11 abstentions. Only four states voted against the declaration: Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada. Of these four states, Canada was the last to announce its full support for UNDRIP in 2016.

The publication of UNDRIP by the UN and of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement by the Canadian federal government in 2007, was followed by the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Formed in 2007, the TRC is the largest class-action settlement in Canadian history. Its goal is to raise awareness and create a historical record of residential schools while promoting reconciliation. Over six years, the TRC was given \$72 million and access to over five million records in order to travel across the country and gather both textual and oral evidence of residential schools and their continued impact on Indigenous individuals and

communities in Canada today. Their final report, *Honouring truth, reconciling for the future*, was published in 2015 and consists of a multi-volume record which documents the horrors of the Canadian Residential School System. This report also included 94 Calls to Action which serve as recommendations by the TRC to the government of Canada to further the process of reconciliation between Canada and its Indigenous peoples (Government of Canada, 2024).

The establishment of the TRC and the publication of its report sought to spark a change in the ways in which the history of residential school is taught in Ontario classrooms. Calls to Action 62 to 65 from the section on '*Education for reconciliation*' in the TRC final report advise that the topic of residential schools should be taught to school-aged children from kindergarten to grade 12 (three to eighteen years old) as well as in post-secondary institutions (Annex 1). These Calls to Action request funding for the creation and implementation of age-appropriate curricula on residential schools in consultation and collaboration with Indigenous peoples, particularly residential school Survivors, as well as the integration of Indigenous teaching methods and knowledge practices in Canadian classrooms. They also ask for funding to better train teachers and educators on how to teach about these topics in schools (TRC, 2015, pp. 62-65).

Method

For the purposes of this study, the eight Ontario curricula and 28 ministry approved textbooks published in English between 1998 and 2024 for history courses taught in the 7th, 8th, and 10th grade were analysed in depth by extracting and coding each mention of residential schools in these texts. These passages were coded based on the frequency and quality, in content, wording and placement, with which residential schools are described. Specific keywords, including abuse, death and generational trauma, were of particular interest, to analyse whether the true extent of the residential school system's cruelty was captured in these texts. Extracting each passage and analysing them in this way makes it possible to understand how specific choices made by the government in the creation, publication and wording of educational material impacts the ways in which the subject of residential schools is taught in classrooms.

Grades 7, 8 and 10 were chosen for two reasons: the age of the students, and the structure of mandatory classes in Ontario. The average student in grades 7, 8 and 10 is between the ages of eleven and sixteen. This age group is a crucial moment for the development of prejudice and discrimination. While studies have shown that children as young as three or four can exhibit signs of prejudice (Raabe and Beelmann, 2011; Williams and Steele, 2019), the pre-teen and teen years are also an important moment when these beliefs take hold. Studies on teen peer culture show that it is during this age range that young teens learn to develop their own identities, identities which can be threatened by those they see as *other* or different to their own (Hughes et al., 2016). This period is also fraught with power struggles and rebellious behaviour which can lead young teens to lash out and discriminate against those they see as different or, in the case of youth from minority groups, to experience various forms of discrimination from their peers or adults (Hidgon, 2008; Takamasa et al., 2024). As a result, learning about different peoples and cultures as well as historical injustices committed against minority groups in a school setting is crucial to help teenagers learn about discrimination and prejudice as well as their long-lasting effects on dispossessed communities (Bryan, 2012).

These grades were also chosen because of the ways in which mandatory and optional courses are established in the Ontario school system. In middle school and high school, history is only a required course for graduation in grades 7, 8 and 10. Students are not required to take any other history class outside of these grades. They are also not required to take any humanities courses beyond history except for a Canadian geography class in 9th grade and a half-semester civic and citizenship course in 10th grade. As of 2019, students can also opt to fulfil their Grade 11 English requirement and their Grade 9 Arts requirement by taking Grade 11 English: Understanding Contemporary First Nations, Métis and Inuit Voices and Grade 9 Expressions of First Nations,

Métis, and Inuit Cultures respectively, provided that the school they are attending has a teacher or educator who is qualified to teach these courses and that enough students enrol in the course in order to justify offering it. Students in Ontario do have the right to take optional course credits in history, including six unique courses currently offered on Indigenous history and culture. However, just as the Grade 11 and Grade 9 requirements, these courses are dependent on the availability of trained teachers and demand. As such, for most students attending schools in Ontario, their only exposure to Canadian history in the classroom beyond elementary school is in grades 7, 8 and 10 (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Between 1998 and 2024, four curricula were published for grades 7 and 8 (1998, 2004, 2013 and 2018) and four curricula were published for grade 10 (1999, 2005, 2013 and 2018), for a total of eight curricula for the study of Canadian history. During this same period, 28 textbooks were approved by the Ministry of Education of Ontario based on these curricula: eight for grade 7, six for grade 8, and fourteen for grade 10. For the purposes of this study, these curricula are separated between those published before 2007 (1998, 1999, 2004 and 2005) and those published after (2013 and 2018) so as to reflect the impact of UNDRIP and the establishment of the TRC on Ontario's education system. Textbooks are also separated into two groups. Unlike the curricula, they are not divided based on their date of publication, but rather the date they were approved for circulation in Ontario classrooms by the Ministry of Education: fourteen before 2007 and fourteen after 2007. The educational materials published in these two distinct periods show a clear shift and evolution in the importance accorded to residential schools in Ontario classrooms.

Results

Curricula

The Ministry of Education outlines the four main components of a school curriculum as: (1) mandatory learning expectations, (2) optional teacher supports, (3) curriculum context, and (4) programme planning and assessment and evaluation information (Ministry of Education, 2024a). This first element is the most pertinent for this paper as it outlines 'the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn and apply by the end of a grade or course' (Ministry of Education, 2024a). In other words, the history curriculum outlines what the Ministry of Education believes to be historically pertinent enough for students to learn and apply. Of the four curricula published before 2007 (1998, 1999, 2004, 2005), none make mention of residential schools. Residential schools are only mentioned for the first time in the Ontario curriculum in the two curricula published in 2013.

In these two curricula, residential schools are mentioned five times in the curriculum published for grades 7 and 8, and ten times in the grade 10 curriculum. Both curricula also include an identical definition of residential schools:

Federally funded, church-run educational institutions for First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, these schools were particularly numerous in the first half of the twentieth century, although some continued into the 1990s. Aboriginal children were removed from their families and sent to boarding (residential) schools as part of a government policy of assimilation. Students were deprived of their families, languages, and culture, and some were subjected to physical or sexual abuse. (Ministry of Education, 2013a, p. 209)

In these curricula, teachers are instructed to teach students about the establishment of residential schools, the increased number of schools opening in the 1930s, the challenges that the schools posed to First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities as well as the short and long-term effects of these schools on these communities.

The two curricula published in 2018 continue to show an increased importance accorded to residential schools. The number of times residential schools are mentioned in the 7th and 8th grade

curriculum increases to 20 and the number in the grade 10 curriculum increases to 17. Beyond the material covered in the two 2013 curricula, the 2018 curriculum for grades 7 and 8 also mentions the impact of residential schools on intergenerational trauma (Ministry of Education, 2018a, p. 282), and the fact that students died while attending these schools (p. 284). While these topics are not included in the grade 10 curriculum of 2018, this curriculum includes a section in the front matter on Indigenous Education in Ontario which pertains to the effects of the legacy of residential schools (Ministry of Education, 2018b, p. 15). Both curricula also contain a definition of residential schools. Unlike the 2013 version, this definition has been edited to remove all mentions of abuse:

A network of government-funded, church-run schools for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children, the goal of which was to eradicate Indigenous languages, traditions, knowledge, and culture and to assimilate Indigenous peoples into mainstream settler society. (Ministry of Education, 2018a, p. 363)

Therefore, while there is an increase in the number of times residential schools are mentioned in school curricula in 2013 and 2018, there still appears to be a hesitancy to describe the true nature of residential schools as a cultural genocide by not including the forced removal of children, nor the abuse and death which took place.

Textbooks

While curriculum materials are a useful tool to guide teachers and help them decide what to teach, students often never see these curriculum materials in the classroom. Rather, students tend to use textbooks based on these guidelines rather than the curricula themselves. Textbooks are written by historians and educators, but, like curriculum materials, textbooks are also subject to approval by the Ministry of Education. Once a textbook is submitted to the Government of Ontario, it undergoes a rigorous editing process to ensure that the final text contains at least 80 per cent of the required materials outlined in the curriculum before it can be approved. These approved textbooks are published on the Trillium List in Ontario and schools can decide which textbook to purchase based on this list (Ministry of Education, 2024b).

Twenty-eight textbooks were approved for classroom use for grades 7, 8 and 10 between 1998 and 2024, totalling over 10,000 pages. Of those pages, only 61 make mention of residential schools, which equals roughly 0.6 per cent of all content featured in these textbooks. Moreover, no single textbook mentions residential schools on more than nine pages, with eight textbooks not mentioning residential schools at all, sixteen making mention of them less than five times, and only four textbooks mentioning them five times or more. Of these four, three were published in 2014 or later, with the fourth being published in 2000.

There is no clear increase in the number of times residential schools are discussed in textbooks approved for use in classrooms after 2007 until 2014, after the updated 2013 curriculum was implemented (Figure 1). Of the four textbooks which were created after the publication of this new curriculum, three mention residential schools from eight to nine times, with only one grade 7 textbook making no mention of them. Still, this trend suggests that the addition of residential schools in the 2013 curriculum had an impact on the inclusion of this topic in textbooks. Given that no new textbook has been approved by the Ministry of Education for the study of history in grades 7, 8 and 10 since 2016, it is unclear whether this number will continue to rise according to the requirements of the 2018 curriculum and the Calls to Action of the TRC, but, taking in account the jump following the 2013 curriculum, it is likely that the number of pages attributed to residential schools will continue to grow in coming years.

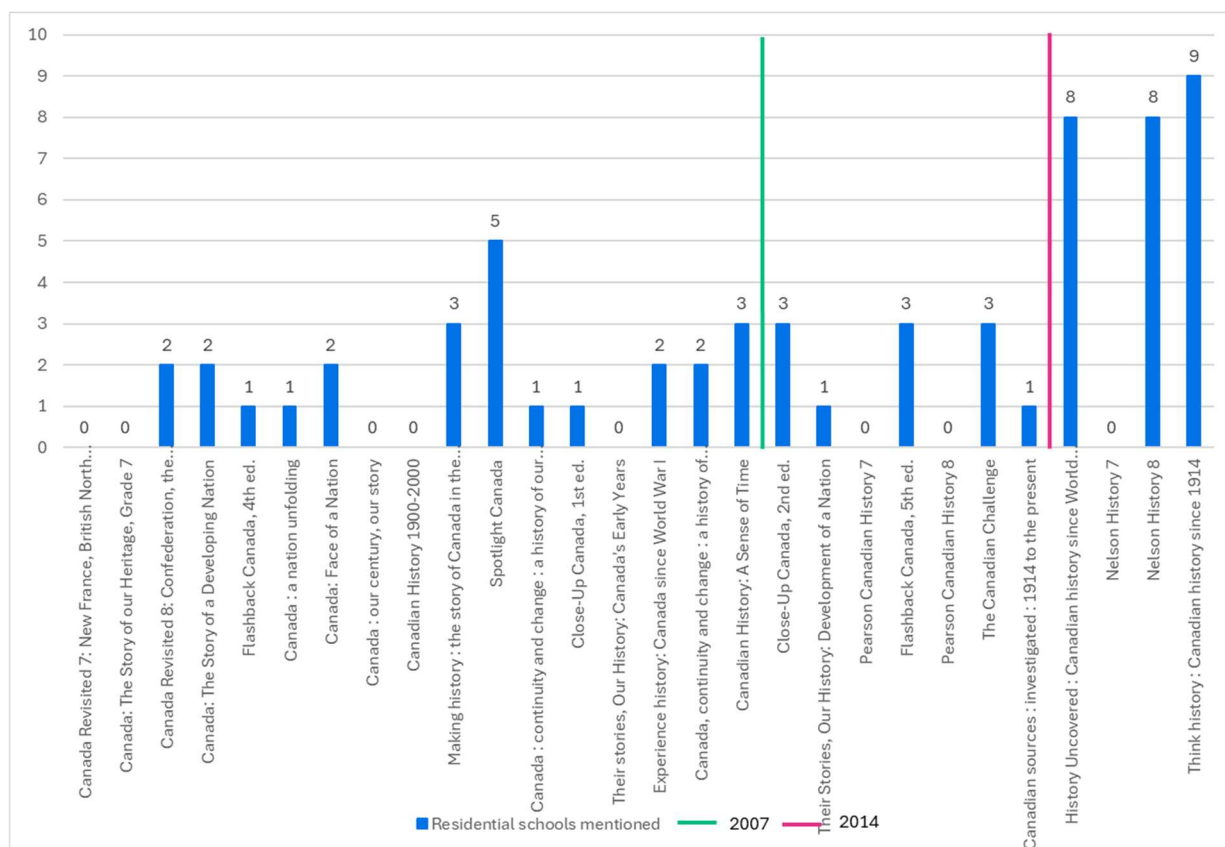


Figure 1: Number of pages dedicated to residential schools in grade 7, 8 and 10 history textbooks in Ontario (1998-2024) listed chronologically.

When residential schools are mentioned in these textbooks, these descriptions vary wildly in terms of quality and placement. Most textbooks define residential schools much in the same way as they are described in curriculum materials: (1) residential schools are acknowledged as tools of assimilation by church and state, (2) students were forcibly removed from their families and stripped of their language and culture, and (in some definitions) (3) students faced abuse while attending these schools. Sixteen out of 28 of the textbooks examined in this study contain at least two of these characteristics when defining residential schools. For example, one textbook defines residential schools as ‘boarding schools established by the federal government to encourage First Nations children to assimilate’ (Haskings-Winner et al., 2007, p. 326), while another text may go further in depth to describe them as such: ‘Government-established schools in which Canadian Aboriginal children were forced to abandon their traditional culture and assimilate into the dominant European culture’ (Newman et al., 2000, p. 414). The best definitions include all three elements, but these definitions are among the minority:

Children were removed from their reserve homes and taken to the schools, mostly run by religious organizations. [...] The schools discouraged children from speaking their first languages and practicing their cultural traditions. Physical abuse was common. (Borlotta et al., 2000, p. 7)

Comparatively, very few textbook entries diverge from this cookie-cutter definition to further elaborate on what happened in residential schools. Nine textbooks talk about the long-term impacts of the residential school system on Survivors and their families. However, of these, five discuss only the loss of cultural identity, while the other four go deeper to examine the psychological effects of residential school trauma. Only one textbook makes mention of

generational trauma as a result of residential schools. Further, only three textbooks explain that children were often stripped of their names and given Christian names as '*teachers thought their given names were too hard to pronounce*' (Deir et al., 2000, p. 307) and as such, this facet of identity deletion which took place in residential schools is often forgotten.

While abuse is mentioned sixteen times in these textbooks, it is often not further elaborated upon. Rather, the abuse faced by students of the residential school system is often described vaguely. For example, one textbook simply states, '*children suffered from diseases, neglect and abuse at the schools*' without explaining the type of abuse that took place, nor the long-term effects of this abuse on Survivors (Hallman-Chong et al., 2016, p. 4). Only five textbooks specify that the abuse was physical, sexual, and/or mental, and all these books are reserved for grade 10 students. Moreover, the diseases, like tuberculosis, which ravaged the student population due to unhealthy living conditions are mentioned only four times. Likewise, the deaths which occurred because of this abuse and these illnesses are only mentioned in passing in three of the textbooks. Only one textbook mentions suicide (Hallman-Chong et al., 2016). No details about the estimated number of deaths are provided in any of these texts.

Many of these textbooks also have a hard time pinning down the timeline of the residential school system. While most correctly place its apogee in the 1930s, none correctly date its inception in 1831. Of the textbooks which do provide a start date for residential schools, most place it in the 1880s or 1890s and link residential schools to the Indian Act of 1876. Most textbooks also fail to identify the end date of the residential school system. Eight textbooks which provide an end date place it in the 1960s and two place it in the 1980s. Only three textbooks correctly identify the true end date of residential schools: 1996.

The localisation of the descriptions of residential schools in these textbooks is also underwhelming. Residential schools are hardly ever given their own two-page (or more) spread. In fact, only three textbooks spend two consecutive pages discussing residential schools, with one of these books doing so twice in two different sections of the textbook. More often, the pages which mention residential schools only allocate a single paragraph to the matter. This paragraph can measure anywhere between a single sentence to twelve sentences. The remaining passages on the residential school system are contained within boxes which are inserted either on a full page or amongst other text. These *snapshot* boxes occur in eight textbooks. Finally, in thirteen out of 28 textbooks, residential schools are mentioned alongside other discriminatory practices undertaken by Canada towards its minority groups.

Analysis

This paper has shown that while the number of times residential schools are mentioned has increased over time in both curricula and textbooks, it still remains very small when compared to the rest of the content in the textbooks, and the quality of the descriptions pertaining to these topics is still lacking. The question that remains to be answered is: why? Considering Canada's apparent openness to the discussion of the history of residential schools since the establishment of the TRC, and most definitely since the publication of its final report in 2015, why do school curricula and textbooks fall so far behind when it comes to describing the realities of the residential school system? One answer lies in the inherently political nature of curricula and textbooks and their status as tools of information control, particularly when describing historical injustices, prejudice and racialised groups.

In the 1990s, researchers began to question the previous assumption that textbooks were objective and '*unproblematic transmitters of knowledge*' (Roldán Vera, 2018, p. 106). However, most of this research focused on developing countries such as the western colonies in Africa and Asia or socialist nations in Eastern Europe and Latin America (Müller, 2018, 281; Roldán Vera, 2018, 107). According to scholars, these regions were chosen due to the authoritarian government structures

which governed these nations in the twentieth century. It was theorised that the nature of these governments increased state meddling and control in the development of school curricula and textbooks (Roldán Vera, 2018, p. 107). While this assumption has been shown to be correct, it nonetheless presents a western bias that authoritarian regimes are more likely to manipulate history in textbooks to present a positive, nationalistic past to school-aged children.

Textbook and curriculum manipulation is not a phenomenon which is exclusive to authoritarian governments. Democratic regimes also rework the past to suit specific agendas and craft national historical narratives which promote pride while erasing wrongdoings and shameful events. The effect of this historical censorship leads to the further marginalisation of peoples who have suffered at the hands of democratic countries such as BIPOC individuals (Morning, 2008; Araújo and Maeso, 2012), members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community (Höhne and Heerdegen, 2018), women (Fine-Meyer and Llewellyn, 2018) and other minorities (Hickman and Porfilio, 2012; Chisholm, 2018).

It is only more recently that studies have begun to be produced which focus on how textbooks are crafted with specific political, economic and cultural goals in mind in democratic countries as well (Apple and Christian-Smith, 1991; Choppin, 2008; Fuchs and Bock, 2018; Apple, 2019). According to these studies, *'education and power are terms of an indissoluble couplet'* (Apple and Christian-Smith, 1991, p. 2) and history curricula and textbooks fall under the adage that history is written by the victors. In Ontario, as in many other provinces, curricula and textbooks are created according to a long and complex process of negotiation between the interests of scholars, government officials, publishers, educators and pupils. The final product is essentially a compromise, one which has historically favoured the views of dominant groups (Apple, 2014, p. 9). While scholars have come to accept that this compromise is but one construction of reality, textbooks and curricula, nonetheless, contribute towards the creation of *'what society has recognized as legitimate and truthful'* (Apple and Christian-Smith, 1991, p. 4).

The description of residential schools in Ontario schools follows the same trends as those identified in this new scholarship outlining the politics of information control in textbooks. When discussing residential schools, the creators of these textbooks and curricula employ information control tactics such as mentioning, argumentation strategies, linguistic realisation and placement to include residential schools in textbooks while at the same time limiting the impact of this history.

One tactic used by these educational materials is called *mentioning*. Mentioning is a process which carefully selects knowledge that has previously been excluded and incorporates it in limited ways to appease public demand (Chisholm, 2018, p. 226). The practice of mentioning is frequently employed when discussing the history of non-majority groups in books. By using this technique, minorities and their history are mentioned in text *'but are not developed in depth'* (Apple, 2014, p. 56). These histories are often hidden, sequestered away into small sections which number only a few pages, and are often grouped together, with women, racialised individuals and other minorities all sharing space in a single section on minority groups rather than being granted their own, individual attention (Apple, 2014, p. 56). In the case of residential schools, once the public and the TRC began to make demands for the inclusion of residential schools in curriculum materials and textbooks so that it would be taught in classrooms, the Ministry of Education had no choice but to include it. That being said, they could choose exactly in what ways and to what extent residential schools would be featured in these materials. Residential schools would be mentioned, but only because they could be included while still allowing the dominant group (in this case, White settlers) to maintain a certain amount of dignity and national pride (Apple, 2014, p. 9) and they are often placed in a section featuring the history of other marginalised groups rather than being accorded their own pages.

Argumentation strategies and linguistic realisation are both types of linguistic choices employed by curriculum and textbook creators in this process of mentioning. These linguistic strategies help to promote the point of view of dominant groups as '*official history*' (Oteiza and Achugar, 2018, p. 320). The passages which describe residential schools in textbooks and curriculum materials often use argumentation strategies like justification discourses and the tactic of playing down in order to hide the true dimension of the abuse and violence of residential schools. Authors use justification discourses to make the reader reflect on why residential schools were established, in the hopes that students may see this decision as rational or as justified. One example of this type of linguistic manipulation can be found in the 2018 curriculum for grades 7 and 8. In this curriculum, teachers are provided with possible questions they can ask students to encourage reflection. One of these questions encourages students to put themselves in the shoes of the religious groups which helped run residential schools: '*What have you concluded about why some religious institutions in Canada felt the need to establish residential schools?*' (Ministry of Education, 2018a, p. 262). These types of questions encourage students to find justifications for the establishment of residential schools and serve to minimise their true nature as tools of assimilation and cultural genocide.

Textbook and curriculum authors are also very careful in their choice of words. The words they choose tend to downplay the actual horrors of residential schools. As mentioned, authors rarely specify the type of abuse undergone by students, preferring to simply refer to *abuse* as a general and vague term. Some textbooks prefer not to mention abuse at all, implying that students were simply '*punished for practicing their traditional spiritual beliefs*' (Cruxton et al., 2001, p. 232). This same tactic is used when textbooks purposefully omit the fact that students died as a result of their treatment in residential school and when textbooks constantly use the word *assimilation* but refuse to use the term *cultural genocide*, which has been identified by both scholars and Survivors as a more appropriate term to describe the effects of residential schools (MacDonald and Graham, 2012; Cohen, 2017; Amir, 2018).

Textbook and curriculum authors also make use of anonymisation to play down the role of White settlers in the violence of the residential school system. To do this, they use broad categories to name the actors such as *the government* and *religious groups* rather than naming individuals responsible for the creation or continuation of the residential school system. Even Egerton Ryerson, one of the fathers of the residential school system, is only mentioned in one textbook (Cruxton and Junyk, 2007, p. 170). Likewise, the role played by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in the forced displacement of children is not mentioned in any of these curricula or textbooks. These linguistic tactics serve to play down the culpability of individuals and White settlers in the residential school system when it is mentioned in textbooks and curricula.

The placement of these passages in textbooks and curricula also plays an important role in the way that residential schools are mentioned. Passages about residential schools are often lumped in with other discriminatory measures employed in Canada on other minority groups. Residential schools are often found surrounded by passages about civil rights struggles for Black Canadians (Newman et al., 2000, p. 186; Cruxton et al., 2000, p. 354) and for women (Arnold et al., 2000, p. 337; Borlotta et al., 2000, p. 210; Bain and Flaherty, 2000, p. 286). In curricula, residential schools are often compared to Japanese Canadian internment camps during the Second World War (Ministry of Education, 2018b, p. 128). As a result, Indigenous and minority struggles tend to be lumped together into a small section about racism and discrimination rather than adequately contextualised and given their own section.

The placement of descriptions of residential schools in *snapshot* style boxes also contributes to this process of mentioning. In both cases, residential schools are awkwardly inserted with very little context, or sandwiched by pages of White colonial history, making them seem like an intruder which does not quite belong within the rest of the narrative. This approach is commonly taken

when discussing minorities in school textbooks and leads to *othering* minority groups by placing them outside the main narrative of the text, one of nation building and the inevitable and commonsensical development of a White, capitalist settler society (Carleton, 2011, p. 101). Othering and mentioning residential schools in these ways gives the impression that they are but a small, inconsequential chapter within a larger, more important nationalist narrative.

Conclusion

In brief, since the publication of the two 2013 curricula for grade 7 and 8 and for grade 10 history classes in Ontario, there has been an increase in the number of times that the residential school system is mentioned in both curricula and textbooks. However, the quality of these descriptions is still severely lacking. When residential schools are mentioned, the wording used is chosen in a way that absolves White guilt, and the placement of these passages equates the residential school system to the struggles and discrimination faced by other minorities in Canada rather than identifying its true nature as an attempt at cultural genocide. All these tactics are carefully employed by the Ministry of Education and the Government of Ontario to control the quality and exactitude of the information about residential schools which is presented to students.

These approaches of information control employed by a government body in Ontario are in direct opposition to creating an environment of reconciliation and openness. By controlling information about residential schools in these ways and limiting the exposure of students to the true extent of the horrors which children their own age were forced to undergo, the Ontario government is further perpetuating the cycle of violence and discrimination which continues to impact First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities to this day. The staunch adherence to a White, nationalistic narrative, and the continued marginalisation of the history of minority groups, including the mere 0.6 per cent of textbook pages reserved to residential schools, shows clearly that the Government of Ontario has a long way to go to improve its transparency and openness on the topic of residential schools and the way they are presented in classrooms.

Of course, textbooks and curricula are only guidelines which teachers and educators are encouraged to follow in the classroom. This study does not consider what teachers reference from these materials, what information is added off-book, and what students learn from these materials. It would be interesting to uncover how textbooks are used by teachers and students in these contents, especially since most schools only have access to one textbook (rather than 28 as in this study) and that schools may not necessarily have the resources to purchase new textbooks every time a new curriculum is published. Students and teachers may very well be using material which is a decade out of date by the time that new textbooks are purchased in accordance with updated curricular standards. The information behaviour of teachers and students pertaining to discussions on residential schools in the classroom would thus benefit from further research.

Annex 1

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

- i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.
- ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.
- iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.
- iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

- i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
- iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

64. We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to denominational schools to require such schools to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with Aboriginal Elders.

65. We call upon the federal government, through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, post-secondary institutions and educators, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and its partner institutions, to establish a national research program with multi-year funding to advance understanding of reconciliation. (Government of Canada, 2024)

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Brian Griffin, whose course on information behaviour at the University of Toronto helped spark the idea for this article. I am also deeply thankful to Wendy Duff, Charlotte Le Fèvre and the selection committee of the CoLIS conference for their thoughtful and insightful suggestions. Finally, I would like to thank Nat Johnson-Tyghter for their assistance in accessing various curriculum and textbook materials from the Ontario Historical Education Collections of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

About the author

Connor White is an archivist at the *Centre de recherche sur les francophonies canadiennes*, University of Ottawa. He has a Master's of Information and Master's of History from the University of Toronto. His research interests include the history of marginalised and dispossessed communities and their inclusion in modern academic studies.

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