December 2017

A Critical Approach to Teaching About, Through, and For Human Rights

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Abstract

This paper presents the findings from a collaborative inquiry research study that explored instructors' perspectives and students' perceptions of an innovative ten-day graduate level human rights education course for educators. The course was the result of a partnership between the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. The purpose of the course was to encourage students to critically examine human rights; specifically, whose human rights stories get told, how they get told, and by whom. The findings suggest that while there were worthwhile insights gained when considering on teaching about, through, and for human rights, there were also significant challenges that can inform other courses that encourage students to adopt a critical stance with topics, like human rights, that seem unassailable.

Cet article présente les résultats d'une recherche menée en collaboration dont l'objectif était d'explorer les perspectives des instructeurs et les perceptions des étudiants concernant un cours de cycle supérieur de dix jours pour éducateurs sur les droits de la personne. Le cours était le résultat d'un partenariat entre la Faculté d'éducation de l'Université du Manitoba et le Musée canadien pour les droits de la personne. L'objectif du cours était d'encourager les étudiants à examiner les droits de la personne de façon critique, en particulier les récits concernant les droits de la personne qui sont racontés, la manière dont ils sont racontés et par qui. Les résultats suggèrent que, bien que le cours ait permis d'acquérir des connaissances utiles qui peuvent être enseignées sur les droits de la personne et pour ces droits, il a également permis de mettre à jour des défis importants qui pourraient s'appliquer à d'autres cours dans lesquels on encourage les étudiants à adopter un point de vue critique sur des sujets tels que les droits de la personne qui semblent inattaquables.

Keywords
human rights education, collaborative inquiry, critical pedagogies

Human rights education not only involves teaching people what human rights are, but also aims to develop "an understanding of our common responsibility to make human rights a reality" (Hopkins, 2011, p. 73). To create a "culture of human rights" and a society engaged with human rights, "direct education of human rights is inevitably necessary" (Tucci, 2005, p. 129). That stated, Tibbitts (2002) also warns that human rights education is more than simply presenting the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and its mechanisms. Rather, human rights education requires interactive pedagogical approaches, "employing methodologies that engage participants in the development of skills and attitudes, as well as knowledge" (Tibbitts, 2002, p. 162), and therefore supports an approach to human rights education that includes teaching *about*, *through*, and *for* human rights (Flowers, 2004; United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, 2001).

Over the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 academic years, we developed and taught two iterations of a ten-day human rights education summer institute for teachers through a formal partnership between our Faculty of Education and the newly established Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR). The course objectives were to examine theories, topics and issues in relation to human rights education, particularly within the context of the establishment of the CMHR. The course aimed to critically explore issues related to human rights and to engage with the ways in which these issues were portrayed through the museum's exhibits. Drawing on readings, lectures, and museum exhibits, the course considered notions of story and narrative in order to ask questions, such as: what and whose stories get told, by whom, and for what/whose purpose(s)? Since the students of the course were practicing teachers and educational leaders, we used these questions to further prompt critical reflection on the stories that our education systems—and we as educators—tell via curriculum, materials, and pedagogical decisions in the context of human rights. It was hoped that the course would not only provide learning opportunities that could bring to the fore knowledge about human rights, but would also provoke the students to consider human rights more critically.

Using a collaborative inquiry approach (Bray, Lee, Smith, & Yorks, 2000), we also chose the design and implementation of the course as a site of study where we could: (a) explore our own experiences of designing and delivering an intensive collaborative summer course with a national museum that operates under federal legislation and political oversight; (b) examine students' reactions to the content and delivery of a summer course focused on critical approaches; and (c) describe the ways that teacher-educators might critically engage with and construct human rights education courses, with a specific focus on the teaching *about*, *through*, and *for* framework. First, we will provide a context for this inquiry by describing the controversies surrounding both the CMHR and human rights education and then describe the development of and principles informing the course. This will be followed by a narration of our collaborative inquiry, and the insights gleaned in teaching *about*, *through*, and *for* human rights.

Controversies about a Museum for Human Rights and Human Rights Education

It is well beyond the scope of this paper to provide a complete account of the various controversies that surrounded the creation of the CMHR. It is, however, worth noting that dating back to at least 1998, the idea of a national museum for human rights located in Winnipeg was ensconced in debates concerning such important questions as: What to include and exclude from a Canadian museum devoted to human rights? How to acknowledge Canada's past and continuing violations as a settler-colonial nation of the rights of its First Nations peoples? How much of the museum's funding should be derived from private and public sources (such as

municipal, provincial and federal governments)? To what extent might the sitting federal government attempt to influence the operational and curatorial decisions of the CMHR (Busby, Muller & Wolford, 2015)? Given the numerous tensions, controversies, and funding matters, it is not surprising that there were many who believed that the CMHR "might never see the light of day" (Busby et al., 2015, p. 9). However, in the fall of 2014, the CMHR opened its doors to the public with a broad mandate as a national museum, to emphasize a Canadian narrative of human rights history and illuminate the challenges associated with the fight to defend human rights within a global context (Busby et al., 2015).

The debates in which the museum has been embroiled from its inception have been magnified due to the fact that the museum's location is in Winnipeg where there are high levels of poverty and large numbers of Indigenous peoples who often experience social and economic disenfranchisement from the broader Canadian society (Gehl & Ross, 2013). Additionally, both the University of Manitoba and the CMHR are situated on Treaty One territory and homeland of the Métis Nation; and the CMHR was built on an important historic, social and cultural site in Winnipeg called "The Forks," where the Red and Assiniboine Rivers meet, and which has been a traditional meeting place for First Nations peoples for 6,000 years. There were numerous issues of university politics involved in creating a "Memo of Understanding" between the University of Manitoba and the CMHR, in part because of the current popularity of the CMHR—in a relatively small city— and various institutions vying for opportunities to engage with the new and prestigious museum.

Furthermore, human rights, as an emancipatory project, is itself controversial, and has been critiqued for being simply gestures that are symbolic and not substantive, lacking in philosophical principles, framing issues individualistically, diminishing cultural contexts and specificities, and as being a pretext for global capitalism (Brown, 2004, p. 451). As if not already complicated enough, human rights education is also regarded as a contentious subject (Coysh, 2014). Coysh argues that although human rights education is an important concept because of its transformational potential, it is simultaneously a problematic proposition given the fact that human rights education can also ignore and sustain the political conditions of injustice. Many human rights educators are convinced that the work that they do is transformative. However, empowering others to make changes in their own lives, as well as in their families, communities, and institutions around them (Tibbitts, 2005) does not necessarily lead to transformation. It is worth noting Ellsworth's (1989) caution that teaching does not necessarily lead to transformation, and that these emancipatory narratives risk enacting "repressive myths that perpetuate relations of domination" (p. 91).

All of these contestations—the philosophical, political, historical, social and pedagogical—illustrate the broader context in which this course was situated and convey some of the tensions that existed as we engaged in the work of developing and delivering this course. We were keenly aware of the fact that we were about to venture into the swamp of controversy in teaching a course about human rights in partnership with the CMHR. In the face of the complexities identified above, the summer institute was developed to be an opportunity to explore with students (that is, the teachers and administrators in our province) the tensions and possibilities that might come with adopting a critical stance towards human rights education.

Developing a Human Rights Education Course

In broad strokes, the course development drew on the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011) as a framing mechanism. The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training outlines three key constitutive components that should frame human rights education: (a) teaching *about* human rights, (b) teaching *through* human rights, and (c) teaching *for* human rights. These components are reflective of Flowers' (2004) concerns that human rights education must be explicitly grounded in human rights principles as expressed in human rights documents; use methods and practices that are consistent with human rights values and address knowledge, skills and attitudes; and lead to local and global action. Thus, the UN framing mechanism and Flower's principals were useful starting points for our course design and also in guiding our collaborative inquiry. However, such clear framing mechanisms for the course did not make its design or delivery easy and underscored our initial uncertainties, that teaching *about*, *through,* and *for* human rights would be—and is—inherently contentious.

A Critical Stance in Teaching *About*, *Through*, and *For* Human Rights

A central concern in the planning stages was how best to approach the development of learning opportunities that exposed teachers to developing a "critical stance" (Curzon-Hobson, 2003) on such an emotionally impactful topic as human rights. "A critical stance," wrote Curzon-Hobson (2003) "refers to *how* one encounters knowledge and *how* one engages with another in the pursuit of understanding. Thus, a critical stance is an attitude that fashions the nature of one's *contact* with knowledge and one another" (p. 202, italics in original). Critique, as Brown (2009) explains, "does not, it cannot, reject or demean its object. Rather, it's an act of reclamation, critique takes over the object for a different project than that to which it is currently tethered" (p. 16). The purpose, therefore, was not to reject the notion of human rights or the value of the CMHR, but rather to consider these ideas critically; to consider the ways in which power, language, and narrative work to naturalize assumptions about human rights and the human rights museum, and to what end.

We wanted students to examine and interrogate the ways that they framed both their thinking about human rights and also their conceptions of teaching *about, through,* and *for* human rights through a critical engagement with their assumptions and beliefs. We hoped that a critical stance would encourage them to regard themselves as public intellectuals and to challenge the social inequities that exist within their classrooms, the education system, and broader society (Giroux, 1985). In engaging critically, we wanted to challenge the grand narratives (Lyotard, 1984) of both human rights and of the CMHR in order to question these seemingly unproblematic narratives, and to consider issues of power, privilege, and language.

The Course

The course, entitled, *Engaging in theories and practices of human rights education: A partnership with the Canadian Museum for Human Rights*, was taught in July in both summers of 2014 and 2015. As instructors, we worked for almost a full year developing the first iteration of the course, and then revised the course based on informal student feedback, reflection on our experiences, and student evaluations for a second offering in 2015. The course was designed as a six-credit hour course that ran for 10 full days. It had a student enrolment of 24 in 2014 and 38 in

2015. The students who enrolled in the course were mostly practising teachers and school administrators who were working towards either an additional university accreditation (called a Post-Baccalaureate Diploma in Education) or towards a Masters in Education degree. The students were from Winnipeg and the surrounding rural area.

The course was organized into human rights topics, and in addition to classroom experiences and through our Memo of Understanding with the CMHR, we had the opportunity to visit the museum and specific exhibits a number of times in order to augment students' experiences and understandings of particular topics and issues. Like most courses, we drew on a variety of readings, delivered lectures, created small and large group activities to facilitate discussion, and required a number of written assignments. We also involved guest lecturers who had specific areas of expertise in some facet of human rights education from the University of Manitoba, the CMHR, Manitoba Education's Aboriginal Directorate, and other organizations.

Collaborative Inquiry

Over a two-year period we engaged in a collaborative inquiry in order to explore and answer compelling questions about our professional practice (Heron, 1996; Reason & Heron, 2001) in the context of teaching a human rights course. A major tenet of collaborative inquiry is to engage in questions "with" rather than "on" people (Heron, 1996; Reason & Heron, 2001). Given that we were cooperatively developing the course and collaboratively teaching it, and that we were interested in knowing more about the ways in which our critical approach to a course in human rights might play out, a collaborative inquiry allowed us to research the learning experiences that we were simultaneously in the process of creating, teaching, re-creating and re-teaching. We believed that a collaborative inquiry would allow for more robust understanding of our teaching and learning experiences given that "epistemologically collaborative inquiry is rooted in the tradition of social constructionism, given that social construction of meaning is important in terms of understanding how human beings negotiate meaning and build knowledge through socially shared efforts" (Löytönen, 2016, p. 8). We followed the suggestions of Bray et al. (2000) and adopted a collaborative inquiry approach that consisted of three broad elements: (a) repeated episodes of reflection and action, (b) a commitment to act as co-inquirers and peers, and (c) a central inquiry question to guide the project.

Dialogue, Critical Reflection, and Difficult Moments

Bray et al. (2000) define collaborative inquiry as "a process consisting of repeated episodes of reflection and action through which a group of peers strives to answer a question of importance" (p. 6). Thus, we engaged in ongoing dialogue and critical reflection in the months leading up to and after each course in regards to the planning, teaching, and evaluation of the course. In order to track and document our perspectives and experiences of designing and teaching the course, we each maintained a teaching notebook comprised of our planning notes, as well as written reflections and descriptions of our conversations, and of various classroom events. We also collected and reflected on course artefacts including our course readings, outlines, lecture notes, and lesson plans. Additionally, we collected quantitative and qualitative student response data[1] using a variety of methods in order to elicit students' perceptions of the content, delivery, and experiences of the course (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Specifically, in the first year, at the end of the course, students were invited to complete an online

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[1] The appropriate institutional research ethics board approved the study.

survey, and three months later were invited to participate in a focus group about students' perceptions of the course. In the second year of the course, we also asked students to participate in an anonymous exit survey upon completion of the course.

Drawing on the traditions of critical reflection specific to teacher education (Van Manen, 1977), we sought not just to record and think about our experiences, but also to reconsider norms and reconstruct knowledge (Yost, Sentner, & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000). In order to engage meaningfully with our individual written reflections, classroom experiences, and artefacts, we actively and purposefully engaged in both dialogue and critical reflection, interrogating our interpretations, analyzing course artefacts, and considering difficult moments as spaces of and possibilities for learning.

Our focus on difficult moments is informed by Pitt and Britzman's (2003) insight into difficult knowledge and reinforces the importance of what it means to learn when knowledge becomes incommensurable, conflicting with naturalized beliefs and assumptions. Difficult knowledge can provoke difficulty in the classroom—difficult moments and pedagogical uncertainty provoking "the dilemmas of thinking" (Britzman, 2003, p. 34), and prompt ethical questions of curriculum, pedagogy, and the project of education. We see teaching not as a direct transmission of knowledge, but rather as complex interplay between the teacher(s), students, and curriculum, imbued with power and complicated by knowledge that is partial (both incomplete and biased), and by the complexities of subjectivities. Thus, a focus on difficult moments experienced within the course, we believed, would reveal, or at least allow for a rumination of the effects of a critical approach to human rights education.

Thus, during each 10-day course, we set aside time at the end of each day for dialogue with each other in order to consider and reflect on difficult moments. We articulated difficult moments during the course as times when we could hear, see or feel student tension, resistance or discomfort. These difficult moments, we decided, might materialize as a critical or negative comment, an impassioned debate among students, active dissent or complaint, and even silence. We attempted to see these difficult moments from various perspectives, discussing our observations of what we saw or experienced, then considering them in light of the workings of power, privilege, normative discourses and resistance that often operate beneath the surface. We focused our daily post-class discussions on difficult moments that emerged during the class as starting points to our dialogue, not only because of their affective force on us as teachers, but also because we understood the importance of the role of difficulty in learning. As we attempted to understand what was at play within these difficult moments, we also attempted to plan for if and how we might address their significance with (or within) the class the following day.

After each course ended, we engaged in weekly and sometimes biweekly dialogue sessions. These sessions focused more intently on examining the course artefacts and student responses. Using the difficult moments as thematic starting points, we then interrogated our artefacts in order to trace these difficult moments more systematically; in order to consider what our intentions were as teacher educators, and how our students responded to these moments. More specifically, we aimed to critically reflect on the impetus of the difficulty (e.g., Was it provoked by a lecture or reading?), how it emerged (What conversations ensued? How did students engage with these ideas?), and its effects (What sense did the students make of these moments?). The purpose of this critical reflection was to consider what these difficult moments might teach us about the course design, curriculum, and our practices. Using dialogue and critical reflection of difficult moments we sought to (re) consider assumptions about our teaching, and in particular, to elicit interpretive insight into teaching *about*, *through,* and *for* human rights.

Insights

Our insights are drawn from the spaces between our intentions as instructors in teaching *about*, *through*, and *for* human rights, and the responses of the students, often manifesting in difficult moments. The difficulties, we believe, provide instructive insights as we consider approaches to human rights education, specifically in our roles as teacher educators.

Teaching *About* Human Rights

Instructors' intent. We ascribe to an understanding of teaching as one that privileges a critical approach, one that "encourages critical perspectives on the relationship between schooling and societal inequities, and a moral commitment to correcting those inequities through the classroom" (Groenke, 2009, p. 3). Thus, instead of teaching what human rights *are*, we employed a critical stance that required students to actively question the narrative of human rights itself. In order to prepare students for this approach, at the outset of the course, we overtly presented our understandings and expectations of critique. We wanted to articulate for students that critique is neither a dismissal of ideas nor propositions, but rather, it is an opportunity to reexamine texts, to question the assumptions embedded within them that become normalized, and the ways in which these normalized narratives become unquestioned and even, constitutive, or having the authority to govern individuals. We felt that it was important that we make our stance overt; we wanted to define and discuss critique in order to provide students with a frame for addressing human rights narratives and accompanying issues surrounding and embedded in human rights.

Early in the course, we focused on the relationships between power and narratives or stories, and pushed students to consider which stories are told, how they are told, and who decides. Drawing on theories of grand narratives (Lyotard, 1984), we attempted to illustrate the power contained within stories that remain unproblematized. Adichie (2009) believes that the perpetuation of single stories can reinforce stereotypes, and states that, "the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story" (12' 56"). This focus on the stories of human rights was particularly important given the fact that the CMHR aims to emphasize a Canadian narrative of human rights (Busby et al., 2015). We believed that human rights' narratives "need to be critically examined" (Osler & Starkey, 2010, p. 17) in the context of social realities and their potential as tools for change and transformation explored. Additionally, we wanted to provide students with conceptual tools to consider the museum itself—its exhibits and narratives—in order for students to understand and critically examine the controversy that surrounds it.

Students' reactions. In large part due to our intentional provocations that disrupted the narratives of "goodness" that circulate around the subjects of human rights, human rights education, and the CMHR, tensions arose on the first day. Osler and Starkey (2010) identified this undeniable and often unassailable "goodness" of human rights and the narratives that surround it. In response to questions about repositioning themselves as human rights educators rather than as scholars of anti-oppressive and anti-racist education, Osler and Starkey describe their rationale in renaming their antiracist work as human rights education, so that they could, "avoid much of the official hostility that was undermining the effectiveness of such work…After all, we figured, what government would want to be seen as opposing human rights" (p. 20). Osler and Starkey identify the difficulty in critiquing human rights. Similarly, many students, who by virtue of enrolling in a human rights education course offered in collaboration with the CMHR,

were not only sympathetic to and supportive of the ideal of human rights and a museum for human rights, but also felt they could not be critical. The idea of "human rights" as a grand and utopian narrative proved difficult for students to consider critically. Questions about human rights (such as, who created modern day human rights and who was excluded from these discussions) that attempted to draw attention to privilege, power, and Euro-centricity, were difficult for students to consider.

Although we felt that overall students were resistance to our critical approaches during the course, a survey completed immediately after the second offering of the course, indicated that students did gain understandings *about* human rights. The majority of the students indicated that through the texts, readings, guest speakers, lectures, and activities, the course enhanced their knowledge and understanding of human rights principles and the legal instruments used to protect and promote human rights, and they felt better prepared to teach *about* human rights. So, although students felt better versed and able to teach *about* human rights, we felt that they maintained a resistance to critically engage with human rights narratives.

Aligned with a complacent consideration of human rights as "good," the students' desire for pedagogical tools to teach human rights and the appetite they displayed for "more resources" to teach human rights in their specific grades, subject areas, or their schools somewhat surprised us. The students' responses to the courses indicated that they wanted the summer course to focus, in large part, on the pedagogical content knowledge required to teach *about* human rights even though, few, if any, had firm understandings of, or were willing to seriously engage in, the contested debates about human rights, human rights education, or the CMHR and the controversies it was immersed in (Coysh, 2014; Figueiredo, 2013). The students' unwavering desire to acquire the information and resources to teach *about* human rights is problematic given that Cochran, DeRuiter, and King (1993, p. 264) contend that the transformation of subject matter for teaching occurs as a teacher (a) critically reflects on and interprets the subject matter; (b) finds multiple ways to represent the information as analogies, metaphors, examples, problems, demonstrations, and classroom activities; (c) adapts the material to students' abilities, gender, prior knowledge, and preconceptions; and (d) finally tailors the material to those specific students to whom the information will be taught. We continued to resist their request for "more resources" and "how-to" approaches, often turning questions back onto the students about the ways in which these questions privilege technical approaches to teaching and asking them to consider of what these requests are symptomatic.

Teaching *Through* Human Rights

Instructors' intent. Participatory approaches to teach human rights are pedagogically appropriate because human rights learning activities should be practical insofar that they relate the concept of human rights to learners' real-life experiences and enable them to build on human rights principles found in their own cultural contexts, which will hopefully spark critical reflections about the possibilities for social change (Canadian Human Rights Foundation, 2001; Tibbitts, 2005). Importantly, Tibbitts explicates emerging "techniques" within human rights education extend beyond mere participation, and include a willingness to deal with tensions and conflicts in the group, an emphasis on critical analysis and reflection, and the engagement of consciousness in order to connect personal experiences to justice issues that also leads to empowerment, social action and change. Drawing on social constructivist perspectives that honoured the principle of teaching *through* human rights, we engaged in collaborative and

participatory methods and critical pedagogies to raise contentious issues for discussion, and create time and opportunities for student reflection and discussion.

Although the Canadian government has participated in numerous human rights violations over the years (including the interred Japanese Canadians, the head tax placed on the Chinese, and resistance to the women's vote, to name just a few), the past and current violations inflicted upon Indigenous peoples is of great concern in this particular time and place. This is magnified by the fact that the CMHR and the University of Manitoba are both on Treaty One territory; that the city of Winnipeg has the notorious title of the "most racist city in Canada" (MacDonald, 2015); and that as a museum and university, we share hegemonic histories of institutional colonialism (Busby et al., 2015). We are also well-acquainted with the recently released Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) reports which detailed the trauma inflicted on First Nations by the colonial and racist policies and practices of the government of Canada, including Indian Residential Schools. The TRC's findings and the location of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation in Winnipeg at the University of Manitoba, have raised the profile of this issue in our university, city and province, and has become an issue that can no longer be ignored. As such, we recognized that teach *through* human rights would require that we honour Indigenous perspectives and content as an illustration of our values.

Although we wanted to convey the importance of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives within the relational context of the museum and of human rights, neither of us are Indigenous peoples to Canada, and thus we were cautious of our roles. We addressed this, in part, by calling on others—experts and guests—who could share their understandings of Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and points of controversy within human rights. For example, one guest lecturer made overt the historical tensions between Indigenous communities and museums, whose archaeologists, anthropologists, and curators have traditionally pillaged Indigenous communities for artifacts and then presented them in essentialized and often erroneous ways. The guest lecturer described the contemporary and controversial issue of building the CMHR on the lands of "The Forks" and one of the largest archeological sites of Indigenous artifacts in the country, and the difficulty of including Indigenous perspectives in the museum in ways that are not just respectful, but that are ethical, culturally appropriate, and approved by local elders and community members. We coupled this lecture with a relevant reading and followed it up with whole group guided discussions.

Additionally, we directed students to engage specifically with one of the museum's exhibits, namely Rebecca Belmore's installation, *Trace*, a three-story high blanket made from hand-formed clay beads. Belmore is an internationally renowned Anishinaabe-Canadian artist commissioned to create *Trace*, and her installation illustrates the tensions in the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers to Canada through the metaphor of the blanket. For example, while a blanket elicits the sense of comfort, it is also a reminder of the blankets brought by the settlers that contained the smallpox virus that killed thousands of Indigenous peoples. More specific to this time and place, we have the layered tension of the CMHR's relationship to the traditional territories on which it is situated, and an Anishinaabe artist using the mud from the nearby river to make an installation for the museum in which she is calling out the tensions within past and current day relationships between settlers and indigenous peoples. This is an example of powerful and productive tensions in considering who we are in this work of human rights education, the complexity of the interrelated historical and present-day tensions that exist between peoples, museums, and governments (Dean, 2015; Failler, 2015), and how we attempted to use these rich opportunities to teach *through* human rights.

Students' reaction. A central challenge of critical pedagogy is, according to McLaren (1995), "to reveal to students how conflictual social relations (society's social logic) are actively inscribed in human intentionality and agency without reducing individuals to simply the static outcomes of social determinations" (p. 74). Illustrating these conflicting relationships seemed to challenge, at least for some of the students, not only the identities of how they perceived themselves as "teachers," but also as how they saw themselves as members of a privileged segment of society for who "rights" have not, largely, been denied. For example, in one such difficult moment, we struggled to honour an individual student's dignity and at the same time uphold our commitments to values that are consistent with critical and inclusionary pedagogies (Ellsworth, 1989; Giroux, 1995). The student voiced concerns about the critical stance we were presenting which challenged his belief in meritocracy and his perceived earned, social success. He felt that his "hard work" and subsequent success as an individual was being recast as an outcome of "white" or "male" privilege, or the social and material advantages derived from invisible and unearned assets that white people and men do not recognize they have (McIntosh, 2003). We did our best to not silence the student's concern that might shut down the conversation, but at the same time, we were mindful of not offending or marginalizing others in the class. We tried to return the discussions back to the critical literature that suggests that members of dominant groups in society are oftentimes reluctant to attribute the lack of social and academic success suffered by traditionally disadvantaged, socio-historical groups as embedded within the fabric of the social systems we live in and organizational structures we work in. This tension arose numerous times and we strategized often as to how to bring conversations about privilege (based on race, gender, class, etc.) to the fore, to illustrate these differences and their effects, while attempting to maintain everyone's dignity. These were challenging moments, but ones that cannot be shied away from and one's that we expect when enlisting critical pedagogies that challenge uncontested norms of privilege.

Interestingly, the data gathered from the online survey, suggested that when learning *through* human rights, students recognized the importance of Indigenous, historical, political, sociological, and legal perspectives as key lenses that should be used to examine the notion of human rights and human rights education. Yet, the written exit survey feedback regarding the effectiveness of some of the Indigenous guest speakers and topics that focused on the rights of Indigenous peoples was not unanimously positive. A few students expressed that they did not feel that these topics, "were necessarily pertinent to my practice," or that "the guest speakers did not complement my learning," or that, "the speakers lacked professionalism and did not make an effort to relate to me by contextualizing or explaining their practices." It could be argued that such comments illustrate the students' privileges by insisting that the onus of responsibility for pertinence and individual learning is placed on the guest speaker; and that the students do not recognize cultural differences, expecting those of marginalized perspectives to conform to their Euro-centric expectations. These examples illustrate the ways in which teaching *through* human rights—in this case through Indigenous perspectives and through presenting issues of power, privilege, and oppression—created, at least for some students, an active resistance to the ideas and the pedagogical approaches.

Teaching *For* Human Rights

Instructors' intent. Giroux (1985) suggests that teacher-educators have a responsibility to help teachers develop counterhegemonic pedagogies that provide them with the knowledge and social skills they need to function in the larger society as critical agents, and educate them

for transformative action. To this end, we designed the course to also focus on teaching *for* human rights by taking seriously the responsibility to consider what it means to challenge the status quo of inequity inherent in formal schooling and society. Teaching *for* human rights education encourages teachers to think critically about the risks associated with the struggle for institutional change, reading the world critically so as to change it when necessary (Giroux, 1985). Therefore, teaching *for* human rights is substantially more difficult and political than what is often delivered as classroom or school-based initiatives that encourage children to pick up litter and hold rallies to save the whales (Alderson, 1999). Teaching *for* human rights is more than the social enterprise of benevolence that demands students "be the change" they want to see (Atkinson, 2013; Jefferess, 2012). While there is undoubtedly good that comes from such well-intentioned and charitable initiatives, such blind commitments to "doing good" obscure the kind of critical thinking that examines the root causes of social and systemic inequities that maintain the vast divide between those with privilege and power and those without, between the haves and the have-nots, between the so-called developed and developing worlds (Tallon & McGregor, 2014). Thus, in teaching *for* human rights, we aimed to illustrate the ways in which power inequities can be reified by such saviour approaches to human rights, and to point out that changing the system of inequities requires awareness and action by those within positions of power, in our case, teachers and school administrators (Cardenas, 2005). However, such a level of critical reflection is difficult and required students to see themselves as incomplete and in a state of becoming and, perhaps, even culpable in maintaining a divided global social order that benefits them (Curzon-Hobson, 2003; Tallon & McGregor, 2014).

Students' reaction. Expectedly, apprehension emerged as students were pushed to interrogate their complicity in the structural and societal inequities that create and maintain a platform to "save" "needy" "others." Although some students repeatedly resisted our emphasis on criticality, others noted the importance of future iterations of the course maintaining its focus on critical perspectives so as to not become simply professional development sessions that promote the benefits of teaching *about* human rights and a human rights museum. To this end, we felt we had achieved one of our intended outcomes of a summer institute focused on teaching *for* human rights. That said, however, it was clear that some students did not welcome our attempts to disrupt the benevolence and charity of the "shameless idealists" (a term coined by the Keilbergers of "We Day") that they idealized. As each course came to a close after 10 days, many students told us that they were excited to return to their schools with a sense of urgency that they needed to initiate or re-invigorate a student-led social justice club or human rights program that would prompt the students to "be the change", reifying the "goodness" narrative of human rights that we had tried to consider more critically and more broadly. Thus, in spite of our efforts and attempts, some students did not appear to be able or willing to connect the course material, design, or discussion to their professional practice or to see themselves or their classrooms and/or school-based practices as the crucial site of teaching *for* human rights.

Reflecting on the Frame

We have framed the discussion as a means to both interpret and describe the significance of our two-year collaborative inquiry project in light of the framing mechanism of teaching *about*, *through,* and *for* human rights. Insights gleaned will help us to consider future iterations of this course and might also be instructive for others engaging in human rights education. Although providing a list of helpful tips does not align with our epistemological or pedagogical grounding, we do believe that our experiences and insights might be useful for other human

rights educators, in considering frameworks of teaching *about*, *through*, and *for* human rights, while considering critical approaches in doing so.

Teaching *About* Human Rights

We made conscious choices in creating a course that avoided focusing on teaching the pedagogical content knowledge of human rights (the "how") without a firm grounding in the content of human rights and human rights education (the "what"). In addition, we wanted to ensure that a theme running through the course was a sustained critique of various narratives of human rights, particularly in regards to the workings of power and privilege and the assumptions of knowledge. For example, Brown (2009) reminds us of the implications of privileging one international justice project:

> Human rights activism is a moral-political project and if it displaces, competes with, refuses, or rejects other political projects, including those also aimed at producing justice, then it is not merely a tactic but a particular form of political power carrying a particular image of justice, and it will behoove us to inspect, evaluate, and judge it as such. (p. 453)

Brown provides a caution and insists that a critical stance is necessary to understand human rights.

Although our collaborative inquiry illustrates that our students felt that they were better prepared to teach *about* human rights, our experiences of the students' resistance indicated that it was difficult to get students to move to a more critical stance on human rights. Taking a critical stance in teaching *about* human rights highlighted for us two key insights. The first was the ways in which the students actively challenged these perspectives and their engagement with them. That is, the discourse of human rights often felt like an unassailable narrative that some of the students had difficulty critiquing. Most were not willing to consider the Eurocentricism, essentialization, and individualism—among other critiques—inherent in human rights discourses. In our discussions and in their assignments, we could see the ways in which the students seemed to maintain a binary conception of critique: good/bad; human rights/anti-rights. Here we see the ways in which the discourses of human rights—as being universally good and virtuous become regulatory (Foucault, 1976/1990). This illustrates a Foucualdian notion of regulation constituting particular teacher identities; to be the "good" teacher, one must support human rights. Thus, the discourses of human rights, which convey a particular political power and view of justice, disallow other forms of politics and justice (Brown, 2004), and thus become normative, subsequently regulating the identity of the "good teacher." Critique—or what the students saw as disputing human rights—was not part of the constructed narrative of the "good teacher."

Secondly, as instructors, our own engagements in critique of human rights narratives were complicated by our relationship with the CMHR. Specifically, we felt the tensions between being partners with the CMHR and while wanting to assert critical perspectives into our course. We worried that our engagements with critique would be misread or misunderstood by our CMHR partners (and/or by students) as disapproval of the museum itself. We struggled with how to engage critically *about* human rights while in an official relationship with a human rights museum. Thus, we often felt subject to the same regulatory discourses of our students, subject to the surveillance implicit within human rights discourses, regulating our behaviours that manifest in the choices we would make about topics, readings, and guest speakers. Accordingly, human

rights discourses become a technology of regulation, circulating throughout the course and, at times, exceeding the capacity of critique.

Teaching *Through* Human Rights

Our experiences illustrate the inherent challenges and limits of teaching *through* human rights. Although Tibbitts (2005) asserts that teaching *through* human rights can lead to transformative actions, we saw and experienced the tensions with our approaches, and perhaps, the simplicity of our assumptions of teaching *through* human rights. Teaching *through* human rights requires that students and instructors see human rights as both a lens through which to observe the world and also a methodology for teaching others. Our critical pedagogical approaches maintained that students should consider and reconsider their conceptual frames—the interrelated concepts that provide a means to understand a phenomenon as they experienced it— and the ones they relied on to understand themselves as human rights educators. In many respects, we were asking the students to take on the difficult work that called into question the interpretative approaches they relied on to make sense of the social reality of schools.

Although some suggest teaching *through* human rights promises transformational outcomes (see for example, Giroux, 1995; Tibbitts, 2005), we were reminded of Ellsworth's (1989) critiques of emancipatory pedagogies. Specifically, that the notion of "empowerment" implies that power is for "us" who possess it to "give" it to those without. Such emancipatory discourses reify what Ellsworth calls the "paternalist project of traditional education" (p. 307). Empowerment approaches echo transmission models of teaching in that there is an implicit assumption that the teacher is the one who "knows." This collaborative inquiry illustrates that we were definitely not unquestionable knowers of human rights education or that we positioned ourselves as such. For example, we did not have intimate knowledge, understandings, and access to Indigenous perspectives and understandings and we needed to engage colleagues and act as allies in order to create spaces for collaborative meaning-making.

When a student spoke aloud with comments that could be read as ignorant, at best, and implicitly racist, at worst, the other students and we had to make decisions about how to proceed; we considered revising content, developing strategic responses, providing more information, shutting the student down, finding ways to support other students. All of these were out of concern both for the dissenting student, in that we wanted the student to share honestly so that we could understand and redirect misconceptions. Of course, we were also concerned for the other students. This scenario illustrates the difficulties encountered in teaching. The best we can hope for in these moments of tension and conflict, when students voice dissenting or problematic positions, is to sustain the encounter (Ellsworth, 1989), to not avoid or dismiss it, but rather to engage with it. This is the trouble with difficult knowledge (Pitt & Britzman, 2003); it is wrought with uncertainty with outcomes that are unforeseeable and unknown. There are competing interests: wanting to honour perspectives, not providing too much space to perspectives that will be upsetting, dealing with inherently racist commentary, considering those that might be offended. We believe, therefore, that teaching *through* human rights, overreaches in its claim of transformation or for emancipation. Like teaching, teaching *through* human rights cannot account for the unforeseen, the uncertainty that resides in teaching.

Finally, teaching *about* and *through* human rights are necessarily overlapping and intertwined events that cannot be delineated into separate processes. Although the framing of *about*, *through,* and *for* attempts to consider human rights education in a multi-faceted way, it

does not account for the intersections among these frames, nor does it account for the indeterminability of teaching itself.

Teaching *For* Human Rights

Teaching *for* human rights in the context of a partnership between the University of Manitoba and the CMHR—both of which are located on Treaty One territory and on the homeland of the Manitoba Métis—means that that students should be asked to confront not just the narratives of human rights, but the human rights violations and abuses and our own complicity in these events, including a lack of genuine engagement and response. An example of such is the absence of an in-depth engagement by the CMHR with missing and murdered Indigenous women (Dean, 2015). Dean writes, "At minimum, I would argue that a museum for human rights does in fact have a responsibility to respond in some way to human rights violations that occur and are mourned and protested on its own doorstep." Thus, the CMHR, and we would argue that students within this course, have an obligation to not just learn and share the narratives of human rights, but also to "elaborate, defend and advocate for the importance of human rights" (Failler & Simon, 2015, p. 163). Like the museum, our course needs to centre current and local human rights abuses, and not simply position these as uncritical narratives of "resolved" human rights abuses or distant problems of the past. While content and pedagogy should embrace human rights' values and encourage participation and critical thinking, one of the goals of teaching *for* human rights is to become aware of one's own complicity within structures and systems that violate human rights. Thus, the act of teaching *for* human rights challenges us as educators to examine the systemic injustices embedded within a formalized education and to centre current human rights issues, or complicity, and our own discomfort with such difficult knowledge (Pitt & Britzman, 2003).

The Next Iteration

Human rights education is still developing and contested in regard to theory, courses and pedagogy. There are few established human rights education courses in North America; and those that do exist are often situated within faculties of law or social work, or include a broader focus, such as democracy or global education. And although there are a multitude of human rights-related teaching resources available on-line, much of this information is not vetted or organized for educators, nor is it created by educators, and therefore, often lacks pedagogical integrity or critical insight. Thus, given the limited theoretical underpinnings of human rights, and more pragmatically, the limited number of courses and the abundance of often-problematic resources available for teachers, human rights education remains an emerging field.

Adopting a critical stance in developing a course that focused on teaching *about*, *through,* and *for* human rights, allowed us to move past simply "covering" the content of what are human rights or prescribing how it should be taught. It required that we design a course in such a way that required us to challenge our own understandings of the debates that surround human rights and the CMHR. We attempted to move beyond the instrumental sense of transmitting information and instead focused on questioning the ways in which knowledge and practice are constructed, evaluated, and used. This course required that the students, and we as instructors, challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and collectively consider what it means to participate in educational change at the system, and, more broadly speaking, societal level (Brown, 2004; Mezirow, 1997). It is hoped that this discussion will provide insights into human rights education

courses, their design, content, and pedagogy, while illustrating anticipated tensions and pitfalls. In addition, we have attempted to extend the articulation of teaching *about*, *through,* and *for* human rights in practice by considering this framework within a course focused on critical perspectives.

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